

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

CONVENTION AND ORIGINALITY

IN THE

MORALL FABILLIS OF

ROBERT HENRYSON

BY

ANNE M. McKIM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to establish the conventional, yet highly original character of Robert Henryson's Morall Fabillis, and I have attempted to achieve this by viewing his poem in the context of the European, medieval and Scottish traditions in which he worked. As a medieval fabulist he inherited a number of literary conventions, and although he is typically medieval in his view of the fable as didactic in purpose, an examination of his treatment of this time-worn genre reveals the skill and creative artistry that distinguish his collection.

By surveying the evolution of the Aesopic fable from antiquity to the Middle Ages, it becomes clear that the transmission of the ancient fables to the medieval period was affected by other materials which contributed to a major shift in the function of the fable from an instrument of entertainment to one of moral instruction. That the nature and purpose of the fable was didactic by the medieval period is clearly indicated by a consideration of the stated attitudes of some of the foremost European fabulists to their tales. Henryson's Prolog demonstrates that he too conformed to contemporary views of the fable's function, but that he also attempted to capture the spirit of ancient fabulists like Phaedrus and Babrius who had placed greater stress on diversion.

Indeed a comparison of four major versions of one fable, "The Lion and the Mouse", with Henryson's treatment indicates that he regarded attention to narrative details as an important device in

promoting the moral. The compare-and-contrast technique allows one to determine the precise nature of Henryson's narrative art; specifically, the additions, subtractions and changes he made to adopted models, as well as details of characterization, motivation and humour original with Henryson.

Furthermore, a comparison of Henryson's fables with the corresponding ones in John Lydgate's Isopes Fabules sheds an interesting light on the former's stylistic qualities. This procedure is useful since both poets were writing in their native languages, but more particularly in vernaculars strongly influenced by aureation. In addition, both writers were working in the medieval allegorical tradition, although Henryson can be seen to move out of the allegorical framework in "The Taill of the Wolf and the Lamb" and "The Taill of the Scheip ad the Doig" towards Complaint and satire. It becomes clear that not only is Henryson the superior artist, but that even in his conformity to literary conventions and styles he evidences a creativity that allows the fable to become a very flexible instrument in his hands.

I have also considered the distinctively Scottish aspect of Henryson's poem, since his work belongs to a vernacular tradition which was peculiarly Scottish in terms of its language, Middle Scots, and in terms of the political and social environment which engendered it. A study of Henryson's most satirical fables, the fox tales, reveals that ultimately he is more didactic than politically critical when compared to his Scottish peers, so that even in his Scottishness one is continually aware of his individuality.

It emerges that Henryson inherited various traditions and that

he followed the prescribed procedures which were so much a part of medieval literary practice. However, he is never confined by them, for while one can point out his "medievalness" and his Scottishness, it is equally obvious that in several vital respects he deviated from the mainstream. He in fact achieves an individual blend of convention and originality.

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INTRODUCTION

My biography of Robert Henryson is of necessity a brief one. Even the precise dates of his birth and death remain unknown, although it can be safely assumed that he lived in the fifteenth century, and most of his previous critics agree that he flourished in the last quarter of that century.

I follow the example of one of Henryson's foremost critics, Denton Fox,¹ in accepting that there are only two known facts about this poet: that he was a schoolmaster in Dunfermline (attested to by the title page of Bassandyne's edition of the Morall Fabillis (1571)), and that he was dead by 1536 since Dunbar records his death in The Lament for the Makaris printed in that year, and again connects him with Dunfermline:

In Dunfermline he [Death] hes done roune
With Maister Robert Henrisoun.

.....
Timor mortis conturbat me.²

Dunfermline was at that time one of the most important centres in Scotland since the royal palace was there, and to be a schoolmaster, possibly the chief schoolmaster,³ in the grammar school of Dunfermline would have been a prestigious position. References to Henryson as Maister indicate that he was a university graduate and although his name does not appear in the lists of graduates of Glasgow (established 1471) or St. Andrew's University (established 1413),⁴ he may have been a graduate of a continental university. Many Scots scholars went to universities in France and Italy and returned home to Scottish

universities and schools as teachers. Their influence was so strong in France that by the early fourteenth century they had given their name to a street in Paris, "rue d'Ecosse".⁵ The newly established Scottish universities closely followed the French pattern in their organisation.⁶

So Henryson may very well have been a student at a continental university, subject to the influence of contemporary movements and developments in learning and literature. The Morall Fabillis testifies to his comprehensive appreciation of both the long established European fable tradition and contemporary developments in the genre. It is the evidence of the fables themselves that leads me to contend that the usual designation of Henryson as a "Scottish Chaucerian" is ultimately a misnomer. As with many generic labels, the term is both too general and too specific. The "Chaucerian" part of "Scottish Chaucerian" implies at best the kind of dogged imitation of Chaucer practised by so many contemporary English poets. Denton Fox is nearer the mark when he observes that Henryson and the other Scots Makars were only "Chaucerian" in the sense that they wrote after Chaucer and could not ignore the fundamental changes he wrought in the course of English literature. "They were 'Chaucerians' in the same way that we now are all, perforce, Cartesians, Marxists, Freudians".⁷

Even the "Scottish" part of "Scottish Chaucerians" is too specific. Henryson is a "Scottish" poet in the sense of his nationality, and in terms of the Scottish vernacular tradition in which he worked. However, he is nonetheless European for being Scots, and the fact that his fables are so much a part of European tradition means that in the final analysis the term "Scottish" is too narrow.

The appellation "Scottish Chaucerian" is also a particularly unfortunate one in the case of a poet like Henryson whose tremendous originality places him in a class of his own. As a medieval fabulist he inherited various literary traditions, and an examination of his treatment of a time-worn genre reveals the skill and artistry that distinguished his own highly individual Morall Fabillis.

CHAPTER 1

Robert Henryson's Morall Fabillis belongs to a long European literary tradition.¹ More particularly perhaps, the work can be related to the widespread interest in animal literature in the medieval period illustrated by the number of texts and manuscripts which survive:² some of these texts almost certainly provided Henryson with some of his sources; others are interesting as analogues, and an examination of these should help to place Henryson's poem in its correct historical and literary context.

Henryson describes his fables as "ane maner of Translatioun" (l. 32), and indeed the majority of them purport to be translations of Aesop, that is, of tales called by those who retold them, Fables of Aesop. When these Aesopic fables are traced through their evolution from antiquity it becomes apparent that they drew to themselves material from other sources and that the attitude of the tellers to their tales varied considerably.

As Ben Edwin Perry tells us, the rhetorician Theon in his Progymasmata defines fable in the Aesopic sense of the term as a "fictitious story picturing a truth".³ Perry points out that a fable's story may be long or it may be contained in a single sentence. Although it is told in the past tense it only pictures a truth, that is, it is only a metaphor in the form of an account of a past event.

The point to note about the ancient fable is that the general proposition implicit in it is not always a moral or ethical principle. The purpose was more often satirical, or the tale an occasion for the

display of clever repartee.

However, an editorial practice tended to turn the fable into a moral tale. A promythium was a common feature in early collections, and it offered an index under the heading of the story's application, usually for the convenience of a writer or speaker who would consult the fable repertoire for the purpose of finding a tale that would illustrate an idea that he wished to express effectively. But since the promythium was also a summary of the fable's meaning, its point, it came to be added after it in the form of an epimythium, intended as an explanation, when the original function of the promythium as an index had been forgotten or ignored. It is possible that this habit of summarizing a fable's meaning at the end of the tale provided a model for the medieval Moralitas.

Phaedrus (first half of the first century A.D.) and Babrius (last quarter of the first century A.D.)⁴ made significant contribution to the history of the fable. Before them, fable collections tended to be informative and utilitarian rather than literary and artistic.

According to Perry:

Phaedrus and Babrius were the first writers to bring a disconnected series of Aesopic fables on to that avowedly artistic plane of literature, as an independent form of writing; but necessarily in verse, in order to sanction it as poetic composition. Only as such could it become, in theory, an independent form of literature in its own right, instead of a dictionary of metaphors.⁵

Both Phaedrus and Babrius state their conscious artistic purpose in the Prologues to their editions. Phaedrus writes:

Aesop is my source. He invented the substance of these fables, but I have put them into finished form in senarian verse. A double dowry comes with this, my little book: it moves to laughter, and by wise counsels guides the conduct of life. Should anyone choose to run it down, because trees are vocal, not beasts alone, let him remember that I speak in jest of things that never happened.⁶

He sees his task as the creative one of transforming raw materials into finished composition. His stated intentions are twofold: to entertain and to instruct. However, his real concern emerges as the desire to be recognized as a poet. His reminder that he speaks "in jest of things that never happened" reveals his view of the fable as a story, a fiction.

Babrius is even more interested in the fable as poetic artefact.

His Prologue runs:

Wise old Aesop . . . has told us fables in the free manner of prose. And I shall adorn each of those fables with the flower of my own muse. I shall set before you a poetical honeycomb, as it were, dripping with sweetness, having softened the hard chords of the stinging iambic.⁷

His emphasis is clearly on pleasure rather than moral instruction.

Although these ancient fabulists usually claim that moral edification and instruction are part of their intention, they were more concerned with being interesting and entertaining. By the later Middle Ages on the other hand, the didactic purpose seems to have been uppermost in the minds of the fabulists. A brief survey of the history of the transmission of these fables to the Medieval period should help to explain this shift in emphasis.

In the first place, the shift in orientation can be explained by the growth of Christianity, and the desire to extend the teaching of Christian truths to a wide audience. Moreover, eminent theologians like Augustine and Aquinas placed great emphasis on the revelation of Christian doctrines through Scriptural exegesis. This practice influenced literary procedures and led to a review of the function of the fable in a Christian society. Furthermore, the move from generalized ethical lessons to specifically Christian moralizations was affected by accretions and modifications resulting from Eastern influences. From

earliest times The Jataka Tales or Buddhist Birth Stories circulated alongside the traditional fables and animal stories, and the purpose of the Buddhist stories was to inculcate moral truths.⁸ The Jatakas are tales supposed to have been told by the Buddha, which relate experiences undergone by him or witnessed by him during one or other of his former manifestations on earth. This was obviously a very convenient form by which to connect a number of stories about birds, beasts, and fishes, since the Buddha is thought to have appeared in animal shape. Given the long established European tradition of animal tales and fables, it was possible to Christianize these Eastern tales, incorporate them into the existing corpus, and at the same time to adopt the habit of moral instruction.

Thus modified, the fables of Babrius and Phaedrus provided the two main source collections for the medieval fable. These are the verse fables of Avian and the prose fables of Romulus, generally referred to as the Latin Aesopic fables. Towards the end of the fourth century Avian translated forty-two of Babrius's fables into Latin verse. Thereafter, Avian's fables were done in prose, transferred back into Latin verse, and sent forth through Europe from England. Avian's collection owes its long popularity to the fact that it was introduced into the schools during the Carolingian epoch, probably by Alcuin himself, who seems to have written a commentary on it, and from that time to the end of the fifteenth century it was extensively employed for educational purposes, imitated, expanded, paraphrased, excerpted and equipped with special introductions and commentaries.⁹

It was Phaedrus, on the other hand, who provided the source for the "Romulus" series, but Phaedrus in a fuller form than has descended

to us in verse. A selection of eighty of his fables was turned into prose in the ninth century by the so-called Romulus. The Romulus fables became the most important collection for medieval scholars, in part because they were derived from the "standard" antique collection, in part because they were more numerous than the fables of Avian, but chiefly because of the prefatory letter which claimed that they were Aesop's fables translated directly from the Greek.¹⁰

Towards the end of the twelfth century Walter the Englishman (Gualterus Anglicus) turned the fables of Romulus into Latin verse, and gradually his collection of fifty-eight fables came to represent the standard Aesop of medieval Christianity.¹¹ This collection is preserved in over one hundred manuscripts, and in numerous editions from 1473 on.¹²

Some of Babrius's fables were transmitted to medieval Europe by a rather different process. A large collection of his fables was done into poor Greek prose, from there translated into Arabic and then enriched by some sixty fables from the Arabic Bidpai¹³ and other sources. Despite these changes, it still passed under the name of Aesop. This collection, containing one hundred and sixty-four fables, was brought to England after the Third Crusade of Richard I (twelfth century) and translated into Latin by an Englishman named Alfred with the aid of an Oxford Jew named Berachyah Na-Nakdan.¹⁴ Part of Alfred's Aesop was translated into English alliterative verse, and this version or a derivative thereof was translated about 1200 into French by Marie de France,¹⁵ who mistakenly attributed the new fables to King Alfred. John Lydgate's Isopes Fabules (c. 1389) are also attached to this tradition.¹⁶

So although the origin of the medieval fable can be traced to its Latin Aesopic sources (Romulus and Avian), and from there back to the original Aesopic collections of Phaedrus and Babrius, its transmission

was greatly affected by Eastern accretions and modifications. These Eastern influences led to the initial introduction of the habit of moral instruction, and the growth of Christianity shaped the nature of the morality expounded. It is also noteworthy that fables were frequently and freely recast throughout the medieval period for educational purposes, for inclusion in school curricula, and this practice may have accentuated the tendency to regard the fable as a vehicle for moral instruction rather than entertainment.

With the advent of the printing press, several important compilations of fables were made. In 1476 a German, Heinrich Steinhöwel, attempted to assemble all the major collections of fables popular in the Middle Ages. He put together the Romulus with selections from Avian, some Greek prose versions of Babrius from the translations of one Ranuzio, and a few from Alfred's Aesop. To these he added the legendary life of Aesop and a selection of tales in Latin from the East translated by Petrus Alphonsi and Poggio Bracciolini (Disciplina Clericalis). It is interesting that Steinhöwel offers three versions of the Romulus: the Latin prose of the Romulus itself, the German translation of it, and a set of Latin verse fables which are essentially Walter's.¹⁷

Within a short time Steinhöwel's collection had been turned into French, English, Italian, Dutch and Spanish. In 1480, an Augustinian monk of Lyons, Julien Macho, made a French translation of it, and in 1483-1484 William Caxton translated¹⁸ Macho's version. The Romulus selection, as in Steinhöwel, stands at the centre, and is recognized as "Aesop's Fables". This basic collection is supplemented, however, by a selection from Avian, for, although his fables were not originally presented as Aesop's, they had long been paired with the fables of Romulus as School texts, so that the traditional link between them must have been very strong.

It is very difficult to date Henryson's Morall Fabillis precisely, but if we accept that he flourished c. 1470-1500, then it is possible that he had access to Caxton's Aesop. Caxton's translation would have been important, since it offered a kind of historical anthology of the medieval fable in the vernacular. At the same time, a line from Henryson's Prolog suggests that he was certainly familiar with Walter's Latin verse Romulus. The first lines of Walter's¹⁹

Prologue are:

Vt iuuet et prosit, conatur pagina presens;
Dulcius arriident seria picta iocis.²⁰

Henryson quotes Walter (ostensibly Aesop) word for word: "Dulcius arriident seria picta Iocis" (l. 28).

Just as the prologues to the ancient collections of fables reveal the ancient view of the fable's purpose, as well as each writer's attitude to his material, so the prologues of the medieval fabulists provide us with the medieval conception of the genre, as well as individual viewpoints. The didactic purpose is paramount in all the versions under consideration. Marie de France is no exception:

Those who are acquainted with letters should devote their attention to good books and writings, and to the examples and sayings which the philosophers have searched out, pronounced and recorded; through moral instruction they have written good proverbs they have heard, in order that those who wish to improve themselves can, for that was their intention in writing them.²¹

For Lydgate, too, the fable is a vehicle for a moral message:

W[isdom ys more in prise, then gold in cofers,
To hem that haue sauour in lettrure.
Olde examples of prudent philosophers
Moche auaylyd to folke that dyd her cure
To search out lykenes in nature,
In whyche men myght conceue & clerely see
Notable sentence of gret moralyte.

Vnto purpos the laureate
 Callyd Isopus dyd hym occupy
 Whylom in Rome to plesse the senate,
 Fonde out fables, that men myght hem apply
 To sondry matyrs . . . 22

He also wants to "do plesaunce to theym, that shall hit rede" (l. 38), not because he regards the fable as entertaining, but because he believes that pleasure can be found in the moral. He also demonstrates a concern about style, but in the narrow sense of his use of language (ll. 29-42). Lydgate views the fable as a rather rude literary device, for he describes it in terms of "Black erthe" that has to be cleared away in order that the rich jewel, the moral, can be appreciated (l. 22).

Caxton's view of the fable as basically didactic in function can be seen in the introduction to his translation of the prose Romulus:

Esope . . . techeth in his fables how men oughte to kepe and
 rewle them well/ And to thende that he shold shewe the lyf and
 customes of al maner of men/ he induceth the byrdes/ the trees
 and the beestes soekynge to thende that the men may knowe
 wherfore the fables were found/ In the whiche he hath wretton the
 malyce of the euylle people and the argument of the Improbis
 / He techeth also to be humble and for tu vse wordes . . . 23

I have quoted only from the foremost vernacular fabulists of the medieval period,²⁴ but their views are representative of the medieval fable tradition. Furthermore, Henryson was in all probability familiar with these versions when he came to produce his own collection. It is therefore all the more surprising to find that his view of the fable's function reveals an awareness of, and a desire to comply with, the purpose of the ancient fable, rather than the contemporary one. This is Henryson's first stanza:

Thocht feinyeit fabils of ald poetre
 Be nocht al grunded upon truth, yit than
 Thair polite termes of sweit Rhetore
 Richt plesand ar Unto the eir of man;
 And als the caus that thay first began
 Wes to repreif the haill misleving
 Off man be figure of ane uther thing. 25

He is aware that fables are "feinyeit", are fiction, and the term calls to mind Phaedrus's reminder that he wrote "in jest of things that never happened". His appreciation of the "polite termes of sweit Rhetore" echoes Babrius's desire to present his readers with a "poetical honeycomb". The phrase "be figure of ane uther thing" reveals his fundamental understanding of the fable as a story which "pictures" a truth, that is to say that it works metaphorically.

There is no doubt that Henryson is also a man of his age in that he shares the contemporary view of the fable as didactic in purpose, but he is almost equally interested in the pleasure that can be derived from the narrative. Like Lydgate, he uses the analogy of the earth as the fable covering the precious moral, but for him it is the "busteous eird" with a value of its own, and from it the "Morall sweit sentence" springs. He has imbibed the spirit of Walter ("Dulcius arident seria mixta iocis"), for he argues:

And Clerkis sayis it is richt profitabill
 Amangis ernist to ming ane merie sport,
 To light the spreit, and gar the tyme be schort.

(ll. 19-21)

A "Bow that is ay bent . . . dullis on the string" (ll. 22-23)

Henryson demonstrates a profound comprehension of the genre which embraces the fundamental purposes of entertaining and instructing. He writes in the full consciousness of the ancient Aesopic tradition of Babrius and Phaedrus. There is no feeling that he is confined to the role of a translator, or that he sets himself up as a detached moral judge in the way Lydgate does. Like Phaedrus, he believes that there is always room "to move to laughter".

At the same time there is ample evidence that Henryson did not regard the fable form as a medium for entertainment alone. In his

adaptation of those fables which do not belong to the tradition of the Fable proper, he makes adjustments which indicate that moral instruction was part of his intention. This is apparent even in his fox tales--

"The Taill of Schir Chantecler and the Foxe", "The Taill how this foirsaid Tod maid his Cōfession to Freir Wolf Waitaskaith", "The Taill of the Sōe & Air of the foirsaid Foxe", "The Taill of the Wolf that gat the Nekherig throw the wrikis of the Foxe that begylit the Cadgear" and "The Taill of the Foxe, that begylit the Wolf, in the schadow of the Mone"--which derive from medieval European sources, that is, from the French Le Roman de Renart, or the Flemish derivative which was translated into English as The History of Reynard by Caxton in 1481.²⁶

The Roman is often referred to as "l'epopée animale" of the twelfth century, for its most ancient branches date from that period, although later branches and "suites" were added by various authors in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Dans ces ouvres, le monde des betes est organisé à l'image de la société française du temps. Chaque espèce s'y trouve représentée par un animal doté d'un nom propre souvent en rapport avec son aspect ou son caractère traditionnel: Renard (le goupil), Ysengrin (le loup), Noble (le lion), Chantecler (le coq), Tardif (le limagon), Couard (le lièvre), etc. . . . Tout l'art consiste à parodier la comédie humaine sans jamais nous laisser oublier qu'il s'agit d'animaux.²⁷

In the French cycle the animals are arranged in a hierarchy with the lion in the supreme role as king. The nearest Henryson comes to presenting a hierarchy which could be said to reflect the Scottish society of the time is in "The Trial of the Fox" where a parliament of animals is summoned. Although the poet claims that he will describe the animals "Als fer as now occurris to my mynd" (l. 886), implying that he will not impose an order of importance, a hierarchy is detectable in the description he proffers. The lion is king, carried on a pavilion by

leopards; then he introduces the minotaur and other fantastic creatures; then the lynx, the tiger, the camel, through to the horse, the mule, the ass, the goat, the badger and the dog, down to the little mouse. His animals may correspond to members of Scottish society, but the parallels are not stressed.

He delineates animal characteristics in some detail, so that we do not forget that his characters are animals. But his purpose is not so much to parody "la comedie humaine" as to make the serious moral point that "mony men in operatioun, / Ar like to beistis in conditioun" (ll. 48-49). His reasons are clearly defined in the Prolog:

Na mervell is, ane man be lyke ane Beist,
 Quhilk lufis ay carnall and foull delyte;
 That schame can not him renye, nor arreist,
 Bot takis all the lust and appetyte,
 And that throw custom and daylie ryte,
 Syne in thair myndis sa fast is Radicate,
 That thay in brutal beistis ar transformate.

(ll. 50-56)

In the French Roman the character of Renard is traced in great detail. He is l'universal trompeur, esprit cynique, sans scrupule"²⁸

In fact:

C'est le goupil qui est au centre. Généralement vaincu par les êtres plus faibles que lui, il triomphe au contraire des plus forts et en particulier du loup dont la force n'a d'égale que sa naïveté.²⁹

Henryson's fox, Lowrance, is a direct descendant of Renard in this respect, for he is introduced as "This wylie Tod" (l. 425) and as the "fox fenyeit, craftie and cawtelous" (l. 402). In "The Taill of Schir Chanticleir and the Foxe" he is defeated by an animal (the cock) who is weaker than himself, and in "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger" and "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman" he succeeds in beguiling the wolf "dont la force n'a d'égale que sa naïveté".

However, Henryson's intention in these fox fables differs fairly considerably from the raison d'etre of his French models. The Renart stories were designed to amuse through satire rather than to provide moral edification (although later "suites" were written for both moral and satirical purposes). In adapting his source material Henryson made a very important change: he introduced a moral note in the form of his Moralitates. In this respect, his Lowrance has more in common with the Bestiary fox.

In the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Bestiaries were popular throughout Europe. Indeed the Bestiary fox was known before Reynard, for Bestiaries date from the second century B.C. when there seems to have existed a book called the Physiologus³⁰ (meaning the Naturalist). This book professed to describe the nature and habits of many animals and birds, some real and some imaginary. After the spread of Christianity exhortations and moralizations were added to the descriptions. By the twelfth century the main object of Bestiaries was not to entertain but to teach, in particular to remind the reader of basic Christian truths. So the description of an animal would begin with a Biblical reference, followed by what the Physiologus had to tell of the creature's habits, and conclude with an explanation of the animal's spiritual significance.

The Significacio was the part of the Bestiary which expounded the animal's spiritual significance. For example, after the description of the behaviour of stags a thirteenth century Significacio states:

De hertes costes we oghen to munen:
 Ne og non oðer to sunen,
 Oc eurilc luuen oðer
 Also he were his broder,
 Wurðen stedefast his wine,
 Ligten him of his birdene,

Helpen him at his nede;
 God giueð ðerfore mede;
 We sulen hauen heuenriche
 Gef we bitwixen us ben briche.
 Ðus is ure Louerdes lage luuelike to fillen;
 Herof haue we mikel ned at we arwi ne dillen.³¹

[We ought to bear in mind the stags' qualities: nor ought any of us to shun the other; also everyone loves the other as if he were his brother, be steadfast in habit, relieve him of his burden, help him in his need; For this God gives a reward; we shall have the kingdom of heaven if we are useful to one another. This is the law of our Lord, beautiful to behold; and in observing it we should not be sluggish.]

The increasing popularity of the Roman influenced the development of the bestiary fox and the fox of the fables. Even so the spiritual significance of such a creature remained the foremost concern of bestiary composers. Although Henryson's fox tales are derived from the Roman, the way in which his narrative is ultimately governed by a Moralitas suggests that he wished our amusement at the fox's roguery and trickery to be guided by an awareness of the moral import of the creature's behaviour. His emphasis is finally closer to that of the Bestiary writers than to that of the authors of Le Roman de Renart. This view receives support from a glance at one such Moralitas, which resembles in approach the manner of the Significacio. He is discussing the death of the fox and advises that this is an "Exampill . . . exhortand folk to amend":

Be war, gude folke, and feir this suddane schoit,
 Quhilk smytis sair withoutin resistence,
 Attend wyislie, and in your hartis be noit,
 Aganis deith may na man mak defence.
 Ceis of your sin, Remord your conscience,
 Obey unto your God and ye shall wend,
 Efter your deith, to blis withouttin end.

(ll. 789-796)

He introduces a didactic note to adopted models whose origin and object were satirical. He is therefore a man of his age in his view of the fable as didactic in purpose, but he differs from his peers in

regarding attention to narrative details as an important device in promoting the moral. In other words, whatever his raw material, he so adapted and transformed it, that he made these animal tales completely his own.

CHAPTER 2

"The Lion and the Mouse" has been retold countless times, and four treatments which might have been available to Henryson have come down to us. They are the Aesopic original in Babrius's version (no Phaedrus version exists), and the medieval treatments of Marie de France, Walter the Englishman and Caxton. We cannot be certain that any of these versions were models for Henryson, or even that he was acquainted with all of them. However, a comparison of these renderings, as analogues, with that of Henryson will help to isolate those features which not only distinguish Henryson's fable from the mainstream of the medieval tradition, but which mark him out as an original and resourceful poet.

Four basic motifs feature in all the versions under consideration: (1) a lion catches a mouse; (2) the mouse makes a plea/argument in self-defence as a result of which its life is spared; (3) the favour is returned; and (4) a moral observation is made, although this varies from writer to writer. The accounts all differ in length, although this factor is not invariably proportionate to the detail of the content, as we shall see later when we examine Babrius's fable.

Henryson's "Taill of the Iyoun & the Mous" is noticeably longer than any of its analogues. The increase in length is a result of an expansion of details. He devotes twenty-four seven-line stanzas to the tale itself and another seven to the Moralitas. Of the thirty-one

stanzas, twelve are devoted to the verbal exchange between the lion and the mouse, in which the mouse tries to save her life through an apologia. By comparison, Marie's account is fifty-four lines long, five of which describe how the lion is persuaded to let the mouse live, while Walter's account is twenty-four lines long, ten of which present the lion's progress towards a merciful decision. Caxton's prose translation is fairly short and four to five lines describe the mouse's plea and the lion's response. The confrontation scene is therefore fairly central to all the accounts, although proportionately more of Henryson's narrative deals with this motif. This is because Henryson has introduced many new details so that not only the individual episodes, but also the story's terms of reference, are amplified and extended. It is in these details that we can see what has been described as the "realizing imagination"¹ of Henryson at work.

The introduction of specific, if sometimes minor, points is often a clue to each writer's attitude to the fable and to his particular emphasis. A survey of the preliminary sections of each of our versions provides examples of distinguishing minutiae. Babrius is succinct:

A lion caught a mouse and was about to eat him. The little house-bred thief, now close to death, poor creature, faintly muttering, begged for life with these words . . . ²

and yet the use of "little house-bred thief" and "poor creature" introduces a personal, sympathetic note to the narrative. Caxton, on the other hand, strikes a fairly impersonal note by beginning his tale with a moral reflection:

The myghty and puyssaunt must pardonne and forgyue to the lytyll and feble/ ought to kepe hym fro al euylle/ For oftyme the lytyll may wel gyue ayde and help to the grete/ wherof Esop reherceth to us suche a fable of a lyon whiche slepte in a forest and the rats disportid and playd aboute hym/ It happed that the rat wente upon the lyon/ wherfore the lyon awoke/ and within his clawes or ongles he tooke the rat/ ³

He stresses the improving qualities of Aesop's fable at the expense of an interesting and adventurous narrative.

The rather prosaic nature of Caxton's translation is pointed up when we compare it to Marie de France's rendering:

De un leun dit ki se dormeit
 En un boschage u il esteit;
 Entur lui se vunt deduiant
 Li suriz petiz en juant
 L'une curut--ne s'en garda--
 Sur le leun, si l'esveilla.
 Li leun fu mut curucez;
 La suriz prist; taut fu irez,
 De li voleit fere justise.⁴

[A story is told of a lion who was asleep in a wood where he lived; the little mice amused themselves by coming to play around him; one, not taking care, ran upon the lion, thus waking him. The lion was very angry; the little mouse was seized; justice was soon to be done.]

The rhyming couplets inject a light-hearted note and underscore the abandonment of the mice at play in a potentially dangerous situation. Marie has not really introduced any new details which would distinguish her account from that of Caxton. Essentially the same series of events leads to the seizure of the mouse by the lion, and yet there is an added ingredient which makes her version more interesting. She captures skilfully the moment when the inevitable happens and the mouse wakens the lion. In the line "L'une curut--ne s'en garda--Sur le leun", the interjection of "ne s'en garda" suggests both the recklessness of the mouse and the belated recognition of the ineluctable results. Attention to a little detail like this, with its connotations of motivation and characterization, makes Marie's account dramatic and immediate, so that Caxton's seems in contrast flat and unimaginative.

In Walter's version the prominent features are terseness of language and yet an unexpected wealth of detail:

Frigida sopito blanditur silua Leoni;
 Cursitat hic murum ludere promta cohors.
 Pressus Mure, Leo Murem rapit; ille precatur,
 Ille precem librat, supplicat ira precci.⁵

[It pleases the sleeping lion to lie outstretched and indolent.
 Running swiftly, a cohort of mice advance to play by him.
 Disturbed by a mouse, the lion seizes it. The latter begs him
 to free him, to release him from his anger.]

Walter sets the scene, so that the indolence of the lion is contrasted with the activity of the mice; "Frigida sopito" is counterbalanced with "Cursitat hic murum".

Henryson may have learned from Walter the advantages of setting the scene, for he develops this aspect of the story more fully than any of his predecessors:

Ane Lyoun at his Pray war foirrun,
 To recreat his limmis and to rest,
 Beikand his breist and belly at the Sun,
 Under ane tre lay in the fair forest;
 Swa come ane trip off Myis out off thair nest,
 Richt tait and trig all dansand in ane gyis,
 And over the Lyoun lansit twyis or thryis.

He lay so still, the Myis was not effeird,
 But to and fro out over him tuke thair trace;
 Sum tirlit at the Campis off his beird,
 Sum spairit not to claw him on the face;
 Merie and glaid thus dansit thay ane space,
 Till at the last the Nobill Lyoun woke,
 And with his pow the maister Mous he tuke.

(ll. 1405-1418)

He concentrates on details of description, characterization, and motivation. He is not only relating a story, he is painting a picture. Like Walter, he sets up a contrast between the physical conditions of the lion and the mice. The lion is weary, the mice are sprightly; the lion wishes to rest his limbs, the mice seem impatient to exercise theirs. There is a strong suggestion that the mice are taking advantage of the situation, while there is something incriminating about the lion's

relaxed posture. The line "Beikand his breist and belly at the Sun" is rich in implications of self-satisfaction and vulnerability. The heavy alliterative 'b' contributes to the texture of the verse and to the resulting graphic image that is specially designed to work on our sense impressions. By contrast, the merry abandon of the mice as they approach the sleeping lion is substantially conveyed by the repeated 't' sounds: "ane trip off Myis . . . Richt tait and trig all dansand". They are light-footed and light-hearted. These mice are mischievous as well as reckless in their abandonment, for not only do they enjoy a licence with the sleeping beast, but they seem to be engaged in a game of daring. While "Sum" makes so bold as to tug at the lion's mane, there is a suggestion in the "Sum spairit not" that these others are urged on by a competitive spirit to outdo their fellows by clawing his face.

The major point to note is of course that most of this material is original with Henryson. This in itself is a measure of his creativeness and superiority as a storyteller. However, another and perhaps more convincing testimony to his skill emerges when we examine how he incorporated and invigorated the more traditional elements of this fable. These are the captured mouse's plea for life and the moral observation made at the end of each account.

Babrius's mouse argues that he is not a good enough meal for the lion and that, although he is small, some day he may be able to help the lion. Babrius's moral, which is offered in parentheses and is clearly separated from the body of the fable is:

Spare the poor, and don't hesitate to rely on them,
considering that a mouse once freed a lion caught in
a trap.⁶

Marie's moral also centres on the rich/poor argument, but in the confrontation scene her mouse simply argues that he did not jump on the

lion knowingly:

Ele escundist que en nule guise
A escient ne l'aveit feit. 7

and the lion realises that there is little honour in killing a mouse,
and so frees him.

Although there is no Phaedrus original of this fable, the Romulus derivative of his version is represented in the Caxton and Walter translations. Here the moral has shifted to an observation on how the small and weak may sometimes aid the great and strong. In each case more emphasis is placed on the lion's realization that he will gain no glory or honour by killing a mouse. In Walter's version a new turn is given to the fable since the predicament is presented entirely from the lion's viewpoint:

Ille precem librat, supplicat ira preci.
Hec tamen ante mouet animo: Quid Mure perento
Laudis emes? Summum uincere parua pudet.
Si nece dignetur Murem Leo, nonne Leoni
Dedecus, et Muri ceperit esse decus?
Si uincat minimum summus, sic uincere uinci est.
Uincere posse decet, uincere crimen habet
Si tamen hoc decum est et laus sic uincere, laus hec
Et decus hoc minimo fiet ab hoste minus.
De pretio uicti pendet uictoria: uictor 8
Tantus erit, uicti gloria quanta fuit.

[The latter begs him to free him, to release him from his anger. This moves him [the lion] despite himself: What praise would he win by killing a mouse? It is shameful for the greatest to kill such a little thing. If the lion deemed it worthy to kill the mouse, surely it would be a disgrace on the lion's part, and surely he would have captured the mouse, only for the glory to be his? If the greatest conquers the least, in thus conquering him, he is conquered himself. It is fitting for him to be capable of conquering, but a crime to actually conquer. But if it is glorious and praiseworthy to so conquer, this praise and glory goes to the least rather than to his enemy: the greater the victor is, the greater is the glory of the vanquished.]

Furthermore, a new argument inclines the lion towards a merciful decision:
the triumph of a victor depends on a conquest of strength. The mouse

does not represent a real threat. Walter's version also incorporates the idea that one day the favour may be returned, ("Mus [h]abit, et grates reddit; si reddere possit / Spondet open").

In Henryson's fable the mouse's apologia stands quite clearly at the centre of the account. His mouse is a highly articulate creature, quite capable of conducting her own defence, and indeed the whole confrontation has courtroom overtones. The suggestion that a trial is taking place is re-inforced by the two stanzas which frame the mouse's plea. When the mouse is caught she bemoans her sorry state with these words:

Now am I tane ane woefull presonair,
And ffor my gilt traistis Incontinent
Off lyfe and deit to thoill the Jugement.

(ll. 1423-1425)

Later, when the mouse has offered her final argument, the result:

"Quhen this wes said, the Lyon . . . to the Mous grantit Remissioun"

(ll. 1503-1506), has all the solemnity of a judge's verdict.

The arguments traditionally used by the mouse to mollify the lion are employed to bring about this happy ending, but they are made to fit in to the larger pattern that Henryson has created. He develops the idea that the lion is the king of all beasts, and given this, the mouse's transgression may represent an attempt to undermine his authority. In the Moralitas the poet goes on to dwell on the dangers to a society led by a weak and lazy king, but in the body of the fable the comic aspects of the situation can be appreciated. When the lion accuses the mouse of presumptuous behaviour, he demands of her: "Knew thow not weill I wes baith Lord and King/ Off beistis all?". The comedy begins with the mouse's nervous reply: "I knaw;/ Bot I misknew", where the contradiction captures the creature's frightened confusion.

However, the mouse sufficiently recovers her equanimity to deliver a series of arguments, and the comic incongruity of the whole situation becomes gradually more evident as we witness this pathetic little creature's very politic manner and her ability to change tack when necessary. In a style one would expect more of an attorney than of a mouse, she argues:

Consider first my simple povertie,
 And syne thy mychtie hie Magnyfyce;
 Se als how thingis done off Neglygence,
 Nouthur off malice nor of presumptioun,
 The rather suld have grace and Remissioun.

(ll. 1435-1439)

She pleads on the grounds of poverty, which brings to mind Babrius's and Marie's moral emphasis, and she claims that her action was a result of negligence not malice, which closely parallels Caxton ("For I supposed not to have done to you ony harme ne displaysyre") and Marie ("Ele escundist que en nule guise/ A escient ne l'aveit feit"). However, Henryson manages to convey that his mouse is not strictly honest, at least in her denial of the accusation of presumption, and her contradiction now has added significance since this is an encounter between a king and his subject. So the traditional arguments are couched in a new context.

Henryson goes on to introduce new material as part of the mouse's defence. She tells the lion that "the sweit sesoun provokit us to dance" (l. 1441), and since the lion lay so still, they thought him dead, otherwise, she says, "we wald not have dancit ouer your heid" (l. 1448). This unfortunately angers the lion even more, and he argues that even if he had been dead and stuffed with straw, the mice should have so respected the skin which "bare the prent off my persoun" (l. 1452), that they would have fallen upon their knees before it. By this point our

imaginations have been so captured that our growing anxiety about the mouse's chances of survival is mitigated by the preposterous nature of this extreme claim and by the mental picture of the mice on their knees. The fact that Henryson can invest a time-worn tale with this kind of immediate dramatic quality testifies to his artistry. Comic incongruity is also explored in this stanza, for the absurd, yet frightening, aspect of the lion's claim is heightened by the way in which two of the strongest emotions, anger and fear, are expressed in restrained, legalistic terms. The lion's "I put the cace . . ." (l. 1449) echoes the mouse's "Consider first . . ." (l. 1435), which maintains the appearance of a court trial.

The lion now proceeds to pass judgement:

For to excuse thow can na cause pretend;
 Thairfoir thow suffer sall ane schamefull end,
 And deith, sic as to tressoun is decreit,
 Upon the Gallous harlit be the feit.

(ll. 1457-1460)

And again this material is Henryson's own invention. Having been accused of treason, the mouse now alters her manner and admits that she is guilty of offending the lion. She throws herself on his mercy. The comic incongruity of a lion trying a mouse is fully explored here, for the little creature launches into a sophisticated consideration of mercy and justice with the cogency and feeling of an impassioned orator:

In everie Juge mercy and reuth suld be,
 As Assessouris, and Collaterall;
 Without mercie Justice is crueltie,
 As said is in the Lawis speciall:
 Quhen Rigour sittis in the Tribunall,
 The equitie off Law quha may sustene?
 Richt few or nane, but mercie gang betweene.

(ll. 1468-1474)

The seriousness of the argument cannot escape us for the strong

sympathies of the writer seem to be crystallized in the ideas expressed. Yet the characterisation of the mouse is not damaged, for the high sentiments and the latinized diction of the first six lines is tempered by the "hamelie language" of the last line.

From this rather abstract level of discussion, the mouse proceeds to an argument of more particular significance. She puts it to the lion that it would not be honourable for him to kill a mouse. This is of course one of the arguments traditionally employed by the mouse.⁹ Just as Walter's lion had realised that the triumph of a conqueror depends on an exertion of strength: "De pretio uicti pendet uictoria: uictor/ Tantus erit, uicti gloria quanta fuit", Henryson's mouse puts it to the lion that "the honour Triumphall/ Off all victour upon the strenth dependis/ Off his conqueist" (ll. 1475-1477). However Henryson adds another dimension by allowing his mouse to equate the situation with a human plight:

Quhat pryce or loving, quhen the battell endis,
Is said off him that overcummis ane man,
Him to defend quhilk nouthir may nor can?

(ll. 1479-1481)

and:

Ane thousand Myis to kill, and eik devoir.
Is lytyll manheid to ane strang Lyoun;

In a subtly inverted way we are reminded of Henryson's purpose in writing these fables which is to:

Put in exempill, and in similitude,
How mony men in operatioun,
Ar like to beistis in conditioun.

(ll. 47-49)

The mouse's penultimate argument is one that is not used by the other medieval fabulists, but it is used by Babrius. His mouse pleads:

'Twere well for you to hunt down stags and horned bulls,
and with their flesh make fat your belly. A mouse is not
meal enough for you to taste with the edges of your lips.¹⁰

Henryson's mouse makes substantially the same point, but in a rather
cunning manner:

Also it semis not your Celsitude,
Quhilk usis daylie meittis delitious,
To fyle your teith or lippis with my blude,
Quhilk to your stomok is contagious;
Unhailsom meit is of ane sarie Mous,
And that namelie untill ane strang Lyoun,
Wont till be fed with gentill vennessoun.

(ll. 1489-1495)

She feeds the lion's vanity at the expense of her own self-esteem, and
of course this strikes a strange note after the almost pretentious tone
of the preceding arguments. The change contributes to a sense of
realism, since it is another example of the mouse adjusting her manner,
lest she invite another charge of presumption.

An examination of two basic motifs--how the lion catches the
mouse and the verbal exchanges between the lion and the mouse-- has
revealed that Henryson has not only expanded the traditional material,
but that he has also assimilated most of the details used by the other
medieval fabulists into a new pattern. At the same time he seems to
have adopted all the best features of the other versions--Babrius's
narrative skill, Walter's capacity for setting the scene, Marie's
dramatic quality--while avoiding the prosaic features of Caxton's
vernacular version. He has also introduced the moral emphasis of the
other fabulists into his story without imposing it on the narrative as
Caxton does. In other words, he has refined these motifs, and integrated
them into a system of his own.

These qualities continue to characterize Henryson's handling of

the third motif, the return of the favour. His version is again an expansion of the previous versions. Babrius's treatment is brief, but, as in his introductory section, his narrative is imaginatively presented. After the release of the mouse he comments:

But he himself ere long fell in with youthful lovers of the chase, was taken captive in their net, made helpless, and bound fast. The mouse ran forth unnoticed from his hole, and, gnawing the sturdy rope with his tiny teeth, set the lion free. By saving thus in turn the lion's life, he made a recompense well worth the gift of life that he'd received.¹¹

Fundamental to Babrius's account is the impression that he enjoys spinning a tale; there is a warmth and vigour in his words which capture and sustain interest.

Of the medieval treatments, Walter's is the least adventurous here:

Solus fit mora dies.
 Nam Leo rete subit, nec prodest uiribus uti,
 Sed prodest querulo murmure dampna loqui.
 Mus redit, hume reperit, cernit loca, uincula todit;
 Hac ope pensat opem; sic Leo tutus (h)abit.
 Rem potuit tantam minimi prudentia dentis,
 Cui Leo dans ulniam se dedit ipse sibi.¹²

[He [the mouse] had to wait only one day. The lion fell under a hunting net, and it was of no avail to use his strength, but it was of use to speak in a quiet, plaintive manner. The mouse returned, found him, saw his situation, and cut the bonds. By this help, he paid back the help given him; thus the lion departed safely. Such a thing could he do through the good sense and the teeth of the least of creatures. The lion, in giving him help, helped himself.]

Caxton's, in contrast, has a refreshing quality:

After this it happed that the same lyon was take at a grete trappe/ And as he sawe hym thus caught and taken/ he beganne to crye and make sorowe/ and thenne whan the rat herd hym crye/ he approached hym & demaunded of hym wherfor he cryed/ And the lyon ansuerd to Hym/ Seest thou not how I am take & bound with this gynne/ Thenne sayd the ratte to hym/ My Lord I wylle not be unkynde/ but ever I shall remembre the grace whiche thou hast done to me/ And yf I can I shall nowhelpe the/ The ratte beganne thenne to byte the lace or cord/ and so long he knawed it that the lace brake/ And thus the lyon escaped/¹³

The introduction of dialogue adds diversion to an otherwise bald narrative. Even so, Caxton does not really develop the potential for characterization. His treatment again suffers in a comparison with Marie's rendering:

Guères de tens ne demurra
 Que uns huem, ceo dit, apparailla
 Une fosse crose dedenz.
 La nuit fu pris li leun enz.
 Grant p'our a ke hum ne l'ocie,
 Dedenz la fosse breit e crie.
 La suriz vient al cri tut dreit,
 Mes ne saveit ki ceo esteit.
 Que (ja) el bois abeit esveillé,
 Quant el le vit si enginne,
 Demanda li qu'il ad la quis.
 Cil respunt que il esteit pris,
 Ocis sereit a grant dolur.
 Dit la suriz: "N'erez pour!
 Ore vus rendrai le guerdon
 Que a mei feistes le pardun,
 Quant od mes piez vus oi merche,
 Gratez la terre a vostre pe
 Tant que aferma vus; pussez,
 E puis amunt bien vus sachiez,
 Que si pussez ça hors eissir;
 E jeo ferai od mei aider
 As cordes, que ci sunt, (de) trencher,
 E as resels ki sunt tenduz,
 Ne serez mie (si) retenuz!¹⁴

[Hardly any time had passed, so the story goes, when a man dug a hollow pit. The night found the lion trapped in it. In great fear that the man would kill him, he struggles and cries in the pit. The mouse came to the cry immediately, but didn't know who was there. The wood had already been alarmed when the mouse saw how the lion was trapped, and asked him what he was doing there. The other replied that he was imprisoned, and that he would be painfully killed. The mouse said: "Don't be afraid! for now you will be rewarded for pardoning me when you listened to my pleas about treading on you. Scratch the earth at your feet as much as you can; push, and then, as you well know, if you push you will get out. And I will go and fetch other mice to help me break the ropes and the nets which bind you. You will not be in pain if you keep back.]

Marie devotes quite a lot of attention to this section. Again she captures that dramatic, exciting note. Her lion really is in trouble for he is trapped in a hole as well as being bound by ropes. She

stresses the anguish of the lion, and at the same time vitalizes the mouse's response to the situation. Her mouse speaks with some feeling, so that the message---kindness and mercy to a fellow creature may sometimes bring unexpected rewards---emerges quite forcefully. In addition, the humorous aspect of the situation is hinted at in the mouse's detailed instructions to the miserable lion.

In some ways Henryson's handling of this section is similar in tone to Marie's. On finding the enmeshed lion, his mouse is intent on returning the lion's "gentrice" by requiting "ane gude turne for ane uther" (l. 1557). Like Marie's mouse, she calls upon her fellows to help in the task of gnawing the ropes. However, Henryson gains his comic effects in a different way, by having his narrator intersperse little comments like: "They tuke na knyfe, thair teith wes sharpe anewch" (l. 1589), which artfully confuses the animal/human nature of his protagonists.

The lion's physical and mental anguish on discovering the hopelessness of his trapped condition is also stressed by Henryson. Brought down by a human device, he is described as:

Welterand about with hiddeous rumissing,
 Quhyle to, quhyle ffra, quhill he mycht succour get;
 Bot all in vane, it vailyeit him na thing.

(ll. 1524-1526)

The desperate hopelessness of his struggle is no less vividly depicted than the contrastingly purposeful activity presented in the lines describing the mice's mission of mercy:

They ran amang the raipis tewch,
 Befoir, behind, sum yeid about, sum under,
 And schuir the raipis off the net in schunder.

(ll. 1561-1563)

Besides striking a balance between these two kinds of activity,

Henryson introduces two new features which are also carefully balanced. These are the depiction of the animal side of the lion's nature, and the lion's complaint when he finds himself thoroughly ensnared. He reminds us that the lion is a hunting beast who, in order to survive, "levit on his Pray" (l. 1511). By slaying "baith tayme and wyld, as he wes wont" (l. 1512), he caused disarray in the country, which the people finally decide to end by trapping him. The lion is of course behaving according to his true animal nature, and his actions are seen in the context of a man-directed world. Having made this distinction between animal and human, Henryson proceeds to emphasise the similarities between human beings and "brutall" beasts by allowing the lion to bemoan his imprisonment in human terms. His complaint is the lament of a powerful figure who has suddenly been brought low, and by letting him vocalize his misery in this way, the poet achieves two things. He makes the point that those who live by violence are unwilling to die by the same violence, and at the same time he manages to present a balanced mixture of human and animal, so that while the animal is clearly the representative of a particular human type, his realism as an animal is not forfeited.

The fable ends with the release of the lion, and the last stanza expresses the moral point made by Caxton and Walter:

Now is the Lyoun fre off all danger,
 Lowis and delyverit to his libertie,
 Be lytill beistis off ane small power,
 As ye have herd, because he had pietie.

(ll. 1566-1569)

Henryson's Moralitas now follows. This is placed in the mouth of Aesop. Before the significance of Henryson's moral conclusions can be fully appreciated, it is necessary to consider the role of this figure, and to do this one has to refer to another of Henryson's innovations, the

Prologue to this fable, in which Aesop is introduced.

In this Prologue, the narrator tells how he goes for a walk one fine June morning and, falling asleep under a tree, he dreams that Aesop appears to him. On learning of his visitor's identity, the narrator begs him to relate "ane prettie Fabill,/ Concludand with ane gude Moralitie" (ll. 1387-1388). Aesop is prevailed upon to tell the tale, but he regrets that his good words will fall on deaf ears for the world is so "canker blak" (l. 1396).

So it is ostensibly Aesop who relates this fable, and provides the moral. This factor has formed the basis of the argument of those critics¹⁵ who view "The Taill of the Lyoun & the Mous" as Henryson's most politically critical fable. They argue that, in order to protect himself, the poet used the figure of Aesop as a device to lessen his own incrimination. According to these critics, the Prologue is necessary to introduce Aesop, and we are deliberately reminded at the end of the fable that the Moralitas is his when the narrator asks: "Maister, is thair ane Moralitie/ In this Fabill?", to which Aesop replies: "Yea, sone . . . richt gude". (ll. 1570-1571).

This analysis is debatable, especially as it has led to an almost exclusively political and topical interpretation of the fable. I would argue that Henryson is an artist first and a social/political critic second. There is the possibility that Henryson prefixes a prologue to the "Lyoun & the Mous" because this fable occurs half-way through his collection. He may have wished to remind his readers that he is following the Aesopic tradition of seeing a "feinyeit Fable" as a way to "repreif the hail misleving/ Off man be figure of ane uther thing" (ll. 6-7), for this point is re-iterated in the second Prologue:

"Fabillis . . . suppois thay fenyeit be,/ Ar full off prudence and moralitie" (ll. 1379-1381). This argument receives some support from the fact that both Babrius and Phaedrus frequently interspersed their collections with reminders of their purpose in writing fables.¹⁶ Furthermore, the introduction of Aesop may be seen as a literary rather than a political device. Marie had stressed the pedigree of her collection by briefly tracing the history of the fables that she came to render in French.¹⁷ Caxton increases the appeal of his fables by affixing a life of Aesop to his translation. Henryson may well have wanted to embellish his collection by creating the character of Aesop and the meeting of his narrator with this popularly esteemed figure.

However, it would be wrong to deny that social/political criticism is present in the Moralitas. Henryson spells out the allegorical significance of his fable. The "Lyoun/ May signifie ane Prince, or Emprior / Ane Potestate, or yet ane King with Croun" (ll. 1573-1575), who is lax in his reign. The fair forest is the transient world of prosperity, and the mice are the community "Wantoun, unwyse, without correctioun" (l. 1588), who become naturally wild and rebellious when law sleeps.

Henryson is making a careful statement about justice and mercy. He makes it clear that in pardoning the mouse the lion does not damage the law, for he emphasises the gratitude that results when a creature recognises himself worthy of death and is then spared. At the same time, powerful men must ever be alert to the dangers of "fals fortoun" (l. 1604), for there will always be those who are ready and waiting their moment to bring their rulers down.

At the end of the tale, Aesop makes a guarded pronouncement:

Mair till expound as now I lett allane,
 Bot King and Lord may well wit quhat I mene:
 Figure heirof oftymis hes bene sene.

(ll. 1612-1614)

and these are the lines which some critics have regarded as thinly veiled topical criticism. Again, one can argue that Henryson here is employing an artistic device. He manages to say a thing more emphatically by stopping short of actually saying it. As the reader works it out and completes the thought, he really notices what might pass him by as a platitude if it were traced out. Even if Henryson was hinting at a more specific reference, the Moralitas taken as a whole seems to be concerned with more universal, ethical implications about law and order. Kinghorn,¹⁸ who explores the topical significance of this fable, comes to the conclusion that there are dangers involved in treating fables as though they were "historical documents". Certainly one of the dangers in this particular fable would be to ignore the wealth of other things that are going on in the tale. The narrative skill evident in the attention paid to little details, like Henryson's creation of two similar but different situations--the mice playing over the sleeping lion and the mice working diligently all about the imprisoned animal--is a notable example.

There is some significance in the fact that Henryson presents his Moralitas separately from the fable. Certainly the Moralitas is not an afterthought, or something imposed upon the fable, for Henryson's purpose is quite clearly didactic. However, he does seem to appreciate the value of letting the narrative progress independently of the moral. In his initial Prolog he writes:

In lyke maner as throw the busteous eird,
 (Swa it be labourit with grit diligence)
 Springis the flouris, and the corne abreird,
 Hailsom and gude to mannis sustenance,
 Oute of the subtell dyte of poetry:
 To gude purpos quha culd it weill apply.

(ll. 8-14)

This tenet sums up his practical procedure. The Moralitas represents his diligent labouring of the "busteous eird" of the fable. His frequent use of the words "fenyeit" and "figure" underline his awareness of the fictive, allegorical nature of the fable genre, and this allows us to class him with the ancient fabulists who spoke "in jest of things that never happened". He explores the full potential of the fable as a "story picturing a truth".

For Henryson the "nuttess schell" which holds the moral "kirmall" has value. He devotes considerable care and attention to the telling of his tale, so that if his fable is ultimately a vehicle for his moral message, one has to admit that he deemed it worthwhile to make the vehicle good. In his narrative skill and vitality, he has inherited the spirit of Babrius; in his didacticism, he has the mind of a medieval man; in the sophisticated synthesis of these two factors lies his originality.

CHAPTER 3

From a comparative study of one fable, "The Lion and the Mouse", it emerges that Henryson is more concerned with the art of story-telling, than were the authors of his analogues. In order to fully appreciate his skill and resourcefulness it is necessary to consider his stylistic qualities, and this can fruitfully be accomplished by comparing four of his fables - "The Taill of the Cok, and the Jasp", "The Taill of the Wolf and the Lamb", "The Taill of the Paddock & the Mous" and "The Taill of the Scheip and the Doig" -- with the corresponding ones in Lydgate's Isopes Fabules.

This line of approach is defensible since both poets were writing in the vernacular, but more specifically in a language strongly influenced by aureation.¹ It is therefore particularly interesting to explore the different effects achieved by the Scottish and the English poet who were working in different vernaculars, yet subject to the influence of Latinate and Romance forms. In addition, both writers were working in a medieval tradition, and their choice of the fable form indicates that they aligned themselves with the didactic purpose of the genre.

Although we noted in Chapter 2 that Henryson allows his narrative to progress independently of the Moralitas, investing much of his art in the depiction of scene, characterization and motivation, if we had looked for "plot development" we would not have found it. This is because the narrative is significant in an exemplary fashion.

It is expository in function rather than rendered entirely for its own sake. In this respect, Henryson inherits the medieval literary theory which regarded the fable as part of the allegorical tradition of writing, and so it is important to understand what this tradition meant.

Both Henryson and Lydgate emphasize the importance of the sentence of the fable:

In fables rude includyd gret prudence
And moralytees full notable of sentence.

(Isopes Fabules, ll. 20-21)

Sa dois spring ane Morall sweit sentence
Oute of the subtell dyte of poetry.

(Fables, ll. 12-13)

and both offer metaphors for the relation of the sentence to the fable:

Perlys whyte, clere & orientall
Ben oft founde in muscle shellys blake.

(Isopes Fabules, ll. 26-27)

The nuttes schell, thocht it be hard and teuch,
Haldis the kirnall, and is delectabill.
Sa lysis thair ane doctrine wyse aneuch,
And full of fruit, under ane fenyeit Fabill.

(Fables, ll. 15-18)

The emphasis on sentence and the suggestion that it may be discovered within the 'shell' of the fable follows Augustinian literary theory. Hugh of St. Victor in his treatise Didascalicon (twelfth Century) provides an exposition of the view that the purpose of the narrative is exemplary:

Exposition contains three parts: letter, sense, sentence.
Letter is the rightful ordering of discourse which indeed we call construing. Sense is the easy and as it were open significance which the letter offers at the first appearance. Sentence is the more profound understanding which may not be attained except through exposition or interpretation.²

These levels are borrowed from Scriptural exegesis and provide a key

to the understanding of the procedure followed by medieval fabulists.

The discovery of the "kirnall" or the "perlys whyte" is therefore the understanding of the sentence beneath the letter and sense of the "nuttis schell" or "muscle shellys". But as we noted in Chapter 1, Henryson and Lydgate have different attitudes to the value and function of the husk/tale. Lydgate regards the fable as a useful, but rather second-rate, literary device: "Where syluer fayleth, in a pewter dyssh/Ryall dentees byn oft tymes seyne" (ll. 17-18). He compares the narrative part of the fable to "blak erthe" which must be cleared away in order to discover the "precious stones" of the moral. Henryson too uses the image of the earth in this context, but for him it is the "bustious eird" connoting vitality, which must be "labourit with grit diligence" (l. 9) so that the flower or "Morall sweit sentence" can spring from it. It is not disposable. We can therefore expect to find differences in the relationship between the narrative and the sentence.

"The Taill of the Cok, and the Jasp" and "The Tale of the Cok, that founde a precyous stone" tell of a cock which, while searching for food, finds a precious stone in a dunghill. The cock rejects the stone because it is of no use to him. He needs food. Henryson's fable is characterized by a narrative economy:

Ane cok sum tyme with feddram fresch & gay,
 Richt cant and crous, albeit he was bot pure,
 Flew furth upon ane dunghill sone be day,
 To get his dennar set was al his cure.
 Scraipand amang the as, be aventure
 He fand ane Jolie Jasp, richt precious,
 Wes castin furth in sweping of the hous.

(ll. 64-70)

Many details are included in one stanza. The cock's physical, temperamental and economic states are described, and we learn of the purpose of his visit to the dunghill, the finding of the

stone, the fact that the stone is "richt precious", and how it came to be in the dunghill. The next stanza speculates on how a precious stone may be "swopit furth" from a house, and the third stanza presents the cock's immediate reaction to his discovery.

Lydgate, on the other hand, takes eight stanzas to get to the cock's discovery of the stone in the dunghill. He first of all speaks of "the cok of kynde" whose red crest, shaped like a crown, betokens "gret noblesse", "corage & hardyness" (ll. 58-60). This bird is also noted for its clear voice which "kepeth the tydes of the nyght (l. 65). He has a purpose in life which is to wake people up. His threefold crow is uttered in praise of the Trinity, and he is gradually associated with virtues: he encourages folk to avoid sloth, he comforts the sick, and he is "Callyd the prophete of ioy & al gladness,/ Embassiatour of Phebus fyry lyght" (ll. 85-86).

Lydgate has so far presented the cock as a type, whereas Henryson has introduced "ane cok", a specific cock. Lydgate continues the generalization by saying, that due to his disposition for song, the cock "ys of poettis callyd Chauncecleer" (l. 101). It only becomes clear in the eighth stanza that the story concerns a particular cock. Given the long preamble on the virtues associated with the type, it is difficult to feel, as is possible in Henryson's version, that we are dealing with an individualised cock.

His eighth stanza corresponds closely to Henryson's first. The cock searches in a dunghill for food and finds a "iacynct stone". This cock is distinguished from Henryson's in that all his wives are about him as he searches for "hys pasture" (l. 112), and the reference, coming so soon far after the mention of "Chauncecleer", brings Chaucer's

"The Nonnes Preestes Tale" immediately to mind. This may be more than coincidental, since Lydgate frequently acknowledged the influence of Chaucer. The echo of this famous poet's tale may therefore represent Lydgate's attempt to embellish his own art and to heighten the effects of a poetic medium which he regarded as essentially "rude".

Henryson's cock seems to realise the value of the jasp, but he rejects it with the comment: "Thow ganis not for me" (l. 80). He contends that it more befits "ane Lord or King" (l. 81). But the creature is really only aware of the superficial value of the stone, for he sees its "vertew" as its worth in gold and its appearance or "cullour cleir". There is also a touch of vanity in the terms on which he rejects it, for he feels that "It may me nouthur extoll nor magnify" (l. 87). However, his humble preference for "draf, or corne" (l. 91) seems quite praiseworthy.

The corresponding sections in Lydgate's fable are delayed by a moral interpolation. In his search for food the cock:

Yaue ensample, whyche gretly may auayle,
As he was only taught by nature,
To auoyde slouthe by dylygent travayle
By honest labour hys lyuelood to procure.

(ll. 113-116)

There follow four stanzas which offer diverse examples of sloth, and which centre around the maxim:

Vertew gynneth at occupacion,
Vyces all procede of idelnesse.

(ll. 134-135)

The cock then addresses the "iacyncte" and particularizes its properties. To a jeweller it is worthy of being set in gold; to Evax the lapidary it symbolizes gladness "geyn sorow & wo[e]" (l. 154.). The best jacinth

is found in Ethiopia, and has been known to comfort men in prison. Finally the cock comes to the same conclusion as Henryson's: "Twene the & me ys no conuenience" (l. 161). Although he appreciates the stone's value, the precise nature of its worth is to him as much a mystery as "how the cherle came furst in the mone" (l. 166).

Lydgate's account is twenty-one stanzas long, nine of which present the cock's actions and speech, the majority presenting the narrator's comments, moral observations and amplifications of the theme of the avoidance of sloth through diligent labour. Henryson's fable is nine stanzas long, six of which present the cock's actions and words directly, one of which speculates on how the jasp got in the dunghill, and the final two of which present the narrator's indication of the importance of the "Inward sentence and Intent of this fable" (l. 117). The most noticeable difference in the procedures of these two poets is that Lydgate does not allow the narrative to progress uninterrupted. The sense and the letter are interpreted as he goes along.

Lydgate's moral conclusions differ from the traditional interpretation of this tale. His cock is praised for his diligence and for his acceptance of his lot in life. His rejection of the jewel in favour of the grain is virtuous, for Lydgate sees the stone as "rychesse" for which the worldly man strives. Henryson's castigation of the cock's foolishness is the more traditional view.³ For him the stone "betakinnis perfite prudence and cunning" (l. 128), and is "mair excellent than ony eirthly thing" (l. 130). By rejecting the "science" that the stone symbolizes, the cock exhibits false intellectual pride.

Henryson's allegory is sophisticated. For the duration of the tale the cock's arguments are apparently rational, but close



examination reveals subtle indications of the true sentence. When he rejects the stone, the seeming humility of "I lufe fer bettir thing of les avail" (l. 90), is subtly undermined by the grossness of his preference for "draf, or corne, to fill my tume Intraill" (l.91). The deliberate choice of words of a very physical nature alerts us to the underlying sentence. The suspicion that the cock's attitude is gross is confirmed by the next stanza:

I had lever ga scraipit heir with my naillis,
 Amangis this mow, and luke my lifys fude,
 As draf, or corne, small wormis, or snaillis,
 Or ony meit wald do my stomok gude,
 than of Jaspis ane mekill multitude.

(ll. 92-96)

There is a predominance of words connoting appetite and a deliberately lowered style of utterance. This contrasts sharply with the heightened style of the passages which describe the value of the jasp. It is the "gentill Jasp, of all stanis the flour" (l. 110), worthy to be "exaltit in worschip and in grit honour" (l. 109). This careful manipulation of styles should prepare us for the Moralitas.

So long as we are confined to the tale we may be under the spell of the cock's seeming rationality. Henryson's Moralitas is therefore a fine example of "the more profound understanding which may not be attained except through exposition or interpretation".⁴ The Moralitas is integrally related to the tale. Henryson's conscious artistry is reflected in the way in which the cock's rhetorical questions:

Quha suld thow mak thy habitatioun?
 Quha suld thow dwell, bot in ane Royall Tour?
 Quha suld thow sit, bot on ane Kingis Crown,
 Exaltit in worschip and in grit honour?

(ll. 106-109)

are counterbalanced by the rhetorical questions in the Moralitas:

Quha may be hardie, riche, and gratiuous?
 Quha can eschew perell and aventure?
 Quha can Governe ane Realme, Cietie, or hous,
 Without science?

(ll. 134-137)

so that the cock's sophism is very effectively pointed up.

Henryson's cock condemns himself through his words. He is blind to the implications of his experience. The cock has a corrupt nature and his actions and words are consistent with it. Henryson's technique therefore contributes to the overall theme of the Fables: "to repreif the haill misleving/ Off man be figure of ane uther thing" (ll. 6-7). In Lydgate's version there is no such subtlety. It is difficult to detect a difference between the voice of the cock and that of the narrator. There is little or no range of registers, and although the cock speaks directly to the stone, his utterances are only to provide "example pleyne" (l. 16) that "eurey thyng foloweth hys nature" (l. 187). Lydgate impresses the moral point on his readers, and indeed the wealth of supportive illustrations offered in the tale almost serves to obscure the point. He is heavy-handed and monotonous where Henryson is compact and varied. His attempts to embellish the fable with scriptural (ll. 73-74; ll. 78-79) and classical (l. 76; 85-86) allusions suggest a failure to come to terms with the fable form. Henryson, on the other hand, has mastered the form, refining the narrative until it has become a perfect vehicle for its allegorical significance.

That allegory is not Lydgate's forte is a view which receives further support from a consideration of his "Tale of the Frogge and the Mowse". Here his procedure involves an equation of the sentence with the sense. The fable is "groundyd ayenst deceyte" and tells of a mouse

who lives in a mill and a frog who dwells by a river. One day the mouse sees the frog pass by his home and invites him in to dinner. The mouse then proceeds to tell the frog that he leads a "mery lyfe" for though he is poor, he is happy with a "suffisaunce" (l. 404). He is moved to exclaim: "Blessyd be pouertie, that causeth assurance, / Namely when gladnes doth hys brydyll lede" (ll. 414-415), which has a proverbial ring to it as well as an echo of "The Beatitudes". The mouse, like the cock, is content with his lot in life. However, when he offers to share his food with the frog, his hospitality is criticised by the latter:

Of fresshe lycour thys ys a baren mylle.
I prayse no feeste, where good drynke doth fayle.

(ll. 458-459)

So they set off to the river for a drink. The frog proposes that they swim to the other side, and when the mouse, tired and dirty, admits: "I have of swymmyng noon experience" (l. 485), the frog suggests that a thread tied to the mouse's neck and to his leg will solve the problem. But, the narrative voice announces: "Thus gan the ffrosshe couertly to feyne/ Of false fraude the lytill mowse to drowne" (ll. 491-492). However the frog's plan is foiled, for a kite swoops down at the critical moment and snatches them up by the thread. As the frog is fat he is eaten, but the lean mouse escapes death. The outcome is that "the frosshe for hys falsnes/ Gwerdon receueth of vynkyndenes" (ll. 501-502).

Lydgate's Conclusio points out that ingratitude is the worst of all vices and that "Where fraud ys vsyd, fraude mot redounde" (l. 521). The fable is to serve as an exemplification of innocence threatened by deceit:

The mouse ys but sympyll, nat contrary
 Where the frosshe by fraude & violence
 Vnder colour of frendly dylygence
 Was euer besy hys felow to encloy:
 The cause out sought hit dyd hymself dystroy.

(ll. 514-518)

The sentence conforms to the interpretation of the sense offered by Hugh of St. Victor, for it is "the easy and . . . open significance which the letter offers at the first appearance." "A more profound understanding" is, however, not offered in the Conclusio. In fact the Conclusio re-iterates the moral comments at the beginning of the fable:

Who that cast hym to deceue hys felaw,
 Shall of deceyte receue the guerdon.
 Who by dyssimelyng & fraude doth procede
 Like a defrauder receue shall hys mede.

(ll. 361-364)

Furthermore, we are told that the frog will deceive the mouse and why-- because he is "felle & contraryouse" and "Dowble of entent"--before evidence is offered in the story. We are therefore told in advance how to interpret the fable.

By contrast, Henryson's "The Taill of the Paddock & the Mous" conforms absolutely to Hugh of St. Victor's system of exposition. His fable begins with the mouse arriving at a river only to find that she cannot get to the other side. She cries for help and attracts the attention of a paddock "in the watter by" (l. 2786). To the paddock's enquiry "quhat is your errand heir" (l. 2790), the mouse returns that she is prevented by the water from reaching the "corne . . . ryip Aitis . . . Barlie, Peis and Quheit" (l. 2792) on the opposite bank. When the paddock proposes to find a way of getting the mouse across, the little creature is rather more suspicious than Lydgate's mouse. She requires

an explanation as to "quhat facultie or gin" enables the paddock to survive in water and she has misgivings about the paddock's trustworthiness. Then, when she learns that the means involve having her leg tied by a thread to the frog's leg, she is anxious about giving up her freedom. So she extracts an oath from the paddock which requires her to swear that her intentions are entirely honourable.

This done, they proceed, but:

In thair myndis thay wer rycht different:
 The Mous thocht off na thing bot ffor to swym.
 The Paddok ffor to droun set hir Intent.
 Quhen that in midwart off the streme wer went,
 With all hir force the Paddok preissit doun,
 And thocht the Mous without mercie to droun.

(ll. 2875-2881)

A struggle ensues. Meanwhile they are observed by a "Gled". He swoops down, snatches the thread that binds them, and carries them off. He kills them both, devours them, and flies off.

The Moralitas begins by treating of the sense of the fable:

Ane wickit mynd with wordis fair and sle.
 Be war thairfore, with quhome thow fallowis the.

(ll. 2913-2914)

We are warned not "to be machit with ane wickit marrow" (l. 2917) for "Ane fals Intent under ane fair pretence / Hes causit mony Innocent for to de" (ll. 2918-2919). It is great folly to believe all those who speak fair, for very often a "silkin toung" hides a cruel heart. In addition, it is inadvisable to "bind the fast quhair thow wes frank and fre" (l. 2927). He goes on: "rycht more I sall the tell" (l. 2934), and he proceeds to offer the underlying sentence of the fable. In these terms the frog and mouse become symbols. The paddock is "mannis bodie" and the mouse is the soul which is bound to

man's body until the "Gled", which is death, separates them. The water is the world "standand rycht different in thair opinioun" (l. 2958). They struggle because the body is "usand in the flude to duell" (l. 2936), "with cairis Implicate" (l. 2936) "Ay in perrell, and reddie for to droun" (l. 2940), whereas the soul's desire is to leave this world for heavenly bliss (symbolized by the abundance of food on the other side of the bank) and while it is bound to the body it must "ever stand in dreid" of drowning. Henryson's Moralitas ends on a note of warning to all his readers: since human beings are mortal they must always be vigilant and have faith in Christ.

Henryson therefore offers an interpretation of the fable that is not obvious at the sense level. As Geoffrey N. Leech observes, it is a convention of allegory that a "hint of the tenor, the underlying sense, should be allowed to peep through".⁵ The "underlying sense" is of course the same concept as the medieval sentence. The "hint of the tenor" in Henryson's tale may lie in his referencé to the water that the mouse wishes to cross, for, according to John MacQueen:

Water . . . is one of the most widespread and powerful symbols of the allegorical tradition, and one upon which the entire interpretation of the poem must be based . . . For Bede at the beginning of the allegorical tradition in Britain, as for Henryson at the end,

The waltir is the warld ay walterand
With mony wayiss of tribulatioun.⁶

He also points out the strong association of fortune with water images in Medieval literature. Since Henryson's readers would have been naturally alert to implications of the underlying significance of the fable, the frequent references to the water that has to be crossed may have provided the necessary clue.

Sense and sentence alike are intended for moral instruction. It

is interesting to compare the different natures of the morality offered by Henryson and Lydgate. The latter evidences a rather black and white sense of morality: the frog is eaten because he is fat and evil, the mouse is spared because he is lean and innocent. In fact Lydgate tends to present us with definitely good and definitely bad characters. Henryson provides us with no such simple solutions. On the sense level⁷ the mouse is innocent and yet she suffers the same fate as the paddock. This may seem a harsher view, but perhaps it is a more realistic view of life.

Certainly two very different minds are behind the narrative methods which promote the morals. Lydgate's concept of men and beasts is presented at the beginning of the fable:

Aftyr theyr naturall disposicions,
In man & beste ys shewyd experyence.

(ll. 372-373)

All creatures act according to their nature.⁸ Different inclinations distinguish the differences in men. Some are inclined to peace, others to violence, some to virtue, others to vice. Different creatures lead different lives. The frog and the mouse are distinguished in this way:

Thus were these wormes contrary of lyving:
The ffroshe delyteth to abyde in mony lakys,
The mouse to fede hym on chese & tendyr cakys.

(ll. 474-476)

By nature the frog is "felle & contraryouse" (l. 387) and the mouse is "sympyll, nat contrary" (l. 514).

Henryson manages to convey similar ideas, but with narrative skill and a minimum of obtrusive authorial comment. We can gather for ourselves that these two creatures have different ways of life. Crossing the water presents the mouse with a real predicament:

Scho nicht not waid, hir schankis were sa schort,
 Scho culd not swym, scho had na hors to ryde:
 Of verray force behovit hir to byde.

(ll. 2779-2781)

The paddock is first seen "in the watter by" (l. 2786), by contrast obviously in her natural habitat, for she "be nature culd douk, and gaylie swym" (l. 2788). In addition, Henryson's animals are not presented simply as the innocent mouse and the wicked frog. The deceit of the paddock emerges gradually. Like the cock, her arguments refuting the truth of the proverb "Distortum vultum sequitur distortio morum" (l. 2832) are allowed to appear convincing. The moral of the fable--beware the silver-tongued but false-hearted--therefore receives pointed significance. There is also a poignant touch in the realization that the mouse has betrayed her own instincts. She initially suspects the paddock of harbouring "sumpart of falset and Invy" (l. 2825), but is persuaded to reject her own convictions.

At first glance, Lydgate seems to provide more narrative detail in this fable. The mouse's invitation to the frog to visit his mill and to join him for dinner has no counterpart in Henryson's fable, although it is similar in some ways to his tale of the town mouse and the country mouse. These details are not in fact vital to the story or its moral. The situation merely serves to provide the mouse, in the thinly disguised voice of Lydgate, to point out the virtue of being content with a simple life. Henryson, on the other hand, focuses on the important details of the story, and so his fable begins with the mouse's arrival at the river. Even so, narrative economy is never synonymous with the baldness of treatment in Henryson's poetry. For example, the first stanza succinctly describes

the mouse's dilemma, but there is room for humour in his presentation. Similarly, when the paddock holds forth on the subject "Thow suld not juge ane man efter his face" (l. 2839) there is humour in the mouse's impatient reply: "Let be thy preiching" (l. 2851), a sentiment, I feel sure, the reader would have appreciated in the mouth of the frog who is required to listen to Lydgate's mouse as he holds forth on the merits of a simple life with so many classical illustrations!

One other aspect of Henryson's style deserves mention here. This is his handling of the Moralitas section of the fable, an aspect which involves a consideration of the kind of author-reader relationship he establishes. Lydgate's Conclusio presents us with a series of detached observations on the moral of the fable, whereas Henryson speaks directly to his reader: "My Brother . . .". He adopts the rôle of an advisor and friend, rather than that of detached moral judge. Alongside the direct, almost colloquial language of the first three stanzas (the informal nature of which is emphasised by the eight line Ballade form as distinct from the usual Rhyme Royal), rhetoric is used as an effective contrast. Aureate words, "Implicate", "Suggestioun", "assay", "dolorus", "tribulation", in this second part of the Moralitas are used to express the serious and elevated nature of his subject. This ability to adapt his style to his subject, to adopt a different approach in his Moralitas from that employed in the narrative, and to achieve different effects within the Moralitas itself, leads to a rich variety of responses. Lydgate's procedure excludes this kind of variety, for he maintains the same tone whether he is dealing with the story or the moral, so that there is only one possible relationship between the author and reader---that of homilist and patient reader.

So far I have discussed Henryson and Lydgate in the context of the allegorical tradition which they both inherited as medieval writers. A comparative study of the next two fables reveals that Henryson was as clearly a product of the fifteenth century as Lydgate was of the fourteenth, since his work is influenced by new developments in poetry. For Lydgate and his contemporaries poetry was "concerned with ideas rather than with the effective values of the concrete"⁹ and allegorical poetry served particularly as a vehicle for the expression of traditional ideas. We have already discerned in Henryson's art an interest in some aspects of realism and an alertness to the "significance of concrete materials as manifestations of . . . concepts".¹⁰ In these two fables we find that Henryson moves out of the framework of medieval allegory towards "Complaint"¹¹ and satire.

In the tales themselves we continue to find the variety and skill in narrative techniques that make him a superior artist to Lydgate. The narrative economy that enables him to come straight to the point is once again evident in "The Taill of the Wolf and the Lamb". A cruel wolf "richt ravenous and fell" (l. 2616) comes down to a river to drink and a "selie lamb" approaches to do the same. In succinct words we are told:

Thus drank thay baith, bot not of ane Intent;
 The Wolfis thocht wes all on wickitnes;
 The selie Lamb wes meik and Innocent.

(ll. 2623-2625)

A potentially dangerous situation is intimated, although Henryson does not weight the scales. He creates the meeting of the two beasts and attributes to them those characteristics made familiar by bestiaries.

Lydgate, on the other hand, leaves little for the reader to

supply. Before the meeting of the two animals takes place, the moral point of the fable is laboriously spelled out. Three stanzas are devoted to demonstrating that "atwene vertues lyfe & vyces/ There may be no iust conuenience" (ll. 227-228). He proceeds to offer a profusion of illustrations. Just as an innocent sheep is powerless against a strong lion, so is a dwarf against a giant. There is a great division in nature between "rancour & humble patience" (l. 232). "The lambe, the wolf[e], contrary of nature,/ Euer diuerse & nothing oon they thynke" (ll. 246-247) is Lydgate's rather cumbersome way of making the same point as Henryson.

There is a world of difference in the way they choose to say the same thing. Henryson's choice of words tends to be imaginative as well as functional, whereas Lydgate's choice tends to be perfunctory. It is also notable that, as in the tale of the cock, Lydgate's animals begin as abstract types and only become individuals in the fourth line.

Compare Henryson's first stanza:

Ane cruell Wolff, richt ravenous and fell,
 Upon ane tyme past to ane Reveir,
 Descending from ane Roche unto ane well,
 To slaik his thrist, drank of the watter cleir.
 Swa upon cace ane selie Lamb come neir,
 Bot of his fa, the Wolff, na thing he wist,
 And in the stream laipit to cule his thrist.

(ll. 2616-2622)

with Lydgate's fourth stanza:

The lambe, the wolf[e], contrary of nature,
 Euer diuerse & nothyng oon they thynke.
 Bothe at onys of soden auenture
 To a fresshe ryuer they came downe to drynke:
 At the hede spryng hy opon the brynke
 Stondeth the wolfe, a froward beste of kynde;
 The sely lambe stood fer abak behynde.

(ll. 246-252)

Lydgate's "contrary of nature" is rather lame in descriptive terms. His animals "drynke" at the river whereas Henryson's wolf comes to "slaik his thrist" and his lamb "laipit to cule his thrist". Both poets are writing in Rhyme Royal verse and yet Henryson's stanza is more free-flowing. His choice of verbs contributes to the impression of movement and activity--"past", "descending", "slaik", "drank", "come neir", "wist", "laipit"--whereas Lydgate's few verbs--"came", "stondeth", "stood"--give the scene a stationary quality.

The meeting of the two beasts quickly disposed of, Lydgate's description of the wolf as a "froward beste of kynde" provides him with the opportunity to digress, this time on the subject of those who are "froward of condicion" (l. 252). He argues that those who are so, are disposed to malice and "outrage", and will soon find an occasion to pick a quarrel. He then returns to the narrative to speak of the wolf who, unsurprisingly, seems inclined to do just this.

Henryson's procedure is similar to that in his tale of the cock. He allows the wolf to condemn himself through his own actions and words. The wolf viciously accuses the lamb of presumption and of defiling his water, to which the fearful lamb replies that this argument "contrair is to resoun" (l. 2643), since he drinks below the wolf and the water cannot run uphill. Besides, he argues, he cannot possibly foul the wolf's water since as a young lamb, accustomed only to his mother's milk, his lips have touched nothing contagious.

Defeated on these grounds, the wolf accuses the lamb of employing "language Rigorous" (l. 2655), just like his father had done. Because the lamb's father angered the wolf, the son is now expected to pay the price. The lamb's rejoinder--that each man should only be

responsible for his own sins---echoes Scripture¹² and is capped by the wolf's twisted quotation from Exodus XX. 5.¹³ Finally the lamb pleads that he is willing to be tried before a lawful court for the wolf should remember that no man should "His adversar punis at his awin hand" (l. 2681).

As MacQueen points out, the arguments of the lamb appeal to Natural Law, Scriptural Law and Civil Law and are phrased in the language appropriate to each.¹⁴ They are not realistic in terms of the animal's "age and situation".¹⁵ They are formally stylized. Since we have noted elsewhere (in "The Taill of the Lyoun & the Mous") that Henryson generally tries to preserve some degree of realism in the presentation of his animals, this violation of verisimilitude seems intentional. We are presented with a confrontation between reason and irrationality, between simplicity and duplicity. The lamb proceeds according to the dictates of the Prolog:

In to gude purpos dispute and argow,
Ane Sillogisme propone, and eik conclude.

(ll. 45-46)

His is the voice of reason with the full weight of law behind it. The preponderance of aureate words introduced to augment the lamb's speech should indicate to the reader that the lamb is expressing noble and elevated sentiments.¹⁶

By contrast, the diction of the wolf betrays his base sentiments. His words are designed to sound rasping and unpleasant:

Thow Cative wretchit thing,
How durst thow be sa bald to fyle and bruke,
Quhar I suld drink, with thy foull slavering?
It wer Almous the ffor to draw and hing,
That suld presume, with thy foull lippis wyle,
To glar my drink, and this fair watter fyle.

(ll. 2631-2636)

He wraithit me, and than I culd him warne
 Within ane yeir, and I brikit my heid,
 I suld be wrokkin on him, or on his barne.

(ll. 2658-2660)

Native and generally monosyllabic words are chosen for their harsh consonants and short vowel sounds, so that the overall impression contrasts strikingly with the mellifluous effect of the lamb's words. The violence, impatience and intimidation which lurk behind his words are substantially conveyed by the word choice and arrangement.

Henryson is therefore discriminating in his use of aureate diction. There is always a relation between his subject matter and his word choice. This enables him to command a variety of styles. In Lydgate's fable the tendency towards aureation is more general, with the result that he does not achieve the variety that comes from juxtaposing styles. Words such as "dolcyes" (l. 225), "conuenience" (l. 228), "patience" (l. 232), "resistence" (l. 23), "dysposicion" (l. 261), "reuerence" (l. 271), "dyspitious" (l. 339), "conumpable" (l. 342), "onrepentaunte" (l. 345), are used by the narrator, the wolf and the lamb alike, and their inclusion seems to represent a general attempt to gild the poet's literary style.

Henryson's wolf finally abandons all pretence of a debate and devours the lamb. His disregard for law and reason has become evident in his attempts to make wrong appear right and in his refusal to admit dialectic defeat. Henryson therefore very effectively indicates that the wolf has achieved the kind of victory that derives from brute strength alone. In Lydgate's version the encounter between the two animals receives less attention. The wolf accuses the lamb of being "false & double" (l. 260) just like his father and of wanting to trouble

the wolf's water. The lamb replies that this is not true since water cannot run uphill, but he is quickly resigned to the fact that it is useless to argue with the wolf. The wolf then accuses the lamb of "feynyd speche flatteryng & benygne" (l. 288) and falsely charges him with malice. With the words: "The lawe shall part vs, whyche of vs hath ryght" (l. 292), he devours the lamb, and Lydgate quickly points out that this was not law, but "law tornyd to rauyne,/ Dome execute by the wolfis tothe" (ll. 296-297).

The lawless killing of the lamb by the wolf affords Lydgate the opportunity to hold forth on associated vices. His ponderous morality rests on rather trite maxims and is sustained by examples from Scripture and classical literature. Naboth lost his vine through "law tornyd to rauyne" (l. 296) and this is why the Bible pronounces that no "rauenous beste" (l. 300) should be offered in sacrifice. Shepherds and sheep-dogs should always be vigilant for there are those who would falsely try to enter Christ's fold. The lamb in Aesop's fable is even less fortunate than the lamb with the golden fleece for Jason left it "hoole" in body, whereas this unfortunate creature was devoured.

He is angered that the innocent lamb should be destroyed by a wolf who is able to go scot-free, and argues that this is similar to the position of poor people in law courts:

With empty hande men noon hawkis lewre
 Nor cache a iorroure, but yef he yeue hym mede.
 The poor pleteth; what ys hys auenture?
 Voyde purse causeth he may nat spede.
 The lambe put bak, the wolf the daunce doth lede.

(ll. 330-334)

These lines strike an unusually personal note, but the strength of feeling is somewhat subdued by the surrounding passages in which a more

objective view is prevalent. The scriptural and classical allusions tend to contribute to the overall impression of formal detachment on the poet's part. In addition, this expression of concern for the sufferings of the poor pales in intensity when it is compared to the following lines from Henryson's "The Scheip ^{ad} the Doig":

We pure pepill as now may do no moir
 Bot pray to the, sen that we ar opprest
 In to this eirth, grant us in hevin guide rest.

(ll. 1318-1320)

Henryson's sympathy is more poignant because he can identify with the experience of the poor people.

Lydgate is more comfortable with moral generalizations, and it is to these he returns in his Conclusio. Like Henryson--in the lines just quoted--his concern with the oppression of the innocent is not simply a condemnation of social wrongs, but is a subordination of temporal to eternal values.

As men deserue, they receue theyr guerdon.
 Onrepentaunte the tyraunt goth to hell.
 The pore man with small possession
 Vertuosly doth in the erthe dwell,
 Content with lytill doth trewly by and sell
 And of houle hert can loue God & drede,
 When he goth hens, hathe heuen to hys mede.

(ll. 344-350)

His manner is sententious and borders on triteness. He finally falls back on the kind of banal observations that is conspicuous in all his fables:

To encrease vertu and vyces to confounde
 Example here is shewyd of gret diuersyte,
 By Isopus was thys fable founde,
 Where ys rehersyd, toforne as ye may se,
 The wolfis felnesse, the lambes propertie;
 The lambe commendyd for naturall mekenes
 The wolfe rebuked for rauenous felnes.

(ll. 351-357)

Henryson's moral conclusions take a very different form.

They are presented in a carefully structured Complaint. His style is suitably direct and relatively unadorned. The choice of native and vernacular words makes his arguments personal and immediate. He begins by saying that the lamb signifies the poor people "Of quhome the lyfe is half ane Purgatorie" (l. 2709) and the wolf "betakinnis fals extortioneris / And oppressouris of pure men" (ll. 2711-2712). He then discusses the wrongs imposed by these oppressors in terms of the three different kinds of wolves that exist in this world: "fals perverteris of the Lawis", mighty men who are greedy and covetous, and feudal lords. The first kind "under Poete termis falset mingis" (l. 2716), who "for ane bud the pure man overthrawis, / Smoirand the richt, garrand the wrang proceid" (ll. 2718-2719). The second type "will not thoill the pure in pece to be" (l. 2731) and even if the poor man and his family should be dying for want of food, "thairof thay gif na rak, / Bot over his heid his mailling will thay tak" (ll. 2733-2734). The third kind are "men of heritage" (l. 2742) or wealthy landlords who when vexed have no hesitation in threatening to turn their less fortunate tenants out of their homes unless the "gressome" or tenant's fine is paid again. They also expect the poor man and his household to be at their beck and call without "Meit or wage" (l. 2752).

Alongside each of these accusations, there is an appeal to the respective oppressors to change their ways. Henryson in fact assumes the rôle of spokesman for the poor. By way of an apostrophe, he addresses the parties most able to remedy these wrongs:

O man of Law! let be thy subteltie
 With nice gimpis, and fraudis Intricait,
 And think that God in his Divinitie
 The wrang, the richt, of all thy werkis wait:
 For prayer, price, for hie nor law estait,
 Of fals querrellis se thow mak na defence;
 Hald with the richt, hurt not thy conscience.

.....
 O man! but mercie, quhat is in thy thoct,
 War than ane Wolf, and thow culd understand?
 Thow hes aneuch; the pure husband richt nocht
 Bot croip and caff upon ane clout of land.
 For Goddis aw, how durst thow tak on hand,
 And thow in Barn and Byre sa bene, and big,
 To put him fra his tak and gar him thig?

.....
 O thow grit Lord, that riches hes and rent,
 Be nocht ane Wolf, thus to devoir the pure;
 Think that na thing cruell nor violent
 May in this warld perpetuallie Indure:
 This sall thow trow haif als greit pane
 As thow the pure had with thy awin hand slane.

(ll. 2721-2769)

While he warns that eternal values will ultimately prevail and that the unjust will answer for their sins, there is an awareness that all men have responsibilities to their fellows. He does not accept Lydgate's tenet that there is a "gret diuersite" (l. 325) in human nature which is worth recording for the purpose of showing by "example" virtuous and vicious behaviour. No doubt Lydgate too intended to improve by his examples, but he rarely reveals the kind of optimistic, philanthropic belief in reform which characterizes Henryson's didacticism.

Henryson's grave yet enterprising moral mind leads him to explore the fable as a vehicle for satire in "The Taill of the Scheip and the Doig". The tale tells of a dog who summons a sheep to court on the charge of owing him a loaf of bread. Although the dog's charge is false, the sheep is found guilty and is forced to sell his fleece to pay the dog. Winter comes and the poor creature dies from cold.

Lydgate's version emphasises the falseness of the hound's claim

and the injustice that derives from the testimony of false witnesses.

The wolf and the kite testify that the dog is telling the truth:

Thus al thre were false by oon assent,
 The hound, the wolf, and the cursid kyte,
 The sheepe, allas, though he were innocent,
 By doome compelled, as Isopus doth write,
 To pay the loff, his dettis to acquyte,
 Thus constrayned, the lawe dide hym compelle,
 Ar grete myschief his wynter flees to selle.

(ll. 617-623)

When the sheep dies, his carrion is devoured by the wolf, the dog and the kite. The sheep is identified with the poor people:

Thus in this world by extorcion verileche
 Poore folk be devoured alwey by the riche.

(ll. 636-637)

Al suche raveyne on poraile to theyr distresse
 Beganne at false iurrours and false witesse.

(ll. 657-658)

Lydgate goes on to warn that those who "for lucre or for gret richesse/
 Wilbe forsworne . . . falsely forsaketh God and al His werkis"

(ll. 712-714).

Henryson's treatment is at the same time more specific and more broadly critical. Whilst the action in Lydgate's version is vaguely located "afore a iuge" (l. 546), Henryson's sheep is called before "Ane fraudfull Wolf" (l. 1150), in the "Consistorie" or ecclesiastical court, the procedure of which he depicts in great detail. The close reproduction of the legal manner of such a court¹⁷ makes his satire all the more powerful.

"Schir Corbie Ravin" is the "Apparitur, / Quha pykit had ffull mony Scheipis Ee" (ll. 1160-1161), the fox is "Clerk and Noter in the Cause" (l. 1174) and the dog's advocate is the kite. The accused sheep

has no advocate, presumably because he is too poor, and must conduct his own defence. The "fraudfull Wolf" is judge and summons the sheep to appear before "This Cursit Court, corruptit all ffor meid" (l. 1241):

By the use, and cours, and commoun style
 On this maner maid his Citation:
 'I, Maister Wolff, partles off fraud and gyle,
 Under the panis off hie Suspensioun,
 Off grit Cursing, and Interdictioun,
 Schir Scheip, I charge the for to compeir,
 And answer to ane Doig befoir me heir.

(ll. 1153-1159)

When the sheep objects to "the Juge, the tyme, the place" (l. 1187) of the hearing,¹⁸ two arbitrators are chosen to consider the validity of his objection.

And thairupon, as Jugis, thay sat down,
 And held ane lang quhyle disputatioun,
 Seikand full mony Decreitis off the Law,
 And Blosis als, the verite to knaw.

Of Civile law volumis full mony thay revolve,
 The Codies and Digestis new and ald;
 Contrait, Prostrait Argumentis thay resolve,
 Sum objecting, and sum can hald.

(ll. 1212-1218)

His objection is overruled and he is charged "Under the panis off Interdictioun,/ The soume off silver, or the breid, to pay" (ll. 1246-1247). The narrative ends with the sheep selling his fleece to raise the money to buy the bread: "Naikit and bair syne to the feild couth pas" (l. 1257).

Two main factors are significant in Henryson's tale. First, there is more direct authorial commentary within the narrative than in the other fables I have considered, and second, there is an overlap of tale and Moralitas. When the bear and the badger consider the sheep's objection to the trial in an apparently solemn manner, Henryson addresses the reader:

For prayer, or price, trow ye that thay wald fald?
 Bot hald the glose, and Text of the Decreis,
 As trew Jugis; I beschrew thame ay that leis.

(ll. 1220-1222)

When their decision requires the sheep to continue his plea, the poet comments:

Than wes he nathing fane,
 For ffra thair sentence couth he not appeill.
 On Clerkis I do it, gif this sentence wes leill.

(ll. 1227-1229)

Finally when sentence is pronounced he observes:

Off this sentence (allace) quhat sall I say,
 Quhilk dampnit hes the selie Innocent,
 And Justifyit the wrangous Jugement?

(ll. 1248-1250)

These remarks form a caustic commentary on the action and indicate quite clearly that Henryson is not only concerned but bitterly angered by legal malpractice. He displays a strength of commitment and feeling that is totally absent from Lydgate's attitude to his subject matter.

Furthermore, the satirical purpose of his treatment is allowed to override the lesser consideration of distinguishing between the tale and the Moralitas. The wretched fate of the sheared sheep is recounted amidst his moral conclusions. The Moralitas is in fact an extension of the satire to include malpractices in Civil courts. So it is that the wolf may be likened to:

Ane Schiref stout,
 Quhilk byis ane forfalt at the Kingis hand,
 And hes with him ane cursit Assyis about,
 And dytis all the pure men up on land.

(ll. 1263-1268)

The raven is compared to:

Ane fals Crownair,
 Quhilk hes ane portioun of the Inditement,

And passis furth befoir the Justice Air,
 All misdoaris to bring to Jugement;
 Bot luke, gif he wes of ane trew Intent,
 To scraip out Johne, and wryte in Will, or Wat,
 And tak ane bud at both the parties tat.

(ll. 1272-1278)

He feels that it is unnecessary to expound on the meaning of the fox and the kite since we have come to know the kind of natures they represent.

Henryson's social criticism contrasts with Lydgate's rather diffuse moralizing on the text "Periury is enemy to al rightwisnesse" (l. 711). His penetrating attack on the whole legal system which countenances simony and corrupt judges is more sweeping. Lydgate's judge is impartial and is forced by the evidence of false witnesses to convict the sheep, whereas in Henryson's fable judges bear the brunt of his anger for too many of them are "corruptit all for meid" (l. 1241) or so "blindit with affectioun" (l. 1305) that justice cannot prevail. Ultimately the poor man suffers most in a world where the man "with okker maist may wyn" (l. 1311).

A comparison of the procedures of these two poets indicates not only that Henryson is the superior artist, but that in his hands the fable is a very flexible form. "Aesop, the slow-moving moralist of Medieval tradition, is barely recognisable".¹⁹ His art is fluent, varied and modulated in narrative terms. He employs a variety of measures and has a faculty for juxtaposition, whether for immediate effects or to carry broad thematic points which elicit a rich variety of responses.

Charles Elliott²⁰ argues that Henryson's method in the fables shows a dichotomy. In detaching the sentence from the narrative which is independent and satisfying in "literary terms", he feels that our "Response cannot easily be a unified one".²¹ I would argue that the

sentence is a well worked-out interpretation or application of the fable. But Henryson's method offers variety here too. In "The Taill of the Cok, and the Jasp" and "The Taill of the Paddock & The Mous" he presents a specific series of events which in the Moralitas receives an interpretation in general terms. "The Taill of the Wolf and the Lamb" and "The Taill of the Scheip & the Doig" operate differently for the tale is given the widest possible reference, while the particular application is reserved for the Moralitas.

CHAPTER 4

So far I have considered Henryson's narrative artistry in the light of the broad European and medieval traditions in which he worked. From a study of individual fables it has emerged that he brought an original and highly inventive skill to bear upon time-worn materials. His work, however, is also part of a Scottish tradition in poetry, a vernacular tradition, which began with Barbour (c. 1330-1395) and was in decline by the time Lyndsay (1490-1555) was writing. To understand the distinctively Scottish aspect of Henryson's poetry it is necessary to appreciate this vernacular tradition which, although a short-lived one, was distinguished by a common literary language and was concerned with, as well as being a product of, a specifically Scottish political and social environment.

The claim that the Scots had a literary language of their own is not universally accepted. H. Harvey Wood, for example, argues that to call Henryson's work peculiarly Scottish is incorrect since Middle Scots derived from the Northumbrian, later Northern, dialect of Old and Middle English. Henryson himself would probably have designated it Inglis rather than Scots, for Scots at that time referred to the Gaelic speech.¹ Certainly philologically Scots (Inglis) was not a separate language. However, by the fifteenth century the language of the Scottish Lowlanders had developed distinctive features, and these had become noticeable to contemporaries. In 1498, a Spanish diplomat, visiting the Court of James IV, was struck by the distinctions between the Scots and

English tongues, comparing them to Aragonese and Castilian.² Tom Scott demonstrates that the literary Scots of Henryson was quite distinct from English by offering this comparison with an English text dating from 1475:

Myghtfull God veray, Maker of all that is,
 Thre persons withoutten nay, oone God in endless blis,
 Thou maide both nyght and day, beest, fowle, and fysh,
 All creatures that lif may wroght Thou at Thi wish,
 As Thou wel myght;
 The son, the moyne, verament.
 Thou maide, the firmament,
 The sternes also full fervent
 To shyne Thou maide ful bright.

(Towmely play of Noah)

Ane doolie sessoun to ane cairfull dyte
 Suld correspond and be equivalent.
 Richt sa it wes quhen I began to wryte
 This tragedie, the wedder richt fervent,
 Quhen Aries in middis of Lent;
 Schouris of haill can fra the north discend,
 That scantie fra the cauld I nicht defend.

(Testament of Cresseid)³

The English text is in a Northern dialect of Middle English and derives from the same philological source as Henryson's language, and yet the two languages "are already as distinct as French and Italian or Spanish, or, more appropriately, Provençal".⁴ As G. Gregory Smith⁵ points out, the distinctly Middle Scots usage is mainly a question of differences in orthography and vocabulary. Most notably, Henryson has Scots ane for early a, and the English text has oone (l. 2); i is added to long vowels as in cairfull (l. 1); Scots retains the older northern form of shall/should: suld (l. 2); quhen is the peculiarly Middle Scots form of when; ō for ã or a is written au or aw: cauld (l. 7); Scots has cht rather than ght: richt (l. 3), nicht (l. 7), English myght (l. 3), myghtfull (l. 1); sa for so; and Scots retains a phonetic variant of the Northern form gar

(pa. t. of ginnen) in can fra (l. 6). In the matter of accidence, Middle Scots adds is for the plural nouns: schouris (l. 6), where Middle English nouns take es or s: creatures (l. 4), sternes (l. 9), persons (l. 2). Middle Scots also tends to have sch for sh or s: schouris.

Wood also argues that Henryson's phraseology is not peculiarly Scottish, for it is not a "spoken, historical dialect of the Scottish language at any period; but an artificial, created 'literary' language".⁶ I have to concede that Henryson's literary language was a hybrid and not a historical dialect of the Scottish language, but Wood's argument that because this language was literary it was not Scottish, is not logical. Henryson could, and did, use a distinctively Scottish literary language. In England in the fifteenth century most of the dialects of medieval English were moving towards a written standard. When Northern English went out of literary use, out went Northern characteristics. But in Scotland Older Scots⁷ remained and continued to develop. In 1424, James I gave this dialect prestige by causing all the old Latin and French laws of Scotland to be translated into Scots.⁸ So what had been a regional dialect became the language of an independent country, used in public and private records, prose and poetry, letters and sermons. Scotland therefore developed a literary language peculiar to that country, and this was the language that Henryson as a poet inherited.

Wood's statement that Henryson's poetic language is "an artificial, created, 'literary' language" also requires qualification since it may lead to the misapprehension that the Scots of the Makars bears little resemblance to the language which people actually spoke at the time. Henryson's diction is an artificial offshoot of the vernacular, but the fact remains that his 'literary' language was created out of a staple of

'spoken' language. As I have noted earlier,⁹ although Henryson's language included Latinate words learned from Chaucer, Lydgate and Continental models, it is also made up of native words (the basic vocabulary for speaking and for writing which Scots and Northern English frequently shared) and highly colloquial items, often obscure in origin, common in everyday speech. In addition, although Henryson's grammatical structures are sometimes formal, elevated and stylized, they frequently range to the informal, and idiomatic, imitative of actual speech.

It is now impossible to compare Henryson's language with fifteenth century spoken Scots, but it is possible to demonstrate that his poetic language has more, rather than less, in common with the ordinary language of the day by comparing one of his least embellished passages with a stanza from "The Wyf of Auchtermwchty", a fifteenth century Scottish ballad which involves ordinary people in a rural setting, and describes aspects of actual life and speech in realistic terms. The ballad is set in Fife, Henryson's own locality, and tells of a husband who comes in one evening after a windy and rainy day at the ploughing, and, envious of his wife sitting at home warm and dry, suggests that they exchange occupations for a day:

Quoth he, "Quhair is my horssis corne?
 My ox hes naithir hay nor stray.
 Dame, ze mon to the pluch to morne;
 I salbe hussy, gif I may."
 "Husband", quod scho, "Content an I
 To tak the pluche my day abowt,
 Sa ze will rowll baith kavis and ky,
 And all the hous baith in and owt."¹⁰

Colloquial forms and items abound in the ballad. There are pendant participles and frequently an absence of connectives and lack of grammatical sequence. There are elliptical constructions, a feature of colloquial speech: "ze mon to the pluch to morne" (l. 3); and reduced

forms such as "hussy" (l. 4): housewife. Native lexical features are also present, for example "salbe" (l. 2): shall be; "gif" (l. 2): if; "sa" (l. 7): so. Various idiomatic expressions are included in the poem as well: "I pray God gif her evill to fair" (l. 2, stanza V).

Compare this stanza with an extract from "The Taill of the Uponlandis Mous and the Burges Mous":

Ane tyme when scho was full and unfute sair,
 Scho tuke in mynd hir sister uponland,
 And langit for to heir of hir weilfair,
 To se quhat lyfe scho had under the wand.
 Bairfute, allone, with pykestaf in hir hand,
 As pure pylgryme scho passit out off town,
 To seik hir sister baithoure daill and down.

(ll. 176-182)

As well as the orthographical features of Middle Scots noted earlier:

ane: one; scho: she; quhat: what; passit: passed; there are peculiarly Scots forms: "unfute sair": comfortable, which captures the predilection for understatement as, for example, when "na bad" means "good". There is the idiomatic expression "scho tuke in mynd hir sister uponland" (l. 177), which is a common colloquial form, and the informal grammatical construction: "To sek hir sister baithoure daill and down" (l. 182).

Certainly there are many passages in Henryson's Fables which cannot be so closely related to the colloquial and native language of the day. These tend to be more noticeable for the inclusion of Latinate forms. Although Henryson is more sparing in his use of aureation than other Middle Scots writers¹¹ he does make use of it for particular effects. For example,¹² when he modestly disclaims any acquaintance with the skills of Rhetoric in his Prolog, he chooses the most Latinate diction he can:

In hamelie language and in termes rude
 Me neidis wryte, for quhy of Eloquence
 Nor Rethorike I never Understude.
 Thairfoir meiklie I pray your reverence,
 Gif that ye find it throw my negligence,
 Be deminute, or yit superfluous,
 Correct it at your willis gracious.

(ll. 36-42)

Eloquence, Rethorike, reverence, negligence, deminute (modelled on a Latinate uninflected past participle), superfluous, gracious are all Latinate forms. These words would have been exclusively literary in distribution and, along with the items from the native and colloquial registers, formed the primary source of poetic diction available to a fifteenth century poet.¹³

The Scottish vernacular tradition to which Henryson belonged was also the medium for the expression of a peculiarly Scottish consciousness. James Kinsley comments on this aspect of the tradition:

Its historical interest and its permanent appeal lie not in any bold departure from the general European tradition, but in the adaptation of stock themes and styles in ways congenial to the Scottish temper and appropriate to Scottish life.¹⁴

On the subject of the "Scottish temper" I hesitate to speak. Like Kinsley's reference to "a distinctively Scottish spirit" and "persistent characteristics in Scottish poetry",¹⁵ the concept of a distinctively "Scottish temper" almost defies sound critical definition or is at least a moot point. However, one can examine how Henryson as a Scottish poet adapted stock themes and styles "in ways . . . appropriate to Scottish life". Barbour, in his Bruce, had adapted the romance form, drawing on the realistic tradition of Scots poetry, by calling his poem a "suthfast story", and appealing to the Scot's sense of patriotism at a time of war with the English.

For the short period that the vernacular tradition flourished,

Scotland was an independent country with her own domestic problems. The poets of the period shared a common social and political environment and, as it happens, this environment was an unstable one of turmoil and treason:

The fifteenth century in Scotland presents in many respects a striking contrast to its predecessor. The nation has now practically secured its independence and goes its own way. But if comparatively free from foreign aggression, Scotland was never more miserable in its domestic policy Everywhere we behold a barbarous scorn of law, savage insolence, sanguinary feuds, and cruel tragedies. It was the heyday of unpatriotic feudalism--a feudalism that had thrown to the winds its ancient loyalty, and ravened like a beast of prey over the unhappy land.¹⁶

It does not come as a surprise to find that this unhappy state of affairs is reflected in the literature of the period. Massive indignation at administrative, social and religious abuses makes itself evident in the upsurge of critical literature in the form of satire and complaint. The general disaffection came to be concentrated more and more on ecclesiastical corruptions, so that the Makars in a very real sense heralded the Scottish Reformation.

Throughout Europe the age was one of satire and complaint: we have the work of Dante, Boccaccio and Chaucer to testify to this. In English poetry, Langland's Piers Plowman contains strong anti-clerical views. This trend in satirical literature indicates one of the major themes of the time. It is therefore interesting to consider how Scottish vernacular poets adapted this "stock" style in a way appropriate to Scottish life, and how Henryson's moral and critical stance relates to this tradition.

The pocrer classes, whom J.M. Ross describes as "not of much account" since they had "neither political weight nor public influence . . . no natural cohesion, and no artificial confederation",¹⁷ were the

victims of the ambitions of the other classes. Sympathy and outrage at their sufferings are among the most frequently expressed themes of medieval Scottish poetry. Richard Maitland (1496-1586) sums up the opinions of many of these poets when he describes the plight of the poor in his "Satire on the Age":

The kirkmen keipis na professioun;
 The temporall men commits oppressioun,
 Puttand the puir from thair possessioun--
 Na kynd of feir of God have thai.
 Thai cummar bayth the court and sessioun
 And chasis charitie away.¹⁸

Of the "temporall" oppressors, Ross regards the nobles of the time as the greatest villains:

Again and again the barons were, if one may so speak, summoned by God to assist in the government of the nation during the minority of its kings, and history scarcely affords a parallel (out of France) to their shameful and senseless perfidy . . . never did a nobility prove itself more unworthy of its privileges, or more unfit to guide and civilize a people.¹⁹

This view is verified by one of the most acrimonious satirists of the age, David Lyndsay. In his allegory, The Dreame, the lot of the poor people is personified in the figure of "Ihone the Comoun Weill" who is forced to leave Scotland because of the abuse he has suffered there. Ihone (John) impeaches the nobles:

Oure gentyll men ar all degenerat(e);
 Liberalitie and Lawte, boith, ar loste;
 And Cowardyce with Lordis is laureate;
 And knychtlic curage turnit in brag and boste.²⁰

Lyndsay's Comoun Weill also sees the minority of kings as the source of the perfidy of the barons: "Wo to the realme that hes our young ane king".²¹

Earlier in the same poem, when the narrator asks "Remembraunce" to define what is wrong with the realm of Scotland, she claims that the principal cause of the country's trouble is misgovernment which she

describes in terms of a negligent shepherd who fails to guard his flock:

For, quhen the sleuthful hird dois sloug and sleip,
 Taking no cure in keypyng of his floke,
 Quho wyll go sers amang sic heirdis scheip,
 May habyll fynd mony pure scabbit crok,
 And goyng wyll at large, withouttin lok;
 Than Lupis cumis, and Lowrance, in ane lyng,
 And dois, but reuth, and sely scheip dounthryng.²²

It is noteworthy that Lyndsay, like Henryson in "The Taill of the Wolf and the Lamb", uses the analogy of the wolves and foxes preying on the sheep to describe the oppression of the poor by the mightier classes:

For quhen this wolfis be oppressioun
 The pure peple but piete doith oppres,
 Than sulde the prencis mak punisioun,
 And cause tha Rebauldis for to mak redres.²³

We have already encountered Henryson's outraged feelings concerning oppressors of the poor in "The Taill of the Scheip and the Doig" and "The Taill of the Wolf and the Lamb". The nobles represent one of the types of wolves he castigates in the Moralitas of the latter fable:

O thow grit Lord, that riches hes and rent,
 Be nocht ane Wolf, thus to devoir the pure.

(ll. 2763-2764)

Henryson is also critical of lax monarchs in his "The Taill of the Lyoun and the Mous", holding them responsible for the unruliness that results when they are lazy. His reference to "Injust men" who "waitit alway amendis for to get" (l. 1610) seems to be a veiled comment on the ambitious nobles of Scotland.

Ross describes the newly emergent middle classes of burghesses as not sufficiently organized or numerous to restrain the barons. However, in the poetry of the period they too come in for criticism with regard to their oppression of the poor. Dunbar has written a poem "To the Merchantis of Edinburgh" in which he rails at their selfish and

socially unjust practices:

Your burgh of beggeris is ane nest,
 To schout thai swentyouris will not rest;
 All honest folk they do molest,
 Sa piteuslie thai cry and rame:
 Think ye not schame,
 That for the poore nothing drest,²⁴
 In hurt and sclander of your name!

This is an open harangue, and it is really only when Henryson is criticising the rural middle classes that he comes close to a similar vehemency of expression:

Thow has aneuch; the pure husband richt nocht
 Bot croip and caff upon ane clout of land.
 For Goddis aw, how durst thow tak on hand,
 And thow in Barn and Byre sa bene, and big,
 To put him fra his tak and gar him thig?

(ll. 2737-2741)

Henryson's most direct allusion to the burghesses of medieval Scotland is found in "The Taill of Uponlandis Mous, and the Burges Mous". Here he invokes Scottish burgh life at the time, depicting the comfort of the burghesses and the sudden violence which might erupt. As John MacQueen points out, the fable "is built around the relationship of the new Third Estate, the burghesses, to the stock from which they sprang, the country folk".²⁵

The "burges mous", a representative of the rich merchant class, is the object of his satire. She is:

Gild brother and made ane fre Burges;
 Toll fre als, but custom mair or les,

(ll. 172-173)

but when she decides to visit her poor sister in the country, she dons the garb of a pilgrim, which implies that she is condescending to do her Christian duty. Although she revolts at her sister's miserable diet, the rural mouse later learns that the rich life has a high price

attached to it. The Moralitas succinctly makes the point: "Quha has aneuch, of na mair heshe neid" (l. 375).

Ross claims that the only order of the community capable of promoting the welfare of the poor, and restraining the excesses of the nobles, was the clergy. But of these he says:

A third--some writers reckon a half--of the land of Scotland belonged to them while in addition to their territorial power, they were the sole interpreters of the mysteries of religion, and wielded the thunderbolts of the church. Moreover, many important civil offices requiring a knowledge of law, historical precedents, foreign languages, etc., were of necessity in their hands; but except that on the whole they were more humane in their dealings with their tenantry than the mass of secular landlords, it cannot be shown that they earnestly sought to grapple with the disorders of the times. The great prelates were themselves members of aristocratic families, and were swayed by ambitions as worldly as those that raged in the hearts of the Crawfords and the Douglasses.²⁶

Most of the satire of the period is levelled at ecclesiastical corruptions.

Dunbar, in his "A General Satyre", inveighs against Scottish church officers:

Sic pryd with prellatis, so few till preich and pray;
Sic hant of harlettis with thame bayth nicht and day,
That sowld haif ay thair God afoir thair ene;
So nyce array, so strange to thair abbay,²⁷
Within this land was nevir hard nor sene.

He denounces their perfidy and worldliness:

Sa mekle tressone, sa mony partiall sawis,
Sa littill ressonne to help the commoun cawis.

Gavin Douglas (1475-1522) accuses the clergy of being major generators of Scotland's turmoil:

Quhay ar wirkeris of this weir, quha walkynaris of wa,
Bot incompetabill clergy, that Crystendome offendis?
Quha revis, quha ar riotus, quha rakles, bot tha?
Quha quellis the puyr commonis, bot kyrkmen, weil kend is?
Thar is na stait of thar stile that standis content,
Knycht, clerk, nor common,
Burgis, nor barroun,
All wald haue vp that is downe,
Weltrit the went.²⁸

Finally, on the eve of the Reformation, there is the report of Lyndsay's

Comoun Weill:

For I have socht throw all the Spirituall stait,
 Quhilkis tuke na compt for to heir me complene.
 Thare officiaris, thay held me at disdane,
 For Symonie, he rewlis up all that rowte;
 And Covetyce, that Carle, gart bar me oute.

Pryde hath chaist (far) frome thame humilitie;
 Devotioun is fled unto the freris,
 Sensuale plesour hes baneist Chaistitie;
 Lordis of Religioun thay go lyke Seculeris,
 Taking more compt in tellying thare deneris
 Nor thay do of thare constitutioun,
 Thus ar thay blyndit be ambitiou.²⁹

Interestingly enough, although this invective sounds like the cry of a militant reformer, Lyndsay was a staunch Catholic who, like many angered Catholics of the time, some of them churchmen themselves,³⁰ called for reform within the Church, but would have been out of sympathy with Knox and the Protestants.

Although they shared the same Scottish political and social environment, it is clear that Lyndsay is a revolutionary moral satirist in a way that Henryson is not. Henryson in fact throws hardly any direct light on the moral condition of the church. His bluntest criticism of the clergy occurs in these lines:

Seis thow not (lord) this warld overturnit is,
 As quha wald change gude gold in leid or tyn;
 The pure is peillit, the Lord may do na mis;
 And Simonie is haldin for na syn.
 Now is he blyith with okker maist may wyn;
 Gentrice is slane, and pietie is ago,
 Allace (gude Lord) quhy thoilis thow it so?

(ll. 1307-1314).

"Simonie" and the disappearance of "pietie" are included in a list of worldly ills, but these vices do not receive particular attention. His attitude is more notable for a deep Christian conviction of the vanity

of earthly possessions and pleasures. Like the poets of the Scottish tradition referred to above, his sympathies are with the "pure pepill . . . opprest" (ll. 1318-1319), but his belief in a divinely ordained social hierarchy in this world leads him to condemn presumption in poor men ("The Taill of the Wolf and the Wedder" (ll. 2595-2608). He is firmly convinced of the transitory nature of this world and of the inevitability of death:

Againis death may na man mak defence.
Ceis of your sin, Remord your conscience,
Obey unto your God and ye sall wend,
Efter your deith, to blis withouten end.

(ll. 792-795)

"Tirrane men" will have to face the wrath of God:

They will in schort tyme end,
And efter deith to lestand panis wend.

(ll. 1263-1264)

Henryson's critical stance is therefore profoundly Christian rather than political or revolutionary. In his Fables temporal concerns are always tempered by spiritual ones; that is to say his social criticism must be seen in the context of his moral views. Ultimately he disapproves of the sin of presumption in all men:

Thairfore I counsell men of everilk stait
To know thame self, and quhome theysuld forbeir,
And fall not with thair better in debait;
Suppois thay be als galland in thair geir,
It settis na servand for to uphald weir.

(ll. 2609-2613)

Henryson is clearly influenced by the satiric trend in Scottish medieval literature, and is obviously moved to comment on the tragic turmoil and misery he saw around him, but his satire is ultimately aimed at the worldly ways of all human beings. This stance is

particularly evident in those fables which derive from Le Roman de Renart, the origin and object of which was social and political satire.³¹

In the Roman the fox is "l'universal trompeur, esprit cynique, sans scrupule"³² who repeatedly dupes the naive wolf.

Ce triomphe de l'esprit et de la ruse sur la force brutale était la revanche du bourgeois et du peuple écrasés par la noblesse.³³

Henryson's sympathies, however, lie with the poor, rather than the bourgeoisie, and the only revenge he recognizes is the righteous wrath of God.

Henryson, it would seem, drew upon the Bestiary tradition³⁴ as well as the Roman when he came to write these fox fables, for like the Bestiary composers his foremost concern is the spiritual significance of the creature's behaviour. He wished to remind his readers of basic Christian truths, rather than to reform society. However, his desire "Amangis ernist to ming ane merie sport" (l. 20) leads him to combine elements of these two "stock themes" in a unique and individual way. For the duration of these fables it is the fox as "l'universal trompeur" who is foremost, but always our amusement at his totally immoral exploits is guided by a narrative which, in the final analysis, is governed by the author's serious moral purpose, for in the Moralitas it is the spiritual significance of the creature's behaviour that is emphasised.

This procedure can be detected in all of his fox fables. In "The Fox and the Wolf" we are regaled with the degenerate conduct of this "craftie" fox as he makes his unrepentant confession to the wolf and almost immediately flouts his penance. He agrees to "forbeir flesch until pasche" (l. 723), but on reaching a river cannot bring himself to fish. So with diabolical cunning, he steals a kid from its mother and

immersing it in water pronounces:

Ga doun Schir Kid, cum up Schir Salmond agane!

(l. 751)

and "off that new maid Salmond eit anewch" (l. 753). However, as he later contemplates the rotundity of his newly filled belly, the goatherd comes upon him and fires an arrow "upon this wame" (l. 760), thus killing the fox. The Moralitas underlines the spiritual significance of the sudden death of "this fals Tod":

Exampill is exhortand folk to amend,
For dreid of sic ane lyke confusioun;
For mony now hes gude professioun,
Yit not repentis, nor for thair sinnis greit,
Because thay think thair lustie lyfe sa sweit.

(ll. 776-781)

"The Trial of the Fox" revolves around the exploits of the son of this fox who is arraigned before the King of beasts and his Parliament. His trickery and "esprit cynique" are highlighted in his quickness to anticipate the grey mare's intention in saying that she has a special dispensation which permits her to stay away from the Parliament. He entices the wolf into reading the message on her hoof with the result that it is the wolf, not he, who receives a kick on the head. The Moralitas again serves to highlight basic Christian truths by bringing out the spiritual significance of the fox:

This Tod I likkin to Temptationis,
Beirand to mynd mony thochtis vane,
Assaultand men with sweit perswasionis,
Ay reddy for to trap thame in ane trayne;
Yit gif thay se Sensualitie neir slane,
And suddand deith draw neir with panis sore,
Thay go abak, and temptis thame no moir.

(ll. 1132-1138)

In "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger" and "The Fox, the Wolf and

the Husbandman" the central episode is again the fox's deception of the wolf. In the first case, the wolf suffers at the hands of the cadger as a result of taking the fox's advice, and in the second instance he ends up trapped in a well for similar reasons. "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger" in particular gives a masterful illustration of the relationship of the fox and the wolf. In the style of the Roman, the wolf is clearly the stronger, but remarkably more naive animal. The fox is prevailed upon to become the wolf's "Stewart", against his will, but his fundamental treachery is later revealed when he dupes the wolf.

In each fable the Moralitas interprets the fox in terms of Christian ethics:

The Foxe unto the warld may likkinit be,

 And as the Foxe with dissimulance and gyle
 Gart the Wolff wene to half worschip for ever,
 Richt sa this warld with vane glore for ane quhyle
 Flatteris with folk, as thay suld failye never,
 Yit suddandlie men seis it oft dissever.

(1. 2205, 11. 2217-2221)

The Foxe the Fiend I call in to this cais,
 Actand ilk man to ryn unrychteous rinkis,
 Thinkand thairthrow to lok him in his linkis.

(11. 2431-2433)

It is also noteworthy that human beings play fairly important roles in these two fables. As André Lagarde and Laurence Michard show, a precedent for this can also be found in the Roman tradition:

Les hommes eux-mêmes apparaissent çà et là: hobereaux maladroits; bourgeois après au gain; riches fermiers bien pourvus; moines charitables et hantées par l'idée de salut³⁵

Since Henryson's objective differs from that of the authors of the Roman, it does not come as a surprise to find that his human beings are not members of the bourgeoisie, but relatively poor men. In these two

fables we meet the cadger and the husbandman; elsewhere we encounter the poor shepherd ("The Wolf and the Wether"), a poor widow ("The Two Mice"), a sower and ploughman ("The Preiching of the Swallow"), none of whom could be categorized with the group Michard and Lagarde describe. These men are there to contribute to the effective transmission of his overall theme. His humans may provide a contrast to animal behaviour, as is the case of the husbandman who, as a "godlie man", points up the shiftlessness of the fox and the wolf. They may be introduced in order to provide a perspective, as in "The Two Mice" when the Spenser arrives and we suddenly see the mice in the context of a human world, or in the way in which the magnitude of the loss of Chanticleir is conveyed in terms of his importance to the survival of a poor widow. Then there is the cadger whose role in the fable is manipulated by the poet so as to yield irony. He is a human being for the course of the tale, pitting his wits against the wiles of the fox and keen to get the animal's fur for gloves, but in the Moralitas he represents death, while the wolf is said to symbolize unregenerate man.

The wolf is a recognisable descendant of Ysengrin, but like the fox his significance is adapted to Henryson's own purpose. He is identified with unregenerate man or "ane wickit man,/ Quhilk dois the pure oppres in everie place" (ll. 2427-2429); that is, he is the representative of brute force and animal appetite, of material and worldly desires. He is therefore an easy victim of the temptation of the devil and the world (the fox).

It is also significant that in the fable which contains Henryson's most satirical comment on the moral laxity of the clergy, it is the wolf who is portrayed as "Freir Waitskaith". Although the fox makes

no attempt to fulfil the conditions of a true confession, the wolf is quite prepared to grant him a full remission for his sins. Furthermore, when the fox recoils at his penance--to "forbeir flesch untill pasche" (l. 723)--and asks that he be allowed

To eit puddingis, or laip ane lyttill blude,
Or heid, or feit, or paynches let me preif,
In cace I fall no flesch unto my fude

(ll. 727-729)

the wolf not only consents, but adds: "for neid may haif na Law" (l. 731). The wolf's leniency is a symptom of his own worldliness. He fails as Christ's representative on earth, because in him Christian ethics have been contaminated by worldly vanities. By contrast, the grey mare in "The Trial of the Fox" represents Henryson's concept of not only the religious, but the Christian ideal. The grey mare stands for:

Men of gude conditioun,
As Pilgrymes Walkand in this wildernes,
Approvand that for richt Religioun
Thair God onlie to pleis in everilk place;
Abstractit from this warldis wretchitnes,
Fechtand with lust, presumptioun, and pryde,
And fra this warld in mynd ar mortyfyde.

(ll. 1111-1117)

Henryson's satire is directed at the ways of earthly, worldly men, and it is always regulated by his central thematic point. While he is obviously influenced by other models, he is consistently concerned with his own declared moral purpose. Like the other Medieval Scots poets, he speaks out of his own experience of life, a life in Scotland that was fraught with power struggles and feudal malpractices born of self-interested ambition. For this purpose, he too adapted stock themes and styles, but we have discovered that more than any other medieval Scots poet his social and political criticism is modified by a Christian

didacticism. Yet, while his emphases are individual, they are within the Scottish political and social landscape.

It is also significant that his social comments are notable for their rural slant: his wolfish oppressors are landlords and wealthy farmers and his "pure pepill . . . opprest" are most easily identified as rural peasants. Dunbar, on the other hand, concentrates on the corruptions and injustices of burgh life. Each poet is of course speaking out of his personal experience of life in Scotland. Dunbar was associated with the Court and city life, and his poetry must be appraised with this circumstance in view; Henryson belonged to Dunfermline and its environs, and therefore knew the provincial life.

It is therefore appropriate to conclude this examination of Henryson's place in the vernacular tradition, by considering his observations of the style of Scottish life and countryside most familiar to him. "The Preiching of the Swallow" is firmly located in Dunfermline, and in it Henryson describes the farming life of the local inhabitants with the realistic eye of an onlooker at the scene:

Moving thusgait, grit myrth I tuke in mynd,
 Off lauboraris to se the besines,
 Sum makand dykes, and sum the pleuch can wynd,
 Sum sowand seidis fast ffrome place to place,
 The Harrowis hoppand in the saweris trace.

(ll. 1720-1724)

Dunfermline was an important flax centre at the time, and when he describes the harvesting and processing of the plant, he does so with the air of one familiar with the methods and terms a fifteenth century onlooker might have used:

The Lint ryipit, the Carll pullit the Lyne,
 Rippillit the bollis, and in beitis set,
 It steipit in the burne, and dryit syne,
 And with ane bittill knokkit it, and bet,

Syne swingillit it weill, and hekillit in the flet;
 His wyfe it span, and twinit it in to threid,
 Of quhilk the Fowlar Nettis maid in deid.

(ll. 1825-1831)

His awareness of the importance of the seasons to the farmer informs the whole fable, but it is his description of winter and its effects that testifies to his experience of Scottish weather. He writes with the sardonic acceptance of a Scot who is only too familiar with this inclement aspect of life in Scotland:

The winter come, the wickit wind can blaw,
 The woddis grene were wallowit with the weit,
 Baith firth and fell with froistys were maid faw,
 Slonkis and slaik maid slidderie with the sleit;
 The foulis ffair ffor falt thay ffell off feit;
 On bewis bair it wes na bute to hyde,
 Bot hit unto housis thame to hyde.

(ll. 1832-1838)

It is ultimately this kind of attention to detail and insistence on realism of presentation that places him in the Scottish tradition of poetry.

At the time Henryson was writing, Scotland enjoyed a period of independence from England, and works in the vernacular flourished under the patronage of the Scottish Court. Then, the Reformation "which the vernacular literature in some sense heralded, and in many ways assisted to bring about, in the end effectively smothered that literature".³⁶ The Scottish Protestant Reformers were exceptionally rigid and stern, and particularly inimical to art. Secular poetry came under their ban because it was regarded as sinful, and the work of the Middle Scots Makars was identified with the Court interest and the Catholic Party.

The effect of the Reformation was to precipitate the process of

anglicisation already in evidence. The written language was gradually becoming infiltrated by English spellings and word forms, partly because printed Scots was being undermined from within. If Scottish writers wanted their work to circulate in the larger English market, they had to make their language approximate to English, so Scottish printers tended to adopt a policy of anglicisation. With the Reformation, the vernacular's most picturesque features were transferred into "sober, estimable English"³⁷ through the circulation of an English bible and the resumption of an alliance with England which paved the way for the Union of the Crowns (1603) and the end of Scottish independence, which finally removed the political reason for a separate language.

The court and its patronage was gone, and after Lyndsay there was no outstanding writer in the Scottish language to give prestige to writing in Scots and to challenge the anglicising vogue in literature. Henryson's Fables therefore belong to a distinctive period in Scottish literary history, to a tradition which was a peculiarly Scottish phenomenon in terms of its language, Middle Scots, and in terms of the political and social environment which engendered it.

CONCLUSION

Although Henryson is ultimately conventional in his view of the function of the fable as didactic in purpose, his narrative skill invests the tales with a humour and warmth that is unsurpassed by the other major vernacular fabulists. The fable is a versatile instrument in his hands, so that resourcefulness and virtuosity distinguish the most hackneyed of his adopted models. He revitalizes a genre which many of his contemporaries regarded as limited in purpose, so that we never feel that he is confined to the prescribed procedures which were so much a part of medieval literary practice.

Although he undoubtedly has an important place in any survey of European literary traditions and of the Scottish vernacular tradition in particular, in several important respects he deviates from the mainstream of these traditions. When satire and complaint were the order of the day, Henryson was comparatively reserved in his comments; when didacticism was prevalent in literary practice, Henryson's procedure had more in common with the ancient fabulists and their stress on diversion than with the contemporary predilection for instruction.

I have demonstrated his sophisticated use of allegory and his discrete application of aureation. Above all, he adapts stock themes and styles with an extraordinary facility. Indeed it is his individual blend of convention and originality of treatment that leads me to support I. A. W. Jamieson's conclusion that:

Henryson was more creative within the fable form, extended its possibilities and scope far wider, than any writer since the invention with the possible exception of the writer or writers who founded the Roman de Renard tradition.¹

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹Denton Fox, "The Scottish Chaucerians", in Chaucer and Chaucerians, ed. D. S. Brewer (London: T. Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1966), pp. 171-172.

²William Dunbar, The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1970), p. 22.

³John MacQueen, Robert Henryson: A Study of the Major Narrative Poems (Oxford: University Press, 1967) claims that "schoolmaster" in this context normally implied "chief schoolmaster" and he cites Sir Francis Kinaston's reference to Henryson as chief schoolmaster, p. 16.

⁴Ibid., p. 17.

⁵P. Rickard, Britain in Medieval French Literature: 1100-1500 (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), p. 32.

⁶John Durkan, "The Cultural Background of Sixteenth-Century Scotland", Essays on the Scottish Reformation: 1513-1625 (Glasgow: Burns & Sons, 1962), p. 274.

⁷Fox, "The Scottish Chaucerians", p. 167.

CHAPTER 1

¹A large amount of this chapter is necessarily based directly on the work of other scholars, particularly that of Ben Edwin Perry, Léopold Hervieux, André Lagarde and Laurent Michard, Joseph Jacobs and I. A. W. Jamieson.

²See George C. Keidel, A Manual of Aesopic Fable Literature, A First Book of References for the Period ending A. D. 1500 (Baltimore, 1896).

³Ben Edwin Perry, Babrius and Phaedrus (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1965), p. xix.

⁴There is some confusion over Babrius's dates. Perry attributes his work to the last quarter of the last century, whereas Joseph Jacobs, The Fables of Aesop (New York: Macmillan, 1894, rep. 1950), places Babrius's fables much later, c. A. D. 230, p. xviii.

- ⁵Perry, Babrius and Phaedrus, p. xii.
- ⁶"Aesopic Fables of Phaedrus the Freedman of Augustus", trans. Perry, Babrius and Phaedrus, p. 191.
- ⁷"Aesopic Fables of Babrius", trans. Perry, Babrius and Phaedrus, pp. 3-5.
- ⁸Jacobs, The Fables of Aesop, p. xvii.
- ⁹Ibid., p. xviii.
- ¹⁰Leopold Hervieux, ed., Les Fabulists Latins, 5 vols.: (Paris: Libraire de Firmin-Didot et C^{ie}, 1894), 2: 303-314. For a full discussion of derivations and abridgements see I. A. W. Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson: A Study in the Use of Source Material". (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 8-20.
- ¹¹Hervieux, Les Fabulists Latins, 2: 316-382. For details see also 1: 473-495.
- ¹²Ibid., 1: 503-602.
- ¹³The Fables of Bidpai (London: D. Nutt, 1885), trans. Joseph Jacobs.
- ¹⁴Alfred's fables are no longer extant. See Jacobs, The Fables of Aesop, p. xix.
- ¹⁵Marie de France, Fables, sel. and ed. A. Ewert and R. C. Johnston (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), Prologue, p. 1.
- ¹⁶John Lydgate, The Minor Poems, ed. H. N. MacCracken, 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., for the E. E. T. S., 1911).
- ¹⁷Steinhöwels Aesop, hg. Herman Osterley (Tubringen: Bibliothek des Litterarischen Verlins in Stuttgart, 1873).
- ¹⁸Caxton's Aesop, ed. R. T. Lenaghan (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1967).
- ¹⁹See pp. 8-9 above.
- ²⁰Hervieux, 2: 316.
- ²¹Marie de France, Fables, p. 1:

Cil ke seivent de lettr[e] ure
 Devreient bien mettre lur cure
 Es bons livres e es escriz
 E as [es] samples e as diz
 Ke li philosophe trouverent
 E escrirent e remembrerent:

Par moralite escrveient
 Les bons proverbes qu' il cieient,
 Que cil amender se peussent
 Ki lur entente en bien eussent.

Translation mine. (ll. 1-10)

²²Lydgate's Minor Poems, p. 566.

²³Caxton's Aesop, p. 80.

²⁴For a fairly comprehensive list see Kendel, A Manual of Aesopic Fable Literature. (Baltimore, 1896).

²⁵The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson, ed. H. Harvey Wood (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1972), ll. 1-7. All references to Henryson's fables will be to this edition.

²⁶The History of Reynard the Fox, ed. Donald B. Sands (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

²⁷André Lagarde and Laurent Michard, Moyen Age (Bordas: Collection Textes et Litterature, 1960), p. 78.

²⁸Ibid., p. 79.

²⁹Ibid., p. 78.

³⁰I am indebted to Kenneth Varty, Reynard the Fox (Lancaster: University Press, 1967), Ch. 10, pp. 90 ff., for most of this information.

³¹From a thirteenth century miscellany, Early Middle English Verse and Prose, ed. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 171. Translation mine.

CHAPTER 2

¹Derek Pearsall, "Fables and Didactic Poems" in John Lydgate (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 95.

²Babrius and Phaedrus, p. 137.

³Caxton's Aesop, p. 86.

⁴Fables, p. 15. Translation mine.

⁵Hervieux, 2: 324. Translation mine.

⁶Babrius and Phaedrus, p. 137.

- ⁷Fables, p. 15.
- ⁸Hervieux, 2: 324.
- ⁹Marie: "Petit d'onur, ceo dit, avreit/ De li (se) il la oscieit", p. 15; Caxton: "Thenne thought the lyon in hym self that no worship ne glorye it were to put it to dethe", p. 86; Walter: "Quid Mure perento/ Laudis emes?", p. 324.
- ¹⁰Babrius and Phaedrus, pp. 137-138.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Hervieux, 2: 324.
- ¹³Caxton's Aesop, p. 86.
- ¹⁴Fables, pp. 15-16.
- ¹⁵See A. M. Kinghorn, The Chorus of History (London: Blandford Press, 1971), pp. 197-207; MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 165-173; and Marshall Stearns, Robert Henryson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 45.
- ¹⁶See Babrius and Phaedrus, p. 139, p. 233, p. 253, etc.
- ¹⁷See her Prologue in Fables, p. 1.
- ¹⁸The Chorus of History, p. 206.

CHAPTER 3

- ¹See John C. Mendenhall, Aureate Terms: A Study in the Literary Diction of the Fifteenth Century (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1919).
- ²Quoted in Bernard F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Fruyt and Chaf (Princeton: University Press, 1963), pp. 10-11.
- ³Cf. Marie de France (p. 2):

Autresi est de meinte gent:
 Si tut ne veit a lur talent,
 Cume del cok a de la gemme --
 Veu l'avums de humme a de femme --
 Bien e honor nient present,
 Le pis pernent, le meuz despisent.

(ll. 17-22)

and Walter (p. 317):

Tu Gallo stolidum tu iaspide pulchra sophye
Dona notes: stolido nil sapit ista seges.

(ll. 9-10).

⁴See above quotation from Hugh of St. Victor.

⁵Geoffrey N. Leech, A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry (London and Harlow: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 163.

⁶MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 112.

⁷On the sentence level, the mouse as a symbol of the soul cannot die because according to Christian teaching the soul is immortal.

⁸Note the frequency of phrases to this effect: l. 63, l. 114, l. 148, l. 194, l. 196, ll. 372-376, etc.

⁹D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: University Press, 1962), p. 279.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹"The 'Complaint' (Lat. planctus) was originally a lament for a dead patron or lady friend, but was in time given a more general sense." W. Mackay Mackenzie, The Poems of William Dunbar, Introduction no. 1, p. xxv.

¹²Ezekiel 18:20, Catholic Edition (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1966), p. 838.

¹³"For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me." The Holy Bible, p. 63.

¹⁴Robert Henryson, pp. 132-133.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁶See Margaret Mackay, "The Scots of the Makars" in Lowland Scots: Papers presented to an Edinburgh Conference (University of Edinburgh: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1973), pp. 20-30, for a discussion of the Makars' use of aureate terms.

¹⁷While it is certainly the case that Henryson's animals are to be equated with man for man's behoof, in this fable the poet may be alluding to the actual practice of trying animals, a custom not uncommon in the medieval period. According to Beatrice White, animals had a recognised part in the great scheme of creation, and, like humans, were held to have responsibilities as well as rights, and so, as if they were

humans, they were brought to justice for wrongdoing before the ecclesiastical courts which were empowered to deal with them as anonymous sinners. The summonses describing the creatures were served by an officer of the court reading them at places frequented by animals. They were allowed advocates, and if these did not win the case for them, they could be excommunicated or banished from the district. Beatrice White, "Medieval Beasts" in Essays and Studies, 1965, (p. 34, 35f.), cites a case where field mice in the Tyrol were banished from the district but their rights were respected for they "were allowed safe-conduct to an assigned place of migration and a further grace of a fortnight's respite to allow pregnant mice and infants to undertake the journey", p. 36.

Most of the examples I could find referred to trials of animals such as mice, caterpillars and pigs in Germany, Italy and France. Records of the Consistory Courts in Scotland almost wholly perished during the Reformation, and the scanty remains which have survived are of a later date. See Bishop John Dowden, The Medieval Church in Scotland. (Glasgow: Js. Maclehose & Sons, 1910), pp. 268-269; Rosalind Hill, Both Small and Great Beasts (U. F. A. W., 1954).

¹⁸This is a "lawless court" because it is held when the sun is down. See H. Harvey Wood, The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson, Commentary, Note 1173, p. 240.

¹⁹Ibid., Introduction, p. xv.

²⁰Charles Elliott, ed., Robert Henryson: Poems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

²¹Ibid., pp. xi-xii.

CHAPTER 4

¹Wood, The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson, Introduction, p. xxi and p. xxxiii.

²Templeton, "Scots: An Outline History", p. 6.

³Tom Scott, ed., Late Medieval Scots Poetry (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 23.

⁴Ibid.

⁵G. Gregory Smith, Specimens of Middle Scots (Edinburgh and London: Wm. Blackwood & Sons, 1902), Introduction, pp. xiv-xix.

⁶Wood, The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson, Introduction, p. xxxi.

⁷The term applied by W. M. Metcalf, Specimens of Scottish Literature (London: Blackie & Sons Ltd., 1913), to the Scottish language at this period, although it was hardly distinguishable from Northern English.

⁸Templeton, "Scots: An Outline History", p. 6.

⁹Chapter Three, pp. 57-58.

¹⁰"The Wyf of Awchtirmwchty", The Bannatyne Manuscript, ed. W. Tod Ritchie (S. T. S. N. S. 23), pp. 320-321.

¹¹Cf. Dunbar's "Ane Ballat of Our Lady", ed. Mackay Mackenzie, The Poems of William Dunbar (pp. 160-161):

Hale, Sterne superne! Hale, in eterne,
 In Godis sicht to schyne!
 Lucerne in derne for to discerne
 Be glory and grace devyne;
 Hodiern, modern, sempitern,
 Angelicall regyne!
 Our tern inferne for to dispersn
 Helpe, rialest rosyne.

¹²Other particular uses are discussed above, Chapter Three.

¹³Although Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1958), suggests that the use of Gaelic words may distinguish Middle Scots usage, I would go along with G. G. Smith: "Direct evidence in support of this assumption is almost entirely wanting. In vocabulary, which is generally the chief test of external influence, there is little or nothing acquired from Celtic during the Early and Middle Periods". Specimens of Middle Scots, p. li.

¹⁴James Kinsley, Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1955), p. 1.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 1-3.

¹⁶John M. Ross, Scottish History and Literature: To the Period of the Reformation (Glasgow: Js. Maclehose & Sons, 1884), p. 110.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 121-123.

¹⁸Scott, Late Medieval Scots Poetry, p. 146.

¹⁹Ross, Scottish History and Literature, p. 110.

²⁰Scott, Late Medieval Scots Poetry, p. 139.

- ²¹Ibid., p. 140.
- ²²G. G. Smith, Specimens of Middle Scots, p. 169.
- ²³Ibid., p. 170.
- ²⁴Mackenzie, The Poems of William Dunbar, p. 82.
- ²⁵MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 121.
- ²⁶Ross, Scottish History and Literature, p. 123. The Crawford and Douglases were the two chief feuding noble families.
- ²⁷Mackenzie, The Poems of William Dunbar, p. 151.
- ²⁸Prologue to the Eighth Book of The Eneados, The Poetical Works of Gavin Douglas, ed. John Small, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1874), 3: 146.
- ²⁹Scott, p. 139.
- ³⁰Dunbar may have been an ordained priest, and Gavin Douglas was Bishop of Dunkeld.
- ³¹For a fuller discussion see Chapter 1, pp. 14-16, above.
- ³²Lagarde and Michard, Moyen Age, p. 79.
- ³³Ibid., p. 78.
- ³⁴See above discussion, Chapter 1, pp. 16-17.
- ³⁵Lagarde and Michard, Moyen Age, p. 79.
- ³⁶T. S. Henderson, Scottish Vernacular Literature (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1910), p. 10.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 12.

CONCLUSION

- ¹"The Poetry of Robert Henryson: A Study in the Use of Source Material", p. 20.

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