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NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND MORAL PURPOSE  
IN MIDDLE SCOTS POETRY

by

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A thesis submitted  
in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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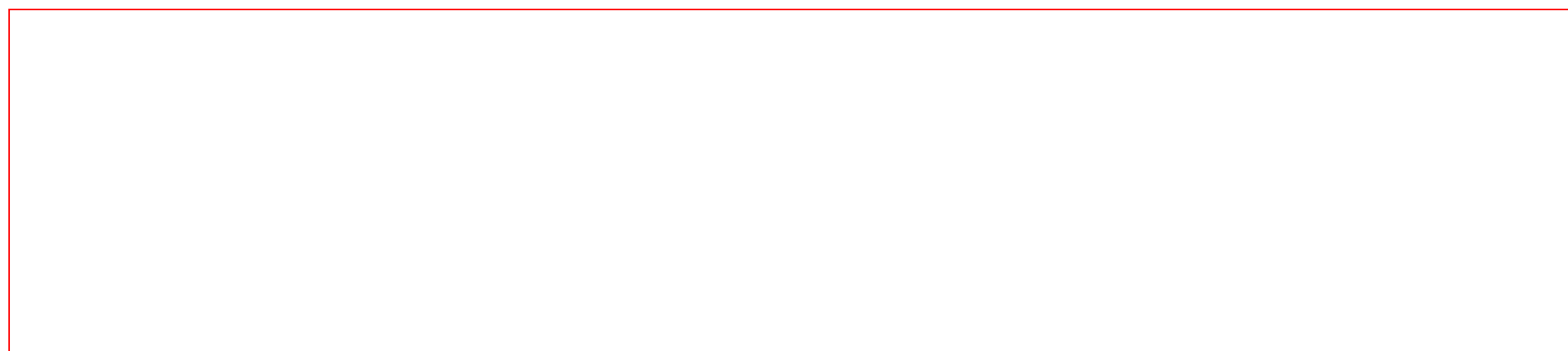
Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Elizabeth (but for whom the thesis might have been finished sooner, and less happily), and Jane, Anne and Sally: without their patience and tolerance it might never have been finished at all.



DECLARATION

The research and writing for this thesis were undertaken entirely by me. To the best of my knowledge all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Helensburgh,  
October 1979.

## SUMMARY

This thesis is a study of the ways in which a number of Middle Scots poets use narrative forms to express broadly moral arguments.

An introductory chapter outlines and illustrates a variety of narrative modes which occur in medieval texts: allegorical forms (including Biblical exegesis, mythological stories, personification-allegory, dream-visions, and certain exempla), "exemplative" stories (including some, non-allegorical exempla), and ironic techniques (illustrated from Chaucer's poetry).

Chapter II discusses representative Middle Scots narrative poems which employ these modes in different ways. The poems considered include collections of linked tales (The Talis of the Fyve Bestes, The Thre Prestis of Peblis, Colkelbie Sow), formal allegories (particularly King Hart), a moral romance (Rauf Coilgear), and fabliaux (The Wyf of Auchtermwchty, The Freiris of Berwik). It is argued that all are concerned with ethical questions, and that they illustrate the diversity of narrative and rhetorical techniques available to, and used by, medieval Scottish poets.

In Chapters III and IV, readings are offered of the narrative poems of Henryson. All are shown to be essentially serious, although in some cases the underlying seriousness is given a comic framework, with skilful use of irony. In Chapter III, two allegories (The Bludy Serk, Orpheus and Erudices) are set against Robene and Makyne and The Testament of Cresseid, where Henryson allows his meaning to emerge through a careful patterning of complex allusions. Chapter IV deals with the Morall Fabillis, in which Henryson combines allegorical and exemplative modes, producing thirteen fables, in no two of which is the relationship between narrative and moralitas precisely the same.

The discussion in Chapter V of thirteen narrative poems by Dunbar suggests that there is a moral intention underlying all these works; Dunbar's characteristic technique is shown to be ironic and allusive, making great demands on the audience's sensitivity to verbal nuances. Chapter VI examines the narrative poems of Lindsay, where there is frequently less formal unity but where many of the same narrative and rhetorical elements appear, again for didactic purposes.

Chapter VII reviews the significance of the "pan-allegorist" school of criticism, rejects any inclusive theory of ulterior meaning, and suggests that an important characteristic of the finest achievements of Middle Scots verse is the skilful interweaving of a diversity of narrative modes.

Volenti autem scire quid agatur, necesse  
est uim sermonis excutere, qua ignota,  
fidus uerborum intellectus constare non  
potest.

John of Salisbury,  
Metalogicon, III, 5.

## CHAPTER I

Introduction: Letter and Spirit  
in the Middle Ages



There is underlying virtually every fiction at least one level of meaning beyond the surface meaning of the words. At the very least, the particularity of a narrative contains within it some more general element: that most elementary of fictions, the simple joke, will be found to contain, however inexplicitly, a comment or "statement" about some aspect of human nature or experience. Literary fictions, of course, contain a great deal more. Great Expectations is at its most literal level an imagined account of the lives of specific characters in specific places at a particular time, while its meaning includes not only a sense in which Pip's experiences mirror any childhood but also a moral argument about the deceptiveness of worldly wealth and ambition and the nature of true happiness. Virtually all readers of Great Expectations would agree in general terms about the nature of Dickens' moral argument, yet it remains implicit in the novel and only emerges through the interplay of character and through Pip's occasional observations upon his own career. The embodiment of the moral sense of the story is clearly different from the techniques used by, say, Spenser in The Faerie Queene, where the characters have designated moral functions which are frequently specified, or at least alluded to, in their names.<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that any critical approach to the problems associated with these underlying levels of meaning must enable the critic to distinguish between these fundamentally different uses of narrative forms for moral or doctrinal purposes, and to distinguish further among the varieties of each. Yet no agreed

terminology has evolved to enable us to deal with these difficulties, and nowhere are the consequences more troublesome than in the field of medieval literature. The problem is here particularly acute, owing to the proliferation of works which more or less clearly belong to the latter category, usually described as "allegorical". Critics are not always in agreement about the limits of the allegorical category, however, and it has recently shown a tendency to expand to include works which seem to resemble Great Expectations rather more than they resemble The Faerie Queene, at least in the way in which the narrative is used to convey moral arguments or notions.

"Allegory" is a term with a wide (and widening) denotative capacity, and still wider connotations, and the situation has only been complicated with the appearance of such alternative terms as "typology" and "figura".<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that these difficulties can only be resolved by a close examination of the actual practice of medieval poets, with some understanding of the cultural milieu within which they worked. We must beware too slavish an absorption in the doctrines of medieval literary theoreticians, for there is no guarantee that the theories were identical with literary practice. Equally, while the evidence of allegorical practice in non-literary areas — such as Biblical exegesis — may be useful, and even necessary, background, it cannot be assumed a priori that the methods of the exegete interpreting Isaiah or the Gospel will be the same as those of a vernacular poet attempting to express in symbolic terms the moral consequences of a romantic affair.

Allegory, in whatever sense we agree to use the term, was



of course a widespread phenomenon in the Middle Ages. Its role in the medieval interpretation of the Bible has been thoroughly studied, and is now quite well understood.<sup>3</sup> Allegorical interpretations of Biblical texts were endemic in the period with which we shall be principally concerned (c. 1450-c. 1550), and had been dominant since the age of the great Patristic commentators.<sup>4</sup> Elaborate schemata were evolved to enable a single passage to carry several levels of meaning at once, and with certain variations these theoretical principles continued to be enunciated throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> It is far from clear, however, that medieval Biblical commentators in practice applied these multiple senses simultaneously: it certainly seems more usual for one or other of them to be selected according to the suitability of the text or the current purpose of the commentator. Thus Thomas Livingstone, addressing the Diet of Mainz on behalf of the Council of Basel in 1439, interprets several texts from Revelation in terms of the medieval Church:

Et ecce quasi equus niger; qui sedebat super eum habebat stateram in manu sua (Apoc. 6: 5). Equus iste niger hereticorum doctrinam significat, super quam sedet heresiarcha habens stateram verbositatis; stateram, inquam, dolosam in manu sua, id est, potestate lingue sue ponderans sic verba scripture inique, ut sentencias catholicas aliter intelligat quam spiritus sanctus efflagitat, qui eas per ora sanctorum dictare curavit, et sic simplices fideles ducit in errorem.

According to the traditional fourfold classification of meaning, this is perhaps an example of allegoria (quid credas,<sup>7</sup> allegory of the Church), but it also comes close to topical or political allegory, which falls outside the traditional classification.

The other striking feature of Livingstone's interpretation is its arbitrariness: there is nothing in a pair of balances to evoke the power of a heretic's tongue, and although the blackness of the horse in the text is appropriately evocative of evil it is only the preacher's theme which leads him to associate the passage with heresy at all. This arbitrariness of the relationship between the detail of a Biblical text and its interpretation is by no means untypical of medieval exegesis.<sup>8</sup>

The usefulness of Biblical materials for interpretation differs, of course, according to the section of the Bible in question. The Apocalypse is obviously amenable to allegorical exegesis, already being cast in the form of a vision and consisting of a treasury of cryptic symbols. The Prophetic Books of the Old Testament are similarly valuable as a basis for allegory, and they are the most obvious case of that general sense, commonplace among medieval theologians, in which the Old Testament was held to prefigure the New.<sup>9</sup> Many of the more popular episodes of the Old Testament were thus held to be allegorical in the strictest sense, as is apparent in a Scots work of about 1500:

This Abraham quhen he offerit his son Ysaac on þe montane to sla him in sacrifice at þe command of God was figur of our Fader of Hevin, þat offerit His Son Ihesus in sacrifice to þe hill of þe Croce to passon for our saluacoun. The angell sufferit nocht Abraham to slay þe child; the Fader of Hevin conseruit þe Godhed of þe Son vnhurt with þe Iowis. Abraham maid sacrifice of a ram ministerit to him be þe angell; the Fader of Hevin offerit His a Son, a ram on þe Croce, callit Aries: tharfor Aries has dominacoun in þe hed, for Crist is hed & we memberis. The child Ysaac followand þe fader hame figuris Crist ascending in



Godhed and manhed to his Fader. Abrahams as and seruandis tarijt in þe vale quhen he & his son ascendit to þe mont figuris Iowis induracoun fra þe Faith quhilk we ascend with sacrifice. This Abraham saw thre childer discending and adorned bot ane figuris of thre personis and bot a God.

10

The Scots writer's use of "figur" is a vernacular application of the technical exegetical term figura, which was applied to that form of allegory in which both the story and its interpretation refer to historical events. This is an allegorical situation, obviously, which is virtually unique to the Bible, and attributable to the working of divine providence through history.

But the events of the Old Testament could be interpreted in other ways as well, which can also be illustrated from the same Scottish treatise:

This Noyes folkis & all vperis was preseruit in ane ark on þe flude, maide be Noye at þe command of God; bot to tell heir þe tyme it was in bigging, þe lenth, breid and hicht of it ware prolix. Bot it had iiij. houssis: ane lawar for bestis of filth, as lyonis, leopardis, vnicornis, beris, baris, grif-fonis & siclyk, figuris Hell lawest. The mydhous conseruit clene bestis neidfull to man, figuris of ws in erth betuix Hevin & Hell, wp or down. The hieast hous conseruit of þe folkis, figur of Hevin. Than opinnit þe hevinnis & ranyt xl. dayis, quhill þe watter our passit þe hieast hillis in þe erth xv. cubitis. Noe in þe ark langtyme send þe ravyn to se gif landis apperit dry, quhilk fand ane foule carioun and tarijt pairon without retorne, figuris of men falling blak in synnis & perseuering pairin, nocht retornyng to confessioun with contricioun. Than Noe send furth þe dow, quhilk fand land and in takin pairof retorned with ane branche of olive in his beke, figuris of men falling in syn and reuertis be confessioun, schawin be mouth beryng þe branche as clene contricioun. In þe vij. moneth þe erth apperit dry and þe ark restit on þe mont of Armeny, coresponding þat God restit þe vij. day for His werkis and als þat þe vij. age salbe rest of saullis.



There are certainly elements here of that "figural" sense just defined: the interpretation of Genesis 8: 4, 'according to which the Ark came to rest in the seventh month of the Flood, looks both back to the Creation and on to the Last Judgment. This sort of allegory essentially involves the perception of patterns in history, just as much secular allegory involves the perception of patterns in Nature, so that both the world and its history are in allegorical terms a sort of map of divine providence. In this sense, if in no other, theological and poetic allegory share a common set of assumptions.<sup>12</sup>

The discussion of the Flood in The Sex Werkdays according to the Sex Agis reveals other aspects of medieval allegory as well, however. The details of the interpretation are somewhat less arbitrary than those we observed in Livingstone's use of Revelation. The passage breaks into two sections: the first relates to the physical appearance of the Ark and the second to the sending out of the raven and the dove at the conclusion of the Flood. The tripartite structure of the Ark, a feature specified in Genesis 6: 16 and much commented upon,<sup>13</sup> is linked with the familiar division of the world into Heaven, Earth and Hell. This identification is obvious enough, but it cannot be said that it adds anything to our understanding of the Noah story: we are not assisted in our appreciation of the significance of the Flood by the information that the "bestis of filth" in the scuppers of the Ark correspond to the damned in Hell. This part of the passage is perhaps no less arbitrary than Livingstone's exegetical method. But when we turn to the latter part, the exegesis is more relevant and rather more

sophisticated. The colours of the birds sent by Noah are, for example, capitalized on in the allegory: the blackness of the raven suggests "men falling blak in syn", and while the whiteness of the dove is not explicitly alluded to, it clearly underlies the interpretation. Similarly, the fact that the raven does not return because it "fand ane foule carioun and tarijt pairon" is evidently intended to evoke the nature of sin. A rather more subtle approach is used in interpreting the significance of the dove: its return with the olive branch is an allegory of "men falling in syn and reuertis [sic.] be confessioun, schawin be mouth beryng be branche as clene contricioun". The crucial phrase here is "schawin be mouth beryng be branche", since the allegorist appears to be alluding to the oral nature of confession, represented by the branch carried in the dove's beak. This is, to be sure, not a particularly brilliant or elaborate example, but it points to an awareness on the part of the allegorist of the possibilities inherent in the images he is interpreting, and his exegesis is the more successful because it exploits those possibilities.

Biblical exegetes sometimes employ evident wit in this application of the natural sense of the text. A good example occurs in the De tripartito tabernaculo of the twelfth-century Scottish Premonstratensian (later Carthusian) Adam of Dryburgh,<sup>14</sup> in which Adam comments on the passage in John 12 where Jesus dines in Bethany with Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Because he is addressing a monastic audience, Adam links the three with monastic orders: Martha stands for coenobii obedientarios because of her faithfulness and wisdom, Lazarus represents novices, while



Mary stands for the ordinary monks. The arbitrariness which we have observed elsewhere of course applies to this interpretation as well: there is nothing in John's account of the meal in Bethany to justify, let alone require, such a reading, which is imposed by Adam upon the text in order to make it fit his homiletic needs. But the exegesis of John 12: 3 (Maria ergo accepit libram unguenti nardi pistici, pretiosi, et unxit pedes Iesu et extersit pedes eius capillis suis; et domus impleta est ex odore unguenti) is much more closely related to the words of the Gospel:

In libra, plenitudo accipitur perfectionis; in nardo, odor cognitionis; in pistico puritas veritatis. Ex his tribus Maria electam et egregiam conficit, et componit unctionem ..... Caput Domini et pedes ungunt: quia geminam ejus naturam, divinam scilicet et humanam ardentem diligunt. Caput namque Christi, ut ait Apostolus Deus (I Cor. 2: 3). Et pedes ejus quid aliud designant, quam incarnationem suam, qua nostrae mortalitatis tetigit terram?

15

There seems to be a genuine attempt here to come to terms with the significance of the events described by John, and as the vernacular exegete took up the colour of the birds in the Noah story, so Adam makes use of an obvious piece of symbolism, even going beyond the Biblical text to make it fit. There is no mention in the Gospel of Christ's head being anointed, but Adam includes it in order to use the head/feet dichotomy to symbolize allegorically the dual nature of Christ. And it seems that he is quite pleased with this interpretation, if we can judge from the rhetorical use of quid aliud? by which he draws attention to the natural correspondence between Christ's feet and the mortality which puts us in contact with the earth. Such a self-conscious exploitation of what I have called the

possibilities inherent in a text surely involves the play of theological wit, pawky perhaps but different from the rather careless application of Biblical texts which we sometimes encounter in medieval exegesis.<sup>16</sup>

In none of these examples have we found evidence of the systematic use of multiple allegorical senses, although it is true that the underlying structure of De tripartito tabernaculo is an exposition of the Temple of Solomon according to the literal, allegorical and tropological senses.<sup>17</sup> Despite the widespread circulation of the theory in medieval discussions of exegesis, the practice in Scotland and elsewhere in Christian Europe appears in the great majority of cases to have been to select a single level of interpretation for a particular text. We have seen that exegetes of the Bible paid differing amounts of attention to the possibilities arising from the literal sense, and that our awareness of the complexity and appropriateness of a reading tends to be directly proportional to the extent to which these literal possibilities are exploited. In other words, we are more likely to appreciate the account of the raven and the dove in The Sex Werkdays according to the Sex Agis or of Christ's head and feet in De tripartito tabernaculo than we are Livingstone's readings of Revelation or Adam of Dryburgh's application to the monastic orders of John 12: 2. This preference arises, no doubt, from our tastes in imagery and symbolism: we expect a natural relationship between the two parts of a metaphor, and we respond less to an arbitrary, imposed reading of a story or image. We should be aware, however, that these expectations differ from those that medieval exegetes



appear to have assumed in their audience. At their best, their methods sometimes produce a novel insight of the sort frequently achieved by Donne and his school, but more usually the effect is, in a memorable phrase of Dr Aers', "to dissolve the narrative's actions and images into thin air".<sup>18</sup>

It is a matter for debate how far the methods of scriptural exegesis extended into secular literature. Since it is apparent that even the exegetes rarely made use of the theory of multiple levels of allegory, we can speedily dismiss that aspect of the problem.<sup>19</sup> What remains, however, is difficult enough: to trace the influence of Biblical interpretation as it was actually practised beyond the exegetical tradition itself. We have already seen how a vernacular compendium like The Sex Werkdays uses traditional allegorical methods in interpreting Biblical texts. The pervasiveness of allegory is perhaps more apparent in a more serious fifteenth-century work of popular theology, John Ireland's Meroure of Wysdome.<sup>20</sup> A great deal of this treatise in fact consists of fairly straightforward literal exposition of such basic texts as the Paternoster, but chapters IX and X of Book II are a long account of the allegory of the Four Daughters of God. This is not in itself surprising, since the story (ultimately based on an allegorical reading of Psalms 84: 11: Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi, iustitia et pax osculatae sunt) was extremely popular throughout the Middle Ages. But within this allegorical framework, Ireland constructs a further symbolic system: when God gives judgment in favour of Mercy He does so, like a medieval king, in the form of a decree arbitral "anens þe gret discensioune and discord þat lang tyme has jndurit betuix me and my seruiture and wassale,



humane lineage". Even the Crucifixion is allegorized according to the language of medieval diplomatic:

The cyrogrof and lettir of perdicione of humane lineage, maid to be jnnemy be auld Adam and his wif, he /Christ/ sall distroy and wesch away be his gret merit and precius blude, and geve lettiris of plane jndulgeans and grace, pat sal be writtin richly jn virgin parchement of his haly body jn humanite, vpone be croce, with horrible pennis of jrne, pat are nalis throu his handis & feit, & be spere throu his sid, pat sal pers sa gretlie, pat be memore of his luf and cherite sal neuir pas out of my mynd ..... And pis lettir of grace and pardoune sal be writtin with richt precius liquore, pat is, be precius blud of my derrast sone jhesus, for pame that be jnnemy of mankind has desaut be fals jnwy, he sall wyne be perfit luf and ardent cherite. And pis charter and lettir of grace and of mercy sal be subscriuit be be consent of be haly spreit, and selit with the sing of the haly croce, pat all the trinite sall euir vse eftir pis in lettiris of grace and remissione.

Ireland has worked out the details of his allegorical image with some care, and the success of the passage depends upon the appropriateness of both the basic identification of Redemption with a royal letter of remission and the details of the working-out of this identification: the nails of the Crucifixion as pens writing man's salvation with the "richt precius liquore" of the blood of Christ, and so on. It is therefore vital for Ireland to avoid the arbitrariness of the association between "tenor" and "vehicle" which we have observed in much Biblical exegesis, and he appears, on the evidence of the text, to have been at pains to make his allegory convincing and illuminating. This care with the details of the allegory is clearly of greater importance in original literary composition than in Biblical interpretation, since in the latter the text is already established and the exegete is concerned only to expound its significance, whereas in literature, even theological literature,

the author is responsible for both text and interpretation. Ireland is not merely expounding a Biblical account of the Crucifixion; he is re-casting it according to an allegorical formula of his own invention, and it is scarcely surprising therefore that he takes some care over the aptness of his parallels.

Two rather different kinds of allegory are in fact apparent in Ireland's version of the story of the Four Daughters of God. The first consists in the feudal letter of remission we have just examined. It is not really narrative, although of course there is a story underlying the metaphor: it is rather an exposition of a static symbol, much more like most of the examples of scriptural exegesis we have noticed. The author of The Sex Werkdays does not repeat or elaborate on the Genesis narrative of the Flood, but rather explicates a series of symbols: the ark, the raven, the dove. In the same way, Ireland is working from his vehicle back to the Crucifixion: the Gospel narrative is not itself responsible for the structure of the passage. Such static symbols are found in secular works as well. The castles, towers, temples and other allegorical loci which infest late medieval courtly poetry are frequently approached by the poet rather in the way that Ireland approaches his allegory of the letter of remission: each detail is given a significance which is carefully (as a rule) made to fit both literal and allegorical senses.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, the dialogue of the Daughters of God themselves is a classic example of personification-allegory, in which the characters are from the beginning identified as em-



bodiments of abstract qualities. It is evident that a great deal of medieval allegory was of this type: indeed, the attention given to it by C.S. Lewis led to the assumption for some time that it was almost the only kind, certainly the archetypical one.<sup>23</sup> Such great and influential medieval poems as the Roman de la Rose and Piers Plowman largely depend, of course, on personifications, and many less significant works use such characters as a sort of moral or existential shorthand.<sup>24</sup> The history of the Four Daughters of God episode illustrates just how easy it is to create such personification-allegory: Psalm 84: 11 uses personification, but it is not allegorical.<sup>25</sup> All that needs to be done, however, is to turn mercy into Mercy and the abstract noun has become a name, the virtue has become a character. The rest is essentially elaboration, and the technique is one which was popular with medieval theologians and poets alike.<sup>26</sup>

Somewhere between the clear moral shorthand of personification-allegory and the figural use of Biblical characters lies another source of medieval allegory, the moralized Classical myth. As the exegetical method provided a ready store of traditional interpretations of the principal stories of the Old and New Testaments, so there was a body of material interpreting and moralizing Greek and Roman gods and heroes. Commentaries such as those of Servius and Bernard of Tours on the Aeneid and those of Rémi of Auxerre and John the Scot on the De nuptiis Mercurie et Philologie of Martianus Capella, together with such encyclopedic works as the Mythologiae of Fulgentius and the Etymologiae of Isidore of Seville, enjoyed currency throughout

the Middle Ages, and were succeeded by humanist writings such as the Africa of Petrarch and Boccaccio's De genealogia deorum.<sup>27</sup> This tradition clearly has affinities with Biblical exegesis in that the allegorist is generally interpreting stories which are established and well-known, but unlike virtually all Biblical allegory the stories are recognizably fictions. There was, it is true, a tendency to rationalize the Classical gods as mortals to whom divinity had been attributed,<sup>28</sup> but even Boccaccio, who makes great use of this euhemerist tradition, regularly refers to his Classical myths as fictiones or fabulae.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the figures of the Classical gods are frequently interpreted by moralists, and used by poets, as if they were a kind of personification. The abstract names of some (most obviously, of Fortuna) certainly invite this treatment, but there is a real sense in which in the later Middle Ages Venus is simply another name for Love, Minerva for Wisdom, and so on. This process is quite evident in the Kingis Quair, where James employs the goddesses Venus and Minerva as shorthand for abstract qualities.<sup>30</sup> By doing so, of course, he gains the great advantage which derives from the gods, a greater resonance by comparison with the abstractness of a personification.

A third major variety of allegory can also be illustrated from Ireland's Meroure of Wysdome, and it is one in which narrative plays a much more significant part. This is the allegorical exemplum, of such great value to the medieval preacher:<sup>31</sup>

I put the cais pat par be a noble king or empriour/ pat  
has of his liberalite and magnificens/ gevin gret



giftis to be noblis and pepil of his realme or empyr/  
 bot mony of þame fallis in a gret and profound foss  
 and perell nocht be the kingis falt bot be þar awn  
 that be na maner of way þai mycht get furth na be  
 deliuerit without his help and suple. This noble  
 prince cummys and offeris þame help/ as a leddir or  
 cord to draw þame furth of þat danger/ quhar þai ar  
 in perale of deid vnder condicioun that is licht to  
 do richt honorable and proffitable for þar self/  
 part acceppis this lordis offer/ and ar deliuerit  
 honorable/ vthir part refusis it and deis þar/ I  
 speir gif þis be the kingis faute or þar awn faute/  
 and gif þou auditor iugis richt/ þou wil find it in  
 þar awn faute/ and nocht the princis. The hie  
 prince is god þat maid angell & man in a hie and  
 noble state/ the man tynt himself & his linage/ and  
 kest him in the law foss and pyt of syn. The gud  
 lord be the passioun and doctrine of ihesu/ and þe  
 sacramentis has offert him help and suple and gif  
 he takis nocht it/ bot refusis þe offer/ it is his  
 awne faute/ and nocht the faute of god þe gud &  
 mercifull lord and prince.

32

Many of the hallmarks of the allegorical exemplum are apparent in this story: the generality of the narrative, with neither location nor characters individualized, the double structure of the telling, the story being told straightforwardly on the literal level first, and then repeated in many of its particulars in order to drive home the theological point. Each of the relatively few elements of the action has a double significance: the king is God, his people are mankind, the "foss" into which they somewhat improbably fall is sin. Only with the allegorical explanation or moralitas does the real meaning become fully clear, but once that has been achieved, at least in a short and simple exemplum such as this, there is very little more of interest in the story. Not all exempla, of course, are as rudimentary as this one of Ireland's, but a great many are, and the point is that Ireland is really only interested in the allegorical correspondences which can be milked from his narrative.



Not all exempla, however, are allegorical. There is an important distinction to be made between those which are and others in which there is no explicit statement of the meaning.

Ireland's Meroure again provides us with an example:

As þe woman in parys quhen sche knew that hir cousing was drownit in the rywer of sayn cryit and said/ that it was his destany & he mycht be na maner euade it/ for it was ordand for him sche said or euir cot or govne was schapin for him. Than come a clerk as my self/ and hard hir criand sayand and affirmand þis/ and be gret wisdom he thocht he wauld schaw hir folly/ and gaf hir twa gret blawis and strakis on baith hir chekis/ þat sche was gretlie abasit of/ And sone sche turnit hir purpos and cryit agane the clerk/ quhy he had sa felony strikin hir without caus or ressoun/ and þat he suld be had to presoun and punyst for it. The wys clerk ansuerit sobirly and said/ lady þis god wist lang befor þat I suld fall in sic a rage/ and folly to strik 3ou and þat 3e suld thole and suffer þis/ for 3our daft & wykit langage/ þat 3e haue spokin agane his honour and wisdom/ and sene þis was destany and ordand for 3ou/ that 3e suld nocht wyt me. And þus þe lady gat twa gret blawis tholit gret scorne and passit schamfully hir gait.

33

The relationship between the literal narrative of events and the meaning deriving from it is here very different from that in the previous example. Although Ireland's moral sympathies are clear enough (the clerk is "wys", the lady's blameworthiness is emphasized both by the clerk and by the narrator's final comment), the characters themselves have no meaning beyond their role in the literal action, and there is no direct, overt exposition of the meaning of the story. We must interpret the point of the narrative from indicators within the narration itself and from the context. Ireland introduces the exemplum at the end of a denunciation of those who deny the existence of free will, and it is sufficiently apparent from the story that the lady's punishment is for her assertion of predestination.

But this emerges only from the interaction of character within the plot: there is no satisfactory way in which the characters can be allegorized to express a reality beyond themselves. We have returned to my initial distinction between the strategy of Dickens in Great Expectations and that of Spenser in The Faerie Queene: whereas the latter is allegorical, like the story of the king and his people, the former is not, like the story of the lady and the clerk. I propose to reserve the term "allegorical" for the Faerie Queene kind of relationship between literal and ulterior meaning, while (borrowing a term from Henryson) using "exemplative" for that form of narrative in which characters, setting and action do not stand for moral qualities, theological or political ideas, or elements of the Christian myth, and where the ulterior meaning must be inferred from the way in which the characters interact with one another and from incidental comments made by the narrator.<sup>34</sup>

It may seem that I have laboured a rather obvious point. But the distinction is fundamental, and it has not always been recognized by critics of medieval literature. It is a misunderstanding along these lines which has led to many of the wilder excesses of "pan-allegorism", to which I shall return in Chapter VII. In all three principal types of allegory that we have examined, there are unambiguous verbal cues which indicate the presence of a systematically-organized second level of meaning: the characters are given abstract names, or the "real" meaning is made clear through the explicit intervention of the narrator as a commentator on his own metaphor or narrative. In such cases, the allegorical nature of the text is hardly in



question, although there may be critical arguments about the adequacy of the author's interpretation of his own words, or about the meaning of an action involving personifications. But when there are no such verbal cues, are we justified in crying "Allegory"? It is clearly the belief of D.W. Robertson Jr and his school that we are:

Medieval Christian poetry, and by Christian poetry I mean all serious poetry written by Christian authors, even that usually called 'secular', is always allegorical when the message of charity or some corollary of it is not evident on the surface.

35

Even critics less single-mindedly allegorizing than Professor Robertson have been inclined to assume the validity of allegorical readings where the text in no way required them, and the tendency has occasionally been apparent in readings of Middle Scots poems.<sup>36</sup> For Robertson, of course, an appeal to the absence of verbal cues suggesting allegorical intent is irrelevant or worse:

Even more important, perhaps, as a deterrent to our appreciation of allegory is the fact that its presence cannot be detected by modern philological methods. Scientific scholarship insists on confining itself to what a text 'actually says'. During the Middle Ages, this restriction was sometimes regarded not as a virtue but as a mark of illiteracy.

37

Well, but if "modern philological methods" are of no use in determining whether a medieval text is allegorical or not, what methods are we to use? It is surely inadequate to argue that because some medieval works, or even some works by a particular author, are allegorical, therefore others must be. The critic's ultimate resort must be to the words of the text, whatever other evidence may be adduced to support a particular reading.



And the evidence of the homilists themselves, whose moral intentions are scarcely in doubt, shows that medieval moralists are capable of embodying their meaning in forms which are non-allegorical, or which can be termed allegorical only by stretching the term to the point at which its generality considerably outweighs its usefulness. If "allegory" is to retain its value as a term of literary criticism, it is necessary that its sense be defined rather strictly, and it seems that the quality shared by those examples which would universally be agreed to be allegorical is that exhibited by Ireland's tale of the king and his people: a level of meaning beyond the literal in which all, or at least the majority of, the principal details of the action are assigned a significance additional to, and in some sense independent of, their literal significance. Some exempla can be read in this way, others can not; but while this argument denies that the latter are allegorical, it does not deny their moral or theological meaning. Medieval secular literature, moreover, manifestly includes works of both kinds.

A further difficulty must, however, be faced. While the distinction between allegorical and exemplative narrative is fairly easily made, it is more difficult to observe another distinction which has a direct bearing upon the reading of medieval poetry: that between overt and covert allegory. Allegories of the type of Ireland's exemplum of the king and his people, in which the moralitas spells out the allegorical sense, are relatively rare in poetry; they occur in the works of Henryson and in a few other texts, but their number is far

exceeded by other varieties of allegory. A further group, including such influential works as the Roman de la Rose and Guillaume de Guileville's Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine, although they do not employ an allegorical moralitas, are nevertheless overt in the sense that the meaning emerges through the use of a series of characters whose allegorical names reveal their significance. With neither of these categories can there be any doubt about the existence of allegory, although the precise implication of some aspects of a poem of the latter type may remain unclear, as in parts of Piers Plowman. But without following Robertson in his assertion that all "serious" medieval works in which there is no such explicit statement of meaning work allegorically, we must concede that there are poems which are generally agreed to be allegorical despite the absence of both a moralitas and characters with allegorical names.

Consider the opening lines of Dante's Divina Commedia:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
 mi ritrovai per una selva oscura  
 che la diritta via era smarrita ...  
 Ma poi ch' i' fui al piè d' un colle giunto,  
 là dove terminava quella valle  
 che m' aveva di paura il cor compunto,  
 guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle  
 vestite già de' raggi del pianeta  
 che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.

38

Dante gives no explicit indication that the dark wood and the hill are features of a landscape that is other than literal, and yet there seems to be no doubt that they, like most of the other elements of the first Canto, and indeed of the poem as a whole, are to be interpreted allegorically. Furthermore, there has been widespread critical agreement about the significance of the allegory: the wood represents the state of sin, the hill repent-



ence, or "la vita virtuosa e ordinata".<sup>39</sup> It does not follow, however, from the covert nature of the allegory in these opening lines that there are no verbal cues to assist us in our discrimination that the passage is allegorical, or in our allocation of values to the allegorical images. Dante does in fact make, at the very outset, one explicitly allegorical statement: "del cammin di nostra vita". Since the journey is thus defined as ultra-literal, it follows that the features encountered within it are likewise to be interpreted allegorically. No such explicit verbal intervention guides us in our interpretation of the wood, the road or the hill, but Dante here appears to be relying upon the traditional associations of these images, which are perhaps triggered off by the scriptural reference of the opening line (to Psalms 89: 10). Similarly, the leopard, the lion and the she-wolf encountered by the poet between ll. 31-54 are not explained in the text — and indeed, the interpretation of these images has occupied more than one generation of modern scholars — and yet the general line of the allegorical argument is clear enough. Again, the passage has a Biblical origin, and it seems probable that Dante was alluding not only to Jeremiah 5: 6 but also to 2 John 2: 16: omne quod in mundo aut est concupiscentia carnis, aut est concupiscentia oculorum, aut superbia vitae. But in some respects at least he seems also to have based the allegory upon the copious literature of the Seven Sins, so that his images had a richness of tradition which undoubtedly contributed to the understanding of the scene by the contemporary audience.<sup>40</sup> The evidence of traditional associations is of course very difficult



to use, since it is not always possible from the text to tell which associations should be applied and which excluded: Professor Robertson frequently finds himself impaled on the thorns of this problem. Yet the general point must be acknowledged: not all allegories are explicitly stated, and while it is reasonable to demand some firm textual evidence for an argument in favour of the presence of allegory in the first place, the actual interpretation of the images is frequently a matter for nice judgments and careful discriminations. And it was obviously this polysemous character of allegorical images which made them attractive to so many medieval poets.

In studying the various kinds of relationship between literal narrative and ulterior meaning which occur in Middle Scots poetry, we must be alert to the influence of all the modes which have been discussed so far: the static allegory of a complex symbol (where the meaning may be overtly, or more usually, covertly indicated), personification-allegory and its relative the moralized myth, the allegorical exemplum, and the "exemplative" narrative which like many exempla contains no allegory and which nevertheless embodies a moral or theological argument. There is also a further, and no less difficult kind of relationship between literal and ulterior senses: the ironic. Modern literary criticism has tended to treat irony rather in the same way that it has treated allegory, for this term also has been expanded in its application to the point where its very value might be questioned.<sup>41</sup> Once again, there seems a strong case for confining the sense of the word as far as possible, so that it applies to a recognizably similar group of

literary phenomena. A suitable starting-point, perhaps, is the definition of irony given by Donatus: ironia est tropus per contrarium quod conatur ostendens.<sup>42</sup> This definition, itself derived from Quintilian, passed into the rhetorical currency of the Middle Ages, together with the identification of such varieties of ironia as sarcasmos, antiphrasis and astismos.<sup>43</sup> But the medieval rhetorical approach to irony was inadequate in at least two ways. First, the rhetoricians followed Quintilian also in regarding ironia as a kind of allegoria, on the grounds that both allegory and irony depended upon the existence of a true sense of the words different from the superficial one. Not until the eighteenth century was it pointed out that

allegory imports a similitude between the thing spoken and intended; irony a contrariety between them.

44

While the notion of contrariety is clearly contained in such definitions of irony as Donatus', the identification of irony and allegory perhaps obscured more than it revealed. Yet beneath the identification lies an important truth, which is central to the chapters which follow: that irony and allegory are complementary (and not necessarily mutually exclusive) ways of making words carry senses beyond the literal, and that they provide the narrative poet with a variety of modes of significance for his story.<sup>45</sup>

The other failure of the rhetoricians' classification of irony was perhaps more serious. Largely because of the oratorical context in which Classical rhetoric existed, the medieval heirs of Cicero and (less directly) Quintilian confined themselves to verbal irony in the narrowest sense. Even such



fundamental types as dramatic irony, demonstrably present in the practice of Classical writers, are absent from the theoretical discussions of ironic method. There is nothing in Cicero, Donatus or the Doctrinale of Alexander of Villa-Dei which corresponds to the elaborate modern classifications of Worcester, Muecke, Knox and Booth. Yet it is obvious that a wide variety of ironic techniques, much wider than simple verbal irony (words used to convey the opposite of what they appear to state), were available to and used by medieval authors. It is easy to illustrate the range and variety of medieval ironic techniques from the works of Chaucer alone: what follows is not intended to suggest that Chaucer is unique in his use of irony, nor is it offered as a definitive discussion of Chaucerian ironia, but I hope to show something of the diversity of ways in which a skilled medieval narrative poet could convey part of his meaning through ironic methods. The examples are all the more relevant to the consideration of Middle Scots verse because Chaucer was undoubtedly a major influence on Henryson, Dunbar, Lindsay and their contemporaries.<sup>46</sup>

The simplest form of irony found in Chaucer is naturally verbal.<sup>47</sup> This may consist of no more than a single line which is clearly intended to be taken in a way denied by the words themselves:

And I seyde his opinion was good,

48

or it may extend to a whole ironic argument, as at the beginning of the Merchant's Tale:

And certeinly, as sooth as God is kyng,  
To take a wyf it is a glorious thyng,



And namely whan a man is oold and hoor;  
 Thanne is a wyf the fruyt of his tresor.  
 Thanne sholde he take a yong wyf and a feir,  
 On which he myghte engendren hym an heir,  
 And lede his lyf in joye and in solas,  
 Where as thise bacheloris synge 'allas',  
 Whan that they fynden any adversitee  
 In love, which nys but chilydyssh vanytee.

49

The full ironic force of these lines is perhaps only apparent at the end of the tale, when the deception of Januarie by May is complete. But there are enough cues within the opening argument to lead us to question, and probably to reject, the view of marriage offered by the Merchant. The emphasis upon the husband's age is surely decisive, since the sexual consequences of a disparity in age between husband and wife are the stock-in-trade of the medieval fabliau and have already been exploited earlier in the Canterbury Tales. The Merchant's subsequent arguments do nothing to make his case more convincing: bachelors

lyve but as a bryd or as a beest,  
 In libertee, and under noon arreest,  
 Ther as a wedded man in his estaat  
 Lyveth a lyf blisful and ordinaat,  
 Under this yok of mariage ybounde.

50

The terms of this contrast are on the surface supposed to reflect unfavourably upon the unmarried condition, but the positive connotations of "under noon arreest" are of course irresistible and the force of "blisful and ordinaat" is immediately subverted by "yok of mariage" in the following line. The reader is thus made to reject the Merchant's arguments, and to conclude that Chaucer is really arguing against such marriages, a reading which is then supported by the narrative which follows.

A little later in the same passage, another technique is employed by Chaucer to undermine the Merchant's argument:

And herke why, I sey nat this for noght,  
That womman is for mannes helpe ywroght.  
The hye God, whan he hadde Adam maked,  
And saugh him al allone, bely-naked,  
God of his grete goodnesse seyde than,  
'Lat us now make an helpe unto this man  
Lyke to hymself'; and thanne he made him Eve.  
Heere may ye se, and heerby may ye preve,  
That wyf is mannes helpe and his confort,  
His paradys terrestre, and his disport.

51

While it forms part of the ironic argument, we should perhaps regard this more properly as an ironic allusion, since it is a ploy which Chaucer frequently adopts in its own right. In this case, the reference to Adam and Eve is striking for what it omits, namely any mention of the Fall or Eve's notorious responsibility for it. Chaucer, of course, intends us to fill in the gap: if this is an example of a man being supported by his wife, we are presumably to conclude, he is probably better off without. The ironic intention is further emphasized by the use of the phrase "his paradys terrestre", recalling Januarie's previous observation that

'wedlok is so esy and so clene,  
That in this world it is a paradys',

52

and reminding us explicitly of the Eden from which mankind is forever banished largely through the fault of Eve. The imagery which springs from this allusion underlies most of the irony of the Merchant's Tale,<sup>53</sup> and the passage is thus an excellent example of the way in which Chaucer puts Biblical material to ironic use. It is not difficult to multiply examples: later in the Merchant's Tale, for instance, Januarie invites May into



the garden with a series of quotations from the Canticum Cantorum,<sup>54</sup> while much of the comic point of the Miller's Tale hinges upon ironic references to Noah's Flood. Not only Biblical allusions are played upon in this way: thus, the Prioress' rosary has a brooch on which the inscription Amor vincit omnia has a patently ironic function. The triumph of Love could, if it referred to caritas, be appropriate to a nun, but both the source of the quotation and various other details in the portrait of the Prioress suggest that a more secular significance may underlie the words.<sup>55</sup>

A further group of ironic techniques arise from Chaucer's use of narrative point of view. The ironic function of the Chaucerian persona is of course now well-established, and the only critical issue is how far we should see the technique extending. Certainly in the House of Fame and elsewhere Chaucer adopts "the guise of an ignorant but earnest and well-meaning innocent",<sup>56</sup> and this ploy is central to the complex ironies of the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.<sup>57</sup> Another dimension to the ironic use of the narrator is given by the narrative framework of the tales themselves, since some at least of the narrators are to be regarded ironically. Even among such examples of ironic narration, however, further distinctions must be made, corresponding roughly to Muecke's categories of ingénu irony and irony of self-betrayal.<sup>58</sup> The Merchant, as we have already seen, takes a view of marriage which does not appear to be Chaucer's own, and which is contradicted by the story he proceeds to tell. Two conclusions are possible from this evidence: either the Merchant himself is arguing ironically



in favour of marriage, "intending" us to see the fallacies in his argument, or he fails to see the logic of his own narrative and must be regarded as a simpleton.<sup>59</sup> In this case, the evidence of his Prologue suggests that the Merchant is fully aware of the disadvantages of marriage, but elsewhere the narrator is more probably treated ironically. The Prioress, for example, tells of a miracle of the Virgin in which horror and pathos are closely interwoven. While this narrative may in part be intended seriously by Chaucer, it can hardly be denied that its gruesomeness and its sentimentality are anticipated in the ironies of the portrait of the Prioress in the General Prologue:

But, for to speken of hire conscience,  
 She was so charitable and so pitous  
 She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous  
 Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.  
 Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde  
 With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed.  
 But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,  
 Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;  
 And al was conscience and tendre herte.

60

There can be no doubt of the irony here, for the Prioress' devotion to trivia is insisted upon throughout the portrait, and the keeping of pets is a clear violation of the monastic rule.<sup>61</sup> If such pity is lavished on mice and dogs, then, is it surprising that the sectarian murder of a child will stir her to rhetorical heights?

Gentle ridicule of the Prioress' sentimentality, then, seems to emerge from her tale and the way she tells it. But this hardly counts as self-betrayal, of the kind to which Chaucer subjects his Pardoner. In only one or two cases in the

Canterbury Tales do we find the story subordinated to the character of the narrator, and the Pardoner's Tale is certainly one such case and one which, as we shall see, was evidently influential. The Pardoner's long Prologue is in one sense hardly ironic at all, so explicit is the Pardoner about his own viciousness:

But shortly myn entente I wol devyse:  
I preche of no thyng but for coveityse.  
Therefore my theme is yet, and evere was,  
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.  
Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice  
Which that I use, and that is avarice.  
But though myself be gilty in that synne,  
Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne  
From avarice, and soore to repente.  
But that is nat my principal entente;  
I preche nothyng but for coveitise.

62

The words here mean what they say; whatever irony is present lies in the Pardoner's awareness of the contradictory nature of his own existence.<sup>63</sup> A more literary variety of irony is present in the structure of Prologue and Tale together, for the Pardoner seems at the end to have forgotten about his earlier confession, and tries his techniques of extortion on his audience of pilgrims, without success. The reason for this lapse is not made clear, although it may simply reflect the Pardoner's extreme — and excessive — confidence in his oratorical skill.<sup>64</sup>

The most powerful ironies, however, reside in the relationship between the Tale itself and its teller. The terrible fate which befalls the rioters of the Pardoner's Tale is a punishment for their avarice, and notwithstanding his confession, there is no evidence that the Pardoner realizes that the lesson of his



story applies to himself as well.<sup>65</sup> Nor is it merely their sinfulness which identifies the Pardoner with his characters. We have seen his awareness of the ironic nature of his own existence, and this sense pervades the tale as well. It is present in the paradoxical quest of the rioters, to kill Death, and also in the plight of the old man, who seeks Death but cannot find him. It is in addition central to the ironic play on words which is the mainspring of the dénouement:

'Now, sires,' quod he, 'if that yow be so leef  
 To fynde Deeth, turne up this croked wey,  
 For in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey,  
 Under a tree, and there he wole abyde;  
 Noght for youre boost he wole him no thyng hyde.  
 Se ye that ook? Right there ye shal hym fynde.  
 God save yow, that boghte agayn mankynde,  
 And yow amende!'

66

The gold which the rioters find beneath the oak is Death, but because of their literal-mindedness (which has both comic and tragic implications) they are unable to see that the old man is speaking symbolically. The irony of the old man's words extends beyond this, however, for it is clear that he knows what he is saying, and the final prayer is thus more of a comment upon their viciousness than a plea for intercession. All of this relates to the identity of the old man himself, which Chaucer avoids defining. He does not reply to the allegation of one of the rioters that he is "oon of his Death's assent", but he certainly acts as an agent, even an agent provocateur, for Death. It is perhaps tempting to allegorize, as some critics have done,<sup>67</sup> but the main focus is upon what he says rather than upon who he is, and his own words suggest that he is a victim of the paradoxes of human nature as much as the rioters and the



Pardoner.

Where the limited vision of reality which is manifest in such narrators as the Pardoner and the Chaucerian persona is found in the characters of the narrative itself, the result is the familiar mode of dramatic irony. The importance of the device in Chaucer has been amply demonstrated, and requires little elaboration here.<sup>68</sup> One of the most important examples comes near the beginning of Troilus and Criseyde, where we see Troilus' scorn of friends in love:

'I have herde told, pardieus, of youre lyvynges,  
Ye loveres, and youre lewed observaunces,  
And which a labour folk han in wynnynges  
Of love, and in the kepyng which doutaunces;  
And whan youre prey is lost, woo and penaunces.  
O veray fooles, nyce and blynde be ye!  
Ther nys nat oon kan war by other be.'

69

The relevance of Troilus' words to his own tragedy is obvious to the audience, but Chaucer goes further by suggesting that his love of Criseyde is actually Cupid's punishment for this heresy. However lightly we may treat this point, the ironic significance of Troilus' blindness is emphasized:

This Troilus is clomben on the staire,  
And litel weneth that he moot descend;  
But alday faileth thing that fooles wenden.

70

Dramatic irony seems here to be upon the verge of becoming something else, that "general" or "philosophic" irony which sets the limitations of human existence against something more (or less) important.<sup>71</sup> This ultimately ironic vision seems to prevail at the end of Troilus and Criseyde, where Chaucer asserts the brotelnesse of human love and makes the dead Troilus "despise/ This wrecched world".<sup>72</sup> This latter case is clearly rather

different from dramatic irony, which depends upon our awareness of a character's limited knowledge or understanding. A more straightforward example of dramatic irony comes from the Knight's Tale, where Mercury tells Arcite in a vision that

'To Atthenes shaltou wende,  
Ther is thee shapen of thy wo an ende.'

73

This prediction of his death goes unrecognized by Arcite, with appropriately tragic results, and the enigmatic nature of the vision is clearly intended as dramatic irony.

With dramatic irony we reach the limits of the ironies termed "stable" by Professor Booth. I have just indicated that there are yet further ironic implications in Chaucer's work: the irony of infinite regression implicit in notions of "general", "philosophic" or "cosmic" irony extend beyond the relationship between the words and their meaning to philosophical and theological questions which lie outside the scope of the present enquiry.<sup>74</sup> Enough has been said, I think, to establish that a range of ironic techniques was employed by one major medieval poet which far exceeds the theories of the rhetoricians, and that we must be alert, not merely to the ironic use of words and arguments, but to the ironic possibilities of allusion, characterization and narrative point of view. That Chaucer was not alone among medieval poets in his skilled and subtle use of irony will be amply apparent from what follows.

The study of Middle Scots narrative poetry which I have



attempted in the following chapters is largely descriptive, in the sense that I have devoted the greater part of my attention to identifying the ways in which Scottish poets used narrative forms to convey broadly ethical views. The question of how best to embody a moral statement in poetic form is not one which can readily be answered in a general way. Each poet must solve the problem for himself; and to some extent, he must solve it afresh every time he writes a poem. The readings of poems which form the bulk of this thesis are not designed, therefore, to present a single, inclusive solution to the question of "ulterior" meaning. Rather, they show the differing processes by which medieval Scottish poets use narratives as a vehicle for moral arguments.

While I disclaim any single, all-purpose relationship between literal and ulterior senses, however, I must declare one or two fundamental assumptions. One, implicit in the previous paragraph, is that a great deal of medieval poetry, including perhaps a number of works not generally read in this way today, is concerned with moral questions. I am thus inclined to read much of Dunbar's verse rather more seriously than most modern critics, as will be seen in Chapter V. I would include in this category of poetry with an underlying moral intention many (but by no means all) romances, and much of the love poetry which descends from the Roman de la Rose. For most of the poems discussed in the following pages, I think, this is not a particularly contentious view, and in many cases a serious intention is avowed by the poet himself.

The more difficult critical problems relate to how the



moral or doctrinal significance is to be drawn from the literal narrative: how are we to discriminate among the various kinds of readings (exemplative, allegorical, ironic) which may appear to offer themselves? My answer to this methodological question reveals my second underlying assumption, for it is my view that we must continually test any reading of a poem against the licence and the limitation of the words. Our understanding of any literary work is bounded on the one hand by the fullest semantic possibilities of the words of which it consists, on the other by the restrictions imposed by the interaction of those same words. The problem of "how far to go" is one which is common to all criticism, and it appears most forcibly in the discussion of such modes as allegory and irony. As I have already suggested above, I do not think that the limitations imposed by the words have always been weighed seriously enough by modern critics, and this is an obligation which I have always endeavoured to make the centre of the readings offered below. On the other hand, the critic of medieval literature, more perhaps than others, must give the language of his text the fullest opportunity to convey its meaning: in the words of John of Salisbury, necesse est uim sermonis excutere. The demands of the text are sometimes philological, sometimes rhetorical, sometimes philosophical or theological, often some combination of all three. Between them lies "the full force of the words", which is the author's intention. In the following chapters, I hope to make the intentions of some medieval Scottish poets clearer than they have hitherto been.

Notes to Chapter I

- 1     Among a copious literature on the allegorical methods of The Faerie Queene, see especially A.C. Hamilton, The Structure of Allegory in the Faerie Queene (London 1961); T.P. Roche, The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser's Faerie Queene (Princeton 1964); and Rosemond Tuve, Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and their Posterity (Princeton 1966).
  
- 2     For figura, see Erich Auerbach's essay with that title in Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York 1959), pp. 11-71. On typology, see Henri de Lubac SJ, "'Typologie' et 'allegorisme'", Recherches de Science Religieuse 34 (1947), 180-226; and Erich Auerbach, "Typological Symbolism in Medieval Literature", Yale French Review 9 (1952), 3-10. For a sensible recent discussion of typology in literature, cf. Robert Hollander, "Typology and Secular Literature: Some Medieval Problems and Examples", in Literary Uses of Typology from the Late Middle Ages to the Present, ed. E. Miner (Princeton 1977), pp. 3-19. An attempt to distinguish between the literary implications of "allegory" and "typology", which has been quite influential, is that by Charles Donahue in "Patristic Exegesis in the Criticism of Medieval Literature: The Summation", in Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1958-1959, ed. D. Bethurum (New York 1960), pp. 61-82.
  
- 3     The standard work is Henri de Lubac SJ, Exégèse médiévale (4 vols, Paris 1959-64). Other important discussions of Biblical exegesis, which pay some attention to the literary implications, include J.M. Campbell, "Patristic Studies and the Literature of Medieval England", Speculum 8 (1933), 465-73; M.W. Bloomfield, "Symbolism in Medieval Literature", MP 56 (1958-9), 73-81; and P.E. Beichner, "The Allegorical Interpretation of Medieval Literature", PMLA 82 (1967), 33-8. An extremely useful analysis of the problems, including a number of readings of actual exegetical texts, is to be found in the early chapters of David Aers, Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory (London 1975); I find that Dr Aers' approach in many respects resembles my own, although of course his primary interest in Langland's poem leads him in rather different directions.
  
- 4     de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale, I, 171-219.
  
- 5     On the so-called "quadruple sense", see H. Caplan, "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Medieval Theory of Preaching", Speculum 4 (1929), 282-90; and de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale, I, passim.



- 6 Copiale Prioratus Sanctiandree, ed. J.H. Baxter (London/St Andrews 1930), p. 295.
- 7 Cf. the widespread mnemonic verse, ultimately traceable to the thirteenth-century Dominican Augustine of Dacia, discussed by de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale, I, 23ff.
- 8 The point is well made by Aers, op. cit., pp. 20-32, and passim. Livingstone's methods closely resemble those of some English homilists of c. 1400 whose allegories are discussed by Aers, pp. 33 ff.
- 9 Cf. de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale, I, 305-17.
- 10 The Sex Werkdays according to the Sex Agis, in The Asloan Manuscript, ed. W.A. Craigie (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1923-4), I, 312-3.
- 11 ibid., I, 302-3.
- 12 The relationship between "allegory of the theologians" and "allegory of the poets", based on the categories defined by Dante in his Letter to Can Grande della Scala /Epistolae, X, 7, ed. Paget Toynbee (Oxford 1920), pp. 173-4/and Convivio, II, 1 /ed. G. Busnelli and G. Vandelli (Florence 1953), I, 95-103/, has been much discussed by recent critics. Cf. Bernard Silvester's distinction between allegoria and integumentum in his Commentary on Martianus Capella, quoted by Winthrop Wetherbee, Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century (Princeton 1972), p. 267.
- 13 For early examples of the standard medieval interpretation of the Ark as a figure of the Church, see Tertullian, De idololatria, XXIV, 4, Opera (CCSL, 2 vols, Turnhout 1954), II, 1124; Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos, CIII, 3, ii, ed. E. Dekkers OSB and J. Fraipont (CCSL, 3 vols, Turnhout 1956), III, 1499. More elaborate allegorizations are found in Rabanus Maurus, Commentarii in Genesim, II, 6, PL. 107: 514-5; and above all Hugh of St Victor, De arca Noe morali and De arca Noe mystice, PL. 175: 617-704.
- 14 On Adam and his career, see James Bulloch, Adam of Dryburgh (London 1958); and Adam of Dryburgh, Six Christmas Sermons, trans. M.J. Hamilton (Analecta Cartusiana 16, Salzburg 1974).
- 15 De tripartito tabernaculo, II, 136, PL. 198: 741.
- 16 Cf. W.J. Ong SJ, "Wit and Mystery: A Revaluation in Medieval Latin Hymnody", Speculum 22 (1947), 310-41.



- 17 For Adam's views on allegory, see De tripartito tabernaculo, Proem, PL. 198: 629.
- 18 Aers, op. cit., p. 26.
- 19 The most detailed study of this question is Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (2nd edn, Oxford 1952).
- 20 John Ireland, The Meroure of Wysdome, I, ed. Charles Macpherson (STS, Edinburgh 1926); II, ed. F. Quinn (STS, Edinburgh 1965). The last two books of Ireland's treatise have yet to be published.
- 21 Meroure of Wysdome, II, x, ed. cit., I, 123.
- 22 Among Scottish examples, cf. King Hart and Dunbar's Bewty and the Presoneir (discussed below, pp. 87-105 and 365-9 respectively), and Gavin Douglas' Palice of Honour, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas (STS, Edinburgh 1967).
- 23 C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford 1936), esp. pp. 44-111. Cf. R.W. Frank Jr, "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification-Allegory", ELH 20 (1953), 237-50; M.W. Bloomfield, "A Grammatical Approach to Personification Allegory", MP 60 (1962-3), 161-71.
- 24 There is a useful short discussion of personification as an allegorical technique in Tuve, op. cit., pp. 25-7.
- 25 For perhaps the earliest Christian allegorization of Ps. 84: 11, see Hugh of St Victor, Miscellanea, II, 63, PL. 177: 623-5.
- 26 On the widespread currency of this tradition, see H. Traver, The Four Daughters of God (Philadelphia 1907); S.C. Chew, The Virtues Reconciled (Toronto 1947).
- 27 The standard account is by Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, trans. B.F. Sessions (New York 1953). Cf. also Pamela Gradon, Form and Style in Early English Literature (London 1971), pp. 41-50.
- 28 The euhemerist tradition is discussed by J.D. Cooke, "Euhemerism: A Mediaeval Interpretation of Classical Paganism", Speculum 2 (1927), 396-410. For an alternative view of

the medieval significance of classical myth, see Paul Piehler, The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory (London 1971).

- 29 Giovanni Boccaccio, De genealogia deorum gentilium, ed. V. Romano (2 vols, Bari 1951).
- 30 The Kingis Quair, ll. 530-1052, ed. John Norton-Smith (Oxford 1971), pp. 19-38.
- 31 On the place of the exemplum in medieval preaching, see J. Th. Welter, L'exemplum dans la Littérature religieuse et didactique au Moyen Age (Paris/Toulouse 1927); G.R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (2nd edn, Oxford 1961), pp. 149-209.
- 32 Meroure of Wysdome, V, v, ed. cit., II, 141.
- 33 ibid., II, 140-1.
- 34 I prefer to use "exemplative" rather than the more usual "exemplary" because many "exemplary" stories are, as we have seen, of the allegorical type. "Exemplary" in my usage, therefore, refers to the whole class of preachers' narratives, translating the Latin exemplum, while "exemplative" refers to a sub-class of these narratives, as defined above. For Henryson's use of the latter term, see The Wolf and the Wedder, l. 2591, Poems and Fables, ed. H. Harvey Wood (2nd edn, Edinburgh 1958), p. 88. I do not claim that Henryson's usage corresponds to mine: his use of such critical terms as "figurale", "exemplative", "moral", "similitude", "parabole", "sentence" and so on defies rationalization, and seems not to have been particularly discriminating. My distinction here does, however, correspond to that of Pamela Gradon between allegory and "mythic narrative", op. cit., pp. 23-4. Cf. also Stanley J. Kahrl, "Allegory in Practice: A Study of Narrative Styles in Medieval Exempla", MP 63 (1965-6), 105-10, where much the same distinction is given a chronological significance, not in my view supported by the evidence.
- 35 D.W. Robertson Jr, "Historical Criticism", English Institute Essays, 1950 (New York 1951), p. 14.
- 36 For discussion of particular cases, see below pp. 206ff., 235-6, 278 and n.
- 37 Robertson, op. cit., p. 4.
- 38 Dante, La Divina Commedia, Inferno, I, 1-3, 13-18, ed. N.



Sapegno (2nd edn, Florence 1968), pp. 4-6.

- 39 *ibid.*, p. 6.
- 40 M.W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins (East Lansing, Mich. 1952), pp. 157, 245-9.
- 41 So, for example, Cleanth Brooks, The Well-Wrought Urn (London 1949), p. 191. Cf. D.C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony (London 1969), p. 13.
- 42 Donatus, Ars grammatica, III, 6, Grammatici Latini, ed. H. Keil (7 vols, Leipzig 1864), IV, 401.
- 43 Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria, VIII, vi, 54-9, ed. H.E. Butler (4 vols, London 1921-2), III, 332-5. The best recent survey of medieval rhetoric is J.J. Murphy, Rhetoric in the Middle Ages (Berkeley 1974).
- 44 Ephraim Chambers, Cyclopaedia (1778-88), as quoted by Norman Knox, The Word 'Irony' and its Context, 1500-1755 (Durham, N.C. 1961), p. 11.
- 45 Cf. also a further parallel noted by Rosemond Tuve:  
 "Like the neighbouring trope of irony, metaphor implies what it can not overtly state without losing its formal character which defines it as a figure; both figures are, as it were, open at one end, allowing interpretations which can be supported by proper evidence but not proven."  
 (op. cit., p. 220)
- 46 The traditional phrase "Scottish Chaucerians" over-emphasized a relationship which was nevertheless important, and we must be careful not to over-react against it. The issue is discussed in detail by G.C. Kratzmann, "Anglo-Scottish Literary Relationships, 1430-1550: the Makars in Relation to the Non-Alliterative English Tradition", (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh 1975), who concludes (p. 25) that the influence of Chaucer "is more important than that of any other non-alliterative English writer, Lydgate included".
- 47 Classifications of types of irony have been attempted by, among others, David Worcester, The Art of Satire (Cambridge, Mass. 1940); D.C. Muecke, op. cit. and Irony (London 1970); Norman Knox, "On the Classification of Ironies", MP 70 (1972-3), 53-62; and Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony (Chicago 1974). While none of these systems is totally convincing, all cast valuable light on the phenomenon of irony in literature. More immediately relevant to the present study are Vance Ramsay, "Modes of Irony in The Canterbury Tales" in A Companion to Chaucer Studies, ed. B.



Smalley (Toronto 1968), pp. 291-312; and Earle Birney, "English Irony before Chaucer", UTQ 6 (1937), 538-57.

- 48 Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, A, 183, Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass. 1957), p. 19.
- 49 *ibid.*, E, 1267-76, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 115.
- 50 *ibid.*, E, 1281-5, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 115.
- 51 *ibid.*, E, 1323-32, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 116.
- 52 *ibid.*, E, 1264-5, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 115.
- 53 See Robert P. Miller, "Allegory in The Canterbury Tales", in A Companion to Chaucer Studies, pp. 268-90, at p. 283. There is a useful brief discussion of Chaucer's irony in this tale in Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition (2nd edn, Berkeley 1964), pp. 230-7.
- 54 Canterbury Tales, E, 2138-48, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 124.
- 55 The ambiguities surrounding this Ovidian allusion were definitively explored by J.L. Lowes, Convention and Revolt in Poetry (Boston 1919), p. 66.
- 56 Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 296.
- 57 Cf. especially Arthur W. Hoffman, "Chaucer's Prologue to Pilgrimage: The Two Voices", ELH 21 (1954), 1-16; E. Talbot Donaldson, "Chaucer the Pilgrim", PMLA 69 (1954), 928-36; and Edgar H. Duncan, "Narrator's Point of View in the Portrait-sketches, Prologue to the Canterbury Tales", in Essays in Honour of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, Tenn. 1955), pp. 77-101.
- 58 Muecke, Compass of Irony, pp. 91-2, 107-12.
- 59 The former view is taken by, for example, Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer (Stanford, Calif. 1932), p. 49. For a version of the latter, see Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 283.
- 60 Canterbury Tales, A, 142-50, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 18.
- 61 On this point, see Muriel Bowden, A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (New York 1948), pp. 98-9. The debate about the Prioress is reviewed by Florence H. Ridley, The Prioress and the Critics (Berkeley 1965). A

view very like that suggested here is argued in more detail by R.J. Schoeck, "Chaucer's Prioress: Mercy and Tender Heart", in Chaucer Criticism: The Canterbury Tales, ed. R.J. Schoeck and J. Taylor (Notre Dame 1960), pp. 245-58. Cf. also U.C. Knoepfelmacher, "Irony through Scriptural Allusion: A Note on Chaucer's Prioress", Chaucer Review 4 (1970), 181-3.

- 62 Canterbury Tales, C, 423-33, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 149.
- 63 It is probably more appropriate to regard this as paradox rather than as irony in the strict sense; cf. A.C. Spearing (ed.), The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale (Cambridge 1965), p. 18.
- 64 Robert B. Burlin, Chaucerian Fiction (Princeton 1977), p. 175, usefully relates this ending to the bravado of the rioters within the Tale itself.
- 65 This is perhaps the ultimate irony at the core of the Pardoner's Tale: the Pardoner reveals not only his avaricious corruption but the inevitable fate which awaits him, and while he admits quite freely to the former he remains oblivious to the dreadful implications of his Tale. The very fact that he tells it is thus a clear indication of his spiritual blindness.
- 66 Canterbury Tales, C, 760-7, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 153.
- 67 Robert P. Miller, "Chaucer's Pardoner, the Scriptural Eunuch and the Pardoner's Tale", Speculum 30 (1955), 80-99; John M. Steadman, "Old Age and Contemptus Mundi in the Pardoner's Tale", Medium Aevum 33 (1964), 121-30; A. David, "Criticism and the Old Man in Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale", College English 27 (1965), 39-44. For a contrary view, see W.J.B. Owen, "The Old Man in the Pardoner's Tale", RES n.s. 2 (1951), 49-55.
- 68 Cf. in particular, Dempster, op. cit., passim.
- 69 Troilus and Criseyde, I, 197-203, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 391.
- 70 ibid., I, 215-7, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 391.
- 71 Muecke, Compass of Irony, pp. 119-58, esp. p. 121.
- 72 Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1816-7, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 479.
- 73 Canterbury Tales, A, 1391-2, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 30.



- 74 These wider implications are discussed at some length by Muecke, Compass of Irony, pp. 124-58. If the medieval Christian view of divine providence precluded an ultimately absurdist sense of universal irony, the motif of contemptus mundi (which underlies both Chaucer's final stanzas of Troilus and Criseyde and the vision of Troilus which immediately precedes them) at times appears to have generated something rather similar, with the important qualification that there was always seen to be a higher order of priorities which transcended the senselessness of sublunary existence.

CHAPTER II

Some Varieties of Moral Narrative  
in Middle Scots

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That the full range of allegorical, metaphorical and ironic techniques outlined in the previous chapter was available to, and used by, Scottish poets can easily be demonstrated from a sample of Middle Scots narrative poems which either are anonymous, or about whose authors we have only the most meagre information. The poems which will be considered in the following pages have generally been neglected, partly because critics have been less comfortable dealing with poets whose identities were unknown, and whose works cannot therefore be attached to any clear literary milieu or pattern of development. These difficulties have thus obscured in large measure the very considerable merits of poems like The Freiris of Berwik or (notwithstanding a certain technical roughness) Colkelbie Sow. The following discussion is partly intended to redress this historical tendency, but it also provides a useful background to the subsequent consideration of the works of three Scots poets who can be seen dealing with the problems of moral narrative over a period of time, through an examination of several of their poems.

The biographical vacuum in which the anonymous poems exist is often additionally complicated by uncertainties over dating. There are no texts of any of the works in question earlier than that of The Quare of Jelusy in Bodleian MS. Arch. Selden B.24 (c. 1488-90),<sup>1</sup> and the rest are found only in sixteenth-century texts. From external evidence, it is plain that several of the poems were in existence by the beginning of the sixteenth century: writing probably in the first decade of that century, Dunbar at different points alludes to Rauf Coilzear and to

Colkelbie Sow, copies of which were in the missing sections of the Asloan MS., although the earliest texts we now have belong to the second half of the century.<sup>2</sup> The Wyf of Auchtermuchty, by contrast, seems (if the ascription to Sir John Mofat is correct) to have been written in the reign of James V,<sup>3</sup> while we can only guess at the date of The Talis of the Fyve Bestes and The Thre Prestis of Peblis (both written by c. 1515, and probably in the fifteenth century), King Hart and The Freiris of Berwik. The arrangement of the present chapter, therefore, is in no sense historical: I am concerned here to show the variety of approaches to the relationship between literal and ulterior meaning adopted by Scots poets between about 1450 and about 1550, and the order in which the poems are dealt with is logical rather than chronological. Questions of text, authorship and dating cannot altogether be left out of account, but they are not central to the present purpose.

Suitable as it is for the homilist, the exemplum does not by itself provide very stimulating material for the poet. Its narrative lines are too simple, its characterization too spare, its moral or theological message too obvious, to offer a sufficient basis on its own for a narrative poem. Some romances, it is true, have some of the characteristics of an extended, greatly elaborated exemplum, and Henryson tried at least once to blend the two forms,<sup>4</sup> but another method of dealing with short moral tales of this kind was to link them



together through a single narrative structure. Such framing devices occur in ancient India and in medieval Islam, and many of the exempla, too, have cognates in the East. But there are also several notable European representatives of the genre, from such straightforward but widespread examples as Les Sept Sages de Rome (which was translated into Scots before about 1515) to the much more elaborate Decamerone and Canterbury Tales, which rank among the finest literary achievements of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> There are three principal Middle Scots collections, apart from The Sevyne Sages, which illustrate three distinct modifications of the linked-tale device: The Talis of the Fyve Bestes, The Thre Prestis of Peblis, and Colkelbie Sow. The scope of each of these collections is much more limited than that of The Canterbury Tales: Chaucer sets tales of chivalry against fabliaux, didactic prose treatises against parody romance, and develops the interplay of the characters who tell the stories into a principal element of the whole work, but in his own way each of the three Scottish authors exhibits a sensitivity to the ways in which disparate narrative elements can be brought together to make a unified moral statement.

This ultimate unity of purpose is manifest in The Talis of the Fyve Bestes, despite the fragmentary nature of the text.<sup>6</sup>

The opening has been lost, the unique copy beginning some way into the first tale, that of the Horse, but it is nevertheless possible to reconstruct from the ending the main lines at least of what it must have contained. It is clear, for example, that the poet has drawn his material partly from the traditions of

the fable and of the Roman de Renart, for the framing-device of the beast-parliament has parallels in both these genres. This is blended, however, with some at least of the conventions of the allegorical vision, as we can infer from the poet's statement that

So sodanely þis court went out of sight  
That all was gone in twynkling of an E,  
(402-3)

which suggests that the opening may have had the familiar machinery of astrological reference and natural setting. It seems likely, too, that there may have been some discussion of kingship in the prologue: certainly it is the virtues of a just monarch which emerge as a dominant theme in the final lines. The Talis of the Fyve Bestes belongs in that tradition of political advice which is a recurring feature of Scottish poetry in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup>

It is more than just a homily for an imperfect ruler, however, and its complexity derives from the interaction of the five stories. The first, 'The Horse's Tale', is not really concerned with kingship at all: it is a version of the very common exemplum of the Wise and Foolish Brothers (or Knights). It occurs in the Gesta Romanorum, Bromyard's Summa predicantium, the Speculum morale of Vincent of Beauvais, and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Encountering a choice of two paths, one narrow and difficult, the other broad and pleasant, the foolish brother wishes to take the latter. The wise brother initially argues with him, but gives in; they fall in with brigands, and are eventually captured and tried. The wise brother blames the other for his folly, but the fool replies that he is not to blame, since God



gave his brother wisdom to protect him, not to cause him to give in to folly. The king agrees, and both are executed. Although there are differences in the detail of the story itself, the general line of the moralitas is the same in the various versions:

Siris, þis Emperour is to vndirstond our Lord ihesu crist ..... And by þe ij. knyztis, scilicet, þe wise man and þe lewid man, ben vndirstonde þe soule and þe flesh; For þe soule is wise, and þe flesh is euer lewid, and buxom to do Evil.

9

Thir brethir two, in euery man þai bene:  
The wantone flesche, it is þe foly broþire,  
The sely saull, forsuth, it is þe toþire;  
So quhen þe saull affermes þe delyte  
Off þe foule flesche, lust & appetit,  
Alson with dedly synnis ar þai wrocht,  
Takin, and slane, and to confusioun brocht.

(44-50)

The moralitas here stands firmly within the tradition of the allegorical exemplum: it is tropological and extremely general. Its relation to the story, however, is a good deal less exact than that of the Gesta Romanorum versions, where every detail, the paths, the places they lead to, and so on, is faithfully explained in the moralitas. In 'The Horse's Tale' the symbolism of the Two Ways is hardly developed, beyond the simple statement that "þe way of buskis, thorne & brere,/ That is þe way of pennance & of grace" (ll. 52-3), although it is possible that the imagery of the discussion between the two brothers contributed to the audience's understanding of the allegory.<sup>10</sup> As an opening statement, the Tale establishes a general moral framework in which virtue is associated with the arduous, and in which it is clear that the delinquent are punished for their sins.

'The Hart's Tale' which follows is concerned not with punishment but with reward, and it narrows the focus of the poem in at least two respects. Because it tells the patriotic story of the elevation of Sir William Wallace into Heaven on the day of his execution, it establishes a specifically Scottish frame of reference for the sequence as a whole, and it also concentrates our attention from virtue in general to the specific virtue of Fortitude. Although f. 230 of the Asloan MS. is damaged, enough of 'The Hart's Tale' survives to show that the poet is here dealing exclusively with military qualities:

Thar was na force mycht gar him fald,  
 Na 3it reward of warldly gud,  
 Bot Scotland ay defend he wald  
 Fra subiection of Saxonis blud:  
 Thus for his realme stedfast he stud,  
 And to his deid was bocht and sauld;  
 Tharfor in hevin his saull I hald  
 Or he was cald: þus I conclud.

(111-8)

Considering the political associations of The Talis of the Fyve Bestes, which are reinforced by the central fiction that the stories are addressed to the king of beasts, it is striking that these virtues are here attributed not to a king but to a relatively base-born nationalist leader. The tale of the ascension of Wallace was, of course, a familiar one in fifteenth-century Scotland,<sup>11</sup> and Hary's Wallace provides much more substantial evidence of the significance of its hero in popular legend.<sup>12</sup> But the use of Wallace as a moral example points to a crucial ambiguity in the Talis: although the poem is, up to a point, offering specifically political advice to a ruler, its moral argument has a wider application as well, so that its relevance is not limited to a tiny audience of crowned heads.



That Wallace (rather than, say, Robert I) is singled out for this spiritual accolade is, perhaps, in one sense an implied reproach to Scottish monarchs, but it also carries the important message that love of country and courage in a just cause can be the attributes of the ordinary layman.

It is probably no coincidence that the next tale is that of the Unicorn, for this takes up the Scottish element in the previous story and transmits it to an exemplum which is not specifically Scottish, which is indeed explicitly set in "Kentschire" (l. 135). As Small pointed out as long ago as 1885, the source of this tale may well be the Speculum Stultorum of Nigel de Longchamps, where a very similar version occurs.<sup>13</sup> Like the tales which precede and follow it, 'The Unicorn's Tale' is exemplative rather than strictly allegorical: the relationship between Gundulfus and the cock whom he wounds and who ultimately has his revenge is used to illustrate the relationship of the wicked ruler and the poor he oppresses but may ultimately depend upon, but this parallel is not developed much or pursued into the detail of the story. The ending in which Gundulfus is thrown off his horse into the mud is primarily comic in its effect, and this reflects the way in which the poet is concerned with the surface of his narrative rather than with the possibilities his story presents for developing the relationship between narrative and moralitas, either through explicit explanation of significant details or through the intensification of patterns of imagery. The dialogue between the cock and his wife Coppok<sup>14</sup> illustrates the point:

The houre 3eid oure, þe cok he held him clos.  
 With þat Dame Coppok putis on hir maike,  
 Said, 'Slepe 3e, schir? Get wp, for Cristis saik!  
 3our hour is gone, quhy syng 3e nocht? For schame,  
 Wait 3e nocht weile, 3one clerk suld ryde fra hame,  
 And all þar trast apon 3our sang þai lay?  
 Schir, syng 3e nocht, 3one clerk sall slepe quhill day,  
 And so in vane is all thing þat þai wirk.  
 It war grete pete he suld tyne his kirk,  
 And of þe tynsall 3e sall haf þe blame.'

Syng wald he nocht, bot schrewitly said, 'Madame,  
 Wysest 3e ar quhen þat 3e hald 3ow still,  
 And 3it 3e wyfis, evir speike 3e will!  
 Dame, intromet 3ow in 3our wyfis deid:  
 Lytill 3e wist quhen þat my leg couth bleid,  
 And 3one is he þat brake my leg in sounder.  
 Gif I suld crawe, madame, it war gret wounder,  
 For þocht my leg be werray haile outward,  
 Quhen I him se, it bledis at my hart!'

(222-40)

Although this passage takes up a number of elements of the two exchanges in the Speculum Stultorum of which it is essentially a conflation, it differs from the Latin version principally in that it gives the cock a much less elaborate statement of his case.<sup>15</sup> The moral point about retribution is not entirely absent, especially in the last few lines (and it is taken further in ll. 263-8, at the very end of the narrative), but the poet's attention seems to be focussed on the liveliness of the dialogue rather than upon the moral theme, and there is certainly nothing which anticipates the political twist which is introduced in the moralitas.

The principal exception to this general narrative sparseness is in the description of the returning Gundulfus, on his way to a benefice. This passage has no parallel in the Speculum, and may be the poet's own contribution. It is hard to put it into context, because there is another lacuna in the manuscript at this point; the text breaks off after l. 176, and when it resumes it is in the middle of an elaborate characterization of Gundulfus:



He was na master in diuinitie,  
 Bot he wald preche in to pat science hie.  
 Weile couth he cast þe bukis of decres,  
 Bot parin no thing had he of his greis:  
 Prentis in court he had bene for a 3ere.  
 He was a richt gud syngar in þe quere,  
 He couth wele reid, & sumpart write & dyte,  
 And in his grammere was he wele perfyte.  
 He was na gret bachillar in sophistry,  
 With part of pratik of nygramansy;  
 Of phesik he baire ane vrynale,  
 To se þir folk, gif þai war seike or hale.  
 And in his clething was he wele besene,  
 For govne and hude was all Lyncome grene.

(177-90)

The basic strategy of this portrait, which has something in it of the art of Chaucer's General Prologue, is to damn with faint praise: Gundulfus has a smattering of most of the Arts, and indeed is expert in one or two, but the general impression created is, I think, of the dilettante. His real attainments are in singing, reading and grammar, but his skill in writing and composition is distinctly qualified,<sup>16</sup> and the curious juxtaposition of 'sophistry' (logical exercises) with 'nygramansy' (the 'black arts') implies that his interests are less than totally serious or admirable. This is borne out by the final Chaucerian touch of his costume, for Lincoln green is the colour of gaiety, even of lasciviousness, and is hardly fitting for an ecclesiastical aspirant.<sup>17</sup> The effect of all this is, of course, to undermine Gundulfus, and to suggest that the original boyish crime of cruelty to the cock is paralleled by other defects of character. As such, the portrait encourages us to sympathize with the cock against Gundulfus. But this development in the character of the principal human figure does not lead us towards the specific significance attached to the story at the end. The discrepancy between narrative and moralitas

remains unresolved.<sup>18</sup>

'The Boar's Tale' which follows changes the emphasis again. Here the ultimate source is Valerius Maximus, whose story of the city of Lampsaco, saved from destruction at the hands of Alexander by the sagacitas of Anaximenes, Alexander's former teacher, is moralized as proof of the need for royal trustworthiness. In one sense, the two parts of 'The Boar's Tale' are more closely integrated, for the speech of the clerk is expanded in a way which anticipates the moralitas:

Than spak þis clerk & set his word on hicht:  
 'A kingis word in more effect suld be  
 Than ony of lawar degre.  
 Excellent, hie, and mychti prince but peire,  
 Now of þis grace þat 3e haf grantit heire  
 I thank 3our hienes, and I ask no more;  
 Bot hald þe purpos þat 3e ar cummyn fore,  
 To sla 3one folk & to distroye 3one tovne,  
 To do no grace, to cast 3one wallis dovne:  
 Now may 3e cheis to lat 3our wordis stand  
 And tyne þe cost, or tak þis tovne on hand  
 And brek 3our word befor þis riall rowte.'

(332-43)

Thus Alexander is trapped by his vow to do the opposite of whatever his former tutor asks. The emphasis in Valerius is upon the wit and skill of the philosopher, but this theme is relatively unimportant in the Scottish version where it is the obligation of Alexander to keep his word which assumes the foreground. This shift of emphasis (which may of course be derived from some intermediary<sup>19</sup>) fits in with the poet's pre-occupation with the royal virtues, since trustworthiness is a recurrent theme in Scottish poems of political advice. Both the Unicorn and the Boar, therefore, restrict the application of their exempla in a way which is only partly explicable in terms of their fictional audience. It is clear that the primary



concern of the poet is to discuss the obligations of monarchs from a number of points of view.

Political matters are also central to 'The Wolf's Tale', at least in the early part:

This wretchit wolf neir by pis lyoun lay:  
His habit was, me thocht, of cottoun gray,  
And so weile fauorit was his face on far  
The laif semed fer farer pan pai war.  
Thinkand to put pis counsall fra pat king  
And his allya to be court inbring,  
He wmbethocht him gretly of his wylis,  
And to pir staitis gaif he weile pair stylis .....

(369-76)

This passage adds several new dimensions to the poem. First, the political issue which is raised is not the nature of a particular royal virtue, or even of royal virtue in general, but the question of the dangers of evil courtiers. The advice which the king has been receiving from the previous speakers has clearly, in the view of the poet, been sound, but the Wolf is anxious to gain political power for his own ends. Secondly, this contrast is underlined by a careful distinction between the drabness of the Wolf's appearance and the splendour of the other animals. In retrospect, we can see that the physical attractiveness of the Wolf's predecessors has been stressed:

It was ane blyth sicht of pis baire:  
Of reid gold was be birs he bure,  
Of reid gold schynand was his haire,  
His scheldis ware richt sad and sure,  
His tuskis scharpe pat he with schure,  
Of stele pai war baith stark & sture.  
This was be tale pat he tald pare,  
I coppyit it with all my cure.

(281-8)

In this case (though in none of the others), the portrait is reinforced by the poet's use of a rather intricate eight-line stanza, which contributes to the courtly richness of the

description. It is hard to know how far to take the significance of the contrast: the Horse, Hart, Unicorn and Boar do not appear to have any specific heraldic or allegorical reference, and it is probably their nobility which we are above all intended to notice. The associations of the Wolf are more obvious: he is a familiar character from Aesopic fable and Renardian epic, and his reputation for duplicity could be relied upon, no doubt, to put an audience on its guard. The poet seems to take this a stage further by stating that his "habit was ..... of cottoun gray", perhaps suggesting clerical, and particularly Franciscan, garb.<sup>20</sup> Again, no topical allegory is evident, but the rivalry of different groups of courtiers was a familiar problem in the Middle Ages and there is no reason to suppose that the poet was attacking a specific, unique abuse.

This final tale, in one sense, takes us from theory to practice. The four previous stories have provided, as it were, a theoretical, ethical framework for political action, and the lion-king's regime is then tested by the duplicity and rapacity of the Wolf and his "allya". The thrust of the Wolf's argument is twofold: there is a shortage of mutton as a result of over-hunting, and the king should therefore confine himself to "gret bestis" for a year in order to allow the stocks to recover. But, as subsequent events show, it is probably the Wolf himself who is responsible for the shortage, and his real objective is to induce the king to destroy his courtiers and to leave the way clear for the Wolf's friends to plunder the sheep. The Lion's political education has been adequate to meet this



challenge:

Than said þe king, 'Be 3our complant, I feile,  
That for I haf na mutoun to my mete  
My cosingis of my Counsall I suld ete.  
Na, neuermore, bocht in defalt I de!  
Than quha wald byde and of my counsall be?  
Bot with my counsall will I seike remeid,  
Fynd how my schepe & how my nolt ar deid.'

(388-94)

On the literal level, therefore, 'The Wolf's Tale' (which is, it should be noted, not a tale at all) illustrates the triumph of royal virtue over wicked courtiers.

The allegorical reading which is offered by the poet, however, takes us away from the political theme, back to the more general moral viewpoint which emerged from the first of the tales. In this change of direction, the very framework of the poem seems to be subverted:

So sodanely þis court went out of sight,  
That all was gone in twynkling of ane E:  
And so gois all þis warldis rialte.

(402-4)

The poet's vision was, after all, a vision, and its unreality reflects the unreality of this transitory world, so that the final lesson for the king is that his power is ultimately subject to mutability and to divine justice. In this sense, the moral law for rulers is no different from that for other mortals, and the application of the poem as a whole can naturally be given a wider dimension. The final allegory interprets not just the Wolf's tale but the entire poem, in which the Wolf represents covetis and the other four beasts the cardinal virtues. This is in every way a moralization of the broadest kind, for cupiditas is the most fundamental of sins, and the moral qualities which act against it are necessary to king and subject alike.

The final exhortation sums up this ambiguity:

Now mak þis wyce exild for to be,  
 Tak lawe and luf, and leif in cherite,  
 And think quhat suld þis warldis fals wanglore;  
 And for þe joye þat lestis euermore,  
 Beseike we him þat bocht ws with his blud,  
 Eternale God, þe ground of euery gud.

(417-22)

As an appeal to the king, the reference to exiling vice refers specifically to his role as law-maker and fount of justice, but it applies as well to the power of every member of the audience to triumph over evil. While it is partly a poem of political advice, The Talis of the Fyve Bestes manages to be a good deal more.

The richness of meaning which is achieved by the author of The Talis of the Fyve Bestes is principally due to the interaction between the different kinds of moral statement made through the various tales, and through the rather ingenious use of the framing device. The Thre Prestis of Peblis works rather differently, for the framework is much more straightforward, the tellers of the tales are in no way allegorized, and the juxtaposition of the tales is less complicated than in the former case. Within each tale, on the other hand, there is much more elaboration than in the stories of the Fyve Bestes. As Dr R.D.S. Jack has recently observed, the key to this elaboration lies in a series of threes,<sup>21</sup> a pattern which may owe something to medieval homiletic technique.<sup>22</sup> Whereas each of the first four tales of the Fyve Bestes is a very simple exemplum reinforced by a relatively straightforward moralitas, only the last of the tales of the Thre Prestis of Peblis is given a formal moralization, while the middle tale has a relative-



ly intricate narrative structure. To some extent, no doubt, the differences of technique within The Thre Prestis reflect the differences between the fictional narrators: Master John and Master Archibald are university men, while Sir William characterizes himself as

of 3ow thrie  
The febillest and leist of literature,

(1008-9)<sup>23</sup>

a fact which is clearly ironic in view of the greater spiritual wisdom which his tale embodies.<sup>24</sup> The allegorical statement which he offers defines the poet's final position and qualifies, as we shall see, the moral line taken by John and Archibald. The overall structure of the poem, despite these differences of technique, is thus somewhat similar to that of The Talis of the Fyve Bestes, where the universal moral statement of the first and last tales also provides a more general (and, finally, superior) basis for the secular morality of the middle three.

The themes of the tales of Master John and Master Archibald are primarily political. John describes a parliament held by a king who asks each of his three Estates a question, focusing upon the decadent state of his kingdom. The narrative line is here very slender, everything hingeing upon the analysis of contemporary affairs offered by a spokesman for each of the Estates. The political theory which emerges is for the most part conventional enough, since the central theme is the interdependence of social classes:

Ane hed dow nocht on body stand allane,  
Forowt memberis to be of mycht and mane  
For to wphald be body & be hed  
And sekerly to gar it stand in steid.

(105-8)

This argument, used by the king, is turned against him by the spokesman for the lords, who insists that the present decadence of the nobility is caused in large measure by the poverty of tenants, itself the result of the failure of justice. The welfare of each class, therefore, depends upon the state of the others, a view which enjoyed great currency throughout the later Middle Ages. Thomas Brinton, bishop of Rochester, for example, preaching in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, states:

Diues et pauper licet appareant contraria sibi tamen sunt valde necessaria. Nam si omnes essent pauperes, nullus alium supportaret. Si omnes essent diuites, nullus laboraret, et sic deficeret statim, mundus. Ideo diues propter pauperem factus est, pauper propter diuitem; diuitis est erogare, pauperis est orare.

25

Even allowing for the difference of tone between the ultra-conservative Brinton and the Thre Prestis, it does not seem to me that this insistence upon the interdependence of social classes can be used as evidence of the impact of humanist ideas on fifteenth-century vernacular Scottish writing, as Dr Jack would like to do, since it is such a commonplace from the twelfth century to the sixteenth.<sup>26</sup> Rather, it illustrates the continuing currency of "medieval" motifs throughout the "Renaissance" period.

There is very little relief here from the didacticism which constitutes almost the whole point of the narrative. Of the 382 lines of Master John's Tale, eighty-two are devoted to the king's three questions, and 156 to the three replies. Only in a rather limited sense is there any narrative development: we see the king responding to the answer of the lords and



acknowledging the justice of their complaints:

'With our justice thair sal pas ane Doctour  
That lufis God, his saul and our honour,  
The quhilk sal be ane Doctour in the Law,  
That sal the faith of veritie weil knaw;  
And fra hence furth he sal baith heir and se  
Baith theif puneist and leil men liue in lie;  
For weil I wait thair can be na war thing  
Than couetyce in justice or in king.  
Efter this tail in vs 3e sal not taint,  
Nor 3it of our justice to mak ane plaint.'

(341-50)

In this respect also the poem reflects literary convention as well as contemporary concerns, since the establishment of an equitable judicial system was a continuing preoccupation of medieval political writers.<sup>27</sup> From a narrative point of view, the passage is interesting because it introduces something akin to action, but in general it is a rather static piece of homily.

Master Archibald is a much more convincing narrator. His story has a more complex narrative structure, built around the characters of Fictus the sage-disguised-as-fool and another un-named king. It is Fictus who dominates the tale from the beginning, an interesting character in a way which differentiates him from the relatively wooden figures of Master John's Tale. His name, which is part of his disguise and which is held back until well into the narrative, contributes to the irony which surrounds his position, for "fictus" (from Latin  fingere , 'to shape, form') means 'feigned' or 'false': the hero is feigning folly, but the statements which he makes are true — he is the witty fool, whose lies reveal the truth in a hidden form. Whether or not the Scottish poet took the idea of the disguised fool from a tale in Franco Sacchetti's  Il Trecentonovelle ,<sup>28</sup> it is clear that the particular combination of  exempla  is carefully

designed and, as Dr Jack has pointed out, there are parallels between Archibald's tale and the one which precedes it.<sup>29</sup> The central theme here, however, is not so much the interdependence of social classes as the ultimate responsibility of the ruler, and the close relationship between public morality and the personal virtue of the king. The first two of the three enclosed tales are concerned with public morality, and thus have much more in common with John's tale. In each case we see the consequences of a breakdown in justice and civil order, but again there are differences in treatment.

The first enclosed story, of the wounded man lying by the roadside, sits uneasily in the middle ground between the allegorical and the exemplative exemplum. On the one hand, there is the theme which emerges from the wounded man's address to the king:

The man answered, 'I have sik sturt,  
For baith with theif and reuer I am hurt.  
And 3it, suppois I haue all the pyne,  
The falt is 3owris, sir King, and nathing myne;  
For and with 3ow gude counsal war ay cheif,  
Than wald 3e stanche weill baith reuer and theif:  
Haue thow with the that can weill dance and sing,  
Thow taks nocht thocht bi realme weip and wring.'

(539-46)

According to this view, the significance of the episode is rather straightforward: the assault and robbery the man has suffered illustrate the disorder which springs from the king's self-centred failure to enforce justice. But a great deal of the story is not really relevant to this interpretation. The conversation between the wounded man and the king is preceded by a courtier's attempt to brush away the flies which infest the former's wounds, and by the reproof of Fictus:



'The ofter that thir fleis away be chaist  
 The new fleis wil mair of his blude waist,  
 And draw his blude and souk him syne sa sair;  
 Thairfoir lat them allane, skar them na mair.'

(523-6)

This is the real point of the tale, and it becomes the dominant motif of the latter part. It relates to the theme of pseudo-folly, for the wounded man points out to the king that his "fool" is wiser than he, or his courtiers. This is not all, however, for the real folly of the king lies not in his misguided attempt to relieve that man's suffering, but rather in his political ignorance which is alluded to in Fictus' allegorical interpretation of the flies:

'The hungry flie that neuer had been thair  
 Scho souks the mans wound sa wonder sair;  
 And quhen the fleis ar ful than byde thay stil  
 And stops the hungrie beis to cum thairtil.  
 Bot, sir, allace, methink sa do not 3e:  
 3e ar sa licht and ful of vanitie,  
 And sa weil lufis al new things to persew  
 That ilk sessioun 3e get ane seruant new .....  
 And quhan thay ar full of sic wrang win  
 Thay get thair leif and hungryar cums in.'

(603-10, 619-20)

At this point, therefore, the various dimensions of the story are skilfully bound together: the king's vices are all represented by the allegory of the voracious courtiers, since the social evils of the kingdom (manifested by the assault which occurs on the literal level) spring from his reliance on bad counsel (the flies on the allegorical level).

There is no trace of allegory in the second and third episodes of Master Archibald's Tale. The second takes up the theme of injustice which emerges from the non-allegorical portions of the first episode, and shows in greater detail how the legal system has, in one respect at least, been subverted by

the king's dependence on bad counsel (which was, of course, the allegorical dimension of the previous episode). Its telling is simple and straightforward, with no elaboration of character or plot. A great deal depends upon reported speech, of the man who commits three murders, of the courtier who intercedes with the king on his behalf, and finally of Fictus, whose condemnation of the king drives home the moral point of the story:

'The first man weil I grant he slew,  
 The vther twa in faith them slew 3ow.  
 Had thow him puneist quhan he slew the first,  
 The vther twa had bene leuand I wist;  
 Thairfoir, allace, this tail, sir, is ouer trew,  
 For in gude faith the last twa men 3e slew.  
 "Blessit ar thay that keeps Judgement and Justice",  
 The Psalmes sayis Daudid war and wyse,  
 Blist not that be that keeps Law and Justice .....

(747-54)

The quotation from Psalms 106: 3 does not relate very directly to the story of the triple murderer, but it serves two other important functions: it lends an air of Biblical authority which was a vital part of the homilist's technique, and it reinforces the point about the moral responsibility of the monarch.

Preservation of the legal system from corruption and abuse is a central aspect of the role of the medieval king, and it is clear that the king in Master Archibald's Tale has failed in this responsibility. Like the ruler in Master John's Tale, however, he learns before our eyes, acknowledging his fault and resolving to do better in future. The success of Fictus in bringing about this change illustrates the benefits of good counsel, and the use of dialogue in the narrative juxtaposes the bad advice of the foolish counsellor and the good advice of the wise Fool.



Although the narrative techniques used here are simple, therefore, they all contribute to the didactic point of the story.

The plot of the third episode is rather more intricate: Fictus sets out to win the king away from lechery towards fidelity to the queen by means of a trick. It seems very likely that the Scottish poet adapted this tale from one in Boccaccio's Decamerone, either directly or through a French intermediary.<sup>30</sup> If this presumption is correct, the poet evidently modifies the story in order to involve Fictus as the brains behind the scheme, thus bringing the episode into line with the rest of the tale. This amendment also affects our attitude towards the king, since we read the final episode in the light of what has gone before. The poet ensures this from the very beginning by stating that the king's reform was complete

All bot ane thing that was not fra him reft,  
(810)

which makes us realize that the political education which he has received from his Fool has not yet extended to his private life. More seriously, perhaps, he has not really understood Fictus' moral position, as is obvious when the king invites him to become a procurer:

The King on hir he casts his lustie eine,  
And with hir faine wald in ane bed haif bene.  
Hee wist full weill that nane had hee  
That was sa subtill as Fictus was and slee:  
He callit him and priuillie can say,  
'Sik fantesie hes put me in effray;  
I am sa ful of lust and fantesy  
With this Madyn on benk that sits me by,  
For gold, for gude, for wage or 3it for wed,  
This nicht I wald haue hir to my bed.'

(821-30)

The king's self-representation here is rather curious: he does not

seem to recognize the sinfulness of his desires, since he announces them to Fictus so openly, and yet his entire speech is an unwitting self-condemnation. The words he uses — "fantasie", "lust" — and his assumption that the girl can be bought (although he claims even to be willing to marry her) are clearly introduced by the poet in order to ensure that we realize the full iniquity of his behaviour. And it is presumably his moral myopia which leads him to enlist the support of Fictus.

It is his myopia, as well, which enables the Fool to go on deluding him. The comedy of this ironic situation is most fully developed in the first stage of the plot, when Fictus, whom the king supposes to be propositioning the girl he desires, actually whispers to her of the benefits of virginity:

Bot ay the king wont he had besie bene  
 Of the mater that was thir twa betwene,  
 And to the Virgine zong thus spak the king:  
 'Quhat my fule sayis I trow be na lesing.'  
 'Sir,' quod sho, 'his saw was suffisand,  
 And as he sayis I sall do, God willand.'

(845-50)

The humour at this point is, I think, very closely related to the didactic theme, for the king's credulity is simply one aspect of his folly, and his enslavement to his senses obviously makes him more gullible. His trust of Fictus, too, is evidence of his misguided condition, since he does not question the Fool's willingness to act as a seducer on his behalf. The medieval notion of stultitia incorporated both stupidity and wantonness, as the Narrenschiff phenomenon illustrates,<sup>31</sup> and the two things evidently belong together in this case. The ultimate triumph of Fictus, which is his accomplishment of the



reconciliation of king and queen, derives not only from his intellectual skills, but also from his moral rectitude, while the king's "fantasy ... and richt gret foly" (ll. 987-8), which leads him into sin, paradoxically makes him vulnerable to Fictus' reforming intrigues.

There are several differences between Sir William's Tale and the two which precede it. Whereas Master John's Tale is not really allegorical at all, and Master Archibald's is only intermittently so, the last tale is a consistent and carefully worked-out allegory. It consists, moreover, of one of the most common exempla of the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> As I observed above, this difference reflects in part the experiences of the narrators. The other two are masters, qualified to be university teachers, while William introduces himself as a much more "humble" figure. It is appropriate, therefore, that his story should be closer to the homiletic tradition. It is also significant that, whereas the main thrust of the first two tales is political, William chooses a much more general theme, specifically contrasting his approach with that of the others:

A King thair is and euer mair will be,  
Thairfoir the King of kings him cal we.

(1013-4)

An understanding of the structure of The Thre Prestis of Peblis requires a recognition that, as Dr Jack says, "the highest truths of the collection are being put into the mouth of the most modest and perhaps the least talented priest."<sup>33</sup> To describe Sir William as "the least talented", however, misses the point of the irony, which is that secular wisdom and secular power are ultimately irrelevant in the face of death and divine

judgment, a point which Dr Jack himself accepts.<sup>34</sup> Improvement of man's lot in this world is all very well, according to this argument, but it does not deal with the fundamental realities of the human condition. In this respect, the concerns of The Thre Prestis of Peblis are very close to those of The Talis of the Fyve Bestes, where again moral statements about the behaviour of rulers in the three central tales are framed, and ultimately transcended, by two more traditional, strictly allegorical exempla, which demonstrate that while kings have a special intermediary role as the maintainers of the social order, there are basic moral laws which affect all men equally.

Among the numerous versions of the exemplum of the three friends which occur in the Middle Ages, the Scots version seems closest not to the Gesta Romanorum group, as has been suggested, but rather to that family of versions which derives from the Latin Barlaam et Josaphat.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the three friends represent not the World, the Flesh and the Devil (as in the B.L. MS. Addit. 9066 version of the Gesta Romanorum<sup>36</sup>), but Riches, Family and friends, and Good Works, almost exactly the arrangement in Barlaam et Josaphat and its derivatives, such as the Speculum historiale of Vincent of Beauvais and the Legenda Aurea of Jacobus de Voragine. The version in The Thre Prestis, however, is somewhat extended, to more than three hundred lines of verse, and the poet has developed the existing structural pattern to make his tale hold together. His principal device in this regard is the emphasis he places upon the hierarchy of friendships involving the central figure:

This man that we of speik had freinds thrie,



And lufit them nocht in ane degrie.  
 The first freind, quhil he was laid in delf,  
 He lufit ay far better than him self.  
 The nixt freind than als weil luifit he  
 As he him self luifit in al degrie.  
 The thrid freind he luifit this and swa  
 In na degrie like to the tother twa.

(1017-24)

This series of distinctions is a straightforward adaptation from the Barlaam tradition,<sup>37</sup> but the Scots poet returns to it at the beginning of each section to reinforce the point and to provide a structural landmark, and dwells upon it at some length in the man's pessimistic soliloquy before approaching the third friend:

Allace, quhat sal I say, quhat sal I do?  
 I haue na ma freinds for to cum to  
 Bot ane the quhilk is callit my thrid freind;  
 With him I trow I wil be lytil meind.  
 To ga to him I wait bot wind in waist,  
 For in him I haue lytil trouth or traist  
 Becaus to him I was sa oft vnkynde,  
 And as my freind he was not in my mynde .....

(1155-62)

The purpose here, of course, is not merely structural: this passage, and to some extent the others I have referred to, bring out the mistaken priorities of the protagonist. Ironically, he is betrayed by those friends he trusts most, and this is because he has placed his trust in the things of this world. This point is inherent in even the shortest versions of the exemplum, but it is seized upon by the poet and emphasized in Sir William's Tale, particularly by the long soliloquy (ll. 1136-74) in which the ignorance of the protagonist is most clearly spelled out.

In other respects, the narrative art of the tale is hardly striking. Like the episode of the triple murderer in Master

Archibald's Tale, the story relies heavily upon dialogue, even to the extent that the poet repeats some of it in the course of his moralitas. The allegorization of the characters is obvious and traditional: the protagonist is Everyman, his king is God, the king's officer is Death. There is little imaginative elaboration of this in the course of the tale (as we shall see, for example, in Henryson): the ironies of the story, and its theological significance, are not reinforced by powerful images. Occasionally, we are given hints of the moralization which is to follow, as when Riches says of the king:

Agane him can I get na gude defence,  
 Sa just he is and stark in his conscience;  
 And al things in this warld that I call richt  
 It is nocht worth ane eg into his sight .....

(1075-8)

But on the whole the narrative is neither systematically integrated with the theological imagery which is implied by the moralitas, nor given an independent liveliness. The characters, as almost always in The Thre Prestis of Peblis (Fictus is the sole, rather doubtful, exception) remain abstract and undeveloped, and the poet's attention remains firmly upon the didactic theme he is expounding. In this sense, The Thre Prestis is from a literary point of view a less convincing performance than The Talis of the Fyve Bestes: there is less subtlety in the treatment of the narrative frame, less variety in the tales themselves, and a great deal more solemnity. Master Archibald's Tale displays considerable skill in the inter-weaving of related stories, and the contrast between John and Archibald on the one hand, and William on the other,



contributes a certain life to the poem as a whole. But it seems quite clear that the author of The Thre Prestis was much closer to the earnest traditions of the homiletic exemplum, and more remote from the poetic traditions of beast-epic and dream-vision, than the author of The Talis of the Fyve Bestes.<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the differences of approach and tone, the two poems we have just considered do have a great deal in common. The total meaning of each collection is determined by the interaction of stories told by different characters, and the fundamentally serious purpose of the poems is never really in doubt. Colkelbie Sow is quite different. Here a single narrative voice unites the whole poem, and becomes, moreover, a basic element in the construction and tone of the work. The three episodes, in this case, are linked not by a device of several characters entertaining either each other or a fictitious audience, but by the more rhetorical ploy of making a single narrator tell a number of stories in asking and answering a three-pronged riddle. A great deal of uncertainty surrounds the essential purpose of the poem, and this doubt springs in part from the ambiguities of the prologue, in which the poet (or, at any rate, the narrator) enters upon a mock-serious discussion of literary principles. His poem begins with a resounding flourish:

Quhen riallest, most redowttit, and he  
Magnificat crownit kingis in maieste,  
Princis, dukes, and marquis curious,  
Erlis, barronis, and knyghtis chevelrous,  
And gentillmen of he genolegye,  
As scutiferails and squieris full courtlye,  
Ar assemblit and sett in a ryell se

With namit folkis of he nobilite,  
 Thair talk þat tyme in table honorable  
 Befoir lordingis and ladeis amiable  
 Is oft singing and sawis of solace,  
 Quhair melody is þe mirthfull maistrace,  
 Ermy deidis in auld dayis done afoir,  
 Croniculis, gestis, storeis, and mich moir.

(1-14)<sup>39</sup>

The contrast between the high style of this opening and the burlesque tales which follow is surely deliberate, and contributes a great deal to the bathetic effect of much of the narrative. Yet the narrator later recognizes the absurdity of his poem, referring to "the fulich face of this mad metir" (l. 50), and apologizing for it, and immediately goes on to assert the serious intention underlying what follows. When so much else is burlesque, we can be forgiven for looking askance at his use of the rhetorically conventional distinction between letter and spirit, sentence and solas:

Sen þe sentence to feill is fantastike,  
 Lat the lettir and langage be such like!  
 Sen all the world changis somony facis,  
 I trest I will cast caiss vpoun caisis;  
 And so lat se quhat cais 3e think most nyce.  
 Wisdome vmquhile holdis þe nycest wys,  
 So þat it be sport in discretioun  
 Without odius, crewale comparisoun;  
 Pairticular malice & all such thing removit,  
 The wys nycest, the wisest quhile is provit.

(51-60)

But much of the poem hangs upon the interpretation of these lines.

The general sense of the passage is clear: the most trifling or foolish (nyce) matters sometimes contain unsuspected wisdom. Whereas this proposition suggests a contrast between the apparent and true meanings, however (roughly corresponding to the cortex and nucleus of medieval critical theory<sup>40</sup>), ll.



51-2 propose a congruence of form and matter. Since the meaning (sentence) is fantastike to understand, the literal sense may as well be so as well. The exact nuance of fantastike here is not altogether obvious: G.F. Jones avoids a translation, while DOST glosses as 'fanciful'.<sup>41</sup> But the semantics of fantastike and fantasie were complicated in Middle English and Middle Scots, and no particular connotation can be taken for granted. The original senses of the words, in their derivation from Greek through Latin and French, centred on the notion of imagination, first as a psychological phenomenon, and then as a characteristic of the thing imagined. Hence the distinction of Sir Philip Sidney, derived from Aristotle perhaps, between eikastike and phantastike imagination, respectively achieved through contemplation of the divine and of the illusory.<sup>42</sup> A little later, fantastic is used to mean 'eccentric, quaint or grotesque', but this sense is not found in English before about 1616.<sup>43</sup> These examples are too late to be of direct relevance to Colkelbie Sow, but I think that something of their feeling pervades l. 51. The poet is not merely saying that his meaning is rather odd: he is suggesting a deliberate difficulty in the presentation of his ideas, an absurdity of imaginative force masking a moral intention. This absurdity is reflected in both plot and style, but it is not, the prologue assures us, the result of chance or incompetence. Beneath the incongruities which make the poem "difficult" (which in this context seems to be a reasonable synonym for fantastike) there is a pattern which makes the poem intelligible as a serious statement.

That such a pattern existed was argued by Jones, who is the only critic so far to have written on the poem at length. Although he drew attention to the basis of Colkelbie Sow in the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25: 14-30; Luke 19: 12-27), however, Jones admits that

whether or not the entire poem is a single and consistent allegory, I cannot say.

44

This surely is the crucial point, and it is one which admits of three basic answers. First, it might be concluded that indeed Colkelbie Sow makes a single, consistent moral statement, which may or may not be allegorical (depending in part on how elastic a definition of allegory is to be allowed). Secondly, we might decide that despite evident attempts in that direction, the poet has failed to produce such a consistent statement. Thirdly, it might be argued that he was not interested in such consistency at all, and that the poem is really a comic work in which declarations of high intent are merely part of the rhetorical machinery. This discussion of the prologue above has tended to suggest that, notwithstanding the ironic vein which is certainly present, a serious statement about the relationship between comedy and didacticism does seem to emerge, and this hypothesis must now be tested against the three parts of the narrative. If no consistent moral explanation can be found, we shall have to revise our reading of the prologue.

The essential linking device of Colkelbie Sow is the riddle of the three pennies, respectively lost, spent and hidden:

Now, quhilk penny of the thre  
Wes best bestowit, say 3e?

(I, 13-4)



The poet deals first with the lost coin, which we are perhaps all disposed to regard as wasted. Yet what follows has little enough to do with the penny or its subsequent fate. Our attention is focussed instead on the pig which the finder of the penny buys, presumably from the purchaser of Colkelbie's sow:

And he þat fand it did by  
 With the samyn penny  
 A littill pig for his prow,  
 Off Kolkelbeis sow.

(I, 41-4)

This pig is then stolen by a whore to become the culinary centrepiece of her feast. The coin is not mentioned for nearly 450 lines, and it is easy to miss what has happened to it: it has returned to its previous owner, who by using it to buy the sow has given himself the means of recouping his expenditure, in this case in a literal sense. Lines 41-4 are, it must be admitted, ambiguous, and it is possible that the finder of the penny buys his pig from Colkelbie himself, who might conceivably have retained his sow's offspring when selling the sow herself. If this reading is to be adopted, then a different point emerges: by losing the coin, Colkelbie has failed to make use of it, and actually has to give up a piglet in order to recover it. The finder, by contrast, cannily profits from his good fortune (at least until he is robbed). Either way, the theme of thrift is reinforced.

This moral point is, however, very lightly sketched in, and the poet makes no direct reference to it; he seems indeed deliberately to be drawing us away with a stream of inconsequentialities. There follows immediately the first of the

series of lists which dominates the First Part of the poem: lists of the guests at the feast (ll. 52-106), of the pigs which attack the revellers (ll. 158-79), of shepherds (ll. 210-53), cowherds and swineherds (ll. 260-88), of peasant and exotic dances (ll. 295-383), and finally of the adventures of the pig when he had grown into a boar (ll. 445-70). They are, quite evidently, the primary narrative device of the tale, which is really no more than a loosely-knit amalgam of the lists themselves. It is not easy to make much sense of such a display of comic pyrotechnics, but beneath the nonsense a certain pattern does emerge. The narrative describes an ever-widening brawl, which begins with the escape of the pig, involves the guests and the rest of the pigs, and finally attracts a vast horde of peasants who attack "the fulis". The narrator draws two conclusions from all this. First,

Be this 3e may weill ken  
 That foly is no sapience,  
 For multitud in negligence  
 He/s/ seldin palme of victory  
 Bot God & gud wit gy;  
 And all this grit brawling,  
 Babling & vper thing  
 Wes for a pig, as 3e hard sayn —  
 3it he eskapit vnslane.

(I, 424-32)

All the human combatants, finally, are overtaken by their greed, which both motivates them to fight and prevents them from co-operating enough to catch the pig they all want. The second point is closer to the central concerns of the poem:

3e may consaue be this twich  
 That oft of littill cumis mich:  
 To contempt a small fo  
 Quhill he haith grace to ryd or go  
 At liberty or fredome,  
 I hold it no wisdome,



Or for loif of pennyis  
To suffer honour perreis.

(I, 475-82)

Nothing that has gone before has introduced the notion of honour; but what the two morals have in common is their condemnation of greed. The fools at the feast, the list of whom is really a collection of the disreputable stereotypes of medieval society, are the villains of the piece, their sin (a mixture of greed and avarice, perhaps) punished equally by the beating they receive at the hands of the peasants and by the escape of the pig. It is all the greater irony that they underestimate their enemy, unaware that the piglet they are allowing to get away will grow "of micht ... maikles" and will live to fight Wade, Meleager and Eglamour of Artois and to be hunted by Diana herself.

Ultimately, the narrator returns to his original question and his primary theme:

And thus is the cais endit  
Of þe penny þat wes spendit,  
That grew to so grit pris.  
Scars spending skathis gentris:  
Thus haif I tald 3ow a cais  
To sett 3ow in solais,  
For our exceding study  
May caus quhyle malancoly;  
Thairfoir to mak ws mirryar,  
Thus did my fantesy fair.

(I, 483-92)

This reversion to the discussion in the prologue revives the same contradictions: with almost the same breath the narrator seems to avow and deny a serious purpose. There is even a mistake, for the story we have heard, according to the original categories established in I, 9-12, is not of the spent penny but

rather of the one which was lost. Yet the penny was spent in the end, and (metaphorically at least) it did grow "to so grit pris". Miserliness is here condemned not in the name of profit but in that of gentris, thus associating the poem with the copious medieval literature on the theme of liberality.<sup>45</sup> As Jones suggests, two distinct but related elements coexist in Colkelbie Sow: the praise of magnificentia or largesse and the admiration of profit.<sup>46</sup> While it may be pushing the point too far to regard these as characteristically "aristocratic" and "bourgeois", it is true that they are not commonly linked, and that the poet here uses both without ever reconciling the discrepancy. This casual approach is, however, consistent with the generally flippant tone, which encourages us to avoid sober analysis and to pass over any inconsistencies, and even errors, in the performance.

Superficially, at least, the Second Part is less of a burlesque than the First; the narrator even offers it "in recompance" for the foolishness of the latter. But it is, nevertheless, hard to take even the "serious" parts seriously. The romance of Flannislíe the son of Colkelbie and Adria the servant-girl he bought with the second penny, who marry and turn out to be the eponymous founders of Flanders is silly enough, and it is difficult to believe that its author intended its literary clichés and bad etymology to be read straightforwardly.<sup>47</sup> Whatever credence we might be inclined to lend this pseudo-romance is utterly destroyed, moreover, by the sequel, in which the narrator introduces his source, his great-grandmother Gurgunnald. She is a grotesque figure, quite out



of keeping with the high style of the romance of Flannislíe  
and Adria:

Hir aige I hald of sevin scoir of winteris heild,  
And saw sumdeill; bot for to say the truth,  
In to hir heid I trest wes nocht a tuth,  
Thairfoir grwew most gredely eit sche;  
And laking teith famvilit hir faculte  
That few folk mycht consaue hir momling mowth .....

(II, 138-43)

Gurgunnald, however, is invoked as a moral authority, not only the source but the interpreter of the romance, and her explanation provides the most detailed and coherent exposition of the poem's argument. Great difficulties flow from this fact, for if her introduction undermines the "serious" tone of what has gone before, so too it must call into question the earnestness of the moral viewpoint she expounds. It is understandable that Dr I.W.A. Jamieson concludes that "all that is left is poetry as laughter".<sup>48</sup>

Such a conclusion has its own problems, on the other hand, since if the noble world of the romance and the moral judgments drawn from it by Gurgunnald are equally being mocked, we can scarcely accept at face value the moralization she offers. But Gurgunnald's interpretation makes good sense, both as moral advice and, to some extent, as an explanation of the narrative. She makes five points: that fools are to be avoided, that the poor and apparently weak are not inescapably in the power of the mighty, that virtue and wisdom, even in the poor, are to be valued, that wealth is not to be esteemed for its own sake, and that hoarding is to be avoided. Her speech thus brings together, and attempts to reconcile, the various dimensions of

the poem which have so far been left to coexist. Her interpretations are, by and large, exemplative rather than allegorical: they draw rather in a commonsense fashion on the natural meanings of the stories in the first two parts:

This maid, this girle, this pure Adria wes  
 3oung faderles leuit, and eik moderles,  
 In strenghe lond, and 3it the Holy Cost  
 Vpliftit hir for wit to wirschep most,  
 And in lykwayis hir lord, Erle Flannysle:  
 Quho wold haif þame opprest for þair pouirte,  
 Remembir now in such hicht as thay are  
 Quhat may thay do to þair pairty contrare,  
 Thay may weill quyt and ouirthraw þame at all.

(II, 215-23)

The fortunes of the characters illustrate moral truths, but Gurgunnald makes no attempt to assign abstract meanings to the various elements of the tale.

This exemplative approach, which is common to the moralitates of Gurgunnald and the comments of the narrator, marks an important difference between Colkelbie Sow and more strictly theological interpretations of the Parable of the Talents. Read literally, the parable as it appears in the Gospel seems rather curious, both as a praise of sensible investment and in its final comment:

Tollite itaque ab eo talentum et date ei qui habet  
 decem talenta; omni enim habenti dabitur, et  
 abundabit; ei autem qui non habet, et quod videtur  
 habere auferetur ab eo.

(Matt. 25: 28-9)

From the earliest commentators on, this passage and the narrative which precedes it were therefore allegorized. Thus, Isidore, following Hilary, takes the five talents given to the first servant to be the Pentateuch, the two talents of the second to be the two Testaments, while



Tertius, sub figura unius talente, gratiae donum  
acceptum in terrenis voluptatibus obscuravit,  
ideoque projectus est in infernum, quia nullum  
inde operatus est fructum.

49

By far the most popular interpretation, however, is the one  
suggested by Gregory the Great, derived in part from Origen  
and Jerome, which also appears in such influential commentators  
as Bede, Rabanus Maurus and Aquinas:<sup>50</sup>

Quinque igitur talentis, donum quinque sensum, id  
est, exteriorum scientia exprimitur. Duobus vero  
intellectus et operatio. Unius autem talenti  
nomine intellectus tantummodo designatur.

51

Whatever the differences of detail, such allegorizations have  
in common the view that the real meaning of the Parable of the  
Talents has to do with eternal rewards for faith, or virtue, or  
obedience to God's laws, and does not relate to actual wealth  
at all.

The difference between this tradition and Colkelbie Sow  
is so great that it obviously makes no sense to regard the poem  
as a variant on "patristic exegesis".<sup>52</sup> The nearest the  
Scots poet comes to all this is in an important passage at the  
start of the Third Part, in which he deals with the hypothetical  
question

How suld a penny fruct contrar nature,  
Sen gold, siluer mettell and alkyn vre  
Fynit be folkis vanisis, and nocht incresis?

(III, 13-5)

His reply is that precious metals do not "bear fruit" of them-  
selves, but only through the intelligence of man, who employs them  
for his benefit. He adds that while existing wealth tends also  
to diminish, man's ingenuity is always replenishing the stock

by further mining and refining:

The examplis: pat quhoso hath a vertew,  
 Vs it wysly, oft syis ten frome it grew.  
 And in schort my long legend, quho so lestis,  
 The Euwangell the trewth pairof attestis,  
 Goddis awin word, quhich tuk frome on fule man  
 A pure penny, having no moir as than,  
 And gaif the wys that had ten pennyis tald.

(III, 45-51)

The poet's explanation of the Parable here stands in the  
 mainstream of Biblical exegesis:

Rycht so he pat hes science and it abusis,  
 Nocht following fast the fruct, bot it refusis,  
 God will it geif to him pat hes far moir.  
 I cast me nocht alday to glois in gloir  
 Or to langar legendis pat ar prolix:  
 Thairfoir I turne vnto my first text .....

(III, 57-62)

It is not easy to see the relation of all this to the rest of the poem, especially as it is followed so summarily by a condemnation of prolixity and a return to the comic, mock-serious narrative vein. Only here is there any hint that the "moral" tales of the three pennies are to be read allegorically, by analogy with the parable which the poet says verifies his story. The opening of Part Three adds a completely new dimension, but like the poem's other serious pretensions, it is immediately threatened by the narrator's comic posture. Notwithstanding these new problems, the discussion helps to clarify the narrator's view of money, which is really quite consistent: money is not intrinsically valuable, but only for the uses to which it can be put by human intelligence in the interests of happiness. The miser, therefore, abuses wealth by preserving it for its own sake, as Colkelbie has learned by the end of Part Two (II, 247-52; III, 5-11).



Like the first tale of the pig, Part Three treats the life of farmyard animals in an heroic fashion. Susan, Colkelbie's neighbour who refuses his gift of two dozen eggs for his godson, parallels the stupidity of the fools in Part One who do not realize the true value of the pig. For careful husbandry allows Colkelbie to turn his penny into a thousand pounds, and the value of thrift is once again exemplified. As Jones points out, the poet reminds us of the role of Grace in human activity, here and throughout the poem, as Colkelbie acknowledges the assistance of "grace devyne" (III, 136). This, too, has a double meaning, for as well as emphasizing man's dependence on God's help it asserts divine approval for wise investment. As in the other narratives, the focus is altogether upon the literal significance: there is no suggestion that the story is to be read other than as a praise of the intelligent use of wealth, and even the comic elements are much less clearly developed than they are in the rest of the poem. By the end, the moral intention seems finally to have become unequivocally paramount.

Colkelbie Sow remains, however, a complex and elusive poem, reminiscent of much of Dunbar's comic poetry in its teasing ambiguity. I do not think that its moral concerns are really in doubt, but any attempt at exposition of them is certain to do less than justice to the lightness of the poet's comic touch which continually denies the value of moral earnestness. The ethical principles he puts forward are no more than one part of a rich and fundamentally comic view of the world, comic not only in the sense that the poem depends upon the burlesque and

the mock-heroic but also in that we are left in no doubt about the benign nature of God's oversight of the affairs of men. Colkelbie, Flannislíe and Adria are rewarded for their virtue, fools are punished. Even the poet's view of the meaning of his tales may be seen as part of this optimistic scheme: behind the apparent nonsense (which, as he says in l. 53 of the prologue, mirrors the apparent absurdity of worldly mutability), there is a hidden meaning, which advocates both the proper use of material resources (avoiding avarice) and the proper use of our own, spiritual resources. In the end, therefore, we can make sense of a superficially bewildering combination of disparate styles and statements.

But Colkelbie Sow remains a very different kind of poem from The Talis of the Fyve Bestes and The Thre Prestis of Peblis. These latter works are unmistakably serious, and make no attempt to obscure their didactic purpose. Colkelbie Sow is obviously much more ambiguous, and demands a great deal more of its audience. This is to be explained in part by the role of the narrator, who always stands between us and his stories: whether or not this betrays the original circumstances of composition, the impression is created of a court performance, and the narrator's function is to present his material directly and explicitly. This may explain the strongly rhetorical and comic character of the early parts of the poem, and the gradual introduction of more evidently didactic elements. There are several references to oral delivery which, while they are not an infallible guide,<sup>53</sup> do suggest that Colkelbie, perhaps unlike the other Scots tale-collections, was probably intended to be



heard rather than read. An audience of this kind, rather obviously, needs to be won and held in a sense that a private reader does not, and it follows that a court entertainer would change his tone and direction more dramatically and more often than an author aiming primarily at manuscript transmission and private reading. It is clear that one of the factors influencing the medieval poet's treatment of his theme is the means of transmission, the literary context, he envisages for his work.

Viewed from another angle, the problem we have just been considering is related to the notions of genre and convention. Certain genres appear to have been associated with particular types of audience: the court environment in which dream-allegory thrived is a clear-cut example. The choice of a genre, too, defines limitations within which the poet must work, and these are often expressed in terms of rhetorical topoi or other kinds of literary convention. While a medieval poet, then, can up to a point be seen as an independent agent, most students of the period would accept that the range of his choices was more circumscribed than has been the case, at least since the end of the eighteenth century.

For some poets, at least, prevailing genres and conventions provided a useful vehicle for the literary embodiment of their ideas, and among such current forms the so-called dream allegory was perhaps the most popular, at any rate with poets of the high style, at the close of the Middle Ages.

Dunbar, for one, frequently uses the dream device, sometimes apparently just as a way of getting his poem started. This is the case also with a much less accomplished poet, the author of The Quare of Jelusy.<sup>54</sup> He describes not a dream but an unknown lady whom he saw complaining against Jealousy on a May morning, but this longish introduction of 116 lines is no more than a device for bringing the audience to his own 'Trety in the Reprefe of Jelousye', which constitutes the bulk of the poem. There can be no doubt that The Quare of Jelusy is didactic, but it is not so clear that it is in any real sense narrative. There is no attempt to take up at the end the incident which set the narrator off, and the lady he overheard is never identified, or even properly described. What is interesting for our present purpose is not why the poet desired to unburden himself on the subject of jealousy, or even why he did not develop the narrative elements of his poem further, but rather why he decided to introduce them at all.

The answer, I believe, lies in his evident conception of good poetic technique. It was, of course, possible to write didactic poems consisting entirely of complaint and exhortation: indeed, there are fairly numerous examples in the Bannatyne and Maitland manuscripts.<sup>55</sup> But the author of The Quare of Jelusy — and no doubt a good many other poets — accepted the critical proposition that homilies are more palatable within a narrative framework. Few Scots poets made a more token gesture in this direction than he did: he begins by invoking the atmosphere of a Spring morning, compares the lady to Diana and makes her apostrophize a number of divinities, indulges in some



philosophizing of the "Quhat may this mene; quhat may this signifye?" variety (l. 121),<sup>56</sup> and then gets on with the denunciation of jealousy which is his real concern. His opening lines are a kit-set assemblage, not only of ideas but of phrases as well:

This lusty Maii, the quhich all tender flouris  
 By nature nurisith with hir hote schouris,  
 The felde oureclad hath with the tender grene  
 Quhich all depaynt with diuerse hewis bene,  
 And euery thing makith to conuert  
 Agayn the stroke of winter cold and smert.  
 The samyn moneth and the sevynt Ide,  
 The sonne the quhich that likith not to hyde  
 His course, ascending in the orient  
 From his first gree, and forth his bemys sent,  
 Throu quhich he makith euery lusty hert  
 Out of thair sleuth to walkyn and astert  
 And vnto Maii to done thair obseruance .....

(1-13)

This passage, the conventionality of which enabled Skeat to "prove" that its author must also have written the Middle Scots Lancelot of the Laik and M.M. Gray to "show" that it must have been borrowed from Dunbar,<sup>57</sup> is, as it were, by Lydgate out of Chaucer's General Prologue, but it gives a fair idea of what its author, and no doubt many of his contemporaries, regarded as a high, polite style.

King Hart is an altogether different matter, and the difference lies in more than the fact that its author makes a systematic use of allegorical techniques throughout. For here the conventions are completely assimilated, an integral part of the work, and not merely a machinery used to introduce straightforward didacticism. Quite properly, King Hart has received some praise, not least from C.S. Lewis, for the neatness of its structure and the accuracy of its perception of human nature.<sup>58</sup>

Its real theme, it is generally agreed, is the inevitable progression of man from youth to old age and death, but the allegorical handling of this development is complicated by a long section derived ultimately from the Roman de la Rose, in which Hart is conquered by Dame Plesance. It has been suggested, therefore, that the poem falls into two distinct sections, the first primarily erotic, the other essentially homiletic.<sup>59</sup> This view is in my opinion open to dispute, and I shall try to show in the following paragraphs that there is a much greater consistency of theme between the various stages of the poem than has previously been recognized, and that the romantic elements in the Dame Plesance episode are a vehicle for moral ideas, the poet being scarcely interested in erotic allegory for its own sake.

Before we deal with the related issues of the poem's unity and the author's moral intention, however, we should give some attention to a few of the more obvious techniques which give King Hart its distinctively convincing force. It is quite evident that not only the narrative structure but also many of the images are thoroughly conventional: Priscilla Bawcutt has documented a large number of parallels and analogues.<sup>60</sup> At its least accomplished (as in The Quare of Jelusy), such borrowing seems hollow and unimaginative, but in King Hart we are more aware of the associative power of familiar images. The poet makes full use of these possibilities in his early description of the king's youthful existence:

Richt as the rose vpspringis from the rute,  
In ruby colour reid, most ryik of hew,  
Nor waindis nocht the levis to outschut,



For schyning of the sone þat dois renew  
 Thir vther flouris, greyne, quhyt and blew,  
 Quhilk hes na craft to knaw the wynter weit,  
 Suppois þat sommer schane dois þame reskew,  
 That dois þame quhile ourhaill with snaw and sleit.

(89-96)<sup>61</sup>

The ambivalence of these lines, which is the essence of their contribution to the poem, derives from the variety of echoes they evoke, for the rose is a common medieval symbol, both of the freshness and vivacity of youth and love and, like all flowers, of the inevitability of decay. As Sheila Delany has pointed out,<sup>62</sup> the primary function of the stanza is to emphasize the inexperience of Hart, but the last line turns the sense around, so that we are ultimately reminded of the falseness of the world which is buttressed by that inexperience. The complex of associations introduced by the imagery of roses and the seasons ensures that these various elements can be allowed to coexist, avoiding the necessity for a hard-and-fast theological interpretation.

The complexity which derives from the skilful use of traditional allegorical images is reinforced by the poet's choice of names for his abstractions. This is most evident in the case of the central character, for "Hart" is a term with a rich set of connotations. Lewis equates it with the Soul, but both Bawcutt and Delany acknowledge a more subtle meaning, the latter proposing as a synonym the equally-ambiguous ME. term 'corage'.<sup>63</sup> Its value for the poet lies in its moral ambivalence, for his interest is in that part of human nature which is least amenable to the moderating influence of Reason. In this sense, the notion of hart is quite closely related to the

familiar allegorical figure Sensuality, who is otherwise a notable absentee from the poem. There are perhaps two reasons for this. Sensuality is not only a very familiar abstraction in fifteenth-century allegory but a wholly unfavourable one, instantly recognizable as unsympathetic; while Hart is a less easily classifiable character.<sup>64</sup> But at the same time, while he avoids the instantaneous judgments which would flow from the introduction of Sensuality, and thus clouds the moral world of his poem, the author of King Hart contrives in another sense to render his allegory more precise. For the term sensualitas itself contains an ambiguity, referring both to the qualities of that part of the soul which responds to sensation and, more pejoratively, to dependence upon the senses and upon the world of the senses. The King Hart poet has neatly distinguished the two, making Hart represent the propensity to sensuality and Dame Plesance the occasion, while their union embodies the state of dependence. King Hart thus presents through its action an analysis of the psychological processes by which the human soul becomes subject to the senses, and of the long-term spiritual consequences of that subjection.

But the allegory does not lend itself to any single summary statement of theme, and it is striking that the poet himself avoids any overt moralizing. This is true not only of the structure of the whole poem, as Bawcutt has observed, but of individual episodes and images.<sup>65</sup> The description of the senses — significantly enough, the guardians of the king's way of life — is a case in point:



Fyve seruituris this king he had without,  
 That teichit war ay tressoun to espy.  
 Thai watchit ay be wallis round about  
 For innemeis pat of hapning ay come by:  
 Ane for the day, quhilk iugeit certanly,  
 With cure to ken the colour of all hew;  
 Ane for the nicht, pat harknit bissely,  
 Out of quhat airt that ever the wyndis blew.

Syn wes pair ane to taist all nutriment  
 That to his king wes seruit at the deis;  
 Ane wther wes all sovellis for to sent,  
 Of licour or of ony lustie meis;  
 The fyft pair wes quhilk culd all, but leis,  
 The heit, the cauld, the harde and eik the soft —  
 Ane ganand seruand, bayth for weir and pece.  
 3it hes thir folk pair king betrasit oft.

(49-64)

Although each of the five senses is individually identified, the identifications are, as it were, inferential: the reader has to work out what they are on the basis of the carefully-established congruence between the sense and its function within the allegory. Thus, the day-time watchman is Sight, that for the night is Hearing, Taste tests the food, assisted by Smell, while Touch has a more general brief. The poet relies upon his audience to make these connections, as he clearly expects them to respond to the various associations of Hart and to the echoes which are evoked by the details of his plot. Only in the last line is there a touch of overt didacticism, alerting us to the untrustworthiness of the senses. The effect of this rather deft approach is, paradoxically, to throw greater emphasis upon the final judgment, ensuring that we are alert to the theme of sensuality.

A different kind of ambiguity arises from the role of Nature in King Hart, which brings us to a more systematic consideration of the poem. Nature is first mentioned (presumably,

but not quite certainly, as a personification) in l. 19, as the source of Hart's counsellors. The catalogue which follows is, in Delany's words, "an odd jumble",<sup>66</sup> in which the relatively benign qualities of Gentrice (good breeding, or perhaps honour) and Fredome (generosity) are mixed in with a very large number of vices. Delany does not altogether recognize, however, how some of the items in the list are qualified by others, particularly in the sequences "Strenth, Lust and Wantownnes" (l. 25) and "Freschnes, Newgate, Waistgude and Wilfulnes,/ Delyuernes, Fulehardenes" (ll. 27-8). Taken by themselves Strenth and Delyuernes are, as Delany suggests, physical qualities, morally neutral or even favourable in connotation, and Freschnes is a "courtly virtue". But because Strenth is immediately followed by the quite unequivocal Lust and Wantownnes it acquires a good deal of their pejorative meaning, as Delyuernes does in the context of Wilfulnes and Fulhardenes. Since strength and agility are valuable or harmful according to the use to which they are put, they are here distorted by the generally vicious existence led by Hart. Similarly Freschnes, in courtly lyric a necessary attribute of the lover,<sup>67</sup> is tainted by the sense of prodigality conveyed by its neighbours in l. 27. Nature's positive gifts, therefore, are thoroughly outweighed by the vices with which man is endowed. What are we to make of the source of such a company?

Nature is, of course, one of the great allegorical figures of the Middle Ages. Her role derives in part from Boethius, whose references to natura were readily allegorized.<sup>68</sup> The catalogue of medieval works in which Nature is assigned a crucial



position, mediating between God and his Creation, is long: the De universitate mundi of Bernardus Silvestris, Alain de Lille's De planctu Naturae, the Architrenius of Jean de Hautville, Les Echechs amoureux and its derivatives, and Chaucer's Parlement of Foules are among the most notable examples. In all these cases, Nature is an authoritative figure, subject of course to divine will but unmistakably beneficent. Her role in Jean de Meun's portion of the Roman de la Rose is more complicated, and has been taken in a variety of ways.<sup>69</sup> Whether or not Jean de Meun regards Nature pejoratively, it is clear that her confession to Genius and the reply raise the issue of Nature's responsibility for human vice, which is precisely the question posed by the role of Nature in King Hart. There is a precedent for this in the twelfth-century Architrenius, in which the protagonist blames Nature for his sins:

'Mene istos,' inquit, 'in usus  
Enixa est Natura parens? me misit ut arma  
In superos damnata feram, divumque reatus  
Irritent odium? leges et jura, meique  
Praeteream decreta Jovis? vitiine potestas  
Mortales aeterna premit? facinusque redundat  
Diis invisa palus? mater quid pignora tantae  
Destituit labi, nec quem produxit alumno  
Excubat, ut nullis maculam scelus inspuet actis?'

70

In neither case, however, does the overall argument of the poem justify such accusations: in the Architrenius, Nature finally emerges as a tutelary figure and gives a long lecture on natural philosophy, while Jean de Meun's discussion makes it clear that, while the gifts of Nature were affected by the Fall, the responsibility for sin rests with the free choice of the individual.<sup>71</sup> The accusation against Nature, as made by the hero

of the Architrenius and by Alexander in the Lai d'Aristote of Henri d'Andéli, is essentially an attempt to avoid that responsibility.

Against this background, the debate about Nature in King Hart assumes a considerable importance. We have seen that the narrator attributes to her the provision of Hart's distinctly unsavoury counsellors, and indeed it is Nature who is blamed by the king when his behaviour is challenged by Conscience:

Quhat haue I done, pat thus hes crabbit 3ow?  
I followit counsale alway for the best,  
And gif thai war vntrew, I dar avow,  
Nature did mis, sic folk apone me cast.

Nature me bred, ane beist in to my nest,  
And gaif to me 3outhheid, first seruitour,  
That I no fut nicht find, be eist nor west,  
Bot euir in warde, in tutourschip and cure.  
And Wantownnes, quha wes to me more sure?  
Sic Nature to me brocht and first devysit,  
Me for to keip fra all misaventure.  
Quhat blame serve I, thus way to be supprysit?

(597-608)

Even if we are inclined to see in this a human attempt to avoid moral responsibility, analogous perhaps to Cresseid's arguments in Henryson's Testament, we must return to the fact that, according to the early part of the poem, Hart is quite correct. Too easy a dismissal of his claims must therefore be avoided, and we are driven to a more careful examination, both of the characters' speeches and of the action of the poem. If Hart's speech is translated into non-allegorical terms, it is stating approximately that the course of his past actions has been guided by his youth and by self-indulgence, which is certainly an obvious human response to any recriminations. What gives



the passage its force is the evident irony: Hart has relied on Youthheid and Wantownnes as sound advisors, and the result has been disastrous. It is less clear which direction the irony points in, whether we are intended to observe Hart's ignorance of the nature of his court, or the treachery of Nature in giving him such help, or both.

Nor does the response of Conscience offer us much assistance. Replying to Hart's complaint that Conscience too has let him down, he says:

Ze put grit wyt pat I so lang abaid,  
 Gif pat I culd with counsale zow avale.  
 Schir, traist weill ane verrie caus I had,  
 Or ellis war no ressoun in my taile.  
 • My terme wes set by ordour naturall;  
 To quhat work, alway I most obey.  
 No dar I nocht be noway mak travale,  
 Bot quhair I se my maister get a swy.

(633-40)

Nature, in other words, has provided that man's conscience is only activated by adversity, since the successful remain immune to its influence. This view is echoed by Ressoun, who asserts that the ability to discriminate between right and wrong derives, not I think from experience, as Delany suggests,<sup>72</sup> but from adversity:

Quha gustis sweit and feld nevir of the sowre,  
 Quhat can he say? How may he seasoun iuge?

(657-8)

It is a particular kind of experience which alerts Hart to the untrustworthiness of Wantownnes and his companions, and the poet seems concerned to offer through the debate an account not only of moral responsibility but also of suffering: mutability and pain themselves have a didactic function, and are therefore a

manifestation of Providence.<sup>73</sup> But is Delany right in stating that the poet's view of the question "tends to minimize Hart's guilt"? The answer must be sought not only in the role of Nature, but also in Hart's allegorical function. He represents, after all, not the totality of human nature but one aspect of it, a mixture of appetite and will. It is not the whole man whose behaviour is determined by the provisions of Nature, but one aspect of his personality. The difficulty which arises here is one inherent in any tropological allegory, namely the fragmentary representation of human nature which results from the personification of various human attributes, but it is exacerbated in this case by the absence of any dream- or vision-mechanism. Where such a device exists, as in the Roman de la Rose, we are inclined to read the personifications as aspects of the dreamer's (or narrator's) personality, but here the tropological action is presented without any such incorporating framework at all. It remains true, however, that Hart represents one part only of human nature.

It is in this sense, surely, that the political metaphor which is sustained throughout the poem is to be understood. The notion of the body politic, which underlies the entire structure, is one of the most common and significant of allegorical images in medieval literature.<sup>74</sup> But the author of King Hart has, as it were, reversed the tenor and the vehicle, so that whereas the body politic metaphor is normally used to comment on the nature of the state by analogy with the human body, in King Hart the image of the state is used to represent human nature. This is important for two reasons. First, it reinforces the



previous point about the representation of the whole man in the poem, since our understanding of the poet's view of man must be based upon the interaction of the whole body politic rather than upon the actions and responses of Hart alone. And secondly, we must recognize that it is not by chance that Hart is assigned the role of king. This is a striking variation on the political tradition of the metaphor: from John of Salisbury on, medieval writers had assigned to the king the function of the head.<sup>75</sup> By making Hart rule, the poet is clearly espousing a particular view of human nature. The primacy of the heart, from the physiological point of view, was asserted by Aristotle, who was followed, with some qualifications, by Avicenna.<sup>76</sup> The precise nature of the relationship between the senses and the intellect was in the later Middle Ages a controversial question, but in general it may be said that medieval philosophers tended to seat the senses in the heart and the virtus intellectiva in the brain. In the sense in which Hart is part of an organological metaphor, therefore, his kingship implies that human nature is ruled by the senses, of which Hart is the general and his various servants (especially the Senses themselves) the particular representatives.

It does not follow from this argument, however, that the poet is cynical about human nature.<sup>77</sup> His purpose is to instruct rather than to denounce. Reason and Conscience do in the end establish their influence over Hart and, as we shall see, the poem concludes with Hart's acceptance of the moral order. But the poet has a preacher's conviction that man is

fundamentally unregenerate until he is pushed to the extremes of adversity, and the earlier part of King Hart is devoted to the narrative representation of this view. The first part demonstrates, as I have already argued, the process by which Sensuality, as an inner tendency, becomes subject to the world of the senses, viewed as an external stimulus. Behind the conventional amatory imagery of warfare lies a subtle homiletic argument. We should notice, in particular, that the initiative throughout the early stages is taken by Hart and his company:

The watcheis of the sicht wes sa effrayit,  
 Thai ran and tauld the king of pair intent.  
 'Lat nocht this mater, schir, be lang delayit.  
 It war speidfull sum folk 3e outwarde sent,  
 That culd rehers quhat thing 3one peple ment,  
 Syn 3ow agane pairof to certifie;  
 For battell byd pai bauldlie on 3on bent.  
 It war bot schame to fein3e cowartlie.'

(145-52)

As Delany has observed,<sup>78</sup> the senses are here quite clearly misleading Hart, for Dame Plesance and her servants have no designs on him at all, but the more important point is the moral one: the sensible world is in itself morally neutral, and it requires a positive action on the part of the will to turn it to nefarious purposes. Hart is incited to involve himself by his wicked counsellors, and he is ironically convinced that he can bring Plesance under his control:

'I sall nocht sit,' he said, 'and se pame thryse  
 Discomfit clein my men and put at vnder.  
 Na, we sall wirk ws on ane vther wys,  
 Set we be few to thame be fifty hounder.'

(213-6)

Such gallantry is, of course, doomed: the man who believes he can both approach and conquer pleasure is likely to find himself



conquered by it, which is what happens in this case. The details of his capture and imprisonment, the wound which he sustains, the conflict of Pietie and Danger, all are drawn from the literature of amour courtois,<sup>79</sup> but I do not think that the poet is very interested in them for their own sake. His real concern is with Hart.

Yet the sequence of Hart's capture, imprisonment and ultimate union with Dame Plesance is evidently that of the typical courtly affair. The crucial point is that again the metaphor has been reversed: instead of the interaction of abstract personifications representing an amatory interlude, the narrative of a sexual encounter is being used to represent an essentially psychological process. The effect of the discussions among Dame Plesance's retinue is to emphasize Hart's dependence: having challenged the forces of pleasure, the will must now wait for the external world to take the initiative. The passivity which is a necessary part of his captivity allegorizes the situation of the man who has surrendered his freedom of moral choice to the irresponsible, irrational forces of the senses:

This wourthy king in presoun thus culd ly  
 With all his folk, and culd pair nane outbrek.  
 Full oft pai kan vpone dame Pietie cry,  
 'Fair thing, cum doun a quhyle and with ws speik.  
 Sum farar way 3e nicht 3our harmes wreik  
 Than thus to murdour ws pat 3oldin ar.  
 Wald 3e ws rew, quhair euir we nicht our-reik,  
 We suld men be to 3ow for euirmare.'

(337-44)

Although a great deal of the detail in ll. 249-424 is not strictly required by the moral argument of the poem, however, it should not be regarded as a mere excrescence. Much of the

narrative life of King Hart derives from this episode, and it is part of the function of the allegorist to cloak his ulterior meaning in fictions which are interesting and attractive to the audience. Many of the details of this part of the poem, such as those noted above and the many sexual puns identified by Delany, help to define the moral argument, but others seem to have the justification simply that they enhance a skilful variation on the familiar themes of amour courtois.

The subsequent narrative is much more closely integrated with the poet's moral purpose. It is significant that it is Age who first disrupts the harmonious union of Hart and Plesance, for his arrival introduces not only the cooling of appetite which supposedly comes with advancing years, but also the first warning of the consequences of mutability: human mortality is after all not only a harsh physical reality but also a sign of man's fallen condition. This intervention by the representative of transience is followed by the arrival of Conscience, who expels Syn and other members of the court and then admits Ressoun and Wit (ll. 521-80). The debate which follows is, as we have seen, of great importance for the understanding of the relative roles of Nature and the king, but it is not altogether satisfactory, either as the dramatic climax or as the intellectual core of the poem. Apart from his use of images in support of the uses of adversity, Ressoun's speech is composed almost entirely of commonplaces:

'Gif I sall say, the sentence sall be plane:  
Do never the thing pat ever may scayth the ocht.  
Keip mesour and treuth for pairin lyis na trayne.'

(650-2)



But the poet does not intend to let clichés of this kind dominate King Hart. Instead, he describes a counter-coup by Dame Plesance and her followers: when she complains about the rule of Conscience, Hart attempts (unsuccessfully) to placate her. Again the will is passive, for he is asleep when Plesance and "all hir folk" steal away (ll. 745-55). And again the narrative detail has a multiple significance: it is true that "Plesance cannot tolerate the presence of Conscience",<sup>80</sup> but the flight of Plesance also signifies the insubstantiality of the things of this world. In Ressoun's words,

'Quhair is the thesaure now pat ze haue woun?  
This drink wes ~~w~~seit, ze fand in Venus' tun:  
Sone eftir this it salbe staill and soure.'

(764-6)

The departure of Plesance is a real turning-point. Now deprived of the pleasures of the senses, Hart is free to consider his own spiritual welfare. His return to his own castle is a symbol of this: whatever else it does, it represents a withdrawal. Yet the poet makes it clear that Hart has undergone no real change, despite his altered circumstances:

The king sat still. To travaill he nocht list,  
And herknit Syn ane quhyte to wit his taill.

Desyre wes dalie at the chalmer dure,  
And Ielousie wes never of his presence.  
Ire kepit ay the 3et with meikle cure,  
And Wretchitnes wes hyde in to the spence.

(807-12)

The difference between this phase and that which preceded it is that, driven back onto his own resources, Hart falls victim to a condition very like accidia. He has lost none of his tendency towards sin, only the opportunity; and the result is a consuming

condition of which the characteristics are desire, jealousy, anger and wretchedness. The passivity of Hart now acquires a new cast, for his refusal to work is a clear indication of his spiritual state. This is a much-remarked characteristic of sloth, as Chaucer's Parson indicates:

And certes, to alle thise thynges is Accidie enemy  
and contrarie, for he loveth no bisynesse at all.

81

The best remedy against sloth, again according to the Parson's Tale, is "fortitudo or strengthe", and it is no coincidence that the description of Hart's spiritual condition is immediately preceded by the departure of Strenth (ll. 793-800). The return to Hart's own castle, therefore, brings not a reversal of his fortunes but another phase in his decline. We see from this his own resistance to moral change, but more important, the limited power of Reason and Conscience. Man can, through the use of his intellectual power, achieve a certain amount, but he remains fallen and therefore dependent on Grace.

The poet does not explicitly make this last point, however, and nothing is allowed to lighten the increasingly sombre tones of the ending. The final stage of Hart's long decline is physical: the ultimate assault on his castle is led by Decrepitus. Like Henryson's Cresseid, Hart finishes by making a testament, which provides the final stanzas of the poem, at least in the form in which we have it.<sup>82</sup> Whereas Cresseid overtly accepts her guilt, however, and makes a definite moral statement, Hart appears to confine himself to apportioning his goods. Delany has concluded from this that the poet's final message is one of acceptance:



Hart's testament represents the final step in his understanding of the natural order, for he wills things to be as they are. He shows no guilt, regret, or otherworldly concern, and rather than reconciling himself to any awareness of future life, he reveals that he has at last learned some of the conditions of human existence, or at least of his own existence ..... Hart is nowhere denounced as a great sinner, undergoes no agonizing torment of mind, and passes through no conversion.

83

But this view ignores at least two important aspects of King Hart. It is natural that Hart should show no otherworldly concern, for he is after all Hart, and the understanding of the ultimate destiny of man belongs not to the senses but to the intellect.<sup>84</sup> Further, Hart is not as accepting of the status quo as Delany appears to believe. His testament, in fact, reveals a waspishly ironic settling of scores with his former companions:

'Grein Lust, I leif to the, at my last ende,  
Of Fantisie ane fostell fillit fow.  
3outhheid, becaus þat thow my barneheid kend,  
To Wantounnes ay will I þat thow bow.  
To Gluttony, þat oft maid me our fow,  
This meikle wambe, this rottin levir als,  
Se þat 3e beir, and þat command I 3ow,  
And smertlie hing both abone his hals.'

(905-12)

Within the limits of his mundane perspective, therefore, Hart has perceived that he owes his present condition to the activities of his courtiers, and the prevailing tone of his testament is one of grim irony. The bequests allude both to physical qualities, as in the case of Gluttony, and to moral entities such as Chaistite (to whom he bequeaths Conscience), Plesance, Fredome, and finally Danger:

'Syn sall 3e eftir faire dame Dangeir schout,  
And say, becaus scho had me ay at feid,  
This brokin speir, sum tyme wes stiff and stout,

To hir I leif, bot se it want the heid.'

(956-60)

With this last sexual allusion the poem, in the text we have, abruptly ends.

It is perhaps logical that King Hart contains no reference to Grace or Salvation, for the king represents the lower powers of the soul, inextricably linked to this world. In this sense, the poem demonstrates not the unregeneracy of man, or his impending spiritual doom, but rather the resistance of that part of the soul which is ruled by the senses to any higher considerations of moral or theological values. Nature's endowment of Hart is bound to lead him astray precisely because of what he is: the fault lies in our sensuality, not in any supposed malice on Nature's part. King Hart, because of this emphasis, is determinist in its effect, if not ultimately in its ideas. We see Ressoun, Conscience and Wit struggling to bring Hart around to a better way of life, but he seems to advance unswervingly through the poem towards an inevitable conclusion. The poet concentrates quite exclusively upon the dangers of sensuality, and we do not gain much sense of the optimism which usually springs from Christian belief in redemption. The nearest we come to a positive view is in the speeches of Ressoun and of Conscience:

'Bot nevirtheles, schir, all thing 3e haue wrocht,  
With help of Wisdome and his willis wald,  
I sall reforme 3ow it blythlie, be 3e bald .....

(643-5)

But this prediction is not borne out by what follows, and even Ressoun and Conscience have been exhausted by the end (ll. 889-92).



I find nothing in the poem to justify Delany's conclusion that it "acknowledges nature's ultimate power over man and accepts man's own nature (especially his sexuality)":<sup>85</sup> it is rather a cautionary tale, demonstrating the vulnerability of the baser part of man to the forces of mutability and death. The poet is not, I think, a "pagan Humanist",<sup>86</sup> but a moralist who is also thoroughly familiar with the courtly literature of his age. A number of factors probably contribute to the ambiguity which leads critics such as Delany and myself, after careful readings of the poem, to reach such radically different conclusions: the richness which the poet achieves through the use of terms, images and episodes with multiple associations and the rigour with which he avoids a direct and explicit moralization, the unsureness with which the modern critic inevitably handles the assumptions of the medieval poet and his audience, even the possibility of textual incompleteness, all make interpretation difficult. King Hart remains puzzling in many respects, but it is without doubt the richest, most consistent, and the most carefully worked-out of Scots allegories, and it offers some rewards, even to a modern audience, for the careful exegesis which it demands.

The allegorical genre is, as we have seen, by its very nature closely associated with the notion of moral narrative. But the didactic possibilities of other narrative forms were not ignored by medieval poets, and such genres as romance and fabliau were from their earliest history involved with moral

considerations. Not every romance, of course, is susceptible to moral interpretation, although even a work such as the Scots Eger and Grime, in which folk-lore motifs of magic and mystery predominate, does at least offer an ethical viewpoint in its advocacy of chivalry.<sup>87</sup> That is moral narrative only in the sense, discussed at the outset, in which any fiction can be seen to mirror, and therefore implicitly to support or condemn, certain kinds of behaviour, and it does not justify a great deal of critical attention, at least in the present context. We are concerned with poems in which the author's central interest is in the statement of a moral argument or the resolution of an ethical problem, and among Scots romances the best example of this type is perhaps Rauf Coilgear. This is one of a widespread group of tales in which a disguised king talks with one of his subjects: the Scottish version, set at the court of Charlemagne, seems to have been written in the later fifteenth century.<sup>88</sup>

The central theme of Rauf Coilgear is the nature of true nobility. It is introduced in the opening lines, as Charles and his court are travelling to Paris to pass Christmas:

Thay past vnto Paris, thay proudest in pane,  
 With mony Prelatis and Princis, that was of mekle pryde;  
 All thay went with the King to his worthy wane;  
 Ouir the feildis sa fair thay fure be his syde;  
 All the worthiest went in the morning,  
     Baith Dukis, and Duchepeiris,  
     Barrounis, and Bacheleiris,  
     Mony stout man steiris  
     Of town with the King.

(5-13)<sup>89</sup>

The repetition of the notions of pride and worthiness, together with the catalogue of the chivalric hierarchy, here contributes



to our sense of nobility as a social order, which seems immediately to be undercut by the storm which assails them:

Sa feirslie fra the Firmament, sa fellounlie it fure,  
Thair nicht na folk hald na fute on the heich fell.  
In point thay war to parische, thay proudest men and pure,  
In thay wickit wedderis thair wist nane to dwell.

(18-21)

There is a certain irony in the fact that these great lords are so vulnerable to the elements: again their pride and nobility are stressed (l. 20) in order to accentuate the contrast between their social rank and their physical situation. "Firmament", too, is a significant word, required no doubt by the alliterative structure of the line but also conveying a hint that the storm may be seen at least as part of God's universe, if not as a manifestation of divine providence. The storm is not merely atmospheric: it initiates the plot by causing the king to become separated from his retinue.

The first exchange between the king and Rauf both sets the tone for their relationship and advances the theme of nobility, for in response to Rauf's blunt, straightforward language Charles strikingly invokes nobility as a moral concept:

'Sa mot I thrife,' said the King, 'I speir for nane ill;  
Thow semis ane nobill fallow, thy answer is sa fyne.'  
'Forsuith,' said the Coilgear, 'traist quhen thow will,  
For I trow and it be nocht swa, sum part salbe thyne.'

(53-6)

The aspect of Rauf's character to which the king draws our attention is his directness, although there may be an ironic nuance in that his supposed nobility and the "fineness" (which may imply haughtiness) of his answers contrast with his humble status. If Charles is being ironic the irony rebounds upon him, for it becomes evident that Rauf has as much true, natural

nobility as he has. This is apparent both from his sturdy independence and from the hospitality he offers to his new acquaintance:

'Dame, kyith I am cummin hame, and kendill on ane fire,  
I trow our Gaist be the gait hes farne als ill.  
Ane Ryall rufe het fyre war my desyre,  
To fair the better for his saik, gif we nicht win  
                        thair till;  
Knap doun Capounis of the best, but in the byre,  
Heir is bot hamelie fair, do believe, Gill.'

(107-12)

Again the poet introduces a note of dramatic irony: Rauf is oblivious of the truly royal identity of his guest, but his inherent courtesy impels him to treat any visitor equally lavishly.

This natural generosity on the part of the collier contrasts with the king's more formal manners, and this difference produces the first conflict between them. When Rauf allows his guest to go through the door before him, Charles responds by giving way also, producing a startling reaction in the collier:

He said: 'Thow art vncourtes, that sall I warrand.'  
He tyt the King be the nek, twa part in tene;  
'Gif thow at bidding suld be boun or obeysand,  
And gif thow of Courtasie couth, thow hes forzet it clene;  
Now is anis,' said the Coilgear, 'kynd aucht to creip,  
    Sen ellis thow art vnknawin,  
    To mak me Lord of my awin;  
    So mot I thriue, I am thrawin,  
    Begin we to threip.'

(122-30)

There is a neat comic contrast between Rauf's talk of 'courtesy and his superficially discourteous manhandling of the king, but there is no doubt that his anger is justified. There is, after all, a great difference between his deference to his guest



and Charles' excessively courteous response, which Rauf interprets as giving him what he already possesses, lordship in his own house. Yet Rauf also displays moderation, controlling his anger by commenting on his own emotions, and the quarrel is over almost before it has begun. It is soon to be repeated, however, for the king declines Rauf's invitation to "begin the buird", to occupy the guest's honoured place at table (ll. 144-7), and the collier responds by knocking him to the floor. His words to the king as the latter staggers to his feet are full of righteous indignation:

'Schir, thow art vnskilfull, and that sall I warrand,  
 Thow byrd to haue nurtour aneuch, and thow hes nane;  
 Thow hes walkit, I wis, in mony wyld land,  
 The mair vertew thow suld haue, to keip the fra blame;  
 Thow suld be courtes of kynd, and ane cunnand Courteir.  
     Thocht that I simpill be,  
     Do as I bid the,  
     The hous is myne, pardie,  
     And all that is heir.'

(159-67)

The humour of these scenes is enhanced not only by the discrepancies between Rauf's words and his actions, but also by the fact, of which he remains completely unaware, that it is Charlemagne whom he is reprimanding in this way. The irony is particularly clear in the lines just quoted: it is the paragon of chivalry whom Rauf accuses of being an uncultured savage. No doubt the possibilities of such a situation help to explain the poet's choice of Charlemagne: Amours notes that "the Scottish tale alone transfers the scene over the sea, perhaps in order to introduce a fresh element in a well-worn theme",<sup>90</sup> but he misses the point that Charlemagne's courtesy would be assumed by the audience, and the irony of the plot is thus

greater than it would be if another king had been chosen, or he had been left unnamed.

Our appreciation of the supper scene is heightened by the discovery that Rauf indulges in poaching as a sideline, and that the venison which is on the table is therefore presumably the king's own. Charles has now recovered sufficiently from the blow he suffered to permit himself an ironic joke:

Thus said gentill Charlis the Mane  
To the Coilgear agane:  
'The King him self hes bene fane  
Sum tyme of sic fair.'

(203-6)

He now identifies himself as a servant of the queen's chamber ("And thocht my self it say, maist inwart of ane", l. 236), and tells the collier that if he brings a load of coal to the court in Paris, he will get a good price. We are given some insight into the king's thinking in this phase of the poem, both from his reported reflections on the desirability of avoiding further conflict (ll. 168-73) and from such details of the dialogue as his private jokes and his evident desire to persuade the collier to travel to Paris. But his exact intentions remain unclear, and the poet creates some suspense by this vagueness, which he reinforces by reporting Gill's misgivings:

'Thow gaif him ane outrageous blaw and greit boist blew;  
In faith, thow suld haue bocht it deir, and he had  
bene allane.  
For thy, hald 3ow fra the Court, for ocht that may be:  
3one man that thow outrayd  
Is not sa simpill as he said;  
Thairun my lyfe dar I layd,  
That sall thow heir and se.'

(369-75)

After the departure of the king from Rauf's cottage, the



narrative structure of Rauf Coilzear becomes more complex.

The poet first describes the meeting between the king and his lords, then returns to report the discussion between Rauf and Gill. The plot now demands that he maintains our interest both in the events at the court and in the progress towards it of the collier. His principal device is the commission given by Charlemagne to Roland, to meet the collier as he approaches and to conduct him to the court. This episode is scarcely required by the plot, but it has considerable thematic value, for Rauf displays the same characteristics in the dialogue with Roland as he did with the king. He lectures Roland on courtesy, and insists that whatever the king orders, he is going to find "Wymond of the Wardrop" — the false identity assumed by Charlemagne. Some care is taken with the description of Roland, and two full stanzas of glittering elaboration ensure that we are fully conscious of the contrast between Rauf's humbleness and the chivalric splendour of Charlemagne's most famous knight:

His plaitis properlie picht attour with precious stanis,  
 And his Pulanis full prest of that ilk peir;  
 Greit Graipis of Gold his Greis for the nanis,  
 And his Cussanis cumlie schynand full cleir;  
 Bricht braissaris of steill about his arme banis,  
 Blandit with Beriallis and Cristallis cleir;  
 Ticht ouir with Thopas, and trew lufe atanis;  
 The teind of his iewellis to tell war full teir.

(467-74)

Rauf remains defiant, however, even to the point of challenging Roland to combat at the same place the following morning. It is clear from this encounter that, despite his social status, the collier has most of the chivalric virtues: courage, loyalty, pride, and a keen sense of honour.

That Charlemagne has recognized this fact only becomes apparent after further narrative complications. Rauf finds his way into the king's presence, but the account of the latter part of his journey covers eleven stanzas, which serve to build up the suspense and, to some extent, to record the collier's awe as he passes through this unfamiliar environment. Charles' response to his arrival, and his silent recognition of the identity of his erstwhile guest, recall the private jokes of their after-supper conversation:

The King fell in carping, and tauld his Intent,  
 To mony gracious Grome he maid his record;  
 How the busteous Beirne met him on the bent,  
 And how the Frostis war sa fell, and sa strait ford.  
 Than the Coilgear quoke as he had bene schent,  
 Quhen he hard the suith say how he the King schord.

(728-33)

Even though the collier is frightened, his inner response is still bold: he wishes that he might meet Charlemagne

'Or ony Knicht that thow may get,  
 Sa gude in thy hall'

(737-8)

at the location of their previous encounter. The king, however, declines the advice of his "curagious Knichtis" — surely a most sarcastic phrase for the poet to use in the circumstances — and announces instead that "That Carll for his courtasie salbe maid Knicht" (l. 746). Rauf is immediately knighted: we are given no detailed information about Charles' presentation of him to the company, for at this point the poet concentrates upon the formal proceedings of the knighting, quoting Charlemagne at some length. The suspense is over, and the poet seems intent on moving on to the next phase of the action.



This too has thematic significance, for Rauf keeps his word the next morning by riding out to meet Roland. The development of the plot means that this episode could easily have been avoided, but it is evidently important to the poet that Rauf demonstrates his chivalric loyalty by keeping his appointment:

'Sall neuer Lord lauch on loft, quhill my lyfe may lest,  
That I for liddernes suld leif, and leuand besyde,  
It war ane graceless gude that I war cummin to,  
Gif that the King hard on hicht  
That he had maid ane carll knicht  
Amang thir weryouris wicht,  
And docht nocht to do.'

(784-90)

He reveals a keen sense of honour as well, as the above lines make clear, and the effect of the passage is to confirm Charlemagne's judgment. Rauf meets, however, not Roland but a knight mounted on a camel, whom he immediately attacks under the impression that it is his opponent. Only when another knight appears and Rauf protests against this violation of the terms of their contest does the first knight clear up the confusion, invoking "Mahoun or Termagant" in the process. This gives Rauf an opportunity to practise another aspect of chivalry:

'Thow sayis thow art ane Sarazine,  
Now thankit be Drichtine,  
That ane of vs sall neuer hine  
Vndeid in this place.'

(852-5)

By thus revealing his crusading zeal Rauf again vindicates Charles' confidence, for the king has given as one of his reasons for knighting the collier his belief that he is "worthie to ga/ To fecht on Goddis fais!" (ll. 750-1). The light tone of the poem is not broken in the event, for Roland appears to

convert the Saracen (who changes his name from Magog to Schir Gawteir), the three knights swear friendship, and Rauf becomes Marshal of France.

Rauf Coilgear is more than a simple rags-to-riches tale; it offers a consistent account of nobility as a moral condition. The debate about the true nature of nobility is a familiar medieval theme, and the narrative action of Rauf Coilgear exemplifies the view expressed by the old woman in the Wife of Bath's Tale:

Looke who that is moost vertuous alway,  
Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay  
To do the gentil dedes that he kan;  
Taak hym for the grettest gentil man.'

91

This position represents medieval orthodoxy on the question: Chaucer quotes Dante's Convivio, and the moral basis of true nobility is also argued in two fifteenth-century English works based on Buonaccorso's Controversia de Nobilitate, John Tiptoft's prose translation, printed by Caxton in 1481, and the early play Fulgens and Lucres by Henry Medwell (c. 1497).<sup>92</sup> To enliven his tale, the author of Rauf Coilgear exploits the comic possibilities of his unknown source, allowing a contradiction to exist between Rauf's apparently churlish behaviour and the lectures on courtesy which he gives. Underlying this, I think, is an unresolved confusion of nobility as an abstract moral concept, chivalry as a code of knightly behaviour, and courtesy as good manners. Rauf's objections to Charlemagne's conduct at his cottage really belong in this last category, and some of the comedy derives from the great significance which he (and the poet) attach to trivial events. Yet the truths which



are revealed by this reversal of social roles are of considerable significance, and it is clear that the effect of the poem as a whole is to set Rauf up as a standard against which we can measure Charlemagne's "curagious Knichtis".

Despite its romance associations, the introduction of Charlemagne and Roland, its intricate rhymed alliterative stanza, Rauf Coilzear has much in common with the folk-tale. This is even more evident in the case of The Wyf of Auchtermwchty, a short verse-tale in eight-line stanzas, probably dating from the reign of James V.<sup>93</sup> The Wyf of Auchtermwchty bears some resemblance to the earlier French fabliaux: it is a comic tale depending on slapstick for its effect, describing a skirmish in the war between husbands and wives. It no doubt originated in a popular story, for although there are no other medieval literary versions, there are a number of sixteenth-century analogues.<sup>94</sup> The narrative style is extremely sparse, with no space wasted on description or imagery: the plot is all. Reversal of roles is again the mainspring of the action, as a discontented farmer urges his wife to do her share of the outside work:

Quhot he: 'Quhair is my horssis corne?  
My ox hes napir hay nor stray.  
Dame, 3e mon to be pluch to morne:  
I salbe hussy, gif I may.'  
'Husband,' quod scho, 'content am I  
To tak be pluche my day abowt,  
Sa 3e will rowll baith kavis & ky  
And all the hous, baith in and owt.'

(17-24)<sup>95</sup>

Virtually the whole of what follows is devoted to an account of the disasters which befall the husband in the course of his day

at home, from the loss of five of the seven goslings to "the gredy gled" to the disappearance of the washing in the flooded burn. This catalogue of domestic catastrophes is skilfully presented, in a broad vernacular idiom,<sup>96</sup> and the cumulative effect is enhanced by the heavy end-stopping of the lines:

Than ben thair come ane gredy sow —  
 I trow he cund hir littill thank —  
 And in scho schot hir mekle mow,  
 And ay scho winkit and scho drank.  
 He cleikit vp ane crukit club,  
 And thocht to hitt the sow ane rowt;  
 The twa gaislingis the gled had left,  
 That straik dang baith thair harnis owt.

(73-80)

The comic element is evidently of the first importance here, but it does not follow that the poet has no serious intent at all. The Wyf of Auchtermwichty asserts the familiar fabliau theme of female superiority, but it also affirms the natural order of things, in which husbands farm and wives maintain the house and its immediate surroundings. Up to a point, these two aspects are in harmony, for it is the husband's unwillingness to accept his role which precipitates the action, and his folly is manifested not only by his failures in the home, but also by his wife's willing and successful occupation of his place. There is a slight complication, however, in the fact that she is initially unwilling to return to her original role:

Quod he, 'My office I forsaik  
 For all the dayis of my lyf,  
 For I wald put ane hows to wraik  
 Had I bene twenty dayis gudwyf!'  
 Quod scho: 'Weill mot 3e bruke þe place,  
 For trewlie I will nevir excep it!'

(105-10)

It is clearly implied in this exchange that the husband did not recognize when he was well off, and that his wife would now be



quite happy to take up ploughing on a permanent basis. Taken to its logical conclusion, such a point would represent a criticism, of a kind termed "feminist" in a modern context, of the existing distribution of labour by sex. No such intention, obviously, is in the poet's mind. The wife's threat merely provides him with the occasion for a further comic exemplification of female superiority:

Quod he: 'Feind fall the lyaris face,  
Bot 3it 3e may be blyth to get it.'

Than vp scho gat ane mekle rung,  
And the gudman maid to the dur.  
Quod he, 'Dame, I sall hald my tung,  
For and we fecht, I ill gett the woir.'

(111-6)

The poem thus leads us away from any consistent criticism of the division of roles, and the husband's closing speech is a straightforward assertion of the status quo:

Quod he: 'Quhen I forsuk my plwche,  
I trow I bot forsuk my seill,  
And I will to my plwch agane,  
For I and this hows will nevir do weill.'

(117-20)

The lesson of The Wyf of Auchtermwchty, therefore, is a relatively simple one: that the proper response to one's role, no matter how unpleasant it may seem, is willing acceptance. We may have some sympathy for Jok the gudman in his sufferings, but we are clearly being invited to laugh at his folly and to learn, as he does, from his errors.

As an example of the fabliau genre, The Wyf of Auchtermwchty is not very highly developed. Its comic vigour is undeniable, its moral point obvious enough, but there is little characterization and less descriptive elaboration. In these

respects it contrasts with another Middle Scots fabliau, The Freiris of Berwik. Here, as C.S. Lewis remarked, the influence of Chaucer is indeed evident,<sup>97</sup> but the poem has its own virtues and cannot be taken as a piece of mere Chaucerian imitation. The author of The Freiris of Berwik is a master of comic narrative, and his poem is carefully patterned to ensure the greatest possible ironic effect. Its basic themes, of marital infidelity thwarted, of the gullible husband and the lecherous friar, are stereotypes of the fabliau genre, and indeed there are remote analogues extant,<sup>98</sup> but the moral vision which the poet communicates is subtler than we might expect, and his interest in character, particularly in that of Friar Robert, is considerable.

The poem begins with an extended praise of the town of Berwick-on-Tweed:

At Tweidis mowth thair standis a nobill toun,  
 Quhair mony lordis hes bene of grit renoune,  
 Quhair mony a lady bene fair of face,  
 And mony ane fresche lusty galland was.  
 In to this toun, the quhilk is callit Berwik,  
 Upoun the sey thair standis nane it lyk,  
 For it is wallit weill abowt with stane,  
 And dowhill stankis castin mony ane;  
 And syne the castell is so strang and wicht,  
 With strait towris and turattis he on hicht;  
 The wallis wrocht craftely withall;  
 The portcules most subtelly to fall,  
 Quhen that thame list to draw thame upoun hicht,  
 That it might be of na maner of micht  
 To win that hous be craft or subteltie.  
 Quhairfoir it is maist gud allutirly  
 In to my tyme, quhair evir I haif bene,  
 Moist fair, most gudly, most plesand to be sene;  
 The toune, the wall, the castell, and the land,  
 The he wallis upoun the upper hand,  
 The grit croce kirk, and eik the Masone Dew,  
 The Jacobene freiris of the quhyt hew,  
 The Carmeleitis, and the Minouris eik;  
 The four ordouris wer nocht for to seik,



Thay wer all in this toun dwelling.

(1-25)<sup>99</sup>

I have quoted this passage in full because it presents the greatest difficulties in the whole poem. Such careful localization is not perhaps in itself surprising, although the local references at the beginning of Chaucer's fabliaux tend to be rather perfunctory by comparison.<sup>100</sup> Since the rivalry of two orders of friars is part of the point, the choice of Berwick, which uniquely among Scottish burghs did have houses of all four of the major mendicant orders, is no doubt natural enough. But the other curious point about Berwick-on-Tweed is that it is only doubtfully Scottish, and that it is far from clear that it in any way justified the specific praises for which it is singled out at the opening of The Freiris of Berwik. From its capture by Edward I in March 1296, the town of Berwick was only in Scottish hands for two short periods, 1318-33 and 1461-82, so that it is rather strange to find it praised so extravagantly in a Scottish poem. No doubt the Scots continued to regard the area as occupied Scottish territory, as a charter given by Robert III in 1392 suggests,<sup>101</sup> but the English made some efforts to anglicize the burgh. Most significantly from our point of view, Edward III ordered when he recaptured Berwick in 1333 that the Scottish friars of the Dominican, Franciscan, Carmelite and Augustinian friaries were to be removed to English houses and replaced by Englishmen.<sup>102</sup> Very little information survives about the subsequent history of these houses, although all four apparently survived in 1539/40.<sup>103</sup> If they retained an English character,

then this would add a certain nationalist piquancy to the familiar anti-mendicant tendency of the Scottish poem.

In view of the regularity with which Berwick changed hands, the statements about the strength of its fortifications may well seem ironic. From the middle of the fourteenth century, moreover, there is evidence of the decay of the burgh. In 1347, the poor commons petitioned Edward III because of the devastation of war, high customs, and the partition of Teviotdale and Roxburgh, which had depopulated the town.<sup>104</sup> The situation was no better in 1358, when Edward's chamberlain reported the town's depopulation and noted that the burgesses discouraged "loyal country people" from settling there.<sup>105</sup> Richard II was sufficiently concerned in 1391 to reduce the customs on the export of wool and hides because of the poverty and decline of the burgh.<sup>106</sup> That the situation was still bad when the Scots regained Berwick in 1461 is clear from reports in the Exchequer Rolls: in 1478, and from then until the English reconquest of 1482, fermes in and around the burgh were said to have been claimed by "diversas personas ecclesiasticas", but they were not recoverable

propter vastitatem earundem ac terrarum et tenementorum clamatorum per ecclesiam.

107

After the return of the English, the burgesses of Berwick petitioned Edward IV's parliament early in 1483, stating that the burgh

at this tyme is so pore and desolate, that th'enhabit-auntez of the same there may not long abide onlesse your ample grace to theym, and other intendyng theder to resorte and there to abide, be shewed.

108



There is a consistent pattern of devastation evident here, although it is possible that there may have been a temporary recovery between Richard II's act of 1391 and the Scottish attack in 1461. But surely nobody who knew Berwick in the fifteenth century could have described it, even within the limits of literary convention, as the "moist fair, most gudly, most plesand to be sene". If irony is intended, its object remains obscure, but it is difficult, on several grounds, to take this eulogy at face value.

The opening is all the more puzzling since it has virtually nothing to do with the main action of the poem. We are introduced immediately to two Dominican friars, Allane and Robert, whose style and behaviour will ultimately be contrasted with that of the Franciscan, Friar Johine. Despite the fact that the Dominicans are in general more sympathetically presented than Johine, there are allusions even in the initial description of them to the unsavoury reputation of the mendicant orders:

Thir silly Freiris with wyffis weill cowlde gluder,  
Rycht wondir weill plesit thai all wyffis  
And tawld thame tailis of haly sanctis lyffis .....

(32-4)

The Chaucerian echoes here certainly pave the way for the amorous adventures of the Franciscan Johine, but at the same time it is true that the Dominicans, and particularly Freir Allane, are "silly" (that is, innocent) by comparison with him. Freir Robert is, to be sure, a more complex case, and his character is by far the most subtle and interesting in the poem. The poet prepares his ground from the beginning, lightly touching upon the fact that Robert is "young and verry hett of blude" (l.

39). The first part of the action, in which Alesone the innkeeper's wife entertains the Dominicans, contains a number of further hints and suggestions, from Allane's initial use of "herbryt" in l. 48 (a word which will be fully exploited later) to Alesone's hypocritical protestations of virtue:

'The gudman is fra hame, as I yow tald,  
And God it wait, gif I durst be so bald  
To herbry Freiris in this hous with me,  
Quhat wald Symon say, ha, benedicite,  
Bot in his absence I abusit his place?  
Our deir Lady Mary keip me fra sic cace,  
And keip me owt of perrell and of schame.'

(81-7)

It will shortly emerge that Alesone's reluctance to accept guests arises from her assignation with her Franciscan lover, but there is also perhaps a gentler irony here which springs from the reputation of all friars, and the mild ambiance of sensuality which pervades the whole scene. The sins of the Dominicans — neglect of the curfew imposed by their Rule, enjoyment of good food, drink and the company of a pretty woman — are minor by comparison with the lasciviousness of Freir Johine, but there can be no question of their complete innocence.

This moral difference is reflected in the language and imagery of the first and second scenes. Whereas the poverty of the Dominicans is not in doubt, Freir Johine has "silver and gold ... abundantly" (l. 126), and the clothes which Alesone puts on for her meeting with him are correspondingly described in terms of silver and gold. In the establishment of this difference of tone, I think the lines objected to by Mackay Mackenzie because of their "coarseness and apparent character



as an interpolation" are probably to be accepted, since their undeniable vulgarity helps to show the mere lust on which Alesone's relationship with Johine is founded.<sup>109</sup> If their motivation is not in doubt, however, the same can hardly be said of Robert. He has earlier announced his intention of staying awake, asking rhetorically

'Quha wait perchance sum sport I ma espy?'

(115)

When the love-making is at its height, the poet reminds us of his interest, giving us more information about the state of his mind:

Freir Robert had ane littill jelosy,  
For in his hairt he had ane persaving,  
And throw the burdis he maid with his botkin  
A littill hoill .....

(168-71)

Again, the effect of these lines is to implicate Robert in Johine's sins: although the Dominican does not have the opportunity, his vicarious interest in the scene below suggests that he is perhaps subject to the same lecherous impulses. He is not in a strong moral position to adopt the role of defender of justice.

The return of Alesone's husband, however, precipitates a situation in which he can do precisely that. We see first the wife's ingenuity, as she hides lover and meal, and then her hypocrisy as she pretends to refuse to answer the door:

'Go hens,' scho sayis, 'for Symon is fra hame,  
And I will herbry no gaistis heir perfey;  
Thairfoir I pray yow to wend on your way,  
For at this tyme ye may nocht lugit be.'

(226-9)

Again there is the play on "herbry", which has now quite

definitely started to take on sexual connotations. The richness of the feast Alesone prepared for Freir Johine is now contrasted with the humble fare — "ane sowsit nolt fute and scheipheid" (l. 248) — which she produces for Symon. This provides Robert with his excuse for exposing her:

'Allace, gud bruder deir,  
I wald the gudman wist that we wer heir,  
Quha wait perchance sum bettir wald he fair;  
For sickerly my hairt will ay be sair  
Gif yone scheipheid with Symon birneist be,  
Sa mekill gud cheir being in the almerie.'

(257-62)

The zeal for justice which he claims is perhaps undermined by the interest he has previously shown in the love-making, and also by the prospect of sharing in the feast, which he subsequently does. It seems quite clear that Robert, too, is a victim of the poet's irony.

The exposure of Alesone's secrets (since she herself is never openly implicated) comes in two stages, handled by the poet with considerable skill. Robert introduces himself as a conjurer, and begins by offering to produce a feast. His elaborate preparations are described in great detail, building suspense and providing a comic image of the charlatan at work. But the poet is more interested in the effect on Alesone:

Syne in the sowth he turnit him abowt  
Weill thryis, and mair than lawly coud he lowt,  
Quhen that he come neir the almery.  
Thairat our dame had woundir grit invy,  
For in her hairt scho had ane persaving  
That he had knawin all hir govirning.  
Scho saw him gif the almery sic a straik,  
Unto hir self scho said, 'Full weill I wait  
I am bot schent, he knawis full weill my thocht;  
Quhat sall I do? Allace, that I wes wrocht!  
Get Symon wit, it wilbe deir doing.'

(328-38)



This presentation of the scene through Alesone's eyes is a very considerable coup, and it contributes greatly to the overall effect. We are led in part to sympathize with her in her plight, although at the same time we remain aware of the misbehaviour which has brought her to this situation. There is an interesting echo, as well, of the earlier situation of Freir Robert, who also "had ane persaving". The repetition of this phrase is not, I think, merely coincidental, or due to a lack of invention on the part of the poet. It is part of a continual process of conscious patterning, and it has the effect of linking Alesone's deceptions with Robert's: both characters live by their wits, and despite their faults they are the most attractive people in the poem. Robert is evidently fully aware of Alesone's discomfiture, to which he adds by making her open the cupboard to reveal his "feat". By doing so, he provides a real test of her acting ability:

Scho stert abak, as scho wer in a fray,  
 And sanyt hir, and smyland coud scho say,  
 'Ha, banedicitie, quhat may this bene?  
 Quha evir afoir hes sic a fairly sene?  
 Sa grit a mervell as now hes apnit heir,  
 Quhat sall I say? He is ane haly Freir,  
 He said full suth of all that he did say.'

(360-6)

Not the least attractive aspect of the scene is the conspiracy of silence which evidently develops between Alesone and Robert, each of whom is fully aware of the underlying motives of the other.

Having consumed his share of the feast, Robert turns his attention to the hidden Freir Johine. The food has been brought, he says, again ironically alluding to his knowledge of

the facts, by a servant of his, whom he will now cause to appear. Since we have already been told that Johine brought part of the feast (ll. 150-5), these references work both directly to the audience and indirectly through the effect which we know they must be having upon Alesone. So, too, with Robert's jovial allusions to the ugliness of the Franciscan:

'... ye sall weill undirstand,  
That ye may se him graithly in his awin kynd,  
Bot ye annone sowld go owt of your mynd,  
He is so fowll and ugly for to se;  
I dar nocht awnter for to tak on me  
To bring him hidder heir in to our sicht,  
And namely now so lait in to the nicht;  
Bot gif it wer on sic a maner wyis  
Him to translait or ellis dissagyis  
Fra his awin kynd in to ane uder stait.'

(439-48)

Fortuitously, Symon says that he would like the magical servant to appear as a friar, and the purpose of Robert's proviso is ostensibly to provide an excuse for the form in which the hidden Franciscan will emerge. From a comic point of view, however, his remarks clearly refer to the ugliness of Johine himself, and are intended to add further to Aleson's discomfiture.

The discussion about the nature of the apparition also contributes both to the theme of the rivalry between the Dominicans and the Franciscans and the more general, and ultimately more important, strand of anti-mendicant satire. Symon wants to see the spirit not merely "in liknes of a Freir" (l. 455) but as a Dominican, and Robert's reply is again directed not only to Symon and, in a sense, to the audience, but also to Johine, who is invisible but presumably within earshot:

'Untill our ordour it wer a grit dispyte,  
That ony sic unworthy wicht as he  
In till our habeit men sowld behald or se.



Bot sen it pleisis yow that ar heir,  
 Ye sall him se in liknes of a Freir;  
 In habeit gray it was his kynd to weir,  
 Into sic wys that he sall no man deir.'

(461-6)

The recurrence of the phrase "in liknes of a Freir" is here a clue to the irony, since it plainly suggests that Johine is not, in a moral sense at least, a true friar. It has strong connections with the satirical tradition of the "fencyeit freir", which is represented in Scots by Dunbar's How dunbar wes desyrd to be ane freir, in which the same phrase occurs.<sup>110</sup> To this extent, the misbehaviour of which Johine is guilty separates him from the authentic mendicant tradition. On another level, however, Robert suggests that such conduct, while unthinkable in a Dominican, is precisely what one should expect of a Franciscan, whose habit is, given the multiple meaning of Robert's words, appropriate both to a necromancer's assistant and to a lecher. It is not clear how far the poet himself intends us to take this anti-Franciscan bias seriously. The rivalry of the orders adds to the comic richness of The Freiris of Berwik, but, as we have seen, the Dominicans and especially Robert are not immune from implicit criticism, and it seems that the satire is ultimately directed against mendicants in general, and not solely against the Grey Friars. On the other hand, we are left in no doubt about the greater sinfulness of Freir Johine, and Robert is, albeit ironically, given the role of instrument of justice.

The ambiguity which dominates the latter part of the poem continues in Robert's address to his "servant":

'In thy depairting se thow mak no deray

Unto no wicht, bot frely pas thy way;  
 And in this place se that thow cum no moir,  
 Bot I command the, or ellis the charge befoir;  
 And our the stair se that thow ga gud speid;  
 Gif thow dois nocht, on thy awin perrell beid.'

(508-13)

In these lines Robert is most obviously presented as a kind of moral arbiter, determined not merely to have a jest at Johine's expense but also to ensure that he henceforth leaves Alesone alone. This moral role is conveyed through the double-meaning of his invocation, in which again he is evidently communicating with Johine in a way which Symon does not suspect. Symon, indeed, is the stereotype deceived husband of the fabliau tradition, and it is important to the comedy of the poem that he should remain oblivious to the hidden nuances of the events. Robert even tells him to hit the apparition as it passes by, thus allowing him unknowingly to punish his wife's lover. From the comic point of view, Symon's ignorance is of the greatest importance, since it provides the standard by which we can measure the secrets shared among the other characters. In moral terms, however, it complicates the issue, for although (and, in a way, because) he is always the victim, finally suffering a greater physical injury than Johine himself, it is impossible to sympathize with him in his stupidity. This is always a problem with the cuckolded husband of the fabliau — similar difficulties surround, for example, the moral world of Chaucer's Miller's Tale <sup>111</sup> — and the moral tone of The Freiris of Berwik is best represented by the off-hand summary with which the poet concludes his tale:

Thus Symonis heid upoun the stane wes brokin,  
 And our the stair the Freir in myre hes loppin,



And tap our taill he fyld wes woundir ill;  
And Alesone on na wyis gat hir will.

(558-61)

As a moralitas, this summary leaves a great deal to be desired. It mixes justice with injustice, and it somewhat obscures the unfairness of the fact that whereas Symon comes to physical harm, Alesone gets off with nothing worse than frustration. It leaves untouched, also, the ambiguous moral role of Freir Robert, who is less than satisfactory as an ethical touchstone. While the poem is clearly concerned with moral problems, therefore, it is very far from offering simple answers. Like many fabliaux, on the contrary, it seems to accept the manifest unfairness of much human life, and to regard sexuality as a rich source of comedy and the ridiculous. The poet clearly condemns the abuses of the mendicants, but he never moralizes overtly himself, and the moral position adopted by Robert is undermined by what we learn of his motives. Our moral judgments are formed only through the subtlety with which the poet manipulates the irony, a technique which reveals a keen sensitivity to the unconscious meanings of the words we use. It is no coincidence that, quite early in the poem, he makes Alesone welcome her lover with the words

'... Ye ar full hertly welcome heir  
At ony tyme, quhen that ye list appeir,'

(159-60)

the final phrase of which acquires only greater resonance in the light of subsequent events. The poet's disapproval of the conduct of Alesone and Freir Johine is clear enough, but he never interferes with the effect of the comic irony by directly saying so.

The eight poems discussed in this chapter have in common a concern with what might broadly be called ethical questions. With the partial exception of The Quare of Jelusy, they employ a narrative framework as a vehicle for the communication of ideas, but beyond these broad similarities we are primarily conscious of the contrasts between the approaches of the various poets. No single critical formula can adequately account for the differences in technique which distinguish exemplum from fabliau, formal psychological allegory from allegorical exemplum, or linked tales with romance elements from a romance with moral overtones. Undeniably, medieval poets, like writers of any period, wrote because they had something to say. The form of their creations was no doubt moulded by many factors: the tastes of their audience, the limitations and possibilities of the genres they chose, the extent to which they wished to make a point explicit. A wide-ranging reading of Middle Scots poetry tends to produce an impression of great flexibility in the handling of these various elements, which should caution any critic tempted to posit a comprehensive theory of ulterior meaning. Every Middle Scots poem, like every other medieval poem, must be approached on its own terms, without any over-riding assumptions based on modern theories or the observations of medieval exegetes. It is possible to distinguish a large number of genres which were current in the medieval Scottish literary tradition (all of which have analogues elsewhere in Western Europe), and I have also been attempting to define by illustration several modes of relationship between literal and



ulterior meanings; I am doubtful whether it is in practice feasible to develop from these distinctions a watertight set of narrative categories, precisely because of the flexibility with which the genres and modes are employed by medieval poets. The flexibility has so far been demonstrated with respect to particular poems and, I think, to the tradition as a whole; but it can also be observed within the corpus of each of the major poets. It is to this stage of the argument that we must now proceed.

Notes to Chapter II

- 1 John Norton-Smith (ed.), The Kingis Quair (Oxford 1971), p. xxxi, says "almost certainly c. 1488", which is the earliest possible date. More cautiously, M.P. McDiarmid (ed.), The Kingis Quair of James Stewart (London 1973), pp. 2-4, suggests limits of 1488-c.1505. A detailed study of watermark and other bibliographical evidence leads me to believe that a date close to 1490 is probably correct.
- 2 The original contents of the Asloan MS. are recorded in Asloan's own table of contents, printed in The Asloan Manuscript, ed. W.A. Craigie (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1923-4), I, xiii-xv.
- 3 See note 93 below.
- 4 See the discussion of The Bludy Serk, below, pp. 144-52.
- 5 For a survey of the medieval use of framing devices, see W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Chicago 1941), pp. 1-33, esp. 6-11.
- 6 The only surviving copy is in the Asloan MS. Not only does Asloan's copy-text appear to have been defective (cf. the lacuna between ll. 176-7, for example), but his MS. has been damaged, resulting in further losses. Quotations are from Craigie's edition of the MS., cited above, II, 127-40; I have provided my own punctuation.
- 7 See my article, "Politics and Poetry in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Scotland", SLJ 3 (2) (December 1976), 5-29.
- 8 Gesta Romanorum, ed. H. Oesterley (Berlin 1872), pp. 378-80; Gesta Romanorum, ed. S.J.H. Herrtage (EETS, London 1879), pp. 19-22; Johannes Bromyard, Summa predicantium (Antwerp, H. Verders 1614), p. 59; Vincent of Beauvais, Speculum morale (Douai, B. Beller 1624), cols. 971-2; An Alphabet of Tales, ed. M.M. Banks (EETS, London 1904-5), II, 483-4. For a list of further examples, see Stith Thompson, A Motif-Index of Folk Literature (2nd edn, 6 vols, Bloomington, Ind. 1955-8), IV, 138.
- 9 Gesta Romanorum, ed. Herrtage, p. 22.
- 10 The Asloan text begins in the middle of this discussion. Line 3 ("This pleasant way þe way is of dissait") alludes quite clearly to the allegorical significance of the two paths.



- 11 It is found in Bower's Scotichronicon, ed. W. Goodall (Edinburgh 1759), II, 230 , and is alluded to early in the sixteenth century by Major and Boece. A version of it is also found in Hary's Wallace, XII, 1238-1301, ed. M.P. McDiarmid (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1968-9), II, 116-7.
- 12 As early as c. 1420, Wyntoun alludes to the "grit gestis and sangis" made about Wallace: Original Cronykyl, VIII, 2299-2306, ed. F.J. Amours (STS, 6 vols, Edinburgh 1902-9), V, 319.
- 13 D. Laing, Select Remains of the Ancient Popular and Romance Poetry of Scotland, ed. J. Small (Edinburgh/London 1885), p. 279.
- 14 The use of "Coppok" here casts some light on Henryson's Schir Chantecleir and the Foxe, where Chantecleir's third wife is called "Coppok" in Bannatyne and "Toppok" by the sixteenth-century printers. Asloan's reading of "Coppok" supports Bannatyne; but the uncertainty in dating of both the Talis and Henryson's Morall Fabillis precludes any inference about the nature of the textual relationship.
- 15 The corresponding passages are ll. 1361-8 and 1453-92 of the Speculum stultorum, ed. J.H. Mozley and R.R. Raymo (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1960), pp. 61-4.
- 16 The deprecatory tone of "sumpart" is obvious. This part of the passage has affinities with the portrait of the Squire in Chaucer's General Prologue, whose attainments are in some respects similar (Canterbury Tales, A, 91-100, Works, ed. F.N. Robinson [2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass. 1957], p. 18).
- 17 For some examples of the pejorative connotations of the colour green in the fifteenth century, cf. D.A. Pearsall (ed.), The Floure and the Leafe and The Assembly of Ladies (London 1962), pp. 36-7.
- 18 This lack of resolution of narrative and moralitas should be compared with, for example, Henryson's Bludy Serk, where great care is taken to integrate the two elements (see below, pp.
- 19 No probable source for the version of the story in the Talis has been found, but there is a fifteenth-century Spanish analogue in El libro de los exemplos par a.b.c., ed. J.E. Keller (Madrid 1961), p. 184, where the exemplum illustrates the proposition that "Juramentum in malum quondam vertit in bonum".
- 20 There is a striking parallel here with the mendicant wolf

of Henryson's Taill how this foirsaid Tod maid his Confessioun, which does not appear to have any precise precedent in beast-epic tradition.

- 21 R.D.S. Jack, "The Thre Prestis of Peblis and the Growth of Humanism in Scotland", RES n.s. 26 (1975), 257-70, at 258.
- 22 Cf. one of the sermons in MS. Royal 18.B.xxiii, where a group of allegorical and non-allegorical exempla is similarly arranged in a pattern of threes (Middle English Sermons, ed. W.O. Ross [EETS, London 1940], pp. 175-87).
- 23 Quotations from The Thre Prestis are from the edition by T.D. Robb (STS, Edinburgh 1926).
- 24 Cf. Jack, op. cit., 269-70.
- 25 The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, ed. Sr M.A. Devlin (Camden Society, 2 vols, London 1954), I, 194.
- 26 See the classic discussion of the implications of this social theme for later medieval English literature (and particularly Piers Plowman) in G.R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (2nd edn, Oxford 1961), pp. 548-93.
- 27 Lyall, "Politics and Poetry", passim.
- 28 As suggested by R.D.S. Jack, The Italian Influence in Scottish Literature (Edinburgh 1972), pp. 19-20.
- 29 Jack, "Growth of Humanism", 259-60.
- 30 Jack (Italian Influence, p. 16) asserts that "the poet had read Il Decamerone, probably in the original, but possibly in a French translation". I do not know why the former should be more probable than the latter, since Laurent de Premierfait's translation (1414) circulated in manuscript during the fifteenth century; cf. Patricia M. Gathercole, "Boccaccio in French", Studi sul Boccaccio, 5 (1968), 275-97. On the other hand, the Italian original was printed in 1471, and several more editions appeared by 1500, whereas the earliest extant edition of Laurent's version was produced in 1510.
- 31 Sebastian Brant, Das Narrenschiff, ed. Manfred Lemmer (Tübingen 1962). The French translator, Pierre Rivière, illustrates the point by quoting from Lactantius: "Stulticia est in factis dictisque per ignorantiam boni atque recti



- erratio", (Paris, Mansteuer and Marnef 1497), f. \*1<sup>r</sup>. Cf. A. Pompen, The English Versions of the Ship of Fools (London 1925), pp. 289-91.
- 32 W.O. Ross notes twenty-three occurrences in sermons and preachers' manuals, op. cit., p. 345. For details of some of these, cf. note 36 below; cf. also the bibliographical note by Oesterley, op. cit., p. 733.
- 33 Jack, "Growth of Humanism", 269.
- 34 *ibid.*, 270.
- 35 The suggestion regarding the Gesta Romanorum, see Jack, Italian Influence, pp. 18-9. For the relationship with Barlaam et Josaphat, see Robb, ed. cit., pp. xxviii-xxxii.
- 36 The extant versions of the exemplum offer a number of related interpretations; in addition to those mentioned in the text, note the isolated version in MS. Harley 1288, f. 54<sup>v</sup>, which is in some respects closer to the Scots poem. For a fuller discussion of the issue, see my forthcoming article, "The Sources of The Thre Prestis of Peblis and Their Significance", (RES).
- 37 Cf. Jacobus de Voragine (Cologne, Conrad de Hoemborch 1476), f. 305<sup>r</sup>; MS. Harley 1288, f. 54<sup>v</sup>.
- 38 I certainly do not mean to suggest that The Thre Prestis of Peblis is a failure as a work of art; merely that its methods are on the whole more explicit than those of The Talis of the Fyve Bestes.
- 39 Quotations are from The Bannatyne Manuscript, ed. W. Tod Ritchie (STS, 4 vols, Edinburgh 1927-33), IV, 279-308; I have provided my own punctuation.
- 40 Cf., for example, D.W. Robertson Jr, "Some Medieval Literary Terminology, with special reference to Chrétien de Troyes", SP 48 (1951), 669-92.
- 41 G.F. Jones, Wittenwiler's 'Ring' and the Anonymous Scots Poem 'Colkelbie Sow' (Chapel Hill 1956), p. 210; DOST, sb. 'fantastik', 1.
- 42 Sir Philip Sidney, Apologie for Poesie, ed. E. Arber (London 1909), p. 54.
- 43 OED, sb. 'fantastic', 6.

- 44 Jones, op. cit., p. 229.
- 45 The extent of the difference may readily be gauged, however, by comparing Colkelbie Sow with such straightforward moral expositions of the liberality theme as Hoccleve's Regement of Prynces, 4124-4746, ed. F.J. Furnivall (EETS, London 1897), pp. 149-71; and Alexander Barclay's Mirroure of Good Maners (Spenser Society, London 1885), pp. 38-41.
- 46 Jones, op. cit., pp. 226-7.
- 47 Thus in an unpublished paper presented to the First International Conference on Scottish Language and Literature, Medieval and Renaissance, Edinburgh, September 1975 ("Some Attitudes to Poetry in Late Fifteenth Century Scotland"), I.W.A. Jamieson describes the derivation of Flandria as "a monstrous piece of etymology".
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 Isidore, Allegoriae Quaedam Scripturae Sacrae, ccii, PL. 83: 124.
- 50 Bede, In Matthei Evangelium Expositio, iv, PL. 92: 107-9; Rabanus Maurus, Commentarium in Mattheum, vii, PL. 107: 1089; Thomas Aquinas, Super Evangelium Sancti Matthei Lectura, 2031-77, ed. R. Cai OP (Turin/Rome 1951), p. 318.
- 51 Gregory, Homeliae in Evangelia, ix, 1, PL. 76: 1106.
- 52 For a discussion of this approach to the study of medieval literature, see below, pp. 479-82.
- 53 Prologue, 19-22, 65-6; II, 1-3 (but cf. II, 6, "now will I wryte"), 258; III, 71. On the question of oral performance at this period, see Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages", Speculum 11 (1936), 88-110; and "Chaucer and the Custom of Oral Delivery", Speculum 13 (1938), 413-32.
- 54 His identity is uncertain: he may be the James Auchinleck named by Dunbar, but the MS. colophon (sometimes read as "Quod Auch——") is indistinct. For a suggestion regarding the identity of Dunbar's "James Affleck", see my article "Two of Dunbar's Makars: James Affleck and Sir John the Ross", Innes Review 27 (1976), 99-109.
- 55 E.g. "O mortall man, remember nycht and day" by "Lichon monicus", Bannatyne MS., ed. Ritchie, II, 119-20; "Consider man, all is bot vanitie", *ibid.*, II, 125-6, The Thre Deid Pollis, *ibid.*, II, 142-5, and The Maitland Folio Manuscript,



- ed. W.A. Craigie (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1913-27), I, 394-5 (ascribed in the latter MS. to Henryson); "Meiknes with mesour", *ibid.*, I, 343. Many further examples could be added.
- 56 Quotations are from the edition by J. Norton-Smith and I. Pravda (Heidelberg 1976).
- 57 W.W. Skeat, "The Author of 'Lancelot of the Laik'", *SHR* 8 (1910-11), 1-4; M.M. Gray, "Vidas Achinlek, Chevalier", *ibid.*, 321-4.
- 58 E.g. C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford 1936), pp. 287-90. The most recent, and most detailed, analysis of the poem is that by Sheila Delany, "King Hart: Rhetoric and Meaning in a Middle Scots Allegory", *Neophilologus* 55 (1971), 328-41. Although I disagree with Delany, both on many details and to some extent in general emphasis, I am much indebted to her thorough and perceptive exposition of the allegory.
- 59 As Delany acknowledges, the division derives from Pinkerton's edition of King Hart in Ancient Scottish Poems (London 1786).
- 60 The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt. (STS, Edinburgh 1967), pp. lvii-lxvi.
- 61 Quotations are from Bawcutt's edition, *ibid.*, pp. 141-70. It is now generally agreed that the poem was not written by Douglas: see Priscilla Preston (Bawcutt), "Did Gavin Douglas Write King Hart?", *Medium Aevum* 28 (1959), 31-47; and Florence H. Ridley, "Did Gawin Douglas Write King Hart?", *Speculum* 34 (1959), 402-12.
- 62 Delany, *op. cit.*, 330.
- 63 Shorter Poems, ed. Bawcutt, p. lxii; Delany, *op. cit.*, 328.
- 64 Among the more obvious examples of the use of Sensuality are Lydgate's Reson and Sensuallite (a partial translation of the French poem Les Echechs amoureux), ed. E. Sieper (EETS, 2 vols, London 1901-3); and The Assembly of Gods, ed. O.L. Triggs (EETS, London 1896), which was formerly attributed to Lydgate.
- 65 Shorter Poems, ed. Bawcutt, pp. lxix-lxx.
- 66 Delany, *op. cit.*, 330.
- 67 Cf. "Off luve and trewth", l. 26, Secular Lyrics of the XIVth

- and XVth Centuries, ed. R.H. Robbins (2nd edn, Oxford 1955), p. 131; "Excellent soueraine, semely to see", l. 90, *ibid.*, p. 212; and among Scottish examples, "Fresche fragrent flour", ll. 1, 46, Bannatyne MS., ed. Ritchie, III, 266-9; "Bayth gud and fair and womanlie", l. 11, *ibid.*, III, 275.
- 68 E.g. Boethius, Philosophiae consolatio, III, m. 2, ed. L. Bieler (CCSL, Turnhout 1957), pp. 40-1. On the medieval treatments of Natura, see Edgar Knowlton, "The Goddess Nature in Early Periods", JEGP 19 (1920), 224-53; E.R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. W.R. Trask (New York 1953), pp. 106-27; J.A.W. Bennett, "Natura, Nature and Kind", in The Parlement of Foules (Oxford 1957), pp. 194-212; and most recently, George D. Economou, The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, Mass. 1972).
- 69 Cf. for example, G. Paré, 'Le Roman de la Rose' et la Scolastique Courtoise (Paris/Ottawa 1941), pp. 146-82; A.M.F. Gunn, The Mirror of Love (Lubbock, Texas 1952), pp. 396-410; D.W. Robertson Jr, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton 1963), pp. 199-202; John V. Fleming, The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography (Princeton 1969), pp. 185-220; and Economou, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-24.
- 70 The Anglo-Latin Satirical Poets of the Twelfth Century, ed. T. Wright (Rolls Series, 2 vols, London 1872), I, 248.
- 71 Le Roman de la Rose, ll. 17763-844, ed. Félix Leçoy (3 vols, Paris 1965-70), III, 33-6.
- 72 Delany, *op. cit.*, 336.
- 73 So Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, 21, 4, ed. Thomas Gilby OP et al. (60 vols, London 1964- ), V, 84-5, quoting Gregory, Moralia in Job, xxvi, 13, PL 76: 360:  
Mala quae in hoc mundo nos premunt ad Deum nos ire compellunt.
- 74 Although there are classical precedents, medieval uses of the metaphor largely spring from John of Salisbury, Polycraticus, V, 2, ed. C.C.J. Webb (2 vols, Oxford 1909), I, 283. Cf. Aquinas, De regimine principum, xii, in Selected Political Writings, ed. A.P. d'Entrèves (Oxford 1959), p. 66; Brinton, Sermons, *ed. cit.*, I, 111; Langland, Piers Plowman, B-text, XIX, 463-73, ed. W.W. Skeat (2 vols, Oxford 1886), I, 576-8; Lydgate, The Fall of Princes, ed. Henry Bergen (EETS, 4 vols, London 1924-7), I, 221-5.
- 75 Polycraticus, *ed. cit.*, I, 282-3: "Princeps uero capitis in re publica optinet locum uni subiectus Deo et his qui uices illius agunt in terris, quoniam et in corpore humano ab anima uegetatur caput et regitur." It is interesting to observe



that Aquinas assigns this ruling function to the heart:  
De regimine principum, ed. cit., p. 66.

- 76 E. Ruth Harvey, The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (London 1975), pp. 22-3, 34-5.
- 77 The word is used tentatively by Delany, op. cit., 330. It is fair to add that her final argument appears to reject the notion.
- 78 *ibid.*, 331.
- 79 This is reflected in the Roman de la Rose by the debate of Dangier with Franchise and Pitie, ll. 3231-3308, ed. Leçoy, I, 99-102.
- 80 Delany, op. cit., 337.
- 81 Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, I, 683, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 249.
- 82 It was suggested by Agnes Mure Mackenzie, "The Renaissance Poets: Scots and English", in Scottish Poetry, A Critical Survey, ed. J. Kinsley (London 1955), p. 36, that the only text, in the Maitland Folio MS., may be incomplete.
- 83 Delany, op. cit., 338-9.
- 84 Cf. for example, the discussion of ratio and intellectus in John of Salisbury, Metalogicon, IV, 15-20, ed. C.C.J. Webb (Oxford 1929), pp. 180-7.
- 85 Delany, op. cit., 339.
- 86 *ibid.*, 340.
- 87 Eger and Grime, ed. J.R. Caldwell (Cambridge, Mass. 1933).
- 88 A copy was in the lost part of the Asloan MS., and the poem is alluded to by both Gavin Douglas (The Palice of Honoure, l. 1711, Shorter Poems, ed. Bawcutt, p. 109) and Dunbar (Poems, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie [3rd edn, London 1960], p. 42) in the first decade of the sixteenth century.
- 89 Quotations are from Scottish Alliterative Poems, ed. F.J. Amours (STS, Edinburgh 1897), pp. 82-114.

- 90     ibid., p. xxxix.
- 91     Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, D, 1113-6, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 87.
- 92     Buonaccorso's Controversia is not accessible in any modern edition. Tiptoft's translation, The Declamacion of Noblesse, was edited by R.J. Mitchell in John Tiptoft (London 1938), pp. 215-41, while Medwall's Fulgens and Lucres is in Five Pre-Shakespearean Comedies, ed. F.S. Boas (Oxford 1934), pp. 1-72. With these views compare Andrew Cadiou's Porteous of Noblenes, a late fifteenth-century Scots translation of Alain Chartier's Breviaire de Noblesse, where nobility, although essentially hereditary, is again given a moral basis: Asloan MS., ed. W.A. Craigie (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1923-4), I, 171-84.
- 93     A late ascription in the Bannatyne MS. assigns this poem to "Mofat", presumably the "Schir Johine Moffett" to whom Bannatyne himself ascribed another poem (cf. Bannatyne MS., ed. Ritchie, IV, 28). This latter is probably the same as the Sir John Moffat (or "de Monte Fixo") who was Master of the grammar school in Dunfermline in 1519, and who was still active as a notary public in 1525. He was no longer schoolmaster in 1530, and may have died by then. Cf. Burgh Records of Dunfermline (Edinburgh 1917), nos. 298, 168, 270; I am grateful to Dr John Durkan for these references. Note, however, the existence of at least two other priests of the same name, both notaries: Johannes de Monte Fixo, alias Moffeth, a priest of Glasgow and bedellus of the University of Glasgow (GU Archives, no. 12425), and Johannes de Moffet, priest of Dunkeld (Dumbarton Charters and Documents, no. 63), who occur in 1452 and 1468 respectively. The later date for the poem is however supported by the linguistic evidence, for which see E.F. Guy, "Some Comic and Burlesque Poems in Two Sixteenth Century Scottish Manuscript Anthologies" (Edinburgh, unpubl. Ph.D. diss., 1952).
- 94     Thompson, op. cit., IV, 214; A. Aarne, The Types of the Folktale, trans. Stith Thompson (Helsinki 1964), pp. 415-6.
- 95     Quotations are from Bannatyne MS., ed. Ritchie, II, 320-4; I have provided my own punctuation.
- 96     Cf. the comments by A.J. Aitken, "Oral Narrative Style in Middle Scots", in Actes du 2<sup>e</sup> Colloque de Langue et de Littérature Écossaises (Moyen Age et Renaissance), ed. J.-J. Blanchot and C. Graf (Strasbourg 1979), pp. 98-112, esp. pp. 103-6.
- 97     C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding Drama (Oxford 1954), p. 99.



- 98 Esp. "Le Povre Clerc", in Recueil général des fabliaux des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles, ed. A. de Montaiglon and G. Reynaud (6 vols, Paris 1872-90), V, 192-200.
- 99 Quotations are from the text in Dunbar, Poems, ed. Mackenzie, pp. 182-95.
- 100 Cf. Canterbury Tales, A, 3187; A, 3921-4; D, 1709-10, ed. Robinson, pp. 48, 56, 94.
- 101 RMS, I, 331.
- 102 Rot. Scot., I, 258.
- 103 LP., XIV, 194.
- 104 Cal. Docs. Scot., III, 278-9.
- 105 *ibid.*, IV, 9.
- 106 *ibid.*, IV, 95.
- 107 Exch. Rolls, VIII, 551-2, 633-4; IX, 81-2, 157-8.
- 108 Rot. Parl., VI, 224-5.
- 109 Dunbar, Poems, ed. Mackenzie, p. 233. There is a problem in the variants between the Bannatyne and Maitland MSS., but these texts differ considerably throughout, and there is really no greater reason to reject these lines on the ground of indecency than others where the two versions do not agree.
- 110 *ibid.*, p. 4. On the tradition, see A.G. Rigg, "William Dunbar: 'The Fenyeit Freir'", RES n.s. 14 (1963), 269-73.
- 111 Cf. Earle Birney, "The Inhibited and the Uninhibited: Ironic Structure in The Miller's Tale", Neophilologus 44 (1960), 333-8; W.F. Bolton, "The Miller's Tale: An Interpretation", Medieval Studies 24 (1962), 83-94; Paul A. Olson, "Poetic Justice in the Miller's Tale", MLQ 24 (1963), 227-36, and now Thomas D. Cooke, The Old French and Chaucerian Fabliaux: A Study of Their Comic Climax (Columbia, Miss./London 1978), pp. 176-85.

### CHAPTER III

Henryson: Allegorical and Non-allegorical  
Modes



In the preceding chapters, we have observed the variety of ways in which a narrative might be related to its ulterior meaning in medieval texts, and traced the complex manner in which these possible relationships were in fact employed and developed by a number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Scottish poets. It will perhaps not be surprising, then, if we find something of the same multiplicity of modes of meaning in the works of a single poet, particularly when the poet in question is the learned and witty Robert Henryson. As we have already seen, in the reading of particular texts the distinctions which were suggested in Chapter I are not always simple to apply. On the surface, Henryson makes things easy for us. Sometimes he points to the allegorical sense by the use of a moralitas, sometimes the absence of any such explicit statement of meaning suggests a less direct kind of relationship between the literal sense and the "true" meaning. But the position is in reality more complicated, for several reasons. First, as we shall see in Chapter IV, not all Henryson's moralitates are genuinely allegorical. Secondly, even where the moralitas does offer an allegorical exposition of the narrative, as in The Bludy Serk and Orpheus and Erudices, there is a good deal of evidence that Henryson is at pains to expand his story in ways which are not explained by the moralitas, or may even appear to contradict it. And thirdly, in poems like Robene and Makyne and The Testament of Cresseid where there is no moralitas, it is far from clear what Henryson's intentions actually are, and in the case of the Testament at least critics have sometimes been tempted to create an allegorical reading even

though the text does not explicitly call for it. In this chapter I intend to discuss the latter four poems, in the hope that the basic distinction between allegorical and exemplary modes will help to illuminate the subtlety with which Henryson cloaks his moral observations in narrative form.

Henryson is fundamentally a narrative poet, and his narratives are short by medieval standards: the shortest is barely a hundred lines long (the briefest of the Morall Fabillis), the longest just over six hundred (Orpheus and Erudices and The Testament of Cresseid). This brevity is a characteristic of Henryson's technique: it has been commented upon in the context of the Testament by Edwin Muir and by A.C. Spearing,<sup>1</sup> but it extends to much of his other work as well. It is also an important element in the definition of meaning, since although he generally (though of course not quite universally) employs a moralitas to make explicit the moral import of his narrative, Henryson also controls our understanding of the meaning through an extremely concise organization of language within the narrative itself, and it is this interplay of implicit and explicit meaning within the framework of tightly-controlled narrative, and of established medieval genres, that we will be considering in the following pages.

Although The Bludy Serk has no overtly acknowledged source (this is in itself a point of some interest, to which we shall in a moment return), it is clear that here the exemplary tradition of medieval homily is represented. The story appears in



the Gesta Romanorum collection,<sup>2</sup> in various other collections of exempla, and in at least two actual sermons, in John Felton's manuscript set of Sermones dominicales and in a fifteenth-century English sermon in B.L. MS. Royal 18 B xxiii.<sup>3</sup> Henryson's poem differs in various details from each of these, and while it is therefore not possible to be certain of his immediate source, we can with profit examine the characteristics of his poetic version by contrast with its nearest prose analogues, not by way of source-hunting but as an investigation of the processes by which Henryson turned a small portion of a homiletic edifice into a free-standing poem. The story of the lady liberated by a knight who perishes in the struggle and whose memory she is enjoined to preserve was, like many others of its kind, quite generally current, and Henryson may have combined elements from a number of versions in composing The Bludy Serk. What is of interest is the way in which, while using the same basic plot and preserving a number of the central features of the exemplum (the very general character of the narrative, with un-named characters and an unspecified setting, and the concluding, didactic moralitas), he has produced a work which reads quite differently from its prose analogues.

On the one hand, Henryson appears to have developed quite deliberately the romance traits which his story already contained. The popularity of the tale of the sacrifice of Christ the lover-knight for his lady, the human soul, is a manifestation of that fruitful interaction of religious literature and romance which occurred in the later Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> The incarceration and rescue of the maiden is a familiar romance motif, and the

usefulness of such exempla to the medieval preacher no doubt arose from the literary tastes of his audience. But there is little evidence in most of the prose versions of the story of any desire to develop this underlying affinity with romance. In this respect, Bromyard's version may stand for all:

Exemplum ad hoc accipientes praesentis parabolae: de quodam haerede magnae haereditatis per cuiusdam tyranni malitiam exhaeredate: cui quidam amicus compatiens, tantum circa haereditatem suam recuperandum, eique restituendam laboravit: quod a fautoribus & ministris praedicti tyranni occisus fuit. instantum tamen processus processerat, quod statim post mortem istius amici heres ad haereditatem suam integre fuit restitutus: heres amico mortuo gratus vestes & arma sanguine aspersa, in camera sua posuit, ut uigam mortui haberet memoriam. Dictus vero tyrannus dolens, quod haeres sic haereditati suae restitutus fuisset, & statim suum recuperasset, per se & suos illum vniuersis modis decipere nitebatur, ut haereditatem suam venderet, vel commutaret vel alio modo alienaret: qui quotiens de hoc requirebatur, nihil sollicitabatur, antequam responderet, ad cameram currens, & sanguinem gratum & charum pro haereditate sua redimenda effusum respiciens: respondit se nolle haereditatem tanta morte & precio redemptam, quocunque modo vendere, vel alienare.

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The narrative technique here is, to say the least, sparse: none of the three characters is introduced by more than a couple of words, neither combat nor conversation is fully described, and the story can scarcely be said to have much dramatic reality. Nor, for that matter, has Bromyard given us many clues in the language of his narrative about its spiritual significance, for only the last couple of lines point us towards the moralitas.

But if in such a version as Bromyard's it is only the bare outline of the plot which suggests links with romance, Henryson has certainly taken pains to make his poem conform more closely to romance models. The verse-form, as has often been remarked,



is closely related to the ballad stanza,<sup>6</sup> but he builds octaves rather than quatrains of alternating tetrameters and trimeters, and his stanzas have as a result a fluent effect not unlike that of the various romance stanzas.<sup>7</sup> The Bludy Serk is a composite work, resembling in different ways the traditional ballad, the short "edifying romance",<sup>8</sup> and the exemplum, forms which were always related but which Henryson has fused in a unique manner.

The affinities of his poem with romance are enhanced by Henryson through the use of alliterative devices (including a few formulaic phrases) and at times of a decidedly courtly diction:

Off all fairheid scho bur the flour,  
And eik hir faderis air,  
Off lusty lait is and he honour,  
Meik bot and debonair.  
Scho wynnit in a bigly bour;  
On fold wes none so fair;  
princis luvit hir paramour,  
In cuntreis our all quhair.

(9-16)<sup>9</sup>

The medieval preacher characteristically spends little time on such details of effictio: even the relatively full accounts in the two versions of the Middle English Gesta Romanorum simply introduce the lady as "a maydyn ... myghty and riche", or even more brusquely as "a faire douter" of Emperor Fredericus.<sup>10</sup>

Henryson's description, by comparison, tells us a little at least about the lady's qualities, using alliterative formulae (ll. 9 and 14) and, as Dr I.W.A. Jamieson has pointed out, a list of superlatives to emphasize her beauty and sweet nature.<sup>11</sup> These stylistic echoes of romance convention are indeed introduced

from the very beginning of Henryson's poem:

This hindir yeir I hard be tald  
Thair was a worthy king .....

(1-2)

There is a great difference between this vague allusion to a source (with a hint of oral transmission), characteristic of the romance poet, and the preacher's authoritative "Ensample here-  
of I fynde in be Gestes of Rome."<sup>12</sup>

Henryson makes changes in the details of his story, too, which are consonant with the elements of romance style. Whereas the princess of the Gesta Romanorum and its closest analogues is seduced, deprived of her inheritance and exiled by quidam dux tyrannus, "an enviouse kyng, and full of giles",<sup>13</sup> the heroine of The Bludy Serk is imprisoned by a "fowll gyane of ane". Two consequences arise from this amendment: the replacement of the usurping rival by a giant gives an obvious link with the world of romance, and the Gesta allegory, of the seduction of the individual's soul by Sin, becomes rather an image of the soul's helpless (and quite unwilling) imprisonment by Lucifer. George S. Peek has in a recent article drawn our attention to this latter aspect of Henryson's treatment of the exemplum,<sup>14</sup> but the former is surely equally important. Again, Henryson pays more attention to description than do most medieval preachers:

He wes the laithliest on to luk  
that on the ground mycht gang;  
His nailis wes lyk ane hellis cruk,  
Thairwith fyve quarteris lang.  
Thair wes nane that he ourtuk,  
In rycht or yit in wrang,  
Bot all in schondir he thame schuke —  
The gyane wes so strang.

(25-32)

Again, alliteration serves to reinforce the descriptive detail:



although the relative brevity of the portrait means that we know rather less about this giant than we do about his counterpart in, say, the alliterative Morte Arthure,<sup>15</sup> there are clear echoes in these formulaic lines which are as important for the romance context they help to establish as is the more spiritually significant imagery of the "hellis cruk" for its foreshadowing of the moralitas. We are reminded of romance, too, by the more innocent, suffering maiden of Henryson's poem, a recurring romance motif and, as Dieter Mehl has observed, a particular characteristic of the "homiletic" romance.<sup>16</sup>

I have so far been emphasizing the ways in which Henryson picks up the romance elements in his story, and develops them by the use of related poetic conventions. But the subtlety of his version of the exemplum depends upon the fact that these elements are interwoven with many little reminders of the poet's underlying moral intention. Henryson takes great care here to integrate narrative and moralitas: whereas stories in the great sermon and exemplum collections often seem to have a tacked-on allegorization, not required by the story in the form in which it is told, Henryson never allows the full significance of his tale to slip from the reader's mind, and the effect of the poem as a whole is therefore richer and more complex. This technique is apparent in the description of the giant quoted above. The giant, of course, is Lucifer, as the moralitas explains: his nails "lyk ane hellis cruk" work this Satanic theme into the poem itself, while the following lines,

Thair wes nane that he ourtuk,  
In rycht or yit in wrang,  
Bot all in schondir he thame schuke —

serve to remind us of the arbitrary nature of the Devil's power, since he can strike equally at sinful men and the righteous. The effect of this suggestion, which incidentally refers back to the lady's helplessness, is to demonstrate the necessity of the redemptive act of Christ for all men: in Peek's words, Henryson saw original sin not as the sin of all men, but as a condition of man after the Fall.<sup>17</sup> Although Peek does not specifically allude to these lines, they help to support his reading of Henryson's theology.

Other lines in the poem also integrate the moralitas into the tale itself. In the deep dungeon where the lady is cast, "licht scho nicht se nane" (l. 22): not only does the dungeon physically echo the medieval idea of Hell, but its darkness stands as a spiritual image of the state of sin, using a familiar New Testament metaphor.<sup>18</sup> Similar echoes run through the account of the knight's mission. The lady's father (the Trinity in the moralitas) must find a knight to fight for her "with his persoun" (l. 38), and the same phrase appears in the description of the battle itself:<sup>19</sup>

That prince come prowldy to the toun  
 of that gyane to heir,  
 and fawcht with him his awin persoun,  
 and tuke him presoneir;  
 And kest him in his awin dungeoun,  
 allane withouttin feir,  
 With hungir, cauld, and confusioun,  
 As full weill worthy weir.

(49-56)

Romance descriptive techniques have here given place to the Christian theme of the Harrowing of Hell, which Henryson clearly intends us to have in mind. The imagery of this stanza recalls Dunbar's "Done is a battell on the dragon blak"; Christ the



lover is also Christ the champion, and the emphasis on the knight's personal sacrifice enriches our understanding of its allegorical significance. The detail of the giant's imprisonment in his own dungeon is a further move in this direction, for it echoes the familiar versions of the Harrowing of Hell, in the Gospel of Nicodemus and its derivatives such as Cursor Mundi:

Wip þis gan Iesus him to wreth  
 Als þou he brath had bene in breth.  
 Sathan, þat pinful prince, he laght  
 And vndir might of hell bitaght,  
 And adam tillward he drogh,  
 Þar blise of brightenes was enogh.

20

In his account of the battle, then, Henryson seems deliberately to be echoing the story which his narrative allegorically represents, and hence the exemplum casts forward through intricate verbal allusions to the moralitas.

In The Bludy Serk we can see Henryson carefully setting about the combination of formal allegory and a literary diction drawn from the romance mode, in order to produce a poem in which the much-repeated exemplum and its moralitas are more closely related than before. The consequences of this process are, I think, twofold, for not only is the moralitas more consistently implied throughout the narrative, giving it in one sense a more central place in the whole work than the rather tacked-on moralitates are apt to have in medieval exempla in general,<sup>21</sup> but also the story itself acquires a new richness, complexity, even grace, by virtue of the allusions and echoes which run through it. More than his predecessors, Henryson really is interested here in making the two elements wholly interdependent, so that

the tale is only fully meaningful when its complex images are picked up and made explicit in the moralitas, while the moralitas depends for its life and interest upon the telling of the tale which has gone before it.

This same harmony is attempted again, more extensively and with rather less success, in Orpheus and Erudices. Again Henryson seems to be indebted for details of his narrative to various sources, but the moralitas comes, explicitly and directly, from Nicholas Trivet's commentary on Boethius' De consolacione philosophiae.<sup>22</sup> Critics have tended to find the relationship of narrative and moralitas here arbitrary and unsatisfactory: only recently have attempts been made to demonstrate their interdependence, while the prevailing view has long been either that the work is ultimately an aesthetic failure, or alternatively that Henryson was only peripherally interested in his formal allegorization.<sup>23</sup> In every way, the scale of Henryson's undertaking in Orpheus and Erudices is larger than in The Bludy Serk. The poem is more than five times as long, and the allegory, rather than being a simple representation of the Crucifixion reduced to its barest outline, is a complex neo-Aristotelian account of the theological implications of human psychology as it was understood in the later Middle Ages. If the allegory seems stiff and fails to integrate properly with the complexities of Henryson's narrative, the sheer ambitiousness of the project may be partly responsible.

Orpheus and Erudices may conveniently be divided into nine narrative sections, seven of which are paralleled by exegetical passages in the moralitas. The first four stanzas form a kind



of preface, setting a context for the poem which I believe to be of some importance. Next comes an account of the parentage and marriage of Orpheus (ll. 29-91, corresponding to ll. 425-34 of the moralitas), then the episode with Erudices, Aristeus and Proserpina (92-133; 435-44), the complaint of Orpheus (134-83; 445-6), his search (184-218; 447-58), the passage on the music of the spheres (219-46; not directly commented on in the moralitas), Orpheus in Hell (247-344; 459-609), the scene at Pluto's court (345-414; 616-27), the whole work concluding with a short prayer. In his telling of the story Henryson follows closely (while expanding considerably) the sequence of events in Boethius' account,<sup>24</sup> while his moralitas is even more closely based upon Trivet's commentary. Interestingly, the musical passage which precedes Orpheus' arrival in Hell does not appear in these sources; the great emphasis which he lays upon the infernal monsters and their allegorical significance, on the other hand, is clearly derived from Trivet, and has carried over into the narrative part of the poem.

In one important respect, Orpheus and Erudices differs from The Bludy Serk: it is not an exemplum in the true sense. The characters are more fully realized, the setting and action better developed, and the whole work has a more complex structure even than the relatively elaborate poetic exemplum which Henryson constructs in The Bludy Serk. This is in large part due to the story's mythological origins: much more is implied to an audience by the choice of Orpheus, as in this poem, than is the case when the leading figures are anonymous. The

resonance of the narrative is therefore potentially much greater, even before the poet begins to build patterns of imagery and reference to enrich his poem further. The Bludy Serk, indeed, works in reverse: whereas Orpheus is a known mythological character, who allegorically represents the abstract notion of the virtus intellectus, the rather abstract, certainly un-named knight of the former poem represents Christ, a significance which is evocative enough in itself once we have read the moralitas.

Something of this direct appeal which comes from familiar mythological characters emerges from the prologue to Orpheus and Erudices, hitherto neglected but nevertheless important. These first four stanzas are structured around a contrast between a proper cultivation of the virtues of one's ancestors and neglectful degeneracy.<sup>25</sup> This introductory statement has, I think, two purposes: to serve as a moral precept in its own right (relating therefore to the audience, and perhaps to a patron) and to bring us to the subject of the poem (relating to Orpheus as tragic hero). It implies a certain familiarity on the part of the audience with the story of Orpheus, and its formal, rhetorical diction gives the poem a dignified opening which serves to elevate it immediately above the level of the exemplum:

The nobilnes and grit magnificens  
 of prince and lord, quhai list to magnifie,  
 his ancestre and lineall discens  
 Suld first extoll, and his genologie,  
 So that his harte he mycht inclyne thairby  
 The moir to vertew and to worthiness,  
 herand reherss his elderis gentilness.



There is an ambiguity in the plethora of third-person pronouns, which can be related to the double purpose I have been suggesting. Knowing the subject of the poem, we initially understand the first four lines to be referring to the hero, whose "magnification" will come in the telling of his story. But it is apparent in l. 5 that the heart belongs to the person to whom the poem is directed, a lord (presumably) whose soul is to be uplifted by the edifying example of his own ancestors. On the other hand, Henryson's subsequent treatment reverts to the first sense, since the un-named patron's elders are never alluded to, and it is indeed Orpheus' lineage which is described. It is therefore difficult to make literal sense of ll. 5-7; and if we may suspect Henryson of not practising what he preaches, we can more certainly indict him for lack of clarity.

But whatever the opening stanza means, it undoubtedly establishes a juxtaposition of rhetoric and moral purpose: the rhetorical principles which Henryson enunciates spring from the poet's desire to improve his audience. We cannot be sure how specific was Henryson's instructional intent. There may be something topical and pointed about the statement that

It is contrair the Lawis of nature  
A gentill man to be degenerate,  
Nocht following of his progenitour  
The worthe rewl, and the lordly estait;  
A ryall rynk for to be rusticat  
Is bot a monsture in comparesoun,  
had in dispyt and full derisioun.

(8-14)

But Orpheus and Erudices is not explicitly dedicated to the king or to anybody else, and apart from some contentious applications

of some of the Morall Fabillis there is nothing which definitely shows Henryson in the role of royal adviser. We can conclude that he is here pronouncing on the obligation of royalty and nobility to maintain the honour of their families, but we cannot go further. Nor is it obvious how these stanzas fit in with the moralitas, where a quite different significance is accorded to the story of Orpheus.

Tactically, Henryson uses his prologue principally as a way of introducing his hero. Unlike some of his own contemporaries, the Greeks were models of filial virtue, and the present poem concerns one who exemplifies this characteristic:

Lyk as a strand, or watter of a spring,  
haldis the sapour of the fontell well,  
So did in grece ilk Lord and worthy king,  
of forbearis thay tuk knowlege and smell,  
Among the quhilk of ane I think to tell;  
Bot first his gentill generatioun  
I sall reheress, with your correctioun.

(22-8)

We are being prepared, then, to view Orpheus sympathetically as one who "tuk knowlege and smell" from his ancestors, who in his case include Jupiter and Memoria (ll. 28-35) as well as Calliope, the muse of music, and Phebus (ll. 61-3). In his description of Orpheus, Henryson goes on to stress the young man's virtues:

No wondir wes thocht he wes fair and wyse,  
gentill and gud, full of liberalitie,  
his fader god, and his progenetryse  
a goddess, finder of all armony:  
quhen he wes borne scho set him on hir kne,  
and gart him souk of hir twa paupis quhyte  
The sueit lecour of all musik perfyte.

(64-70)

This excellence makes good allegorical sense, for Orpheus, we learn from the moralitas, is "the pairte intelletyfe/ Off manis



saule" (ll. 428-9), that intellectual power of the soul which stands above the sensitive and vegetable powers.<sup>26</sup> This undeniably favourable treatment which Henryson gives Orpheus at the beginning of the poem does not prepare us to see him as a degenerate figure, and it is hard to agree with Professor John MacQueen, who applies to him, without further explanation, the earlier lines about the unnatural practice of failing to follow the example of one's ancestors.<sup>27</sup> Our final judgment of Orpheus is more complex than the early parts of the poem might suggest, but it is scarcely accurate reading to see him simply, or even primarily, as a passive or negative force.

Although the narrative structure of the poem centres our attention almost wholly upon Orpheus, its moral structure is based more upon the contrast between Orpheus and Erudices, the intellectual and sensitive powers of the soul, a variation on the familiar poetic theme of Reason and Sensuality.<sup>28</sup> Erudices' role as "effectioun", as defined retrospectively in the morality-tas,

Euridices is our effectioun,  
Be fantasy oft movit up and doun;  
Quhile to ressonne it castis the delyte,  
Quhyle to the flesche it settis the appetyte,

(431-4)

is also introduced by Henryson into the narrative, much in the same way that the allegorical meaning of The Bludy Serk is hinted at in the body of the poem before it is made explicit in the final exegesis. This, I think, is the interpretation we should adopt of Erudices' wooing of Orpheus:

and quhene scho saw this prince so glorius,  
hir erand to propone scho thocht no schame,  
with wordis sueit, and blenkis amorouss,

Said, 'welcum, Lord and lufe, schir orpheuss,  
In this province ye salbe king and lord!'

(79-83)

The function of the sensitive power, after all, is to respond directly to the world, to take the initiative, as it were. I do not think that any blame attaches to Orpheus here: the emphasis falls not upon his "passivity", but rather upon Erudices' amorousness, befitting as it does her lower place in the hierarchy of the soul.<sup>29</sup>

The marriage of Orpheus and Erudices, Henryson makes clear, is tied to this world, to "wardly Joy" (l. 89), and it is therefore essentially transitory,

Lyk till a flour that plesandly will spring,  
quhilk fadis sone, and endis with murnyng.

(90-1)

On the literal level, sublunary lovers remain bound by their mortality, and love offers no real answer to the transitoriness of this world (this is accentuated by the "In this provynce" of l. 83); on the tropological level, the harmony of intellect and appetite is indeed fragile, for the appetites tend constantly towards rebellion while reason, as the ending of the poem will make clear, is all too willing to indulge the senses. But that is not stressed here. Henryson is content at this early point in the story to moralize briefly on the brittleness of this world, another pervasive theme and one which fits in well with a medieval tragedy of thwarted love.

With the episode of Aristeus and Erudices, we reach a real crux in any allegorical reading of the poem. For Aristeus, the "busteous hird", seeks to ravish the queen, and by doing so



causes her death. Yet the moralitas makes him "nocht bot gud vertew", and Erudices' flight represents the flight of man

outthrow the medow grene  
Fra vertew, till this warldis vane plesans,  
myngit with cair and full of variance .....

(438-40)

It may be, as Dr Jamieson suggests, that this dissonance between narrative and moralitas is a Henrysonian joke, designed to make us more aware of the complexities of the moral judgments we must make.<sup>30</sup> But the dissonance is in fact inherited from Trivet, who does not seem to have such an ironic purpose when he speaks of Eurydice

scilicet pars hominis affectiua, quam sibi copulare  
cupit qui interpretatur uirtus.

31

The Latin turns upon a pun on "copulare", which means primarily 'unite with' and has only secondarily a sexual connotation.<sup>32</sup> For Trivet, therefore, the passage points to the desire of Virtue to unite with the Sensitive power, and we are clearly not intended to think too literally about the sexual implications of the Aristeus-Eurydice encounter.

Henryson, on the other hand, does emphasize the attempted rape:

quhair in a schaw, neir by this lady ying,  
a busteouss hird callit arresteuss,  
kepand his beistis, Lay undir a buss.

And quhen he saw this Lady solitar,  
bairfut, with schankis quhyter than the snaw,  
preckit with lust, he thocht withoutin mair  
hir till oppress, and to his cave hir draw:  
Dreidand for evill scho fled, quhen scho him saw;  
and as scho ran, all bairfute on a buss  
Scho strampit on a serpent vennemuss.

(96-105)

The verbal patterns here give a rather confused impression, but their general tendency is to bring out the dramatic nature of the scene. The ambiguity of l. 101, where "preckit with lust" might just possibly refer to either of the characters,<sup>33</sup> serves to heighten the confusion: its natural application, reinforced by the rest of the syntax and the structure of the lines, is surely to Aristeus, but the previous line has certainly been showing Erudices as an inviting, almost a wanton, figure.<sup>34</sup> "Oppress", however, unmistakably refers to Aristeus' desires in a way which emphasizes his role as sexual predator. There is the possibility of a further ambiguity in l. 103: the Bannatyne reading, "dreidand for evill", would normally carry the sense of 'fearing evil', thus placing the evil outside, in Aristeus, and stressing Erudices' virtue, but "for" here might equally mean 'because of', as in constructions like "for shame", "for fear", or as in this line from Hary's Wallace:

His hart for ire bolnyt for byttir baill.

35

If this only slightly strained reading were to be adopted, it would exactly parallel the sense of the moralitas, where the senses flee virtue because of their sinfulness. The earlier Asloan version, it should be added, does not suggest such an ambiguity, reading at this point "Dredand for scaith".<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to draw any consistent moral reading from this mixture of hints, allusions and ambiguities: perhaps the best we can do is to notice the incongruity of narrative (taken at face value) and moralitas, and to hold firmly to the unquestionable fact that the death of the Sensitive power comes from the sting of



the unquestionably Biblical serpent.

Orpheus' response to the loss of his queen is a traditional one for lovers in medieval romantic literature: half-crazed, he takes to the wilderness. Analogues for this behaviour abound, one of the most striking being Chrétien's Yvain, where the hero, rejected by the wife he has neglected,

se voldroit estre a la fuie  
toz seus en si salvage terre  
que l'en ne le seüst ou querre,  
ne nus hom ne fame ne fust  
qui de lui noveles seüst  
ne plus que s'il fust en abisme.

37

The case of Yvain is of some interest because whereas the topos of grief-stricken flight to the woods sometimes appears merely as a romantic hyperbole — as in the fifteenth-century English lyric "I must go walke the wode so wyld"<sup>38</sup> — for Chrétien Yvain's exile in the wilderness and gradual recovery of his sanity has a moral implication and symbolizes "healing and regeneration".<sup>39</sup> The romance hero of Sir Orfeo, too, takes to the wilderness in his grief:

Noping he fint þat him is ays,  
Bot euer he liueþ in gret malais.

40

The function of the topos differs in Henryson's Orpheus and Erudices from that in either of these other works, but I think it is clear that Henryson is conscious of the resonance which derives from the tradition of the sorrowing lover who abandons civilization in order to give full vent to his grief.

Certainly, the complaint of Orpheus falls within a well-established tradition which includes the latter part of Chaucer's

Book of the Duchess and Lydgate's Complaynte of a Louers Lyfe as well as Chaucer's Cantici Troili (Troilus and Criseyde, I, 400-20 and V, 638-65) and Henryson's own complaint of Cresseid. Its style is rhetorically elaborate, making heavy use of antithesis, apostrophe and alliteration. MacQueen and Jamieson both see in this passage an implicit criticism of Orpheus, whose earthly music is supposedly contrasted with the music of the spheres which he will subsequently learn:

Orpheus himself is more than material, and music of the kind he is now capable of producing has no power to make good a loss, which is also more than material, or even to comfort him. The song is musical in the discipline of its stanzaic structure, but the refrain is a question ("Quhair art thou gone, my luve Ewridicess?"), with no answer stated or implied . . . . . Where he makes a statement, it is one merely of loss or of change, and when he does attempt resolution, it is at once qualified by the negation of its contrary — a rhetorical device which strengthens rather than weakens the overall negative impression.

41

Dr Jamieson clearly reads the passage similarly, characterizing "these introspective stanzas" as "self-defeating", and adding that "Orpheus must look elsewhere for consolation".<sup>42</sup> This interpretation, in my view, does insufficient justice to the rhetorical pattern of the complaint, in the course of which Orpheus proceeds through a series of questions and apostrophes from helpless grief to a course of action. His initial response, expressed through an address to his harp, is entirely inward-looking:

and all thy game thou change in gole, and greit,  
Thy goldin pynnis with mony teiris weit;  
and all my pane for till report thou preiss,  
cryand with me, in every steid and streit,  
"quhair art thou gone, my luve Ewridicess?"

(139-43)



Even the natural beauty of his surroundings can make no impression, "his hairt wes so upoun his lusty quene" (l. 149).

The following stanza carries this self-indulgence a stage further; Orpheus renounces the world and proposes to stay lamenting in the wilderness:

my bed salbe with bever, brok, and bair,  
in buskis bene with mony busteouss bess,  
withowttin song, sayand with siching sair,  
"quhair art thow gone, my luve Euridicess?"

(160-3)

When he turns from his own woes to the divinities who are also his ancestors, however, Orpheus undergoes a change. His apostrophe to Phoebus falls within the rhetorical category of exclamatio as defined by Geoffrey de Vinsauf and well-liked by later poets,<sup>43</sup> but Orpheus' lament is no longer pure complaint:

Direk me from this deid so doloruss,  
Quhilk gois thus withouttin gilt begyld;  
Lat nocht thy face with cluddis to be oursyld;  
Len me thy lycht, and lat me nocht go leiss,  
To find that fair in fame that was nevir fyld,  
My lady quene and lufe, Euridices.

(168-73)

Within the structure of the lament, then, there is a shift from inward-looking grief to a determination to seek a solution, which is carried a step further in the final stanza where Orpheus calls upon Jupiter to aid him in his search for Erudices:

forsuth seik hir I sall,  
and nowthir stint nor stand for stok nor stone.

(178-9)

This is hardly negative or self-defeating: the remaining action of the poem is in fact triggered by Orpheus' decision in these stanzas to go in search of his wife. His recognition of his need for divine help is partly a conventional rhetorical figure,

but I think it is also a partial guide to the point of the poem. While it is true that Orpheus, himself mortal, has not sufficient power to save Erudices, he has the sense to ask the help of the gods; allegorically, the virtus intellectus is not self-sufficient, and depends upon the support of Grace. Clearly, if the moralitas is a reliable guide, Henryson did not regard the complaint of Orpheus as suspect, for we learn that on the fall of the virtus sensitiva

Thane perfyte wisdome weipis wondir soir,  
Seand thus gait our appetyte misfair .....

(445-6)

From this point on, the application of moralitas to narrative is a matter of some difficulty. Immediately, there is some dissonance between the two. As we have seen, Orpheus' achievement at the end of his complaint is settling upon a line of action, but this active course of search and rescue is made in the moralitas to stand for the contemplative life:

Schawand to us the Lyfe contemplatife,  
The perfyte wit, and eik the fervent luve  
We suld haif allway to the hevin abuve .....

(448-50)

Furthermore, the point in the moralitas is that this search is bound to fail because our appetites, being tied to the body, are seldom found in the heavens, and therefore Orpheus must proceed to Hell (ll. 451-4). Henryson's attitude to Orpheus is here quite obscure. The search through the spheres, even though it provides an image of the contemplative life, is misconceived because the object of the search is too imperfect to be found there. Taking this up, J.B. Friedman has suggested that Orpheus exhibits a concern for Erudices which ought "to be



directed heavenward",<sup>44</sup> but nowhere in narrative or moralitas does Henryson indicate unequivocally that this love of Erudices is intrinsically wrong. The moralitas, it is true, does imply some criticism of Orpheus:

Thairfoir dounwart we cast our myndis E,  
Blindit with lust, and may nocht upwartis fle;  
Sould our desyre be socht up in the spheiris,  
Quhen it is tedderit in thir warldly breiris,  
Quhyle on the flesch, quhyle on this warldis wrak:  
And to the hevin full small intent we tak.  
Schir orpheus, thow seikis all in vane  
Thy wyfe so he .....

(453-60)

The testing of Orpheus in Hell is perhaps a natural consequence of his uxoriousness, on the Augustinian basis that love of this world and its goods is justified only if our love is really directed towards the manifestation of God in the world,<sup>45</sup> but it scarcely squares with the narrative to describe him as "blindit with lust". A great deal depends on whether the "we" of ll. 453 are represented by Orpheus: if so, then the neglect of heaven and the lustfulness dealt with in the rest of the passage are to be understood as Orpheus' own. But according to the narrative Orpheus does "upwartis fle", and it is Erudices whose sensuality makes it impossible for her to enter Heaven. "We", in allegorical terms, are represented by the combination of Orpheus and Erudices, of intellect and sense; and it follows that ll. 453-4 are not primarily intended as criticism of Orpheus. Allegorically speaking, the imprisonment of Erudices in Hell is a consequence not of Orpheus' desire but rather of her nature, and the union of sense and intellect, which might result in the freedom of sense, represents a desirable strengthening of the soul (ll. 616-7).

Within the narrative itself, moreover, we do not altogether gain the impression that Orpheus' search in the heavens is a completely misconceived undertaking, a consequence of blind lust. We are given, certainly, a succession of stanzas which record his fruitless search in the spheres of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Phoebus, Venus, Mercury and the Moon, a downward movement which leads logically into the long passage about the infernal regions.<sup>46</sup>

But Henryson has interposed three stanzas about the music of the spheres, which form another crux but which undeniably show that Orpheus learns something from the experience. It may be, as Professor MacQueen and Dr Jamieson have suggested, that this passage provides a key to the interpretation of the whole poem, contrasting Orpheus' terrestrial music, represented by the complaint, with the divine music he subsequently learns.<sup>47</sup> It is, in that case, curious that the episode is not more closely worked into both the narrative and the moralitas. The introduction of this interpolation about the music of the spheres is as casual as the rest of its treatment:

Thus from the hevin he went onto the erd,  
Yet be the way sum melody he lerrd.

(217-8)

And indeed, there is very little stress upon the significance of the experience for Orpheus, and correspondingly no mention of the passage in the moralitas, where Orpheus passes directly from the spheres to Hell. Henryson offers no interpretation within the narrative, either, and seems to be at pains to emphasize that it is an interpolation:

Off sic musik to wryt I do bot doit,



Thairfoir of this mater a stray I lay,  
For in my life I cowth nevir sing a noit.

(240-2)

Professor MacQueen finds that this remark emphasizes the importance of the passage, but it seems to me rather to be a way of getting back to the main line of the action, a Chaucerian narrator's device which serves here to diminish rather than increase the significance of the musical exposition.

Yet it is undeniably the case that Orpheus' music dominates the latter part of the poem. The long infernal sequence (fourteen stanzas of narrative glossed by nearly 150 lines of moralization), which involves successive encounters with Cerberus, Ixion, Tantalus and Tityus until Orpheus arrives at Pluto's court, derives from Boethius, and the interpretations offered by Henryson follow for the most part the moralitas of Trivet. We are reminded constantly of Orpheus' musical accomplishments, not only in the narrative (where Orpheus plays upon his harp in order to lull Cerberus to sleep, to release the sufferers from their torments, to reach the court, and to persuade Pluto and Proserpyne to free Erudices), but also, in additions to Trivet, in the moralitas:

Thus cerberus to swelly sparis nane,  
Bot quhen our mynd is myngit with sapience,  
and plais upoun the herp of eloquence;  
That is to say, makis persuasioun  
To draw our will and our affectioun,  
In every eild, fra syn and fowll delyte,  
The dog our sawll na power hes to byte.

(468-74)<sup>48</sup>

There are problems associated with the view that this power of Orpheus' music in the infernal regions springs from a new-found musical skill, different in kind from the degenerate music he

had practised before, as represented by the complaint. The rhetorical music of the complaint, after all, had drawn Orpheus' own desires upward, and launched him on his heavenward journey. And what are we to make of Henryson's statement at the very beginning, that Orpheus had imbibed from his mother "the sueit licour of all musik perfyte" (my emphasis)? It surely follows from this that Orpheus' musical knowledge already comprehended the celestial harmony, although it is possible that we are intended to infer that this knowledge has been clouded by Orpheus' obsession with the life of the senses.

The interpretation suggested by Professor MacQueen and Dr Jamieson depends upon a very clear distinction, almost a contradiction, between worldly, degenerate music and the perfection of the celestial harmony. Yet in the Middle Ages music was valued precisely because it reflected, albeit imperfectly, the divine harmony of the universe. "Thus microcosmic man, imitating in his musica instrumentalis or practical music the ideal order of the harmonia mundi, can regain in some small way the musica humana, the ordering of his being, that characterizes the music of the spheres and the prior good state of his soul."<sup>49</sup> Read carefully, Henryson's moralitas illustrates exactly this point. The last of the occupants of Hell to be released by Orpheus is Tityus, whose crime was to have set

al his intentioun  
To find the craft of divinatioun .....

(561-2)

This does not seem on the face of it to have very much to do with music, but Henryson proceeds to make the age-old distinction between astrologia and astronomia in terms which quite clearly



evoke Orpheus' own celestial experience:

This perfyte wisdome with his melody  
 fleyis the spreit of fenyeid profecy,  
 and drawis upwart our affectioun,  
 . . . . .  
 Fra wichcraft, spaying, and sorsery,  
 and superstitioun of astrology,  
 Saif allanerly sic maner of thingis  
 quhilk upoun trew and certane caussis hingis,  
 The quhilk mone cum to thair caus indure,  
 On verry forss, and nocht throw avanture,  
 As is the clippis and the conjunctioun  
 of sone and mone be calculatioun,  
 The quhilk ar fundin in trew astronomy,  
 Be moving of the speiris in the sky;  
 All thir to speik it may be tollerable,  
 And none udir quhilk no caussis stable.

(585-99)<sup>50</sup>

The relationship between the movement of the spheres and "certane caussis" is the calculable manifestation of divine order in the universe, while its (theoretically) audible manifestation is that music which Orpheus experiences as he journeys through the spheres. This is, of course, appropriate to Orpheus in his allegorical role as Reason, since according to medieval theologians it is through reason that man perceives the divine element in creation.<sup>51</sup> The significance of the controversial passage about the music of the spheres, then, is that it represents the proper, rational approach to the universe, for which Orpheus is already equipped literally by the musical skills he acquired from his mother and allegorically by the fact that he stands for the virtus intellectiva, and which contrasts both with the sinful curiosity about God's "prevetie" exhibited by Tityus and with Orpheus' over-riding devotion to Erudices, the virtus sensitiva (which will ultimately lead to the tragic dénouement).

For there is the further problem that notwithstanding the

significance of the learning which he gains in the heavens, Orpheus fails in his attempt to bring Erudices back to the world. The point here is, I think, that despite his great musical powers, Orpheus is betrayed by his love for Erudices, just as our reason, however powerful, is always likely, because it is human, to fall victim to the appeal of the senses. The emphasis, as in The Bludy Serk, is less upon a man's sin (the turning back of Orpheus) than it is upon that state of Original Sin which has caused, since the Fall, human suffering and which opens the way to positive sin. Only through the Grace which is represented in The Bludy Serk by the knight's sacrifice can that state be transcended, and there is no evidence in Orpheus and Erudices of such Grace at work. The desire of the gods to help Orpheus is clear enough, but it is also plain that the power of each is limited to his own sphere ("certane caussis" in another guise!), and even the understanding of divine harmony which he gains cannot ultimately succeed without the miraculous help which is nowhere mentioned in the narrative and which appears only in the last lines of the moralitas.

Before we reach that point, however, it is necessary to consider Orpheus' dealings with Erudices in a little more detail. The link between the various parts of the episode in Hell is appetite. Ixion, Tantalus and Tityus each represent a different aspect of sensuality, and the source of their crimes is their subjection to the virtus sensitiva. Thus, Ixion embodies lechery, Tantalus avarice, and Tityus curiosity — a triad which seems to echo the three sins (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life) of 1 John 2: 16, as glossed



by Augustine and many of his successors.<sup>52</sup> Their crimes foreshadow the test to which Orpheus will in turn be put: his music is powerful enough to free others from their suffering, and to enable him to reach the court of Pluto, but at the end his own affections are involved, and at that point he fails. Within the narrative, this conflict is expressed in terms of the debate about love. Orpheus greets Erudices in the language of the courtly lover:

Quod he, 'my lady leill, and my delyt,  
ffull wo is me to se you changit thus;  
quhair is your rude as ross with cheikis quhyte,  
your cristell ene with blenkis amorus,  
your Lippis reid to kiss delicius?'

(352-6)

But it differs from the complaint in its emphasis upon physical detail, its savouring of erotic experience, and this is a trait which is taken up as the pair proceed on their way out of Hell, "talkand of play and sport" (l. 385). As Friedman has observed, this preoccupation anticipates Orpheus' failure; indeed, Henryson suggests that it causes that failure:

Thus Orpheus, with inwart lufe repleit,  
So blindit was with grit effectioun,  
pensyfe in hart apone his lady sueit,  
Remembrit nocht his hard conditioun.

(387-90)

The "inwart" here is of some importance: love should properly be turned outward, towards God, but Orpheus' love is inward-looking, selfish, and firmly grounded in this world. Perhaps we should think of the well of Narcissus in the garden of the Roman de la Rose.<sup>53</sup> More unambiguously here than elsewhere in the narrative, we see Orpheus obsessed with temporalia, and it costs him, if not his life, then certainly his pleasure in the

world. His complaint is again conventional, but the theme now is the insecurity of love, a theme which Henryson himself struck as early as ll. 90-1:

'Quhat art thow, luve, how sall I the defyne?  
 Bittir and sueit, crewall and merciabile,  
 plesand to sum, to uthir plent and pyne,  
 Till sum constant, to uthir variable;  
 hard is thy law, thy bandis unbrekable;  
 Quho servis the, thocht thay be nevir so trew,  
 Perchance sum tyme thay sall haif causs to rew.'

(401-7)

This stanza exploits the familiar topos of the contrarities of love, but with an underlying sententia: Orpheus has discovered too late that his preoccupation with Erudices is fundamentally deceptive and destructive.

The moralitas interprets this in other terms. Orpheus' criticism of love is from within, using the diction of amour courtois and still from the viewpoint of the disappointed lover. In the moralitas we are given an outside judgment, and we are furthermore enabled to understand the meaning of Orpheus' lesson in a wider moral context. For it is not just love that the moralitas rejects, but all obsessions with worldly things:

Bot ilk man suld be wyse, and warly se  
 That he bakwart cast nocht his myndis E,  
 Gifand consent and delectatioun,  
 off fleschly lust and for the affectioun;  
 for thane gois bakwart to the sone agane  
 our appetyte, as it befoir was slane,  
 In warldly lust and vane prosperite,  
 and makis ressoun wedow for to be.

(620-7)

Sexual excess is specifically mentioned here, but "affectioun" and "appetyte" have a wider significance, as we have seen, and we are being warned generally against the evils of subjection to the senses. Against this sensuality Henryson sets the "perfyte



love" of the final prayer (l. 632), the love of God which should derive from the mastery of the intellect and which should suffuse our appreciation of temporalia. In this sense, the positive side of the poem is fully realized only in the last lines of the moralitas: the crucial importance of the control of reason is everywhere apparent, but the greater love to which this rationality opens the way is introduced only as a prayer for the audience, and it contrasts with Orpheus' own tragic (and cautionary) conclusion.

Orpheus and Erudices remains a baffling poem. The interweaving of narrative and moralitas is obvious enough, and yet Henryson's intentions are not always clear. The role of Orpheus and of his music remains ambiguous, in the sense that we are not really prepared in the earlier parts of either narrative or moralitas for the failure which completes his quest. On a moral level, the argument is quite consistent: the power of the senses is great, very often quite enough to overcome the best intentions of the intellect. But what is in some ways unsatisfactory is the working-out of this theme through the story of Orpheus and Erudices as Henryson tells it. MacQueen, Manning and Jamieson have attempted to provide a consistent reading which integrates the two principal elements of the poem, and yet there remains a body of contrary evidence. There is the prologue, setting up Orpheus as a model of filial devotion, the paradox of Aristeus, the multiplicity of musical references, all tending to complicate our assessment of the moral judgments which seem so certain in the moralitas. The poem seems to show Orpheus learning as he goes, so that the harmony

of the universe leads him to Erudices and starts him on the journey back. And yet that harmony too fails him in the presence of Erudices. I do not find that any self-consistent reading of the poem satisfactorily explains all these difficulties. Even if his learning of the music of the spheres is accepted as a symbol of the legitimate intellectual activity of the rational man, the position of Orpheus remains somewhat paradoxical, that of his music unresolved. In the case of Orpheus and Erudices, the interpretation offered by the poet does not coincide exactly with the meaning which emerges from the work as a whole.

Close examination of The Bludy Serk and Orpheus and Erudices reveals both similarities and differences. In both poems, Henryson introduces material from the romance tradition to increase the resonance of his narrative, for example,<sup>54</sup> and in both poems various rhetorical devices and allusive techniques are deployed to heighten our interest. The differences spring in large measure, as I suggested above, from the relative scale of the two works: The Bludy Serk is short enough and straightforward enough to permit the integration of virtually every narrative and allegorical detail, but Orpheus and Erudices covers a great deal more ground, its allegorical framework requiring greater subtlety both in the writing and in the reading. Many of the details of the narrative and its moralitas resist integration, and no reading seems able to dispel all the ambiguities and apparent contradictions. Yet it seems clear that Henryson intended this moralitas to be read as an integral part of the poem, and perhaps it limits the meaning of the poem, through its



length and its comprehensiveness, more than Henryson's other moralitates do. We must recognize, if we wish to set the narrative above the moralitas, or detach it altogether, that we are breaking up the parts of a whole which Henryson tried hard, if unsuccessfully, to blend.

Henryson's non-allegorical narrative poems parallel in some ways the allegorical poems examined above. Robene and Makyne, like The Bludy Serk, employs a mixture of genres to enrich the meaning of what is a highly compressed work, while both Orpheus and Erudices and The Testament of Cresseid are at least in their origin, and in important respects in their presentation, classical narratives, used by Henryson to expound Christian themes. The parallel holds in another respect as well: whereas the two shorter poems have no identifiable source, being derived rather from well-established generic traditions, Orpheus and Erudices and the Testament have clearly defined sources. That is to say, it is clear that the starting-point for the Testament is Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: the problem of Henryson's "uther quair" is much more difficult, but it is likely that this is another example of the spurious medieval authority.<sup>55</sup> Chaucer, at least, is real enough, and we shall have to consider the relationship between his narrative methods and Henryson's in due course. But it is again convenient to begin with the shorter work, to see how Henryson proceeds when he is making only an implicit moral statement.

The absence of a moralitas in Robene and Makyne is not a

casual omission. It is thoroughly consistent with the terseness which is the poem's most striking stylistic trait. This, for example, is the way Henryson describes that crucial reversal of feeling which is the mainspring of the action and of the moral:

Be that sum pairte of mawkynis aill  
 Outthrow his hairt coud creip;  
 he fallowit hir fast thair till assaill,  
 and till hir tuke gude keip.

(77-80)

The last phrase is particularly telling: the earlier section of the poem has stressed Robene's unco-operative devotion to his sheep, but he here transfers his attentions from them to Makyne. There is, however, a difference, for his care of the sheep is selfless, while his taking "gude keip" to Makyne is much more basely motivated — he wishes to "assaill" her. Brief though the portrayal of Robene's fall may be, this in itself accentuates its very suddenness, and the words are clearly chosen to produce a precise effect, undermining Robene's presentation of his own situation. Although Henryson does not overtly comment on the actions of his characters, he gives us quite sufficient information to allow us to form judgments about them.

Makyne's first remarks illustrate this also:

Robene sat on gud grene hill,  
 Kepand a flock of fe:  
 mirry makyne said him till,  
 'Robene, thow rew on me;  
 I haif the luvit lowd and still,  
 Thir yeiris two or thre;  
 my dule in dern bot gif thow dill,  
 Downtless but dreid I de.'

(1-8)

Perhaps the first thing to observe is the discrepancy between the



introductory description of Makyne and her speech: she may be "mirry", but there is no obvious trace of it in ll. 4-8. This inconsistency should in itself make us alert to the nuances of what she says: if she is so cheerful, how seriously should we take her references to her "dule"? It is at this point that the issue of sources and influences begins to become relevant, though not in the way that it has generally been discussed.<sup>56</sup> The important thing is that Makyne, in keeping with the pastoral setting, uses the language of the courtly lover, and it is apparent that "courtly love" (itself a thorny critical problem) is at the very least one of the subjects of the poem. Makyne's declaration of love is altogether conventional, apart from the fact that it is in this case the woman who has for years been the unrequited lover. This reversal of the courtly tradition, while it is not uncommon in the French pastourelle which is undoubtedly one of Henryson's models, leads on ironically to the latter part of Robene and Makyne, where the roles revert to something more like the conventional situation of smitten lover and scornful lady. The courtliness of Makyne's language is confirmed in the third stanza, where she responds to Robene's "quhat is lufe?" with a straightforward exposition of the code of love:

'At luvis lair gife thow will leir,  
 Tak thair ane a b c:  
 be heynd, courtass, and fair of feir,  
 Wyse, hardy, and fre;  
 So that no denger do the deir,  
 quhat dule in dern thow dre;  
 preiss the with pane at all poweir,  
 be patient and previe.'

(17-24)

The moral terminology here is again typical, and it tends to

concentrate the audience's attention upon courtly love as an ethical system, as a "refinement of sensibility". Makyne presents love as a series of moral rules, consistent with the rhetoric of her own first speech — so much so that she echoes herself (l. 22, cf. l. 7). It may seem a little ironic that she is counselling in Robene precisely those qualities which she claims already to have exhibited herself and which have clearly had no effect, and particularly so that she, who is so unfortunate, should be pressing upon Robene the need for patience. But then, Makyne's position is full of such ironies.

Her third speech, indeed, somewhat undermines her previous rhetorical position:

'Robene, tak tent unto my taill,  
And wirk all as I reid,  
And thow sall haif my hairt all haill,  
Eik and my madinheid.  
Sen god sendis bute for beill,  
And for murning remeid,  
I dern with the, bot gif I daill,  
Dowtles I am bot deid.'

(33-40)

Makyne's sexual preoccupations are here exposed: she has clothed her lust in courtly language, but her own view of love is firmly based on the senses. The irony extends from Makyne herself to the language she has been using, and the effect of this part of the poem is, to some degree at least, to call into question the whole basis of the courtly mode. Certainly, Makyne is a witness of doubtful credibility. This change in our attitude towards Makyne also modifies our view of Robene, whose responses seem initially to fluctuate between naïveté and churlishness. His devotion to his sheep even leads him to invoke them as moral arbiters:



'And we wald play us in this plane,  
Thay wald us bayth reproif.'

(31-2)

This is, to say the least, somewhat ridiculous, and we are perhaps inclined to sympathize with Makyne at this point. I think it is clear, however, that her openly sexual declaration of ll. 33-40 is intended to alienate us from her, and in this respect its effect on Robene is significant:

'Makyne, to morne this ilk a tyde,  
And ye will meit me heir,  
Peraventure my scheip ma gang besyd,  
quhill we haif liggit full neir .....

(41-4)

This weakening on Robene's part is the first sign of his eventual fall, and it is at this stage temporary: he immediately qualifies the proposition with his concern that the sheep might stray, and by the end of the following stanza is rejecting Makyne outright:

'Ga lufe, makyne, guhair evir thow list,  
ffor lemman I /lue/ none.'

(55-6)<sup>57</sup>

The narrative economy of the poem is well illustrated by the passage I have been discussing. Virtually the whole action is conveyed through the use of dialogue: after the opening three lines Henryson hardly interrupts the exchanges of direct speech at all. The meaning emerges, therefore, through a variety of ironic techniques, of which the discrepancy between Makyne's courtly rhetoric and real sexuality is perhaps the most important. Our interest in the characters is excited purely by their speech, although the ironic twists do gain some piquancy from their associations with the conventions of courtly love

poetry, and with the pastourelle in particular. Henryson's skill in handling the dialogue is apparent in the quickening pace of ll. 49-64: whereas the opening speeches of both characters are given whole stanzas, a formal pattern which continues to l. 48, the last two stanzas of the first conversation are broken into much smaller units, with each speaker having only two lines at a time. The rather formal, static nature of the dialogue thus breaks down, and we have a sense of Makyne's increasing desperation:

'Robene, I stand in sic a styll;  
I sicht, and that full sair.'  
'Makyne, I haif bene heir this quhyle;  
at hame god gif I wair.'  
'my huny, robene, talk ane quhill,  
gif thow will do na mair.'  
'Makyne, sum uthir man begyle,  
ffor hamewart I will fair.'

(57-64)

The rapid interchange of this dialogue is emphasized by the repeated use of the characters' names, though that has the functional purpose as well of telling us who is speaking (useful for the reader of an unpunctuated manuscript, and crucial for an audience hearing the poem performed). Makyne's pleas are evidently contrasted with Robene's "final" rejection, in which "begyle" has important connotations: Robene has cast her, appropriately enough, in the role of female temptress.

The firmness of Robene's rejection is taken up by the narrator, whose two following stanzas cover the ironic reversal of roles. Robene is initially "als licht as leif of tre" (l. 66), his gaiety still contrasted with Makyne's "murning". But this is the gaiety of false security, for Makyne's words have had their effect, and Robene is about to succumb to "sum pairte of



Mawkynis aill". In Robene's defiant, but thoroughly misplaced, self-confidence we are perhaps justified in finding an echo of Chaucer's equally deluded Troilus, who looks askance at love:

Forthy, ensample taketh of this man,  
 Ye wise, proude, and worthi folkes alle,  
 To scornen Love, which that so soone kan  
 The fredom of youre hertes to hym thralle;  
 For evere it was, and evere it shal byfalle,  
 That Love is he that alle thing may bynde,  
 For may no man fordon the lawe of kynde.

58

Robene, certainly, does not openly mock love itself, but his rather scornful rejection of Makyne's overtures has a hollow ring when his subsequent fall is presented so casually. To this extent, Henryson's poem, like Chaucer's, asserts the power of Love, but it is very far from praising or defending it. We have seen how Makyne's romantic rhetoric is undermined by the sexuality of her real concerns; this process is carried a stage further by her miraculous recovery as soon as Robene has succumbed:

'Robene, thow hes hard sounng & say,  
 In gestis and storeis auld,  
 The man that will nocht quhen he may  
 sall haif nocht quhen he wald.  
 I pray to Jesu every day  
 mot eik thair Cairis cauld,  
 that first preiss with the to play,  
 be firth, forrest, and fawld.'

(89-96)

Makyne's piety, too, has a hollow ring, when it is compared to her sexual advances of the day before. Her proverbial sententia is appropriate enough, although she has perhaps been presented too ironically for any words of hers to have, as has been suggested, the unequivocal force of a moralitas.

The moral viewpoint of the poem, indeed, is too complex to be incorporated in a single aphorism, by Makyne or anyone else. Robene is, in part, punished for his light-hearted treatment of Makyne's plight: this is certainly the interpretation offered by Makyne herself (ll. 105-12). But given the doubt which the poem casts upon the sincerity of her avowals of true love, it is hard to take this seriously as the poet's own view. It almost seems that Makyne is liberated by Robene's subjection, which is consistent with the sense of the destructiveness of love which is perhaps the poem's final impression on the reader:

Robene murnit, and Malkyne lewche;  
 Scho sang, he sichit sair;  
 and so left him, bayth wo & wrewche,  
 In dolour & in cair,  
 Kepand his hird under a huche,  
 amangis the holtis hair.

(123-8)

The important point about these last lines is that the landscape is very different from the sylvan setting of the opening, where Robene is found "on gud grene hill". "Holtis hair" has a note of wildness and desolation, the conventional background of the rejected lover. Makyne, by contrast, is "blyth annewche", a phrase which takes us back to the introduction of her as "mirry". For all her sententiousness, it is difficult to avoid the sense that it has for her been something of a game, while Robene's woe is now altogether serious. We cannot ignore the element of ironic justice in his plight, for he has been somewhat churlish, but the prevailing sense is of the arbitrariness of love, and of the wasteland which it brings with it.



The desolation to which the lover is vulnerable is, of course, the dominant background of The Testament of Cresseid. "Background" rather than "theme", because I hope to show that the ultimate effect of the Testament transcends the sense of waste and destruction which superficially dominates the poem. The question of Henryson's optimism or pessimism here has been a major critical issue, relating to other critical debates, about the relationship of pagan and Christian elements in the poem and about the nature and justice of the gods' sentence on Cresseid.<sup>59</sup> I believe that the structure of the Testament is Christian, and that Henryson's own view of Cresseid's fate (and hence, of the fate of human beings generally) is clearly optimistic, but at the same time, there has been a tendency for those critics who have stressed these aspects to underestimate the more immediate impression of misery which the poem creates. It is this double nature of the Testament which I intend to explore in the following pages, since it appears to me that it is closely related to the patterns of irony and ambiguity which have caused — and are still, if the current literature is any guide, causing — the critics so much trouble, and it is ultimately crucial in defining that didactic theme which is Henryson's central concern.

We may perhaps begin with Henryson's own final statement of purpose:

Now, worthie Wemen, in this Ballet schort,  
 Made for your worschip and Instructioun,  
 Of Cheritie, I monische and exhort,  
 Ming not your lufe with fals deceptioun.  
 Beir in your mynd this schort conclusioun  
 Of fair Cresseid, as I have said befoir.

Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir.

(610-6)

This is not, I think, in any real sense a moralitas, as Professor Bennett suggests.<sup>60</sup> It is rather an envoi, a formal direction of the poem to its audience, than a clear-cut statement of the moral meaning, and the only real information it offers is that Henryson was aiming his poem at a female audience, or at least, to the female part of his audience. Beyond this point, the stanza is a tissue of ambiguities. Professor Bennett has noted the "final touch of teasing ambiguity" of the last line, but he misses the even greater complexity of the earlier part of the stanza:

But Henryson cannot forgo his moralitas, heavy as it is with laboured polysyllables and padded lines. Even at this point he can take his eye off the object and glance at other purposes, professing that this balade on female fickleness is made not only for the instruction of women but in their honour ('worschip' 611); they are not to mingle their love with false deception (613) — though Cresseid's 'deception' has hardly been the central theme of the story.

61

A great deal hinges, I think, upon the function of the phrase "of Cheritie", which hovers ambiguously in the middle of the stanza: it can be read in at least six different ways, each of which imparts a slightly different nuance to the stanza and hence to the poem as a whole. The alternatives may be summarized as follows:

1. "in this Ballet schort ..... Of Cheritie"
2. "in this Ballet schort, Made ..... Of Cheritie"
3. "Made for your worschip, and Instructioun of Cheritie"
4. and 5. "Of Cheritie I monische and exhort" (where 'Of' may be read either as 'concerning' or as 'out of')



6. "Of Cheritie ..... Ming not your lufe with fals  
deceptioun".

According to which of these alternatives we choose, "Cheritie" may be understood, most neutrally, as the theme of the poem (1 and 3), or as an attribute of the narrator (2 and 5, 'out of'), or as an attribute desirable in the female audience (4, 'concerning', and 6). In any case, it is evident that "Cheritie" is a notion to which Henryson attaches considerable importance, for why else would he give it such prominence in his final stanza?

Charity, indeed, is an important moral concept in medieval Christianity, owing its significance ultimately to St Paul and to Augustine.<sup>62</sup> In its fullest sense it means Christian love, that love of God which according to Augustine is the sole justification of attachment to the things of this world. This is how it is defined by Henryson's contemporary John Ireland in his treatise on penance:

And doctouris sayis þat cherite is luf and dilectioun  
be þe quhilk þow lufis god for him self and þi  
nychtbour for þe luf of him and becaus þat grace and  
cherite is forme and perfectioun of all wertheu and na  
werk is meritour na acceptable to god without it.

63

It is noteworthy, for reasons which will emerge later, that Ireland here seems to regard "grace" and "charity" as near-synonyms, but the more important point for an understanding of the medieval connotations of the word is the all-inclusiveness upon which Ireland insists: every part of our lives in this sublunary world ought properly to be suffused with caritas, the selfless love of God. But charity can also carry a less inclusive

meaning, as natural affection, or more generally still, as benevolence towards one's neighbours, or as an application of this, alms-giving. All three occur frequently in Middle English, as a glance at dictionary-entries shows.<sup>64</sup> A further sense, which seems to have developed later than the others, is also relevant to Henryson's poem, for when Caxton, in his version of the Disticha Catonis, appeals to his audience's tolerance, he is using "charity" in a rather special way:

I ..... beseche alle suche that fynde faute or errour  
that of theyr charyte they correcte and amende hit.

65

"Charity" in this case means, in the words of OED, "a disposition to judge leniently", perhaps as a particular example of Christian benevolence. Caxton's use of the term in this sense (in 1483) indicates that it was available in the later fifteenth century, and it cannot be ruled out in considering Henryson's Testament.

This last point is worth insisting upon, since the nature of judgment is one obvious theme in the poem. It should direct our attention, not only towards the judgment of Cresseid by the gods, but also towards the vexed question of the judgments which are offered by Henryson's narrator. There is an ambiguity even in the way in which we are to see him as charitable: in intention towards his female audience, perhaps, to whom he is "charitably" offering moral instruction, but also towards Cresseid, whose sins he seems willing to overlook, or at least to excuse. I do not see how else we can read that well-known (notorious is perhaps a better word) passage in which the narrator introduces Cresseid herself:

Quhen Diomeid had all his appetyte,  
And mair, fulfillit of this fair Ladie,



Upon ane uther he set his haill delyte  
 And send to hir ane Lybell of repudie,  
 And hir excludit fra his companie.  
 Than desolait scho walkit up and down,  
 And sum men sayis into the Court commoun.

O fair Creisseid, the flour and A per se  
 Of Troy and Grece, how was thou fortunait!  
 To change in filth all thy Femitie,  
 And be with fleschlie lust sa maculait,  
 And go amang the Greikis air and lait  
 Sa giglotlike, takand thy foull plesance!  
 I have pietie thou suld fall sic mischance.

Yit nevertheless quhat ever men deme or say  
 In scornfull langage of thy brukkilnes,  
 I sall excuse, als far furth as I may,  
 Thy womanheid, thy wisdome and fairnes;  
 The quhilk Fortoun hes put to sic distres  
 As hir pleisit, and nathing throw the gilt  
 Of the, throw wickit langage to be spilt.

(71-91)

These difficult stanzas are full of qualification and evasion: the narrator excuses Cresseid "als far furth" as he can, and dodges the question of her promiscuity by attributing the story to rumour. But he does positively relieve her of the moral responsibility, stating that Fortune is to blame for her actions and her plight: the outright statement of ll. 90-1 is all the more emphatic because it is taking up the "fortunait" of l. 79.<sup>66</sup> This is, of course, a way of dealing with the accusations of "brukkilnes" which are made against Cresseid, since this word too is full of ambiguity: "brukkil" (cf. ME. "brotel") can mean either fragile or fickle, senses which are respectively without and with pejorative connotations. Henryson's narrator does not entirely deny Cresseid's fickleness, but he tries to focus our attention upon her fragility, her vulnerability to Fortune. His use of "Feminitie" (l. 80) and "womanheid" (l. 88) is interesting in this context, for the qualities they suggest for

him are clearly favourable, whereas they would have for the medieval anti-feminist connotations of untrustworthiness, sensuality and worldliness, attributes which are consistent with Cresseid's role.

In other words, the narrator is making out the best case he can for Cresseid, casting some doubt on the reliability of the hostile accounts of her behaviour, suggesting that she was not altogether responsible for her situation, and invoking her femininity as a positive quality. In treating her in this way, he certainly models himself to some extent upon the narrator of Troilus and Criseyde, who similarly hedges on the question of Criseyde's guilt (Tr. IV, 15-21; V, 1044-50, 1094-9). But Henryson carries both the evasiveness and the partisanship of his narrator much further than does Chaucer: Professor Bennett is surely right to distinguish between the compassion shown by the narrator of Troilus and Criseyde and the excuses offered by the narrator of the Testament.<sup>67</sup> The charity which the latter reveals is excessive, part of the ironic treatment of the narrator's role which Henryson has developed a great deal from his Chaucerian models.<sup>68</sup> The self-characterization which the narrator gives in the opening stanzas of the Testament prepares the way for this; he is himself an adherent of the cult of Love:

For I traistit that Venus, luifis Quene,  
To quhome sum tyme I hecht obedience,  
My faidit hart of lufe scho wald mak grene,  
And therupon with humbill reverence,  
I thocht to pray hir hie Magnificence;  
Bot for greit cald as than I lattit was,  
And in my Chalmer to the fyre can pas.

(22-8)

It is not immediately clear whether the "sum tyme" of the



narrator's devotion to Venus is the same as, or earlier than, the present of the prologue: on reflection, it must be the same, and yet it is set very firmly in the past, both by the sense of distance which the phrase itself creates, and by the past tense of "traistit", which implies that the narrator no longer trusts Venus. This suggestion is perhaps the best evidence we have that we are to see the narrator learning from Cresseid's experience; and if this reading is correct, it provides a reason for his initial partiality for Cresseid. He begins the poem as a servant of Love, and is hence predisposed to think well of Cresseid and chivalrously to offer excuses for her. But as she suffers for her sins, he learns that there are higher values than those to which he is attached at the beginning of the poem. The "charity" which he initially reveals in excusing Cresseid is replaced by a sense of that higher caritas which, as the opposite of cupiditas, must carry him beyond the religion of Love. This makes sense of the apparent contradiction that the advocate of Charity is also a devotee of Venus: his dual role is carefully embedded in the structure of the Testament, which unfolds a slow process of education of Cresseid, narrator and audience together, and it is bound up with the teasing ambiguities of the notion of charity.

The parallel between the narrator and Cresseid is an element of the greatest importance. It is not coincidental, or merely conventional, that the narrator is presented as past his prime, though of course there are Chaucerian precedents.<sup>69</sup> He, like Cresseid, is subject to the vicissitudes of life, and his prayer

My faidit hart of lufe scho wald mak grene

anticipates Cresseid's own complaint against Cupid and Venus:

'Ye causit me alwayis understand and throw  
The seid of lufe was sawin in my face,  
And ay grew grene throw your supplie and grace.  
Bot now allace that seid with froist is slane,  
And I fra luifferis left and all forlane.'

(136-40)

The delusion which Cresseid here reveals, that lovers can somehow stand outside the vicissitudes of Time, has its parallel in the narrator's trust that Venus will renew his "faidit hart":

to this extent, I do not agree with Professor MacQueen that his natural ageing is contrasted with Cresseid's premature blight.

The primary sense, it seems to me, is of a similarity between the two in their misapprehension of their place in Time, admittedly qualified by the greater acceptance manifested by the narrator. For he concedes that alcohol is a substitute for natural vigour, and comforts himself with a sustaining drink (ll. 36-8).<sup>70</sup>

This comic realism (in two senses of the term) makes an important contribution to the prologue and to the poem, for the narrator's relatively cheerful acceptance of his situation does contrast with the overwhelmingly negative treatment of Cresseid. The narrator is set against an actual landscape, and the bleak, wintry spring of the prologue is an actual season, against which spirits, a fire and a good book offer some consolation; but the wasteland of Cresseid's environment is entirely spiritual, and her response to it, for the greater part of the poem, only makes things worse.

The moral blindness exhibited by Cresseid far outweighs that of the narrator. He, it is true, places some trust in the



regenerative power of Venus, and tries to relieve Cresseid of the responsibility for her actions. Cresseid herself carries both delusions much further. Her first long speech, the prayer to Venus and Cupid, shows that she accepts neither her moral responsibility nor her own mutability.<sup>71</sup> The repetitive use of "always . . . . ay" in her prayer gives emphasis to the latter point, but the former is perhaps in the long run the more important:

'Quha sall me gyde? quha sall me now convoy  
Sen I fra Diomeid and nobill Troylus  
Am clene excludit, as abject odious?

O fals Cupide, is nane to wyte bot thow,  
And thy Mother, of lufe the blind Goddes!'

(131-5)

The point is, of course, that the blame for her situation rests not with Cupid and Venus but with Cresseid herself, as the inclusion of Troilus is surely intended to remind us. Cresseid is excluded from his company through her own choice, and it is hardly surprising that the gods react angrily to her accusation. The central interest is not, I think, in Cresseid's blasphemy itself, but in the reasons for it, her inability to understand or accept the nature of human responsibility and transience.

Henryson's treatment of the pagan gods in the Testament has proved a further source of difficulty, not least because their parliament is ambiguously set within Cresseid's dream.<sup>72</sup> A number of related issues arise from Henryson's rather veiled intentions here: whether Cresseid's dream belongs to a reality outside her own psychological state (a visio, or oraculum, according to Macrobius' terminology) or is rather a projection of her own frame of mind (an insomnium),<sup>73</sup> the actual nature of

the crime for which she is punished, whether the gods' sentence is just, and how the power of the gods is to be reconciled with a Christian view of the world. On this last point, the narrator is quite specific:

At quhais sound befoir Cupide appeiris  
The seven Planetis discending fra thair Spheiris,

Quhilk hes power of all thing generabill  
To reull and steir be thair greit Influence,  
Wedder and wind, and coursis variabill .....

(146-50)

This perfectly orthodox medieval reconciliation of the omnipotence of God and freedom of the human will with the science of astrology provides a basis for the intervention of the planetary gods: their jurisdiction is confined to the transitory things of this world, to "all thing generabill".<sup>74</sup> The planetary nature of Henryson's gods is heavily stressed, in the introductory reference to the "seven Planetis", in the descending Ptolemaic order in which they are described, and in numerous details of the portraits and of the parliament. Their relevance to Cresseid's prayer, in which she challenges her own mutability, is obvious enough, and it is significant that they exercise their power by blighting her body: it is, after all, the corporeal part of man which is within the scope of the planets, while the soul is (potentially, at least) beyond their power. The disease of leprosy is therefore a clear symbol of Cresseid's vulnerability to the gods, which is actually greater because she does not recognize it. In the words of a popular medieval tag, Sapiens dominabitur astris,<sup>75</sup> but the foolish man (or woman) does not understand the limited nature of their jurisdiction, and therefore is unable to escape them.



Cupid's actual accusation against Cresseid, however, is based on somewhat different grounds:

'I say this be yone wretchit Cresseid,  
The quhilk throw me was sum tyme flour of lufe,  
Me and my Mother starklie can reprufe,

Saying of hir greit Infelicitie  
I was the caus, and my Mother Venus,  
Ane blind Goddes, hir cald, that nicht not se,  
With sclander and defame Injurious;  
Thus hir leving unclene and lecherous  
Scho wald returne on me and my Mother,  
To quhome I schew my grace abone all uther.'

(278-87)

With these charges, we return to the other side of Cresseid's double delusion, her failure to accept moral responsibility for her actions. Cupid, it is true, is primarily concerned with the insult she has thrown at himself and Venus, but the underlying cause of her "blasphemy" is to be found in the inadequacy of her moral understanding. Cresseid's fault, therefore, is not merely technical: it goes to the heart of the question of human freedom. Cresseid portrays herself as the helpless victim of forces beyond her control (a view, as we have seen, which the narrator shares at the outset of his poem), but it is not evident that Henryson intends us to accept this position. The attitude of Cupid is of some importance in this connection since his own understanding of Cresseid's fault seems to be only partial. The real basis of his complaint is self-centred, while it appears from the overall pattern of the poem that Henryson intends his audience's attention to focus not on the wrong suffered by the gods, but rather on the effect on Cresseid of her lack of self-awareness. This produces an ironic situation in which the gods' accusation and judgment, while just,

has a significance which the gods cannot see: the "blasphemy" of which Cupid complains is a side-issue, and the planetary divinities reach a conclusion, in itself correct, for the wrong reasons. How far can this discrepancy which I am suggesting, between Henryson's ultimate perception of the working of justice and that of the gods, be substantiated from the text of the Testament?

The introductory descriptions of the gods are obviously an important element in the poem, occupying nearly a third of the whole work. The catalogue of portraits is formalized in a number of ways: the sequence is that of the planets in the Ptolemaic system, in descending order, and, as Professor MacQueen has observed, they are alternately hostile and sympathetic.<sup>76</sup> Various iconographic details are picked up again and again, defining the role of each deity through his or her attributes. Thus, Saturn's bow and arrows, one of the many details which Henryson himself appears to contribute, drawing on no identifiable mythographic or iconographic tradition,<sup>77</sup> is taken up in the emphasis upon the arms of Mars, while both are contrasted in the intervening portrait of Jupiter with the "burelie" brand and the spear which he carries "Of his Father the wraith fra us to weir" (l. 182). The effect of these portraits is to a very large extent defined by the colours associated with each of the gods: grey and the blue of ice and cold for Saturn, green and gold for Jupiter, red (modified perhaps by the rustiness of his sword) for Mars, gold for Phebus, green and black for Venus (qualified by the gold of her hair), scarlet for Mercury, black and grey for Cynthia. It is clear that such details are



intended to have a profound effect upon our attitude to the various deities, and that while the hostile ones are primarily associated with drabness, brightness is the characteristic of the favourable planets, Jupiter, Phebus and Mercury. As Henryson describes them, the gods are rather evenly balanced, since Cynthia, although the imagery tends to associate her with the hostile group, has no real qualities of her own:

Haw as the leid, of colour nathing cleir;  
 For all hir licht scho borrowis at hir brother  
 Titan, for of hir self scho hes nane uther.

(257-9)

Here again we find that ambiguity which characterizes the poem as a whole: in one sense neutral, and from the astronomical point of view associated with the friendly Phebus (the source of her light), Cynthia nevertheless seems to be in the hostile camp from the outset. Nor is this a mere question of numbers, for it is to Cynthia, together with the unambiguously hostile Saturn, that the judgment of Cresseid is assigned by Mercury.

This latter passage is in itself rather puzzling. We are given very little information about the process by which the gods reach their decision, which makes it even more difficult to evaluate its justice. The whole matter is disposed of in two stanzas:

Mercurius to Cupide gave answeir  
 And said: 'Schir King my counsall is that ye  
 Refer yow to the hiest planeit heir,  
 And tak to him the lawest of degre,  
 The pane of Cresseid for to modifie;  
 As god Saturne, with him tak Cynthia.'  
 'I am content,' quod he, 'to tak thay twa.'

Than thus proceidit Saturne and the Mone,  
 Quhen thay the mater rypelie had degest,  
 For the dispyte to Cupide scho had done,  
 And to Venus oppin and manifest,

In all hir lyfe with pane to be opprest,  
 And torment sair, with seiknes incurabill,  
 And to all lovers be abhominabill.

(295-308)

Stated in this form, the choice of Saturn and Cynthia as assessors is bound to seem arbitrary, and what we have been told of their natures leads us to expect a harsh decision. It is perhaps curious that Mercury should make this choice, since his own place is clearly among the favourable party. One of the difficulties inherent in Henryson's use of the allegory of a trial, of course, is that the image requires him to imply decisions freely taken among the gods, while the astrological system upon which the metaphor is based is much more mechanistic. Saturn and Cynthia, in astrological terms, come into conjunction as a result of their determined movements through the heavens ("certane caussis"), and the effect which they have upon human affairs as a result is also fixed, and without reference to the facts of the case.<sup>78</sup> Henryson cannot afford, for the sake of his metaphor, to bring these contradictions too much out into the open, but they have a great deal to do with the inadequacy of the gods' decision, since the system of which they are part is both inferior to and less morally sensitive than the divine providence to which they, like the rest of Creation, are ultimately subject.

Yet, without going into details, Henryson does stress the care taken by Saturn and Cynthia who "rypeliē ... degest" the question. He thus contrives to hold the two parts of his allegory together, since the decision they reach both conforms to astrological principles and relates to the moral themes of the



poem, and the idea of the court is maintained. It is only this section of the poem, it should be noted, which is truly allegorical in the sense to which I have suggested the term should be confined. Cresseid herself is in no way an allegorical character, and the action which springs from her punishment is non-allegorical also. The success with which Henryson has thus blended allegorical and non-allegorical elements within a single action is one of the hallmarks of The Testament of Cresseid, and it contributes much to the richness of the moral viewpoint which the poem ultimately expounds. The ambiguity surrounding the status of the gods themselves is a direct consequence of the introduction of the allegorical mode, since the relationship between dreams and reality is an endlessly absorbing subject about which there was a large literature in the Middle Ages.<sup>79</sup> I do not think that the dream-trial can be written off as a mere product of Cresseid's tormented mind, for such an approach eliminates from the poem the whole question of the moral relationship between the individual and the various forces at work in the universe which seems to me to occupy a substantial proportion of Henryson's attention. But it suits his complex purposes to let the gods stand ambiguously between the real and the imaginary, partly a reflection of an astrological reality which has a limited effect upon human life, partly a metaphor for the more generally powerful operation of moral cause and effect: Cresseid's failure to grasp both her moral responsibility and her essential transience brings her to a terrible fate, and the allegory of planetary divinities will do very well to represent these undeniably real consequences

imaginatively. Yet Henryson is careful not to give the gods an unambiguously literal reality: they are, after all, part of a dream and therefore ultimately imaginary. It is the reality of the forces which they represent which is the central point.

It is perhaps in the light of these considerations that we should read the narrator's second intervention into the action:

O cruell Saturne! fraward and angrie,  
 Hard is thy dome, and to malitious;  
 On fair Cresseid quhy hes thou na mercie,  
 Quhilk was sa sweit, gentill and amorous?  
 Withdraw thy sentence and be gracious  
 As thou was never; so schawis thow thy deid,  
 Ane wraikfull sentence gevin on fair Cresseid.

(323-9)

This apostrophe is, of course, thoroughly consistent with the position earlier adopted by the narrator. It, too, echoes the role of Chaucer's narrator in Troilus and Criseyde: most obviously, at the point at which the weather forces Criseyde to stay at Pandarus' house, Chaucer's narrator explicitly accepts the limited powers of Fortune and the planetary gods:

Butt O Fortune, executrice of wyrdes,  
 O influences of this hevenes hye!  
 Soth is, that under God ye ben oure hierdes,  
 Though to us bestes ben the causes wrie.

80

Henryson makes his narrator give similar sanction to the real power of Saturn, and hence presumably of the other gods as well. It seems that there is a certain irony intended, however, for the narrator is evidently unaware of those ambiguities which we have just seen to emerge from the use of dream-allegory. This irony reinforces that which arises from his defence of Cresseid: she is "sweit, gentill and amorous", which scarcely represents a



strong vindication of her character in view of the offences she has committed. As a defence against the charge of blasphemy, perhaps, the qualities attributed to Cresseid by the narrator do redeem her somewhat, but the last trait, amorousness, is obviously ironically intended and damns the heroine by invoking in her support the very quality which has led to her moral predicament.

The discrepancy between the moral vision of the gods and a higher morality which the narrator thus points to (not, perhaps, altogether wittingly) does not exhaust the significance of these lines. In another sense, he is here allowed to foreshadow one of the central questions which dominates the latter part of the Testament, namely the distinction between justice and mercy, punishment and Grace. Up to a point, the narrator is representing Henryson's own view, I think, when he criticizes Saturn's lack of mercy towards Cresseid: the sternness of "this duleful sentence" is readily apparent in the terms of the judgment (ll. 313-22). But there is a naiveté in his questions which still separates his view from the poem's ultimate meaning. The reason for Saturn's lack of mercy lies, as we see in the portraits of the gods, in his nature, and there is no point in appealing to him for clemency. Grace, indeed, is not a characteristic of the planetary forces of which the gods are symbols but rather of God himself, and the narrator is therefore still manifesting his ignorance of the true nature of things when he suggests that it is possible for Saturn to reverse his judgment. At the same time, he introduces the word "gracious" into the discussion; anticipating the last stage in the education of

Cresseid, and the emphasis on charity in the final stanza.

I am not certain, moreover, that Henryson might not have expected us to perceive another ironic ambiguity in the narrator's appeal. For the whole nature of fiction is in a way questioned by his apostrophe, referring us back to the narrator's earlier doubts:

Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait wes trew?  
 Nor I wait nocht gif this narratioun  
 Be authoreist, or fenyeit of the new  
 Be sum Poeit, throw his Invention,  
 Maid to report the Lamentatioun  
 And wofull end of this listie Creisseid,  
 And quhat distres scho thoillit, and quhat deid.

(64-70)

To the extent that the Testament is a fiction, the power to alter the course of events lies not with Saturn but with the poet himself, and the suffering which Cresseid undergoes is sanctioned by him, no doubt for aesthetic and doctrinal reasons alike. To the extent that as a fiction the poem purports to give an account of actual events, on the other hand, Cresseid's fate as heroine is indeed determined in a sense much more rigid than the determination bound up with the supposed operations of the planetary powers. This neat contradiction is (or ought to be) evident to the modern reader, and it cannot be assumed that Henryson himself did not perceive it. Indeed, given his earlier introduction of the issue of fiction-as-history, and the ironic treatment his narrator receives elsewhere in the Testament, it seems reasonable to regard this reading as one naturally carried by the words. To accept this involves the proposition that Henryson was aware of the absurdity underlying that very common medieval rhetorical ploy, the apostrophe, already criticized by



Chaucer on other grounds.<sup>81</sup> It also gives to the Testament another level of complexity, introducing a narrator whose limitations as a moral interpreter are paralleled by a failure to understand the boundaries of his own fiction.

The immediate consequence of Cresseid's discovery, on awaking, that the sentence proclaimed by the gods in her dream has indeed been carried out is a considerable gain in awareness:

Weiping full sair, 'Lo quhat it is,' quod sche,  
 'With fraward langage for to mufe and steir  
 Our craibit Goddis, and sa is sene on me!  
 My blaspheming now have I bocht full deir.'

(351-4)

She subsequently lapses from this position, but taken by itself, this statement indicates a degree of recognition of responsibility, although as yet even this is confined to the question of her blasphemy. She has absorbed the narrow lesson of the dream, but she is not yet capable of wider understanding. Cresseid's primary concern in the following stanzas, indeed, is with the misery of her situation. The request she makes of her father is heavily laden with mortification:

'Father, I wald not be kend.  
 Thairfoir in secreit wyse ye let me gang  
 Into yone Hospitall at the tounis end.  
 And thidder sum meit for Cheritie me send  
 To leif upon, for all mirth in this eird  
 Is fra me gane, sic is my wickit weird.'

(380-5)

Henryson continues to develop the ironic patterns of the poem. We may note here the reference to charity, used by Cresseid in the limited sense of alms-giving. Not surprisingly, her attention is concentrated upon the difficulty of merely surviving as a leper, but there is surely a contrast between the

charity she envisages at this point and the much more spiritual effect of Troilus' charity towards the end of the poem. Even more significantly, perhaps, what drives Cresseid to the leper-house outside the walls is the desire to avoid recognition, when it is the near-recognition of her by Troilus which will finally trigger her moral regeneration. When we look back to this passage with the hindsight of the closing stanzas, Cresseid's "'I wald not be kend'" acquires considerable poignancy.

Cresseid could hardly maintain her ignorance of her mutability in the face of advancing leprosy, and she has therefore learned one of the two lessons required by her earlier folly. It is not clear, however, that she has yet learned the true nature of human responsibility. Her long, rhetorical complaint (ll. 407-69) is largely concerned with the impact of mutability, falling within that prolific medieval genre of laments over the transience of this world, one feature of which is the employment of the ubi sunt? motif.<sup>82</sup> She is even willing to set herself up as a dire warning to other women, addressing the "Ladyis fair of Troy and Grece":

'Nocht is your fairnes bot ane faiding flour,  
 Nocht is your famous laud and hie honour  
 Bot wind inflat in uther mennis eiris.  
 Your roising reid to rotting sall retour:  
 Exempill mak of me in your Memour,  
 Quhilk of sic thingis wofull witnes beiris,  
 All welth in eird, away as wind it weiris.  
 Be war thairfoir, approchis neir the hour:  
 Fortoun is fikkill, quhen scho beginnis & steiris.'

(461-9)

This view, which is perhaps foreshadowed in Cresseid's allusion to her "wickit weird" in l. 385, is scarcely an advance on that of her earlier complaint; then she was blaming Venus and Cupid,



now she blames Fortune, but she still avoids the conclusion that her situation is her own fault. The orthodox medieval view, from Boethius on, is that a man is only vulnerable to Fortune if he allows himself to be, and that it is attachment to the things of this world which subjects us to her power.<sup>83</sup> Cresseid's complaint parallels Troilus' long lament in Troilus and Criseyde (IV, 260-336), and similarly reflects only a partial understanding of the working of the world.<sup>84</sup>

It is vital, I think, to a proper reading of the Testament to sort out the way in which Cresseid here approaches Henryson's own view of the world, while still falling short of it. There is no doubt that the transience of human life, of which the complaint is such an eloquent expression, is an important part of Henryson's world-view, expounded elsewhere in the moralitas to The Paddok and the Mous, for example:

The Paddok, usand in the flude to duell,  
Is mannish bodie, swymand air and lait  
In to this world, with cairis implicate,  
Now hie, now law, quhyllis plungit up, quhyllis doun,  
Ay in perrell, and reddie for to droun.

(Bass. 2936-40)

It provides the basis, moreover, for the final twist in Troilus and Criseyde, and must therefore be relevant at least to the genesis of Henryson's poem:

O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,  
In which that love up groweth with youre age,  
Repeyareth hom fro worldly vanyte,  
And of youre herte up casteth the visage  
To thilke God that after his ymage  
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire  
This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.

Whatever the difficulties associated with integrating these

orthodox views into the totality of Troilus and Criseyde,<sup>86</sup> it is clear that the contemptus mundi theme implicit in them is echoed by Cresseid in her complaint. The rhetorical force of Cresseid's speech gives them a crucial position in the Testament, and there is an important difference which helps to define the much more sombre tone of Henryson's poem. Whereas Chaucer at the end of Troilus and Criseyde contrasts divine providence with the mutability of worldly things, Cresseid concentrates only upon the misery of the human condition without any compensating sense of man's spiritual capacity to transcend his physical limitations. Nor is this entirely surprising: she has after all seen no evidence of the divine help which is necessary for such a process, and the central part of the poem is thus dominated by a pessimism (which has its roots in the determinism of the mechanistic world of the pagan gods, a world which here remains unrelieved by any over-riding Christian interpretation) which is characteristic of Cresseid's limited, distorted view. It is from this source, I think, that those critics who have found the poem as a whole to be pessimistic have drawn their evidence,<sup>87</sup> but such a reading ignores the change which takes place with the entry of Troilus.

The first stage of Cresseid's spiritual recovery, however, arises not from Troilus but from another leper, who counsels acceptance:

'Sen thy weiping dowbillis bot thy wo,  
I counsall the mak vertew of ane neid .....

(477-8)

This terse but practical advice is presumably accepted by Cresseid:



Thair was na buit, bot furth with thame scho yeid .....

(481)

Henryson's brevity in such contexts contrasts markedly with Cresseid's high-flown rhetoric, and emphasizes the harshness of her situation.<sup>88</sup> But Cresseid has moved from recognition of her vulnerability to acceptance of her fate, at least in the sense that there is nothing to be done about it, and this brief scene is therefore perhaps a necessary prelude to the more important lesson which she is about to learn from Troilus.

It is not altogether clear exactly how this latter lesson actually works. The narrative sequence itself is obvious enough: Troilus, passing the hospice, sees Cresseid and without quite recognizing her is sufficiently moved by the recollection of Cresseid to give her alms, and it is only after he has gone that Cresseid discovers his identity and is overcome by remorse:

And ever in hir swouning cryit scho thus:  
'O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus.

'Thy lufe, thy lawtie, and thy gentilnes,  
I countit small in my prosperitie,  
Sa elevait I was in wantones,  
And clam upon the fickill quheill sa hie:  
All Faith and Lufe I promissit to the,  
Was in the self fickill and frivolous:  
O fals Cresseid, and trew knicht Troilus.'

(545-53)

Since Troilus has said nothing to her, Cresseid cannot know whether he has recognized her or not, and we are faced with the intriguing possibility that her sudden self-awareness arises from yet another misapprehension. This is, however, something of a red herring, for what really matters is not the technical question of recognition, but the generosity he displays towards Cresseid the leper.<sup>89</sup> She is, after all, correct in her

assumption that recollection of their love is related to his gift, which he makes "For knichtlie pietie and memoriall/ Of fair Cresseid" (ll. 519-20). The caritas which he thus reveals is neatly contrasted with the vengefulness of the planetary gods, and particularly of Cupid, and it seems that for Henryson Troilus represents a different, higher moral order. The effect which is wrought by his gift parallels on a smaller scale that which springs from the gift of divine Grace — a moral and spiritual regeneration which allows Cresseid to achieve self-understanding. It is important not to overstate this case, for the Testament is not, after all, an allegory, and there is no clue which allows us to treat Troilus as a kind of Christ-figure. Henryson remains conscious of the pagan background to his story, and reminds us of it as well towards the end of Cresseid's final testament:

My Spreit I leif to Diane quhair scho dwellis,  
To walk with hir in waist woddis and wellis.

(587-8)

The closest he can come to introducing the Christian notion of God's caritas, therefore, is to describe that natural charity of the good man which is a reflection of it, and this is what Troilus' action exemplifies.

Henryson is at pains, indeed, to prevent Troilus' moral function from occupying too much of our attention. He devotes an entire stanza to an Aristotelian exposition of the operation of the memory, thus giving a precision to Troilus' reactions.<sup>90</sup> There is a very detailed account of his emotional response as well, and even the description of the physical act of throwing down the alms to Cresseid is given a sharp reality:



For knichtlie pietie and memoriall  
 Of fair Cresseid, ane gyrdill can he tak,  
 Ane purs of gold, and mony gay jowall,  
 And in the skirt of Cresseid doun can swak .....

(519-22)

Henryson's use of "swak" here is interesting: it certainly suggests considerable physical force, and may even contain a vague, vestigial echo of the earlier, sexual relationship of Troilus and Cresseid. Quite certainly, there is an echo of earlier gifts, of the rings they exchanged and the brooch given by Criseyde to Troilus (Tr. III, 1366-72) and of the brooch given to her by Troilus just before her departure from Troy (V, 1660-6), the latter the sign by which he later learns of her unfaithfulness. These gifts play an important part in Chaucer's telling of the story, and they are taken up by Henryson both here and in Cresseid's testament. It is perhaps also significant that Troilus now gives her a girdle: this may suggest, as Wood indicates, "the cincture of chastity",<sup>91</sup> but it is also a further echo of the sexuality they once shared.<sup>92</sup> Like the rest of the poem, the scene between Troilus and Cresseid is a mass of interconnecting echoes and ironies, which challenge the audience to adopt any single hard-and-fast interpretation: the overall direction of this latter part is towards a kind of redemption for Cresseid, and yet the literal emphasis here is upon the poignancy of near-recognition and the tragedy to which human beings are condemned as a result of their fundamental condition.<sup>93</sup>

Cresseid's third long speech is much more straightforward. She now attributes to herself the qualities of instability and unreliability which are assigned to Venus in her dream, and

traditionally to Fortune:

'Becaus I knaw the greit unstabilnes  
 Bruckill as glas, into my self I say,  
 Traisting in uther als greit unfaithfulnes:  
 Als unconstant, and als untrew of fay.  
 Thocht sum be trew, I wait richt few ar thay,  
 Quha findis treuth lat him his lady ruse:  
 Nane but my self as now I will accuse.'

(568-74)

The last line is the moral climax towards which the whole poem has been leading: Cresseid at least realizes her responsibility for her own acts, and with this recognition she is ready to die. Her use of the "brukkill as glas" image recalls the narrator's defence of her (cf. l. 86), but now there is no real ambiguity, for Cresseid accepts that her inconstancy is nobody's fault but her own, and the poem does indeed seem to be approaching the classic anti-feminist stance characteristic of so much medieval literature.<sup>94</sup> Professor Bennett finds Cresseid's self-condemnation excessive, and it certainly represents a complete reaction against her previous attempts at self-justification.<sup>95</sup> It has the enthusiastic imbalance of the recent convert, but it is hard to see how Henryson could have compensated for this without making her seem still to be engaged in rationalization and excuse-making. This last lament is, after all, not Henryson's view, or ours, but Cresseid's final view of herself, and the means by which we can assess her spiritual progress. If she errs on the side of self-excoriation, that is at least an improvement on her earlier moral blindness.

The poem now moves quickly towards its end. Cresseid's disposal of her few goods is closely related to the education she has received: she begins by admitting her physical corrupt-



ibility (ll. 577-8) and making provision for her burial, returns her ring to Troilus and assigns her soul to Diana, the goddess of chastity, and then, apparently lamenting her gifts to Diomeid, dies.<sup>96</sup>

The remaining stanzas of the narrative have an understated quality which is reminiscent of the closing chapters of Malory's Arthuriad.<sup>97</sup> Troilus' response to her death packs sorrow, helplessness and moral judgment into a dozen words:

Siching full sadlie, said: 'I can no moir,  
Scho was untrew, and wo is me thairfoir.'

(601-2)

The epitaph which "sum said" he placed on Cresseid's tomb (an echo of "sum men sayis" in l. 77?) not only summarizes her tragedy but sets it up, in the same way that Cresseid herself does in two of her speeches, as a moral example:

'Lo, fair ladyis, Crisseid, of Troyis toun,  
Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid,  
Under this stane, lait lipper, lyis deid.'

(607-9)

This exhortation paves the way for the narrator's closing "Now, worthie women", which makes such a sharp contrast with his earlier attempts at a defence of his heroine, and the narrator's perspective at the end seems to resemble Troilus' own. It is not surprising, therefore, that Troilus' epitaph is better balanced than Cresseid's own assessment of the significance of her story: although there is some ambivalence inherent in the statement that she was

Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid,

it does point to her double nature, the beautiful and passionate woman who was brought to moral and physical ruin by the very qualities which were the foundation of her attractiveness. The

rest is understatement, the reticence of the epitaph echoed by the narrator's final words, "Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir". This quasi-proverbial remark<sup>98</sup> suggests perhaps that nothing more can be said in Cresseid's favour, but it also leaves us most conscious of her mortality (and hence, presumably, of our own). Whereas Chaucer, at least in the final version of Troilus and Criseyde,<sup>99</sup> gives Troilus an apotheosis in the eighth sphere, we are left by Henryson only with Cresseid's physical death. The moral growth which she achieves is met by no eternal reward, and the explicitly Christian view of death and resurrection is nowhere allowed to impinge.

The sombreness which is undoubtedly the most striking literal quality of The Testament of Cresseid is in part the natural consequence of the story Henryson has to tell: he begins with only degradation and misery before his central character. But this is reinforced by a series of aesthetic choices, of which the most important is this refusal to introduce an explicitly Christian point of view into his narrative. The Christian level of significance — which is, I am convinced, central to Henryson's intention — emerges only through hints and suggestions, and particularly through the recurring introduction of "cheritie" and related ideas. There is no contesting the fact that Troilus' act of charity brings about a moral change in Cresseid, or that this regeneration<sup>(s)</sup> makes sense of the overall pattern of increasing self-awareness which is the fundamental structural principle of the Testament. There is no doubt also that the narrator equally moves, from his original service to Venus and not-very-convincing defence of



Cresseid, to an espousal of the doctrine of caritas. But it is important to observe that the narrator (and here, presumably, Henryson as well) does not altogether reject the place of love: the final stanza counsels fidelity, not celibacy ("ming not your lufe with fals deceptioun"), and so in the end, perhaps, the servant of Venus and the advocate of Charity are reconciled.<sup>100</sup> What distinguishes The Testament of Cresseid, finally, is its human perspective: no apotheoses, no elaborate ex cathedra moralizations, no explicitly theological language, are allowed to break into the tragic human world which Henryson portrays. Yet it is not a world without hope of redemption, for Henryson does change, and whatever the theological implications may be, it is important that the change is brought about by a human act, not by divine intervention.

The four poems which we have examined in this chapter give a very clear indication of the range of Henryson's narrative techniques. His thematic concerns are perhaps rather more limited: the nature of sin, its manifestation in human behaviour, and its spiritual consequences are subjects which occur again and again in his poetry. But there is no question about the variety of forms in which he clothes these repeated themes. His technical eclecticism is apparent not only from one poem to another but also within a single work: we have seen how (with varying degrees of success) exemplum and romance convention are harmonized in The Bludy Serk and Orpheus and Erudices, how the conventions of pastourelle are made to carry a deftly ironic

moral theme in Robene and Makyne. Even in the Testament, generally the most homogeneous and formally the best organized of his "major" poems, Henryson introduces a dream which cuts across the otherwise realistic presentation of detail. No single mode of exposition is made to carry the whole moral weight of any of these poems, and none of them — not even the perplexing and perhaps incoherent Orpheus and Erudices — can be reduced to a single formula to account for the relationship between immediate narrative and ulterior meaning.

The contrast between Orpheus and Erudices and The Testament of Cresseid gives rise to another important point. For these two poems stand at opposite ends of the narrative spectrum. In Orpheus and Erudices the reader is given the assistance of a comprehensive moralitas, and the interpretative problems arise from the relationship between this explicit statement of "the meaning" and the information conveyed by the narrative itself. The difficulty is that we have, as it were, an excess of material, not all of which can readily be fitted into a single, coherent reading of the text and some of which is claimed to be an explicit interpretation of the rest. In the Testament, on the other hand, there is no such explicitness: apart from a final stanza which threatens to dissolve in ambiguity, Henryson offers no direct help with the conclusions which are to be drawn from his poem, and every stage of the narrative opens new vistas of ambiguity and irony. It is hardly surprising that such a poem has so far produced no critical consensus, and that readers are apt to reach diametrically opposed views on the most basic issues raised by the text. Henryson is sometimes portrayed as



a stern moralist, and no doubt there is much to be said for such an assessment of his personality as revealed in his poetry. But the more closely one approaches poems such as these, the more the apparent certainties of the moral and theological categories with which he deals dissolve in ambiguity. In allegory and in exemplative narrative alike, Henryson's moral vision is both subtle and complex, and it is a bold critic who claims to have de-mystified the ultimate, teasing ironies of The Testament of Cresseid or rationalized the apparent contradictions of Orpheus and Erudices.

Notes to Chapter III

- 1 Edwin Muir, Essays on Literature and Society (London 1949), pp. 17-8; A.C. Spearing, "Robert Henryson and the 'High Concise Style'", Speculum 37 (1962), 208-25, reprinted in Criticism and Medieval Poetry (London 1964).
- 2 Cf. Gesta Romanorum, ed. H. Oesterley (Berlin 1872), pp. 376-7; Gesta Romanorum, ed. S.J.H. Herrtage (EETS, London 1879), pp. 23-6.
- 3 For Felton's version, see MS. Harley 4, f. 25<sup>r</sup>; the English one, from MS. Royal 18 B xxiii, is printed in Middle English Sermons, ed. W.O. Ross (EETS, London 1940), pp. 77-8. Cf. Nicholas Bozon's version in The Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft, ed. Thomas Wright (2 vols, Rolls Series, London 1868), II, 426-37; and that by Étienne de Bourbon (which I have not seen) in Paris, Bibl. nat. MS. lat. 15970.
- 4 The exemplum of the bloody shirt and its various literary relations are discussed by Rosemary Woolf, "The Theme of Christ the Lover-Knight in Mediaeval Literature", RES n.s. 13 (1962), 1-16, and The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages (Oxford 1968), pp. 48-53; and by John Stevens, Medieval Romance (London 1973), pp. 127-8.
- 5 Johannes Bromyard, Summa predicantium (Antwerp, H. Verders 1614), s.v. P.ii.25.
- 6 Most recently, by A.M. Kinghorn, "The Minor Poems of Robert Henryson", SSL 3 (1965-6), 30-40, at 32; and I.W.A. Jamieson, "Henryson's Minor Poems", SSL 9 (1971-2), 125-47, at 144-5.
- 7 The difficulty of defining romance in such a way as to distinguish it satisfactorily from other kinds of narrative is notorious. On the ballad/romance distinction, see Dorothy Everett, Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. Patricia Kean (Oxford 1955), pp. 16-9. But the treacherous middle ground between these genres has been surveyed more recently (and controversially) by D.C. Fowler, A literary history of the popular ballad (Durham, N.C. 1968), who suggests that "romance provided the style and narrative technique that determined the evolution of the popular ballad" (p. 182).
- 8 This term is employed by Maldwyn Mills, Six Middle English Romances (London 1973), p. vii, elaborating on the approach of L.H. Loomis in Medieval Romance in England (New York 1928). The term "homiletic romance" is used by Dieter Mehl, The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (London 1969), where the religious affinities of



English romances are stressed.

- 9     Quotations from Henryson's works (with the exception of the Morall Fabillis) are from the edition by H. Harvey Wood (2nd edn, Edinburgh 1958). For a discussion of the text of the Fabillis, see below, pp.
- 10    Gesta Romanorum, ed. Herrtage, p. 23.
- 11    I.W.A. Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson: A Study of the Use of Source Material" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss, Edinburgh 1964), p. 339.
- 12    Middle English Sermons, ed. Ross, p. 77.
- 13    Gesta Romanorum, ed. Oesterley, p. 376; ed. Herrtage, p. 23.
- 14    George S. Peek, "Robert Henryson's View of Original Sin in The Bludy Serk, SSL 10 (1973-4), 199-206. Although I find several important defects in Peek's treatment of the poem, especially his rather naive use of sources and his (unsupported) assertion that "Henryson is very careful ..... to separate the 'moralitas' from the tale itself" (p. 200), his suggestions regarding Henryson's theological position are useful.
- 15    Morte Arthure, ll. 1074-1103, ed. J. Finlayson (London 1967), pp. 50-1.
- 16    Mehl, op. cit., pp. 120 ff.
- 17    Peek, op. cit., 202.
- 18    Cf. for example, John 1: 5; 8: 12.
- 19    There is an interesting parallel with the phrasing of two passages in John Ireland's Meroure of Wysdome, III, viii:
 

bot in verite þe saule and persoune of ihesu passit  
 þar/ for þe consolacioun/ of þe haly saulis þat war  
 þar/ & for þar liberacioun and deliverance fra þe  
 hevy payn/ and bring þame to glor eternall,  
 and (glossing Matt. 11: 3):  
 And sanct iohne sperit quheþir he would discend in  
 proper persoune to hell/ as he come in the waurld,  
 or send ane uther with his autorite.  
 (vol. II, ed. F. Quinn /STS, Edinburgh 1965<sup>7</sup>, pp. 36-8)

Ireland's phrase "in proper persoune" looks like a translation of the Latin in propria persona, of which Henryson's "his awin persoun" is a better rendering.

- 20 Göttingen MS., ll. 18221-6, ed. J. Morris (EETS, 7 vols, London 1874-93), III, 1045.
- 21 On the general question of the relationship of the moralitas to the medieval exemplum, cf. Stanley J. Kahrl, "Allegory in Practice: A Study of Narrative Styles in Medieval Exempla", MP 63 (1965-6), 105-10; and P.E. Beichner, "The Allegorical Interpretation of Medieval Literature", PMLA 82 (1967), 33-8.
- 22 The relevant sections of the commentary are printed (from Cambridge University Library MS. Mm.2.18) by G. Gregory Smith, The Poems of Robert Henryson (STS, 3 vols, Edinburgh 1906-14), I, liii-lv, and reprinted by H. Harvey Wood, ed. cit., pp. 264-5. I have compared this text with that in GUL MS. Hunterian V.1.11, and found a number of minor differences. But a really reliable text must await a proper edition based on the many MSS. of Trivet's commentary.
- 23 The unimportance of the moralitas, or at any rate its inadequacy, has been argued by Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh/London 1958), who goes so far as to state that the poem is "one of the very few poems of the Middle Ages that tells a classical tale for its own sake, with no allegorical trappings", by K.R.R. Gros Louis, "Robert Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice and the Orpheus Traditions of the Middle Ages", Speculum 41 (1966), 643-55; by D.A. Wright, "Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice and the Tradition of the Muses", Medium Aevum 40 (1971), 41-7; by Carol Mills, "Romance Convention of Robert Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice", in Bards and Makars, ed. A.J. Aitken et al. (Glasgow 1977), pp. 52-60; and, more summarily, by John Hollander, The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry 1500-1700 (Princeton 1961), pp. 85-6. The unity of the two parts has been defended by John MacQueen, Robert Henryson: A Study of the Major Narrative Poems (Oxford 1967), pp. 24-44; R.J. Manning, "A note on symbolic identification in Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice", SSL 8 (1970-1), 265-71; J.B. Friedman, Orpheus in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, Mass. 1970), pp. 194-210; and I.W.A. Jamieson, "'To preue thare preching be a poesye': some thoughts on Henryson's poetics", Parergon 8 (April 1974), 24-36, esp. 32-6.
- 24 At a few points the influence of Virgil's version (Georgics, IV, 454-98) is evident, but there is no reason to doubt Henryson's own statement that Boethius is his principal source. For the suggestion that Henryson may have been influenced by the Orfeo of Angelo Poliziano, see R.D.S. Jack, The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature (Edinburgh 1972), pp. 7-14; but cf. my arguments against this in "Did Poliziano Influence Henryson's Orpheus and Erudices?", FMLS 15 (1979), 209-21.
- 25 There is a similar use of this rhetorical ploy in Hary's Wallace, I, 1-16, ed. M.P. McDiarmid (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh



1968-9), I, 1.

- 26 C.S. Lewis gives a straightforward introductory account of this aspect of neo-Aristotelian psychology in The Discarded Image (2nd edn, Cambridge 1967), pp. 152-69. A much fuller, and now classical, version is found in Dom Odín Lottin's Psychologie et morale aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles (6 vols, Louvain 1942-60), I; and III, 539-75.
- 27 MacQueen, op. cit., p. 40.
- 28 The precise genealogy of this theme has not been systematically traced. It is the organizational idea behind the fourteenth-century poem Les Echecs amoureux, part of which was translated by Lydgate as Reson and Sensuallyte, ed. E. Sieper (EETS, 2 vols, London 1901-3); it may be relevant to King Hart (cf. above, pp. 89-90), and is certainly found in Dunbar's Goldyn Targe (see below, pp. 380-3, and R.J. Lyall, "Moral Allegory in Dunbar's Goldyn Targe", SSL 11 [1973-4], 47-65, esp. 59-64).
- 29 The parallel with King Hart can here be extended, for Orpheus' passivity is not unlike that of Hart in his relationship with Dame Plesance, noted above, p. 99.
- 30 Jamieson, "Some thoughts", 34.
- 31 Smith, ed. cit., I, liii; cf. MS. Hunterian V.1.11, f. 73<sup>v</sup>.
- 32 For copulare (from copula, 'a bond'), see OLD, sb. 'copulo', where no sexual sense is given; Thesaurus Linguae Latinae (Leipzig 1900- ), sb. 'copulo'. According to Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus, ed. J.F. Niermeyer (Leiden 1976), sb. 'copulare' etc., even in Med. Lat. the word signified marriage generally rather than specifically sexual union.
- 33 Manning, op. cit., 271.
- 34 On the moral significance of the bare feet and white legs of Erudices, see MacQueen, op. cit., p. 33.
- 35 Hary, Wallace, VI, 756, ed. cit., I, 131.
- 36 The Asloan Manuscript, ed. W.A. Craigie (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1923-4), II, 158.
- 37 Chrétien de Troyes, Yvain, ll. 2786-91, ed. M. Roques (Paris 1960), p. 85.
- 38 Secular Lyrics of the XIV and XV Centuries, ed. R.H. Robbins (2nd edn, Oxford 1955), pp. 14-15.

- 39 Stevens, op. cit., p. 72.
- 40 Auchinleck MS., ll. 239-40, ed. A.J. Bliss (2nd edn, Oxford 1966), p. 22; cf. Carol Mills, op. cit., p. 58.
- 41 MacQueen, op. cit., p. 41.
- 42 Jamieson, "Some thoughts", 35.
- 43 Cf. Geoffrey de Vinsauf, Poetria nova, ll. 264-430, in Les arts poétiques du XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, ed. E. Faral (Paris 1924), pp. 205-10.
- 44 Friedman, op. cit., p. 204.
- 45 On this point, see Augustine, De doctrina christiana, I, 3-4, ed. J. Martin (CCSL, Turnhout 1962), p. 8; cf. De catechizandis rudibus, 17, ed. I.B. Bauer (CCSL, Turnhout 1969), p. 141.
- 46 The strict order recalls The Testament of Cresseid, where Henryson uses a similar sequence to impress upon us the limited powers of the astrological divinities: see below, pp. 194-9.
- 47 MacQueen, op. cit., pp. 41-3; Jamieson, "Some thoughts", 35-6. Cf. also now John MacQueen, "Neoplatonism and Orphism in Fifteenth-Century Scotland: The Evidence of Henryson's 'New Orpheus'", Scottish Studies 20 (1976), 69-89. The most probable source of the musical stanzas is in my view Macrobius, In Somnium Scipionis, II, i, 14-20, ed. J. Willis (Leipzig 1970), pp. 97-8: some indirect Platonic influence here seems fairly certain, but it is difficult to accept Professor MacQueen's suggestion that the primary allegorical sense of the poem relates to the Platonic notion of the World-Soul; cf. Marianne Powell, "Henryson, Boethius and Trevet", in Actes du 2<sup>e</sup> Colloque de Langue et de Littérature Écossaises (Moyen Âge et Renaissance), ed. J.-J. Blanchot and C. Graf (Strasbourg 1979), pp. 297-306, esp. 302-3. I intend to deal with this issue in more detail in a future article.
- 48 These lines are part of a passage (ll. 571-615) found only in the Bannatyne MS., which are clearly of great importance to our understanding of the poem, and the authenticity of which I have defended in my article "The Bannatyne 'Additions' to Henryson's Oroheus and Erudices", NM (forthcoming). Denton Fox reaches substantially the same conclusions in "Manuscripts and Prints of Scots Poetry in the Sixteenth Century", in Bards and Makars, pp. 156-71, at pp. 162-3.



- 49 Hollander, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-1.
- 50 This passage is obviously defective around l. 587, where a whole line is missing.
- 51 Cf. for example Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1a, 84, and esp. art. 5. Aquinas' whole discussion of the soul and reason is basic to much later medieval ethics and psychology.
- 52 On the tradition of the three sins, see Donald R. Howard, The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World (Princeton 1966), pp. 44-56 and *passim*.
- 53 Roman de la Rose, ll. 1423 ff., ed. Félix Leçoy (3 vols, Paris 1965-70), I, 44 ff. The passage has been discussed at some length by John V. Fleming, The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography (Princeton 1969), pp. 92-6; and by D.W. Robertson Jr, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton 1963), pp. 93-6.
- 54 Cf. Gros Louis, *op. cit.*; Carol Mills, *op. cit.*
- 55 On the dubious nature of "Lollius", Chaucer's alleged source for Troilus and Criseyde, see G.L. Kittredge, "Chaucer's Lollius", Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 28 (1917), 50-5. The status of Henryson's "uthur quair" is complicated by a reference to Cresseid's subsequent fate in G. Myll's Spectacle of Luf, written in 1492 (Asloan MS., ed. Craigie, I, 279). Although it is possible that Myll and Henryson derived their information from a common source, it is more likely that Henryson is Myll's source. The issue is discussed by B.J. Whiting, "A Probable Allusion to Henryson's 'Testament of Cresseid'", MLR 40 (1945), 46-7; J. Kinsley, TLS, 14 November 1952, p. 743; Denton Fox (ed.), The Testament of Cresseid (London 1968), pp. 17-18.
- 56 The suggestion that Robene and Makyne was derived from the OF. pastourelle was made by Smith, *ed. cit.*, I, lvi, and followed up by W. Powell Jones, "A Source for Henryson's Robene and Makyne", MLN 46 (1931), 457-8. The alternative of ballad-influence is argued by A.K. Moore, "Robene and Makyne", MLR 43 (1948), 400-3, and in The Secular Lyric in Middle English (Lexington 1951), pp. 188-94. I.W.A. Jamieson adopts a middle position, seeing the relevance of both traditions, in "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 294-300, and in "Henryson's Minor Poems", 145-6.
- 57 [lue], so the Bannatyne MS., presumably a variant of "luve". Wood's emendation "bid" seems unnecessary; cf. Henryson, Poems, ed. Charles Elliott (2nd edn, Oxford 1974), pp. 141, 181.



- 58 Troilus and Criseyde, I, 232-8, Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass. 1957), p. 302.
- 59 The principal views on Cresseid's punishment are well summarized by Ralph Hanna III, "Cresseid's Dream and Henryson's Testament", in Chaucer and Middle English Studies in honour of R.H. Robbins, ed. Beryl Rowland (London 1974), p. 296. In the rival camps there listed now add, from a flourishing critical literature, (to those who see the punishment as justified) C.W. Jentoft, "Henryson as Authentic 'Chaucerian': Narrator, Character and Courtly Love in The Testament of Cresseid", SSL 10 (1972-3), 94-102; John McNamara, "Divine Justice in Henryson's Testament of Cresseid", SSL 11 (1973-4), 99-107; and Larry M. Sklute, "Phebus Descending: Rhetoric and Moral Vision in Henryson's Testament of Cresseid", ELH 44 (1977), 189-204; (to those who regard it as unjust) Lee W. Patterson, "Christian and Pagan in The Testament of Cresseid", SP 52 (1973), 696-714; J.A.W. Bennett, "Henryson's Testament: a flawed masterpiece", SLJ 1 (1974), 5-16; and Götz Schmitz, "Cresseid's Trial: A Revision. Fame and Defamation in Henryson's Testament of Cresseid", Essays and Studies 32 (1979), 44-56. Hanna himself seems to accept the justice of Cresseid's fate, but in psychological terms rather than cosmic ones; the related view that the gods seem untrustworthy because of Cresseid's limited understanding is argued by Craig McDonald, "Venus and the Goddess Fortune in The Testament of Cresseid", SLJ 4 (2) (December 1977), 14-24. The most influential Christian interpretations of the Testament have been those of Fox, ed. cit., and MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 45-93; for a contrary view, see Dolores L. Noll, "The Testament of Cresseid: Are Christian Interpretations Valid?", SSL 9 (1971-2), 16-25.
- 60 Bennett, op. cit., 16.
- 61 *ibid.*
- 62 D.W. Robertson Jr, "Historical Criticism", English Institute Essays, 1950 (New York 1951), pp. 3-31, at 14-15 and elsewhere, takes the view that the notion of caritas underlies all "serious" medieval poetry; for a discussion of this position, see below, pp. 479-82.
- 63 Ireland, Of Penance and Confession, X, Asloan MS., ed. Craigie, I, 51.
- 64 See OED, sb. 'charity', 2, 4a, 4b; MED, sb. 'charite', 2, 3; DOST, sb. 'cherite'.
- 65 Caxton, Disticha Catonis (Westminster, W. Caxton 1481), III, as quoted in OED, sb. 'charity', 3a.



- 66 As E. Duncan Aswell points out, "The Role of Fortune in The Testament of Cresseid", PQ 46 (1967), 471-87, at 472, there are elements here, aspecially in ll. 80-3, which appear to be designed to subvert the narrator's protestations of Cresseid's innocence.
- 67 Bennett, op. cit., 10.
- 68 Among Chaucerian examples, note particularly Troilus and Criseyde, I, 1-51, Works, ed. Robinson, pp. 389-90; The Legend of Good Women, prologue, *ibid.*, pp. 482-96; and The House of Fame, *ibid.*, pp. 282-302 — in all of which Chaucer treats his narrator ironically. For the contrary view that the narrator of the Testament is "Henryson himself", see Thomas W. Craik, "The Substance and Structure of The Testament of Cresseid: A Hypothesis", in Bards and Makars, pp. 22-6.
- 69 The affinity between the narrator and Cresseid has often been noticed, most recently (with some attention to Chaucerian precedent) by Schmitz, op. cit.
- 70 W.S. Ramson has recently pointed out that the narrator places his confidence not only in a drink by the fire but also in aphrodisiacs ("help be Phisike", l. 34): cf. "A Reading of Henryson's Testament, or 'Quha falsit Cresseid?'" , Parergon 17 (April 1977), 25-35, at 30.
- 71 Many critics have agreed that the poem is in some sense about the gradual education of Cresseid; for an approach in many ways similar to my own reading, see Jennifer Strauss, "To Speak Once More of Cresseid: Henryson's Testament Reconsidered", SLJ 4 (2) (Decemher 1977), 5-13.
- 72 The importance of this fact is argued by Hanna, op. cit., pp. 288-97, who takes the view that Cresseid's dream is an insomnium, but his psychological approach perhaps overstates the subjective nature of the gods.
- 73 Macrobius, In Somnium Scipionis, I, 3-4, ed. Willis, pp. 8-14.
- 74 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 70-1.
- 75 See T.O. Wedel, The Medieval Attitude Toward Astrology (New Haven 1920), pp. 134-41. There is a useful note on the sixteenth-century controversial significance of this theme by A.M. Stewart, "Sapiens Dominabitur Astris: Wedderburn, Abell, Luther", AUR 46 (1975), 55-62.
- 76 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 71.

- 77 I have discussed this topic in more detail in my article "Henryson and Boccaccio: A Problem in the Study of Sources", Anglia (forthcoming).
- 78 The sinister implications of the conjunction of Saturn and Luna, held by some astrologers to be a cause of leprosy, are discussed by Johnstone Parr, "Cresseid's Leprosy Again", MLN 60 (1945), 487-91.
- 79 Apart from Macrobius' detailed discussion of almost every aspect of medieval dream-lore, see for example Vincent of Beauvais, Speculum naturale, XXVII, lvi (Cologne, Adolf Rusch, c. 1473), II, f. 161<sup>r</sup>.
- 80 Troilus and Criseyde, II, 617-20, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 427.
- 81 Canterbury Tales, B<sup>2</sup>, 3338-54, *ibid.*, p. 204. One of the more curious nuances in the Testament perhaps supports this point: Mercury, the chairman of the gods' parliament, is associated with poetry and medicine, precisely the areas linked by the narrator in his description of his own situation (ll. 29-42). It may be that Henryson is alluding to his own control over Cresseid's fate within the poem: the same point has recently been made in somewhat different terms by Strauss, *op. cit.*, 11-12.
- 82 The philosophical foundations of this tradition are discussed by Joseph J. Mogan, Chaucer and the Theme of Mutability (The Hague 1969), pp. 21-53.
- 83 Cf. Boethius, Philosophiae consolatio, IV, pr. 6, ed. L. Bieler (CCSL, Turnhout 1957), pp. 78-84.
- 84 Works, ed. Robinson, pp. 443-4. For a discussion of the ironic treatment of Troilus here, see D.W. Robertson Jr, "Chaucerian Tragedy", ELH 19 (1952), 1-37, at 13-15.
- 85 Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1835-41, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 479.
- 86 On this notoriously difficult question, see J.P. Tatlock, "The Epilog of Chaucer's Troilus", MP 18 (1920-1), 625-59; Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences (2nd edn, New York 1960), pp. 294-8; J.L. Shanley, "The Troilus and Christian Love", ELH 6 (1939), 271-81; A.J. Denomy CSB, "The Two Moralities of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde", Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Series III, sect. 2, 44 (1950), 35-46; John M. Steadman, Disembodied Laughter: 'Troilus' and the Apotheosis Tradition (Berkeley 1972).



- 87 So, for example, Spearing, op. cit.; Douglas Duncan, "Henryson's Testament of Cresseid", EC 11 (1961), 128-35.
- 88 Spearing, op. cit.; cf. Ramson's characterization of the latter part of the poem as "stylistic diminuendo", op. cit., 27, 34.
- 89 In a recent essay, C. David Brown has argued that Henryson's portrayal of Troilus is consistently ironic, and that he is to be seen as a prisoner of this world: see "Troilus and Cresseid in Henryson's Testament", Chaucer Review 13 (1979), 263-71. But it is difficult to see this in the text of the Testament (although it would perhaps have been impossible for Henryson's audience to detach his Troilus completely from the ironies of Chaucer's characterization).
- 90 Florence H. Ridley, "A Plea for the Middle Scots", in The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature, ed. Larry D. Benson (Cambridge, Mass. 1974), pp. 175-96, at p. 192, perceptively suggests that Henryson may have been alluding here to Chaucer's description of Troilus' reactions when first seeing Criseyde (Tr., I, 295-307).
- 91 Wood, Poems and Fables, p. 258.
- 92 The sexual connotations of the girdle in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight — it is evocatively described as a "luf-lace", ll. 1874, 2438 — suggest that this is not stretching Henryson's meaning too far: cf. the edition of J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, re-ed. Norman Davis (Oxford 1967), pp. 52, 67.
- 93 Henryson himself describes his poem as a "tragedie" (l. 4), presumably in the medieval sense of the story of a fall from prosperity to misery through the action of Fortune; it does not, therefore, necessarily imply any final recognition on the part of the tragic figure.
- 94 The anti-feminist tradition is exhaustively treated by F.L. Utley, The Crooked Rib (Columbus, Ohio 1944).
- 95 Bennett, op. cit., 14.
- 96 The "belt" which Cresseid says (l. 589) she has given to Diomeid has no basis in Chaucer: Professor Bennett is probably correct that Henryson intends these gifts to balance those just made by Troilus.
- 97 In particular, of the scene in which Lancelot arrives at Guenevere's convent shortly after her death:

Than syr Launcelot sawe hir vysage, but he wepte  
not gretelye, but syghed.

(The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. E.  
Vinaver /2nd edn, 3 vols, Oxford 1967/, III,  
1256.)

Edwin Muir, op. cit., p. 21, suggests a parallel between  
Henryson's style here and the compression of the ballads.

- 98 The proverbial phrase "De mortuis nil nisi bonum" was known in the Middle Ages through Latin versions of the philosophical anthology of Diogenes Laertius, where it is attributed to Chilon (see Artur Biedl, Zur Textgeschichte des Laertios Diogenes: Das grosse Exzerpt /Città del Vaticano 1955/, pp. 44-6), and perhaps from the De vita et moribus philosophorum of Walter Burley, which is largely based on Diogenes Laertius; cf. John A. Stigard, "The Manuscript Tradition of the De Vita et Moribus Philosophorum of Walter Burley", Medievalia et Humanistica 11 (1957), 44-57. The tag has recently been linked with Henryson's poem by Schmitz, op. cit., 55.
- 99 This is one of the passages added to his poem by Chaucer in the course of revision; see R.K. Root, The Textual Tradition of Chaucer's Troilus (Chaucer Society, London 1916). There is no indication which version was known to Henryson, but it is perhaps worth observing that the manuscript known to have been copied in Scotland (Bodleian MS. Arch. Selden B.24) is of the later version, in which the stanzas in question appear. Spearing, Criticism and Medieval Poetry, pp. 181-2, relates Henryson's starting-point to this passage, while MacQueen disagrees: "In particular, Henryson ignores Chaucer's account of the death of Troilus and the Christian epilogue", Robert Henryson, p. 46.
- 100 The point that Henryson does not reject all love, but only its disordered forms, is made by G.C. Kratzmann, "Anglo-Scottish Literary Relationships, 1430-1550: the Makars in Relation to the Non-Alliterative English Tradition" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh 1975), pp. 95-7; and by Strauss, op. cit., 5.



## CHAPTER IV

Henryson: Aesopic Fable and Beyond

When we turn to the Morall Fabillis, the problems of interpretation with which we have so far been concerned are compounded by a confused textual situation. Three manuscripts contain partial versions, of which the most complete is Bannatyne's. Three fables which are missing from Bannatyne are found together in the two early printed editions, those of Henry Charteris (1570) and Thomas Bassandyne (1571), in which moreover there are several differences in order from the Bannatyne text. There are in addition numerous variant readings, some of which are quite important, which complicate critical discussion. No really adequate edition of the Morall Fabillis exists: H. Harvey Wood's text is based on the Bassandyne print, as is Charles Elliott's, whereas Professor MacQueen has shown that there is a good case for following Bannatyne's text wherever possible.<sup>1</sup> Although these factors are not crucial to the approach which I intend to adopt, they create difficulties in such matters as quotation, and more important, they indicate that the textual tradition of the Fabillis as it has come down to us represents "work in progress". Two of the three fables which seem not to have been known to Bannatyne, The Fox that begylit the Wolf and The Wolf and the Wedder,<sup>2</sup> are probably derived from Caxton's Aesop and could not in that case have been written before 1484,<sup>3</sup> while the majority of the fables could certainly be earlier. It seems reasonable to suppose, in view of the great variety of sources that he used,<sup>4</sup> and the substantially different states of the various texts, that Henryson gradually added to his collection, and that incomplete versions sometimes found their way into circulation.



Although it is incomplete, there are reasons for regarding Bannatyne's version as a better representation than the prints of Henryson's intentions. Some of the many variants in the printed texts seem quite clearly to be post-Reformation excisions of Henryson's Catholic sentiments. This process is apparent in two stages in a well-known example from the moralitas of The Parliament of Fourfuttit Beistis, where Henryson appears to have written:

O Mary myld, mediatour of mercy meke,  
Sitt doun before thy sone celestially,  
For us synnaris his celsitude beseke.

(330-2)<sup>5</sup>

Bannatyne, writing in the decade after the Reformation, changed this passage to

O lord eternall, medeatour for us mast meke,  
Sitt doun before thy fader celestially,  
For us synnaris his celsitude beseke,

6

while, more radically, the prints read

O Mediatour! mercifull and meik,  
Thow soveraigne Lord, and King Celestially,  
Thy celsitude maist humillie we beseik.

7

On this evidence, the accuracy of the printed versions is hardly to be trusted, and even Bannatyne must be treated with proper caution. Less clear-cut is the evidence of the prints in the Prologue, which there introduces the whole collection but which in the two early manuscripts in which it is found applies only to The Cok and the Jasp. These early versions read:

My auctowr in his fabill tellis quhow  
bat brutell bestis spak, and understuyd,  
and to gud purpos disput, and argow,  
a sylogysme propone, and eik conclud.

(Makculloch 43-6)<sup>8</sup>

Myne auctour in his fable tellis fow  
 bat brutall beistis spak and undirstud  
 And till gud purpois dispit and argow  
 A sylogysme propone and eik exclud.

(Bann. 43-6)

In Bassandyne, by contrast, the first line of the stanza reads "his Fabillis", and the fourth line prefers Bannatyne's "exclud" to Makculloch's "conclud". MacQueen argues that the manuscript text is better, but it should be observed that these lines hardly offer an accurate characterization of The Cok and the Jasp.

The fable shows us not "brutall beistis" but one animal, addressing a monologue to a jewel he finds in a dunghill. As a description of the collection as a whole, on the other hand, the passage is quite exact. I think, therefore, that there is some basis for the view that Henryson did indeed write this prologue for the collection (although he may not have foreseen at that time the ultimate shape of the work and may, for example, have been thinking about a group of fables translated from the Romulus tradition<sup>9</sup>), and that it was subsequently amended for inclusion in the Makculloch MS., where only The Cok and the Jasp appears, and — possibly independently — in Bannatyne, where that fable occurs in the middle of a sequence.

No easy resolution of the overall textual problem is in my view possible, because of the confused nature of the evidence. At many points, Bannatyne's readings seem better than those of the prints. Against this, his version of The Parliament of Fourfuttit Beistis omits two stanzas which are found in the prints and which seem to be genuine. With some hesitation, then, I have followed MacQueen in using the Bannatyne text where possible as a basis for discussion and quotation, but the



evidence of the prints has been considered as well, along with that of the earliest manuscripts, and I have recorded in footnotes any departures (other than in punctuation, which is my own) from the text of the Bannatyne manuscript.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever its original status, the Prologue with which the printed versions begin provides a useful starting-point for a discussion of moral purpose in the Fabillis. It is in fact a kind of gloss on the title used by the printers, which may or may not be Henryson's own: The Morall Fabillis of Esope. Like that title, it makes three points about what will follow: Henryson's debt to Aesop, the place of the tales within the genre of beast-fable, and their essentially moral intent. Several metaphors are used to emphasize this latter aspect, and to reinforce the well-known argument that fictions, although literally untrue, are justified when they convey an underlying truth.<sup>11</sup> The sentence of the Fabillis emerges as flowers and corn spring from the ground, story and meaning are like the shell and kernel of a nut, and as a bow which is constantly bent grows weak, so a mind which never relaxes grows stale. The point of the Fabillis, in other words, is

to repreife /the haill misleving/  
of man be fegour of ane vper thing.

(Bann. 6-7)<sup>12</sup>

There is, however, a more precise reason for the use of the beast-fable in this way:

No mervell is a man be lyk a beist,  
Quhilk leivis ay in carnall fowll delyte,  
That schame can nocht derenze nor arreist  
Bot takis all pair lust and appetyt,  
Quhilk throw be custome and be dayly ryte  
Syn in be mynd is sa fast radicat

That he in brutall beist be transformat.

(Bann. 50-6)

The similarity between the behaviour of beasts and that of men is not merely a literary device, for it demonstrates the well-worn adage that by becoming subject to their appetites men become as beasts. This is a moral view at least as old as Boethius (and, no doubt, Aesop):

Euenit igitur, ut quem transformatum uitiis uideas hominem aestimare non possis. Auaritia feruet alienarum opum uiolentus ereptor? Lupi similem dixeris. Ferox atque iniques linguam litigiis exercet? Cani comparabis. Insidiatur occultus subripuisse fraudibus gaudet? Vulpeculis exaequetur ..... Ita fit ut qui probitate deserta homo esse desierit, cum in diuinam condicionem transire non possit, uertatur in beluam.

13

Animals live by their senses and man, abandoning his reason in favour of sensuality, becomes less than human.

This theme is taken up fairly directly in a number of the Morall Fabillis, as we shall see, but the variety of themes and techniques apparent in the whole work makes any straightforward classification difficult. An analysis of the interpretations offered by Henryson in his moralitates reveals radically different approaches from fable to fable: some, like The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous, are not strictly allegorical but rather illustrate a moral situation, while others, like The Wolf that gat the Nekhering, have a thoroughly allegorical framework imposed on them through the moralitas. It is not clear how far Henryson himself was aware of these distinctions. The three fables which are grouped in the Bannatyne MS. as The Tod, for example, combine the exemplative and allegorical modes in ways which are sometimes difficult to define.<sup>14</sup> Again, The



Paddok and the Mous actually has in its moralitas two interpretations, one allegorical, the other not. And as we have seen, Henryson's terminology does not encourage the belief that he was operating a rigorously-defined set of critical categories.<sup>15</sup>

A further general problem must be faced at the outset. As Dr Jamieson has recently observed,<sup>16</sup> the Morall Fabillis seem to point two ways. The Prologue we have been discussing emphasizes Henryson's moral purpose, the very serious intent which underlies his portrayal of the human-like behaviour of beasts which images the bestial behaviour of men. And yet against that must be set the "merie sport" which the poet acknowledges to be the superficial level of his fables (Bann., Prol. 19-28). We are told that both entertainment and moral doctrine are to be found in the Fabillis, and that the doctrinal level is the more important, but we are given no indication that Henryson was aware of any interaction between the two; in Jamieson's words, "there is no discussion of the effect that 'merie sport' might have on the serious material, the 'sentence', the 'sad materis', the reproof of total misliving".<sup>17</sup> This problem is more pressing in the case of the Morall Fabillis than in those of Henryson's allegorical works we have so far considered because the latter were uniformly serious throughout narrative and moralitas,<sup>18</sup> so that any discrepancies which appeared were in possible figural meanings rather than in tone. Here, where the trivial and often comic world of animals is given a moral or political interpretation, it is the tone which is not always consistent, and this raises difficulties of a

different and perhaps more fundamental kind. This, too, is a question to which we shall have to give attention as we trace the relationship between Henryson's narrative methods and his stated moral purpose.

The simplest form of that relationship is represented by The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous, and yet even here Henryson has enriched the meaning of his fable with many little details, as well as making some fundamental changes to the structure of his story. The contrast between the situations of the two mice is a traditional element in the fable, but it is exploited here in significantly different ways. For the mice are sisters, and it is the urbanized mouse who has abandoned the simple rural life to which she was born in favour of a middle-class existence in town:

The topir mous pat in þe burgh can byd  
Was gilt bruper and maid ane fre burges;  
Tolefre alswa but custome mair and les,  
and fredome had to go quhair euer scho list  
Amang the cheis and meill in ark and kist.

(Bann. 10-14)

These lines are, as Professor MacQueen has noted, ironic in the sense that both mice actually live by pilfering,<sup>19</sup> but it is ironic in another way as well. For the fable shows that, in the words of the moralitas, "no stait is fre" (Bann. 208); the mice are interrupted, almost disastrously, in their enjoyment of the pleasures of this world, and their plight illustrates the insecurity which binds us all. It is striking that our sympathies are engaged with the rural mouse, who is actually caught by the cat and whose happy return to her frugal but adequate existence embodies the contentment with our worldly lot that we



are all supposed to settle for. We lose sight of the town mouse towards the end not, I think, because her sister is morally the more vulnerable, but because we are able to watch the latter learning from her experience. By returning to the country and accepting her place in life, she places herself beyond the influence of the Fortune which had both threatened her and allowed her to escape. It is this Boethian doctrine which is the point of the moralitas.

No such reformation is implied for the town mouse, who is characterized from the beginning as worldly, materialistic and supercilious. She looks down on the fare her sister offers:

This burges mous /prompt furth in/ pryd  
And said, 'Sistir, is this 3our daly fude?'  
'Quhy not,' quod scho, 'think 3e this meit nocht gud?'

'Na, be my saule, me think it bot a skorne.'  
'Madame,' quod scho, '3e be the moir to blame.  
My moder said eftir bat we wer borne  
That 3e and I lay baith within hir wame.  
I kepe the ryt and custome of my dame,  
And of my ser, levand in pouertie,  
For landis haif we none of propirtie.'

(Bann. 47-56)<sup>20</sup>

The pride of the town mouse is constantly stressed, and it is pride, rather than largess, which leads her to invite her sister to return home with her. Closely related to this pride is her self-confident assurance:

With blyth upcast and mery contenans  
The elder sistir sperit at hir gest  
Gife bat scho thocht be ressoun differans  
Betuix bat chalmer and hir sary nest.  
'3it deme,' quod scho, 'bot how long will pis lest?'  
'For evirmoir, I wait, and langir to!'  
'Gif it be trew, 3e ar at eis,' quod scho.

(Bann. 113-9)

The caution of the country mouse's replies is, of course, borne

out by subsequent events, and there is no doubt that we are to see her on the whole as a relatively sensible and sympathetic figure. But her plight is all the more significant because she has allowed her sister's appeal to her appetites to override her own reason, reminding us perhaps of the situation of the wise brother in 'The Horse's Tale' among The Talis of the Fyve Bestes.<sup>21</sup> The proper balance is restored by her narrow escape, and she is given a speech in which she comments upon the hazards of the town mouse's existence:

'Fair weill, sistir, heir I thy feist defy!

'Thy mangery is myngit all with cair,  
Thy gus is gud, thy ganesall sour as gall.  
The /subcharge/ of thy service is bot sair,  
So sall thow fynd heireftirwart may fall.  
I thank zone courtyne and zone parpane wall  
Of my defens now fra zone crewell beist.  
Almighty God keip me fra sic a feist!

War I /anys in be kith pat I come fra/  
For weill nor wo I suld nevir cum agane.'

(Bann. 182-91)<sup>22</sup>

This judgment is thoroughly confirmed by the moralitas, which dwells on the virtues of poverty and the insecurity of worldly goods. Henryson's praise of "blythnes in hairt with small possessioun" has far-reaching social implications, which he might have developed in the light of the implicit and explicit social criticism which runs through his treatment of the status of the two mice, but he neglects this possibility in favour of a very general moralization on the vanity of temporalia. To be sure, those who are most in danger are

thay that clymis up most he,  
And nocht content of small possessioun.

(Bann. 210-11)



But this observation is not taken up. Nor, I think, is it clear, as Professor MacQueen argues, that these lines are directly aimed at the country mouse.<sup>23</sup> We do not actually see the retribution which awaits the town mouse, but we are left in no doubt from the country mouse's speech about its reality or its inevitability. Her brief lapse notwithstanding, the country mouse is ultimately content with "small possessioun", and we certainly do not have the sense that she deifies her stomach (Bann. 220-1). The point about the town mouse is that she is a confirmed and unrepentant sinner, but Henryson chooses to stress the positive reformation of the country mouse, who was never in any case a whole-hearted materialist, rather than the impending doom of her sister.

Not the least interesting aspect of this fable is the desire of modern critics to allegorize it. Explicating the Boethian elements which underlie the theme of the vulnerability to Fortune of those who place their trust in worldly goods, Dr Jamieson suggests that the cat "refers not only to Fortune but also to Death".<sup>24</sup> Professor MacQueen goes further:

If Gib Hunter is Fortune as well as Death, who is the Spenser? It is tempting to apply the Boethian concept, and suggest that he is the Providence which governs Fortune — a suggestion which may gain some support from the etymological connexion of the word 'Spenser' with 'dispenche' and 'dispensation'.

It can hardly be disputed that Boethian motifs are important in the poem, or that the literature concerning Fortune is specifically invoked (e.g. Bann. 169-75), but there is a great difference between the proposition that the fable illustrates the operation of Fortune and Providence and the argument that the cat

and the Spenser are allegorical figures standing for Fortune (and/or Death) and Providence. It is not clear whether Dr Jamieson means that the cat "is" Fortune/Death in the strict allegorical sense: "refers to" is sufficiently vague to cover both kinds of interpretation. Professor MacQueen, by contrast, is committed to an allegorical reading. But Henryson himself avoids any genuine allegory. He might have used the relationship of the two mice as the basis for another reason-and-appetite, soul-and-body allegory, like Orpheus and Erudices, or 'The Horse's Tale' in The Talis of the Fyve Bestes. But he did not do so. Even the reference to the cat in the moralitas does not really add an allegorical dimension to the narrative:

The cat cumis and to be mous hewis E.  
 Quhat dois awaill thy feist and ryelte,  
 With dreidfull hairt and tribulatioun?

(Bann. 223-5)

The sudden arrival of the cat in the fable illustrates the power of Fortune and the imminence of Death, but there is no clear verbal clue which invites a consistent allegorical reading. Our attention is centred upon the events themselves, and the nature of the human predicament which they immediately reveal, and not upon another level of meaning to which every detail of the narrative corresponds in some way. The fable, in other words, is exemplative, and not allegorical.

The distinction can be clarified by reference to a fable which is genuinely allegorical, The Wolf that gat the Nekhering. The sources of this piece lie outside the tradition of beast-fable, in the Roman de Renart cycle,<sup>26</sup> and the moralitas therefore represents part of Henryson's adaptation of the story to



the fable form. The approach he chooses is one which recurs in his Fabillis and throughout the tradition of the allegorical exemplum:

The Foxe unto the warld may likkinnit be,  
The revand Wolf unto ane man but leis,  
The Cadgear Deith, quhome under all man preis:  
That ever tuke lyfe throw cours of kynd man dee,  
As man, and beist, and fische in to the see.

(Bass. 2205-9)

This interpretation adds something to the literal narrative in a way that the exemplative moralitas of The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous does not. Even allowing for the effect of some of the details in Henryson's narrative (which we shall consider in due course), the atmosphere of the fable remains pretty much that of beast-epic: the irony surrounding the duping of the predatory but stupid wolf by the treacherous fox is that of the Roman de Renart, and we are perhaps inclined to take Henryson's fable at first reading as a rather cynical exemplification of the view that however mean one may be, there's always likely to be someone meaner waiting to take advantage. This seems to be the sense of the final stanza of the narrative:

The Wolff wes neir weill dungin to the deid,  
That uneith with his lyfe away he wan,  
For with the Bastoun weill brokin wes his heid.  
The Foxe in to his den sone drew him than,  
That had betraisit his Maister and the man:  
The ane wantit the hering off his creillis,  
The utheris blude wes rynnand over his heillis.

(Bass. 2196-2202)

This terse, almost aphoristic ending is reminiscent of the summary of poetic justice at the end of The Freiris of Berwik:

Thus Symonis heid upoun the stane wes brokin,  
And our the stair the Freir in myre hes loppin,  
And tap our taill he fyld wes woundir ill;  
And Alesone on na wayis gat hir will,

which in turn owes something, as we have seen, to Chaucer's fabliaux, and especially to the Miller's Tale.<sup>27</sup> There is scarcely much poetic justice in the fox's double betrayal, but there is certainly something of the same ironic acceptance that this is how the world wags.

This tale, however, is explicitly "myngit with Moralitie" (Bass. 2203). It follows that there is something of a dissonance between the comic mode of the narrative and the serious moral tone of the moralitas. This can be illustrated from one of Henryson's apparent additions to the story, the opening dialogue between fox and wolf. This long passage consists of the wolf's eulogies of the fox's predatory skills, punctuated by the fox's self-deprecation:

'Na,' quod the Wolff, 'thow can cum on the wind,  
For everie wrink, forsuith, thow hes ane wyle.'  
'Schir,' said the Foxe, 'that beist ye nicht call blind,  
That nicht not eschaip than fra me ane myle.  
How nicht I ane off thame that wyis begyle?  
My tippit twa eiris, and my twa gray Ene,  
Garris me be kend, quhair I wes never sene.'

(Bass. 1986-92)

There is a genuine pleasure here in the comic situation and in the exploitation of the iconographic details of the fox's ears and eyes.<sup>28</sup> The whole scene is rich in the comedy which arises from the fox's patently false protestations of his inadequacy as a hunter. But of course the significance of the situation reaches beyond these superficially comic aspects: as MacQueen has observed,<sup>29</sup> the fox covertly warns the wolf of his own duplicity (as Chaucer's Pardoner warns his audience), and the hint is not taken. It is, after all, the wolf who ultimately fails to escape, and his blindness is not only symbolic



of his stupidity but is literally brought about by it (Bass. 2184-5), and it stands allegorically for the spiritual blindness of the worldly man. This nexus between comedy and morality is a constant factor in this fable, and it greatly enriches the meaning when we read back from the moralitas:

This warld, ye wait, is Stewart to the man,  
 Quhilk makis man to haif na mynd of Deid,  
 Bot settis for winning all the craftis thay can .....

(Bass. 2210-12)

As a gloss on the opening dialogue, these lines go some way towards illuminating the fox's strategy. By his apparent reluctance to become the wolf's steward, and his rapid volte-face (followed immediately by the scheme for robbing the cadger), Lowrence disarms his rival completely, and it is by concentrating on the details of the plan that he is subsequently able to delude the wolf into his beating.

The position of the cadger is a little more equivocal. Whatever the dissonance of tone in the case of the fox and the wolf between the comedy of the narrative and the moralizing at the end (and I have been suggesting that it is more illusory than real), they undeniably act out in the story the relationship between the World and man which we are eventually told they symbolize. But the cadger's behaviour in the fable is not altogether consistent with his stated allegorical role as Death. This is particularly true of the scene in which he finds the fox, playing possum beside the road:

The Cadgear fand the Foxe, and he wes fane,  
 And till him self thus softlie can he say:  
 'At the nixt bait, in faith, ye sall be flane,  
 And off your skyn I sall mak mittennis tway.'  
 He lap full lichtlie about him quhair he lay,  
 And all the trace he trippit on his tais;

As he had hard ane pyper play, he gais.

'Heir lyis the Devyll,' quod he, 'deid in ane dyke.  
Sic ane selcouth saw I not this sevin yeir;  
I trow ye have bene tussillit with sum tyke,  
That garris you ly sa still withouttin steir:  
Schir Foxe, in faith, ye ar deir welcum heir;  
It is sum wyfis malisone, I trow,  
For pultrie pyking, that lychtit hes on yow.'

(Bass. 2056-69)

In associating the fox with the Devil, the cadger follows an established medieval tradition,<sup>30</sup> and MacQueen may be right to see in this an allusion to the commonplace triad of World, Flesh and Devil.<sup>31</sup> It is important to notice, however, that the cadger is mistaken in his understanding of the situation, and his gleeful leaping is ironic in that he is blissfully unaware of the fox's ploy. In this case at least, the allegory does not provide us with a reading which incorporates all the details of the narrative, as we found in The Bludy Serk and as I believe Henryson was attempting in Orpheus and Erudices; and this is a difference which is characteristic of the allegorical Fabillis. Henryson is much less interested here in a comprehensive interpretation. In the first part of the fable the cadger is simply a cadger, a victim for the fox's duplicity: it is only in the latter part, in relation to the wolf, that he assumes the role of Death. Henryson's allegorical method, here, then, is to pick up some of the comic elements in the narrative and to give them an ulterior meaning, but others remain simply comic, a framework for whatever moral there is and a source of entertainment in their own right. This much more arbitrary approach to the interpretation of the narrative inevitably recalls the way in which we observed some medieval exegetes treating their Biblical materials.<sup>32</sup>



Nothing could better illustrate Henryson's interest in comedy for its own sake than the pun which he puts at the centre of his version of the story, and which he uses as a basis for the second dialogue of fox and wolf. It begins with the cadger's threat to the fox after his initial, successful raid on the creel of herring:

'Abyde, and thou ane Nekhering sall haif,  
Is worth my Capill, Creillis, and all the laif.'

(Bass. 2089-90)

Into the trap presented by this double entendre walks the wolf, whose gullibility has been established in the earlier dialogue:

'Bot quhat wes yone the Carll cryit on hie,  
And schuke his hand,' quod he, 'hes thou no feill?'  
'Schir,' said the Foxe, 'that I can tell trewlie;  
He said the Nekhering wes in till the creill.'  
'Kennis thow that hering?' 'Ye, Schir, I ken it weill,  
And at the creill mouth I had it thryis but doubt;  
The wecht offit neir tit my tuskis out.

'Now, suithlie, Schir, nicht we that hering fang,  
It wald be fische to us thir fourtie dayis.'

(Bass. 2112-20)

This exchange shows us Henryson at his best. We see the fox in action, developing a plot before us. Up to l. 2118, perhaps, we might take his hyperbolic description of the "nekhering" as a typical fisherman's yarn, with no aim beyond creating an impression. But the next two lines reveal the fox drawing the wolf in, playing upon his greed and upon his ignorance of the true meaning of the word. Allegorically, of course, this represents the way in which the World tempts man, but its effect is splendidly comic, and it all hinges upon the initial pun. The ironic ending, too, depends upon the play on words, since it is part of the point that the wolf surrenders the real herring that he already has (the proceeds of Lowrence's foray) in order

to seek, and ultimately obtain, the much less desirable "nekhering", while Lowrence seizes the opportunity to make off with all the fish (ll. 2191-5).

All this verbal enrichment of the comedy, we should observe, is absent from Henryson's reputed source, branche XIV of the Roman de Renart.<sup>33</sup> There the fish are again herring (harenz), but the deceived carters merely chase Renart, shouting. The relationship between Renart and Primaut, the wolf, is more complicated and therefore closer to Henryson's version, and again it is the wolf's greed which impresses us as he interrogates Renart about the source of the fish. Renart gives him one and describes his trick, adding:

Et se tu en veus plus avoir,  
Va après, si feras savoir,  
Et si t'apareille autresi.  
Je cuit et croi par Saint Remi  
Que il feront autel de toi.  
Par foi, dist Primaut, je l'otroi,  
Je vos afi que ge i vois;  
Mès atendez moi dans cest bois,  
Et ge irai endementiers.  
Par foi, dist Renart, volentiers.

34

Four elements in Henryson's version of the scene are absent here, all of them important. The basic one, as we have seen, is the pun which provides Henryson's title and which in his fable sets the action going: from it spring the subtlety of the portrayal of Lowrence, the allegorical motif of temptation, and the final irony of Lowrence's theft of the herring (since Renart has already eaten them all in the Roman, this twist is impossible). To some extent, then, we can see that interweaving of narrative and allegorical elements which we found in The Bludy Serk and to a lesser extent in Orpheus and Erudices; but the essential



effect of the latter part of The Wolf that gat the Nekhering is of a richly comic irony of which the allegory is only one, perhaps not ultimately crucial, element.

We can now draw together some of the differences between the two fables just considered. Because it has no allegorical framework, The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous appeals more directly and straightforwardly to the audience. Henryson's moralitas in this case adds very little to our understanding of the fable: we can see quite clearly from the narrative itself, and in particular from such details as the characterization of the town mouse and the rural mouse's final speech, that the poem illustrates the hazards of worldliness and the merit of accepting one's station in life. The moralitas perhaps helps us to recognize the importance of Fortune in the narrative, but in general it simply confirms what has been said narratively. In The Wolf that gat the Nekhering, by contrast, the narrative does not in itself make any clear, consistent moral statement, and certainly not the one which is offered by the moralitas. In the latter, Henryson takes up some of the features of the fable (the punishment of the wolf for his cupidity, the treachery of the fox, the role of the cadger as an unintentional agent of retribution) and gives them a further meaning which is extrinsic to the sense of the narrative. Some of the details of the narrative certainly point towards this allegorical reading when we return to them: we have seen how the first dialogue between the fox and the wolf works in this way, the second dialogue is at least compatible with the moralitas, and we might add such significant remarks as the

placing of the wolf in "ane wildernes" (Bass. 1951).<sup>35</sup> But whereas in an exemplary fable like The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous all the elements are quite closely integrated, in The Wolf that gat the Nekhering the relationship between the literal level of the narrative and the spiritual level which Henryson points to in his moralitas is neither self-evident nor altogether consistent.

At times, Henryson seems quite evidently to be exploiting this dissonance between letter and "spirit". The most celebrated example is The Cok and the Jasp, where our initial response is to praise the cock for his acceptance of his social position and his rejection of the material world which the jewel appears to represent. It is difficult, of course, to be sure whether our response to the text, however carefully we read, is anywhere near that of the original audience, and once we know from the moralitas what Henryson's moral intentions are, we can easily find pointers within the narrative, as we could in the case of The Wolf that gat the Nekhering. For a modern audience at least, the moralitas reverses the interpretation we initially draw from the narrative: the cock is a fool, who rejects "perfite prudence and cunning" (the jasp) since he only values the "sempill corne", a moral which has clear affinities with the Prologue.<sup>36</sup> This interpretation is traditional, and would have been anticipated by anyone familiar with Bromyard, Bozon, or the medieval Latin and French Aesopic sequences, where broadly similar moralitates occur.<sup>37</sup> But we cannot assume that this familiarity was part of Henryson's assumptions about his audience, and we must therefore look to



the text for assistance in deciding whether the surprise which is experienced by a modern reader on reaching the moralitas is merely a function of our remoteness or was actually built into the fable by the poet.

The opening description of the cock deserves careful attention:

A Cok sumtyme with fethreme fresch and /gay/,  
Rycht cant and crous suppois he was bot pure,  
Flew furth /apone a dOUNg hill/ sone be day;  
To get his denner sett was all his cure.

(Bann. 64-7)<sup>38</sup>

Four aspects of the cock are apparent from these lines: his physical attractiveness (which is conventional), his liveliness and self-confidence, his poverty, and his preoccupation with food, which might already be taken as symbolic of material comfort. The words which most clearly define the tone are the formulaic "cant and crous", which are a variation on the ME. formula "cant and kene".<sup>39</sup> By exchanging "crous" for "kene" Henryson introduces a note of criticism: "crous" seems to have been primarily a pejorative term in Middle Scots, carrying boldness into the region of self-satisfaction.<sup>40</sup> Set against his poverty, therefore, is the cock's boldness, which must colour our understanding of his apparent humility when confronted by the jewel:

To grit lordis thocht thow be leif and deir,  
I lawfe fer bettir thing of les awaill,  
As /draf/ or corne to fill my tome entrell.

(Bann. 89-91)<sup>41</sup>

What emerges from the cock's long speech of rejection, in fact, is his preoccupation with his appetites, rather than his humility

or sense of inferiority. He recognizes the properties of the jewel, but he does not attach any importance to them:

Thy cullour dois bot comfort to be sicht,  
And pat is nocht annwch my wame to feid,  
For /wyffis/ sayis pat lukand wark /is/ licht.

(Bann. 100-2)<sup>42</sup>

What might seem to be humility, then, is really, in the light of l. 65, a kind of arrogance: the cock believes that he has no need of anything except food for his body. Not all of this is apparent from the fable in isolation from its moralitas, perhaps, but I think that we are to a considerable extent to be guided by the connotations of "rycht cant and crous".

The second stanza of the fable provides another basis for judging the cock:

As madynis wantoun and insolent  
That fane wald play and on be streit be sene,  
To swopyne of be hous /pai tak/ no tent  
Quhat be pairin swa pat be flure be clene.  
Iowalis ar tynt, as oft tymes hes bene /sene/,  
And in be swowpyne is castin furth annone,  
Perauentour swa was be samyn stone.

(Bann. 71-7)<sup>43</sup>

Ostensibly, this stanza provides us with an explanation of the jewel's presence in the midden, but it is in reality doing rather more. The maidens who neglect their responsibilities and the importance of the jewel parallel, in the latter respect at least, the cock, who is also oblivious of its value: their preoccupation is with another kind of pleasure, their sin is luxuria rather than gula, but both are manifestations of the same worldliness which is the prevailing theme of the Fabillis. It may be, as Dr Jamieson and Professor MacQueen have suggested,<sup>44</sup> that Henryson is here alluding to Luke 15: 8-10: certainly there



is a stark contrast between the assiduousness of the woman in the parable and the carelessness of the "madyne wantoun and insolent". Again, our understanding of this parallel is clearer when we "read back" from the moralitas, but the point emerges, I think, from a careful reading of the narrative as well.

The rhetoric of the cock's address to the jewel is a further element in our assessment of him. As I have already suggested, the cock is not ignorant of the jewel's worth, but he perversely denies its relevance to himself. His folly, in other words, is more culpable than it would be if he were merely unaware of the virtues of the jasp: he sees it, acknowledges its worth for others, but rejects it for himself out of pride and materialism. A careful examination of the text does not justify our seeing the cock as overcoming the temptations of the material world. He does in fact pay homage to the jewel:

Quhair suld thow mak þi tributatioun?  
 Quhair suld thow dwell bot in a ryall tour?  
 Quhair suld thow sit bot one a kingis croun,  
 Exalt in wirchep and in gret honour?

(Bann. 106-9)

This reverence is in a way another aspect of his materialism: although he himself seeks different, more basic goods, he accepts the worthiness of the jewel because of its physical beauty and because of the temporal power of which it is a conventional symbol. Attention to the detail of Henryson's presentation of the cock, therefore, tends to confirm Professor Fox's view that he is portrayed as "natural man",<sup>45</sup> and the literal sense of the narrative hovers, as it were, between sympathy for the cock's understandable desire for food and the clues to his

spiritual blindness with which Henryson prepares us for his moralitas. To the extent that these clues depend upon medieval literary convention, as in the skilfully varied formula or in the implications of the cock's rhetoric, the modern reader is no doubt less sensitive to the consistently ironic presentation of the cock than Henryson's own audience would have been, and due allowance must be made for this factor in assessing the effect of the fable. I believe that we have a keener sense of a reversal in the moralitas than Henryson would have anticipated, and that in reality the narrative of The Cok and the Jasp and its moralitas are quite carefully integrated.

The Cok and the Jasp is, like The Wolf that gat the Nekhering, a formal allegory, in which the cock is the fool and the jewel represents the abstract quality of wisdom. Although we have already seen that the Fabillis are a varied collection in their patterns of meaning, the majority are allegorical in this strict sense. It is, however, difficult to see any systematic organization of the sequence into allegorical and exemplative poems, and this rather chaotic situation tends to confirm the impression which we gain from a study of text and sources that the collection "just grew" without any clear structural intention on Henryson's part. There seem to be conflicting tendencies even within that group of fables derived from the Gualterus Anglicus/ Isopet tradition: The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous preserves the non-allegorical exemplative mode of its source,<sup>46</sup> while in The Preiching of the



Swallow and The Wolf and the Lamb, for example, Henryson develops his fables and the manner in which their moral is conveyed in radically different ways.

One group of fables which can conveniently be taken together consists of the three, all derived from Gualterus and/or some untraced Isopet, in which social issues are discussed. In all three, we may state at the outset, Henryson has taken a rather general social application and given it much greater political precision, so much so that a concern for social justice begins to emerge as a significant minor theme of the Fabillis.<sup>47</sup> In all three cases, I think, the relationship between the narrative and Henryson's moralitas is more straightforward than in the fables we have just been considering. In The Wolf and the Lamb, for example, there is a certain parallelism of structure between the two parts, although it is not carried very far. As Professor MacQueen has observed, both fable and moralitas have a four-part structure, the dialogue between wolf and lamb involving three exchanges followed by the wolf's denunciation of Reason, the moralitas consisting of Henryson's three categories of human wolves, followed by his appeal for mercy and generosity on behalf of the poor commons.<sup>48</sup> But Henryson does not really develop this parallel — the three categories do not correspond in any systematic way to the three stages of the argument, so that the structural scheme remains superficial. There are, however, some points of contact: when Henryson inveighs against

fals pervertaris of þe lawis,  
 Quhilk vndir poleit termes falset myngis,

Leitand þat all wer gospels that they schawis,  
(Bann. 100-2)

he is obviously thinking of the wolf's perverse misuse of Exodus 20: 5 (Ego sum Dominus Deus tuus, fortis, zelotes, visitans iniquitatem patrum in filios in tertiam et quartam generationem eorum qui oderunt me) in his declaration that

                    quhen þe fader offendis  
[I] will cheris none of his successioun,  
And of his bairnis may weill be tane amendis  
Vnto þe nynt degre descending doun.

(Bann. 57-60)<sup>49</sup>

This abuse of Scripture itself contrasts with the lamb's entirely proper appeal to the authority of Ezekiel 18.<sup>50</sup> The lamb, indeed, is an exceedingly voluble and persuasive representative of the poor, belying both his supposed innocence (he is "sely", l. 5) and the humility of the social class he stands for. But then, the fable has obvious links with the Piers Plowman tradition, in which the poor classes are often better defended than realism would strictly allow.<sup>51</sup>

A further general point of correspondence between the narrative and the moralitas lies in the emphasis which the latter places upon the grasping nature of the rich: just as the wolf is not content to drink from his part of the river, so "mychty men haifand annwch plente" (Bann. 107) are prepared to harass the poor and steal their very means of livelihood. Even this correspondence cannot be pushed very far, however, for the wolf is not really concerned with the lamb's part of the river at all, his real motive being to find a pretext for eating his victim. The moralitas, therefore, most nearly approaches the narrative in the metaphor of the penultimate stanza:



O thow grit lord þat hes riches and rent,  
 Be nocht a wolf thus to devoir þe pure;  
 Think þat no thing crewall nor violent  
 May in this warld perpetually indure:  
 This is a sentence suth, I 3ow assure,  
 For till oppress, thow sall haif als grit pane  
 As thow the pure anis with thy hand had slane.

(Bann. 148-54)

Nevertheless, in its demonstration that the strong will ultimately use force to overcome the legitimate rational arguments of the weak, The Wolf and the Lamb gives a thoroughly controversial twist to the traditional significance of the fable.

Just how far Henryson has politicized his version is apparent if we compare the moralitas with those of the analogues which probably resemble his source most closely, the versions of Gualterus Anglicus and the Isopet de Lyon.<sup>52</sup> The former is characteristically terse:

Sic nocet innocuo nocuus, causamque nocendi  
 Inuenit. Hii regnant qualibet urbe lupi.

53

The Isopet goes a good deal further, but still stops some way short of the degree of explicit social comment we find in Henryson:

Si con li Lous ploins de malice  
 Occist l'Aigneal simple senz vice,  
 Autresi a cel examplaire  
 Soillent es bons li mavaiz faire.  
 Il s'estuidient de trover  
 Achoison por les bons grever,  
 Per fausetey, per felonie  
 Ont cilz lous pertout signorie.  
 Au dessoz est en toute place  
 Mise vertuz, droiz et simplace.  
 Li plus fort lo plus foible esquaiche,  
 Povres hons est mort qui ai vaiche.  
 Il covient que voincu se rende,  
 Qui ne trueve qui lo deffende.  
 Apertemant puis donc conclure:  
 Ou lous raigne, morte est droiture.

Onques vertuz ne fut segure  
 Avuec genz qui de Deu n'on cure.

54

The basis for Henryson's development of the fable is here obvious enough, but the OF. version lacks the detail of his tripartite division of the "wolves" into perverters of the law, bad landlords and greedy nobles. The result is the subtle difference that whereas the Isopet states that the wolves of society "ont ... signorie", Henryson says, more strictly allegorically, that the lords are wolves. The Isopet, in other words, starts from the terms of the fable and shows how the relationship of wolf and lamb echoes that of the oppressor and the oppressed, while Henryson starts from the social hierarchy and assigns to the two principal social groups roles fulfilled by the characters of the fable. It is the difference between the allegorical and the exemplative fable, and in a curious way Henryson's allegory makes the political comment all the more pointed.

This development of the allegorical element in the fable is apparent in the other political poems apparently drawn from the same sources. The moralitas of Dou Lion et de la Rate (the version of the fable of the lion and the mouse found in the Isopet de Lyon) is extremely brief:

Se per puissance es eslevez,  
 Aide velontiers es grevez.  
 Ce te dit dou Lyon l'estoire:  
 Au chaiti fait bon faire aidoire;  
 Car mainte foiz puet despaichier  
 Tel qui ne porroit empaichier.

55

Again Henryson uses allegory to make his point more specific. The lion in the French version is alluded to in the narrative as "li soverains" (l. 23), but the unmistakable allusion to the



relationship of king and subjects is not taken any further.

Henryson devotes seven stanzas to a detailed allegorization; the lion

May signifie ane Prince, or Empriour,  
Ane Potestate, or yit ane King with Croun,

(Bann. 254-5)

while the forest is "bot the warld and his prosperite", the mice are the common people, and (somewhat confusingly) the men who try to capture the lion seem to be subjects with a grievance against their monarch:

Thir crewall men, pat stentit hes the nett  
In quhilk be lyone suddanelly wes tane,  
Waitit alway amendis for till get,  
For hurte men wrytis in the marble stane.

(Bann. 288-91)

The point, implicit in the Isopet, that the goodwill of the people towards their king is dependent on the extent to which he succeeds in tempering justice with mercy, is here developed at some length, in a much more concretely political way.

But Henryson's allegory tells us a great deal more than that. By making the forest, which in the Isopet is just a setting for the action, into a symbol of this world, Henryson establishes both that the sleeping lion is neglecting his responsibilities and that the consequence of this is rebelliousness on the part of the commons. This is not, certainly, immediately apparent from the opening of the narrative:

A Lyone at his pray wery for-run,  
To recreat his lymis and to rest,  
Bekand his breist and bely at be son,  
Vndir a tre lay in be fair forrest:  
Sua come a trip of mys out of pair nest,  
Rycht tait and trig all dansand in a gys,  
And our be lyone lansit twys or thrys.

(Bann. 85-91)

Even the reader practised in spotting the associations of medieval imagery is unlikely to grasp that the "fair forrest" is a symbol of mutability until he is told in the moralitas, although the unnaturally cavalier way in which the mice run all over the sleeping lion should perhaps alert us to the fact that something is wrong. As Henryson explains in the moralitas:

Thir littill mys ar bot be commonte,  
Wantone, vnwys, without correctioun:  
Thir lordis and princis, quhen þat thay se,  
of iustice makis non executioun,  
Thay dreid no thing to mak rebelloun  
and discobey, for quhy, thay stand none aw —  
That garis thame thair soveranis to misknaw.

(Bann. 267-73)

The "crime" which initiates the action, then, is as much the lion's responsibility as it is the mouse's, and as Dr Jamieson suggests,<sup>56</sup> this tends to lead us to regard the lion with some suspicion. He does, after all, need to be taught his business by the mouse, whose long speech in her defence (Bann. 141-82) provides a spirited and effective exposition of legal theory:

'In every Iuge mercy and rewth suld be,  
as assessouris, and collaterall;  
Without mercy, Iustice is creweltie,  
as said is in þe lawis spirituall:  
quhen rigour sittis in þe tribunall,  
The equety of law quha may sustene?  
Rycht few, or nane, bot mercy go betuene.'

(Bann. 148-54)

Like the lamb in The Wolf and the Lamb (and, as we shall see, the sheep in The Scheip and the Doig), the mouse is here a spokesman for the ideal view of society which medieval writers so consistently set against contemporary conditions.

Henryson's heightening of the allegorical patterns of the fable also makes better sense of the reversal of Fortune which



is the pivotal point of the action. For the capture of the lion, we learn from the moralitas, is not merely fortuitous (as it is in the Isopet de Lyon): it is a function of the lion's worldliness that he is vulnerable to the operations of Fortune. That same neglect which led to the "rebellion" of the mice is, according to the moralitas, the cause of the retribution which follows. Again, it is hard to find any direct evidence of this in the narrative. In retrospect, perhaps, we can see in the lion's hunting (stressed in ll. 190-6 as the cause of his being pursued himself) a suggestion that he is

rolland in warldly lust and vane plesandis,  
(Bann. 282)

but we are more likely to read the lines literally as a description of the way lions behave and men react to them. The point is not, therefore, primarily about worldliness as such, but rather about the transience of worldly power, which the fable offers as a pragmatic reason for rulers to show mercy towards their subjects: it cannot be predicted when they may themselves be in need of mercy.

I have argued elsewhere<sup>57</sup> that the allegory of The Lyoun and the Mous is more conventional and less topical than some other critics have suggested, but that is not to say that the fable is without contemporary relevance. All three political fables show a concern with the nature and administration of justice which emerges from a large number of Middle Scots poems, and which we have already observed in The Thre Prestis of Peblis and The Talis of the Fyve Bestes.<sup>58</sup> But the effect of the allegory in Henryson's fable is to place the administration of

justice within the wider framework of sin and corruption, rather than to tie it to a particular set of political circumstances in 1482 or any other year. This, I believe, is the real significance of the observation in the moralitas that

Moir till expone as now I latt allane;  
Bot king and lord may weill wit quhat I mene,  
Fegour heirof oftymis hes bene sene.

(Bann. 292-4)

These lines do not, pace M.W. Stearns, point to a topical allusion, a knowing leer at a specific audience: rather they assert the very recurrence of the situation described in the fable, of neglectful rulers prone to dispense arbitrary justice, and of the fall which awaits such princes and which may make them grateful for any goodwill and mercy they can obtain. The Lyoun and the Mous reverses the pattern of The Wolf and the Lamb: in the latter case, the tyrannical beast ignores the arguments of the weak, but in the former the lion is persuaded to show clemency and is rewarded by his subsequent rescue. But then, Henryson surely did not miss the point that the lion is a legitimate, if imperfect, ruler, while the wolf is a tyrannical predator without any shred of legitimacy.

We have seen that the greater measure of allegory in Henryson's version of The Lyoun and the Mous heightens the political metaphor and yet puts it within a more universal context. But he adds yet another level of complication to the narrative, for this fable, unlike all the others, is put directly into the mouth of Aesop. The poet, in a summer landscape, dreams that he encounters "maistir Ysop, poet lawreat", whom he asks to tell him a fable. Aesop at first refuses, but finally agrees and



narrates The Lyoun and the Mous. It is far from clear why Henryson should have chosen to augment his fable in this way. Stearns, who sees strong political satire in the poem, thinks that it may have been a precaution on the poet's part,<sup>59</sup> a distancing device not unlike the ironic complexity of point of view in More's Utopia. MacQueen suggests that The Lyoun and the Mous may have been published separately.<sup>60</sup> Certainly, Henryson seems to use Aesop as an authority, and as a commentator on the role of the fabulist. Declining to tell such a story, he says:

'For quhat is worth to tell a fenzeit taill,  
Quhen haill preiching may no thing now awaill?'

(Bann. 69-70)

It may be, as MacQueen argues, that "preiching" here is an allusion to The Preiching of the Swallow. Be that as it may, the effect of Aesop's remark is to question the efficacy of the moral tale (and, indeed, of overt homily) in the face of really obdurate sinning. Some specific reference to Scotland seems to be intended, for at the end of his moralitas Aesop adds:

'My fair chyld,  
Perswaid the kirkmen ythandly to pray  
That tressone of this cuntre be exyld,  
And Iustice ring, and lordis keip thair fey  
Vnto pair souerane lord both nycht and day.'

(Bann. 295-9)

"This cuntre" seems unequivocally explicit, and more than anything else roots the fable firmly in the circumstances of Henryson's own place and time. But the phrase is not used by the poet, whose dependency is stressed in l. 295, but by Aesop, who is clearly being used here as an authoritative voice. There is no real reason to conclude that Henryson feared personal

reprisals: rather, we are led to believe that the wretchedness of contemporary society is not merely a matter of the poet's own opinion but is evident to the outsider who appears with the oracular authority of the dream. And he ironically questions the value of the whole enterprise he is part of, as if challenging us to be reformed by the indirect influence of "a fen-zeit taill". The function of the framing device of the prologue, then, is essentially persuasive, designed to make it harder for the audience to ignore the argument about the human condition, with particular reference to the relationship of princes and subjects, which the fable presents.

Another kind of allegorical device is apparent in The Scheip and the Doig, which like the other political fables is concerned with the proper administration of justice. In the Isopet de Lyon, which appears to be very like Henryson's source,<sup>61</sup> there is a beast-court, with some indication of the roles played by different animals:

Li Chiens en jugemant apele  
 La Burbiz, et li muet querele.  
 En cel plait est juges li Lous:  
 Cilz juges est mout perillous.  
 Li Chiens avoit bons consoillours,  
 (Por son plait ne querez moillours),  
 Lo Nieble et lo Voutour ensamble:  
 Si li uns tost, li autres amble.

62

Henryson develops this hint at some length. In his fable, the court is an ecclesiastical consistory, in which not only is "ane fraudfull Wolff" the judge and the gled (kite) and the grip (vulture) are advocates for the dog, but "Schir Corby Rawin" is the apparitor, the fox is clerk, and the bear and the brock act as adjudicators. The moralitas converts all this into terms



of a secular court: the wolf becomes sheriff, the raven "a fals crowner".<sup>63</sup> Henryson's invention might be thought to have

given out at this point. Rather lamely, he adds:

Off this fals tod, becaus I spak befoir,  
And of this gled, quhat thay mycht signify  
Off pair natur, as now I speik no moir.

(Bann. 134-6)

Professor MacQueen states:

These lines imply that Henryson had previously set out the significatio not only of the toad, but also of the gled — in other words, that The Frog and the Mouse as well as The Cock and the Fox and The Trial of the Fox should precede The Sheep and the Dog.

64

Such an interpretation, however, depends upon one particular version of the punctuation, and also upon a straightforward misreading of l. 134: "tod" is Henryson's usual word for 'fox', while the villain of The Paddock and the Mous is not a toad but a paddock, or frog. The tod of l. 134 is quite unmistakably the fox of l. 29, which is all the more probable since nowhere else does Henryson refer across from one moralitas to another. The real point of the lines, then, is that Henryson carries the elaborate allegorical application of the fable to the secular court just far enough to make his argument stick, but then is not interested in developing it further as mere decoration, turning instead to the much more direct technique of putting into the mouth of the sheep a long complaint against the injustice of the world (Bann. 141-75).<sup>65</sup>

This rather perfunctory, certainly functional, attitude towards the allegory is less apparent in the narrative where, as we have seen, seven animals are given roles in the consistory

court. The tradition of such an allegorical subdivision of functions is well established in later medieval literature, sometimes having a clear didactic purpose, as in the allegorical use of monastic offices in The Abbey of the Holy Ghost and perhaps at some points in Dunbar's Bewty and the Presoneir, while at others, as in The Assembly of Ladies, the particularization of the allegory in this way appears to be primarily a form of rhetorical elaboration.<sup>66</sup> The three animals named as court officials in the Isopet de Lyon are all predators, and the kite and vulture are moreover principally scavengers, so that the judgment they invite of the legal profession is a particularly harsh one. Henryson has taken this idea up, adding the raven ("Quha pykit had full mony sheipis ee", Bann. 16) and the fox, both of whom are also predators with a long-standing, almost proverbial antagonism towards sheep. The introduction of the bear and the badger at l. 64 is a little more surprising: neither is a frequent character in beast-fable, or for that matter in beast-epic, and while both are again predatory creatures, neither of them has the unsavoury reputation of the other court officials. That, however, is perhaps part of the point: they seem on the surface to be less hostile than the wolf, fox and raven, or the kite and the vulture, and their apparent neutrality is confirmed by Henryson's account of their elaborate consideration of all the relevant legal arguments:

Off Sewall mony volum thay rewoll,  
 The codys and degestis new and ald;  
 Prowe and contra, strait argument thay resoll,  
 Sum a doctryne, and sum anoper hald;  
 For prys nor prayer trow 3e thay wald fald?  
 Bot held the glose and text of the decreis  
 As trew Iugeis: I schrew pame pat leis.

(Bann. 71-7)



But of course the objectivity is a sham, and the bear and the badger are as partisan as all the other animals. Like the great display of legal terminology which runs through the fable, the increase in the number of animals named and discussed is a tactic of Henryson's to further his condemnation of the biased and unfair system of justice which is his primary target..

He does not, however, seem to wish the theme of injustice to be seen as a narrowly political problem. As Dr Jamieson has pointed out,<sup>67</sup> the latter part of the moralitas widens the concern of the fable from the maladministration of justice to the nature of the human condition in the temporal world, a theological rather than a political theme. The sheep, in his complaint, moves from his own destitution to the general corruption that is its cause, and utters an understandable, and thoroughly conventional, apostrophe:

Se thow nocht, lord, this warld ourturnit is,  
As quha wald chenge gud gold in leid or tyn;  
The pure is pelit, the lord may do no mis;  
Now symony is haldin for no syn;  
Now is he blyth with okir can most wyn;  
Gentreis is slane and pety is ago —  
Allace! lord God, quhy tholis thow it so?

(Bann. 162-8)

The tone here is not of rebellion but of resignation, for the sheep knows the answer perfectly well:

Thow tholis this bot for our grit offens,  
Thow sendis ws truble and plaigis soir,  
As hungir, derth, wer and pestilens,  
Bot few amendis pair lyfe now pairfoir.

(Bann. 169-72)

The possibility of a purely political solution is thus excluded by the sheep's complaint, since injustice is to be seen simply as one aspect of the misery which follows upon that "aboriginal

calamity" (in Newman's perhaps unfortunate phrase), the Fall. Prayer is the only refuge, the sheep concludes (Bann. 174), since suffering is a necessary part of man's lot in the world. The most striking thing about this complaint is its directness: Henryson abandons the allegorical mode of the fable and of the early part of the moralitas, and although there is still some element of allegory here, in the sense that the sheep is explicitly speaking as a representative of the poor commons, these stanzas do not in any way disguise their straightforward didactic purpose. Like the lamb of The Wolf and the Lamb and the mouse of The Lyoun and the Mous, the sheep is an articulate and authoritative spokesman for the oppressed, but unlike them he is allowed to step outside the immediate narrative framework of confrontation and debate in order to present a summary of the significance of his fable. Whereas in the other two fables the full meaning is provided by the narrator, in The Scheip and the Doig the sheep is able to interpret his own story, the narrator relegated to the position of an observer and reporter. This device resembles in some ways the introduction of Aesop in The Lyoun and the Mous, distancing the poet from his political theme. But in this case, I think, it has the more important effect of engaging us directly with the sheep himself, ending the fable on a note of rhetorical passion and not on the more usual one of allegorical analysis or didactic exhortation.

Although the three political Fabillis have certain common themes, and in all three Henryson uses allegorical methods to heighten the rather general social comment of the sources, the examination we have just been making further illustrates the way



in which the Morall Fabillis is an extremely diverse collection. Within these three fables, Henryson never uses the same technique twice: he creates the persona of Aesop, engages in overt political analysis, uses landscape to symbolize the temporal world, describes an allegorically-organized court, reports a long, formal complaint. The relationship of narrative and moralitas is in all three cases fairly straightforward, lacking, for example, the ironic twists and turns of The Cok and the Jasp or of parts of The Tod; but it does not seem that Henryson had any clear-cut, hard-and-fast idea of the function of allegory in his fable-cycle. The greater part of the moralitas of The Scheip and the Doig, indeed, is scarcely allegorical at all, for the sheep's complaint stands somewhat apart from all the complex detail about who's who in court. It is The Lyoun and the Mous in which the allegorical machinery is most consistently worked out: in the other political fables, Henryson is ultimately more interested in stating his views directly, either in his own voice or through the persona of the sheep. These three fables, then, differ from The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous in that they contain a greater element of allegory, and from The Cok and the Jasp in that (apart, perhaps, from the rather ambiguous treatment of the lion and the mouse) they do not have that fable's ironic subtlety in the treatment of the leading character, or the apparent discrepancy between narrative and moralitas. This leaves two of the Gualterus/Isopet group to be considered: The Preiching of the Swallow and The Paddok and the Mous.

The Preiching of the Swallow is arguably Henryson's richest

and most complex single fable, and it has attracted a correspondingly larger critical discussion than most of the others. Its significance lies in the breadth of its vision, providing in some ways a theological framework for the whole of the Morall Fabillis, an exposition of the working of the entire universe. This broadening of interest is particularly apparent if we begin with the moralitas of Gualterus' version, which is, as always, very brief:

Vtile consilium qui spernit, inutile sumit.  
Qui nimis est tutus, retia iure subit.

68

This is elaborated by Henryson in a way which suggests that, whatever its limitations, his moralitas is certainly not to be taken lightly. It begins with the traditional formulation of the three stages of sin: suggestion, delectation, and consent.<sup>69</sup> The sowing of the flax in the fable represents the Devil's sowing of the seeds of sin in the human soul, which grow through the delectation of the will ("wickit thocht", Bann. 283) and the consequent blinding of reason, thus providing him with the materials for his "snair". Like many other animals in the Fabillis, the birds are prisoners of their appetites, and their death symbolizes the fate which awaits the worldly man. The point of the fable shifts in Henryson's treatment of it from the value of good advice to the perils of sensuality: whereas Gualterus' version is about the preaching of the swallow, Henryson's is (at least according to the moralitas) about the death of the other birds. A reading which asserts the unity of narrative and moralitas must show this emphasis within the fable itself, and must also find within the presentation of the fowler



some preparation for the unfavourable treatment he receives in the moralitas. Otherwise, the view that Henryson's interpretation is an arbitrary appendage would seem to have some force.

In The Preiching of the Swallow Henryson takes a long time, by the standards of his own rhetoric, to come to the point. The first thirteen stanzas form a discursive introduction, the subject of which is no less than the shape of Creation. The final effect of this passage is positive and optimistic, well represented by the progression of the seasons from summer to spring, a point which has been made by a number of critics,<sup>70</sup> but we must not allow this overall assertion of divine providence to obscure the very dark note on which the prologue begins:

The he prudence and wirking mervellus,  
The profound wit of god omnipotent,  
Is so perfyte and so /ingenious/,  
Excelland fer all manis argument:  
For quhy, till Him all thing is present,  
Rycht as it is or ony tyme salbe,  
Befoir þe sight of His devinitie.

Thairfore our saull with sensualitie  
So fettrit is in presoun corporale,  
We may nocht cleirlye vnderstand nor see  
God as he is, a thing celestiale.  
Oure mirk and deidlye cors materiale  
Blindis þe spirituall operatioun,  
Lyke as man war bundin in presoun.

(Bann. 1-14)<sup>71</sup>

Henryson adds that some knowledge of God is possible from the observation of His Creation, and the fact that the swallow is able to warn the other birds on the basis of such knowledge perhaps justifies the tendency of critics to read these lines optimistically, so that Professor Fox sees man's blindness and tinyness incorporated in God's greatness,<sup>72</sup> and J.A. Burrow

argues that the key word in the passage is "prudence", the real theme of the fable.<sup>73</sup> It seems to me, however, that Henryson's emphasis falls very heavily at the beginning upon the blindness and bondage of human sensuality, images which anticipate the fate of the birds and which are taken up in the moralitas:

And quhen þe saull, as seid dois in þe erd,  
Giffis consent in delectatioun,  
The wickit thocht than begynnys to breird  
In deidlye syn quhilk is dampnatioun:  
Reasoun is blindit with affectioun .....

(Bann. 281-5)

Thir hungrie birdis wretchis we may call,  
Ay scraipand in þis warldis vaine plesaunce,  
Gredye to gadder guidis temporall  
Quhilk as þe calf ar tome without substaunce,  
Litill of vaill and full of variance,  
Lyke to þe mow befoir þe face of wind  
Wiskis away, and makis wretchis blind.

(Bann. 295-301)

The image of blindness, in particular, provides a crucial link between the language of the opening and that of the moralitas. The sense of an all-encompassing Providence, which certainly does emerge from Henryson's description of the world and which is invoked in the final stanza of the moralitas, is not the starting-point of the poem. And the developing narrative is dominated not by our sense of God's infinite goodness, but rather by the ignorance and impending death of the birds, which has its origins in the blindness of the second stanza.

The contrast between the goodness of God — "wittie" is Henryson's term — and the pitiful ignorance of man provides the paradox which is at the centre of the poem, and close to the centre of neo-Aristotelian, scholastic thought. For notwith-



standing the poverty of man's intelligence, and the need to "lat dirk ressounis be" (Bann. 28), we can at least perceive God's beneficence through the study of His creatures. This is part of the "tragedy within a larger comedy" of which Professor Fox writes,<sup>74</sup> and it relates directly to the fable of the birds. The swallow is a keen observer of the world, and he derives from his observations a scheme for self-preservation:

'For clerkis sayis it is /nocht/ sufficient  
To considder þat is befoir þine ee;  
Bot prudence is ane inward argument  
That garris a man prowde befoir and see  
Quhat guid, quhat evill is likly for to be,  
Off everye thingis at þe final end,  
And se fro perrell ethar him defend.'

(Bann. 134-40)<sup>75</sup>

His appeal to prudence here associates him with the God of the first stanza, while the improvident response of the other birds equally clearly identifies them with the human blindness of which the second stanza speaks. So the swallow remains an isolated figure, the preacher whose vision of the truth goes unheeded.

His understanding of the world lies specifically in the passing of the seasons, which provide both the structure of the fable and an important core of imagery. The two descriptions of the seasons, that of the prologue and that of the fable proper, move in opposite directions with carefully calculated effect. In the prologue, we see the year passing from summer through autumn and winter to spring, a sequence which is essentially optimistic. The optimism is somewhat tempered, however, by the greater emphasis which Henryson places on winter, giving it two stanzas to the other seasons' one, and by one

particularly relevant detail:

Than flouris fair, faidit with frost, moist fall,  
And birdis blyith changeis pair notis sweit  
Intill murning neir slane with snaw and sleit.

(Bann. 75-8)

It is not, finally, the snow and sleet which bring about the deaths of the birds in the fable, although their hunger is certainly a contributory factor, but these lines do establish what the narrative will later bear out, that winter is a perilous season. The imagery of fading flowers, too, links the passage to that tradition of mutability poetry which is an important part, not only of the work of Henryson, but of the whole literature of the Middle Ages.<sup>76</sup> Still, for those who survive there is another spring, and it is on this note of optimism that the prologue ends and the narrative begins.

This description of spring, however, is presented through the eyes of a narrator who, like that of The Scheip and the Doig, involves us directly in his story. He interprets the spring scene simply and joyfully, giving us a vignette which recalls the illuminations of the Labours of the Months in a Book of Hours:<sup>77</sup>

Movand thus gait, grit mirth I tuik in mynde  
Off Lawboraris to see be besynace;  
Sum makand dike, and sum be pleuch can wynd,  
Sum sawand sedis fast fra place to place,  
The harrowis hoppand in the sawaris trace:  
It was grit joy to him pat lufit corne  
To se thame laboure sa at evin and morne.

(Bann. 99-105)

Those that love corn, presumably, include both the narrator and the majority of the birds: only the swallow responds to the scene with dread rather than pleasure. On the literal level,



of course, the man has nothing to fear, and his pleasure in the landscape-with-figures is therefore more rational than that of the birds, who really are ignoring their peril. I am not sure, however, that we should accept without question the narrator's view, which contrasts so obviously with that of the swallow. When he returns to the spot (or at least Henryson so implies) for the third time, he sees the fowler and his wife making the nets:

This Lint þe carll pullit the lyne,  
 Ripplit þe bowis and in beitis sett;  
 It steipit in þe burne and dryit syne,  
 and with a bittill knokit it and bett,  
 Syne scutchit it weill and heclit it in þe flett;  
 His wyffe it span and twane it into ffreid,  
 Off quhilk þe foular nettis war maid indeid.

(Bann. 204-10)

This very accurate and technical description of the processing of flax is the first direct mention by the narrator of the fowler, although his purpose has already been explained by the swallow (Bann. 190-6). It is striking in its neutrality, by comparison with the tone of the swallow's remarks and the intention behind the making of the nets. When we consider the allegorical interpretation the narrator offers us in the morality-tas, this is all the more remarkable: this is, allegorically speaking, a description of the Devil's preparation of a snare for the unwary sinner and yet, by his use of technical language, Henryson keeps our attention very firmly centred on the process itself, so that the autumn scene is as much a descriptive vignette as those which preceded it.

This discrepancy between the perception of the swallow and that of the human narrator is preserved almost throughout the

winter scene which follows. Again we are given technical details, of the chaff-strewn trap the fowler prepares in the snow: the narrator does now refer to the fowler's "fals intentioun" (l. 228), but the real emphasis on the duplicity of his intentions again comes from the swallow:

'Trow 3e 3one churll for pietie will 3ow feid?  
Na, na, he hes it lyit heir for a traine!  
Remowe, I ride 3ow, or ellis 3e wilbe slaine!  
His nettis he hes sett full priuelie,  
Reddie to draw in tyme. Be war, for thye!'

(Bann. 234-8)

The narrator approaches this kind of judgment only at the very end:

Alace! it was rycht grite hertis sair to see  
That bludye bouchure beit þaj birdis down,  
And for to heir quhen þaj wist weill to dee,  
Thair cairfull sang and Lamentatioun.

(Bann. 253-6)<sup>78</sup>

The recognition by the narrator of the fate of the birds almost exactly coincides, therefore, with that of the birds themselves: the man, as an observer, has been as ignorant of the true significance of the scenes he has witnessed as have the birds, who by their participation have symbolized the ignorance of man. The moral neutrality of the narrator within the fable, I think, is a deliberate device, to isolate the swallow further and to reinforce the message about human shortsightedness. We see ignorance on two narrative levels, allegorically through the fable of the birds, and more literally through the imperceptiveness of the narrator. This helps to explain the apparent gap between the view taken in the narrative and that of the moralitas: only in the latter are we given a reliable guide to what has been going on (attributed, we may note, not to the



narrator but to Aesop), and the interpretation offered falls into line with that given by the swallow throughout the fable. Only in The Preiching of the Swallow, as Mr Burrow has recently observed, does Henryson introduce a narrator into the action in this way,<sup>79</sup> and I think it is reasonable to suppose that it is for a specific purpose. I hope I have demonstrated that it is an important element in the ironic structure of the fable; yet it also points a more positive moral, for the narrator, by observing the natural world, has learned something about Divine Law, if not about God. His discovery of the lesson of the birds, therefore, confirms Henryson's comment in the prologue that human blindness can be offset by the observation of Nature, and somewhat mitigates the harsh emphasis on punishment within the moralitas.

The Paddok and the Mous, the last of this group of fables to be considered, is a much more straightforward poem, lacking both prologue and explicitly-involved narrator. It, too, is unique among the Fabillis, however, in that Henryson has divided the moralitas into two distinct parts, neither of which derives from the sources.<sup>80</sup> As in The Wolf and the Lamb, there is a general structural parallel between narrative and moralitas: the debate between frog and mouse corresponds to the first part of the moralitas, while the second, more strictly allegorical, part explains the actual crossing of the river and the intervention of the gled. This double structure raises the most obvious critical question about the fable: as Dr Jamieson says, it is doubtful whether

the first part of our fable — the reason for crossing the river, the argument between the animals — is

relevant to the 'allegorization': Henryson certainly had no Platonic notion of the pre-existence of the Soul; and one would scarcely attribute to him the idea of the soul being slain by death.

81

The modern reader is likely to find such a fundamental lack of unity a serious flaw in the poem, if Dr Jamieson's strictures are justified, although it is far from clear that Henryson's contemporaries, familiar with the arbitrariness of the interpretations of the medieval exegete, would have recognized such a critical problem.

I am in any case not sure, however, that the break between the two parts, of the narrative in particular, is as complete as Dr Jamieson suggests. There is, for example, a good deal of emphasis near the beginning of the fable upon the mouse's appetite:

'Seis thow,' quod scho, 'of corne 3one Ioly flat,  
of ryp aitis, of beir, of peiss and quheit?  
I am hungry and fane wald be pairat;  
Bot I am stoppit heir be this wattir greit,  
And on þis syd I get no thing till eit  
Bot hard nutis quhilk with my teith I boir —  
War I bezond, my feist wald be þe moir.'

(Bann. 15-21)

This superficially understandable concern on the part of the mouse has parallels elsewhere in the Fabillis: in the materialism of the cock in The Cok and the Jasp, or of the Borowstoun Mous, or for that matter of the birds in The Preiching of the Swallow, we see that an excessive preoccupation with good food can be a powerful image of the life of the senses. The presence of "hard nutis" on the mouse's side of the river is explicitly mentioned, so that we are aware of her desire, not just to eat in order to live, but to obtain a gourmet diet. She is, in



the terminology of the moralitas to The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous, making a god of her stomach,<sup>82</sup> and it is precisely this preoccupation, this subjection to the senses, which makes her vulnerable to the duplicity of the paddock: that is, it is the appeal of the senses which makes possible the bondage of the soul as prisoner of the body. This, I think, is the point of the thread with which the mouse is induced to tie herself to the paddock, after an initial protest:

'Suld I be bund and fast, quhair I am fre,  
In howp of help? Nay, than I schrew ws baith,  
for I mycht los both lyfe and libertie.'

(Bann. 85-8)<sup>83</sup>

Again there is an echo of the fable of the two mice, where it is ironically said of the Borowstoun Mous that she "fredome had to ga quhair euer scho list". The binding of the mouse to the paddock signifies not the entry of the soul into the body, as Professor MacQueen has suggested,<sup>84</sup> but rather that surrender by the soul of autonomy and free will which is consequent upon its subjection to the senses. If this interpretation is correct, then Dr Jamieson's difficulty about the pre-existence of the soul disappears: the separate allegorization of body and soul here no more implies that the soul literally pre-exists than the allegory of Orpheus and Erudices suggests that the intellect literally follows the senses to Hell to liberate them, or than the allegorization of various feminine attributes in the Roman de la Rose tradition implies a literal dismemberment of the beloved.<sup>85</sup> Henryson's fable offers a way of imagining the relationship of body and soul in the face of the attraction and vicissitudes of this world, and its fictional world does not

oblige us — or even allow us — to extend our allegorical reading beyond that issue.

The role of the gled must be understood in the same way. Because the soul is the prisoner of the body, it is threatened by Death:

This gled is deid pat cumis suddanly,  
as dois be theif, and endis this battell:  
be vegeland pairfoir, and ay reddy,  
for manis lyfe is brukle & mortall.

(Bann. 186-9)

The point that Henryson intends us to grasp, I think, is not that the soul is subject to Death, but that it is made vulnerable in this way by its subjection to the body. The theological details of what happens to the soul after death are irrelevant: what matters is the moral argument that death is a greater hazard when the soul has given up its freedom. Unlike The Bludy Serk, Henryson's version of The Paddock and the Mous does not appear to me to be about the Fall, but rather about the moral choices of the individual man. Its theme, as in many of the other Fabillis, is the peril which attends sensuality.

The earlier, exemplative part of the moralitas — "semple counsale" Henryson calls it, to contrast it with his "figurat" allegory — takes up a different theme, caution against hypocrisy. Only at one point do the two parts seem to touch, when Henryson warns that it is

grit negligence  
To bind be fast quhair thow was frank & fre.

(Bann. 150-1)

This is a much more literal reading of the binding of mouse and paddock, but it does make basically the same point about the



autonomy of the human will. To be taken in by the blandishments of the hypocrite involves the same abandonment of rational judgment as does the surrender to the interior hypocrisy of the senses. This is, however, not allegory, and its influence on the narrative is towards a rather straightforward debate about appearance and reality. Such discussion-scenes are a standard part of Henryson's repertoire, and we recognize in the paddock's rhetoric the hallmarks of his other hypocritical predators, the false logic and the misuse of Biblical authority:

'The face may faill to be be hairtis taikin:  
Thairfoir I fynd in scriptour in a place,  
Thow suld nocht Iuge a man eftir his face.

Thocht I vnlusty be to luk vpone,  
I haif no wyt quhy suld I lakkit be;  
War I als fare as Ioly Absalone,  
I am nocht causer of pat grit bewte.  
This differens in forme and qualite  
Almychty god hes cawsit dame nature  
To prent and set in every creature.'

(Bann. 61-70)

The irony here is that the mouse's initial fears are justified, and the ugliness of the paddock is a symptom of evil intention, while the moralitas adds another twist to the irony by referring to the untrustworthiness of "fare pretence" (Bann. 142): in the case of the paddock, physical and moral realities do coincide, and it is only the skill of his deceitful rhetoric which overcomes the mouse, but the paddock is quite right to point out (Bann. 71-4) that even a pleasant appearance is no guarantee of good intentions.

The first part of The Paddok and the Mous in particular, then, provides a basis for both Henryson's interpretations of his fable, the "semple" and the "figurat". In its use of such

formal devices as the debate, and of familiar and resonant images like the stream the mouse desires to cross — the medieval associations of which have been admirably glossed by Professor MacQueen<sup>86</sup> — this fable is characteristic of the amplification by Henryson of his apparent sources in Gualterus Anglicus and a French Isopet. Two things emerge from an examination of this group of fables: the diversity of methods he employs, and the way in which he makes the narrative and metaphorical richness of his poems transcend the didactic prescriptiveness which his use of the moralitates might imply. No two poems in the Fabillis depend upon the same devices: we can compare the straightforward, exemplative narrative of The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous with the wide perspective of the prologue and the use of the narrator-observer in The Preiching of the Swallow, the introduction of Aesop as narrator in The Lyoun and the Mous with the ironic ambiguity of The Cok and the Jasp or the overt social criticism of The Wolf and the Lamb, the complexities of the double moralitas of The Paddok and the Mous with the lament of the sheep in the moralitas of The Scheip and the Doig. This entire group of seven fables, it must be remembered, comes in large measure from the same two, basically homogeneous collections of Aesopic material. The diversity which Henryson manages to achieve, therefore, stands out as a deliberate policy, and its effect is at almost every point to complicate the relationship between narrative and moralitas. For the modern reader, perhaps, the greater variety, life and interest with which he infuses his narratives actually diminishes the relevance of the moralitates,<sup>87</sup> but I



believe that we can be fairly sure that Henryson's intention was precisely the opposite. We have already seen many examples of the ways in which the language and imagery of the narratives prepare the way for, and ultimately enhance, the didactic statements of the moralizations, and while they may at times be somewhat heavy-handed, Henryson's moralitates are generally richer and more complex than those of his sources.

The same sort of diversity is evident, again coupled with greater narrative complexity, in the two fables which Henryson probably adapted from Caxton's Aesop, The Wolf and the Wedder and The Foxe that begylit the Wolf in the schadow of the Mone.<sup>88</sup> A cursory examination of the moralitates immediately reveals that he has allegorized the latter but left the former as a "moralitie exemplative". In this fundamental respect, therefore, The Foxe that begylit the Wolf falls into the same category as The Wolf that gat the Nekhering, The Preiching of the Swallow, and the majority of the Fabillis, while The Wolf and the Wedder shares with The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous a form of meaning in which our principal concern is directly with the interaction of the characters. There is nothing particularly esoteric about the interpretation Henryson offers here: the wether who impersonates a watchdog stands for those who try to rise above their station by affecting fine clothes. This, we should note, is different from the reading in Caxton, where the point is that

he that is wyse muste take good hede/ how he playeth  
with hym whiche is wyser/ more sage/ and more stronge

than hym self is.

89

Henryson's moralitas brings his fable more into line with the themes of the collection as a whole, and in particular echoes the attack on social climbing in The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous. Apart from the representative status of the wether, nothing in the fable is given anything approaching an allegorical meaning: not the wolf, nor the shepherd, nor (pace Professor MacQueen) the landscape.<sup>90</sup>

As we might expect in such a case, much of the interest of the poem arises from the characterization of the wether himself. The problem here rather resembles that of The Cok and the Jasp, for the modern reader at least is slightly startled to discover that the wether is in Henryson's view not deserving of praise for his offer to help the shepherd out by impersonating his dog. Dr Jamieson has argued, from a contrast with Caxton's version, that Henryson carefully establishes this surprise in order to lull us onto the wether's side, thus revealing that we are prone to the same vice; while Professor MacQueen and Donald Macdonald find that the wether's folly is apparent from the beginning.<sup>91</sup> I do not think that either of these views is altogether adequate, since both assume that the wether is uniformly presented throughout the poem. The moralitas, however, should alert us to the change we are shown in his character:

Heir may thow se that riches of array  
Will cause pure men presumptuous for to be;  
 Thay think thay hald of nane, be thay als gay,  
 Bot counterfute ane Lord in all degre.

(Bass. 2595-8) [My emphasis]

The point is not that the wether offers out of pride, or that



his pride is shown from the beginning: on the contrary, it is a consequence of his adoption of the disguise. To this extent, I agree with Dr Jamieson that the wether is presented sympathetically at the opening of the poem, but it does not appear to me that Henryson is deliberately setting out to mislead us with ironic intent. He takes some care, indeed, to stress the impersonator's initial success:

In all thingis he counterfait the Dog;  
 For all the nycht he stude, and tuke na sleip,  
 Swa that weill lang thair wantit not ane Hog.  
 Swa war he wes and walkryfe thame to keip,  
 That Lowrence durst not luke upon ane scheip;  
 For and he did, he followit him sa fast,  
 That off his lyfe he maid him all agast.

(Bass. 2497-2503)

This stanza contains definite echoes of the wether's original proposal (cf. Bass. 2484, 2489), the effect of which is to suggest that he is able, at the outset, to keep his word and protect the shepherd's flock. Even when in pursuit of the wolf, he is convincing enough in his impersonation to ensure the release of the lamb (Bass. 2532). And it is precisely at this point that we see the effect of his disguise upon the wether:

'Na,' quod the Wedder, 'in Faith we part not swa:  
 It is not the Lamb, bot the, that I desyre;  
 I sall cum neir, ffor now I se the tyre.'

(Bass. 2534-6)

He is now exceeding his brief, and the reason is that he has come to believe his own propaganda. This presumption, we are told in the moralitas, springs from the adoption of inappropriate dress, and I think that this is exactly what the narrative shows. The wether's "madness" strikes when he no longer remembers his true character.

The irony of the narrative, then, centres on the fact that the wether is led by his good intentions into self-destruction. The shepherd's comment that

'Quha sayis ane scheip is daft, thay lieit of it,'  
(Bass. 2492)

turns out to be inaccurate, although as a response to the scheme it has some merit. Even more striking is the wether's reversion to sheepish behaviour when caught: he bleatingly insists that it was all a game, and tries to win the wolf over with meekness. As a tactic, it is doomed, and I think we find the wether more sympathetic when he is defiantly guarding the flock. Henryson's presentation of him goes through a number of stages, and it seems clear that his character is more complex than many of the other animals in the Fabillis, or, for that matter, than the wether of Caxton's version.

The strategy in The Foxe that begylit the Wolf is entirely different. Henryson's allegorizing moralitas is one of his most elaborate, and yet one of the least contrived. Again his adaptation of Caxton's version alters the point of the fable, but here the Scottish poet has seen and developed metaphorical connections which in Caxton are barely implicit, so that the relationship between the narrative and its allegorical interpretation rather resembles that in The Bludy Serk. In Caxton's fable, for example, the counter-weight system of the buckets in the well, which means that the fox rises as the wolf descends, is made to evoke the traditional imagery of Fortune's wheel:

..... and as faste as he wente downward/ the Foxe came  
upward/ and whan the wulf sawe the Foxe comynge vpward/  
he sayd to hym/ my godsep ye goo hens/ thou sayst trew  
sayd the Foxe, For thus hit is of the world/ For when



one cometh doune/ the other goth upward .....

92

Within the narrative, Henryson renders this fairly accurately, making the point slightly more explicit:

The Tod come hailland up, the Wolf yeid down;  
 Than angerlie the Wolff upon him cryis:  
 'I cummand thus dounwart, quhy thow upwart hyis?'  
 'Schir,' quod the Foxe, 'thus fairis it off Fortoun:  
 As ane cummis up, scho quheillis ane uther doun!'

(Bass. 2415-9)

The moralitas, however, adds another dimension to the meaning, in a way characteristic of the allegorical Fabillis:

The Cabok may be callit Covetyce,  
 Quhilk blomis braid in mony mannis Ee;  
 Wa worth the well of that wickit vyce!  
 For it is all bot fraud and fantasie,  
 Dryvand ilk man to leip in the buttrie  
 That dounwart drawis unto the pane of hell. —  
 Christ keip all Christianis from that wickit well!

(Bass. 2448-54)

In addition to being an image of Fortune's wheel, then, the well is both the seat of covetice and a symbol of Hell itself, as the dungeon is in The Bludy Serk. In the same way, the woods which the wolf inhabits are interpreted in the moralitas as "wickit riches, quhilk all men gaipis to get" (Bass. 2442).

As the moralitas makes clear, the fable is primarily concerned with the fox and the wolf, and it is ultimately related, at least indirectly, to that strand of the beast-epic tradition dealing with the rivalry of fox and wolf, of which Henryson makes use elsewhere in the Morall Fabillis.<sup>93</sup> The introductory episode, in which the fox mediates in a dispute between the wolf and the labourer over a team of oxen, is not of obvious thematic relevance, although it does provide a narrative introduction to the fox's stratagem. Henryson, however, devotes about half

his poem to the matter, which certainly suggests that he regarded it as of some importance. In preparing the way for his allegorical moralitas he makes some significant changes; the fox does not merely happen along, as in Caxton, but instigates the action:

Bot yit the Wolff wes neirar nor he wend,  
 For in ane busk he lay, and Lowrence baith,  
 In ane rouch rone, wes at the furris end,  
 And hard the hecht; than Lowrence leuch full raith:  
 'To tak yone bud,' quod he, 'it wer na skaith.'  
 'Weill,' quod the Wolff, 'I hecht the be my hand;  
 Yone carlis word, as he wer king, sall stand.'

(Bass. 2245-51)

When we read subsequently that the fox is Satan, this detail takes on a powerful meaning, emphasizing the seductive role of the Devil and the wicked man's susceptibility to him. Its broader effect is to diminish the role of the husbandman: whereas in Caxton's fable the opportunist fox makes use of a dispute which already exists independently of him, Henryson's fox/Satan sets up the argument in order to trap the wolf. Allegorically speaking, the husbandman survives because he is virtuous, although this point is perhaps clearer in the moralitas than it is in the narrative.<sup>94</sup>

Henryson uses a number of techniques to focus our attention upon the fox. His discussions with the labourer and with the wolf are full of devilish cynicism, which Henryson clearly intends us to read in the light of his allegorical role:

'I am ane Juge,' quod Lowrence than, and leuch;  
 'Thair is na buddis suld beir me by the rycht;  
 I may tak hennis and caponis weill aneuch,  
 For God is gane to sleip; as ffor this nycht,  
 Sic small thingis ar not sene in to his sicht .....

(Bass. 2329-33)

The reference to the "sleep of God" is particularly telling, for



the fox's meaning is not altogether borne out by the fable as a whole; that is, the labourer, the just man, is able to escape Satan's clutches. The associations of the phrase, however, are with political complaint,<sup>95</sup> and hence with the social theme which is part of the sententia:

This Wolff I likkin to ane wickit man,  
 Quhilk dois the pure oppres in everie place,  
 And pykis at thame all querrellis that he can,  
 Be rigour, reif, and uther wickitnes.

(Bass. 2427-30)

We have observed before Henryson's tendency to place political questions in the context of wider, theological issues, and here again he is not centrally interested in social injustice in itself. Social evils are a consequence of a greater evil at work in the world, and that is represented by the machinations of the fox. Although he is seeking from the beginning to destroy the wolf, we are shown that his plans are improvised, and that his power is not absolute:

Lowrence wes ever remembering upon wrinkis  
 And subtelteis the Wolff for to begyle;  
 That he had hecht ane Caboik, he forthinkis,  
 Yit at the last he findis furth ane wyle,  
 Than at him selff softlie couth he smyle.

(Bass. 2378-82)

The purpose of these lines, certainly, is partly comic, but they show the Devil at work better than would a fully-preconceived plan; and they also tend to emphasize the stupidity of the wolf, who is blind to the fox's rather hard-pressed duplicity. Throughout the fable, we can see Henryson's comic devices underlining his moral argument, and nowhere in the Morall Fabillis is the juxtaposition of the two tones more skilfully managed.

The fables we have examined so far provide ample evidence of Henryson's eclecticism in his treatment of source-material and the subtlety of his handling of the delicate balance between didacticism and the frequently comic form of his narratives. What might at first sight appear to be a chaotic lack of unity in the Fabillis turns out on closer inspection to be a crucial factor in their success; Henryson avoids any single formula for cloaking a moral point in narrative, and each fable provides a unique variation on a limited range of themes. Nowhere is this flexibility of approach more apparent than in the sequence entitled The Tod in the Bannatyne MS. and referred to by Henryson himself as "the talking of the tod!"<sup>96</sup> These three tales, drawn from a variety of sources, have a common narrative line of sorts, but otherwise, in their themes and in the ways in which Henryson relates his ulterior meaning to the narrative, they are extremely diverse. Nowhere else does he link his fables even to this extent, and the foxes which occur in his other poems are not identified (other than by the occasional use of the conventional name, Lowrence) with the father-and-son combination of The Tod. It is not immediately clear how far Henryson intends us to read the sequence as a unified whole, other than on the strictly literal level, and this is a question which can only be resolved after a closer critical analysis than the group has hitherto received.

The Tod begins, characteristically, with a generalization, which both relates back to the Prologue and helps to set the tone of the sequence. Despite the irrational nature of beasts, we are told, they do have natural traits, just as men too have



natural characteristics (which, according to the Prologue, tend to reduce them to the level of beasts). In terms of the first fable of the triad, Schir Chantecleir and the Foxe, these natural traits are pride and flattery as they are found in the cock and the fox respectively, and it is to these vices that the moralitas will return:

Till oure purpois, bis cok wele may we call  
A nyce proud man, void and vaneglorious  
Off kyn or gude, quhilk is presumptuous .....

This feynit fox may wele be figurate  
To flatteraris with plesand wirdis quhite,  
With fals menyng and mouth mellifluate,  
To loife and lee quhilk settis pair delyte.

(Bann. 194-6; 204-7)

Despite Henryson's use of "figurate", this interpretation is, of course, not truly allegorical: the cock illustrates the weakness of proud men, but he is not really Pride, and the moralitas makes it clear that the fox is a flatterer, and not Flattery. In other words, the fable shows us the relationship between a proud fool and a clever flatterer, and the moralitas (even more than in the case of The Uponlandis Mous and the Borowstoun Mous) adds very little to what is already apparent from the narrative.

The moralitas, indeed, notably fails to account for a number of features of the narrative. It does not mention, for example, the important fact that in the fable the vainglorious fool escapes from his devious captor, by a method not altogether dissimilar to that employed by the fox himself. This optimistic view of the triumph of good over evil is ignored in the more hortatory moralitas, but it does receive some comment in the fable itself: the cock, in tricking the fox, is "with sum guid spreit inspyrit" (Bann. 162), and Henryson does offer some

reassurance regarding the fortunes of the oppressed:

This Fox, thocht he was fals and frielous,  
And hes fraudis his quarrellis to defend,  
Dissaut was throw mynis marvellous,  
For falsheid failzeis at þe latter end.

(Bann. 169-72)

This last proverbial aphorism provides a positive note which contrasts with the emphasis of the moralitas, and the discrepancy takes us back to Dr Jamieson's observation about variations in tone.<sup>97</sup> For this is an essentially comic tale, and the comedy which emerges from the narrative is not altogether consistent with the uniformly serious moralization, with its sterner view of the fate of the sinner.

A greater discrepancy is produced by the long passage about the three hens, which offers a sort of commentary on the action and serves as a distraction (and an ironic heightener of tension) at the point at which Chantecleir is being carried off by Lowrence. In its positioning this debate contrasts with the part of Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale with which it has been compared; for whereas Chaucer's Chauntecleer and his Pertelote debate in an abstract way before the event, the discussion between Pertok, Sprutok and Coppok comes in media res, at the very moment that Lowrence is disappearing with Chantecleir in his jaws.<sup>98</sup> The function of the two passages differs too in that, while the argument about the significance of dreams relates more or less explicitly to Chaucer's theme, it is less easy to see how the hens' laments in Henryson's fable fit into the overall structure of the poem, especially as its meaning is defined in the moralitas. For the subject of the hens' discussion is not really pride and flattery at all, but rather the



significance of the seizure of Chantecleir from their own point of view. As such, our attention is diverted from the main narrative line to the character of the hero,<sup>99</sup> and it seems that the passage has more affinity with Dunbar's Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo than it has with the dream-debate of the Nun's Priest's Tale.

There are some textual difficulties associated with this passage,<sup>100</sup> but its general lines are clear enough. Pertok and Sprutok represent variations on a common anti-feminist motif, that of the lecherous female. Sprutok's rejoicing at Chantecleir's apparently impending demise is the more overt: she echoes the Wife of Bath and Dunbar's Wedo in her enthusiastic embracing of widowhood, while Pertok goes through the motions of courtly lament before she too rejoices at the prospect of future lovers. Even in her later speech she seems to retain something of a hypocritical romanticism, for

In lust but lufe he set all his delyte

(Bass. 524)<sup>101</sup>

surely suggests that mere physical satisfaction (Chantecleir's supposed preoccupation) is not enough for the finer sensibilities of the hens, for whom romantic love is a necessary accompaniment to sexual desire. This latter pretension is of course thoroughly discredited by Pertok's final lines:

'I hecht 3ow be my hand sen 3e ar quyte,  
Within a wolk for schame and I durst speik,  
To gett a berne could better claw 3our /breik/.'

(Bann. 131-3)<sup>102</sup>

The crude sexuality of this last phrase outdoes even Sprutok's directness.

To Coppok Henryson gives the last word, a fact which led M.W. Stearns to see in her orthodoxy something of Henryson's own opinion:

..... the orthodox views of Toppok are given the final and most emphatic position in the argument.

103

Her sanctimonious condemnation of Chantecleir's lechery and of his scorn for divine judgment certainly contrasts with the sexuality of the other hens, and it brings us, moreover, back towards the moral categories of the moralitas:

'Prydefull he was, and joyit of his syn,  
And comptit nowper of goddis falvour nor feid,  
Bot traistit ay to rax and sa furth rin,  
Till at be last his synnis could him leid  
To schamefull end and to 3one suddane deid:  
Thairfore I wait it was be hand of god  
That causit him be wirreit with be tod.'

(Bann. 141-7)

But there are problems awaiting the reader who accepts this too much at face value. There may be a link between Chantecleir's vainglory and his lechery, but it is clear from the fable that the latter has nothing directly to do with his succumbing to the fox's flattery, and Coppok is simply wrong (so far as the narrative allows us to go) when she ascribes his downfall to divine punishment for his unrepentant adultery. Furthermore, all the hens, Coppok included, base their assessments of the situation on the assumption that Chantecleir is as good as dead, whereas the rest of the fable allows him to escape — a development which undermines the rigid morality of Coppok's homily.

This narrative complexity extends to the presentation of the cock. Whereas the fox really does little more than exemplify the traditional cunning with which he is associated in the



opening stanza (though it must be conceded that he is not devious enough to avoid falling into the cock's trap), the cock is a less simply-portrayed character. He is, from the beginning, presented ironically: he is "joly" and "rycht curageous". The first epithet has something of the dandy about it, and the other takes on ironic meaning in view of the cock's subsequent sorry plight. Both also have courtly echoes, which may help to prepare the way for the hens' debate. The superficiality of his finery is emphasized by the poet's handling of his first words:

'Knew thow my fader?' quod þe cok, and leuch.

(Bann. 50)

The laugh, given the circumstances, verges on the imbecilic, and this naive question remains the cock's only quoted remark until the intervention of "sum guid spreit" over a hundred lines later. And yet, despite his manifest folly and his undoubted pride, the cock is able to escape, and we actually see him learning from his experience:

'I was vnwyis þat winkit at thy will;  
Quhairthrow allmaist I lossit had my heid.'

(Bann. 183-4)

Our appreciation of Chantecleir, in other words, is not altogether negative, for he is capable of learning, and this reinforces the optimistic note of the narrative.

In the second fable of the sequence, The Taill how this foirsaid Tod maid his Confessioun, Henryson's methods are even more indirect than they were in the first, so that again the fable carries a greater and more subtle meaning than is allowed by the moralitas. According to the latter, the subject is

repentance, the death of the fox in the fable illustrating the disastrous end awaiting those whose contrition is only temporary and who subsequently relapse into sin. On a superficial level, the story provides a clear exemplification of this spiritual danger, for the fox who, fearing death, makes his confession to Freir Wolff Waitskaith has no real intention of performing the penance imposed on him, and his death is therefore inevitable. But that very inevitability forms part of a much richer pattern of irony which transcends the straightforward message of the moralitas, for it is his attempt to avoid the "inevitable" death which awaits him which in fact brings about Lowrence's end.

We are to some extent prepared for this by the poet's introductory reference to

the fatal aventure  
And destenye that to his fox befell,

(Bann. 3-4)

which precedes the description of the fox's casting of his own horoscope. The determinism of astrological theory is of course part of a continuing medieval debate: poems such as Troilus and Criseyde and The Kingis Quair are in differing ways concerned with the issue of how far man's affairs are controlled by the operations of the planets, and of such quasi-divine agencies as Fortune,<sup>104</sup> and we have already seen Henryson condemning astrology in Orpheus and Erudices and according the planets severely limited powers in the Testament. In such a theoretical context, the phrase "fatal aventure/ and destenye" has a fairly clear meaning. Certainly, Lowrence himself purports to accept the power of the stars:



'My destany and eik my werd, I /wait/,  
 Myn evintour is cleirly to me kend;  
 With mischeif myn3et is my mortall fait,  
 My mysleving the soner bot I mend:  
 Deid is reward of syn, and schamefull end,  
 Thairfoir I will ga seik sum confessour  
 And scryfe me clene of all synnis to this hour.'

(Bann. 36-42)<sup>105</sup>

But it is important to observe that his reaction is faulty in two respects. Most obviously, even after "reading" his fate in the stars, Lowrence believes that he can overcome his destiny by an act of contrition. While this decision is superficially compatible with the doctrine of free will, his motive for seeking a confessor is to cheat the stars, a purpose which violates astrological principles as clearly as it distorts the nature of confession. He both accepts the influence of the planets and thinks he can escape their power by making a dishonest confession. This is nonsensical, both according to the determinist view of astrology (to which Lowrence himself seems to adhere) and according to the modified Christian version, asserting the power of the human will to overcome destinal forces through moral choice, which descends from Albertus Magnus and Aquinas and which is well summed up by the maxim Sapiens dominabitur astris.<sup>106</sup> Lowrence fails to understand not only the confessional but also the very system he is working within: he says that there is a link between the fate he has read in the stars and his own moral standing, but he has not really grasped that the whole basis of the system lies in the notion of culpability. That is why his confession is bound to be a token one only: his view of the operation of the universe is purely technical, and he plans a technical observance of the rules.

The dialogue between Lowrence and Freir Wolff Waitskaith parallels in some ways Lowrence's earlier dealings with Chanteclair: the gesture of kneeling recurs at a number of points in the Fabillis, associated with the fox's flattery.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, throughout the interview we are shown the wolf's gullible side; his first remark, for instance, echoes the cock's folly:

'A, silly Lowrence!' quod the wolf, and leuch.

(Bann. 71)

The ease with which he grants confession is a function of this gullibility, although it is significant that he is aware of the inadequacy of Lowrence's performance and sees fit to ignore it:

'Weill,' quod the wolf, 'thow wantis pointis twa belangand to perfytt confessioun .....'

(Bann. 99-100)

Those critics are surely correct who have found in this episode an anti-mendicant intention:<sup>108</sup> Freir Waitskaith is quite significantly a Grey Friar, although that may simply be a physiological reference rather than a particularly anti-Franciscan jibe. But the friars in general are quite clearly under attack here, for the laxity of Waitskaith's confessional conforms to the fifteenth-century criticism of the mendicant orders.<sup>109</sup>

It is nevertheless striking that this theme nowhere appears in the moralitas: there our attention is directed entirely towards the hypocritical, unrepentant sinner, and there is no explicit criticism of the confessor who fails to ensure true penitence. Our understanding of this aspect of the fable, therefore, hinges upon a reading of the narrative itself, and our sensitivity to the nuances (such as that of Freir Waitskaith's vulnerability to flattery) which Henryson introduces. The



friar's name is just such a clue: "Waitskaith", a name with Reynardian associations,<sup>110</sup> means perhaps 'waiting to do harm', a sense which is appropriate to the nature of the wolf in general but is less obviously applicable to this wolf. It does however work ironically, in my view, for the wolf does in fact do harm, not in his usual predatory way but rather by letting Lowrence off too easily. And perhaps it is not going too far to observe that, in spiritual terms, the harm affects both of them; by giving Lowrence so many escape clauses, Freir Waitskaith helps to bring about his death, while his neglect of his duty as a confessor scarcely bodes well for his own spiritual fate. As a comment on the mendicants, too, the name operates on more than one level, since it suggests both the predatoriness of the wolf and, more subtly, interpreted as 'waiting for harm', hints at the fact that the itinerant confessor actually makes a living out of other people's wrong-doing.

The fortunate (in view of the earlier discussion of astrology, it is tempting to say "fateful") meeting over, Freir Waitskaith disappears from the action as casually as he entered it:

Quhen this was said, the wolf his wayis went.

(Bann. 120)

Lowrence, we are explicitly told, begins to observe the terms of his "pane" ("To fang sum fische was hellely his intent," Bann. 122), but the sight of a kid overcomes his good intentions.

Given his usual duplicity, it cannot be said that he has misled his confessor: on the contrary, he has been disarmingly frank.

That fact is of some relevance when we come to the episode of the

kid, for we must try to decide whether his parody-baptism is cynical or self-deceiving. I think it is more consistent with the detail of the fable to conclude the latter, that Lowrence is not simply trying to trick anybody (God, presumably, or the planets, since they are the obvious witnesses), but is rather expressing an ignorance which seems to me to be central to his role in this fable. His penance, it is clear, was almost entirely verbal, his momentary good intentions overcome at the first new temptation. The same concern with forms of words marks the baptism of the kid — both incidents have their roots in the Christian sacraments, but a more important similarity is that in each case Lowrence believes that words are enough. He believes (or purports to believe) that he has changed the nature of the kid by changing its name, a basic flaw in understanding which violates the rules of logic and language as well as the theology of baptism and the conditions of his penance.<sup>111</sup> The parallel with his formal, technical approach to the business of confession is obvious enough.

This point helps to explain the ironic ending of the fable, in which Lowrence is shot after observing that "Upon this bellye ware sett a bolt full mete" (Bann. 147):

'Now,' quod þe fox, 'allace and welloway!  
 Gorrit I am and may no forther gāg;  
 Me think no man may speke a word in play,  
 Bot now on dayis in ernist it is tane!'

(Bann. 155-8)<sup>112</sup>

The failure to recognize the moral order which underlies his fate is a basic element in Lowrence's downfall, and his wilful misunderstanding of his situation (his nearest analogue is,



perhaps, Cresseid) is well illustrated by this twist. For Lowrence's last words suggest that he has been killed not because of his slaughter of the kid (which we know to be the case) but rather because of what he said: throughout the fable he asserts the efficacy of words in themselves, and three times he is wrong. The wryness of the joke is all the greater when we realize that his remark is true in a sense of which he is unaware, for there is at least a suggestion that his fate is sealed in part by the blasphemous baptism which was itself in part a joke. All this contributes to our sense of the ironic justice of his end. This sense is further developed by another striking echo, for the goatherd's arrow "prikkit" the fox to the earth, a term which takes up the fox's earlier, bogus assertion to his confessor that he would like him to

'..... heir me now declair  
My conscience pat prikis me so /sair/.'

(Bann. 76-7)<sup>113</sup>

The detail of the fox's death, then, represents a characteristic Henrysonian device: linked through its imagery to the rest of the story, this final episode enriches our understanding of the whole fable, confirming that the fox is indeed ignorant of the spiritual realities which govern his life and death and that he believes to the end that his words are what really matters. Not much of this is made explicit, but equally, none of it is inconsistent with the much simpler interpretation which is offered in the moralitas.

Both Schir Chantecleir and the Foxe and the Confessioun are, strictly speaking, non-allegorical, exemplary fables.

The third part of The Tod, The Parliament of Fourfuttit Beistis, is given in its moralitas a fully allegorical interpretation, and again it comes as something of a surprise. Our reading of the fable suggests that the mare who refuses to attend the lion's parliament is indeed contumax, and although we do not really pity the wolf for his broken head, or admire Lowrence's avoidance of a similar fate, we are not prepared for the interpretation of the parliament we are finally given:

The Lyon is this world be liklynace,  
 To quhom lowtis bayth Emperour and king  
 And thinkis of this world to get mare grace  
 And gapis for to get mare lifing,  
 Sum for to reule, and sum to rax and regne,  
 Sum gadderis gere, sum gold, sum vther gude,  
 To wyn this world sum wirkis as pay wer wode.

This mere is men of contemplatioun,  
 Off pennance walkand in bis wildernace,  
 As monkis and othir men of religioun  
 That presis god to pleis in euery place,  
 Abstrackit fra this worldis wretchidnes,  
 /Fechtand with lust, presumptioun and pryde/,  
 And fra this world in mynd ar mortifyde.

(Bann. 295-308)<sup>114</sup>

It cannot be said that the presentation of either character in the fable obviously sustains such a reading. We might in retrospect view the lion's rhetoric at the opening of his parliament with some suspicion, but the borderline between due regal pomp and the self-confidence of worldliness is fine indeed, and without the hindsight of Henryson's allegorical interpretation the modern reader is surely inclined to take the rhetoric rather at face value. Even less help is given with the mare, whose role is barely developed in the narrative and whose behaviour in no way suggests the contemplative orders. Her scorn for Lowrence's "courtlie knax" (Bann. 196) is perhaps significant,



but she offers no real critique of the world other than the eloquent blow she deals the wolf.<sup>115</sup>

There are more difficulties than these associated with Henryson's allegory. So long as we confine ourselves to the episode of the mare's kick, the allegory makes reasonably good sense: the contemplative man, tempted back to the world by Sensuality and Temptation, need only batter Sensuality with the consciousness of death to put both to flight. But substantial elements of the fable remain unexplained. The catalogue of animals can perhaps be incorporated without too much difficulty, since they are presumably acting out in coming to the parliament the subservience of all created beings to this world.<sup>116</sup> The opening and ending, however, make no sense at all in the terms of the moralitas. There is no obvious allegorical reason for us to be shown the fox's glee at his father's death, and indeed the moralitas contains no mention of the father. The last part of the fable is even less amenable to allegorization, as Dr Jamieson has pointed out:

..... one would have to read the lion as the world destroying temptation for not obeying it, a reading which would make nonsense at whatever level of allegorical contortion might be imagined.

117

As we have found with the other fables of The Tod, in other words, the moralitas does not offer a total explanation of the whole narrative: the other parts of the tale, those not glossed in the final interpretation, enrich the meaning and give us a foundation for understanding the moral import of the fable in a less simplistic way than the rigid categories of the moralitas allow. The death of the fox, like the debate of the hens and

the discussion of astrology, forces us to re-examine the whole work, but now provided with a framework, the moral precepts established by the moralitas.

The relationship of the lion, the fox and the wolf is one aspect of The Parliament of Fourfuttit Beistis which obviously deserves more attention. In terms of the moralitas, they are allies: Temptation and Sensuality join forces to bring the contemplative back to the World. And yet we are aware as we read the fable of a certain incompatibility: the wolf is betrayed by the fox, the fox is ultimately judged and executed under the lion's law, the wolf administers the last rites. Is this just an example of the comic plot resisting a spiritual interpretation, or of the arbitrary and inconsistent allegory of the medieval exegete? I think Henryson's point is in reality more subtle. The interpretation of these three characters, World, Sensuality and Temptation, suggests the familiar triad of World, Flesh and Devil, the Three Enemies of Man.<sup>118</sup> Sensualitas is certainly closely related to the Flesh, as Henryson himself implies:

Thow may brek sensualiteis hede,  
And fleschlye lust away fra þe sall flee,

(Bann. 318-9)

and as we have already seen in considering The Wolf that gat the Nekhering, the fox (here "assaultand men with sweit perswasionis", according to the sixteenth-century prints<sup>119</sup>) is traditionally associated with the Devil. In the Parliament we see these three, essentially allies and yet falling out in ways which recall the Vices of morality drama: the World has some authority over the other two, but they are so false that they



cannot truly co-operate. The allusion to the triad in part explains the difference between the lion and the other two, for the World is rather less actively evil than the Flesh and the Devil, both of whom actively seek to destroy man's soul. The World, by contrast, like the lion in the fable, is essentially passive, waiting for the homage which is its supposed due.<sup>120</sup>

It is to emphasize this last point that Henryson lavishes such attention on his catalogue of animals. They exemplify the allegiance of all Creation to the temporal world:

Sum for to reule, and sum to rax and regne,  
Sum gadderis gere, sum gold, sum vther gude,  
To wyn this world sum wirkis as pay wer wode.

Although in function and detail Henryson's list resembles the one in The Kingis Quair, the order of the two catalogues is quite different, and at first glance both seem somewhat random. A closer examination of Henryson's, however, reveals that there are some logical principles, although some stanzas seem to be controlled more by the dictates of alliteration than by any rational categorization. It is probably no coincidence that the list starts with mythical monsters (whose half-man, half-beast constitution, Dr Jamieson suggests, aptly recalls the theme of the Fabillis as a whole<sup>121</sup>) and concludes with the mouse, so that we are conscious of the completeness of the attendance, from the great to the tiny, from the exotic to the domestic. The other animals of the first stanza, the lynx, the tiger, the elephant, the dromedary and the camel, while they are less mythical than the Minotaur or Pegasus, are nevertheless exotic, and all were known to the later Middle Ages more from literary sources than from direct experience. Some such vague

organizing principle also seems to underlie the following stanza:

The Leopard, as I haif taute beforne,  
 The antelop, the sparth furth culd hir speid;  
 The paynttit panther and the vnicorne,  
 The raynder ran throuch rever, ron and reid,  
 The ioly ionet and the gentill steid,  
 The aiss, the mwill, the horss of ewerye kynd,  
 The /da/, the /ra/, the hornit hairt, the hynd.

(Bann. 99-105)<sup>122</sup>

Apart from the leopard and the panther, all these creatures are ungulates (hoofed mammals), a notion which was certainly available to Henryson through Aristotle and his commentators.<sup>123</sup> If that was indeed Henryson's basis in composing the stanza, the leopard and the panther seem to be anomalous; but Henryson may not have been certain of the true nature of these animals and may have assumed that they were ungulates also. Strikingly, the panther is described in the twelfth-century English Bestiary as a "wilde der":<sup>124</sup> the term there retains, of course, the original meaning of OE. deor, 'animal', but that sense was obsolete by the fifteenth century and there is no Scots occurrence of the word with the meaning 'animal'. It is therefore just possible that Henryson may have encountered a description of this type and, misled by the unfamiliar usage, formed the impression that the panther (and conceivably but less probably, the leopard) was a distant relative of the unicorn.<sup>125</sup> After these opening stanzas any organizing principle seems to be abandoned, and otters and apes are thrown together with cats and oxen in a jumbled, mostly alliterative list. This rather random approach perhaps has a point, since it contributes to the sense of inclusiveness which is the primary purpose of the passage.



A similar thematic, though non-allegorical, purpose underlies the opening six stanzas, in which the fox welcomes the death of his father. Henryson does not take much trouble over the integration of the opening with the rest of the fable: whereas he makes a point of telling us in the first stanza that the son's name is Fader Wer or War, and makes a joke about it, he is subsequently called, like the other foxes of the Fabillis (including his father), Lowrence, and sometimes Lowrie. The only reason for naming the first Lowrence's son Fader Wer is apparently to make a rather laboured joke:

It followis wele be reasoun naturale,  
 And gree be gree of rycht comparisoun:  
 Off evill cummys war, of war cummys warst of all;  
 Off wrangus get cummys wrang successioun.

(Bann. 8-11)

This jest, however, contains a subtle paradox: the son is "far-the-wer" (indeed, he is the Devil, or almost), but he is also his father's son. He both continues his father's sins, and surpasses them, and yet he is not literally entitled to be called Fader, unless we see an anti-clerical jibe which is not explicitly developed anywhere in the fable.<sup>126</sup> He provides, retrospectively, a comment on the sins of the father, since he is completely lacking in filial respect:

O fulich man, ploungit in warldlynes!  
 To conquest wrangwis guidis, gold or rent,  
 To put thy saule in pane and hevynes  
 To riche thyne air, quhilk after þow be went,  
 Haue he thy gude, he takis small entent  
 To sing or say for thy saluatioun:  
 Fra thow be dede, done is thy deuotioun.

(Bann. 36-42)

This stanza focusses our attention, I think, not upon the ingratitude of the son so much as upon the futile acquisitiveness

of the father: although it does not apply particularly closely to Lowrence, whose pleasures were of a much more immediate kind, it takes up the theme of the worldliness which he embodied. These lines provide, in this respect, a thoroughly appropriate link between the more specific themes of the first two fables of the sequence and the more general theme of worldliness in the third. It is in this way that they comment upon the fox of the Parliament as well, for in his non-allegorical role he is another subject of the lion's court, a tributary of this world.

I have just suggested that The Tod proceeds from the particular to the general. The first fable deals with a pair of sins, and with the relationship between them. In the second, Henryson moves on to the causes of sin (represented by the spiritual blindness of the fox) and the proper means of atonement, confession correctly performed. The third of the group offers another, more generic explanation of sin, in terms of the sensuality which is the central theme of the whole of the Morall Fabillis. This structural pattern is worked out through a number of narrative devices as diverse as anything in the Fabillis, compounded by the fact that here, more than anywhere else, Henryson seems to be putting his fables together from a number of different sources, both Aesopic and Reynardian.<sup>127</sup> Given the rather straightforward adaptation of sources which we have encountered elsewhere, especially in those fables derived from the Romulus tradition alone, the composition



of The Tod seems a rather ambitious undertaking, but it is one in which Henryson allows his comic spirit a freer rein than he does elsewhere, and these three fables have an ironic complexity which transcends the more overtly didactic moralitates without making them seem dull or pedestrian. They combine formal allegory with the exemplative mode of meaning, as does the whole collection, and allegory, comedy, irony and homily ultimately all work together to present a many-faceted pattern of meaning. The Morall Fabillis as a whole, like The Tod, defy any single theory of non-literal meaning, even one based on the notion of several layers of sense, because Henryson obviously had no clearly-defined theory of his own. The key to the meaning, and to the effectiveness, of the Fabillis is their multifariousness, the juxtaposition of many different elements, of narrative as well as of moral statement, which are discrete and yet compatible. The sequence really has a single theme — the futility, transitoriness and perilousness of the things of this world — but it is a measure of Henryson's eclectic approach that he never repeats himself. Starting from the rather limited formula of the Aesopic fable, and using a great variety of the most traditional materials, he has constructed a work which offers a complex and comprehensive image of "the haill misleving of man".

Notes to Chapter IV

- 1 Henryson, Poems and Fables, ed. H. Harvey Wood (2nd edn, Edinburgh 1958), pp. xix-xxiv; Poems, ed. Charles Elliott (2nd edn, Oxford 1974), pp. 144-5. MacQueen's views on the text were set out in "The Text of Henryson's Morall Fabillis", Innes Review 14 (1963), 3-9, reprinted as Appendix I of Robert Henryson: A Study of the Major Narrative Poems (Oxford 1967), pp. 188-99.
  
- 2 The titles I have employed for the individual fables are those found in Bassandyne's edition.
  
- 3 This point remains uncertain: the case for Caxton's influence is argued by D.K. Crowne, "A Date for the Composition of Henryson's Fables", JEGP 61 (1962), 583-90; by MacQueen, op. cit., pp. 208-21; and by I.W.A. Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson: A Study of the Use of Source Material" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh 1964), pp. 255-60, 274-5; but cf. Denton Fox, "Henryson and Caxton", JEGP 67 (1968), 586-93.
  
- 4 Apart from the contentious question of Caxton's Aesop, the list of works at present recognized as sources for the Morall Fabillis includes: Gualterus Anglicus, Fabulae, and/or a French collection of the type of the Isopet de Lyon; Odo of Cheriton, Fabulae; at least one branche of the Roman de Renart; Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale; Caxton's Reynard the Fox (1481); and perhaps Lydgate's Isopes Fabules. For two further suggestions, see I. Carruthers, "Henryson's Use of Aristotle and Priscian in the Moral Fables", in Actes du 2<sup>e</sup> Colloque de Langue et de Littérature Écossaises (Moyen Âge et Renaissance), ed. J.-J. Blanchot and C. Graf (Strasbourg 1979), pp. 278-96.
  
- 5 The Bannatyne Manuscript, ed. W. Tod Ritchie (STS, 4 vols, Edinburgh 1927-33), IV, 181. All quotations from the Bannatyne text are based on this edition; I have provided my own punctuation.
  
- 6 *ibid.* Bannatyne has deleted the original version and inserted the readings given here.
  
- 7 Poems and Fables, ed. Wood, p. 42, where Bassandyne, the superior text is the basis.
  
- 8 The Makculloch version is printed in Pieces from the Makculloch and Gray MSS., together with the Chepman and Myllar Prints, ed. G. Stevenson (STS, Edinburgh 1918), pp. 3-8.



- 9 In the order in which they occur in the printed editions, both sixteenth-century and modern, fables I, II, VI, VII, VIII, XI, XII and XIII are based on the Romulus tradition. The various versions which descend through Romulus from the fables of Phaedrus are printed by L. Hervieux, Les Fabulistes Latins (5 vols, Paris 1885-99, vols I and II re-edited 1893-4).
- 10 In listing variants, I shall employ the following sigla: Bannatyne, Bann.; Makculloch, M.; Asloan, A.; Bassandyne, Bass.
- 11 D.W. Robertson Jr, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton 1963), pp. 337-65. Cf., for example, Augustine, Contra mendacium, xiii, 28, ed. J. Zycha (CSEL, Vienna 1900), pp. 508-10.
- 12 /the haill misleving/ of man: so Bass. Bann. reads "þe vyce of mysdoing/ of man" and M. "þe of þi myslewyng,/ of man", neither of which seems adequate.
- 13 Boethius, Philosophiae consolatio, IV, pr. 3; 16-8, 21, ed. L. Bieler (CCSL, Turnhout 1957), pp. 71-2.
- 14 The narrative unity of this group was first pointed out by John and Winifred MacQueen, A Choice of Scottish Verse, 1470-1570 (London 1972), p. 194. For a discussion of The Tod, see below, pp. 284-302.
- 15 Cf. p. 39, n. 34 above.
- 16 I.W.A. Jamieson, "'To preue thare preching be a poesye': some thoughts on Henryson's poetics", Parergon 8 (April 1974), 24-36, at 31-2.
- 17 *ibid.*, 28.
- 18 Even where a play of wit may be involved — as in the treatment of Aristeus in Orpheus and Erudices — there is no suggestion that it is comic in purpose or effect.
- 19 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 123-4.
- 20 /promptit furth in, Bass., A.; "prwnnigit full of", Bann.
- 21 Cf. above, pp. 48-9.
- 22 /subcharge, Bass.; "suchardis", A.; "sachnigis", Bann. /anys in þe kith þat I come fra, A.; "into þe kith that I come ffra", Bass.; "in to þe place þat come fro", Bann.

- 23 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 126-7.
- 24 Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", p. 95.
- 25 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 127.
- 26 Le Roman de Renart, Branche XIV, ed. D.M. Méon (3 vols, Paris 1826), I, 147-59.
- 27 Canterbury Tales, A, 3850-4, Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass. 1957), p. 55; cf. above, pp. 128-9.
- 28 On the iconography of the fox in the Middle Ages, see K. Varty, Reynard the Fox: a study of the fox in Medieval English Art (Leicester 1967), and "Further Examples of the Fox in Medieval English Art", in Aspects of the Medieval Animal Epic, ed. E. Rombauts and A. Welkenhuysen (Louvain/The Hague 1975), pp. 251-6.
- 29 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 179.
- 30 Varty, Reynard the Fox, pp. 26-7; the influence of the Bestiary on this motif is apparent (ibid., p. 91).
- 31 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 181. For a discussion of the place of this triad in The Parliament of Fourfuttit Beistis, see below, pp. 298-9.
- 32 Cf. above, pp. 5-10.
- 33 The connection between this episode and Henryson's fable was first pointed out by A.R. Diebler, Henrisone's Fabel-dichtungen (Halle 1885), pp. 64-70. It is commented on by Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 239-54; and by A.W. Jenkins, "Henryson's 'Fox, Wolf and Cadger' Again", SSL 4 (1966-7), 107-12.
- 34 Roman de Renart, Branche XIV, ll. 4175-84, ed. Meon, I, 156-7.
- 35 So MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 177. But there is a difficulty here. Henryson does sometimes specifically say that his landscapes are allegorical (e.g. The Lyoun and the Mous, Bann. 260-2; The Foxe that begylit the Wolf, Bass. 2441-7): are we therefore entitled to extrapolate to the "wilderness" of The Wolf that gat the Nekhering, or should we conclude that when Henryson means us to read the setting allegorically, he makes it explicit? At the very least, we should notice that there is a difference between the two modes of expression.



- 36 The corn/chaff metaphor is one of the basic images of fruitful meaning in the Middle Ages: cf. Prologue, Bann. 8-21. The theme is discussed by Robertson, op. cit., pp. 316-7, and (with B.F. Huppé) Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories (Princeton 1963), pp. 3-31.
- 37 Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 40-5.
- 38 /gay/, Bass., M.; "gray", Bann. /apone a dounghill/, M.; "upon ane dunghill", Bass.; "at a dounhill", Bann.
- 39 MED, sb. "cant": "cant and kene" occurs as early as Robert Mannyng of Brunne and Minot, and continues in use during the fifteenth century; cf. The Battle of Otterburn, st. 26, in English and Scottish Popular Ballads, ed. H.C. Sargent and G.L. Kittredge (Boston/ New York 1904), pp. 387-90.
- 40 DOST, sb. "crous"; cf. for example, the MSc. translation of the Lamentatio domini Dalphini Francie pro morte uxoris sue (c. 1450): "Sum ar heire crouss that thaire will syt full dum", Liber Pluscardensis, ed. F.J.H. Skene (2 vols, Edinburgh 1877-80), I, 387.
- 41 /draf/, Bass., M.; "cafe", Bann.
- 42 /wyffis/, M.; "wyfis", Bass.; "wyse men", Bann. /is/, M.; "ar", Bass.; "was", Bann.
- 43 /pai tak/, M., Bass.; "takis", Bann. /sene/, M., Bass.; om. Bann.
- 44 Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 48-9; MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 104.
- 45 Denton Fox, "Henryson's Fables", ELH 29 (1962), 337-56, at 344.
- 46 Hervieux, op. cit., II, 321; cf. Isopet de Lyon, XII, in Recueil Général des Isopets, ed. J. Bastin (2 vols, Paris 1929-30), II, 105-7.
- 47 It was taken as a major theme by M.W. Stearns, Robert Henryson (New York 1949), who stressed Henryson's social pre-occupations on the basis of a number of rather dubious parallels with contemporary events.
- 48 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 134. MacQueen actually notes only the parallel between the triple division of the dialogue and the interpretation of the wolf; but the two subsequent rhetorical passages are neatly counterpointed also.

- 49 [I], Bass.; om. Bann.
- 50 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 132.
- 51 Apart from Piers himself, cf. the Jack Upland poems edited by P.L. Heyworth, Jack Upland, Friar Daw's Reply and Upland's Rejoinder (Oxford 1968). After Henryson, the tradition is strikingly continued by Lindsay through his character Jhone the Comoun-weill (see below, pp. 420-2).
- 52 Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 109-111.
- 53 Hervieux, op. cit., II, 317.
- 54 Bastin, op. cit., II, 87-9.
- 55 ibid., II, 118.
- 56 Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", p. 128.
- 57 R.J. Lyall, "Politics and Poetry in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Scotland", SLJ 3 (2) (December 1976), 5-29, at 7-10.
- 58 Cf. above, pp. 56-7, 61-5.
- 59 Stearns, op. cit., p. 18.
- 60 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 168.
- 61 Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 98-9.
- 62 Bastin, op. cit., II, 91.
- 63 The satire on legal practice is given greater point by the possibility that Henryson had a university degree in canon law, and the probability that he acted as a notary public in Dunfermline in 1478. For "venerabilis vir Magister Robertus Henrisone in Artibus Licentiatu et in Decretis Bachalarius", incorporated in the University of Glasgow in 1462, see Munimenta Alme Universitatis Glasguensis, ed. Cosmo Innes (3 vols, Glasgow 1854), II, 69; for the Dunfermline notary, see Edinburgh, NLS, MS. Adv. 34.1.3A, ff. lxiii<sup>r</sup>-lxiv<sup>r</sup>.
- 64 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 192.
- 65 My view that the whole of this passage is spoken by the sheep is shared by Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson",



- and "Henryson's Fabillis: An Essay towards a Revaluation", Words: Wai-te-Ata Studies in English 2 (December 1966), 20-31, at 30; and (without comment) by H.H. Roerecke, "The Integrity and Symmetry of Robert Henryson's Moral Fables" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University 1969), p. 162. Modern editors have given the last 22 lines to Henryson's narrator, but Laing assigned them to the sheep in The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson (Edinburgh 1865).
- 66 The Abbey of the Holy Ghost has been edited by N.F. Blake in Middle English Religious Prose (London 1972), pp. 88-102. For The Assembly of Ladies, see The Floure and the Leafe and The Assembly of Ladies, ed. D.A. Pearsall (London 1962), pp. 105-26.
- 67 Jamieson, "Henryson's Fabillis", 25.
- 68 Hervieux, op. cit., III, 325.
- 69 Cf. Donald R. Howard, The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World (Princeton 1966), pp. 56-60.
- 70 Fox, op. cit., 350; MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 160-1; J.A. Burrow, "Henryson: The Preaching of the Swallow", EC 25 (1975), 25-37, at 29.
- 71 /ingenious/, Bass.; "ingenis", Bann.
- 72 Fox, op. cit., 350.
- 73 Burrow, op. cit., 27-8.
- 74 Fox, op. cit., 354-5.
- 75 /nocht/, Bass.; om. Bann.
- 76 Cf. for example, Chaucer's "thynketh al nys but a faire/ This world, that passeth soone as floures faire", Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1840-1, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 479.
- 77 On this tradition and its relation to medieval literature, see R. Tuve, Seasons and Months (Paris 1933); and Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World (London 1973), pp. 119-60. On the literary traditions themselves, cf. Nils Erik Enkvist, The Seasons of the Year: Chapters on a Motif from Beowulf to the Shepherd's Calendar (Helsingfors 1957), esp. pp. 135-6, where Henryson's fable is superficially discussed. Cf. also R.S. Gerke, "Studies in the Tradition and Morality of Henryson's Fables" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Notre Dame 1968), pp. 206-10.

- 78 [/cairfull/, Bass.; "cirfull", Bann.
- 79 Burrow, op. cit., 25. This statement is too sweeping in the form in which it appears in Burrow's article, for Henryson occasionally refers to his narrator as observer of the events he describes, or as the recipient of first-hand information: cf. Schir Chantecleir and the Foxe, Bann. 70; The Taill how this foirsaid Tod maid his Confessioun, Bann. 21. But nowhere else is his involvement as significant as it is in The Preiching of the Swallow.
- 80 Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 59-61.
- 81 *ibid.*, p. 72.
- 82 ll. 220-1, Bannatyne MS., ed. Ritchie, IV, 224.
- 83 [/I/, Bass.; "Eschrew", Bann.
- 84 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 118-9.
- 85 For an extreme Middle Scots case, cf. Dunbar's Goldyn Targe (see below, pp. 378-85).
- 86 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 112-6.
- 87 This view is taken by Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh/London 1958), p. 40; and has recently been reaffirmed by Burrow, op. cit., 34-5.
- 88 See above, p. 304, n. 3. Even if Henryson had not read Caxton, it seems clear at least that his source was a fable-collection in the same tradition.
- 89 Caxton, Aesop's Fables, ed. R.T. Lenaghan (Cambridge, Mass. 1967), p. 161.
- 90 MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 184.
- 91 *ibid.*, pp. 184-8 ; Jamieson, "Henryson's Taill of the Wolf and the Wedder", SSL 6 (1968-9), 248-57; Donald Macdonald, "Narrative Art in Henryson's Fables", SSL 3 (1965-6), 103-4.
- 92 Caxton, Aesop's Fables, ed. Lenaghan, p. 207.
- 93 Cf. The Wolf that gat the Nekhering, and the Confessioun. For the influence of beast-epic on the Fabillis, see MacQueen, Robert Henryson, pp. 208-21.



- 94 Bass. 2434-40. This stanza may, however, be corrupt: l. 2437 seems suspiciously Protestant, and may have been tampered with by the printers (cf. Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", p. 272).
- 95 Wood, ed. cit., p. 248.
- 96 This sequence is printed together by John and Winifred MacQueen, op. cit., pp. 55-85, and discussed pp. 21-6; cf. R.J. Schrader, "A Critical and Historical Study of Henryson's Morall Fabillis" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University 1968), pp. 103-36, where the Reynardian associations of the group are stressed.
- 97 See above, pp. 231-2.
- 98 Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, G, 2882-3171, ed. Robinson, pp. 202-3; cf. Donald Macdonald, "Henryson and Chaucer: Cock and Fox", TSL 8 (1966), 451-61.
- 99 Cf. Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 177-9, who reads the whole passage as an indirect comment on Chantecleir's self-deception. I think Henryson is more interested in the hens themselves than Jamieson allows.
- 100 Bannatyne attributes ll. 129-33 (cf. Bass. 525-9) to Sprutok, and makes l. 128 a comment on her lustfulness. But in such a reading, it is difficult to see the nature of her "feigning", and the reference to "feinzeit faith" (l. 127) makes better sense if it is taken as a comment on her earlier courtly rhetoric, which certainly contrasts starkly with the coarseness of l. 133.
- 101 The equivalent line in Bann. is "In luste but luif pat sett all hir delyte".
- 102 /breik/, Bass.; "beke" (!), Bann.
- 103 Stearns, op. cit., p. 68.
- 104 The medieval debate about astrology is discussed by T.O. Wedel, The Medieval Attitude Toward Astrology (New Haven 1920): Henryson "harks back to the early prejudice against astrology as a divinatorial art", p. 154. Cf. also C. Wood, Chaucer and the Country of the Stars (Princeton 1970), pp. 3-102.
- 105 /wait/, Bass.; "watt", Bann.
- 106 Wedel, op. cit., pp. 134-41.

- 107 Kneeling is, of course, also the proper posture for confession: cf. Angelo de Clavasio, Summa de casibus conscientiae (Strasbourg, M. Flach 1491), sigs. g 2<sup>v</sup>, c 6<sup>v</sup>. For a recent study of the later medieval confessional, the rules of which both Lowrence and Freir Waitskaith consistently violate, see Thomas N. Tentler, Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation (Princeton 1977).
- 108 E.g. MacQueen, Robert Henryson, p. 147; J.B. Friedman, "Henryson, the Friars, and the Confessio Reynardi", JEGP 66 (1967), 550-61.
- 109 Cf. the so-called Orders of Cain (1382), ll. 99-104:  
 For had a man slayn al his kynne  
 Go shryue him at a frere,  
 & for less þen a payre of shone  
 He wyl assoil him, clene & sone,  
 And say þe synne þat he has done  
 His saule shal neuer dere.  
 (Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, ed. R.H. Robbins [New York 1959], p. 160)  
 More generally, see Gower, Vox clamantis, IV, 835-86, Works, ed. G.C. Macaulay (4 vols, Oxford 1899-1902), IV, 189-90; and Mum and the Sothsegger, ll. 392-535, ed. M. Day and R. Steele (EETS, London 1936), pp.
- 110 There is a character in Caxton's Reynard who is called "wayte scathe": Caxton, The History of Reynard the Fox, ed. N.F. Blake (EETS, London 1970), p. 66.
- 111 For a medieval discussion of the relationship between language and reality, see Aquinas, In Peri Hermeneias, I, 23-35, ed. R.M. Spiazzi (Turin 1955), pp. 14-7; I hope to take up this point in a future article.
- 112 /gang/, Bass.; "gane", Bann.
- 113 /sair/, Bass.; "fair", Bann.
- 114 /Fechtand with lust, presumptioun and pryde/, Bass.; "In wilfull pouertee, fra pomp and all pryde", Bann.
- 115 Bann. actually reads "3our carping and 3our knax", but the version of the prints is more pointed.
- 116 There is a similar catalogue in The Kingis Quair, ll. 1079-99, ed. J. Norton-Smith (Oxford 1971), pp. 39-40; cf. also Schrader, op. cit., p. 215.



- 117 Jamieson, "Some thoughts", 26.
- 118 Howard, op. cit., pp. 61-4. Cf. S. Wenzel, "The Three Enemies of Man", Medieval Studies 29 (1967), 47-66.
- 119 This line is perhaps not intrinsically better than Bann.'s "That daylie sagis men of religioun", but it does make the Satanic theme more explicit. The many variants between the two texts make the elucidation of Henryson's real meaning difficult.
- 120 Cf. Howard, op. cit., p. 65.
- 121 Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 228-9.
- 122 /da ... ra/, Bass.; "de ... re", Bann.
- 123 Aristotle, Historia Animalium, II, 1, ed. A.L. Peck (3 vols, London 1965- ), I, 86-7; De partibus animalium, IV, x, ed. A.L. Peck (London 1937), pp. 388-9. Aristotle actually distinguishes (as Henryson does not) between cloven-hoofed and solid-hoofed mammals, but in De partibus it seems that these are sub-categories of the ungulate class. Aristotle's zoological works were available in Latin from the thirteenth century through the translations of Michael Scot (c. 1220) and William of Moerbeke, and form the basis of zoological writings by Albertus Magnus and others.
- 124 An Old English Miscellany, ed. R. Morris (EETS, London 1872), p. 23.
- 125 The panther of medieval heraldry bore no relation to the real creature, the artistic traditions deriving from Physiologus' Bestiary. Curiously, there are examples of panthers portrayed with horses' heads or with cloven hoofs, although these are admittedly very remote analogues: see A.C. Fox-Davies, A Complete Guide to Heraldry (London 1909), pp. 194-5.
- 126 It should be noted, however, that the wolf is identified as a cleric, Bann. 243, 283.
- 127 On the composite nature of the various parts of The Tod, see Jamieson, "The Poetry of Robert Henryson", pp. 169-82, 190-3, 213-21; cf. Schrader, op. cit., pp. 195-215.

CHAPTER V

Dunbar: Narrative Lyric and  
Ironical Allegory



There could hardly be a greater contrast, both in technique and in literary personality, than that between Henryson and Dunbar. Whereas Henryson's characteristic form is a narrative poem of some length, often followed by an explicit moralitas, Dunbar habitually employs lyric forms, even if there is a narrative element as the basis of his poem, and he hardly ever offers an overt comment on the significance of his narrative. The lyrical appearance of his work has to some extent disguised its frequently narrative character, and, partly as a consequence, the great subtlety with which Dunbar modulates our understanding of his moral position, depending as it does for its expression upon the inter-weaving of narrative and lyrical elements, has not been adequately examined. It is largely for this reason, I think, that the moral intention behind many of his poems has been under-valued, and hence Dunbar has generally appeared to modern critics as a less serious poet than he would have seemed to his contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> I shall confine my discussion of Dunbar's methods to those poems with a definite narrative structure of some kind (about a quarter of the total corpus), leaving out of consideration that large majority of his poems which are petitions, and moral or theological lyrics with no narrative element. This chapter, therefore, is in no sense an attempt to do justice to Dunbar's poetry as a whole; rather, it will provide an examination of a group of technical problems associated with the reading of some of his poems, and of the consequences for the meaning of these poems of the issues raised by the technical problems.

The extent to which Dunbar's narratives are sometimes made to depend upon formal, structural considerations is well illustrated by The Merle and the Nychtingaill. Here the eight-line stanzas are given alternately to the two birds, the merle advocating earthly love, the nightingale the love of God, and the clearest mark of this structural division is the alternation of their respective refrains, "A lusty lyfe in loves service bene" and "All luve is lost bot upone God allone". The poem is narrative in the sense that it reports a debate between the birds, but the arguments themselves are Dunbar's real interest, and the factors which determine the movement of the poem are rhetorical rather than narrative. He is careful, for example, not to weight the poem (or our sympathy) too much against the blackbird at the beginning:

In May as that Aurora did upspring,  
 With cristall ene chasing the cluddis sable,  
 I hard a merle with mirry notis sing  
 A sang of lufe, with voce rycht comfortable,  
 Agane the orient bemis amiable,  
 Upone a blisfull brenche of lawry grene;  
 This wes hir sentens sueit and delectable,  
 A lusty lyfe in luves service bene.

(1-8)<sup>2</sup>

The adjectives here are all basically favourable; there are no ironic undertones to alert us to the unsoundness of the blackbird's position. There is, indeed, not much to distinguish the tone of the first stanza from that of the second: the nightingale's notes are "suggurit", her feathers "angell", and only the parenthetical

This wes hir song, and of a sentens trew,

(15)

in any way foreshadows the ultimate preference for one view over



the other. One further descriptive detail is perhaps relevant: whereas the blackbird is seen "Agane the orient bemis amiable", the nightingale is "Agane the hevinly aisur skyis licht" (l. 11). Not only the use of "hevinly" but also the association of the nightingale with the colour blue, which was for a medieval audience inevitably linked with the purity of the Virgin, points the reader delicately towards the poet's preference for the nightingale's argument. In retrospect, furthermore, we can see that a "sentens sueit and delectable" is perhaps not to be trusted; but this ironic sense does not emerge on first reading.

Throughout the discussion, the two rival views appear to be given about equal weight. The blackbird tends to stress the power of Nature, who is the instructor of Flora (l. 22), whose "law of kynd" is invoked as a model of behaviour (ll. 36-9), and who is the source of female sexuality (l. 52). This last point is perhaps the first indication that the blackbird is weakening:

The merle said, 'Quhy put God so grit bewte  
In ladeis, with sic womanly having,  
Bot gife he wald that thay suld luvit be?  
To luve eik natur gaif thame inclynnyng;  
And He, of natur that wirker wes and king,  
Wald no thing frustir put, nor lat be sene,  
In to his creature of his awin making:  
A lusty lyfe in luvess service bene.'

(49-56)

The acknowledgment of God's suzerainty over Nature and her works is perfectly orthodox Christianity, and it shifts the argument firmly onto the nightingale's ground. The blackbird has been willing previously to treat Nature as an independent agent, but the nightingale's insistence upon the role of God forces her to the untenable position that God intends women to be appreciated

in their own right for their beauty and sexual attractiveness. This argument is easily disposed of by the nightingale in familiar, Augustinian terms:<sup>3</sup>

'Nocht to that behufe  
Put God sic bewty in a ladeis face,  
That scho suld haif the thank thairfoir or lufe,  
Bot He, the wirker, that put in hir sic grace  
Off bewty, bontie, riches, tyme or space,  
And every gudnes that bene to cum or gone,  
The thank redoundis to him in every place;  
All luve is lost bot upone God allone.'

(57-64)

This exchange is perhaps as close as the poem comes to genuine dialectic, for these stanzas contain a real interchange of ideas. Elsewhere the two strands of the discussion seem to run parallel without either being much influenced by the other.

One of the consequences of this restricted degree of interaction is that the blackbird ultimately gives in, in Dr Scott's words, "rather tamely".<sup>4</sup> There are several clues in the earlier stanzas which imply the superiority of the nightingale's case, as we have seen, but the final capitulation nevertheless comes abruptly and without much preparation. The last exchange concerns the moral consequences of love: the blackbird asserts that love has a generally uplifting effect, while the nightingale replies that in truth all moral sense is apt to be swept away by "fals vane glory" (l. 92). Immediately the blackbird recants:

'Myn errour I confes;  
This frustir luve all is bot vanite;  
Blind ignorance me gaif sic hardines,  
To argone so agane the varite;  
Quhairfoir I counsall every man, that he  
With luve nocht in the feindis net be tone,  
Bot luve the luve that did for his luve de;  
All luve is lost bot upone God allone.'

(97-104)



Debate has here given way to moral exhortation, and this is carried further in the following stanza, where both birds join in a duet which consists entirely of such instructions. It is a measure of the extent to which Dunbar's eye is upon his doctrinal message that the blackbird's last stanza introduces a definition of love which has never been part of the nightingale's argument, that love which was manifested in the death of Christ. This extends the notion of divine love from the abstract to the world of action, reminding the audience of the immediate presence of that love in the human world.

A number of features of Dunbar's technique are illustrated here. The importance of the stanza pattern, reinforced by the interwoven refrains, blends with the use of an established rhetorical genre, the debate. It is the moral argument which ultimately dominates, however, and this is stated directly through the final stanzas, especially ll. 105-12 in which, for the first time, the structural principle of devoting successive stanzas to the rival birds alternately is broken, and the songs of blackbird and nightingale are made to harmonize. Dunbar adds a further narrative aspect to his poem by making his poet overhear the debate, adding as he often does the formal element of dream-vision. The final effect of this is to transfer the moral statement from the birds to the poet, and to allow him to put the point in more directly human terms:

Thane flaw thir birdis our the bewis schene,  
 Singing of lufe amang the levis small,  
 Quhois ythand pleid yit maid my thochtis grene,  
 Bothe sleping, walking, in rest and in travall;  
 Me to reconfort most it dois availl  
 Agane for lufe, quhen lufe I can find none,

To think how song this merle and nyctingail,  
 All lufe is lost bot upone God allone.

(113-20)

The "greening" of the poet's thoughts takes us back to the May opening, and suggests that the link between landscape, birds and the human watcher is more than conventional: there is an ironic contrast between the Spring locus, with its amatory associations, and the rejection of sexual love which is the point of the poem. But this again indicates that the narrative element is here a mere device for bringing out the moral theme: Dunbar does not develop the visionary machinery of his poem, and although the birds take on a wider significance than the merely individual, emerging as representatives of, or at least as spokesmen for, alternative moral points of view, these wider significances are not so consistently developed that The Merle and the Nyctingail can properly be regarded as an allegorical poem in the full sense.

In The Merle and the Nyctingail, Dunbar employs some of the devices of the dream-vision tradition to reinforce a directly-stated moral argument. Elsewhere, he uses proso-popoeia, the rhetorical figure of personification which is the most limited form of allegory, as a similar incidental device, without making the personifications the structural basis of the poem. Meditatioun in Wyntir is a case in point: although five of the poem's ten stanzas report the speeches of a series of allegorical figures, Dunbar merely uses their names as a spiritual shorthand, and wastes no time on description or any other form of elaboration. The characters themselves are familiar enough from the didactic, homiletic tradition of the Middle Ages



(Dispair, Prudence, Age, Deid), and at one point the list threatens to become a rather dull catalogue:

Then Patience sayis, 'Be not agast:  
Hald Hoip and Treuthe within the fast,  
And lat Fortoun wirk furthe hir rage,  
Quhome that no rasoun may assuage,  
Quhill that hir glas be run and past.'

(21-5)

These characters are given no life by the way in which Dunbar introduces them, although perhaps in the case of a familiar allegorical personification like Fortoun no detailed introduction was necessary for a medieval audience. Any force which the characters have derives from the imagery they are made to employ. This is apparent in the words of Prudence:

'Quhy wald thow hald that will away?  
Or craif that thow may have no space,  
Thow tending to ane uther place,  
A journey going everie day?'

(27-30)

The Biblical metaphor of a spiritual journey works here through a characteristic understatement, the transitoriness of human life deftly conveyed through the allusive vagueness of "ane uther place", which most generally refers to life after death, and which might be taken to imply Heaven, man's spiritual home, but which clearly does not exclude connotations of both the grave and Hell. These last associations are taken up in a more striking image given to Deid:

Syne Deid castis upe his yettis wyd,  
Saying, 'Thir oppin sall the abyde:  
Albeid that thow wer never sa stout,  
Undir this lyntall sall thow lowt:  
Thair is nane uther way besyde.'

(36-40)

The open gate, with its connotations both of the grave and of

Hell-mouth,<sup>5</sup> has a considerable and sinister force, and "lowt" is a particularly evocative word to convey the humbling power of death. "Stout" here has a certain ironic tone: its primary meaning is obviously 'strong', but it may also suggest corporeal bulk, with perhaps even a hint of physical awkwardness. Dunbar is here playing with several notions: that death strikes even the mightiest, that physical decay contrasts starkly with human vigour and self-confidence, and hence that all human power is a delusion.

Such force as the personifications have, then, derives from the speeches they are given rather than from vivid description, and their overall role in the poem is rather less than might be suggested by the number of stanzas devoted to them. The movement in the poem which arises from the catalogue is in fact misleading: we are led from the insidious words of Dispair, through the advice of Patience and Prudence to the irresistible onslaught of Age and Deid.<sup>6</sup> In a certain sense this sequence, implying as it does the inevitable downfall of the human estate, confirms the pessimistic message which is the keynote of the poem from the beginning:

In to thir dirk and drublie dayis,  
 Quhone sabill all the hevin arrayis  
     With mystie vapouris, cluddis, and skyis,  
     Nature all curage me denyis  
 Off sangis, ballattis, and of playis.

(1-5)

The seasonal imagery, with this initial emphasis upon the misery and deadness of winter, is clearly both the most strikingly effective aspect of Meditatioun in Wyntir and its structural core; but of course the point about the seasons is that they are



cyclical, and this recognition of the inevitable return of summer brings about the final reversal:

Yit, quhone the nycht begynnys to schort,  
 It dois my spreit sum pairt confort,  
 Off thocht oppressit with the schowris.  
 Cum, lustie symmer! with thi flowris,  
 That I may leif in sum disport.

(46-50)

The contradiction between the linear progression of the personifications and the circular pattern which finally emerges is not, I think, fortuitous: Dunbar uses it to assert the ultimate power of regeneration over death and decay. He does not directly introduce notions like resurrection into his poem, but they are obviously implicit, and it would be a mistake to regard Meditatioun in Wyntir merely as an exposition of the depressing nature of a Scottish winter. The seasonal image is in the fullest sense a symbol, and the effectiveness of the poem derives in part from the contrast between the imaginative power of that symbol, reinforced as it is by the idea of darkness (ll. 6, 46), and the relatively prosaic quality of the central allegorical passage. The final point of Meditatioun in Wyntir is to remind us that not only human life but death itself is transitory, and the personifications are introduced only incidentally to lead us towards that rather unexpected conclusion.

The incidental nature of the allegory is more evident if we contrast this poem with another where some of the same characters appear, but where the allegory does form the central structural basis, "This hindir nycht, halff sleiping as I lay" (The Dreame).<sup>7</sup> Although the individual personifications are

here hardly more developed, they are much closer to the narrative line, and Dunbar also employs a number of other rhetorical devices associated with generic allegory in the fifteenth century: dream-vision, significant wall-decorations, mysterious companies of revellers, and the dreamer's final, sudden awakening from his vision. The theme of the poem is more limited than that of Meditatioun in Wyntir despite its allegorical framework, for that merely serves as a disguise for one of Dunbar's petitions to the king for a benefice. This is, of course, a favourite subject of Dunbar's, and one which he approaches in a variety of ways.<sup>8</sup> The rather base motive which underlies the poem perhaps threatens to deflate the allegorical machinery, and it may explain the fact that notwithstanding the potentially elaborate allegorical framework, Dunbar uses his rather functional five-line stanza and a relatively plain diction:

Thane com the ladyeis danceing in ane trace,  
 And Nobilnes befoir thame come ane space,  
     Saying, withe cheir bening and womanly,  
     'I se ane heir in bed oppressit ly,  
 My sisteris, go and help to get him grace.'

(26-30)

Again the personifications are from the common medieval stock of abstractions: Distres, Hivines, Langour, Nobilnes, Confort, Plesance, and so on. It is not always clear whether a particular character is truly tropological (that is, represents an aspect of the poet's own personality), or whether it stands for some force outside his control. Distres and Hivines, for example, fall fairly clearly into the first category, since they describe the dreamer's state of mind. Nobilnes, the guardian



Lady who attempts to secure redress for the dreamer, represents some external force, and so does Ressoun, ultimately the moral touchstone of the poem:

Than spak ane wicht callit Blind Effectioun,  
'I sall befoir yow be, with myne electioun,  
Of all the court I have the governance.'

Than spak ane constant wycht callit Ressoun  
And said, 'I grant yow hes beine lord a sessioun  
In distributioun, bot now the tyme is gone,  
Now I may all distribute myne alone;  
Thy wrangous deidis did evir mane enschesoun .....'

(58-65)

This provides for the first time a clear-cut statement of the poem's true subject, and it leads in the end to a change in the nature of the personifications, for whereas most of the characters are truly abstract, representing such qualities as Nobilnes and Ressoun, Dunbar eventually introduces two figures from a different tradition:

Than com anon ane callit Sir Johne Kirkpakar,  
Off many cures ane michtie undertaker,  
Quod he, 'I am possest in kirkis sevin,  
And yitt I think thai grow sall till ellevin,  
Or he be servit in ane, yone ballet maker.'

And then Sir Bet-the-kirk, 'Sa mot I thryff,  
I haif of busie servandis foure or fyve,  
And all direct unto sindrie steidis,  
Ay still awaitting upoun kirkmenes deidis,  
Fra quham sum tithingis will I heir belyff.'

(86-95)

This pair of simonists clearly derive not from the mainstream of medieval tropological allegory, but from the satirical tradition of Piers Plowman and its derivatives.<sup>9</sup> Their names — especially that of Kirkpakar — have a curiously modern ring, suggesting Jonson or Congreve rather than any medieval precedent, for even Langland does not customarily introduce such evocative names. The point is partly that "Kirkpakar" at least is almost

a credible surname, and also that it describes in a very direct way the behaviour for which the character is to be condemned. This is a very different kind of shorthand from that generally practised by medieval poets, even by Langland himself. And its effect in "This hindir nycht, halff sleiping as I lay" is to root the poem more firmly in the contemporary situation, so that the generalized argument which we are led to expect by the original allegorical setting is given an unexpectedly topical slant.

The satirical tone which enters the poem in these stanzas is, however, itself dispelled by the last fifteen lines, in which more positive assertions are made by three allegorical characters of the former kind: Ressoun, Temperance and Patience. Their message to the dreamer is that justice requires that he be given a benefice, and that he must rely upon the wisdom of the king. This is a neat variation on the usual pattern in allegorical visions, where the dreamer receives a moral education of some kind.<sup>10</sup> Here the lesson is ostensibly directed toward the dreamer:

Patience to me, 'My friend,' said, 'mak guid cheir,  
And on the prince depend with humelie feir,  
For I full weill dois know his nobill intent;  
He wald not for ane bischopperikis rent  
That yow war unrewardit half ane yeir.'

(106-10)

But the real point, of course, is that the king himself should be shown the appropriate behaviour, and the tutelary function which is assumed by Patience and by some of the other characters, in the true allegorical tradition, is aimed not at the dreamer but at James IV, who is the poem's primary audience. These



characters thus have a mediatory role as voices for the author's petition, while the persona the latter has created, although he is quite evidently based upon Dunbar's own situation, appears as little more than a sounding-board off which these opinions are projected.

It is advisable to bear these points in mind when considering the strictures placed upon the poem by Dr Scott, who comments adversely upon the blend of allegorical machinery and personal petition:

The mixture of conventions here — the dream-plus-allegory used for a satirical-cum-complaint theme — is unsatisfactory. The allegorical machinery is too cumbersome for the subject, which, being personal, concrete, and direct, should have that kind of treatment . . . . . The impersonal, abstract, circumlocutory nature of the dream-allegory is at odds with the theme, and the result is a weakening of the complaint.

11

This criticism is based, I think, upon a misunderstanding of the medieval function of both dream-allegory and complaint. The conventions associated with the allegorical genre were after all not merely current as conventions, detached from the matter of poetry: they were used because they offered a vehicle for the communication of ideas. The ideas with which Dunbar is here concerned are certainly conceived in personal terms, but they are not therefore inappropriate to the allegorical structure. The injustice which the dreamer in the poem has suffered is, on the evidence of more directly petitionary poems like "Off benefice, Schir, at everie feist" and Quhone mony benefices vakit, felt by Dunbar to be his own plight, but it is also part of a more general experience in a world where success is insecure and worth

goes unrecognized, and in which sin is rampant: this, surely, is the place of the satirical figures like Sir Johne Kirkpakar, to bring out the prevalence of evils such as simony, of which the dreamer is but one victim. In addition to its personal dimension, therefore, "This hindir nycht, halff sleiping as I lay" has a wider reference, in which the suffering of the dreamer is part of the general corruption and misery of human life, neatly summed up by the early detail that his room is

all depent with many divers hew,  
Of all the nobill storyis ald and new,  
Sen oure first father formed was of clay.

(3-5)

This apparently incidental observation is characteristic of Dunbar's technique, in that the allusion to Adam, reinforced by "clay" with its associations of corruptibility,<sup>12</sup> suggests the Fall in a way which is most lightly sketched in and yet which has a profound effect on the significance of the poem. Dunbar's tone often depends upon such hints and allusions, from which the elusive moral arguments also frequently derive. Many another fifteenth-century poet would give an elaborate catalogue of exemplary stories at this point;<sup>13</sup> for Dunbar the barely-hinted-at implications of sin and corruption are sufficient. In this way, the context of the poem which transcends the merely personal is established at the outset.

Another kind of formal pattern used by Dunbar as a basis for a poem which is nominally narrative is that of The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis, where the iconographic tradition of the sins, one of the most common in medieval Europe, provides the Scots poet with a ready-made narrative sequence.<sup>14</sup> As is so



often the case, Dunbar casts his narrative in the form of a dream, setting The Dance on Fastern's Eve, when the inhabitants of Hell might be expected to participate in the general festivities, and adding the further information that the date was 15 February. Such specific dating — which incidentally allows us to conclude that the poem was probably written in either 1496 or 1507<sup>15</sup> — is not normally part of the machinery of dream-vision, and it may suggest an immediate or topical intention on Dunbar's part, presumably having something to do with the court environment in which The Dance is likely to belong.<sup>16</sup> The notion of Satan ordaining an "observance" at the beginning of Lent is of course paradoxical, but the obscene and at times violent pageant which follows is thoroughly in keeping with the spirit of Fastern's Eve celebrations.<sup>17</sup> Its tone is strikingly colloquial: the effect depends upon the juxtaposition of grotesque details and the familiar, so that the Synnis are felt to be both infernal and part of the real world. Pryd, for example, is drawn from the traditions of anti-fashion satire:<sup>18</sup>

With hair wyld bak and bonet on syd,  
 Lyk to mak waistie wanis;  
 And round abowt him, as a quheill,  
 Hang all in rumpillis to the heill  
 His kethat for the nanis .....

(17-21)

The jauntily-worn bonnet, the long hair, the full gown are all familiar targets in later medieval criticism of the gallant, so that Pryd is firmly set in the context of Dunbar's own surroundings, and those of his audience. In a similar manner, Invy is given an entourage of "flattereris ... And bakbyttaris" (ll.

49-50), which are explicitly associated with the vices of courtiers. There cannot be much doubt that Dunbar conceives of his Synnis in terms of contemporary images.<sup>19</sup>

The seven portraits provide the basic structure of the poem. But Dunbar does more than merely elaborate on each of the seven Synnis in turn, and indeed, he does not actually provide much detail about any of them. Several of the traditional elements in portraits of the Deadly Sins — such as the beasts associated with each of them — are omitted or touched on only incidentally,<sup>20</sup> and the only aspect he customarily deals with is the appropriate punishment to which the company of each of the Synnis is subjected. These descriptions of the torments of the damned are both the most vivid parts of the poem and the most clearly didactic, since they are derived from that tradition in which the pains of Hell are invoked to encourage the errant onto the paths of righteousness:<sup>21</sup> as the villains who surround Cuvatyce proceed, for example,

Out of thair throttis thay schot on udder  
Hett moltin gold, me thocht a fudder,  
As fyreflawcht maist fervent;  
Ay as thay tomit thame of schot,  
Feyndis fild thame new up to the thrott  
With gold of al alkin prent.

(61-6)

Dunbar's careful selection and marshalling of traditional details produces portraits which are relatively concise, and he sketches his fiends with great economy. Such compression is, indeed, one of the most distinctive characteristics of his technique.

The topical element which we have already observed operating within the portraits extends some way beyond them. After



the first, that of Pryd, Dunbar adds the following passage, which is half the length of the other stanzas:

Heillie harlottis on hawtane wyis  
 Come in with mony sindrie gyis,  
 Bot yit luce nevir Mahoun,  
 Quhill preistis come in with bair schevin nekkis,  
 Than all the feyndis lewche and maid gekkis,  
 Blak Belly and Bawsy Brown.

(25-30)

These interpolated lines thus vary the pattern of the poem in a formal as well as in a rhetorical way, breaking up the twelve-line stanzas which comprise the rest of the poem. Rhetorically, they break up the sequence of portraits, and take us back to the infernal scene with which the vision opened. This half-stanza follows on naturally from the stanza on Pryd, through the use of "hawtane" and the reference to dress, but its central point is anti-clerical, suggesting that the most truly ridiculous figures of all are tonsured priests. I take it that Dunbar is here suggesting that the clergy suffer from worse vanity even than the gallants: as so often with Dunbar, however, the point is merely touched on by juxtaposition of ideas, and not explicitly stated.

Another half-stanza occurs at the end of the portrait-sequence, immediately after the dance of Glutteny's company:

Na menstrallis playit to thame but dowl,  
 For glemen thair wer haldin owt,  
 Be day and eik by nycht;  
 Except a menstrall that slew a man,  
 Swa till his heretage he wan,  
 And entirt be breif of richt.

(103-8)

These lines are rather puzzling: they have something of the air of a veiled topical allusion, but they may simply refer to one

of a large number of exempla about sin and its punishment.<sup>22</sup>

The point Dunbar is making seems to relate to the significance of music, for the reason that minstrels are barred from Hell is that harmony has no place there. In an indirect way, this tells us something about the dance, since its violence is apparently paralleled by an unmusical discord. This theme is then extended in a new direction in the final stanza, into which Dunbar introduces some characteristic anti-Gaelic satire:

Than cryd Mahoun for a Heleand padyane;  
 Syne ran a feynd to feche Makfadyane,  
 Far northwart in a nuke;  
 Be he the correnoch had done schout,  
 Erschemen so gadderit him abowt,  
 In Hell grit rowme thay take.

(109-14)

Music may be inappropriate to Hell, but this clearly does not apply to the "discordances" of Highland music. Dunbar may have known that the coronach is a lament: if so, it adds a further twist to the irony. But certainly we are intended to understand that Makfadyane and his numerous compatriots make, both literally and metaphorically, an infernal noise. It proves too much even for Mahoun:

The Devill sa devit wes with thair yell,  
 That in the deepest pot of hell  
 He smorit thame with smuke.

(118-20)

Since discord has, at least by implication, been established as the characteristic of Hell, the notion that the Gaels are too discordant even for Satan is particularly scathing, and, in part at least, the justification for the introduction of the remark about the exclusion of musicians from Hell is that it prepares the way for this anti-Gaelic jibe.



The relationship between this final passage and the earlier stanzas of the portrait-sequence is, however, not altogether clear. Professor Kinsley has observed that "horror is dissolved in the comedy of ll. 109-20, which makes a smooth transition to the farce which follows"(in The Sowtar and Tail-youris War),<sup>23</sup> Dr B.S. Hay observes that these lines "signal his changed and lighter attitude toward what follows, now that the Seven Sins have passed",<sup>24</sup> while Dr Scott goes so far as to suggest that the final stanza "is really a second poem in its own right, in a sense".<sup>25</sup> There is certainly a marked change of tone from the portraits, with their grim accompanying punishments, to the Highland pageant at the end, but whether Dunbar intended a comic relief of tension is not so obvious. From one point of view, the satire directed against not only Gaelic music but against the whole company of "Erschemen", who are so numerous in Hell, carries a stage further the topical comment which has already been directed against courtiers, clerics, and other social groups. There is undeniably an element of humour here, but it is neither independent of nor inconsistent with the portraits of the Synnis: indeed, the argument of the poem as a whole hinges upon the point that while the full horror of the Synnis is part of the normal environment of Hell, a gathering of Highlanders is too much for the Devil himself. It is not easy to tell just how seriously Dunbar intends this observation, for the problem of tone is the central critical problem in understanding his poetry.

That he is a great comic poet is immediately apparent to any reader, and we have been accustomed to agree with Professor

Fox that "in all of Dunbar's poems the prose sense is negligible".<sup>26</sup> According to such a view, there is no difficulty about the curious dissonance which exists between the final stanza of The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis and the rest of the poem, or between both and The Sowtar and Tailyouris War. If Dunbar was primarily interested in effect rather than meaning, in lyrical or humorous qualities rather than in moral argument, in technically brilliant exploitation of convention rather than the exploration or exposition of ideas, then we have no need to try to elucidate any deeper patterns of meaning in his poetry. The difficulty is that it is impossible to be sure about this. Dunbar's characteristic mode of expression is allusive, and there is seldom, at least in his finest poetry, an explicit exposition of a moral or doctrinal point of view: some of his poems, of course, consist of little else than moral assertions, but such poems, falling within the genre of moralizings or exhortations and having no fictive element, are outwith the scope of the present study. The uncertainty of tone which is so common in Dunbar is to a considerable degree a function of this allusiveness. In much of The Dance, for example, it is very hard to tell where comedy gives way to moral comment or to sheer horror:

Than the fowll monstir Glutteny,  
 Off wame unsasiable and gredy,  
 To dance he did him dres:  
 Him followit mony fowll drunckart,  
 With can and collep, cop and quart,  
 In surffet and excres;  
 Full mony a waistles wallydrag,  
 With wamis unweildable, did furth wag,  
 In creische that did increse;  
 'Drynk!' ay thay cryit, with mony a gaip,  
 The feyndis gaif thame hait leid to laip,  
 Thair lovery wes na les.



Notwithstanding the many pejorative terms which colour the description and the unpleasantness of the torment to which the gluttonous are subjected, there is a certain comic dimension in the heavily alliterative picture of "mony a waistles wallydrag/. With wamis unweildable" which belies the note of horror which is also quite evidently present. There is thus perhaps more humour in the portraits of the Synnis than Kinsley suggests, just as the final stanza has a greater element of serious satire underlying the humorous jibe at "Erschemen". But the fundamental critical point is the uncertainty which surrounds Dunbar's tone.

The same difficulties apply to the relationship between The Dance and The Sowtar and Tailyouris War, which was clearly intended to be part of the same sequence:

Nixt that a turnament wes tryid,  
That lang befoir in hell wes cryid,  
In presens of Mahoun,  
Betuix a telyour and ane sowtar .....

(1-4)

The burlesque tournament which follows is in no way unprecedented, for parodies of chivalric combat are found in France and England, in such examples as The Tournament of Totenham,<sup>27</sup> while the rivalry of cobblers and tailors appears to have been, a little later in the sixteenth century, a Middle Scots stereotype.

Bannatyne preserves a Flytting betuix be sowtar and the tailyour of uncertain date, attributed to a poet called Stewart,<sup>28</sup> and Lindsay included an episode involving a tailor, a soutar, and their respective wives in his Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis.<sup>29</sup>

The latter is definitely later than Dunbar, the former probably so, and both may have been influenced by his poem, but it also

seems likely that all three draw upon a common popular tradition. At first glance, it might seem that we are justified in concluding that the movement of Dunbar's sequence is away from serious religious themes to mere burlesque. The burlesque element is certainly important: Dunbar is at pains to parody the detail of a real tournament, and the comedy, where it is not simply scatological, depends upon the distance between chivalric behaviour and the activities of the bourgeois antagonists. Thus, the tailor's banner consists of "clowttis ane hundreth scoir", while the souter's depicts "Sanct Girnega", a bogus saint who is also associated with souters in Stewart's Flytting (in a reference which may of course derive from Dunbar's poem) and who occurs as a fiend in Roull's Cursing.<sup>30</sup> It is not easy to discern which way this ribald humour is pointing: is Dunbar satirizing the genteel pretensions of artisans, or the ritual of a chivalric tournament, both or neither? Dr Scott suggests that both are targets, but Dunbar himself seems to deny any serious purpose at all:

I had mair of thair werkis writtin,  
 Had nocht the sowtar bene beschittin  
 With Belliallis ers unblast;  
 Bot that sa gud ane bourd me thocht,  
 Sic solace to my hairt it rocht,  
 For lawchtir neir I brist;  
 Quhairthrow I walknit of my trance.  
 To put this in remembrance,  
 Mycht no man me resist,  
 For this said justing it befell  
 Befoir Mahoun, the air of hell:  
 Now trow this gif ye list.

(97-108)

The challenge to belief, the last resort of the teller of the tall tale, confirms the note of wild, scatological absurdity which prevails throughout the War, and it is this more than



anything which belies Dunbar's supposed seriousness.

What, then, are we to make of the strange blend of tones and concerns in the whole sequence? That the portrait-sequence of The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis conveys a moral point of view seems undeniable, but it is a view which is inextricably mingled with comedy, at least in the modern sense of that term. Whether it is comic in the stricter medieval sense is more problematical. Dr Hay suggests that it is:

The pattern is then a comic one, not because of bawdy jokes and crude exchanges of defecation, but again in the larger sense of comedy, like that of The Divine Comedy, moving through a vision of evil to a sense of God's lasting concern for Man and his ultimate good.

31

It should be noted, however, that the use of obscene or violent humour in association with evil is a common medieval ploy: the comic devils of the cycle plays, the coarse wit and practical joking of the Vices in later morality plays and interludes illustrate this tendency very well,<sup>32</sup> and I believe that Dunbar is here making use of a similar tactic. The burlesque tournament suggests the distortion or inversion of values which Dunbar intends us to associate with evil; and it follows that he is not finally concerned with the pretensions of craftsmen or the absurdities of chivalry, but rather wishes to demonstrate what Hell is like. The solid, doctrinal basis of hellishness lies in the character of the Synnis, which is accordingly where the vision begins, and the retinues of the Synnis also provide a link with our own world. For the rest, apart from the incidental swipes at such targets as Gaelic culture, it seems to me that Dunbar is centrally interested in evoking Hell, disorder-

ly, funny in a horrific way, and ultimately repellent. Our laughter is always tinged with disgust, and this is not merely because our age is more squeamish than Dunbar's:

To comfort him, or he raid forder,  
The Devill off knychtheid gaif him order,  
For sair syne he did spitt,  
And he about the Devillis nek  
Did spew agane ane quart of blek,  
Thus knychtly he him quitt.

(55-60)

The vividness of such details is surely intended to repel us, and the comedy, because rather than in spite of its vulgarity, has a genuine didactic purpose. The narrator's laughter at the end does not in my opinion controvert this sense of disgust; it is, after all, provoked by yet another scatological sally, in which there is no evidence whatever of "God's lasting concern for Man and his ultimate good". This laughter seems almost nihilistic, and the savage ironies of Dunbar's subsequent Amendis to the Telyouris and Sowtaris, despite the ostensible provision of a heavenly perspective, do nothing to reverse the pattern.<sup>33</sup> The vision of events in Hell is genuinely funny, but the "solace" it offers is entirely superficial

The preceding discussion reveals, I think, how misleading the tone of Dunbar's poetry can be, and how his meaning is often conditioned by his preoccupation with formal considerations. He frequently casts his poems within the dream-vision mould, skilfully exploits the potentialities of his chosen stanza-form, uses various rhetorical techniques to give shape to his argument, and sometimes — as in The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis/ Sowtar and Tailyouris War sequence — allows comic effects to dominate his poetry in a way which is at first glance



puzzling, apparently contradicting any suggestion of serious intent. Out of this blend of elements emerges a tone which is characteristically Dunbar's, in which meaning depends upon inference, and the argument proceeds largely from the juxtaposition of ideas. This complex interweaving of elements enables Dunbar to transcend the limits of any single convention, but it requires a great deal of the reader, and particularly of his/her sensitivity to the nuances of the words and images, the latter frequently themselves traditional, which the poet employs. His exploitation of the dream-machinery illustrates this freedom: many of Dunbar's poems, including the majority of those discussed in this chapter, make at least nominal use of a dream or vision, but the variety of purposes to which this device is put is almost as great as the variety in the themes and subjects, and Dunbar is less tied to the formal Roman de la Rose species of allegory than many other fifteenth-century poets.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, we can hardly appreciate the force of the visions, and the ways in which Dunbar uses them, if we are completely ignorant of either the theory of dreams as it was expounded by Macrobius and others or the uses to which the theory was put by medieval allegorists. The poems so far discussed in this chapter do not, in my view, rank among Dunbar's most successful or significant: I intend in the following pages to deal with eight poems which, while they represent the core of the narrative poetry and include some of Dunbar's finest work, nevertheless provide further evidence of the difficulties inherent in defining his tone and hence elucidating his meaning.

"This hindir nycht in Dumfermeling" (The Tod and the Lamb) is a classic example of a poem by Dunbar in which the moral intention has in my view been under-rated by critics.<sup>35</sup> It is, formally, a beast-fable composed in seven-line stanzas with a refrain, two elements of great importance to our understanding of Dunbar's purpose. Another crucial factor is the role of the narrator, whose reaction to the events of the story is constantly underlined by the refrain:

And that me thocht ane ferly cace.

The ambiguity of "me thocht", which suggests opinion rather than certainty, and of "ferly", a subtle word the meaning of which ranges from 'surprising' through 'strange' to the borders of the unnatural,<sup>36</sup> is very important, especially since this beast-fable differs from others in the genre in lacking a formal moralitas in which the moral intention of the author is explicitly defined. It has generally been concluded from the absence of any clear moral statement, and the bawdy atmosphere of the narrative itself, that Dunbar was not taking a moral position, and that "This hindir nycht in Dumfermeling" is merely a ribald tale, deriving perhaps from some episode at the court of James IV.<sup>37</sup> That the ironic twist at the end of the poem is very funny can hardly be denied, and it is certainly true that an attempt to explicate the serious purpose underlying it is apt to spoil the joke. But I do not accept that Dunbar employs irony so uncritically, and I find that the nuances of the narrator's language provide quite sufficient evidence for extracting the moral argument from Dunbar's superficially off-hand and cynical manner.



A great deal hinges upon the inter-relationship of the three characters of the fable, the fox, the lamb and the wolf. Fox and wolf are, of course, predators with a long history in both fable and beast-epic, and in the latter tradition long-standing rivals, while the lamb is an equally conventional victim.<sup>38</sup>

But the foxes and wolves which attack sheep in Aesop and elsewhere are generally after food, whereas the appetites displayed by Dunbar's fox are of a quite different kind:

... lait ane tod wes with ane lame,  
And with hir playit, and made gud game,  
Syne till his breist did hir imbrace,  
And wald haif riddin hir lyk ane rame:  
And that me thocht ane ferly cace.

(3-7)

The sexual predatoriness is here accompanied by a confusion of animal roles: the exchange is a ferly because the tod wishes to play the ram, which is unnatural enough. The idea appears again, neatly reversed, in the following stanza:

He braisit hir bony body sweit,  
And halsit hir with fordir feit;  
Syne schuk his taill, with quhinge and yelp,  
And todlit with hir lyk ane quhelp;  
Syne lowrit on growfe and askit grace;  
And ay the lame cryd, 'Lady, help!'  
And that me thocht ane ferly cace.

(8-14)

Dunbar is keeping us fully aware of the animal nature of the fox, who is given "fordir feit" and a tail (the latter will shortly have quite unmistakable sexual connotations) and who is making canine noises, but the interview has courtly overtones as well, with the tod asking for "grace" — a familiar courtly euphemism. The lamb is now treated like a whelp, a member of the tod's own species, and again the fox is seen playing with

her. This image has, I think, quite definitely sinister implications, which are in no way diminished by the puns on "todlit" and "lowrit", both of which echo vernacular names for the fox and which perhaps therefore carry connotations of fox-like duplicity as well as their primary meaning.

It is not readily apparent which aspect of the second stanza is in particular ferly: the whole situation is of course surprising, but the cries of the lamb immediately precede the refrain, and Dunbar is possibly pointing to the inadequacy of her response to the tod's importunities. There is less ambiguity about her reaction, and the poet's comment, in the following stanza:

The tod wes nowder lene nor skowry,  
 He wes ane lusty reid haird lowry,  
 Ane lang taild beist and grit with all;  
 The silly lame wes all to small  
 To sic ane tribbill to hald ane bace:  
 Scho fled him nocht; fair mot hir fall!  
 And that me thocht ane ferly cace.

(15-21)

With the obvious sexual innuendo of the tod's long tail, it is easy to miss what is happening to the portrayal of the lamb, whose acquiescence is beginning to "puzzle" the narrator. What is surprising to him is that the lamb does not flee, and if we are at first inclined to ascribe this to her innocence, Dunbar has more surprises in store. It should be noted, also, that the pattern of paradoxical reversal is here taken up in another way: it is surely startling to find that it is the tod's treble to which the lamb cannot "hald ane bace", but this is another ferly, and one which again reinforces the contrast between the characters. Dunbar continues to develop this contrast ("The



tod wes reid, the lame wes quhyte", using a well-established colour-symbolism), stressing the lamb's youth and simplicity:

Becaus this lame wes yung and tender,  
He ran upoun hir with a race,  
And scho schup nevir for till defend hir:  
And this me thocht ane ferly cace.

(25-8)

The underlying imagery of hunting for food almost becomes explicit in these lines, with the reference to the tenderness of the lamb, but we are made increasingly aware of the lamb's failure to flee, which is surely the most striking feature of the third and fourth stanzas.

This emphasis on the reactions of the lamb is carried a stage further in the following stanza:

He grippit hir abowt the west,  
And handlit hir as he had hest;  
This innocent, that nevir trespass,  
Tuke hert that scho wes handlit fast,  
And lute him kis hir lusty face;  
His girnand gamis hir nocht agast:  
And that me thocht ane ferly cace.

(29-35)

These lines, ironically, both confirm and undermine the lamb's innocence, so that "this innocent" in l. 31 has a very complex function. Up to now, her failure to flee has seemed like excessive trustfulness, but there are signs here that she is becoming a more or less willing participant in the love-making, "taking heart" at the tod's advances. Her face, we notice, is "lusty", a word which has already been applied, with much less ambiguity, to the fox himself. The moral situation is certainly rather more complicated than a cursory reading might suggest. The beast-fable background to the poem leads us to expect a ruthless predator and a helpless victim or, as in

several of Henryson's Morall Fabillis, a victim whose rightness is apparent from his or her arguments,<sup>39</sup> but while the tod is conventionally ruthless, the lamb does not appear in an unequivocally sympathetic light. Her culpable innocence is strongly implied by the juxtapositions of ll. 31-5: the force of "girnand gamis", reinforced by the alliteration, emphasizes her failure to perceive the danger she is in, and there can be no doubt that her behaviour at this point is our central interest.

Something of the original feeling of unnaturalness is now coming back into the refrain: in the next stanza, when the lamb is taken in by the tod's protestations that his intentions are honourable, Dunbar says:

The silly thing trowd him, allace!  
The lame gaif credence to the tod:  
And that me thocht ane ferly cace.

(40-2)

Even conceding that "silly" does not have its modern implication of stupidity and means simply 'innocent', there is a clear sense here of the unnatural: it is against nature that a lamb should be deceived by a fox's legendary duplicity. It follows, I think, that the "allace!" is at least partly ironic, in a way which typifies Dunbar's refusal to adopt an explicit, unambiguous moral stance: the tone of the stanza and of the preceding one seems to suggest that the lamb is gullible to the point of culpability, and although the narrator's "allace!" expresses on one level sympathy for the lamb's predicament, the "ferliness" of her ingenuousness does indicate that her behaviour verges on the wilful. In other words, no simple formula of praise and



blame can adequately deal with the relationship of tod and lamb.

So far, the role of the narrator has largely been confined to the conveying of his responses through the subtly-modulated refrain. Indeed, Dunbar begins by isolating himself from the narrative by using the familiar rhetorical ploy of claiming that he is merely transmitting his story:

This hindir nycht in Dumfermeling,  
To me wes tawld ane windir thing .....

(1-2)

But by the seventh stanza, the narrator has become almost an eye-witness:

I will no lesingis put in vers,  
Lyk as thir jangleris dois rehers,  
Bot be quhat maner thay war mard,  
Quhen licht wes owt and durris wes bard;  
I wait nocht gif he gaif hir grace,  
Bot all the hollis wes stoppit hard:  
And that me thocht ane ferly cace.

(43-9)

Beyond the conventional, rhetorical protestations of veracity, and the confession of partial ignorance which is supposed to heighten the verisimilitude, the poet is now very much a part of the action, for "all the hollis wes stoppit hard" conjures up an image of a curious by-stander, trying without success to pry after lights-out.<sup>40</sup> One consequence of this inconsistency is that we become much more involved with the narrative as the tension grows and the climax approaches. The shift of narrative point of view, therefore, may not simply reveal carelessness on Dunbar's part: the change from mere transmission of a story to the personal involvement of the narrator has some structural advantage, and it may be taken as a positive feature of Dunbar's narrative skill.

With the arrival of the wolf, and the consequent comic dénouement, we reach the complex central metaphor of the poem. The joke hinges, of course, on the sexual twist which Dunbar gives to a proverbial phrase, echoing the earlier play with the notion of devouring:

Throw hiddowis yowling of the wowf,  
This wylie tod play doun on growf,  
And in the silly lambis skin  
He crap als far as he micht win,  
And hid him thair ane weill lang space .....

(57-61)

By entering the lamb the tod completes the seduction in which he has been engaged from the beginning, but part of the irony is that he finally does so because of the intervention of the wolf. It is not easy to determine what the interest of the wolf actually is: he has been interpreted as both father and husband,<sup>41</sup> but neither seems very likely. The logic of the fable, after all, makes him a rival predator, and a narrator who finds a ferly in the relationship of tod and lamb would hardly pass without comment over a blood or marriage bond between lamb and wolf. I conclude that the wolf is probably another prospective devourer/seducer, a reading which is supported by his response when he concludes that everyone is in bed:

And, quhill the bell had strikkin ten,  
The wowf hes drest him to his den,  
Protestand for the secound place .....

(66-8)

"The secound place" can only mean that the wolf is disgruntled because the fox has beaten him to the seduction. Dunbar wastes no time in offering moral judgments, and indeed the tone



is highly elusive. While the tradition of Aesopic fable leads us to expect a simple moral structure, cruel predator against innocent prey, we have seen that Dunbar makes his lamb a gullible, almost a willing, victim.

But I do not think that it can be assumed from this fact that "This hindir nycht in Dumfermeling" is completely lacking in moral content. The world portrayed in the poem is indeed harsh, but it is a mistake to ascribe this to Dunbar's cynicism. His slightly mystified narrator, with his emphasis on the ferlies he has seen or heard, draws our attention to a moral wilderness in which unnatural events occur, not least the behaviour of the lamb. The refrain, in some ways, replaces the moralitas, pointing up the strangeness of the events and, at times, intruding the narrator's reactions into the poem. But the meaning is for the most part stated indirectly, and to a large extent through a skilful variation on Aesopic themes. Dunbar's subtle treatment of the predator-victim relationship is only part of this: the balance between human and animal characteristics is a staple source of irony in fable, and Dunbar varies this pattern as well. Whereas the desire of fox or wolf to eat a lamb is naturalistic enough, sexual desire between the same animals is scarcely so. On the human level, by contrast, the sexual element is directly explicable, while the eating which takes place or is threatened in, for example, Henryson's Aesopic fables must be understood metaphorically. Insofar as the animal characters represent human types, therefore, the poem's complex ironic patterns imply criticism of the victim as well as of the predator. A further twist to Dunbar's use

of the fable tradition derives from the fact that while the structure of the poem is essentially Aesopic, the motif which ultimately lies behind the plot, the wolf (or fox) hidden in a lamb's skin, is not really Aesopic at all, but Biblical.<sup>42</sup> As Dunbar uses it here, the fox "in" the lamb's skin is an obscene pun, the humour of which comes partly from the ironic fact that it is the wolf's arrival which provides the tod with his opportunity, partly from the vulgar joke that although the tod is theoretically hiding he can hardly be said to be well hidden even if he did creep "als far as he micht win". Here, as throughout the poem, Dunbar makes skilful use of the familiar Aesopic situations, and it seems beyond dispute both that his poem contains an implicit moral argument, and that this argument is more obvious when the poem is considered in the context of its approximate Aesopic analogues.

We find a somewhat similar use of literary materials for a broadly moral purpose in another of Dunbar's poems which has frequently been misunderstood, Hbw dunbar wes desyrd to be ane freir.<sup>43</sup> Critical opinion has been for so long preoccupied with the possible relevance of this poem to the life of Dunbar, especially those lines in which the poet "confesses" his former crimes:

'In freiris weid full fairly haif I fleichit,  
In it haif I in pulpet gon and preichit  
In Derntoun kirk, and eik in Canterbury;  
In it I past at Dover our the ferry  
Throw Piccardy, and thair the peple teichit,'

(36-40)

that the firm basis of the anti-mendicant satire in the literary traditions of the mendicants themselves has been overlooked.



As so often with Dunbar, the personal element is a problem here: I do not believe that How dunbar wes desyrd to be ane freir is as autobiographical as Bannatyne's title suggests, although the use of the dream convention and a first-person narrator gives a narrative immediacy which is a keynote of much of Dunbar's best poetry. It falls in fact within the flourishing late medieval tradition of anti-mendicant satire:<sup>44</sup> Dunbar's distinctive touch is to parody the mendicants' own hagiographical traditions in attacking their contemporary vices.

The central narrative point of the poem is that the apparition, supposedly St Francis, who attempts to persuade the poet to enter the Franciscan order is "ane fieind", a demon. Demons played an important part in medieval thought, and their strong influence upon the imagination is constantly reflected in literature. As fallen angels, they were perpetually exiled from Heaven, and their chief activity was the temptation and tormenting of humanity: hence, they occur constantly in hagiography, and nowhere more consistently than in Franciscan literature. Francis himself and several of his disciples were so troubled at various times: the early Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli contain a number of such incidents, others are to be found in the lives of St Francis written by Thomas of Celano, whence many of these stories pass into the later literature, into the Speculum Perfectionis and the Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius, the latter the Latin original of the best-known piece of Franciscan hagiography, the Fioretti.<sup>45</sup> The attitude to demonic activity which these stories reveal is ambivalent in a way characteristic of the Middle Ages. One much-repeated

statement of St Francis' on the subject indicates that demons are really part of God's overall plan:

Demonēs sunt castaldi Domini nostri: sicut potestas cum aliquis offendit mittit castaldum suum ad puniendum ipsum, sic Dominus quos diligit per castaldos suos, uidelicet per demonēs, qui in hoc ministerio sunt eius ministri, corripit et castigat.

46

This view is scrupulous in its avoidance of dualism, since the function of demons is to assert God's will by punishing the sinner. At other times, however, Francis appears to give demons a greater degree of autonomy, and to see them as a more sinister force:

Quoniam scio quod demonēs inuadent michi de beneficiis, que michi Dominus largitus est per misericordiam suam, cum michi per me nocere non possunt, insidiantur et student michi nocere per socios meos; si uero per me et socios meos nocere non possunt cum confusione magna recedunt.

47

The relevance of this latter attitude in particular to Dunbar's poem is quite clear. The demon of Dunbar's vision is out to trap the dreamer, and he disappears "with stynk and fyrie smowk" when he is foiled. But in addition to this general resemblance between How dunbar wes desyrd to be ane freir and Franciscan demon-literature, there is a more precise analogue in one story concerning Rufino which occurs in Thomas of Celano, in the Fioretti and its Latin source, in the Chronica XXIV Generalium, and in the Speculum vite beati Francisci et sociorum eius which printed in Venice in 1504 and again in 1509.<sup>48</sup> Rufino is tempted by a demon which, appearing in the guise of the crucified Christ, attempts to persuade him away from his devotion by informing him that he was predestined to be



damned, that Francis was also, and that therefore it doesn't matter what either of them or their order does:

'O frater Rufine, quare in orationibus et paenitentia te affligis, quum tu non sis de praedestinatiis ad vitam? Et hoc credas mihi, quia ego scio quos elegerim. Et non credas filio Petri Bernardonis, si contrarium tibi dixerit; nec etiam ipsum interrogas de ista materia, quia ipse vel alius hoc ignorat, sed ego qui sum Dei Filius bene scio: ideo credas mihi pro certe quod tu es de numero damnatorum. Et ipse frater Franciscus, pater tuus et suus, est damnatus; et quicumque sequitur eum decipitur.'

(31, 4-6)<sup>49</sup>

Although Rufino is unwilling to tell Francis of his experience, the saint knows of it by intuition, and he advises Rufino, next time the demon informs him that he is damned, to reply: "Aperi os tuum et cacabo ibi!" (31, 13). Rufino does as Francis advises, whereupon

diabolus indignatus recessit cum tanta tempestate et commotione lapidum montis sub Asisii, et per magnum spatium fluxit lapidum multitudo, ubi adhuc apparet lapidum horrenda ruina. Nam per vallem etiam dicti montis saxa se invicem collidendo ignem plurimum emittebant.

(31, 20-1)

Whereas in the Rufino story we have a demon disguised as Christ endeavouring to persuade one of Francis' disciples to leave the order, in Dunbar's poem we have a demon disguised as Francis attempting to persuade the dreamer to enter the order. This reversal is at the centre of the poem, and it fairly clearly enriches the meaning. In both stories, a demon assumes a holy disguise and counsels behaviour which is manifestly against the victim's spiritual interests. The satirical point is that while in Francis' own day Satan may have wanted to prevent the success of the new mendicant order, now he pursues his

ends by encouraging villains like the dreamer — whose villainy is established through his confession of having been a "fenyait freir" earlier in his career — to become mendicants. This twofold implication, that the mendicants are on the devil's side, and that the order contains the less-than-virtuous, is reinforced by the dialogue which makes up the body of the poem, and which itself contains subtle nuances which frequently enhance the irony. We first read the dialogue, it must be remembered, in ignorance of the identity of the apparition; only with hindsight do we see more in the dreamer's

Me thocht Sanct Francis did to me appeir

(2)

than a conventional description of a dream, and realize that the very status of the dream and its central character is in doubt. The falseness of the "Sanct Francis" is manifested only at the end, and then in the most off-hand way:

This freir that did Sanct Francis thair appeir,  
Ane fieind he wes in liknes of ane freir .....

(46-7)

Within the context of the dialogue, therefore, we find arguments for and against membership of the Franciscan order presented in their own right, and the injunctions of "Sanct Francis" are set against the cynicism of the persona. At the end of the poem this cynicism turns out to be justified, but as the narrator is presented in the dialogue, he is less than sympathetic.

As it is recorded in the manuscripts, the dialogue seems to break naturally into four parts, consisting of two exchanges between the demon and the dreamer.<sup>50</sup> To the former's initial summons, the dreamer responds with elaborate courtesy:



Quod I, 'Sanct Francis, loving be the till,  
 And thankit mot thow be of thy gude will  
 To me, that of thy clayis ar so kynd,  
 Bot thame to weir it nevir come in my mynd;  
 Sweit Confessour, thow tak it nocht in ill.'

(16-20)<sup>51</sup>

The tone here is mock-courtly: the rather curious participial construction "loving be the till", with its suppressed first-person subject, is not without precedent in Middle English, where it seems to occur in formal, polite contexts.<sup>52</sup> The irony is in this case of a very simple kind, since the point of the dreamer's remark is to suggest that Francis is rather too generous with his habit — Dr Scott may be correct to see in this an allusion to the story that Francis stripped himself naked, returning his clothes to his father and embracing poverty, but the main point is surely more obvious.<sup>53</sup> The dreamer's second argument is more complex:

'In haly legendis haif I hard, allevin,  
 Ma sanctis of bischoppis nor freiris, be sic sevin;  
 Off full few freiris that hes bene sanctis I reid;  
 Quhairfoir ga bring to me ane bischopis weid,  
 Gife evir thow wald my sawle gaid unto Hevin.'

(21-5)<sup>54</sup>

Read in one way, this might be taken to mean that it is easier for a bishop to be canonized than it is for a humble friar, since the church hierarchy tends to look after its own kind; that, in other words, the mendicants receive less than their due at the hands of episcopal authority, and the cynical poet would therefore prefer to be a bishop. There certainly seems to be an echo of Dunbar's constant benefice-seeking, and part of the irony no doubt works against the dreamer himself.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the overall anti-mendicant drift of the poem suggests that

if few friars have become saints, it may be because they are less worthy of canonization than other clerics: this is perhaps the strongest possible reading of the dreamer's observation that "Off full few freiris that hes bene sanctis I reid". A further layer of irony emerges from the last line of the stanza when it is set against the poem's ending, for it is not to Heaven that the demon-Francis wishes to guide the dreamer's soul, but to Hell. This stanza, then, reveals Dunbar at his most intricate, scoring satirical points off both the mendicants and their clerical opponents, yet also implying weaknesses in his narrator and planting hints which take on fuller meaning within the total ironic structure of the poem.

A further stanza of exhortation by the apparition is met by a response in which Dunbar takes up in some detail the "fenyeit freir" tradition which has been traced by A.G. Rigg.<sup>56</sup> This is no doubt the satirical core of the poem, although it lacks the ironic richness of ll. 21-5 and of the narrative framework of demonic impersonation. Its generic associations are with the self-exposure of Chaucer's Pardoner, later to be taken up and exploited by Sir David Lindsay.<sup>57</sup> The charges which Dunbar makes against fraudulent friars through this mock-confession are general enough: flattery and deception are part of the standard list of mendicant offences, but they are very little developed here, and it may be that Dunbar is relying on our familiarity with the tradition. This is certainly a characteristic of his poetic style, as we have already seen in relation to Aesopic materials in "This hindir nycht in Dumfermeling", and as we shall see in other poems. One thing at



least is clear: there is no good reason to regard this "confession" as directly drawn from Dunbar's personal experience. Rather, it is part of a carefully-constructed interweaving of direct and ironic criticisms of the Franciscans of Dunbar's day, using both the mendicants' own literature and the charges of their opponents to build up a moral argument which, whatever the rhetorical patterns of the dialogue, is ultimately conveyed through the narrative with its reversal in the final stanza. This is narrative art cunningly marshalled for a moral purpose, and it enables Dunbar to avoid the excesses of rhetorical denunciation which characterize so much medieval satire.

The anti-mendicant motif of the "fenyait freir" occurs again, for a somewhat different purpose, in The Fenyait Freir of Tungland, one of a pair of poems directed by Dunbar against John Damian, abbot of Tongland, a foreign member of the king's household.<sup>58</sup> It is easy to see in this poem and its companion-piece, "Lucina schynnyng in silence of the nicht", a mere personal animus against the royal favourite Damian, a more actively unpleasant aspect of Dunbar's persistent seeking of preferment, which is expressed in other terms in poems like "Off benefice, Schir, at everie feist" and Of the Warldis Instabilitie, and indeed they have generally been so interpreted.<sup>59</sup> But while it can hardly be denied that the invective element is present, and indeed very important, in both works, they have a wider significance as well, which must be elucidated through a more detailed reading and through some consideration of the literary conventions within which Dunbar chooses to work.

The central motif of The Fenzeit Freir of Tungland, the attack on the airborne Damian by the outraged birds, is no doubt the image associated with the poem by most readers, but Dunbar actually devotes less than half the work to the catalogue of birds. The first three stanzas are concerned with Damian's earlier history, leading up to his ill-fated attempt to fly, and they reflect not only Dunbar's dislike of Damian — expressed in his flyting-like charges of his enemy's Tartar origins and sacrilegious murder of a priest — but also a more general hatred of medicine and alchemy, mysterious arts much mistrusted in the Middle Ages. Dissimulation is the basis of all Damian's crimes in this first section; he is a bogus priest and a bogus physician, and his supposedly healing arts are in fact destructive:

In leichecraft he was homecyd;  
 He wald haif, for a nicht to byd,  
 A haiknay and the hurt manis hyd,  
     So meikle he was of myance.  
 His irnis was rude as ony rawchtir,  
 Quhair he leit blude it was no lawchtir,  
 Full mony instrument for slawchtir  
     Was in his gardevyance.

(33-40)

There is in addition here a passing jibe at the greed of physicians: Damian's demand for payment of a horse for a night's care, the failure of his treatment ("the hurt manis hyd") notwithstanding, is reminiscent of Chaucer's Doctour of Phisik, who "lovede gold in special".<sup>60</sup>

To these allegations, however, Dunbar adds one more serious, neglect of religious duty:

Unto no mes pressit this prelat,  
 For sound of sacring bell nor skellat;  
 As blaksmyth bruikit was his pallatt



For battering at the study.  
 Thocht he come hame a new maid channoun,  
 He had dispensit with matynnis cannoun,  
 On him come nowther stole nor fannoun  
 For smowking of the smydy.

(49-56)

With this passage, I think, we pass from hyperbole to a more damaging form of accusation. Damian was, after all, primarily a clerk — "the Franch leich", as he is described in the Treasurer's Accounts<sup>61</sup> — and only secondarily an ecclesiastic. He was, despite the title given to Dunbar's poem in the earlier manuscripts, never a friar,<sup>62</sup> and there is no evidence of his having been connected with the Premonstratensian Order before he was made abbot of Tongland by James IV in 1504; and even then he continued to work in his apartments at Stirling rather than becoming an active member of the Tongland community.<sup>63</sup> Such absenteeism was increasingly a feature of the Scottish monastic system: the holding of monastic offices in commendam by secular clergy increased sharply during the fifteenth century, and became an item of royal policy.<sup>64</sup> Dunbar does not deal with this abuse directly, concentrating instead upon Damian's neglect of both liturgy and proper ecclesiastical dress: in other words, it is Damian's personal failure as a cleric which concerns the poet, not the weaknesses in the system which encourage such abuses. Yet the charge levelled against him is one which any alchemist is prone to in the later Middle Ages, for implicit in Dunbar's lines is the notion that there is something unnatural about seeking to understand (rather than simply celebrating) the mysteries of God's universe.

This element of the unnatural is even more clearly present

in the episode which is the occasion for the poem, Damian's attempt to fly from the walls of Stirling Castle. The whole attempt is monstrous:

And quhen that he did mont on he,  
 All fowill ferleit quhat he sowld be,  
     That evir did on him luke.  
 Sum held he had bene Dedalus,  
 Sum the Menatair marvelous,  
 Sum Martis blaksmyth Vulcanus,  
     And sum Saturnus kuke.

(62-8)

The function of "ferleit" in this passage resembles that of the related noun in "This hindir nycht in Dumfermeling": it suggests strangeness bordering on the unnatural. The catalogue of mythological analogues, with its humorously bathetic last line, serves the same purpose, as does the cumulative effect of the long list of birds, all outraged at this invasion of their territory. Such catalogues are part of the stock-in-trade of the medieval poet, as the lists of beasts in The Kingis Quair and in Henryson's Parliament of Fourfuttit Beistis should remind us.<sup>65</sup> Dunbar's intention, however, by contrast with these other poets', is primarily comic, to which end he employs heavy alliteration, colloquial idiom, and very broad humour:

The tarsall gaif him tug for tug,  
 A stanchell hang in ilka lug,  
 The pyot furth his pennis did rug,  
     The stork straik ay but stynt.  
 The bissart, bissy but rebuik,  
 Scho was so cleverus of hir cluik,  
 His bawis he nicht not langer bruik,  
     Scho held thame at ane hint.

(81-8)

This is Dunbar's low, satiric tone in full spate, and the element of personal abuse, at once harsh and funny, is obvious: what is less clear is the extent to which we are entitled to generalize



beyond the attack on Damian, to take the poem as in some sense moral. I have suggested that such a claim can be made for the earlier part, in which Damian may be taken as representative of a whole class of undutiful ecclesiastics, and of scholars whose preoccupation is with the things of this world, proto-scientists who neglect theology, the mother of sciences. In this sense it is scarcely too far-fetched to see in Damian "a sort of Faust",<sup>66</sup> but both the tone and the purpose of the poem are comic, and we are not permitted to sympathize in any way with Damian in his fall.

Dunbar is highly skilled, in fact, in treating serious themes with deceptive levity, and he does so again in the other poem directed against Damian, "Lucina schynnyng in silence of the nicht". Here we have an apocalyptic vision of the lurid kind also found in sixteenth-century woodcuts and paralleled in medieval propaganda, the implications of which are highly serious. But there are traces of other genres as well: dream-allegory, the complaint against Fortune, and, in the promise of Fortoun (and most important for the ironic effect of the poem), the comic tradition of impossibilia which enjoyed something of a vogue in sixteenth-century Scotland:

Thy trublit gaist sall neir moir be degest,  
 Nor thow in to no benifice beis possest,  
 Quhill that ane abbot him cleith in ernis pennis,  
 And fle up in the air amangis the crennis,  
 And as ane falcone fair fro eist to west.

(21-5)

The whole point of this, of course, is that it is never likely to happen, but when the dreamer awakes from his vision, he discovers that an abbot has indeed made a fethreme and is about

to fly. The Bannatyne Manuscript contains several poems which employ a similar device to decry the fidelity of women, and while it is not possible to establish the chronology of such anonymous pieces, it is clear that Dunbar's work is part of the same tradition:

Quhen þat the mone hes dominatioun  
 Aboif the sone in mydis of someris day;  
 Quhen Abirdene and Air ar baith a toun,  
 And Tweid sall turne and rynnys in to Tay,  
 And quhen the Bass fleittis to the yle of May;  
 Quhen Parradyce is quyt of hevinly hew,  
 Scho quhome I luve sall steidfast be and trew.

67

Apart from the difference in subject-matter, there are other important differences between Dunbar's methods here and those of the anonymous poets: the structure of Ane ballat of vnpossibiliteis and others of the genre is rhetorically very simple, with a series of improbable events, mostly involving seasonal, astronomical and topographical disturbances of nature, linked by the refrain in which the theme of female fickleness is expressed. But the impossibilia motif plays a relatively small part in "Lucina schynnyng in silence of the nicht", the structure of which is basically narrative and not formally rhetorical. This blending of genres is, as we have seen, a vital aspect of Dunbar's poetic technique, and his standard use of it is as a source of ironic complexity. The reversal here derives from the notion of impossibility: the "impossible" has happened, in the sense that an abbot has set out to fly, but the audience is of course aware of the fact that the attempt has failed, that Nature has reasserted herself and the abbot has not flown "aboif the mone".



As has recently been pointed out, some of this irony is in fact directed against the narrator,<sup>68</sup> for if his much-desired benefice depends upon an abbot flying over the moon he is no more likely to succeed after Damian's attempt than he was before. Furthermore, as Dr Hay tellingly observes, since the flight of the abbot is associated by Fortoun with the beginning of the reign of Antichrist, in which, by tradition, the Church will be annihilated, there is not much future in ecclesiastical preferment anyway. We should not be misled, therefore, by the similarity between the preoccupation with preferment here and the subject-matter of Dunbar's more straightforward petitions into the assumption that the hopes of the narrator are Dunbar's own. As in The Fenzzeit Freir of Tungland, the personal element cannot be entirely ignored, but the narrator of this poem has more in common with the personae of How dunbar wes desyrd to be ane freir and The Dregy of Dunbar than he has with Dunbar himself.<sup>69</sup> This ironic treatment of the narrator is not, of course, unique to Dunbar: it is a commonplace of Chaucer criticism, and we have already found it present in Henryson's poetry. But Dunbar's narratives are so much sparser, the detail so much more lightly sketched, that the distinction between poet and persona is harder to make, and the subtlety of the irony much easier to destroy by detailed analysis. The very similarity between the narrator's benefice-hunting in "Lucina schynnyng in silence of the nicht" and Dunbar's own preoccupations, presumably well-known to his immediate audience, illustrates the way in which Dunbar blurs such distinctions, and it is not surprising perhaps that critics have

not been quick to perceive the ironic distance which complicates many of Dunbar's poems and which is a principal source of their elusive moral element.

If the theme of impossibility and the treatment of the persona are two important facets of "Lucina schynnyng in silence of the nicht", the apocalyptic prophecy of Fortoun is obviously the central part of the poem. It draws extensively upon the medieval prophetic tradition, in which the coming of Antichrist was regarded with some ambivalence:<sup>70</sup>

'He sall ascend as ane horrebbble grephoun,  
Him meit sall in the air ane scho dragoun;  
Thir terrible monsteris sall togidder thrist,  
And in the cludis gett the Antechrist,  
Quhill all the air infeck of thair pusoun.

'Under Saturnus fyrie regioun  
Symone Magus sall meit him, and Mahoun,  
And Merlyne at the mone sall him be bydand  
And Jonet the weido on ane bussome rydand,  
Off wichis with ane windir garesoun.

'And syne thay sall discend with reik and fyre,  
And preiche in erth the Antechrystis impyre,  
Be than it salbe neir this warldis end.'

(26-37)

These allusions, not only to Antichrist, but to several other features of medieval lore, are controlled with Dunbar's characteristic skill. The attack ranges from the rather obviously comic comparison of the unfortunate, airborne Damian to "ane horrebbble grephoun" (which exemplifies the method of the poem in that it uses an image from the iconographic tradition of the Apocalypse, normally terrifying, for comic effect) to the much subtler drawing-in of Simon Magus, whose attempt to fly was, according to legend, similarly unsuccessful and whose very name is identified with the ecclesiastical corruption of which Dunbar



considered Damian to be guilty.<sup>71</sup> Other touches also contribute to the overall effect: the preaching (albeit of the reign of Antichrist) which will be undertaken by the abbot and his infernal colleagues after his flight contrasts with the neglect of ecclesiastical duty by Damian which Dunbar attacks in The Fenzeit Freir of Tungland, and we are perhaps intended to observe the difference.

In none of the last four poems I have discussed is the moral element self-evident to a modern reader at first glance, and if it is true that Dunbar's own audience was probably more sensitive to the nuances of traditional images and motifs, and to the interplay of an ironically-treated persona and the poet's own personality, it is equally the case that Dunbar relies to a very great extent upon hints and innuendoes rather than upon direct statement. In every case in this group of poems, the meaning at its fullest must be inferred through a sensitivity to the variations which Dunbar introduces in his treatment of familiar genres: Aesopic fable, Franciscan hagiography, anti-mendicant satire, bird parliaments, apocalyptic literature, and everywhere the tradition of dream and vision. Yet the absence of direct moral statement and the prevailingly comic tone do not preclude moral intention, and there is, I believe, a strong case for regarding Dunbar as a fundamentally serious poet, no less concerned with the moral instruction of his audience than Henryson or Chaucer. His vision is perhaps less far-reaching, and less humane, than Henryson's, but his wit is often sharper and his perception is certainly no less keen. The condemnation of sexual excess in "This hindir nycht in Dumfermeling", of

worldly and neglectful clerics in How dunbar wes desyrd to be ane freir and in the Damian poems is no less clear than the treatment of similar themes in The Testament of Cresseid and in parts of the Morall Fabillis, but Henryson's longer and more developed narratives allow a fuller expression of character and of moral principle than does Dunbar's ironic allusiveness. The personal element, too, is an omnipresent influence in Dunbar's moral narratives, both in the poet's concern with particular objects for his criticism, such as Damian, and more generally in the projection of a literary personality which, even when the narrator is treated ironically, is so strikingly similar to Dunbar's own (as we understand it from the body of his work as a whole) that the underlying ironic intention has frequently been missed.

Dunbar's intermittent use of allegoria, the rhetorical device of personification, and his more frequent introduction of at least some of the elements of formal allegory and dream-vision, have already been discussed in passing in this chapter. It remains to consider three poems in which one or other of these devices plays a central role (Bewty and the Presoneir, The Thrissil and the Rois, The Goldyn Targe), and another, The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Women and the Wedo, which, while it is in no sense allegorical, has some formal connection with the others and is moreover closely related to them in theme. All four, in fact, deal with love, marriage and sexuality, although it must be admitted that The Thrissil and the Rois is concerned



with a good deal else besides. Taken together, these four poems cast valuable light upon one another, and tell us much about Dunbar's moral vision and about his technique as a moral poet.

Of the four, Bewty and the Presoneir is in many ways the simplest. In method and in imagery it has something in common with King Hart: both derive from the chivalric side of the Roman de la Rose tradition, and both employ conceits of imprisonment to express the pains of love. But Dunbar is, as almost always, much more terse, and his poem extends to only 112 lines, by contrast with the thousand or so of King Hart. Again, this is one of Dunbar's narratives which employ some of the techniques of lyric: each of the eight-line stanzas ends with a variation of the "Bewty and the presoneir" formula, which thus virtually amounts to a refrain. The personifications are used by Dunbar as a kind of moral shorthand, and there is very little elaboration of any kind, but the allegorical action is carefully thought out, and there is a degree of dramatic realization which is rare in later allegory. This comes partly from the sort of detail which we found also in Meditatioun in Wyntir:

Gud Houp rownit in my eir,  
And bad me baldlie breve a bill;  
With Lawliness he suld it beir,  
With Fair Service send it hir till.  
I wouk, and wret hir all my will;  
Fair Service fur withouttin feir,  
Sayand till hir with wordis still,  
'Haif pety of your presoneir.'

(41-8)

The whispering of Gud Houp is a vivid touch which brings the

catalogue of abstractions to life, and this is one of the keys to the poem's success. Another is the lucidity of the allegory itself: it makes good sense when translated into non-allegorical language, since we can readily understand, within the conventions of amour courtois, that inspired by hope of success the lover tacitly petitions the lady for her love through his humility and his "service". And most of the poem can be "de-allegorized" in this way.

The personifications are divided into two factions, for the most part with due regard to the overall sense of the allegory. The lady's company includes Bewty (who seems at the end almost to be identified with the lady herself), Strangenes (which perhaps represents the lady's disdain), Comparesone, Langour (here the division breaks down, since Langour, while a member of the lady's garrison, is surely an attribute of the poet), Scorne, Gud Fame, and Sklander (again not properly an attribute of the lady, but an external enemy). On the side of the lover are, as we have seen, Gud Houp, Lawlines and Fair Service, together with Thocht, Lust (desire or pleasure, but with no clear pejorative sense, as far as one can tell from the handling of the character) and Bissines. All this group are clearly associated with the attributes of the lover, and the action of the poem follows the classic pattern of the romantic affair: the lover is a prisoner of the lady's beauty but overcomes her resistance through a combination of determination and the right moral qualities. One of the rather surprising features of Dunbar's treatment of this standard plot is the jauntiness of his account:



Thrucht Skornes nos thai put a prik,  
 This he wes banist and gat a blek;  
 Comparisone wes erdit quik,  
 And Langour lap and brak his nek.  
 Thai sailyeit fast, all the fek,  
 Lust chasit my ladeis chalmirleir,  
 Gud Fame was drownit in a sek;  
 Thus ransonit thai the presoneir.

(81-8)

The language here is highly colloquial, and contrasts with the rather formal diction which generally characterizes fifteenth-century allegorical poetry. The stanza-form itself contributes to this lightness of tone, but it is further heightened by such idiomatic phrases (highlighted by the rhyme) as "gat a blek" and "all the fek". Dunbar is at pains, then, to avoid the ponderous rhetoric and elaborate descriptive passages which we find even in such effective allegories as King Hart.

But it does not follow from this that Bewty and the Presoneir is lacking in serious content. Beyond the conventional machinery of thralldom and battle is a clear purpose on the poet's part, which springs in my view from the drowning of Gud Fame, who is mentioned here for the first time in the poem, at l. 87. Whose Gud Fame (i.e. reputation) is in danger is not immediately obvious: is it the lady's, threatened by her involvement in an amorous liaison, or is it the lover's, the victim of malicious rumour? Since the drowning of Gud Fame is part of the defeat of the lady's party, and leads directly to the ransoming of the lover, it seems more probable that the death of Gud Fame signifies the lady's surrender, but then it is difficult to explain the relationship between these lines and the ones which follow:

Fra Sklandir hard Lust had undone,  
 His enemies, him aganis,  
 Assemblit ane semely sort full sone,  
 And rais and rowttit all the planis.  
 His cusing in the court remanis,  
 Bot jalous folkis and geangleiris,  
 And fals Invy that no thing lanis,  
 Blew out on Luvis presoneir.

(89-96)

I take it that in terms of the metaphor this passage describes a counter-attack, led by Sklandir and Invy, which results in the defeat of Lust. There is no explicit connection between the drowning of Gud Fame and the triumph of Sklandir and Invy, and yet the two images fit together so neatly that some relationship seems evident. The threat of malicious gossip, prejudicing the lady against the lover, is a commonplace of later medieval love poetry, but I think we are entitled to conclude that in Bewty and the Presoneir the injury to reputation is not merely a barrier to the lover's success but a consequence of the affair itself. This interpretation is supported by the resolution offered by Dunbar, the intervention of "Matremony, that nobill king" (l. 97), who drives Sklandir away and presides over the reconciliation of lover and lady. The effect of this bond is expressed in appropriately feudal terms:

Be that of eild wes Gud Famis air,  
 And cumyne to continuatioun,  
 And to the court maid his repair,  
 Quhair Matremony than woir the crowne.  
 He gat ane confirmatioun,  
 All that his modir aucht but weir,  
 And baid still, as it wes resone,  
 With Bewty and the presoneir.

(105-12)

This moral sasine is, of course, a natural consequence of the reign of Matremony: Dunbar is saying that sexual relationships are licit within marriage but not outside it. This conclusion



is neither original nor surprising, but Dunbar blends it neatly with the conventional imagery of amour courtois, and in this sense (though in no other) Bewty and the Presoneir is faintly reminiscent of The Kingis Quair. It is not just that the poet is in favour of marriage, but that he sees in matrimony a resolution of the pains of love: at best, romantic love is a gallant but hopeless quest for the medieval poet, at worst, a mere cover for sensuality,<sup>72</sup> but through the legitimation of love in marriage it can be turned into a lasting and rational ("as it wes resone", l. 111) relationship.

Marriage is again the subject in The Thrissil and the Rois, but this time it is a particular and identifiable marriage which is in question — that of James IV and Margaret of England in 1503. The poem is, however, very far from being merely occasional, and the dream-framework and the allegorical machinery are designed as much to present an argument as for rhetorical elaboration. Although the celebratory aspect is not the last important part of The Thrissil and the Rois, a great deal of the narrative can be explained only by reference to Dunbar's less explicit, more serious intentions. This fact was first noted by Tom Scott, who points to the element of advice which enters through the speeches of Nature to the lion, eagle and thistle, which are respectively rulers of the animal, bird and floral kingdoms.<sup>73</sup> Although I disagree with many of the details of Dr Scott's reading of the poem, I take the point that these speeches are of central importance, and that the didacticism which they reveal is a key to the understanding of the poem as a whole and of Dunbar's theme. Without some such

approach, large sections of the poem, and many of its specific references, do not make sense and must be ignored or dismissed as mere rhetoric. The entire dialogue with May raises problems of this kind, and even such minor details as the dating of the dream cannot be explained simply in terms of the royal marriage the poem nominally celebrates, since although the poem is dated 9 May the marriage took place on 8 August.<sup>74</sup> Some other explanation must therefore be sought which will fit in with the rest of the poem.

The Thrissil and the Rois falls naturally into three principal parts: the introductory description by the poet of his state of mind and of his discussion with May (ll. 1-63), the parliament called by Nature and her injunctions to the various rulers (ll. 64-161), and the praise of the Rois and the dreamer's awakening (ll. 162-89). Clearly, any reading which does not account for the juxtaposition of these three parts cannot do justice to Dunbar's structural scheme, assuming of course that there is some underlying logic to the form of the poem. The first of the three sections is perhaps the most puzzling. It appears to contain at least one serious contradiction; the opening describes a conventional Spring setting, with birdsong, flowers, and so on, and yet the dreamer seems to deny the reality of his environment:

'Quhairto,' quod I, 'sall I uprys at morrow,  
For in this May few birdis herd I sing?  
Thai haif moir caus to weip and plane thair sorrow,  
Thy air it is nocht holsum nor benyng;  
Lord Eolus dois in thy sessone ring;  
So busteous ar the blastis of his horne,  
Amang thy bewis to walk I haif forborne.'

(29-35)



The exact context of these allegations is not immediately apparent. The poet is asleep (l. 8), and therefore the dialogue with May is itself part of the dream setting; yet when he follows her into the garden (also part of the dream), he finds that the birds are singing and that Spring is well advanced (ll. 45-63). It follows from this inconsistency either that the poet is mistaken in his statements about the climate, or that there is a distinction to be made between the landscape he complains of and the locus amoenus in which he subsequently finds himself. There is certainly a contrast between the natural world which is represented by May herself, "sobir, benyng, and full of mansuetude" (l. 17) and the Spring scene described by the dreamer, in which "Thy [i.e. May's] air it is nocht holsum nor benyng" (l. 32). May's response to his complaint, too, is interesting: she smiles, and reminds him of his undertaking to write in praise of the Rois. Dunbar does not really make his intentions explicit, as is so often the case, but it does not seem that we are to disregard the dreamer's statements altogether. It appears rather that the Rois is central to the contrast of the two landscapes: in the sequence of the poem, the bleak wilderness of the poet's blasted Spring is replaced by the idyllic setting of the Parliament which Nature holds to bless the union of thistle and rose.

Taken at its simplest level, this can be interpreted as a compliment to Margaret: her arrival will affect the very climate for the better. But I think that Dunbar's point goes beyond courtly flattery. There are in essence three Springs described in the first nine stanzas of The Thrissil and the Rois:

the ideal one portrayed by May and denied by the dreamer, the blasted one of the dreamer's complaint, and the idyllic one presided over by Nature into which the dreamer is conducted by May. It is not too difficult to make sense of this pattern. The conventions of amatory poetry lead us to expect an unambiguously favourable description of a natural setting in early May, the conventional scene of the celebration of natural sexuality which parallels (or ironically inverts) the lover's own condition. We are not told why the poet finds his own environment so different but it is evident that the lack is supplied by the advent of the Rois, whose coming is supervised by Nature herself. What is at issue is in part the nature of Nature: Dunbar is perhaps suggesting that there is something false about the conventions of formal amatory poetry, and it may be that, as has sometimes been suggested, his sceptical comments about the weather represent a wry and consciously realistic view of the Scottish climate.<sup>75</sup> But we should not miss the fact that the observation is quite specific:

For in this May few birdis herd I sing .....

[My emphasis]

There is more at issue here than the weather, I think, and that is why it is possible for the advent of the Rois to make such a difference. The vision which follows, of the parliament called by Nature and of the universal celebration of the union of Thrissil and Rois, is one of natural harmony, a harmony which is apparently absent at the beginning of the poem. It is this disharmony which is symbolized by the unnatural weather; in other words, the primary sense of the opening section is not



that poets get the weather wrong, but rather that something is obstructing the natural course of the climate. In order to understand the significance of this line of argument, we must turn to the speech of Nature.

The parliament which she convenes involves the whole of the natural world, and the summons which she issues anticipates the structure of the parliament itself:

With that annone scho send the swyft Ro  
To bring in beistis of all conditioun;  
The restles Suallow commandit scho also  
To feche all fowll of small and greit renown;  
And, to gar flouris compeir of all fassoun,  
Full craftely conjurit scho the Yarrow,  
Quhilk did furth swirk als swift as ony arrow.

(78-84)

It is probably no coincidence that this assembly, like the Scottish parliament, has three Estates, but Dunbar does not pursue this analogy in any of the subsequent detail. What matters for the allegory is partly that this is an inclusive vision of the whole of Nature's realm, partly that Nature is thus enabled to give three distinct speeches of advice, which together make up a coherent basis for good government.<sup>76</sup> This tripartite division is set up with some care, and it involves Dunbar in a rather curious incidental reference: the roe deer and the swallow are obviously chosen by Nature as messengers because of their speed, and the same presumably applies to the yarrow (or milfoil, Achillea millefolium), "quhilk did furth swirk als swift as ony arrow". It seems probable that this rather opaque remark is actually a botanical joke, and that Dunbar is alluding to the speed with which yarrow spreads.<sup>77</sup> Again we find the complexity of purpose which is so characteristic of

Dunbar: his primary objective here is to establish the parallelism of the three realms of Nature, but he takes the opportunity to lighten the tone with a passing play of wit.

Nature deals with each of the realms in turn, proceeding from the animals to the birds and thence to the flowers, the central category in the poem and the basis for the marriage-symbolism which marks the function of The Thrissil and the Rois as an epithalamium. If the third part is concerned with the marriage, the first two are quite clearly related to kingship:

'The King of Beistis mak I the,  
And the cheif protector in woddis and schawis;  
Onto thi leigis go furth, and keip the lawis.

'Exerce justice with mercy and conscience,  
And lat no small beist suffir skaith na skornis  
Of greit beistis that bene of moir piscence;  
Do law elyk to aipis and unicornis,  
And lat no bowgle, with his busteous hornis,  
The meik pluch ox oppress, for all his pryd,  
Bot in the yok go peciable him besyd.'

(103-12)

Syne crownit scho the Egle King of Fowlis,  
And as steill dertis scherpit scho his pennis,  
And bawd him be als just to awppis and owlis,  
As unto pacokkis, papingais, or crennis,  
And mak a law for wycht fowlis and for wrennis;  
And lat no fowll of ravyne do efferay,  
Nor devoir birdis bot his awin pray.

(120-6)

Reacting against the received critical opinion that Dunbar in The Thrissil and the Rois (and, indeed, in his other allegorical poems) had nothing to say, Dr Scott exaggerates the difference between these two passages, and argues that the lion represents the king "in his role of Government", the eagle "his role as law-giver, justice".<sup>78</sup> They seem to me, however, to be strikingly parallel: both place great emphasis upon the need for



justice, defined as the imposition of a single set of laws which are enforced alike for all subjects. This preoccupation with justice is thoroughly characteristic of later medieval political poetry,<sup>79</sup> and once again we will be disappointed if we seek to find in Dunbar evidence of original thinking. The king is here portrayed as the fountainhead of justice and the protector of the weak against the strong, and these are quite certainly political commonplaces. Dunbar repeats his point, perhaps for emphasis (wisely giving the second version only as reported speech), even to the extent of making

Do law elyk to aipis and unicornis  
exactly parallel

And bawd him be als just to awppis and owlis  
As unto pacokkis, papingais, or crennis,  
And mak a law for wycht fowlis and for wrennis .....

and it seems clear that, taken together, the lion and the eagle embody the public side of kingship, which has so obvious an effect on the well-being of the State.

The central point of this section of the poem dealing with the monarch's public function is therefore equality before the law. When she comes to the thistle, Nature turns from the king's public face to his private one, and emphasizes not equality but discrimination:

'In feild go furth, and fend the laif;

And sen thow art a king, thow be discreit;  
Herb without vertew thow hald nocht of sic pryce  
As herb of vertew and of odor sueit;  
And lat no nettill vyle and full of vyce  
Hir fallow to the gudly flour delyce;  
Nor latt no wyld weid, full of churlichenes  
Compair hir till the lilleis nobilnes;

Not hald non udir flour in sic denty  
As the fresche Ros of cullour reid and quhyt;

For gife thow dois, hurt is thyne honesty,  
 Conciddering that no flour is so perfyte,  
 So full of vertew, plesans, and delyt,  
 So full of blisfull angeilik bewty,  
 Imperiall birth, honour and dignite.'

(133-47)

The praise of the rose with which the speech ends is of course the principal rhetorical purpose of the poem, but there is more here than simple celebration of Scotland's new queen. Dr Scott may well be right in suggesting that the references to nettles and wild weeds point to James IV's known character as a "habitual libertine",<sup>80</sup> but again the poem transcends these personal, occasional preoccupations. The insistence upon virtue in private morality, and upon recognition of the moral qualities of the virtuous queen, reflect a conjunction of public and private considerations which we found also in The Thre Prestis of Peblis,<sup>81</sup> and which figures prominently also in Lindsay's Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis.<sup>82</sup> For the king's moral probity and the welfare of the State are almost indistinguishable in a society dependent upon the king for the enforcement of the law and the maintenance of true religion, and the two sides of Nature's argument are therefore in reality parts of a single view of the obligations of the king to his subjects.

This brings us back to the opening of the poem, and to a number of unanswered questions. It is, I think, no accident that The Thrissil and the Rois is set on 9 May, for on this date was celebrated the feast of the translation of the relics of St Andrew.<sup>83</sup> Such specific datings are seldom given in medieval poetry without good reason, and this association with the moving of the relics of Scotland's national saint to the



ecclesiastical centre at St Andrews fits in well with the poem's theme. For the true subject of The Thrissil and the Rois is not Dunbar's insomnia, or the weather, or even the forthcoming royal marriage, but the well-being of Scotland itself. That all is not well with the kingdom is apparent from the congenial natural setting of the opening, but Dunbar suggests that the intervention of Nature, and in particular the wedding which she sponsors, will bring an improvement:

The commoun voce uprais of birdis small,  
 Apone this wys, 'O blissit be the hour  
 That thow wes chosin to be our principall;  
 Welcome to be our princes of honour,  
 Our perle, our plesans, and our paramour,  
 Our peax, our play, our plane felicite,  
 Chryst the conserf frome all adversite.'

(176-82)

The note of formal eulogy is unmistakable, but I think there is more in these lines than rhetorical compliment: the union of thistle and rose is in part a mirror of, in part the source of that natural harmony to which Dunbar looks forward. Read in this way, the various elements of the poem make sense together, and the machinery of dream-vision and parliament of Nature's kingdom can be seen to be, as they are in Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls,<sup>84</sup> more than mere decoration, a carefully-organized celebration not just of a royal marriage but of that divine order, based upon public and personal virtue, which is the foundation of the Christian commonwealth in medieval political theory.

The difficulty which attaches to the reading of The Thrissil and the Rois along these lines is that so much is implicit, dependent upon a subtle juxtaposition of elements and images

rather than upon direct statement. Dunbar's allegories are sometimes rather like cryptograms: their sense emerges not from an explicit moralitas, or from a set of readily-translatable personifications (as in Bewty and the Presoneir), but from vague hints and allusions and the subtle use of traditional terms and images, which often have special significance in the literary and philosophical milieu within which Dunbar worked, and which were presumably laden with meaning for the poet's original audience. I have recently considered this problem in some detail in discussing Dunbar's most substantial allegory, The Goldyn Targe.<sup>85</sup> Again in the case of this poem, modern critics have not been quick to detect a serious intention underlying Dunbar's elaborate rhetoric, and have paid little attention to the implications of the allegorical action. Yet it is basic to the allegory that the dreamer/poet undergoes a struggle of the psychomachia type between Reason, his protector, and an army of feminine attributes who evidently represent between them an otherwise unidentified — and possibly altogether abstract — lady. In this respect, the action resembles that of Bewty and the Presoneir, but The Goldyn Targe is in truth a very different poem, not only in technique but also in content. Whereas Bewty and the Presoneir offers marriage as a solution to the dilemma of amour courtois, The Goldyn Targe has nothing positive to offer, and the wasteland with which the poet's dream ends resembles the situation at the beginning of the shorter poem, and is resolved on this occasion only by the dreamer's awakening.

From the point of view of technique, The Goldyn Targe is



more elaborate than Bewty and the Presoneir, and much more allusive. It is distinguished by that decorative richness for which it has been principally admired, and which is an essential part of Dunbar's symbolic method on this occasion. The subtlety of the descriptive technique can be fully appreciated when part of the opening depiction of the landscape in which the poet falls asleep is compared with the same scene when he wakes up at the end of the poem:

For mirth of May, wyth skipkis and wyth hoppis,  
 The birdis sang upon the tender croppis,  
     With curiouse note, as Venus chapell clerkis:  
 The rosis yong, new spreding of thair knopis,  
 War powderit brycht with hevinly beriall droppis,  
     Throu bemes rede birnyng as ruby sperkis;  
     The skyes rang for schoutyng of the larkis,  
 The purpur hevyn, our scailit in silvir sloppis,  
     Ourgilt the treis, branchis, lef, and barkis.

(19-27)

And as I did awake of my sueving,  
 The joyfull birdis merily did syng  
     For myrth of Phebus tendir bemes schene;  
 Suete war the vapouris, depaynt wyth flouris ying;  
     The air attemperit, sobir, and amene;  
     In quhite and rede was all the felde besene,  
 Throu Naturis nobil fresch anamalyng,  
     In mirthfull May, of eviry moneth Quene.

(244-52)

Whereas the garden of the opening stanzas is described in purely physical terms, with many musical and lapidary images to reinforce the sensuous effect, the adjectives of the latter passage are almost without exception moral ones. There is, furthermore, a more measured tone in ll. 244-52, achieved partly through the use of masculine instead of feminine rhymes: feminine rhymes dominate the second, third, fourth and seventh stanzas of the poem, but virtually disappear thereafter. This contrast is, I think, basic to the structure of the poem, and

it points to a shift in awareness which is only implied but which is clearly very important for our understanding of The Goldyn Targe.

The message of the dream experienced by the poet is surely that the pleasures of love, which are customarily evoked by the sort of natural imagery with which the poem and the dream both begin, are a snare and a delusion, and that the wilderness, psychological and ultimately physical, which the dreamer observes towards the end, is a normal consequence of the blinding of Resoun. Various devices are used to drive home this moral argument. The abstract personifications are perhaps the most obvious markers, although they are rather obscured for us by such semantic shifts as that in the meaning of "reason".<sup>86</sup> There are many references, too, to eyesight and perception, culminating in the crucial metaphor of Resoun's blindness, which of course echoes the traditional notion of caecus amor, but which is anticipated in The Goldyn Targe in a variety of ways. Since the dreamer attracts the attention of the ladies by attempting to obtain too close a view of the court of Venus, he is initially endangered "all throu a luke" (l. 135), and several other passing comments maintain our consciousness of sight,<sup>87</sup> which by the end of the dream at least has an evident meaning beyond the literal. The motif of sight, moreover, connects with the notion of appearance, and particularly deceptive appearance, which in turn culminates in the complex and ambiguous oxymoron which conveys the spiritual consequence of Resoun's blindness:

Quhy was thou blyndit, Resoun? quhi, allace!



And gert ane hell my paradise appere,  
 And mercy seme, quhare that I fand no grace.

(214-6)

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>88</sup> the latter two of these lines move in opposite directions. In l. 215, the narrator suggests that the effect of the blinding of Resoun is to make the paradise-garden seem like Hell. That the landscape is paradisaical in the narrator's view is established much earlier, in l. 72, but there is good reason to believe that the statement is to be taken ironically (as it is, for example, in Chaucer's Merchant's Tale<sup>89</sup>), and that this Paradise is illusory. This is apparently confirmed by what happens: with the defeat of Resoun, the illusion crumbles and the landscape seems quite different. It is important to notice, however, that this too is an appearance; in the confused, subjective world of the narrator's vision there are no certainties. The second contradiction is more straightforward: the narrator believes that the ladies' intentions are "merciful" (here Dunbar is playing with a familiar courtly euphemism), but the belief is mistaken, and within little more than a stanza he is rejected and abandoned. The complex contradictions here have, I think, a thematic point: within the world of the dream, deceptive appearances and the subjection of Resoun lead inevitably to confusion and misery, but there is a further, unambiguous reality outside the dream, into which the narrator re-awakens with a changed moral perspective.

A further source of richness in the sense of The Goldyn Targe is the introduction of characters from classical mythology. It seems likely that for some of these, specifically those

mentioned in the company of Venus and Nature (ll. 73-90) Dunbar drew directly from Lydgate's Resoun and Sensuallite,<sup>90</sup> and it is true that this list does not appear to have any direct bearing upon the allegory. I do not think, however, that the same can be said of the company of Cupid, which begins with Cupid himself, Mars, Saturn and Mercury, all familiar planetary divinities, but then moves on to a group of much less common gods:

Thare was the god of gardingis, Priapus;  
 Thare was the god of wildernes, Phanus;  
     And Janus, god of entree delytable;  
 Thare was the god of fludis, Neptunus;  
 Thare was the god of wyndis, Eolus,  
     With variand luke, ryght lyke a lord unstable;  
     Thare was Bacus the gladder of the table;  
 Thare was Pluto, the elrich incubus,  
     In cloke of grene, his court usit no sable.

(118-26)

This stanza contains a wealth of hints and suggestions, typical of Dunbar's allusive allegorical method. The pairing of Priapus and Phanus (i.e. Faunus) is particularly suggestive: Priapus is no doubt appropriate in view of the elaborate garden setting of both the dreamer and his vision, but the intrusion of Faunus contrasts with the fertile environment of the locus amoenus, and looks forward to the wasteland which is the result of the dreamer's subjection. Janus, the "god of entree delytable", perhaps marks the beginning of the dreamer's involvement, since Dunbar alludes specifically to his role as god of beginnings, but his image is traditionally two-faced, and therefore perhaps evokes the ambivalence of the lover's situation.<sup>91</sup> The instability of Eolus probably functions in the same way, and we should not forget that it is Eolus who ultimately



intervenes, bringing the wilderness which marks the end of the dream and symbolizes the dreamer's emotional condition. Neptune is paired with Eolus, partly perhaps because of the river which plays such an important role in the opening description of the locus amoenus, more probably because together they embody the natural forces of climate and landscape. I am not clear about the function of Pluto among this company: the greenness of his raiment probably denotes fertility, an ironic touch in view of the play with lushness and desolation which Dunbar makes in the poem, and fertility moreover in its pejorative, sensual aspect — Pluto is after all "the elrich incubus".

It is characteristic of Dunbar that this negative side of the poem should be present only in such hints and allusions. Whereas a work like Lydgate's Reson and Sensuallyte is carefully balanced, and the operation of sensualitas is explicitly demonstrated within the allegory, we can only infer such concerns in The Goldyn Targe on the basis of admittedly tenuous evidence. The suffering of the dreamer consequent upon the blinding of Resoun is clear enough, but it is for us to perceive the relationship between these events and the elaborate description of the garden setting and indeed the whole "classical" machinery of gods and goddesses. The link between all these images is, I think, the notion of perception: it is, after all, the appearance of the garden which the poet initially describes, and appearances are shown in the vision to be deceptive. After the dream, the poet sees the garden as it really is, not as a temple of the senses but as an expression of natural moderation and order. This is the significance of the change in tone and

descriptive method between the first and last parts of the poem to which I have already drawn attention: the poet has learned through the painful experience of his vision where reliance on sensory pleasure can lead, and it is Nature, not Venus, whom he finally acknowledges.

The Goldyn Targe ends with three stanzas which have on the face of it nothing to do with the themes of the poem as I have defined them, and which have been cited in the past as evidence that Dunbar was here concerned with the nature of poetry as such.<sup>92</sup> In response to this argument three points ought to be made. First, these final stanzas represent a formal, rhetorical exercise rather than a statement of theme, and as such they have no necessary direct relationship to what has gone before. The address to the book is a familiar variant of the topos excusatio, parallels to which can be found throughout later medieval French and English verse.<sup>93</sup> Second, they are striking as much for what they do not say as for what they do; in other words, we might expect to find in such a poem a formal envoi addressing the poem to the lady. But the absence of this envoi is thoroughly compatible with the themes of the poem as I understand them, for The Goldyn Targe is not a love poem, but rather an attack upon love as an aspect of worldliness, and therefore an envoi to the lady would not only be irrelevant but would actually be at odds with the rest. The stanzas in praise of Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate are similarly part of the formal ending, and are within a well-established rhetorical tradition.<sup>94</sup> But even here, Dunbar is not merely concerned with diction for its own sake, as has sometimes been claimed:



O reverend Chaucere, rose of rethoris all,  
 As in oure tong ane flour imperiall,  
     That raise in Britane evir, quho redis rycht,  
 Thou beris of makaris the tryumph riall;  
 Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall  
     This mater coud illumynit have full brycht:  
     Was thou noucht of oure Inglisch all the lycht,  
 Surmounting eviry tong terrestriall,  
     Alls fer as Mayis morow dois mydnycht?

(253-61)

The crucial words here are "This mater coud illumynit have", for the purpose of rhetoric is not mere decoration but the lucid expression of meaning, and Dunbar points to the content of his poem in these lines as well as to its form. The "mater" of Dunbar's poetry has been the subject of critical neglect until very recently, for reasons which I have in the foregoing pages been attempting to explain.

That The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo is a poem about sexuality is perhaps sufficiently obvious: its techniques are in this respect much more direct than those of The Goldyn Targe. But Dunbar's avoidance of any outright commitment to a point of view remains a critical problem, and the satirical tone of the Tretis raises difficulties of the same kind that we have confronted in dealing with his other narrative poems. Two fundamental problems must be solved in any adequate reading of the Tretis: how seriously is the poem intended, and at whom, or what, is the main thrust of the satire directed? On the latter question, critical opinion divides fairly clearly into two camps. For the majority, Dunbar is simply satirizing the women, and the Tretis is an example of that lively anti-feminist tradition which goes back to Chrysostom and beyond, and which continued to enjoy currency throughout the

sixteenth century.<sup>95</sup> More recently, it has sometimes been suggested that Dunbar was rather more sympathetic towards his women characters than received opinion will admit, and that the true object of the satire is a social system, and more particularly a marriage system, over which women had no control.<sup>96</sup> The degree of seriousness with which Dunbar approaches his subject, whatever it is, is a matter of greater difficulty. For an early critic like David Irving, the moral tone is not in doubt:

He has characterized the three dissolute females with admirable powers of description. Nor is the charge of immorality to be urged against him. He has exhibited these characters, not as patterns of imitation, but as objects of infamy.

97

Kurt Wittig, by contrast, while he accepts the anti-feminist basis of the poem, finds the comic element dominant:

... Dunbar did not set out to compose a satire on women, or to censure feminine immorality; he took far too much mischievous delight in his chosen subject for that.

98

The disagreement is one which is more or less inevitable with a poet of Dunbar's allusiveness and subtlety of tone, and it lies behind many of the arguments in this chapter. Dunbar's seriousness of intention is often undermined by a levity of manner which is an essential part of his method, and the problem for the critic is to elucidate the serious theme without destroying, or underestimating, the poet's wit and lightness of touch.

No better illustration of this phenomenon could be found than the opening lines of the Tretis. Dunbar employs a complex



mixture of traditions and techniques: the long alliterative measure,<sup>99</sup> a formal diction with occasional aureate phrases, the conventional attributes of the locus amoenus, the characteristic features of feminine beauty. All this is intended, as is generally accepted, to create a particular set of expectations in the audience, but the expectations are not of the women alone, but of the poem. The contrast between the physical beauty of the three ladies and the moral ugliness which they subsequently reveal is immediately obvious, but the poem itself defeats our expectations also, by offering not an allegory but a "realistic" account of a conversation, not tutelary goddesses but women of (literally) exemplary viciousness, not elegant aureation but extreme verbal crudity. This deliberate subversion of our reactions is in part comic, for we smile at the dissonance of the women's drinking ("Thay wauchtit at the wicht wyne", l. 39) which is the first real indication of the change of tone. Throughout the poem, familiar images and conventions occur in new contexts, and Dunbar clearly relies upon his audience's expectations as a source of both humour and moral judgment.

With the opening of the dialogue, a further literary tradition is introduced, that of the demande d'amour:<sup>100</sup>

'Bewrie,' said the Wedo, 'ye woddit wemen ying,  
 Quhat mirth ye fand in maryage, sen ye war menis wyffis;  
 Reveill gif ye rewit that rakles condition?  
 Or gif that ever ye luffit leyd upone lyf mair  
 Nor thame that ye your fayth hes festinit for ever?  
 Or gif ye think, had ye chois, that ye wald cheis better?  
 Think ye it nocht ane blist band that bindis so fast,  
 That none undo it a deill may bot the deith ane?'

(41-8)

The issues raised are fundamental ones, and are capable of

serious debate within the bounds of serious medieval theorizing about love. The notion of choice is of particular importance, since it is employed in many courtly poems, including The Kingis Quair,<sup>101</sup> especially in relation to the annual choosing of mates supposedly made by birds on St Valentine's Eve. It is this tradition which is taken up by the first wife:

'It is agane the law of luf, of kynd, and of nature,  
Togiddir hairtis to strene, that stryveis with uther:  
Birdis hes ane better law na bernis me meikill,  
That ilk yeir, with new joy, joyis ane maik,  
And fangis thame ane fresche feyr, unfulyeit, and constant,  
And lattis thair fulyeit feiris flie quhair thai pleis.'

(58-63)

There is a big difference, of course, between the emphasis given to the image by the Wife and that of the tradition, for while courtly poets use the joyful mating of the birds to contrast with their own unsuccessful suing for their ladies' favours, the Wife sees that the analogy, if pursued to its logical conclusion, can be used to advocate the abolition of the bond for life. If this is a distortion of the courtly sense of the motif it is nevertheless, within the terms of the Wife's assumptions, a legitimate extension of the argument, and it should make us alert to the presence of other courtly notions in the Tretis, similarly distorted or perverted.

A second aspect of the first Wife's views upon choice casts valuable light upon the themes of the Tretis as a whole, for she wishes the choosing or, more particularly, the right to replace her mate, to be solely upon her side; although she allows some reciprocity ("That I nicht cheis, and be chosin, and change quhen me lykit", l. 75), the changing is to suit her, and it is clear from the overall sense of this first part of her speech (ll. 50-



88) that she wishes the freedom to be women's, and at men's expense. Marriage, here and elsewhere throughout the Tretis, is conceived of as sexual warfare, and the women have in common their desire not for equality but for superiority, sovereigntee. This attitude relates to the essential sexuality of their thinking, which is everywhere stressed:

'We suld have feiris as fresche to fang quhen us likit,  
And gif all larbaris thair leveis, quhen thai lak curage.'

(66-7)

Once again, the Wife uses a courtly term in a debased sense: "curage" normally signifies manliness in the lover, haughtiness in his lady, or, more generally, mind or disposition, but as the Wife uses it, it is a synonym for virility in a narrow sexual sense. This crude sexuality is one of the attributes of women in the anti-feminist tradition, along with the desire for sovereignty in marriage, and together these motifs contribute a great deal to Dunbar's attack upon the women.<sup>102</sup>

When the first Wife turns from theorizing about marriage to a description of her circumstances she abandons all pretence of gentility, and the tone becomes unequivocally one of flyting. Taken at a superficial level, it might seem that her situation is indeed horrific, but Dunbar is at pains to prevent our sympathy becoming too great. The basic rhetorical ploy of all three principal speeches is self-exposure: like Chaucer's Pardoner, or more immediately, the Wife of Bath,<sup>103</sup> the three women stand condemned from their own mouths, and the first Wife confesses (though with none of the guilt that that term perhaps implies) to a form of prostitution within marriage:

'Ay quhen that caribald carll wald clyme one my wambe,  
Than am I dangerus and daine and dour of my will;

Yit leit I never that larbar my leggis ga betueene,  
 To fyle my flesche, na fumyll me, without a fee gret;  
 And thocht his pene purly me payis in bed,  
 His purse pays richely in recompense efter .....

(131-6)

The effect of this admission is to make the man rather than the woman the victim, and the zest with which she exacts revenge for his sexual inadequacy, while it does not win our sympathy for him, at least prevents us from taking too seriously her claim to be the wronged party. The ironic use of courtly language is continued also, for the Wife's remark that she is "dangerus and daine" links her with the haughty lady of amour courtois: the rest of her language, and even the alliteratively-linked phrase "dour of my will", reveals the most un-courtly motives which underlie her behaviour.

The seriousness of the complaint is also undermined by the response of the other women, and the mutual laughter which suggests that none of them is too concerned about their situation:

Quhen that the semely had said her sentence to end,  
 Than all thai leuch apon loft with latis full mery,  
 And raucht the cop round about full of riche wynis,  
 And ralyeit lang, or thai wald rest, with ryatus speche.

(146-9)

This merriment is hardly concordant with the miseries described by the first Wife, and her position is further subverted by the ironic use of "semely". The second Wife, too, is introduced as "the plesand" (l. 158), and her long complaint is followed by another burst of laughter and another round of drinking (ll. 239-44). It is important, I think, to distinguish between this laughter and Dunbar's own. The poet, no doubt, takes a certain pleasure in the creatures he has invented, but it seems clear



that the ribald laughter of the three women is a deliberate tactical move, and that its purpose is to alienate us from them. That Dunbar treats the women ironically is quite apparent from the repeated use of terms like "semely", "plesand", and "amyable" (l. 239), and this fact indicates a greater distance between the poet and his creations than some recent critics have allowed.<sup>104</sup> It is true that there is no explicit judgment offered within the Tretis, but that is an abstention which we should have come to expect from Dunbar. The women are nowhere condemned directly, but they condemn themselves quite sufficiently through their own statements: this is most obviously true of the Wedo, whose speech is the rhetorical, emotional and ideological high-point of the poem.

The Wedo, it should be observed at once, does set herself up as a tutelary figure; she is not merely describing her own experiences, or her preferences, but she undertakes to instruct the others:

'God my spreit now inspir and my speche quyckin,  
And send me sentence to say, substantious and noble;  
Sa that my preching may pers your perverst hertis,  
And mak yow mekar to men in maneris and conditiounis.'

(247-50)

This pious and formal opening is, of course, mock-serious, and the meekness she advocates is apparent rather than real. But she does give advice, and she "preaches" a gospel of female sovereignty which embodies (and, therefore, purports to excuse) most of the familiar charges of the anti-feminist tradition. Her speech is above all very long: its 250-odd lines make up nearly half the Tretis, and it is a carefully-structured piece of rhetoric in which we are constantly aware of two intentions,

the Wedo's and Dunbar's own. For the Wedo, her life is a kind of exemplum to illustrate her precept:

'Be constant in your governance, and counterfeit gud  
maneris,  
Thought ye be kene, inconstant, and cruell of mynd ...'  
(259-60)

The programme of hypocrisy which she espouses is the basis for her whole life, and her success has been founded on not allowing her successive husbands and lovers to realize that her real aim has been to master them. The imagery she uses is suitably that of masculine domination:

'Quhen I the cure had all clene and him ourcummyn haill,  
I crew abone that craudone, as cok that wer victour ...'  
(325-6)

There is another important aspect of this simile, for animal imagery recurs throughout the poem, and especially in the Wedo's speech. She begins with a whole bestiary of such metaphors:

'Thought ye as tygris be terne, be treftable in luf,  
And be as turtoris in your talk, thought ye haif talis  
brukill;  
Be dragonis baith and dowis ay in double forme,  
And quhen it nedis yow, onone, note baith ther strenthis;  
Be amyable with humble face, as angellis apperand,  
And with a terrebill tail be stangand as edderis ...'  
(261-6)

The link between these images is the notion of hypocrisy, the theme of the Wedo's "sermon", but the last pair have a special resonance: the adder's sting, contrasted with an angelic countenance, is bound to suggest the serpent of the Fall, and we shall shortly see that there is good reason for supposing that the hint is both deliberate and significant.

The Wedo's quest for sovereigntee alternates throughout her speech with another theme, that of scarcely-bridled sexuality.



It occurs first during her account of her first marriage, to an old man who recalls both the first Wife's husband and a familiar medieval type:<sup>105</sup>

'I had a lufsummar leid my lust for to slokyn,  
That couth be secrete and sure and ay saif my honour,  
And sew bot at certayne tymes and in sicir places ...'

(283-5)

Her terminology is a curious mixture: "leid", "secrete", and "sew" are from the language of polite, euphemistic love-poetry, in which the lady's honour is an important consideration and means a good deal more (at least in theory) than just not getting caught, but the Wedo's real preoccupations are revealed in her reference to "my lust for to slokyn", a crude and overtly sexual phrase. Once established, this tension between the language of amour courtois and the Wedo's indiscriminate lust recurs throughout her speech:

'Bot mercy in to womanheid is a mekle vertu,  
For never bot in a gentill hert is generit ony ruth.'

(315-6)

Dunbar plays on this ambiguous meaning of "mercy", "vertu" and "ruth" elsewhere:

Sweit rois of vertew and of gentilnes,  
Delytsum lyllie of everie lustynes,  
Richest in bontie and in bewtie cleir,  
And everie vertew that is held most deir,  
Except onlie that ye ar mercyles.

106

In this latter instance, I think, the poet approaches the moral ambiguities of contemporary love poetry lightly, without passing judgment, but in the Tretis they are to be seen as part of the Wedo's hypocrisy, and as symptoms of an immorality which Dunbar sets out to condemn.

The most obvious, and climactic, use of the language and situations of courtly love in this way comes towards the end of the Wedo's speech, when she portrays herself at the centre of an outrageously orgiastic Court of Love. The euphemisms of service and devotion are here replaced by a sexuality which is quite explicitly physical and overt:

'Sum kisset me; sum clappis me; sum kyndnes me proferis;  
Sum kerffis to me curtasli; sum me the cop giffis;  
Sum stalwardly steppis ben, with a stout curage,  
And a stif standand thing staiffis in my neiff ...'

(483-6)

Yet despite this mixture of direct statement and crude innuendo, the Wedo is still capable of reverting to the language of polite love, to echo the allegory of The Goldyn Targe by saying

'... Bot with my fair calling, I comfort thaim all,'

(489)

and to comment complacently on her exemplary courtliness:

'Thar is no liffand leid so law of degre  
That sall me luf unluffit, I am so loik hertit;  
And gif his lust so be lent into my lyre quhit,  
That he be lost or with me lig, his lif sall nocht danger.  
I am so mercifull in mynd, and menys all wichtis,  
My sely saull salbe saif, quhen /Sabot/ all jugis.  
Ladyis leir thir lessonis and be no lassis fundin:  
This is the legeand of my lif, thought Latyne it be nane.'

(497-504)<sup>107</sup>

She is indeed a Saint of Love,<sup>108</sup> but her hypocrisy seems here almost to have engulfed her, so hard is it to tell whether her claim to courtly virtue is fully ironic or at least half-seriously intended. At any event, this parody of courtly values is an important aspect of Dunbar's point in the Tretis: the high-sounding euphemisms are, it is clear, a mere facade, hiding the Wedo's (and, by implication, other people's) rampant sexual



appetites. We recall that the other women, too, evoked the world of courtly poetry, which indeed provides a frame for the whole poem, and we may perhaps think of the dialogue of the hens in Henryson's Taill of Schir Chantecleir and the Foxe, where again courtly phrases are employed to mask ugly sexuality.<sup>109</sup>

I do not think, however, that the Tretis is simply a poem against love, any more than it is simply a poem against women. With deceptive neatness, Dunbar returns to the natural world of his opening, as the women carouse through the night:

The soft sowch of the swyr and soun of the stremys,  
The sueit savour of the sward and singing of foulis,  
Myght confort ony creatur of the kyn of Adam,  
And kindill agane his curage, thocht it wer cald sloknyt.

(519-22)

"Kyn of Adam" is surely there for its associations as much as for the alliteration, echoing as it does the Fall and man's sinful, sensual condition. It was, after all, through a woman in a garden that Adam fell, a fact never far from the mind of the medieval anti-feminist,<sup>110</sup> and it is as a consequence of that first surrender to the senses that the kin of Adam are perennially subject to the weakness of the flesh. It is perhaps characteristic of Dunbar that although the "kyn of Adam" might be taken to incorporate the whole of humanity, both men and women, the "creatur" whose "curage" is "cald sloknyt" is male. As in The Goldyn Targe, there is an underlying contrast, conflict even, in the Tretis between masculine and feminine, and while the women's stories are full of lascivious males, the foreground is unequivocally occupied by Dunbar's three grotesquely lustful females. They are representative of human nature at its worst, bestial and depraved, and they

reveal through their speeches not just the appetites of women and the perils of sexuality, but one whole aspect of fallen man. It would be foolish to deny the comic element in the Tretis, any more than it can be denied in the cycle plays and moralities, where vice is often portrayed as funny as well as wicked, or in much of Henryson, or in many of Dunbar's other poems. But the fundamental purpose of the poem is essentially serious, and while it adheres in many respects to the anti-feminist tradition its themes are more diverse and more universal than a simple anti-feminist interpretation would allow.

The control which Dunbar exercises over his portrayal of the women, and over the arguments, images and language they use, denies any suggestion that he does not condemn the attitudes they reveal, or accepts or secretly sides with the animal view of sexuality and of human nature they espouse. The Tretis is typical of Dunbar's narrative verse in its subtle and enigmatic use of irony, the casual, sometimes infuriating way in which the poet leaves a hint of his true purpose and moves on. Dunbar is often a moral poet, but he is a moral poet who makes great demands of his audience, and it is fitting that his final ploy in the Tretis should be to turn the demande d'amour device round on his audience, ironically inviting them to make a judgment which he has persistently refused to make, and which reverses the Wedo's line of questioning:

Ye auditoris most honorable, that eris has gevin  
 Oneto this uncouth aventur, quhilk airly me happinnit;  
 Of thir thre wantoun wiffis, that I haif writtin heir,  
 Quhilk wald ye waill to your wife, gif ye suld wed one?

(527-30)



The final, ironic and enigmatic question of The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo is in many ways illustrative of Dunbar's characteristic methods. In its reference to a listening audience, which is in this case probably rather more than a nod in the direction of convention, it reminds us that Dunbar is essentially a poet of the court, and that the allusiveness of his poetry is due in no small measure to the fact that it is coterie-poetry. Dunbar could no doubt rely on the familiarity of his immediate audience with many of the themes, genres and images he employed, and this partly explains why so much is left unstated in his work. We must also remember that many of his poems were evidently intended as entertainments for the court: it seems probable that the great majority of the works considered in this chapter, including the Tretis, The Goldyn Targe, The Thrissil and the Rois, "This hindir nycht in Dumfermeling", the Sevin Deidly Synnis sequence, and quite possibly The Merle and the Nichtingail, had this function of entertainment in a court setting, which accounts for the lightness of tone and the element of rhetorical decoration which are so typical of Dunbar. Yet however graceful and light-hearted Dunbar's narratives may be, I believe that the above analyses have demonstrated that a moral lesson generally lies beneath the surface, wittily presented, ironically convoluted, but never quite absent for an audience sufficiently alert to the nuances which arise from Dunbar's sophisticated manipulation of convention.

Notes to Chapter V

- 1 So, for example, James Kinsley: "His eye seldom reached beyond the fringe, or his mind beneath the surface, of that now remote Stewart court which was his milieu. He does not share Chaucer's (or even Henryson's) interest in philosophy and letters." (Dunbar, Poems, ed. James Kinsley /Oxford 1958/, p. xviii). Cf. R.A. Taylor, Dunbar (London 1931), pp. 71-7; the view that Dunbar is not really a "serious poet" pervades such works as this, and Cécile Steinberger's Étude sur William Dunbar (Dublin 1908), as well as the discussion by Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh 1958), pp. 53-76.
  
- 2 All quotations from the works of Dunbar are from Poems, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (3rd edn, London 1960).
  
- 3 The doctrine that physical beauty is but an image of God, expressed by Augustine, De vera religione, xxix, 52, ed. K.D. Daur (CCSL, Turnhout 1962), p. 221, is a commonplace in the Middle Ages; cf. D.W. Robertson Jr, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton 1962), pp. 65 ff.
  
- 4 Tom Scott, Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems (Edinburgh 1966), p. 279.
  
- 5 On the medieval literary traditions of descriptions of Hell, see H.R. Patch, The Other World (Cambridge, Mass. 1950) and D.D.R. Owen, The Vision of Hell (Edinburgh/London 1970). For the iconography, and especially the survival of the Classical image of the half-open door to Hell in some medieval MSS., see Robert Hughes, Heaven and Hell in Western Art (London 1968), pp. 175-201.
  
- 6 This progression parallels the course of the allegory in the latter stages of King Hart: cf. above, pp. 101-2.
  
- 7 The title is Laing's. The poem is untitled in the Reidpeth Manuscript, the only extant source; cf. The Maitland Folio Manuscript, ed. W.A. Craigie (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1913-27), II, 46-50.
  
- 8 Dunbar's more direct petitions include "Schir, at this feist of benefice", "Off benefice, Schir, at everie feist", "Schir, ye have mony servitouris", and "Schir, yit remembir as of befoir"; he chooses a more circuitous rhetorical posture in such poems as Of the Warldis Instabilitie and the pseudo-moralistic "discretioun" poems. The petitions are discussed at some length by Scott, op. cit., pp. 92-157.



- 9 Even in Piers Plowman, it is perhaps only the eponymous hero whose name is as functional (rather than abstractly representative) as those of Dunbar's clerics. To put the point another way, the tropological characters belong to the medieval tradition of complaint, while Kirkpakar and Bet-the-Kirk are among the relatively small company of genuinely satirical medieval characters. For a discussion of the eclipse of satire and prevalence of complaint in medieval English literature, see John Peter, Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature (Oxford 1966); cf. S.M. Tucker, Verse Satire in England before the Renaissance (New York 1908), and Alvin Kernan, The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance (New Haven 1959). A distant relative of Kirkpakar and Bet-the-Kirk is perhaps Sir Peny, who occurs in ME. and MSc. lyrics, although he too is an abstract quality rather than a social type: cf. for example, Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, ed. R.H. Robbins (2nd edn, Oxford 1955), pp. 50-5; Maitland Folio MS., ed. Craigie, I, 399-400.
- 10 For the suggestion that Dunbar is wittily echoing Boethius in this scene, see Charlotte N.C. Morse, "William Dunbar: His Vision Poetry and the Medieval Poetic Tradition" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Stanford University 1970), p. 333.
- 11 Scott, op. cit., p. 153.
- 12 Cf. Cursor Mundi (Göttingen MS.), ll. 401-2:  
 All gangand bestis þe sexte day,  
 And Adam als he made of clay.  
 (ed. J. Morris /EETS, 7 vols, London 1874-93/, I, 31).
- 13 E.g. Lydgate, The Temple of Glas, ll. 55-142, Poems, ed. J. Norton-Smith (Oxford 1966), pp. 68-71; The Assembly of Ladies, ll. 454-69, The Floure and the Leafe and the Assembly of Ladies, ed. D.A. Pearsall (London 1962), p. 118. The ultimate source is doubtless the series of wall-paintings in the Roman de la Rose, ll. 129-460, ed. Félix Leqoy (3 vols, Paris 1965-70), I, 5-15.
- 14 For a detailed account of this tradition, see M.W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins (East Lansing, Mich. 1952): Dunbar's poem is discussed, pp. 236-8.
- 15 1507 seems the more likely: cf. J.W. Baxter, William Dunbar (Edinburgh 1952), pp. 154-6.
- 16 On the probable court context of this poem, see Bryan S. Hay, "William Dunbar's Vision of Disorder" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester 1969), pp. 242-3.
- 17 Dunbar, Poems, ed. Kinsley, p. 120.

- 18     Although there are clear contemporary echoes here, the association of Pryd with satire on fashions is not unique to Dunbar: cf. Detmar W. Straub Jr, "European Literary Tradition and William Dunbar's Major Poetry" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University 1970), pp. 66 ff.
- 19     For the traditional basis of many of the details, see Straub's discussion, *ibid.*, pp. 63-80.
- 20     The closest analogue for Dunbar's treatment of the Synnis seems to be the series of portraits in Piers Plowman (e.g. B-text, Book V). But Langland does not follow the "Gregorian" order adopted by Dunbar.
- 21     So, for example, the thirteenth-century Visio Turcilli: see Patch, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-1, Straub, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-6. The most elaborate development of the motif is, of course, Dante's Inferno.
- 22     Cf., for example, the tale of the rich Sicilian in a sermon in MS. Royal 18.B.xxiii, Middle English Sermons, ed. W.O. Ross (EETS, London 1940), pp. 174-5, and the tale of a son's vision of his mother's suffering in Hell, Gesta Romanorum, ed. S.J.H. Herrtage (EETS, London 1879), pp. 383-4.
- 23     Dunbar, Poems, ed. Kinsley, p. 121.
- 24     Hay, *op. cit.*, p. 253.
- 25     Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 231.
- 26     Denton Fox, "Dunbar's The Golden Targe", ELH 26 (1959), 311-34, at 333.
- 27     Printed in Middle English Metrical Romances, ed. W.H. French and C.B. Hale (New York 1930), pp. 990-8.
- 28     The Bannatyne Manuscript, ed. W. Tod Ritchie (STS, 4 vols, Edinburgh 1927-33), III, 22-6, 37.
- 29     Satyre, ll. 1280-1387, Lindsay, Works, ed. D. Hamer (STS, 4 vols, Edinburgh 1929-34), II, 139-49.
- 30     Bannatyne MS., ed. Ritchie, III, 22, 25 (for Stewart); II, 277-85 (see l. 95).
- 31     Hay, *op. cit.*, p. 245.



- 32 On the functions of comedy in medieval drama, see V.A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, Calif. 1966), pp. 124-74; Robert Potter, The English Morality Play (London/Boston 1975), pp. 34-7.
- 33 Dr Hay appears to be moving towards the opposite view in his discussion of the Amendis, op. cit., pp. 245-6, 262-7.
- 34 A useful discussion of Dunbar's varying uses of the dream-vision is in Morse, op. cit., pp. 284-348.
- 35 The following paragraphs are a revised version of my article "William Dunbar's Beast Fable", SLJ 1 (1974), 17-28, to which the reader is referred for further discussion of some points. Although I argued there for the adoption of the title The Tod and the Lamb (reflecting the poem's place in the beast-fable genre) rather than the Bannatyne manuscript's The Wowing of the King quhen he wes in Dumfermeling, which adds a sense which is not necessarily supported by the text, I have here adopted my standard practice in this thesis of referring to poems by the first line where there is no overwhelming sixteenth-century evidence for a title.
- 36 Cf. DOST, sb. "ferly", where however the examples suggest that the word preserved in MSc. few of its ON. connotations of horror.
- 37 Cf. Æ .G.J. Mackay, in Dunbar, Poems, ed. J. Small (STS, 3 vols, Edinburgh 1884-9), I, clviii.
- 38 William Caxton, The History of Reynard the Fox, ed. N.F. Blake (EETS, London 1970), p. xviii; R. Bossuat, Le Roman de Renard (Paris 1957), pp. 93-8.
- 39 E.g. The Lyoun and the Mous, Bann. 113-89; The Wolf and the Lamb, Bann. 15-84.
- 40 For the suggestion that the characterization of the narrator as a "gossip" and a "doubting-Thomas" makes an important contribution to the effect of the fable, see Hay, op. cit., pp. 291-3.
- 41 Dr Scott suggests that the former is more probable, op. cit., p. 214.
- 42 Cf. Matt. 7: 15:  
Attendite a falsis prophetis, qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium, intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces; a fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos.  
This text was developed into a fable by the Byzantine

- Nicephorus Basilaces: see Corpus Fabularum Aesopicarum, ed. A. Hausrath and H. Hunger (2 vols, Leipzig 1957-9), I (2), 186.
- 43 A shortened version of the following discussion has been published as "Dunbar and the Franciscans", Medium Aevum 46 (1977), 83-8.
- 44 See A.G. Rigg, "William Dunbar: The 'Fenyeit Freir'", RES n.s. 14 (1963), 269-73.
- 45 The complicated question of the early sources of the life of St Francis has been much debated. The pioneering studies of P. Sabatier, in his editions of the Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Ejus (Collection d'Études et de Documents, IV, Paris 1902) and of the Speculum Perfectionis (Collection de Documents, I, Paris 1898; 2nd edn, British Society of Franciscan Studies, XIII, XVII, Manchester 1928-31) have been developed and criticized by F.C. Burkitt, "The Study of the Sources of the Life of St Francis", in St Francis of Assisi, 1226-1926: Essays in Commemoration, ed. W. Seton (London 1926), pp. 15-61; A.G. Little, "Some recently discovered Franciscan Documents and their Relation to the Second Life by Celano and the 'Speculum Perfectionis'", PBA 12 (1926), 147-78; J.R.H. Moorman, The Sources for the Life of S. Francis of Assisi (Manchester 1940); and most recently, Rosalind B. Brooke, in her edition of the Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli Sociorum S. Francisci (Oxford 1970).
- 46 Scripta Leonis, ed. Brooke, p. 250; cf. Speculum Perfectionis, ed. Sabatier (2nd edn), I, 191.
- 47 Scripta Leonis, ed. Brooke, p. 260.
- 48 This work has never been edited. A copy of the 1504 edition is in the British Library, the Rufino story occurring on fols. 110<sup>r</sup>-112<sup>r</sup>: its text is virtually identical to that of the Actus Beati Francisci. A French translation was printed at Paris c. 1510.
- 49 This and the following quotations come from the Actus Beati Francisci, ed. Sabatier, pp. 107-12, as modified by A.G. Little, "Description of a Franciscan Manuscript formerly in the Phillipps Library, now in the Possession of A.G. Little", in Collectanea Franciscana, I, ed. A.G. Little, M.R. James and H.M. Bannister (Aberdeen 1914), pp. 9-113, esp. p. 26. Cf. the parallels listed by Sabatier in his edition.
- 50 As printed by Small and Mackenzie, there is only one such exchange. But it has been convincingly argued by Baxter, op. cit., pp. 149-51, and more recently by Priscilla Bawcutt, "Text and Context in Middle Scots Poetry", in Actes du 2<sup>e</sup>



Colloque de Langue et de Littérature Écossaises (Moyen Âge et Renaissance), ed. J.-J. Blanchot and C. Graf (Strasbourg 1979), pp. 26-38, at 32-5, that there is no justification for this re-ordering of the stanzas as they are found in the sixteenth-century manuscripts.

- 51 I have renumbered the lines according to the order in the MSS.: these lines are 21-5 in Mackenzie's text.
- 52 E.g. Lydgate, The Siege of Thebes, ll. 86, 98, ed. A. Erdmann (EETS, 2 vols, London 1911-30), I, 5.
- 53 Scott, op. cit., p. 270.
- 54 These lines are 26-30 in Mackenzie's text.
- 55 Cf. in particular the claim in "Schir, yit remembir as of befoir", again with some wry irony, that Dunbar was "on nureice kne,/ Cald dandillie, bischop, dandillie."
- 56 Rigg, op. cit., passim.
- 57 Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, C, 329-62, Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass. 1957), pp. 148-9; Lindsay, Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis, ll. 2037-2121, Works, ed. Hamer, II, 203-7.
- 58 These poems have most recently been discussed by Bryan S. Hay, "William Dunbar's Flying Abbot: Apocalypse Made to Order", SSL 11 (1973-4), 217-25.
- 59 E.g. Baxter, op. cit., pp. 169-72. Dr Scott takes a view closer to mine: for him, Dunbar sees in Damian "a symbol of the corruption at court", op. cit., p. 125. I do not altogether agree with this emphasis on the court, but it certainly seems that Dunbar's concerns are wider than Damian himself. For a wider-ranging interpretation still, identifying the theme of The Fenzeit Freir as "the sin of charlatanry", see Straub, op. cit., pp. 198-204.
- 60 Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, A, 444, ed. Robinson, p. 21.
- 61 Treasurer Accts, II, 390, 395. The background to Damian's career is described in John Reed, "Alchemy under James IV of Scotland", Ambix 2 (1938-46), 60-7.
- 62 In neither poem is he described as a friar, and indeed in "Lucina schynnyng in silence of the nicht" he is accurately identified as an abbot: all the sixteenth-century manuscripts, however, with slightly surprising consistency, agree on the

title of The Fenzzeit Freir of Tungland.

- 63 Treasurer Accts, III, 179; IV, 79, 83, etc.
- 64 The growing practice of in commendam appointments is discussed by Ranald Nicholson, Scotland: The Later Middle Ages (Edinburgh 1974), pp. 458-63, 558-9.
- 65 The Kingis Quair, ll. 1072-1102, ed. J. Norton-Smith (Oxford 1971), pp. 39-40; Henryson, The Parliament of Fourfuttit Beistis, ll. 92-126, Bannatyne MS., ed. Ritchie, IV, 174-5. Cf. above, pp. 299-300.
- 66 Hay, "William Dunbar's Flying Abbot", 221.
- 67 Bannatyne MS., ed. Ritchie, IV, 42.
- 68 Hay, "William Dunbar's Flying Abbot", 220-1.
- 69 For the view that the narrator of the Dregy is to be taken ironically, see my "Some Observations on The Dregy of Dunbar", Parergon 9 (August 1974), 40-3.
- 70 The medieval apocalyptic tradition is outlined by Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (2nd edn, London 1970), pp. 29-36. There is a more detailed account in E. Wadstein, Die eschatologische Ideengruppe: Antichrist, Weltsabbat, Weltende und Weltgericht (Leipzig 1896), pp. 81-158. A contemporary woodcut which shows Antichrist trying to fly is reproduced by Cohn, op. cit., Plate I.
- 71 On Simon Magus, see J.A.W. Bennett, "Dunbar's Birth of Antichrist, 31-2", Medium Aevum 26 (1957), 196; B.D. Brown, "Marlowe, Faustus and Simon Magus", PMLA 54 (1939), 82-121.
- 72 The conception of "courtly love" as essentially adulterous, deriving largely from C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford 1936), has been steadily eroded in recent years, and such works as Lydgate's Temple of Glas testify to the possibility of romantic love leading to marriage. But it remains true that many poetic lovers write from a position of pathetic helplessness, and that marriage is relatively seldom explicitly discussed.
- 73 Scott, op. cit., p. 50.
- 74 The date is clear from Treasurer Accts, II, 254. The problem is posed by W.S. Ramson, "'The nynt morow of fresch temperit May'", Parergon 1 (December 1971), 23-4. Baxter,



op. cit., p. 114, explains the dating in terms of various stages of the wedding preparations.

- 75 Cf. H. Harvey Wood's contention that Dunbar "rejects the usual medieval picture of blythsome May in favour of a more realistic and Scottish weather report", Two Scots Chaucerians (London 1967), p. 30; Wittig, op. cit., p. 68; Scott, op. cit., pp. 47, 50; Morse, op. cit., p. 289.
- 76 Cf. the use of the Three Estates motif in The Thre Prestis of Peblis, discussed above, pp. 59-61.
- 77 Although I must confess that I have so far been unable to find any medieval authority for this characteristic of yarrow (well-known to modern gardeners).
- 78 Scott, op. cit., p. 50.
- 79 Cf. my article "Politics and Poetry in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Scotland", SLJ 3 (2) (December 1976), 5-29.
- 80 Scott, op. cit., pp. 48-9.
- 81 See above, pp. 61-7.
- 82 See J.S. Kantrowitz, Dramatic Allegory: Lindsay's Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis (Lincoln, Nebraska 1975), pp. 61-83.
- 83 This date is given in a number of Scottish kalendars: see Kalendars of Scottish Saints, ed. A.P. Forbes (Edinburgh 1872), and cf. Wittig, op. cit., p. 64, n. 24.
- 84 The parallel is noted by, among others, Hay, "William Dunbar's Vision of Disorder", p. 337.
- 85 R.J. Lyall, "Moral Allegory in Dunbar's Goldyn Targe", SSL 11 (1973-4), 47-65.
- 86 This point is misunderstood by Dr Scott, who sees Resoun in Dunbar's poem as the opposite of madness (op. cit., p. 44). For a detailed discussion of my objections to this reading, see my "Moral Allegory", 59-62.
- 87 E.g. ll. 115, 123, 217, 232, 235.
- 88 "Moral Allegory", 54-6.

- 89 Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, E, 1331-2, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 116.
- 90 R.D.S. Jack, "Dunbar and Lydgate", SSL 8 (1970-1), 215-27.
- 91 The two-faced Janus is a commonplace of medieval kalendars.
- 92 Denton Fox, "Dunbar's Golden Targe", 311-34; L.A. Ebin, "The theme of poetry in Dunbar's 'Goldyn Targe'", Chaucer Review 7 (1972), 147-59.
- 93 Among English examples, cf. Hoccleve, The Regement of Princes, ll. 5440-63, ed. F.J. Furnivall (EETS, London 1897), pp. 196-7; Lydgate, The Complaynt of the Black Knight, ll. 674-81, Minor Poems, ed. H.N. MacCracken (EETS, 2 vols, London 1911-34), II, 410, and The Churl and the Bird, ll. 379-86, *ibid.*, II, 484-5; Hawes, The Pastime of Pleasure, ll. 5803-16, ed. W.E. Mead (EETS, London 1928), pp. 223-4.
- 94 W.S. Ramson, "In Praise of Chaucer", Proceedings and Papers of the XII Congress of AULLA (Sydney 1970), pp. 456-76; P.M. Kean, Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry (2 vols, London 1972), II, 210-39.
- 95 On the anti-feminist tradition generally, including a list of Middle English and Middle Scots examples, see F.L. Utley, The Crooked Rib (Columbus, Ohio 1944).
- 96 Thus John Speirs, The Scots Literary Tradition (2nd edn, London 1962), p. 59 sees "no hint of arbitrary condemnation" in Dunbar's portrayal of the Wedo, while Dr Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 182, remarks that feudal marriage "thwarts and perverts life". Cf. A.M. Mackenzie, An Historical Survey of Scottish Literature to 1714 (London 1933), p. 86; Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
- 97 David Irving, The Lives of the Scottish Poets (2 vols, Edinburgh 1810), I, 415.
- 98 Wittig, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
- 99 Cf. Catherine Singh, "The Alliterative Ancestry of Dunbar's The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo", Leeds Studies in English n.s. 7 (1973-4), 22-54. On the alliterative background generally, see W.A. Craigie, "The Scottish Alliterative Poems", PBA 28 (1942), 217-36; cf. now J.S. Norman, "The Paradox of Tradition in the Poetry of William Dunbar", in Actes du 2<sup>e</sup> Colloque de Langue et de Littérature Écossaises (Moyen Âge et Renaissance), ed. J.-J. Blanchot and C. Graf (Strasbourg 1979), pp. 339-61, esp. pp. 340-2.



- 100 Cf. Straub, op. cit., pp. 45-54; note also the parallels in the Canterbury Tales, A, 1347-54, Works, ed. Robinson, p. 30, D, 904-12 and 1219-27, ibid., pp. 85 and 88, and F, 1621-4, ibid., p. 144.
- 101 The Kingis Quair, ll. 246-87, ed. Norton-Smith, pp. 9-11, where the topos underlies much of the play on the notions of freedom and thralldom, with many echoes of other debates on the subject.
- 102 Cf. Norman, op. cit., pp. 349-55.
- 103 The link between the Wedo and the Wife of Bath was pointed out by James Kinsley, "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo", Medium Aevum 23 (1954), 31-5, at 33-4.
- 104 E.g. Baxter, op. cit., p. 53: "To him also, as well as to his ladies, their reminiscences present themselves as 'a natural and adequate view of life'."
- 105 The old, deceived husband is, of course, a familiar figure in medieval fabliaux, not least in Chaucer's Miller's Tale and Merchant's Tale.
- 106 Dunbar, Poems, ed. Mackenzie, p. 99.
- 107 [Sabot], Chepman and Myllar, "sa bot", M. "sall not". The emendation is provided by E.J. Dobson and Patricia Ingham, "Three Notes on Dunbar's The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo", Medium Aevum 36 (1967), 38-9.
- 108 Scott, op. cit., p. 201.
- 109 See above, pp. 286-8.
- 110 It leaps, for example, to the mind of Gawain when he fails in his test at the Green Knight's chapel: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ll. 2414-28, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, re-ed. Norman Davis (Oxford 1968), pp. 66-7.

CHAPTER VI

The Episodic Narratives of  
Sir David Lindsay



Even by the standards of the criticism of Middle Scots literature, the poetry of Sir David Lindsay has been neglected. His verse-play, Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis (1552), must of course be excepted from this generalization, but apart from one biographical study,<sup>1</sup> the work of the Scottish Text Society's editor,<sup>2</sup> and one or two articles,<sup>3</sup> the poems have been the subject of little critical discussion.<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps not difficult to see why this should be so: the Satyre, for all its faults, is such a remarkable achievement, dominating Lindsay's works all the more because it is the earliest and almost the only surviving example of medieval and Renaissance Scots drama, that the poems understandably appear to be relatively insignificant. They are, too, not especially poetic poems, in which the satirical and propagandist element apparently preponderates over stylistic factors such as versification, diction and rhetorical elaboration. In this respect, Lindsay has much in common with other sixteenth-century Scottish exponents of the plain style like Alexander Arbuthnot, William Lauder and Sir Richard Maitland, who similarly await serious consideration.<sup>5</sup> The elevated style of Douglas and of Dunbar's formal allegories has its heirs in the later sixteenth century, and they have received greater attention, but Lindsay's less ornate narratives are no less significant, and not merely as evidence of pre-Reformation dissent.

The present discussion is confined to those of Lindsay's works which can properly be described as narrative and which have a moral purpose: The Dreame (c. 1528), The Testament and Complaynt of the Papyngo (1530), Kitteis Confessioun (?c. 1540), The

Tragedie of Cardinal Beaton (1547), and The Historie of Squyer William Meldrum (c. 1550).<sup>6</sup> I have thus excluded Lindsay's two longest, and probably latest, works: Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis, and Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour (c. 1552-3).<sup>7</sup> Both fall outside the strict definition of narrative verse, and while the Dialog in particular is deserving of detailed critical attention it raises issues which are out-with the scope of the present study. The five poems which I shall be dealing with are in many ways typical of Lindsay's interests and methods, and we shall find that he depends upon medieval sources and yet moves beyond them. His works are characteristically encyclopedic in form, containing a multiplicity of elements loosely assembled within an overall narrative framework, so that their unity is much less distinct than that of the works of Dunbar or Henryson, and less even than that of such composite poems as The Thre Prestis of Peblis.

This loose structure which I have termed encyclopedic is apparent in Lindsay's earliest surviving work, The Dreame.<sup>8</sup> It consists of at least six distinct parts, differentiated by headings in the sixteenth-century printed editions. The strictly narrative character of the work is here, as so often in Lindsay's poems, somewhat in question: the difficulty is not, as with Dunbar, that the narrative elements are given a lyrical form which impinges upon the narrative line, but rather that the greater part of the poem is essentially rhetorical, either in the form of a direct address from the poet to his patron, James V, or in the form of a long speech by one of the principal characters in the dream, Dame Remembrance or Jhone the Comoun-



weill. In this respect The Dreame resembles many other dream visions, in which the long speeches of the Roman de la Rose have expanded almost to take over the whole poem, reducing the narrative machinery to a formality. Yet a good deal happens in Lindsay's poem, and the long account of the poet's journey through the universe is handled skilfully and economically. The opening description, called "The Proloug" by the printer John Scot,<sup>9</sup> is also a skilful reworking of familiar medieval materials: the astrological references which fix the winter setting, the sleeplessness of the poet, the landscape itself, the lark's apostrophe to Aurora, Phebus and the months of May, June and July are all paralleled in many dream allegories, and yet Lindsay's evocation of winter and his choice of environment have a measure of originality:

With cloke and hude I dressit me belyue,  
 With dowbyll schone, & myttanis on my handis.  
 Howbeit the air wes rycht penitratyue,  
 3it fure I furth, lansing ouirthorte the landis,  
 Towarte the see, to schorte me on the sandis,  
 Because vnblomit was baith bank and braye.

(71-6)<sup>10</sup>

The landscape is a variation on the motif of the wilderness we find in Dante, in Chaucer, and in Gavin Douglas,<sup>11</sup> but the specific choice of a seashore locus seems to be Lindsay's own. The point is neatly made: the landscape which normally attracts a restless poet is in the grip of winter ("vnblomit"), and the barren seashore is therefore an appealing place of resort. The discomfort of the season is emphasized, moreover, by Lindsay's reference to the protective clothing he dons — a strikingly personal touch.

The hint of a contrast between the winter landscape and that of high summer which is contained in the word "vnblomit" is taken up in the following stanzas, in which both the poet and the lark whose song he quotes emphasize the difference between the seasons. This theme is of course another medieval commonplace, and it leads on naturally to the more explicit statement of the poet's awareness of mutability which is the crucial point of the prologue:

Bot Idelnes, ground of iniquitie,  
Scho maid so dull my spretis me within  
That I wyste nocht at quhat end to begin;

Bot satt styll, in that coue, quhare I mycht se  
The woltryng of the wallis vp and down;  
And this fals wardlis Instabilytie  
Unto that sey makkand comparisoun,  
And of the wardlis wracheit variasoun  
To thame that fixis all thare hole intent .....

(124-32)

Lindsay's concerns therefore extend rather wider than those of Dunbar in The Thrissil and the Rois, which seems a likely immediate source of the idea of the poet's encounter with Flora.<sup>12</sup> Although the theme of political advice is an important element in The Dreame — as I believe it to be in Dunbar's poem — Lindsay places his subsequent criticism of the state of Scotland in the context of the transience of human life, and of the greater permanence which transcends it. Throughout The Dreame, the sense we are given of the inevitability of change and of the passage of time is set against the unchanging pattern of the cosmos, in a skilful juxtaposition of this world and the next. This contrast is prepared for in the poet's reverie upon the seascape, with its Boethian moralizing on the waves<sup>13</sup> in terms of "the wardlis wracheit variasoun". Both the



seasonal imagery and the moving sea, then, evoke the transience of the sublunary world, a fitting prelude to the appearance of Dame Remembrance.

The dream itself, in which the poet is guided around the universe by the tutelary figure of Remembrance, occupies the bulk of the poem (ll. 148-1029), and breaks naturally into four main sections: the vision of Hell, the journey through the spheres and the vision of Heaven, the description of the Earth, and the discussion of the state of Scotland. If it is the latter which is the principal point of the poem, the other sections are more than mere padding, and their purpose is in part, as I have just suggested, to provide a framework within which to consider the political, moral and theological implications of contemporary Scottish affairs. In Dr Jack's words:

The journey from Heaven to Hell (sic.) is latterly seen as merely a means for the dreamer to gain experience, so that his judgment on the vital issue of Scotland's government may be seen to be a responsible one.

14

This is, I think, part of the truth; but only part. It is not only the dreamer's judgment which is informed by the earlier parts of the dream, but the audience's as well, and what we learn has to do with the fundamental verities of which the present state of Scotland is merely a reflection. Nor must we forget the effect upon the poem's original audience, the patron to whom it is directed: the political twist which Lindsay gives to his description of Hell is unmistakably aimed at James and his court.

This political emphasis is in fact the chief distinguishing

feature of Lindsay's version of Hell, for the damned are quite explicitly divided into their Estates. This method differs from that of other medieval descriptions, having no real parallel in Dante's Divina Commedia, which has sometimes been suggested as a source.<sup>15</sup> It does, however, bear some resemblance to the treatment in Henryson's Orpheus and Erudices, of which there are also verbal echoes.<sup>16</sup> It is possible, then, that Lindsay has taken up Henryson's separate treatment of princes and clergy, and adapted the description to his more directly political purpose. The balance of the vision anticipates the later, particularly Scottish section of the dream: the clergy are given ten stanzas, princes and nobles nine, the "comoun peple" five, of which only two (ll. 302-15) are specifically concerned with their sins. The focus is very firmly upon the sins of the governing classes and the punishments they must endure:

Sum catyue kyngis for creuell oppressioun,  
 And vther sum, for thare wrangus conquest,  
 War condampnit, thay and thare Successioun.  
 Sum, for publict adultrye and incest:  
 Sum leit thare peple neuer leif in rest,  
 Delyting so in plesour sensuall,  
 Quharefor thare paine was, thare, perpetuall.

(246-52)

Lindsay blends in these stanzas a number of narrative techniques: straightforward description as in the lines just quoted, commentary by Dame Remembrance, and the lamentations of the damned themselves. These various techniques give the vision rhetorical complexity, and they allow Lindsay to put his most direct condemnation of clerical abuses into the mouth of an authoritative figure:



Scho said, 'The cause of thare vnhappy chance  
 Was Couatyce, Luste, and ambysioune,  
 The quhilk now garris thame want fruitioun  
 Off God, and heir eternallie man dwell  
 In to this painefull poysonit pytt of hell.

Als, thay did nocht instruct the Ignorent,  
 Prouocand thame to pennence, be precheing,  
 Bot seruit wardlie Prencis insolent,  
 And war promouit by thare fenzeit flecheing,  
 Nocht for thare science, wysedome, nor techeing.  
 Be Symonie was thare promotioun,  
 More for deneris nor for deuotioun.'

(183-96)

There are traces here of another of Lindsay's rhetorical techniques, the alliteration with which, like Henryson, he picks out passages of narrative or moral significance: the alliteration of "painefull poysonit pytt" is taken up again in the second line of the following stanza, neatly associating the punishment and the crime. Although the message that such a fate awaits Scotland's rulers is, for obvious reasons, never introduced explicitly into the poem, Lindsay comes very close to it at the end of his "Exhortatioun to the Kyngis Grace" with which The Dreame concludes:

And, fynalie, remember thow mon dee,  
 And suddanlie pas of this mortal see:  
 And art nocht sicker of thy lyfe two houris,  
 Sen thare is none frome that scentence may fle,  
 Kyng, Quene, nor knyght, of lawe estait, nor hie,  
 Bot all mon thole of deith the bitter schouris.  
 Quhar bene thay gone, thir Papis, & empriouris?  
 Bene thay nocht dede? so sall it fair on the:  
 Is no remeid, strenth, ryches, nor honouris.

(1118-26)

The echoes in these final lines are clear enough: the "mortal see" is the Boethian one of the prologue, the "Papis & empriouris" are most obviously those who inhabit Hell, while the ubi sunt? motif of l. 1124 recalls the lament of the damned

temporality:

'Quhare is the meit and drynke delicious,  
With quhilk we fed our cairfull cariounis,  
Gold, syluer, sylk, with peirlis precious,  
Our ryches, rentis, and our possessionis?  
Withouttin hope of our remissionis,  
Allace, our panis ar Insufferabyll,  
And our tormentis to compt Innumirabyll.'

(295-301)

While the orchestration of such echoes illustrates Lindsay's skill as a narrative designer (especially in view of the generally episodic character of The Dreame, which means that without such touches the poem would be in serious danger of fragmentation), the rhyme in the final couplet in the above stanza points to a major weakness: Lindsay's tendency towards polysyllabic formulae without much narrative or rhetorical value, coupled with a diffuseness of both syntax and thought. Lindsay is at his best when the content carries him along, either through the rhetorical fervour of his satire or through the weight of narrative or descriptive material:

First, to the Mone, and vesyit all hir speir,  
Quene of the see, and bewtie of the nycht,  
Off nature wak and cauld, and no thyng clere,  
For, of hir self, scho hes none vther lycht  
Bot the reflex of Phebus bemes brycht.  
The twelf singnis scho passis rounde aboute  
In aucht and twenty dayis, withouttin doute.

(386-92)

The adaptation of the quotation from Dunbar and the lameness of the final rhyme notwithstanding,<sup>17</sup> this stanza succeeds by virtue of the sheer volume of material it contains, and of the wealth of traditional material which lies behind it. Lindsay's version of the planets makes a fascinating contrast with that of Henryson in The Testament of Cresseid, both for what it includes



and for what it omits. It is generally rather more concise (fifteen stanzas as against eighteen), but a much more substantial difference lies in the way the planets are imagined: as planets rather than as deities. It is instructive to compare Lindsay's description of the Moon with Henryson's:

Nixt efter him come Lady Cynthia,  
The last of all, and swiftest in his spheir,  
Of colour blak, buskit with hornis twa,  
And in the nicht scho listis best appeir;  
Haw as the leid, of colour nathing cleir —  
For all hir licht scho borrowis at hir brother  
Titan, for of hirself scho hes nane uther.

Hir gyse was gray and ful of spottis blak,  
And on hir breist ane churle paintit full evin,  
Beirand ane bunche of thornis on his bak,  
Quhilk for his thift nicht clim na nar the hevin.

18

It is clear that Lindsay is primarily interested in the planets as such, while Henryson, whose personified planets are to act out a court-room drama, is more concerned with their mythographic background. Henryson's descriptions are both more concrete and less conventional: while the man in the moon is a figure from medieval folktale, he has no traditional part in the astrological or mythographic sequence of the planet-gods, and is one of several extensions by Henryson beyond his immediate sources.<sup>19</sup> Only one detail is common to the two passages, the fact that no light emanates from the moon itself.<sup>20</sup> Lindsay's astronomical emphasis is reflected in his inclusion of the length of each orbit, which he takes some pains to specify. This seems, indeed, to be a primary reason for the whole passage, and it takes us back to the theme which was introduced by the seasonal imagery of the prologue. Against the transience of the seasons we must set the steady progress of the Spheres, which paradoxically both

influence the passing of time and represent the order which transcends time:

Than past we to the speir of Phebus brycht .....

Quhose Influence and vertew excellent  
 Geuis the lyfe tyll euerilk erthlie thyng.  
 That Prince of euerilk planeit, precellent,  
 Dois foster flouris, and garris heirbis spryng  
 Throuch the cauld eirth, and causis birdis syng:  
 And, als, his regulare mouyng in the hewin  
 Is Iuste vnder the Zodiack, full ewin.

(421; 428-34)

It is no coincidence that Phebus is more clearly personified than any of the other planets, bringing Lindsay's portrait closer than any other in the sequence to the corresponding one in Henryson's Testament, for Phebus' beneficent influence is the active ingredient in the working of Providence. We should perhaps think also of Dunbar's Meditatioun in Wyntir, where the bleakness of winter is again transcended by the cyclic order which asserts the triumph of the eternal over the temporal.

Beside this moral intention which underlies the structure of The Dreame there is a humbler didactic purpose: the provision of a miscellany of basic information about the world, which also helps to explain many of the features of the poem, and which gives a further dimension to the characterization of Lindsay's works as "encyclopedic". The details of the planets' orbits, for example, may be included not only for the sense they give of the great cycle of the heavens, but also as a useful item of knowledge. This certainly seems to be the dominant purpose behind the third section of the vision, in which Remembrance gives a great variety of information: the circumference of the Earth (15,750 leagues, apparently on the authority of Sacro-



bosco's De Sphaera<sup>21</sup>), the time taken to encircle it at ten leagues a day, a description of the world listing over a hundred countries, cities and islands, and a summary account of Paradise. This compendium of geographical information gradually brings the focus closer to the Scotland which is the poem's ultimate subject, the progression of the list of countries moving from Asia through Africa to Europe (echoed in miniature in the stanza on islands), then surprisingly veers away to the passage on Paradise. But even here there is, I think, an ulterior purpose, for the description of Eden is immediately followed by the dreamer's transfer to Scotland: the contrast between man's ideal, pre-lapsarian condition and the sorry state of the contemporary commonwealth is made all the more stark by this juxtaposition. Lindsay's rhetoric drives the point home even more clearly, for the properties of Paradise seem almost to be equalled by those of Scotland:

The sweit hailsum arromanyke odouris,  
 Proceidyng frome the herbis Medicinall,  
 The heuinlie hewis of the fragrant flouris,  
 It was ane sycht wonder celestially.  
 The perfection to schaw, in speciall,  
 And Ioyis, of that Region deuyne,  
 Off mankind it exceidis the Ingyne.

(764-70)

The ryche Ryueris, plesand and proffitabyll;  
 The lustie loochis, with fysche of sindry kyndis;  
 Hountyng, halkyng, for nobyllis conuenabyll;  
 Forrestis full of Da, Ra, Hartis, and Hyndis;  
 The fresche fontanis, quhose holesum cristel strandis  
 Refreschis so the fair fluriste grene medis:  
 So laik we no thyng that to nature nedis.

(820-6)

But this is, after all, Scotland and not Eden. The defects of the present state of the country, now described at

considerable length (ll. 841-1014), are caused by the same ruling classes whose predecessors the dreamer has already seen suffering in Hell:

The falt is nocht, I dar weill tak on hand,  
 Nother in to the peple nor the land.  
 As for the land, it lakis na vther thing  
 Bot laubour and the pepyllis gouernyng.

(844-7)

The poem owes its tone, no doubt, to the historical moment at which it appears to have been written, the point in the summer of 1528 at which James V took over the government of his kingdom.<sup>22</sup> Hence the direct and scathing condemnation of the rulers themselves in both Dame Remembrance's replies to the dreamer's questions and the subsequent speech of Jhone the Comoun-weill: Lindsay stresses the past abuses of "our infatuate heidis Insolent" (l. 905), and then turns to the king himself in his "Exhortatioun" and urges him to do better. Jhone the Comoun-weill plays an important part in lending immediacy and urgency to the articulation of this condemnation of the rule of Angus and his associates: he is, as it were, Piers Plowman without the theological perspective, voicing the suffering and resentment of the ordinary folk in the face of exploitation and bad government. He is, as far as one can tell, Lindsay's own creation, and one he later re-used in the Satyre. The form of personification used here is rather different from that which is usual in medieval allegory: Jhone the Comoun-weill represents neither an intellectual nor a moral abstraction, but the experience of a social class, which is abstract in a different sense.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, he differs in function from his "Syster, Iustice", whom he mentions at l. 948, although Lindsay



does not seem at all self-conscious about thus mixing allegorical metaphors. Jhone himself, indeed, hovers between symbolizing and representing the ordinary people. The description of his appearance suggests allegory in the stricter sense:

We saw a boustius berne cum ouir the bent,  
But hors, on fute, als fast as he mycht go,  
Quhose rayment wes all raggit, rewin, & rent,  
With wisage leyne as he had fastit lent .....

(919-21)

The physical attributes listed here actually embody the privations which Lindsay associates with the peasantry, and in that sense Jhone is more than merely a typical example of his class. The central metaphor of his complaint is of disinheritance and exile, which can be taken neither as the literal experience of the poorer classes as a whole nor as the literal experience of the individual: rather, it seems to symbolize in a more general way the neglect and exploitation which the ordinary people are subjected to:

'In the law land I come to seik refuge,  
And purposit thare to mak my residence.  
Bot singulare proffect gart me sounne disluge,  
And did me gret Iniuris and offence,  
And said to me: "Swyith, harlote, hy the hence;  
And in this countre se thow tak no curis,  
So lang as my auctoritie induris."'

(966-73)

The terse prosopopoeia we find here is repeated in the following stanzas in a way typical of Lindsay's rhetoric: Symonie and Couatyce are officers of the clergy, "Sensuale plesour hes baneist Chaistitie", and so on. The banishment of Jhone the Comoun-weill is part of this allegorical pattern, representing the loss of political harmony within the realm. This is the sense, I think, of his prophetic final words:

'..... thare sall na Scot haue confortyng  
 Of me, tyll that I see the countre gydit  
 Be wysedome of ane gude auld prudent kyng,  
 Quhilk sall delyte him maist, abone all thyng,  
 To put Iustice tyll exicutioun,  
 And on strang tratouris mak puneisioun.'

(1003-8)

This is the point towards which the vision has been leading from the beginning, and it brings Lindsay back to the mode of direct address with which he began. After a conventional description of his re-awakening, patently inspired by Dunbar's Goldyn Targe,<sup>24</sup> he uses the complaint of Jhone the Comounweill as a basis for his "Exhortatioun to the Kyngis Grace", which is perhaps the real purpose of The Dreame. Here he employs familiar historical exempla: Midas against avarice, Tarquin against lechery, and Julius Caesar (somewhat incongruously) as a model of kingship. Lindsay thus uses a wide variety of rhetorical techniques to support his central pedagogical purpose: the dream vision, various kinds of personification, encyclopedic lists, traditional descriptions of Heaven, Hell and the planets, the rich connotations of landscape poetry, exempla, and direct address to his audience. The initial impression one gains from this farrago of disparate elements is of a rather chaotic richness, but I have tried to show that Lindsay is in fact disposing his materials with a careful eye for structure, and the uniting factors are a contrast between the transience of this world and the eternal order of the next, and between the hierarchical permanence of the planets and of the Earthly Paradise and the decadence of contemporary Scotland.



Similar structural problems arise with The Testament and Complaynt of the Papyngo. The sixteenth-century printers here discerned five distinct sections, of which only two are strictly narrative. The Prologue is really a long exercise in excusatio, notable principally for a list of Scots poets as frustrating as that of the Lament for the Makaris.<sup>25</sup> The first narrative section, entitled "The Complaynt" by John Scot, describes the fatal accident of the king's pet parrot in a style appropriate to great affairs of state. Lindsay begins in the best Henrysonian style with a general moral proposition:

Quho clymmis to hycht, perforce his feit mon faill .....  
(73)

This generalization, with its Boethian overtones, introduces the principal theme of the poem, but the irony which pervades much of what follows derives from the fact that in this case it is literally true: the Papyngo falls to her death from the top of a tree she has unwisely ascended. Lindsay uses all the conventions of "serious" poetry to establish a mock-tragic tone: the dawn opening, the locus amoenus of a formal garden, an elaborate astrological scheme. But these details are more than merely atmospheric. The stars, for example, seem to be favourable (ll. 115-35), and the weather is fittingly idyllic for 12/13 June.<sup>26</sup> Against this setting, the Papyngo's tragedy is all the more stark. While it is clear that her fall illustrates her vulnerability to Fortune, I do not think that Hamer's comment on the astrological passage shows a full understanding of Lindsay's point:

Everything therefore was favourable to the escapade of the papingo, judging by the astrological signs, but

Fortune can contrive ruin at any time.

27

The irony goes further than a contest between the powers of the stars and of Fortune. We have already seen how such external forces are moderated by the exercise of the human (or, to take the allegory literally, avian) will. Lindsay includes a passage which explicitly covers this aspect:

'Sweit bird,' said I, 'be war, mont nocht ouer hie;  
 Returne in tyme; perchance thy feit may failze;  
 Thov art rycht fat, and nocht weill vsit to fle;  
 The gredie gled, I dreid, scho the assailze.'  
 'I wyll,' said scho, 'ascend, vailze quod vailze;  
 It is my kynd to clym, aye, to the hycht:  
 Off fedther and bone, I watt weill, I am wycht.'

(157-63)

These lines have a complexity which is unusual in Lindsay's narratives. The first point has already been made: we see here the Papyngo's folly, which leads directly to her death. It is not, finally, Fortune who is responsible for the tragedy, it is the Papyngo herself, who submits to Fortune's power by climbing too high. This moral observation clearly relates to the Papyngo's allegorical function, for although it is never directly stated by Lindsay, it is obvious that she stands for the ambitious courtier, and that her ascent stands for "the vaine ascens of court" (l. 351). But the Papyngo is guilty not only of ambition, but also of pride, as l. 163 emphasizes. Her confidence in her own strength is altogether misplaced, as her almost immediate fall illustrates. The Papyngo's role as courtier is also surely the point of the reference to her fatness, rather than an attempt to make her fall seem credible.<sup>28</sup> The whole stanza is in fact full of hints and allusions, even including an anticipation of the Papyngo's subsequent discussion



with the gled, magpie and raven. All this is achieved in a colloquial exchange which represents one pole of the poem's diction, contrasting with the formal high style of much of what has gone before.

The Papyngo's formal complaint (ll. 192-219) reinforces the points already made in the narrative. She apostrophizes both Fortune and the World, but she does not deny her own culpability:

'Prudent counsell, allace, I did refuse,  
Agane reassoun vsyng myne appetyte:  
Ambitioun did so myne hart abuse,  
That Eolus had me in gret dispyte.'

(199-202)

She contrasts her life and death at court with the life she might have led "Had I in forrest flowin, amang my feris" (l. 197). This contrast takes up the motif of the parrot's corpulence, since her tree-bound vulnerability is very different from the freedom of those who stay away from court. But everything is subordinated to the theme de casu principum which is the central motif of the whole poem:

'This daye, at morne, my forme and feddrem fair  
Abufe the prude Pacoke war precellande,  
And now one catyue carioun, full of cair,  
Baithand in blude doun from my hart distelland,  
And in myne eir the bell of deith bene knelland.'

(206-10)

The theme of the fall of princes is then worked out in a more direct manner in the Papyngo's two "Epystylls", directed respectively to James V and to "Hir Brether of Courte". Although they employ somewhat different techniques of argument, these letters form in reality a coherent whole, the second illustrating the main point of the first. The Papyngo's advice

to James includes a great deal of conventional political wisdom about justice and royal morality, ending with an assertion of the exemplary value of history,

The Cronecklis to knaw I the exhorte,  
 Quhilk may be myrrour to thy Maiestie:  
 There sall thov fynd boith gude & euyll reporte  
 Off euerilk Prince, efter his qualytie,

(311-4)

and a reference to James' own ancestry:

Sen first kyng Fergus bure ane Dyademe,  
 Thov art the last king, of fyue score and fyue,  
 And all ar dede, and none bot thov on lyue:

Off quhose number fyftie and fyue bene slane,  
 And, moist parte, in thare awin mysgouernance.

(322-6)

Two points are being made together here: the inevitability of death even for princes (a theme we have already found in The Dreame), and the moral content of history, both as a guide to proper behaviour and as a judge of one's own actions. The implications of these two arguments, taken together, are perhaps somewhat contradictory: the Papyngo condemns the false values of this world, and yet she also argues the need for virtuous action. The resolution of the difficulty, of course, lies in the proper end of politics and the court. Those at court habitually pursue worldly power and riches at the expense of justice and equity, while the Papyngo exhorts James to consider the welfare of his people and of his own soul, and advises other courtiers to abandon worldly goals. In support of this latter exhortation, she gives (ll. 402-597) an outline history of Scottish politics from the reign of Robert III. The form of this passage is more like that of Chaucer's Monk's Tale than it is like even sixteenth-century historiography, and it is clear that



Lindsay is primarily interested in using the admittedly disastrous fortunes of the House of Stewart between 1390 and 1530 to exemplify the transience of worldly power, and the vain ambition of courtiers. It is in this context that we must read stanzas such as those describing the reign of James III:

Thus, Cochrame with his catyue companye,  
 Forsit thame to flee; bot 3it that wantit fedderis.  
 Abufe the heych Cederis of Libanye  
 Thay clam so hie, tyll thay lape ouir thair ledderis;  
 On lawder bryge syne keppit wer in tedderis,  
 Stranglit to deith, thay gat none vther grace,  
 Thair king captyue, quhilk wes ane cairful cace.

(465-71)

Lines such as these are of more than literary significance, since they are quoted by Lindsay's kinsman, the historian Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, and form the basis for his account of the crimes of James III's favourites.<sup>29</sup> Yet the contemporary evidence suggests that Pitscottie's account is in many ways inaccurate.<sup>30</sup> It is of vital importance to recognize Lindsay's conception of history as exemplum, which Pitscottie himself shared.<sup>31</sup> There are hints in the stanza above which suggest that Lindsay is, moreover, relating his account of recent history to the circumstances of his poem: the Papyngo refers to the courtiers' lack of feathers, and the allusion to climbing "abufe the heych Cederis of Libanye" seems to recall her own tragic fate. A similar propagandist purpose no doubt underlies the great contrast between the glittering court of James IV, with its European reputation, and the disaster of Flodden, a contrast which is again taken up by Pitscottie. When she reaches the more recent past, the Papyngo extends her focus to include a number of examples: Albany, the Dowager Queen Margaret, James

Beaton, archbishop of St Andrews, Francis I of France and Charles, duke of Bourbon, Pope Clement VII, Wolsey, and Angus. An allegorical personification, Dame Curia, here makes a couple of fleeting appearances, seemingly embodying the properties of Fortune in a specifically courtly context:

His Wolsey's princely pompe, nor Papale grauitie,  
 His palyce ryall, ryche, and radious,  
 Nor, 3it, the flude of Superfluitie  
 Off his ryches, nor trauell tedious,  
 Frome tyme dame Curia held hym odious,  
 Preualit hym not, nor prudence moste profound:  
 The ledder braik, and he fell to the ground.

(577-83)

The pace of the Papyngo's account quickens as she nears the end, and the rhetorical pitch is heightened by an increasing use of the ubi sunt? motif, applied first to Scottish figures and then to more familiar Classical examples:

Quhare bene the heych tryumphant court of troye?  
 Or Alexander, with his twelf prudent peris?  
 Or Iulius, that rycht redoutit Roye?  
 Agamenone, moste worthy in his weris?  
 To schaw thare fyne my frayit hart aferis.

(605-9)

With the rhetorical conclusion of her second Epystyll, and her farewell to the royal palaces she has frequented, Lindsay concludes the first main line of his argument. Although there are a number of structural breaks within this first part of the poem, the themes of the vain ambition of courtiers and the responsibilities of rulers unite the various parts. But at l. 647 there is a fundamental change of subject as well as of narrative method, and another kind of symbol is introduced with the arrival of the magpie:

'I am,' said he, 'one Channoun regulare,  
 And of my brether Pryour principall.



My quhyte rocket my clene lyfe doith declare;  
The blak bene of the deith memoriall .....

(654-7)

Two kinds of allegorization are present in these lines, the basic fiction by which various birds are made to represent members of religious orders and the Pye's own explanation of his "habit" in theological terms. The fundamental technique is not greatly different from that by which the Papyngo stands for the ambitious courtier, except that the religious allegory is much more explicit. In each case, something concrete (a bird) is made to represent a human group or type: it is the reverse of the process by which a human character is invented to represent an abstract quality, such as Dame Curia in the Papyngo or Remembrance in The Dreame. This final section of Lindsay's poem stands within a long tradition of bird-debate, and its closest analogue is perhaps Richard Holland's Buke of the Howlat, where a wide range of ecclesiastical positions are assigned to various birds. The details are, however, quite different: Lindsay's magpie is the prior of a house of Augustinian canons, the raven is a Benedictine, and the gled (kite) is a friar. Holland makes the magpie, along with partridges and plovers, an abbot, but the friars are represented by crows and jackdaws, while the raven is described as a rural dean, and the kite seems to be placed among the retinue of the eagle/emperor.<sup>32</sup> If he has taken anything directly from Holland, Lindsay has borrowed the idea of such specific associations, but his scope is narrower than Holland's and his purpose somewhat different.

The basic technique of the dialogue between the Papyngo and the clerical birds is to contrast their materialism and

hypocrisy with her straightforward and commonsense faith. The propaganda advantages of this gambit are obvious, but its logic carries us a little further, for if the Papyngo is indeed more Christian than her would-be confessors, what then happens to the claim of the Church that the priest is a necessary intermediary between God and man?<sup>33</sup> In fact, Lindsay combines in the first part of the dialogue the accusations of the Papyngo with the self-exposure of the religious:

The Papyngo said: 'Father, be the rude,  
Howbeit 3our rayment be religious lyke,  
3our conscience, I suspect, be nocht gude.  
I did persaeue, quhen preuelye 3e did pyke  
Ane chekin frome ane hen, vnder ane dyke.'  
'I grant,' said he; 'that hen was my gude freind,  
And I that chekin tuke, bot for my teind.'

(675-81)

The defence which the Gled offers for ecclesiastical taxation is distinctly weak, and this is an obvious way in which Lindsay constructs his dialogue to put the clergy in the worst possible light. The Gled's account of the obsequies which will be performed for the Papyngo is a curious mixture of liturgical references and pagan ones ("dame Nature", l. 689; "Pluto", l. 708), and the solemnity of the occasion is scarcely increased by a rather jaunty macaronic rhyme on "Conmemoratio Animarum", "alarum", and "Secundum Vsum Sarum" (ll. 697-700). The Papyngo is, we feel, quite right to reject the attentions of these birds of prey, and to prefer those of a number of gentler creatures.

These exchanges are, however, really only a preliminary to the dialogue proper, initiated by the request of the Gled that the much-travelled Papyngo should give them an account of the current reputation of the clergy. The main body of her



analysis runs, with several brief interruptions, from l. 759 to l. 975, and it provides the intellectual core of this second part, and probably of the whole Papyngo. She begins by describing the primitive Church, its purity and evangelical zeal before the time of Constantine.<sup>34</sup> Once again, Lindsay uses simple personification-allegory to reinforce his point:

'The Prelatis spowsit wer with pouertie,  
Those dayis quhen so thay flurisit in fame;  
And with hir generit Lady Chaistitie,  
And dame Deuotioun, notabyll of name:  
Humyll thay war, simpyll, and full of schame.  
Thus, Chaistitie and dame Deuotioun  
War principall cause of thare promotioun.'

(794-800)

Allegorical figures of this kind abound in the Papyngo's speech, following through the metaphor of marriage. Constantine marries the Church to Dame Propertie (ll. 808-10), by whom are borne two daughters, Ryches and Sensualytie (ll. 840-4). Such sketchy personifications do not really make the abstract qualities described any more concrete: the marriage-metaphor enables Lindsay to suggest that certain qualities are the "offspring" of others, but in the absence of physical attributes or any other narrative detail we are no more aware than we were before of the nature of Chaistitie or Sensualytie. The device of personification works a little better further on, when the exile of Chaistitie allows Lindsay to make his satire more specific and immediate:

'In Inglande couthe scho get none ordinance:  
Than to the Kyng and courte of Scotlande  
Scho markit hir, withouttin more demande.

Traistyng to that court to get conforte,  
Scho maid hir humyll supplycatioun.  
Schortlye, thay said scho sulde get na supporte,  
Bot bostit hir with blasphematioun:

"To preistis go mak 3our protestatioun.  
It is," said thay, "mony one houndreth 3eir  
Sen Chaistitie had ony entres heir."

(875-84)

Here the rejection of Chaistitie by the Scottish court is more dramatic because it is conceived in terms of concrete action, and indeed the passage anticipates the maltreatment of the virtues in the Satyre.<sup>35</sup> Such techniques also give Lindsay an opportunity to pay a neat compliment to the recently-founded Convent of Sciennes in Edinburgh,<sup>36</sup> for when Chaistitie makes her way there, having been rejected everywhere else, she finds both her mother, Pouertie, and her sister, Deuotioun (ll. 916-26). The narrative is here approaching the sort of resonance we have come to expect of medieval allegory, and the Papyngo's subsequent comments bring us a little closer to the analytical allegory of, for example, King Hart. Thus, the nuns of Sciennes defend themselves with six cannons (a pun on canones may be intended), Perseuerence, Constance, Conscience, Austerity, Laubour, and Abstynance, and a "Boumbard" called Domine custodi nos. The naming of guns was of course commonplace in the sixteenth century,<sup>37</sup> but Lindsay is here drawing upon a medieval analogy between monastic life and military activity (the militia Christi) which is of great antiquity.<sup>38</sup> This passage is of more than technical significance, however, for it indicates quite clearly that at this date (1530) Lindsay was willing to recognize the merits of at least one house which held to genuinely ascetic ideals.

By this point, the Raven is beginning the counter-attack. The Papyngo's rhetorical apostrophe to the prelates (ll. 962-8)



stings him to reply, first quoting Scripture to show that property is legitimate. His examples (Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Joseph) are all, we may note, from Genesis, and all are secular: he has nothing to say about religious affluence. His main "defence", indeed, is in reality more like a confession: he concedes the decadence of the contemporary Church, but tries to place the blame anywhere other than at his own door. The principal line of his argument is that temporal rulers are responsible, since they appoint corrupt or irresponsible prelates. His answer, and presumably Lindsay's own, is a "Congregatioun" (l. 1020), by which he appears to mean a General Council, in order to bring about reform within the Church. He thus identifies himself as a conciliarist, but his view is as much in the minority within the dialogue as it was in the sixteenth-century Church.<sup>39</sup> Lindsay is thus able to have his argument both ways: by denying responsibility on behalf of the Church the Raven exemplifies clerical self-justification, and yet he also acknowledges the truth of much that the Papyngo says and even offers a suggestion for a partial solution of the problem. The moderation of his position contrasts with the arrogance of the Gled, who dismisses the Papyngo's arguments for clerical marriage out of hand:

'Pew!' quod the gled, 'thow prechis all in vaine:  
3e Seculare folks hes of our cace no curis.'

(1060-1)

This observation brings the discussion full circle, for the Papyngo's reply that people nevertheless comment on the immorality of the clergy brings us back to the Gled's original question:

'So, be thyne heych ingyne superlatyue,  
 Off all countreis thow knawis the qualiteis,  
 Quharefore I the coniure, be God of lyue,  
 The veritie declare, withouttin leis,  
 Quhat thow hes hard, be landis, or be seis,  
 Off ws Kirkmen, boith gude and euyll reporte,  
 And quhov thay Iuge, schaw ws, we the exhorte.'

(752-8)

The careful circularity of the debate thus reflects the same concern with structure which we observed in The Dreame, and it makes a further propaganda point, for although the Gled wishes to know the reputation of the clergy among the laity, his arrogance is inclined to deny any authority to their views.

This impenitent determination of the clerical representatives is immediately contrasted with the humility of the Papyngo, who even confesses to the Gled (ll. 1067-8). Her Christian piety is then further demonstrated by the testament which she makes, Cresseid-like, at the end of the poem. She begins by appointing the Raven and the Gled executors, which enables Lindsay to emphasize their predatory natures and which gives rise to a more specific echo of Henryson:

The rowpand Reuin said: 'Sweit syster, lat se  
 3our hole intent; for it is tyme to go.'  
 The gredie gled said: 'Brother, do nocht so.  
 We wyll remane, and haldin vp hir hede,  
 And neuer depart frome hir, tyll scho be dede.'

(1083-7)

The image of the hunter "holding up" the head of the dying victim seems to me unmistakably to recall Lowrence in Henryson's Taill of Schir Chantecleir and the Foxe:

'And at his end I did my besie curis  
 To hald his heid and gif him drinkis warme:  
 Syne at the last the sweit swelt in my arme.'

The whole of the Papyngo's testament is overhung by the greed of



those surrounding her, and it is no surprise when at her death they ignore her bequests and tear her apart themselves. The rapacity of the clerical birds is the poem's final image, and it neatly counterpoints the foregoing discussion by vindicating the Papyngo's allegations. This final passage, in which the birds struggle and argue over the Papyngo's corpse, is indeed "brilliant satire of the rapacity and quarrels of the Church in the division of property".<sup>41</sup> But its success depends very largely upon its context, and upon the contrast between the formal, static sections which have gone before, the Papyngo's two letters, the dialogue, and her formal testament, and the conclusion. Set against these formal passages, the violent outburst at the end is shocking both aesthetically and morally, as Lindsay clearly intended it to be, and the contrast is not least between the Papyngo's formal self-dismemberment in her bequests and the greedy tearing-apart which actually follows.

The Testament and Complaynt of the Papyngo falls naturally into two parts, a division which tallies well enough with the more complex organization of the sixteenth-century printers. The first four of their five sections are in reality bound together by a common theme, the vanity of worldly power and in particular the blind ambition of courtiers. The "allegory" of this part of the poem is of a very loose kind, in which images are used to establish the function of the Papyngo as representative courtier without a clear pattern of correspondences in detail. The latter part of the poem, the printers' final section, is both more specific in its meaning, relating both through dialogue and action to the vices of the clergy, and more

systematic in its allegory, using the identifications of the various birds to condemn the entire clerical estate. Cutting across this natural division, which parallels the structure of both The Dreame (where the description of the cosmos gives way to specific satirical comment on Scotland) and, more obviously, Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis,<sup>42</sup> is Lindsay's use of a variety of rhetorical forms: straightforward narrative, reported dialogue, formal complaint, verse-epistle. The organization of diverse elements into a more or less unified whole, which we observed in The Dreame, is thus again apparent in the Papyngo, although there is perhaps a less coherent relationship here between the anti-court satire and the anti-clerical satire than there is between the various elements of The Dreame. The unifying function is fulfilled in this poem by the Papyngo herself, whose role nevertheless changes from the victim of Fortune in the first part to that of the voice of outraged Christian layman in the second. It is, finally, Lindsay's satiric drive which holds the disparate elements together, despite the poem's formal disunity.<sup>43</sup>

A similar range of rhetorical elements is given much greater thematic unity in The Tragedie of the Cardinale (1547), in which Lindsay returns to the theme of the Fall of Princes, explicitly associating his account of the life and death of Cardinal David Beaton with the De casibus of "Ihone Bochas".<sup>44</sup> As the poet in The Kingis Quair is reading Boethius, and Chaucer sometimes links his visions with his nocturnal reading-matter,<sup>45</sup> so Lindsay's reading of Boccaccio is interrupted by

Ane woundit man, abundantlie bledyng,  
With vissage paill, and with ane dedlye cheir,



Semand ane man of two and fyftie zeir,  
 In Rayment reid, clothit full curioslie,  
 Off vellot, and of Saityng Crammosie.

(17-21)

By making Beaton tell his own story Lindsay is able to give "authority" to his version of events: at many points in the poem Beaton effectively admits his crimes, and there is thus, in fictional terms at least, no argument about the authenticity of what is said. We are, therefore, again dealing with the device of self-exposure as a satiric tool, and there is no doubt that one of the principal intentions underlying the Tragedie is Lindsay's animosity towards the assassinated Cardinal.

Thus, he makes Beaton straightforwardly acknowledge his responsibility for the war between Scotland and England in 1542:

'Quhair throch thar rose gret weir & mortal stryfe,  
 Gret heirschippis, hounger, darth, and desolatioun:  
 On ather syde did mony lose thare lyfe.  
 Geue I wald mak ane trew Narratioun,  
 I causit all that trybulatioun:  
 For tyll tak peace I neuer wald consent,  
 Without the kyng of france had bene content.'

(106-12)

There are many similar passages in the Tragedie, in which Beaton admits his over-reaching ambition (ll. 61-3; 71-5), his treacherous scheming against Arran (ll. 155 ff.), his persecution of "All fauoraris of the auld and new Testament" (ll. 211-7). In this latter connection, it is striking that whereas Lindsay is very specific throughout the Tragedie in his political references, he does not allude explicitly to the burning of George Wishart, which certainly seems to have been the original provocation for the assassination of Beaton.<sup>46</sup> Omitting all reference to this incident, Beaton attributes his murder to the

fear of the Fife lairds he subsequently intended to arrest on charges of heresy.<sup>47</sup> But the explanation which Lindsay makes Beaton offer in the latter part of his autobiography moves away from any specific sequence of events to a more general theme, the vanity of worldly possessions:

'Behald my Faitell Infylicitie!  
I beand in my strenth Incomparabyll,  
That dreidfull Dungioun maid me no supple,  
My gret ryches, nor rentis proffitabyll;  
My Syluer work, Iowellis inestimabyll,  
My Papall pompe, of gold my ryche threasure,  
My lyfe, and all, I loste in half ane hour.'

(253-9)

Behind Beaton's various crimes lies his most fundamental sin, the worship of false gods, and in view of the association of the poem with Boccaccio's De casibus, it is not surprising that the poet's thematic concern should at one level be with the familiar subjects of mutability and contemptus mundi. It is in this most general sense, in part, that Beaton's tragedie is a lesson to "all proude Prelatis" (l. 271), in the same way that the many examples in Boccaccio's work illustrate the vanity of temporal power and the inevitability of death.

Yet Lindsay is not exclusively concerned with such moral generalizations, as the specific nature of Beaton's confessions makes clear. The Tragedie is more satirical, and more directly concerned with political and ecclesiastical reform, than many of the moralistic works in the Falls of Princes tradition. The "Tragedie" proper, the narrative part of Lindsay's poem, is followed by two apostrophes, similar in function to the verse-epistles of the Papyngo, in which the reformist themes of the Tragedie are expounded. The charges made here are familiar to



anyone who has read Lindsay's earlier poems: as has often been remarked, Lindsay is a poet who frequently repeats himself, in subject-matter and sometimes even in wording.<sup>48</sup> Just as the Papyngo changes her function half-way through the Testament and Complaynt of the Papyngo, so does Beaton shift from confessing his own misdeeds to an uncompromising attack on the Church's dereliction of duty. If such sentiments seem to fall rather oddly from the lips of the hated Beaton, this is perhaps an indication of the lightness with which Lindsay regards his fictions, but it might also be argued that the Beaton of the poem has learnt a harsh lesson from his fate, and is the posthumous equivalent of the repentant Papyngo. Even in the narrative part of the Tragedie there is a certain ambiguity about some of the Cardinal's utterances, which perhaps derives from the hindsight with which he now regards his behaviour while alive:

'For schortnes of the tyme, I am nocht abyll  
At lenth to schaw my actis honorabyll.

For my moste Princelye Prodigalytie  
Amang prelatys in france, I bure the pryse:  
I schew my Lordlye Lyberalytie,  
In Banketting, playng at cartis, and Dyse:  
In to sic wysedome I was haldin wyse,  
And sparit nocht to playe with Kyng nor knyght,  
Thre thousand crownis of gold, vpon ane nyght.'

(76-84)

At the most obvious level, these lines fit within the general pattern of self-condemnation: Beaton is confessing to a most un-clerical enjoyment of the pleasures of this world. But what do we make of "honorabyll" in l. 77, or of "wysedome" in l. 82? For Lindsay and for us, of course, they are ironic, since there is nothing honourable and wise about gambling or feasting. But Beaton is perhaps here reflecting the opinion

of his worldly companions, who judge a churchman not by his piety or by his learning but rather by his "Lordlye Lyberalitye" — largesse is, after all, a courtly virtue. And there may, in addition, be a degree of self-irony, since the relishing of temporalia was his own vice when he was alive. If we treat the fiction seriously, therefore, a complex relation is seen to exist between Lindsay's moral judgments, those of the murdered Beaton, and those which Beaton made (or failed to make) during his lifetime. It is perhaps the sense of moral discrimination which emerges from the Cardinal's account of his own misdeeds which prepares us for his function as the voice of clerical reform in his final addresses to spiritual and temporal princes.

The criticisms which he voices in this latter part of the Tragedie are, as I have already stated, much the same as those Lindsay makes elsewhere. Like the Raven in the Papyngo, Beaton blames the secular lords in part for the faults of the ecclesiastical hierarchy:

'Imprudent Prencis, but discretoun,  
 Hauyng, in erth, power Imperiall,  
 3e bene the cause of this Transgressioun:  
 I speik to 3ow all in to generall,  
 Quhilk doith dispone all office spirituell,  
 Geuand the saulis, quhilkis bene Chrystis scheip,  
 To blynd Pastouris but conscience, to keip.'

(344-50)

The reference to "blynd Pastouris" takes up an earlier allusion to the New Testament imagery of sheep and shepherds, deriving principally from John 10: 11-16, although there it is the lower-level clerical appointments made by the prelates which are condemned:



'Or quhy suld men geue to sic Hirdis hyre,  
 Quhilk can not gyde thare scheip about the myre?'

(293-4)

This is one of a number of recurrent themes in Lindsay's satire: bad appointments, the inadequacy of contemporary preaching, the worldliness and personal immorality of clerics, and especially of the religious orders. The catalogue of clerical vices here is punctuated by references to Beaton's salutary experience, which serve the aesthetic purpose of binding the two sections of the poem together as well as the propagandist one of lending concreteness and authority to the accusations. Beaton's apostrophe to secular princes ends with an authoritative appeal for reform which takes on positively apocalyptic proportions:

'Quharefor I counsayle euerylk christinit kyng  
 With in his realme mak Reformatioun,  
 And suffer no mo Rebaldis for to ryng  
 Abufe Christis trew Congregatioun:  
 Failzeying thareof, I mak Narratioun  
 That 3e Prencis and Prelatis, all at onis,  
 Sall bureit be in hell, Saule, blude, and bonis.'

(421-7)

We have seen that in each of Lindsay's narrative poems we have examined so far there is an authoritative figure who is made to voice Lindsay's own views: Remembrance and Jhone the Comoun-weill in The Dreame, the Papyngo and (with many qualifications) the Raven in the Papyngo, and Beaton, again with complications of irony, in The Tragedie of the Cardinale. The device of using the dream-vision to introduce authoritative tutelary characters is, of course, well established in medieval allegorical literature; but one interesting innovation of Lindsay's, most obviously apparent in the Papyngo's discussion with her clerical interlocutors, is the introduction of lay figures

who are more reliable than the clerical characters. The Protestant implications of such a development have in the past been commented on,<sup>49</sup> and do not need further elaboration here. But the occurrence of much the same device in a non-allegorical context in Kitteis Confessioun is perhaps as close as we are likely to come to internal evidence supporting Lindsay's authorship of this poem, which was doubtful even in 1568.<sup>50</sup> Again we find a two-part structure, with the dialogue of ll. 1-95 giving way to a monologue by Kitte in which

she ceases to be a country wench who has never heard of heresy, and discusses the history of confession from the days of the early Christian Church onwards, denounces general confessions, and advocates voluntary confession of the sins which trouble.

## 51

We should not by now be surprised that Lindsay makes so free with his own fabula, but it is important to realize that the authoritativeness of Kitte is more than an excuse for Lindsay to harangue us; it is part of the satiric point that she knows more of doctrinal matters than the curate.

Kitteis Confessioun begins with the conventional comic image of the lecherous priest, in whom the hypocritical blend of devotion and desire is conveyed both by direct statement and by innuendo:

Quhen scho was telland as scho wist,  
The Curate Kitte wald haue kist,  
Bot 3it ane countenance he bure,  
Degeist, deuote, daine, and demure,  
And syne began hir to exempne;  
He was best at the efter game.

(3-8)

There is nothing especially Protestant about such anti-clerical satire: it is easy to parallel this situation from fifteenth-



century lyric poetry, and behind such pieces lies a stereotype of the fabliaux as popular as that of the senile cuckold.<sup>52</sup> But there is a more serious accusation beneath what follows, for in addition to his lecherous designs, the curate is shown to use the confessional for his own ends. The four exchanges which follow (ll. 9-28) have a common pattern, in which the curate's betrayal of the secrecy of the confessional is associated with his various nefarious purposes:

(Quod he) haue 3e na wrangous geir?  
 (Quod scho) I staw ane Pek of beir.  
 (Quod he) that suld restorit be,  
 Tharefore delyuer it to me:  
 Tibbe and Peter bad me speir,  
 Be my conscience thay sall it heir.

(9-14)

The point of these lines is not just that, as Hamer suggests, the curate "has no intention of restoring the stolen barley to its rightful owners";<sup>53</sup> he is using the confession to further others' ends as well as his own, acting as an agent for other parishioners. He is also looking for heresy ("Inglis Bukis", l. 21) and for treason (l. 25), both of which he reports to the proper authorities. Once again, the technique here is effectively self-condemnation, coupled in this case with the dramatic question-and-answer of the confession. The point of the satire is to prepare the way for the condemnation of the abuse of confession which comes in the second half of the poem, anticipating Kitte's comment that

'It is nocht ellis bot mennis law,  
 Maid mennis myndis for to knaw .....

(101-2)

The curate's combination of personal ambition, evident in his demand to be given the barley and his expectation of profiting

from Kitte's fornication with Will Leno by himself seducing Leno's wife (ll. 17-8), with service to the Establishment by hunting heretics and other dissidents, lends weight to Kitte's subsequent denunciation.

A second narrative episode (ll. 33 ff.) gives the poem a somewhat different direction. In reply to the curate's instruction that she "to my Chalmer cum at euin/ Absoluit for to be and schreuin" (ll. 31-2), Kitte describes a previous confession she has made to "schir Andro my brother".<sup>54</sup> This passage bridges the gap between the innocent, passive Kitte of the opening lines and the knowledgable plain-speaker of the final part: here she catalogues Andro's omissions, for if the curate is an unscrupulous abuser of the confessional, Andro is a lax, negligent confessor:

'He teichit me nocht for tyll traist  
The confort of the haly Gaist:  
He bad me nocht to Christ be kynd,  
To keip his law with hart and mynd,  
And loue and thank his greit mercie,  
Fra Syn and hell that sauit me,  
And lufe my Nichtbour as my sell.  
Of this na thing he could me tell,  
Bot gaue me pennance, ilk ane day  
Ane Aue Maria for to say,  
And Frydayis fyue, na fische to eit;  
Bot butter and eggis ar better meit:  
And with ane plak to by ane Messe  
Fra drounkin schir Iohne latynelesse.'

(63-76)

It is perhaps ironic that Kitte is so well-informed about the things she should have been instructed in: it is a case of the pupil knowing more than the teacher. The reported confession is a neat device, since it allows the poet to contrast two kinds of bad confessor, and in this respect it quite obviously strengthens the case for reform. It also permits one or two other



passing shots, as in Kitte's accusations against Schir Andro of voyeurism:

'He speirit mony strange cace,  
 Quhow that my lufe did me Inbrace,  
 Quhat day, how oft, quhat sort, and quhare?  
 (Quod he) I wald I had bene thare .....

(37-40)

and of the irrelevance of the ritual to those it was supposed to instruct:

'... And mekle Latyne he did mummill,  
 I hard na thing but hummill bummill,  
 He schew me nocht of Goddis word .....

(43-5)

Throughout this passage Kitte grows in stature, turning like the Papyngo from merely another sinner into a scourge of clerical vice.

Yet we are never allowed to lose sight of the sinful Kitte. She has a "lufe", she admits to fornication with Will Leno and to stealing barley, and her reaction to the easy penance imposed on her by Schir Andro is to affirm her intention of continuing to sin:

'Of all his pennance I was glaid,  
 I had thame all parqueir, I said:  
 To mow and steill, I ken the pryce,  
 I sall it set on Cincq and Syce.'

(81-4)

In a way, of course, this makes Lindsay's propagandist line even more convincing: Kitte is not merely an ordinary Christian, she is a fairly sinful ordinary Christian, and yet she still knows more of basic doctrine than her clerical "instructors". It is on these grounds that I believe the inconsistencies of her character to be deliberate and an effective element in the satire, rather than evidence that Lindsay was simply using her as a way

of getting us to pay attention to his reformist lecture.

The greater part of Kitte's final speech is indeed scarcely dramatic at all, consisting of Lindsay's own views on the superiority of discretionary confession over compulsory general confession on the Catholic model. It serves as a kind of commentary on the confessions we have witnessed through dialogue and through reported action, and it involves a straightforward doctrinal statement which is, as Hamer observes, in literal terms inconsistent with the character who makes it. Only at the very end does Lindsay vary his simple expository style:

'Swa to confes, as I descryue,  
Wes in the gude Kirk Primityue:  
Swa wes Confessioun ordanit first  
Thocht Codrus kyte suld cleue and birst.'

(137-40)

This last reference seemed to Hamer to be particularly out of keeping with Kitte's character, but then, he remarks, Lindsay "has long since given up the pretence that Kitty is speaking."<sup>55</sup> The allusion is, as Irving pointed out, to Virgil's eighth Eclogue:

Pastores, hederæ nascentem ornate poetam,  
Arcades, invidia rumpantur ut ilia Codro.

56

Whether Hamer is correct or not in his hypothesis that "Codrus kyte" may have come to be associated with the greed of the Church, it is surely true that the bursting of the envious poet is linked by Kitte with the reaction of the Church to the loss of such a profitable source of revenue as the confessional.<sup>57</sup> But the most obvious thing about Virgil's remark is its pastoral context, which would certainly have been assumed by Lindsay's



audience at the mention of Codrus.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, it appears to take up the rural setting of the poem, which is hinted at in Kitte's earlier reference to stealing "ane Pek of beir". A reference which is both pastoral and literary, it might be argued, neatly parallels Kitte's own double function of sinful peasant and moral teacher, thus tying together the poem's ambiguities. As so often in Lindsay, satire, propaganda and fiction are deftly harmonized in Kitteis Confessioun.

The plurality of forms of narrative and rhetoric which we have observed in the narrative poems of Lindsay we have so far examined is much less evident in The Historie of Squyer Meldrum, occurring only vestigially in the form of the Testament which is appended to the narrative proper.<sup>59</sup> Lindsay's characteristically overt didacticism, too, is here absent: while I believe it is clear that Lindsay's concerns in Squyer Meldrum are at least partly ethical, there is no direct statement of intent, and indeed no authoritative voice (other than the narrator's) to articulate Lindsay's views. This difference from Lindsay's other works has led to some critical debate about the poet's intentions, and in particular about the relationship between the biographical and romance elements in the story of Lindsay's contemporary and friend, William Meldrum. The more usual approach has been to regard the narrative as essentially factual, and to minimize the extent to which romance conventions have influenced the form of the poem. Thus Hamer, while he identifies many parallels between the details of Squyer Meldrum and earlier Middle English and Middle Scots romances, insists that Lindsay is following Meldrum's life-story faithfully, and James

Kinsley similarly plays down the element of romance artifice:

His story, within the natural framework of good and ill fortune and a quiet end, is episodic; its shape seems to be merely and strictly that of Meldrum's life.

60

Insofar as Squyer Meldrum conveys any thematic content, therefore, it does so, in Kinsley's view, because of the underlying significance of the historical facts themselves; the story is figura, and not fabula.<sup>61</sup> Up to a point, the case made by Hamer and Kinsley may readily be granted: Lindsay did, after all, choose as his hero a man lately dead, an ordinary Fife laird whose story was presumably already known, in outline at least, to many in his audience. To deal with events of such proximity in place and time undoubtedly imposes restraints not experienced by the author of an Arthurian or Charlemagne romance.

But such an approach leaves unexplained not only a number of details in the poem which belong squarely within the romance tradition and which we shall have to examine in the following pages, but also the reason for Lindsay's decision to write about Meldrum in this way at all. Was he merely, as Chalmers suggested, entertaining the Lindsay household with the tale of "such a domestic as Meldrum"?<sup>62</sup> And if, as Kinsley argues, the poet saw in his hero a model of chivalric virtue, so that Squyer Meldrum is "a serious biography celebrating the virtues and deeds of a great man intimately known and lately dead",<sup>63</sup> what are we to make of the curiously anti-chivalric tone of the poem's diminuendo ending, not to mention at least one episode in which Meldrum's behaviour seems distinctly unchivalric?<sup>64</sup> One way of resolving the ambiguities, of course, is to carry the



biographical argument to its logical conclusion, and accept that virtually everything in the poem was imposed on Lindsay by his material, that the ambiguities are in the nature of the evidence. Yet Lindsay does seed his poem with romance allusions and moral observations, which have a profound effect upon the way in which we interpret the characters and their actions, and indeed upon the significance with which we endow the whole Historie. It is difficult to escape the awareness that the relationship between history and romance in Squyer Meldrum is both complex and most artfully controlled.

An answer to these difficulties has recently been offered by Felicity Riddy in an important study of the poem.<sup>65</sup> To Mrs Riddy, Squyer Meldrum reveals a move by Lindsay away from romance towards a more realistic approach to human life. The Meldrum of the first half of the Historie is a conventional romance hero, his own experiences deliberately selected by Lindsay to fit an established literary pattern. But even here, she suggests, we are intended to see the inadequacy of this approach:

... in the course of making Meldrum into a romance hero Lindsay reveals the simplifications of that poetry for what they are: the very exclusiveness of romance serves to suggest other irreducible complexities, and as the poem proceeds we are made more and more clearly aware that romance is an imperfect paradigm of life.

Everywhere in the poem Mrs Riddy sees a tension between romance and life: in the joust between Meldrum and Talbart, where an allegorical dream invades a conflict which presumably actually took place, in the comic juxtaposition of courtly language and

un-courtly passion in the wooing scene with the Lady of Glen-eagles, in the harsh detail of the ambush. Gradually, however, art gives way to life, so that eventually, living out his days after his defeat and the loss of his Lady, "the Meldrum of the end of the poem is not a romance hero at all",<sup>67</sup> and Squyer Meldrum culminates in the rejection of romance in favour of a less heroic, but no less admirable, way of life.

It seems to me that Mrs Riddy's reading of the poem brings us a good deal closer to an understanding of Lindsay's purposes than a more straightforwardly biographical interpretation, and it will be apparent from what follows that my own views are in many ways similar to hers. At the same time, I think the ironies which spring from Lindsay's exploitation of the romance tradition deserve further exploration, and it is possible to be more precise about the values which are articulated at various points, and most obviously in the ending. There are also ambiguities surrounding Lindsay's notion of virtue in Squyer Meldrum which take us close to the core of the poem, leading us back to the whole question of Meldrum's role as paragon. Such difficulties are raised at the very outset, in Lindsay's conventional opening:

Quho that Antique Stories reidis  
 Considder may the famous deidis  
 Of our Nobill Progenitouris,  
 Quhilk suld to vs be richt mirrouris,  
 Thair verteous deidis to ensew,  
 And vicious leuing to eschew.

(1-6)

This moral generalization, with its echoes of Barbour, Henryson and Blind Hary,<sup>68</sup> is ambiguously applicable to Lindsay's hero. His story, obviously, is not antique, but Lindsay goes on to



argue that he is as deserving a subject as the more familiar heroes of romance. Yet his "verteous" deeds include his affair with the Lady of Gleneagles, which may fit well enough within the romance conventions but which can hardly be offered without qualification as a moral example. Lindsay does indeed justify his claim, by reference to Lancelot and Guenevere:

I wait Sir Lancelote du lake  
 Quhen he did lufe King Arthuris wyfe,  
 Faucht neuer better with sword nor knyfe,  
 For his Ladie in no battell,  
 Nor had not half so just querrell.  
 The veritie quha list declair,  
 His Lufe was ane Adulterair,  
 And durst not cum into hir sicht,  
 Bot lyke ane Houlet on the nicht.  
 With this Squyer it stude not so:  
 His Ladie luifit him and no mo.  
 Husband nor Lemman had scho none;  
 And so he had hir lufe alone.  
 I think it is no happie lyfe,  
 Ane Man to jaip his Maisteris wyfe,  
 As did Lancelote: this I conclude,  
 Of sic amour culd cum na gude.

(48-64)

It might be argued that the extra-marital nature of Meldrum's affair is irrelevant within the conventions of romance; but Lindsay himself draws our attention to such moral considerations by his favourable contrast between Meldrum's conduct and that of Lancelot. It is true, if we apply such notions, that Lancelot's relationship with Guenevere is adulterous, while Meldrum's behaviour with the Lady of Gleneagles is mere fornication (and an offence against the Canon Law on consanguinity). But l. 64 could apply as well to Meldrum and his Lady as it does to Lancelot and Guenevere, and the unhappy end of their affair is also perhaps foreshadowed by Lindsay's earlier allusions to the stories of Troilus and Cressida and of Jason and Medea (ll. 23-6).

This moral ambivalence is again evident in the first narrative episode, the rescue of the young woman in Carrickfergus (ll. 93-212). At the most obvious level, Meldrum is here acting like the romance hero par excellence, rescuing a damsel from robbery or worse,<sup>69</sup> disposing of two assailants, and then behaving courteously towards the lady. Mrs Riddy properly emphasizes the formalization which pervades this scene, and even the lady's offer of marriage to her rescuer is not unprecedented in medieval romance.<sup>70</sup> Meldrum deals with the proposal courteously enough, facing a problem of manners not unlike Gawain's difficulties with Bercilak's lady.<sup>71</sup> Yet no amount of special pleading will dispose of the fact that he does promise to marry her:

'Of that (quod he) I wald be fane,  
 Gif I nicht in this Realme remane.  
 Bot I mon first pas into France;  
 Sa quhen I cum agane, perchance,  
 And efter that the Peice be maid,  
 To marie 3ow I will be glaid:  
 Fair weill, I may no langer tarie.  
 I pray God keip 3ow, & sweit sanct Marie.'

(187-94)<sup>72</sup>

The "perchance" may be strategically placed to give Meldrum an escape, but he certainly leads the lady to believe he has accepted her, and she gives him a ruby ring as "ane Lufe taking". As if to dispose of any doubt about the question, Meldrum gives a further pledge:

'Ladie, I say 3ow in certane  
 3e sall haue lufe for lufe agane,  
 Trewlie, vnto my Lyfis end.'

(207-9)

When the campaign in France is at an end, however, Meldrum makes no effort to return to Ireland, and the lady is only referred to



again in the appended Testament, where, significantly, he regrets having given up his "dayis darling" of Carrickfergus:

3e suld haue bene my spous and paramour,  
With Rent and riches for my recompence,  
Quhilk I refusit, throw 3outh and insolence.

(222-4)<sup>73</sup>

That we are not intended simply to pass over this unexplained omission, which presumably leaves the lady in Carrickfergus awaiting Meldrum's return, is suggested by a number of echoes in the episode in which Meldrum meets and wins the Lady of Gleneagles. Perhaps the most obvious is the exchange of rings which follows their first love-making:

Scho rais, and tenderlie him kist,  
And on his hand ane Ring scho thrist;  
And he gaif ane lufe drowrie,  
Ane Ring set with ane riche Rubie,  
In takin that thair Lufe for euer  
Suld neuer frome thir twa disseuer.

(1001-6)

Even if (as seems just possible) Lindsay is not suggesting that it is the same ring, the language here unmistakably evokes the scene in Carrickfergus:

Then gaif scho him ane Lufe taking,  
Ane riche Rubie set in ane Ring.

(195-6)

The formulaic nature of romance description can hardly explain so precise an echo, and the effect is surely to remind us of Meldrum's unfulfilled commitment to the lady in Ireland. The differences between the episodes are, however, as interesting as the parallel: the use of "thrist" conforms to the more erotic atmosphere of the later scene and to the Lady of Gleneagles' much more purposeful character (consistent, perhaps, in literary

terms, with her widowed status), while the exchange of rings contrasts with the unilateral gift of the Irish lady and emphasizes the reciprocity of this new relationship. While Meldrum may have been engaged to the damsel of Carrickfergus, he is certainly never involved with her, and according to romance values, that is perhaps a partial justification of his conduct.

Other echoes also serve to establish a link between the two wooing-scenes. Thus, Meldrum's promise to the lady in Carrickfergus that "3e sall haue lufe for lufe agane" has its parallel in the meditation of the Lady of Gleneagles when she overhears Meldrum's expression of longing:

Hir hart fulfillit with pietie,  
Thocht scho wald haif of him mercie,  
And said, 'howbeit I suld be slane,  
He sall haue lufe for lufe agane.  
Wald God I nicht, with my honour,  
Haue him to be my Paramour.'

(921-6)

We might be inclined to ascribe this repetition to mere lack of invention on Lindsay's part (especially since a very similar line appears in Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis<sup>74</sup>), were it not for the fact that the final couplet of the speech also recalls the scene in Carrickfergus:

'Suld I not lufe him Paramour,  
That saifit my Lyfe and my honour?'

(205-6)

Again, while the Irish lady is "my Fatheris Air" (l. 182), at Gleneagles it is Meldrum who is, as the Lady points out, "3our Fatheris Air" (l. 972). The cumulative effect of these cross-references is unmistakable: we are constantly reminded of the earlier scene, emphasizing the differences between the two



kinds of wooing as well as the way in which Meldrum simply ignores his previous obligation. Lindsay does not invite us directly to make a judgment, but the Carrickfergus episode adds a further level of complication to the moral ambiance of Meldrum's life at Gleneagles. It also enriches the significance of the allusion to Dido and Aeneas which, as Mrs Riddy observes, "hangs over the whole scene":<sup>75</sup>

During that nicht thair was nocht ellis  
 Bot for to heir of his Nouellis.  
 Eneas, quhen he fled from Troy,  
 Did not Quene Dido greiter Ioy,  
 Quhen he in Carthage did arryue,  
 And did the seige of Troy discryue.

(873-8)

But Aeneas deserted Dido, a betrayal which surely leads us back to Carrickfergus at least as much as it leads forward to the tragic separation of Meldrum and his Lady.

There may indeed be overtones of foreboding, but the primary sense of the Historie's central wooing scene is both humorous and explicitly sexual. With great delicacy Lindsay allows a realistic perception of human passion to show through, but never quite to overwhelm, the courtly language proper to romance wooings. There is, in fact, just one hint of the same balance in the scene in Carrickfergus, when an echo of Wyatt breaks through the formality:

With that, hartlie scho did him kis.  
 Ar 3e (quod scho) content of this?

(185-6)<sup>76</sup>

One hint in the first episode, however, develops into the prevailing tone at Gleneagles, pervading such clichés as the rhetorical topos of effictio:

With that, this lustie young Squyar  
 Saw this Ladie so plesantlie  
 Cum to his Chalmer quyetlie,  
 In Kyrtille of fyne Damains broun,  
 Hir goldin traissis hingand doun.  
 Hir Pappis wer hard, round, and quhyte,  
 Quhome to behald wes greit delyte;  
 Lyke the quhyte lyllie wes hir lyre;  
 Hir hair was like the reid gold wyre;  
 Hir schankis quhyte withouttin hois,  
 Quhairat the Squyer did rejois.

(940-50)

Most of the details here are conventional attributes of the courtly lady, but the description of her breasts is perhaps a little more enthusiastic than usual, and the addition of the detail that her legs are bare to the traditional feature of whiteness emphasizes her near-nakedness, which is frequently alluded to (ll. 933, 953, 986) and which thoroughly justifies the Squyer's delight.<sup>77</sup> This realistic awareness of Meldrum's desire is accompanied by a number of practical details: the couple initially talk "on the flure", Meldrum bars the door and then, when the love-making is about to begin in earnest,

Thair tenderlie he hes hir happit,  
 Full softlie vp, intill his Bed.

(992-3)

Lindsay keeps us better informed than we might expect to be of the course of the seduction, so that his subsequent coy use of occupatio in denying knowledge of further details rings particularly false. The whole scene is among the most erotically developed in medieval literature, yet throughout we are aware of a dimension of courtly restraint.

One aspect of this obligatory reticence is the Lady's own coyness, which is a recurrent motif and which contrasts with her evident boldness in inventing an excuse for coming into Meldrum's



room in the first place. Thus, when Meldrum bars the door she affects astonishment and/or alarm:

'Squyer (quod scho) quhat is 3our will?  
Think 3e my womanheid to spill?'

(963-4)

A similar note is struck when, her requests that Meldrum wait until they are married having failed to lessen the impact of Cupid's "fyrie dartis", Meldrum takes her into his bed:

'Allace (quod scho) quhat may this mene?'  
And with hir hair scho dicht hir Ene.

(995-6)

This is clearly part of the irony with which Lindsay treats the whole scene, although it is not altogether obvious at whose expense the irony is operating. Mrs Riddy believes that it is the romance conventions themselves which seem ridiculous, while Meldrum himself is "rather absurdly precipitate".<sup>78</sup> It does not seem to me that the irony leaves the audience out of sympathy with either the lovers' urgent desire or their tendency to express their passion in terms of the currently-accepted courtly language: like Chaucer at a similar moment in Troilus and Criseyde,<sup>79</sup> Lindsay is able to make us smile at the discrepancy between ideal behaviour and actual feeling without destroying our identification with the characters whose violation of the rules of manners and morals we recognize to be rather like our own.

To some extent, of course, it is the precipitateness of the lovers which ultimately brings about their downfall, since the legal informality of their relationship leaves them vulnerable to just the kind of intervention which eventually occurs. But Lindsay never does more than comment that the Papal dispensation

which they needed did not arrive in time, and he does not suggest that there is a direct causal relationship between the dubious morality of their position and their fate. Indeed, he seems at pains to give a more general explanation, one which is characteristic of medieval poetry:

Of warldlie Ioy it is weill kend,  
That sorrow bene the fatall end;  
For Ielousie and fals Inuie  
Did him persew richt cruellie;  
I meruell not thocht it be so,  
For they wer euer Luiferis fo .....

(1183-8)

The transience of human happiness here asserted is in neat counterpoint to the confidence with which the lovers lived together, "Beleifand neuer to haue distres" (l. 1160), and Lindsay's attitude recalls that of Henryson to the brief happiness of Orpheus and Erudices.<sup>80</sup> The seasonal imagery, as one might expect, reinforces the point: it is May when the lovers meet, which is appropriate enough, but it is May again just before the "cruell Knicht" is introduced into the poem, and now we are to be made aware of the fragility of worldly pleasure which is so often likened to the fragility of Spring and its joys. The moral details are irrelevant in the face of this cosmic tragedy: the pleasure of the lovers would have been no less transient had they been, like Orpheus and Erudices, properly married.

If there are many such uncertainties and ambiguities in the amatory episodes of Squyer Meldrum, the military aspect of the romance is for the most part much more straightforward. From the outset, Meldrum is presented as a paragon of chivalric prouesse. This is an important element even in the first scene at Carrickfergus, where the rescue of the lady from her



assailants is described in conventionally heroic terms. The line continues through the account of the wars in France, with the long narrative of the joust with Maister Talbart occupying a central position in the first half of the poem and, as Mrs Riddy points out, structurally balancing the ambush near Edinburgh. It is in the episode of the joust that the claim of literal veracity is hardest to maintain, since the rhetorical core of the narrative is Talbart's allegorical dream, which evidently belongs to the traditions of romance literature rather than to a realistic presentation of life. The allegory of the dream is appropriately heraldic:

'Me thocht I saw cum, fra the See,  
 Ane greit Otter, rydand to me,  
 The quhilk was blak, with ane lang taill,  
 And cruellie did me assaill,  
 And bait me till he gart me bleid,  
 And drew me backward fra my steid.  
 Quhat this suld mene I can not say;  
 Bot I was neuer in sic ane fray.'

(403-10)

The reference, as Talbart himself discovers at ll. 547-52, is to a version of the arms of Meldrum (presumably those of William Meldrum of Cleish), argent, an otter sable issuant from a fess

wavy azure.<sup>81</sup>

Such heraldic allusions are not unprecedented in medieval poetry, although they are perhaps less common than one might expect in view of the compatibility of the allegorical method with the symbolic side of heraldry.<sup>82</sup>

The effect of the prophetic dream is to contribute to the formalization of an episode in which chivalric values are confidently asserted.

Both the action itself, exemplified by Meldrum's courtly generosity towards his fallen opponent, and the way it is described are directed towards this single purpose, and the ultimate

effect is to emphasize the hero's embodying of the chivalric archetype.

The same qualities are apparent in the less formally chivalric sea-fight which follows. The literary conventions which transform an incident which no doubt has its basis in sober biographical fact are less obvious in this passage, but the narrative is no less clearly manipulated in order to reveal Meldrum's courage and strength. It is Meldrum who turns the fight in the Scots' favour by leaping aboard the English vessel, and the scene is treated in an appropriately grandiloquent style:

Than peirtlie answerit the Squyar,  
And said, 'O tratour Tauernar,  
I lat the wit, thow hes na micht  
This day to put vs to the flicht.'  
They derflie ay at vther dang:  
The Squyer thristit throw the thrang,  
And in the Inglis schip he lap,  
And hat the Capitane sic ane flap  
Upön his heid till he fell down,  
Welterand intill ane deidlie swoun.

(761-70)

Little physical detail is introduced to emphasize the bloodshed: there is even something euphemistic about the English captain's "deidlie swoun". The stress is upon heroism rather than upon carnage, and in this respect Lindsay follows the romance decorum of the battle-scene. Nor is he particularly careful about the details of his description: all the English are killed at l. 776, but two hundred survivors are subsequently put ashore in Kent, and the captain, apparently unconscious or worse at l. 770, is surrendering a few lines later. But despite these inconsistencies, the chivalric momentum of the conflict is maintained, and the episode serves its purpose of helping to



establish Meldrum's reputation.

Nor does Meldrum's military prowess diminish with his involvement with the Lady of Gleneagles. As if to emphasize the point, Lindsay describes his expedition to recover her castle in the Lennox which had been seized by Andrew Macfarlane.<sup>83</sup> Again, the description is full of conventional touches; Meldrum before his departure is "like Mars, the God of weir" (l. 1074), and Lancelot is invoked once more, this time with little moral ambiguity:

And said, 'Madame, I 3ow assure,  
That worthie Lancelot du laik  
Did neuer mair, for his Ladies saik,  
Nor I sall do, or ellis de,  
Without that 3e reuengit be.'

(1078-82)

The description of the battle itself contains the same variety of euphemistic formulae with which the romances characteristically present the taking of life:

Thair was bot schot and schot agane,  
Til, on ilk side, thair wes men slane.

(1123-4)

As the audience no doubt expected of the romance hero, Meldrum treats Macfarlane with the same courteous generosity he has previously shown towards Maister Talbart, sparing the prisoners and putting Macfarlane himself "in fre waird" (l. 1143). The Lennox episode, then, is part of a consistently favourable presentation of Meldrum's military activities, which contrasts with Lindsay's much more complex treatment of his amatory involvements.

These two aspects of his career are brought together in the final battle scene of the Historie, the ambush in which Meldrum

is attacked by the "cruell Knicht" who wishes to separate him from the Lady. This is the climactic episode, and it is the one in which the tensions already existing in the poem, between romance ideals and the imperatives of ordinary existence, are brought into harsh juxtaposition. If the tension has comic implications in the wooing scene at Gleneagles, here they are unmistakably tragic. As Mrs Riddy has shown, the initial presentation of Meldrum is as the outnumbered hero, compared with the great chivalric heroes of the past:

This worthie Squyer courageous  
 Micht be compairit to Tydeus,  
 Quhilk faucht for to defend his Richtis,  
 And slew of Thebes fyftie Knichtis.  
 Rolland, with Brandwell, his bricht brand,  
 Faucht neuer better, hand for hand,  
 Nor Gawin, aganis Golibras,  
 Nor Olyuer, with Pharambras.  
 I wait he faucht, that day, als weill  
 As did Sir Gryme aganis Graysteill.  
 And I dar say, he was als abill  
 As onie Knicht of the round Tabill,  
 And did his honour mair auance  
 Nor onie of thay Knichtis, perchance.

(1309-22)

We have seen previous examples of Lindsay's use of literary parallels to place his hero in a romance context, frequently with ironic overtones. Something of the same kind is, I think, working here, since Meldrum's heroism is as the battle develops seen to be inadequate in the face of superior numbers and the realities of physical combat. The description of the conflict is more concrete, and much less euphemistic, than the earlier ones, and Lindsay avoids giving Meldrum the heroic grandeur of such doomed heroes as Roland at the end of the Chanson de Roland:

And sa thay did, richt secreitlie,  
 And come behind him, cowartlie,



And hackit on his hochis and theis,  
 Till that he fell vpon his kneis.  
 Zit, quhen his schankis wer schorne in sunder,  
 Upon his kneis he wrocht greit wounder,  
 Sweipand his sword round about,  
 Not haifand of the deith na dout.  
 Durst nane approche within his boundis,  
 Till that his cruell mortall woundis  
 Bled sa, that he did swap in swoun;  
 Perforce behuifit him, than, fall doun.

(1345-56)

Even here, in Meldrum's courage despite his wounds, there are echoes of the romance heroism of the earlier part of the poem, but the prevailing impression is of the futility of such ideals in the face of reality. It is the manner of Meldrum's defeat which undermines the language of romance; yet I do not believe that his idealism is completely rejected by Lindsay, nor are we to regard his behaviour as quixotic. If he falls victim to evil designs, superior numbers and shabby tactics, that is because the world is less noble than he is; and it is in addition part of that process by which man's vulnerability to circumstance is constantly asserted.

It is with the proper response to this endemic misfortune of which Meldrum's life is merely an example that the latter part of Squyer Meldrum is concerned. The early parts of the poem demonstrate, as we have seen, that Meldrum is, in military terms, a paragon of knightly prowess, and that, if his behaviour in love is not unambiguously praiseworthy, he is nevertheless a noble and passionate lover, and faithful to the Lady of Glen-eagles. The ambush, however, reverses his fortunes in both areas: his wounds put an end to his military career, and he is soon separated permanently from his mistress. Lindsay's handling of this part of his plot is interesting, and parallels

his techniques throughout the poem. First, when the Lady believes Meldrum to be mortally wounded, she utters a lament which is appropriate to the romance context:

'Allace,' quod scho, 'that I was borne:  
In my querrell thow art forlorne.  
Sall neuer man, efter this hour,  
Of my bodie haue mair plesour:  
For thow was gem of gentilnes,  
And werie well of worthines.'

(1373-8)

There is no reason to suppose that these words are insincere, yet they are almost immediately undermined by the information that, having been persuaded by her friends to return to Strathearn because her distress at his injuries is paining Meldrum, she is married "aganis hir will" to someone else (ll. 1455-66). Lindsay proceeds to employ yet another group of romance parallels to evoke her grief at the separation:

Penelope for Ulisses,  
I wait, had neuer mair distres;  
Nor Cresseid for trew Troylus  
Wes not tent part sa dolorous.  
I wait it wes aganis hir hart  
That scho did from hir Lufe depart.  
Helene had not sa mekill noy,  
Quhen scho perforce wes brocht to Troy.

(1471-8)

There is, at the very least, a certain ambiguity about these analogies. Neither Cresseid nor Helen can really be taken as the type of constancy which the context seems to demand, although Professor Kinsley maintains that Lindsay's introduction of them is perfectly serious.<sup>84</sup> It is no doubt true that Cresseid was initially distressed by her separation from Troilus,<sup>85</sup> but the insertion of the usual adjective before his name recalls the traditional contrast of his fidelity with her faithlessness in a way which scarcely reflects creditably upon the Lady of



Gleneagles. There is, of course, a difference: the Lady has no choice, and Lindsay insists upon her sadness. But her departure leaves Meldrum as forlorn as Troilus (or Menelaus), and it is with his reactions that the poem concludes.

There is an obvious contrast between the Meldrum of the early episodes and the figure who lives out his life in a Lindsay household in Fife. Mrs Riddy suggests that the latter is "not a romance hero at all."<sup>86</sup> But it should not be supposed that he is any less a paragon because he no longer participates in military exploits or passionate love-affairs. In his final years, Lindsay's Meldrum shows his resistance to the vicissitudes of Fortune; he practises both medicine and law, and is in particular the servant of the poor:

Bot efterward, quhen he was haill,  
He spairit na coist, nor 3it trauaill,  
To preif his practikis on the pure,  
And on thame preuit monie ane cure,  
On his expensis, without rewaird:  
Of Money he tuik na regaird.

(1449-54)

He was ane richt Courticiane,  
And in the Law ane Practiciane;  
Quhairfoir, during this Lordis life,  
Tchyref depute he wes in Fyfe;  
To euerie man ane equall Iudge,  
And of the pure he wes refuge,  
And with Iustice did thame support,  
And curit thair sairis with greit comfort;  
For, as I did reheirs before,  
Of Medicine he take the Lore.

(1535-44)

Furthermore, he reveals both his fidelity and his largess through the annual feast he gives "for his Ladies saik" (l. 1557). These are the fundamental virtues: liberality, generosity, fidelity, justice, and Meldrum's later life is an example of the Boethian argument that through such a life of virtue the cruel

blows of Fortune may be overcome. The low-key ending of the Historie is not, I think, coincidental, nor does it simply represent the triumph of life over art. While it is clear that much of Squyer Meldrum depends upon the tension between romance idealism and harsh reality, I do not think that Lindsay's primary concern is with the inadequacies of romance conventions in themselves. The point which emerges at the end of the poem is that the truest heroism is that which confronts misfortune and accepts it. The argument of Squyer Meldrum is thus ethical rather than aesthetic: there are certainly many points at which the ideals of chivalry are seen to be inadequate, but we are told quite clearly that Meldrum's misfortunes are a function of a basic human vulnerability which finally has nothing to do with any specific cultural pattern, and the Biblical parallel with which Lindsay makes his hero begin his Testament takes up the same theme:

The Holie man Iob, ground of pacience,  
 In his greit trubill trewlie did report,  
 Quhilk I persaeue now be Experience,  
 That mennis lyfe in eirth bene wounder short.  
 My youth is gane, and eild now dois resort:  
 My time is gane; I think it bot ane dreame:  
 3it efter deith remane sall my gude fame.

(1-7)

Viewed from this angle, Squyer Meldrum is an extremely expanded exemplum of a non-allegorical kind, illustrating the virtues which are ultimately more important than the more obvious and glamorous ones of Meldrum's youth. But it is, of course, much more. Lindsay does not deny the impressiveness of his hero's prowess, nor (more significantly, perhaps) the beauty and power of his sexual experiences. The poem's strength lies in its inclusiveness, which allows Lindsay to offer an alternative,



more secure and more permanent, to the chivalric values of the romance tradition without actually rejecting the qualities of that tradition. There is, perhaps, a certain nostalgia for the simple grace of the chivalric world, but such a view is both unhistorical (in its supposition that the realities were ever different from those which confront Meldrum and his Lady) and ethically dubious (since the chivalric world of romance is deeply involved with temporalia). Lindsay's view of chivalry as expressed in Squyer Meldrum is a complex one, and his treatment of the romance tradition is correspondingly ambiguous.

Despite the final Testament, in which Meldrum disposes of his possessions and says farewell to the world, Squyer Meldrum is formally the most integrated of Lindsay's poems. Everywhere in his poetry we find an awareness of medieval models, and a willingness to employ familiar modes and conventions. We have seen the ways in which various rhetorical modes (the complaint, the testament, the verse epistle, the dream vision) are incorporated together with a number of allegorical techniques in his narrative poems, although the moral, satirical or controversial ends to which he puts this range of conventional materials often reflect the world of religious and political discord in which he wrote. His vision is more fragmentary than that of either Henryson or Dunbar, and that fact is reflected in the form of his poems. Yet we cannot help but be struck by the traditionalism of many of Lindsay's narrative and rhetorical techniques. If he uses them in novel ways, that

should not surprise us; for we have seen throughout the preceding pages how flexibly the Middle Scots poets treated their inherited materials, and to what a great extent the allegorical tradition liberated rather than restricted the medieval poet.



Notes to Chapter VI

- <sup>1</sup> W. Murison, Sir David Lyndsay, Poet and Satirist of the Old Church in Scotland (Cambridge 1938).
- <sup>2</sup> The Works of Sir David Lindsay, ed. D. Hamer (STS, 4 vols, Edinburgh 1931-6); Hamer, "The Bibliography of Sir David Lindsay", The Library, 4th series, 10 (1929-30), 1-40.
- <sup>3</sup> Felicity Riddy, "Souyer Meldrum and the romance of chivalry", YES 4 (1974), 26-36; Richard M. Clewett Jr, "Rhetorical Strategy and Structure in Three of Sir David Lindsay's Poems", SEL 16 (1976), 3-14.
- <sup>4</sup> There is now also the recent thesis by J.E.H. Williams (Australian National University, 1978), which I recently had the opportunity to read, and which makes an important contribution to our understanding of Lindsay's poetry. I have not, however, incorporated Dr Williams' findings into the present discussion.
- <sup>5</sup> Arbuthnot's poems have never received any serious critical attention. For Lauder, see The Office and Dewtie of Kingis, ed. F. Hall (EETS, London 1864), and Minor Poems, ed. F.J. Furnivall (EETS, rev. edn, London 1910). For Maitland, see Poems, ed. J. Bain (Maitland Club, Edinburgh 1830), and T.F. Henderson, Scottish Vernacular Literature (Edinburgh 1898), pp. 262-6. The "plain style" in sixteenth-century English verse is discussed by Yvor Winters, "The Sixteenth Century Lyric in England", Poetry 53 (1939), 258-72 and 320-5, and 54 (1939), 35-51; G.L. Peterson, The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne (Princeton 1967); and (most usefully for comparison with Scotland) G.K. Hunter, "Drab and Golden Lyrics of the Renaissance", in Forms of Lyric: Selected Papers from the English Institute, ed. R. Bower (New York 1970), pp. 1-18. A study of the plain-style lyric in sixteenth-century Scotland is overdue.
- <sup>6</sup> For the dates of these poems, see Lindsay, Works, ed. Hamer, III, passim.
- <sup>7</sup> The late date of the Dialog is evident from Lindsay's sources, *ibid.*, III, 237-8. For the case for regarding Ane Satyre as belonging to the same period, see J.H. Kantrowitz, Dramatic Allegory: Lindsay's 'Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis' (Lincoln, Nebraska 1975), pp. 11-27.
- <sup>8</sup> It is apparent from the "Epistil" (ll. 30-46) that Lindsay had previously told the King many Classical stories, though it is not certain that these were ever written down. For a tale of the "Reid Etin" which may be Lindsay's, see The

Bannatyne Manuscript, ed. W. Tod Ritchie (STS, 4 vols, Edinburgh 1927-33), III, 13-4.

- 9 Scot's reading "Prolong" is preserved by Hamer, but it seems more likely that the 'n' is an inverted letter.
- 10 All quotations from Lindsay's works are from Hamer's edition.
- 11 The nearest analogue is perhaps Douglas' Palice of Honoure, ll. 2089-2106, Shorter Poems, ed. P.J. Bawcutt (STS, Edinburgh 1967), pp. 128-9; but cf. also the "blasted Spring" openings of both The Testament of Cresseid and The Thrissil and the Rois.
- 12 Dunbar, Poems, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (3rd edn, London 1960), pp. 108-9.
- 13 Although "wallis" in l. 128 seems ambiguous, I am convinced that Lindsay intended 'waves' rather than 'walls'. Even "this fals wardlis Instabilytie" would scarcely explain "woltryng" walls.
- 14 R.D.S. Jack, The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature (Edinburgh 1972), p. 39.
- 15 Janet M. Smith, The French Background of Middle Scots Literature (Edinburgh 1934), p. 131; Jack, op. cit., pp. 32-41.
- 16 In particular, cf. Orpheus and Erudices, ll. 338-44, Poems and Fables, ed. H. Harvey Wood (2nd edn, Edinburgh 1958), p. 140, with The Dreame, ll. 162-215.
- 17 Line 390 is a very close imitation of The Goldyn Targe, l. 33, Poems, ed. Mackenzie, p. 113.
- 18 The Testament of Cresseid, ll. 253-63, Poems and Fables, ed. Wood, p. 114.
- 19 For a discussion of Henryson's use of traditional materials in the planet-portraits, see R.J. Lyall, "Henryson and Boccaccio: A Problem in the Study of Sources", Anglia (forthcoming).
- 20 But this is a commonplace: cf. M.W. Stearns, Robert Henryson (New York 1949), pp. 95-6.
- 21 Lindsay, Works, ed. Hamer, III, 32.



- 22 The date is discussed, *ibid.*, III, 1-2. For an account of the events, see Gordon Donaldson, Scotland: James V to James VII (Edinburgh 1965), pp. 40-2.
- 23 He is in this sense closer to a figure like Dunbar's Sir Johne Kirkpakar, cf. above, pp. 325-6. But cf. also more general social types, such as the figures of the Estates in Alain Chartier's influential Quadrilogue Invectif, ed. E. Droz (Paris 1950).
- 24 The Goldyn Targe, ll. 235-43, Poems, ed. Mackenzie, pp. 118-9.
- 25 Thus, we know nothing at all of such poets as Galbraith or Kinloch, while none of the works of Sir James Inglis is known to survive. For a discussion of the poets in Lindsay's list, see Works, ed. Hamer, III, 68-79.
- 26 Hamer seems to have misunderstood the astrological signs, and he admits "I have no skill in astrology" (Works, III, 80). Still, no-one should try to calculate the solar date from the position in the zodiac of Mercury! Lindsay clearly tells us that the sun was that day passing from Gemini into Cancer (ll. 122-3), which in the sixteenth century occurred on 12/13 June. I hope to discuss the significance of this astrological passage in more detail in a future article.
- 27 Works, ed. Hamer, III, 80.
- 28 Cf. Lindsay, Poetical Works, ed. David Laing (3 vols, Edinburgh 1879), I, 263.
- 29 Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, Historie and Cronicles of Scotland, ed. E. J. G. Mackay (STS, 3 vols, Edinburgh 1899-1911), I, 211-2.
- 30 Cf. N. A. T. Macdougall, "James III: A Political Study 1466-1488" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Glasgow 1968), and "The sources: a reappraisal of the legend", in Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, ed. J. M. Brown (London 1977), pp. 10-32.
- 31 E.g. Historie and Cronicles of Scotland, ed. Mackay, I, 210: "Thairfoir we pray all godlie kingis to tak exampill of him and feir god and wse wyse consall ....."
- 32 Holland, The Buke of the Howlat, ll. 157-234, Scottish Alliterative Poems, ed. F. J. Amours (STS, Edinburgh 1897), pp. 52-5.

- 33 On this point, see for example, Hugh of St Victor, De Sacramentis, II, iii, 12, PL. 176: 428-9.
- 34 The disastrous spiritual consequences of the Donation of Constantine are something of an idée fixe with Lindsay; cf. The Dreame, ll. 232-8; Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis, ll. 1450-5; Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour, ll. 4403 ff. Note too the recurrence in these passages of the allegoria of the exile of Chastity.
- 35 Ane Satyre, ll. 1128-1473, Works, ed. Hamer, II, 127-57.
- 36 On the convent of Sciennes, see I.B. Cowan and D.E. Easson, Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland (2nd edn, London 1976), p. 152; Liber Conventus S. Katherine Senensis prope Edinburgum /ed. J. Maidment/ (Abbotsford Club, Edinburgh 1841).
- 37 Cf. for example, Treasurer Accts, I, 115 (Mons); *ibid.*, IV, 278 (the Necar).
- 38 The ultimate sources are Job 7: 1 and Ephesians 6: 11-12. The metaphor figures prominently in the Rule of St Benedict: on this aspect see Eugene Murray OSB, "La Signification de 'Militare — Militia — Miles' dans la Règle de Saint Benoît", Revue Bénédictine 72 (1962), 135-8.
- 39 For the later history of Conciliarism, see Hubert Jedin, A History of the Council of Trent, trans. Dom Ernest Graf OSB, vol. I (London 1957).
- 40 The Taill of Schir Chantecleir and the Foxe, ll. 47-9, Bannatyne MS, ed. Ritchie, IV, 159.
- 41 Works, ed. Hamer, III, 110.
- 42 On the two-part structure of the Satyre, see Kantrowitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-7.
- 43 This point is made in somewhat different terms by Clewett, *op. cit.*, 12-4.
- 44 The form of the name suggests that Lindsay was thinking of the translation by Lydgate, which was printed by Richard Pynson in 1494, and reprinted in 1527.
- 45 E.g. The Book of the Duchess, ll. 44-290, Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass. 1957), pp. 267-70; The Parliament of Fowls, ll. 15-98, *ibid.*, p. 311.



- 46 Cf. John Knox, A History of the Reformation in Scotland, ed. W.C. Dickinson (2 vols, London 1949), I, 71-5.
- 47 *ibid.*, I, 76.
- 48 Cf. n. 34 above. For further examples, with rather questionable conclusions drawn from them, see John MacQueen, "Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis", SSL 3 (1965-6), 129-43, at 136-9.
- 49 For an account of Lindsay's criticisms of the Church, see Murison, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-119.
- 50 The printer Henry Charteris states that the poem was "Compylit (as is beleuit) be Schir Daudid Lindesay", Works, ed. Hamer, III, 147. The issue is never likely to be settled: the poem's ironic methods are not inconsistent with Lindsay's authorship, but he was surely not the only poet of the period sufficiently skilled to produce such work. I am here treating the poem as authentically his, but with a full recognition of the uncertainty of the attribution.
- 51 Works, ed. Hamer, III, 148.
- 52 For a discussion of some examples of the lecherous cleric in the fabliau tradition, see Per Nykrog, Les Fabliaux (Copenhagen 1957), pp. 112-20. For a ME. lyric which employs the same motif, see Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, ed. R.H. Robbins (2nd edn, Oxford 1955), pp. 21-2.
- 53 Works, ed. Hamer, III, 148.
- 54 There is a textual difficulty here, noted by Hamer, *ibid.*, III, 150; I am inclined to accept his suggestion that Lindsay probably wrote "thy brother".
- 55 *ibid.*, III, 151.
- 56 David Irving, A History of Scottish Poetry (Edinburgh 1861), p. 339; the quotation is from Virgil, Ecloga VII, ll. 25-6, Opera, ed. R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford 1969), p. 18.
- 57 It is perhaps relevant that Codrus occurs as a type of Christ in two of Boccaccio's eclogues, Opere Latine Minore, ed. A.F. Massera (Bari 1928), pp. 49-55, 66-74; but a more precise and topical reference may be intended here.
- 58 Apart from the references in Virgil and Boccaccio, the name of Codrus occurs occasionally applied to a character in

Renaissance pastoral: the most immediately relevant is perhaps the fourth of Alexander Barclay's Eclogues, ed. Beatrice White (EETS, Oxford 1929), pp. 140-80.

- 59 Hamer treats the two works as separate, but their close relationship is pointed out by James Kinsley in his edition, Squyer Meldrum (London 1959).
- 60 *ibid.*, p. 6.
- 61 For figura, see above, p. 6; the special sense of the term normally applies to Biblical texts, which are held to be literally true as well as having an allegorical meaning. Lindsay would probably not himself have applied the term to a secular history like Meldrum's, but his "true" events do have a moral lesson.
- 62 Lindsay, Poetical Works, ed. G. Chalmers (3 vols, London 1806), II, 243.
- 63 Squyer Meldrum, ed. Kinsley, p. 6.
- 64 That is, in his rejection of the lady he rescues in Carrickfergus; cf. below, pp. 452-5.
- 65 See above, n. 3.
- 66 Riddy, *op. cit.*, 29.
- 67 *ibid.*, 36.
- 68 Barbour, Bruce, I, 1-36, ed. W.W. Skeat (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1894), I, 1-2; Henryson, Orpheus and Erudices, ll. 1-7, Poems and Fables, ed. Wood, p. 129; Hary, Wallace, I, 1-16, ed. M.P. McDiarmid (STS, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1968-9), I, 1.
- 69 Cf. G. Bordman, Motif-Index of the English Metrical Romances (Helsinki 1963), p. 84.
- 70 *ibid.*, p. 89.
- 71 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ll. 1208-89, 1476-1557, 1750-1869, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, re-ed. Norman Davis (Oxford 1968), pp. 34-6, 41-3, 48-52; there are, of course, important differences, but in both episodes a courtly hero is presented with the problem of turning a lady down politely, a difficult task if he is not to be unchivalrous.
- 72 Hamer somewhat obscures the nature of the promise by



commenting that "the Squyer and the lady are talking at cross purposes, the Squyer deliberately so" (Works, III, 193), and that Meldrum "intends not to go" beyond "courtly devotion". He seems rather to be deliberately misleading the lady, and l. 192 surely goes beyond courtly devotion.

- 73 This is, of course, written with the benefit of Meldrum's fictive hindsight of the tragic outcome of his affair with the Lady of Gleneagles.
- 74 Ane Satyre, l. 3489, Works, ed. Hamer, II, 323.
- 75 Riddy, op. cit., 32.
- 76 Cf. Wyatt, "They fle from me", ll. 12-14, Collected Poems, ed. J. Daalder (Oxford 1975), p. 32.
- 77 There is an interesting parallel in Erudices' barefootedness and white legs, Orpheus and Erudices, ll. 99-100; cf. above, pp. 159-60.
- 78 Riddy, op. cit., 33.
- 79 Troilus and Criseyde, III, 686-1337, Works, ed. Robinson, pp. 428-35.
- 80 Cf. Orpheus and Erudices, ll. 85-91, Poems and Fables, ed. Wood, p. 132.
- 81 Works, ed. Hamer, III, 197.
- 82 There is a need for a serious study of the relationship between heraldry and medieval approaches to symbolism: the prevailing view, e.g. C.W. Scott-Giles, The Romance of Heraldry (London 1929), pp. 2-9, that the symbolic element in medieval heraldry is negligible, probably requires revision.
- 83 Marjorie, Lady Gleneagles held Boturich Castle by Loch Lomond, which had been granted to her former husband by Matthew, earl of Lennox in 1498 (RMS, I, no. 2436). There is no record of the Macfarlane raid referred to by Lindsay, but it accords well enough with conditions in the Lennox at this period.
- 84 Squyer Meldrum, ed. Kinsley, p. 96.
- 85 Troilus and Criseyde, V, 15-63 etc., Works, ed. Robinson, pp. 459-60.

86 Riddy, op. cit., 36



## CHAPTER VII

### Conclusion

Literary criticism thrives on neat distinctions and embracing solutions. There is an underlying streak of purism in most of us which makes us ever willing to consider such distinctions and solutions, as a way of making intelligible the authorial decisions of other ages. This tendency has long bedevilled critical discussion of the ulterior meanings of medieval poetry. Attempts to adopt in literary criticism the fourfold method of Biblical exegesis are one example. Another is C.S. Lewis' well-known distinction between symbolism and allegory:

On the one hand you can start with an immaterial fact, such as the passions which you actually experience, and can then invent visibilia to express them. If you are hesitating between an angry retort and a soft answer, you can express your state of mind by inventing a person called Ira with a torch and letting her contend with another invented person called Patientia. This is allegory, and it is with this alone that we have to deal. But there is another way of using the equivalence, which is almost the opposite of allegory, and which I would call sacramentalism or symbolism. If our passions, being immaterial, can be copied by material inventions, then it is possible that our material world in its turn is the copy of an invisible world.

1

This influential distinction, which forms the basis of Lewis' Allegory of Love, is seriously misleading in at least two ways. First, it is not a distinction which is observed with any consistency by medieval poets themselves. Medieval personification-allegory, influenced by the mythographic tradition throughout its history, frequently employs additional techniques, including those described by Lewis as "symbolism".<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Lewis does not sufficiently emphasize the fact that it was precisely the belief that "our material world ... is the



copy of an invisible world" which made allegorical techniques so attractive to the medieval author and his audience, for allegory thrives on the perception of correspondences, and the most popular allegorical images of the Middle Ages — like that of the body politic, for example — are marked by "sacramentalism" in Lewis' sense.<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand, then, we must beware the useful but unreal distinction. At the other extreme is the catch-all methodology, a critical Philosopher's Stone which holds out the offer of an answer to every difficulty in a medieval text. Of this approach the most notorious example is the "pan-allegorical" method of D.W. Robertson Jr and his school, about which I said a little at the outset of this study.<sup>4</sup> Since Robertson's critical system offers the most comprehensive approach to medieval allegory, and has had a profound effect on the criticism of medieval poetry over the last thirty years, something more now ought to be said on the subject.

The "Robertsonian" position can, I think, be concentrated into six principal propositions. First, and quite unexceptionably, Professor Robertson insists upon the notion of "historical criticism", upon the obligation of the critic to approach as closely as possible to the assumptions of the original audience and the intentions of the author.<sup>5</sup> The difficulty about this is to know how to do it, and it is far from clear that Professor Robertson has himself, as he claims, found the secret. This secret, as expounded in the second proposition, lies in the relationship between the literal sense and the spiritual, a relationship discussed by medieval writers in terms

of such metaphors as that of the cortex and the nucleus, the shell and the kernel.<sup>6</sup> In theory at least, the recognition of the importance of the spiritual meaning does not require that we should completely discard the literal sense:

We should be careful ... not to regard the letter and spirit as modern 'opposites' which are mutually exclusive. The letter is an evil only when it is not understood spiritually, but remains the basis for spiritual understanding.

## 7

And yet Professor Robertson's method leads him to critical judgments like the following, concerning Chrétien's Chevalier de la charrete:

Our own difficulties with Chrétien's romance arise from the fact that we insist on reading it 'as a story', so that we become vicariously involved with the hero's adventures and so lose the exemplary force of the narrative.

## 8

As an understanding of the literal sense, and indeed of Chrétien's intentions, this seems bizarre: if we are to take Professor Robertson's protestations about the validity of the literal sense seriously, and to come to terms with the poet's reasons for casting his moral views in the form of a romance in the first place, we must surely accept that Chrétien expects us to grasp "the exemplary force of the narrative" through our involvement with the characters and our awareness of the workings of the plot. Too often the allegorical method has in practice required the discarding of the literal narrative and its palpable effects.

This problem is clearly linked with the issue of how we are to detect the presence of allegory in Professor Robertson's sense in a given medieval text. We have seen above that he



holds "modern philological methods" (that is, apparently, deciding what the words themselves actually mean) to be inadequate for this purpose.<sup>9</sup> The corollary of this third proposition is the view that meaning can and should be assigned to the details of a poem by reference to Biblical exegesis or to such exegetical handbooks as the Allegoriae in sacram scripturam,<sup>10</sup> a method which has sometimes produced interpretations which are at best unconvincing and at worst patently silly.<sup>11</sup> Once the uniting and controlling force of the literal narrative is abandoned or undermined, there is no clear principle according to which the appropriateness of suggested readings can be measured. It is for this reason that I believe that we must insist upon the rooting of interpretation in the words of the text, and the words moreover in context as part of the total narrative or rhetorical structure of the work.<sup>12</sup> This is, in particular, the principal criterion by which I would wish the critical readings in the preceding chapters to be judged.

But Professor Robertson goes further still. Not only do all "serious" medieval literary works have a spiritual meaning, but that meaning centres on the twin themes of caritas and cupiditas:

We may conclude that to the medieval mind the sententia of any serious poem is a corollary of Charity, and that the word sententia in its literary use suggests Charity.

13

As we saw when examining Henryson's Testament of Cresseid, caritas is a complex notion which could be used with great effect by a medieval poet. But as this proposition stands it seems a

great deal too sweeping: only by extending the meaning of the term to absurd limits can we turn The Talis of the Fyve Bestes or The Thrissil and the Rois into poems about Charity, and yet they are demonstrably serious. Other critics of Professor Robertson's methods have pointed to his philological slackness:<sup>14</sup> it seems to me that this weakness characterizes not only his reading of medieval texts but also his use of his own terminology. Words like "serious", "Charity", and, most fundamentally, "allegory" itself mean what Professor Robertson wants them to mean at a particular moment: the arbitrariness which marks much Biblical exegesis has transmitted itself to a school of modern criticism which acknowledges its debt to the exegetes in other respects.

The final precept of "pan-allegorism", implicit rather than clearly stated, is that where other allegorizing techniques are of no avail, the allegory is to be read ironically. This method is applied by Professor Robertson to the De amore of Andreas Capellanus and to the Roman de la Rose, with varying success.<sup>15</sup> The problems of identifying ironic allegory are in reality no different from those attaching to the identification of either allegory or irony separately: there is no alternative to the careful analysis of verbal cues embodied in the fabric of the literal sense. Where this fundamental requirement is adhered to, the results of the allegorical method can be highly rewarding, although it is perhaps salutary that the most impressive achievement of the Robertsonian school has been with a work which was already acknowledged to be one of the finest examples of medieval allegory.<sup>16</sup>



I have devoted so much space to the position of Professor Robertson and his followers for a number of reasons, and not simply to serve as an awful warning of the hazards of adopting a single, inclusive solution to the problems of ulterior meaning raised by medieval texts, or because of the influence exercised by their views. By the extreme position he adopts, Professor Robertson has become an important catalyst, and he has raised questions which are no less important for his inability to provide wholly satisfying answers. Reviewing A Preface to Chaucer, R.E. Kaske puts the issues very well:

Towards this future investigation, I would propose two fundamental questions concerning the nature of literary allegory, in Chaucer as well as in medieval literature at large: First, what kinds of relationship are possible between the literal and the extra-literal meanings in literary allegory, and how direct can we normally expect this relationship to be — particularly by comparison with Biblical exegesis, where a pre-established literal text inevitably makes for greater possible boldness in the development of extra-literal significances? And secondly, to what extent does this 'allegory' produce a continuous level of meaning beyond the literal, and to what extent merely a number of separate allusions?

17

It was as an attempt to answer these questions — or others very like them — on the basis of the evidence of a single literary tradition of the later Middle Ages that the writing of the present thesis began, and if I have not confronted them directly in the analysis of particular texts (I have avoided such a confrontation deliberately, wishing the texts and my analysis of them to speak for themselves) I nevertheless believe that the discussion in the preceding chapters provides a basis for at least beginning to answer them.

In the first chapter, I tentatively outlined three

principal modes of relationship between the literal sense of a narrative and its ulterior meaning (Kaske's "extra-literal meanings"): the allegorical, the exemplative, and the ironic. Within each of these broad categories, obviously, there are many varieties of relationship, and I do not wish to impose them too rigidly upon Middle Scots or any other literature. But we have found clear evidence that Middle Scots poets made wide-ranging use of all three. Formal allegories of the exemplum-type (such as Henryson's The Bludy Serk) occur alongside a major personification-allegory like King Hart or The Goldyn Targe, while "exemplative" fictions, in which the ulterior meaning emerges from the interaction of character and plot and from the way in which the poet manages his action, include a Charlemagne romance like Rauf Coilgear, a pseudo-classical tale like The Testament of Cresseid, and a contemporary romance-cum-verse-novel like Squyer Meldrum. It is also evident that the capacity for ironic discourse is as great among Middle Scots poets as it is in Chaucer. A list of poems in which irony plays a central part would include (among others): The Talis of the Fyve Bestes, Rauf Coilgear, The Freiris of Berwik, many of the Morall Fabillis of Henryson, Robene and Makyne, The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo and many of the shorter poems of Dunbar, and Kitteis Confessioun. Within these works, moreover, we can find examples of virtually all the principal varieties of irony identified in Chapter I.<sup>18</sup>

But there is a more important lesson to be learnt from the foregoing study. It is possible, for the purposes of critical discussion, to distinguish between modes of narrative discourse



in the way I have suggested, provided we recognize that the distinctions are almost never observed by the medieval poets. Not only do they habitually cross the boundaries between mode and mode within the scope of a single work, but it is arguable that such a blend of types of moral narrative is characteristic of nearly all the finest poetic achievements of Scots writers between the middle of the fifteenth century and the middle of the sixteenth. It is, for example, to be found in the complex narrative structure of The Talis of the Fyve Bestes, where exemplative stories like that of the ascension of Wallace stand side-by-side with the allegorical tale of the Wise and Foolish Brothers, while the whole is encompassed by the formality of a dream-vision. Here, too, the central fiction of a group of tales told on a single occasion is subverted by the intervention of the Wolf, and the ironic edge of this final section contrasts neatly with the conventional nature of the other stories, only to be subverted in its turn by the narrator's formal allegorical interpretation.

In various ways the narrative poems of Henryson, Dunbar and Lindsay reveal the same characteristic. We have seen how Dunbar commonly juxtaposes conventions: in the supreme example, the Tretis, an opening which consciously echoes the bright, unreal world of amatory allegory is starkly set against the speeches of the three women, while our response to the "exemplary" tales they relate and the frequently romantic language they employ is subtly modulated by a narrator who is the pivot of much of the poem's irony. Dunbar binds his diverse materials into a narrative whole; Lindsay's poems are less

coherent, but again we find a fruitful interaction of allegory, exemplative fiction and ironic observation. Even in a work as unified as Henryson's Testament of Cresseid we find the same freedom of narrative technique. A story which is quite patently non-allegorical nevertheless contains within it a dream-vision which is a principal source of ambiguity, and further ambiguities are created by the interventions of a narrator who stands in uncertain, but almost unquestionably ironic, relationship with Henryson himself.

It is Henryson's Morall Fabillis, however, which seem to me to represent the fullest expression of this flexibility of narrative technique. In no two fables does the moral or theological meaning co-exist with the literal narrative in quite the same way, and despite the textual uncertainties and their unfinished state, the Fabillis are in my view the most conclusive evidence of Henryson's genius as a narrative poet, the poignancy of the Testament notwithstanding. Many problems remain: the balance of serious allegory and comic irony may not always be to our taste, and we may continue to be troubled by the fact that some aspects of his interpretation in the moralities are at odds with the literal sense. But the richness of the narrative fabric and of its ulterior senses is undeniable, and it is in large part, I would argue, the product of Henryson's exploitation of such a wide variety of allegorical, exemplative and ironic techniques.

It follows from this argument that the first at least of Professor Kaske's questions is unanswerable in any summary way. To the second, perhaps, we can formulate a reply: the coherence



of the moral argument in most of the works we have examined is demonstrable, although it does not always (or even, perhaps, often) amount to a second level of narrative or of sense running along beside the literal. But if, with Professor Kaske, we ask what kinds of relationship can exist in practice between the literal narrative and its ulterior meaning, and we seek a reply which is more profoundly significant than the critical shorthand of three (or thirty-three) suitable labels, then the answer must be: about as many as there are narrative poems, and certainly as many as the wit, skill and moral commitment of medieval poets were able to contrive as they allowed their ingenuity to play upon the traditional narrative and rhetorical materials which were their stock-in-trade.

Notes to Chapter VII

- 1 C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford 1936), pp. 44-5.
- 2 This is recognized by Robert W. Frank Jr, whose less hard-and-fast distinction between "personification-allegory" and "symbol-allegory" in "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification-Allegory", ELH 20 (1953), 237-50, at 238, avoids the weaknesses of Lewis' approach.
- 3 Lewis' notion of "sacramentalism" seems to take up the Platonic conception of a reality beyond the sensible world; it would be interesting to pursue the relationship between medieval allegorical methods and the much more moderate forms of "realism" (in the philosophical sense) expounded by Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and their followers, which were so influential in the later Middle Ages.
- 4 See above, pp. 18-19.
- 5 Cf. for example, D.W. Robertson Jr, "Historical Criticism", English Institute Essays, 1950 (New York 1951), pp. 3-31.
- 6 See the discussion by D.W. Robertson Jr in "Some Medieval Literary Terminology, with special reference to Chrétien de Troyes", SP 48 (1951), 669-92.
- 7 D.W. Robertson Jr, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton 1963), p. 304.
- 8 *ibid.*, p. 452.
- 9 Cf. above, p. 19.
- 10 Allegoriae in sacram scripturam, PL 112: 849-1088 (where it is attributed to Rabanus Maurus); for a similar work by Hugh of St Victor, see PL 175: 633-924.
- 11 A particularly striking example is Robertson's interpretation of the ME. lyric "Maiden in the mor", "Historical Criticism", pp. 26-7. For a devastating critique of this reading, see E.T. Donaldson, "Patristic Exegesis in the Criticism of Medieval Literature: The Opposition", in Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1958-1959, ed. D. Bethurum (New York 1960), pp. 1-26.
- 12 Robertson himself quotes (A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 297-8) Augustine's statement, De doctrina christiana, 3, 25, 36-7,



ed. J. Martin (CCSL, Turnhout 1962), pp. 98-9, that the meaning of a "similitude" is defined by its context. But he does not always seem to have absorbed its significance.

- 13 "Some Medieval Literary Terminology", 688-9.
- 14 M.W. Bloomfield, "Symbolism in Medieval Literature", MP 56 (1958-9), 73-81, at 74; D.S. Brewer, review of B.F. Huppe and D.W. Robertson Jr, Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories, RES n.s. 16 (1965), 305.
- 15 On the De amore, see Robertson, "The Subject of the De Amore of Andreas Capellanus", MP 50 (1952-3), 145-61, and A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 393-448; on the Roman de la Rose, ibid., pp. 91-104, 196-207.
- 16 John V. Fleming, The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography (Princeton 1969).
- 17 R.E. Kaske, "Chaucer and Medieval Allegory", ELH 30 (1963), 175-92, at 192.
- 18 See above, pp. 25-33.

## List of Abbreviations



<u>AUR</u>	<u>Aberdeen University Review</u>
<u>Cal. Docs. Scot.</u>	<u>Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland,</u> ed. J. Bain (4 vols, Edinburgh 1881-8)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
<u>DOST</u>	<u>Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue</u>
<u>EC</u>	<u>Essays in Criticism</u>
EETS	Early English Text Society
<u>ELH</u>	<u>English Literary History</u>
<u>Exch. Rolls</u>	<u>The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland,</u> ed. J. Stuart <u>et al.</u> (23 vols, Edinburgh 1878- 1908)
<u>FMLS</u>	<u>Forum for Modern Language Studies</u>
<u>JEGP</u>	<u>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</u>
<u>LP</u>	<u>Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry</u> <u>VIII,</u> ed. J.S. Brewer and J. Gairdner (22 vols, London 1862-1932)
ME.	Middle English
<u>MED</u>	<u>Middle English Dictionary</u>
<u>MLN</u>	<u>Modern Language Notes</u>
<u>MLQ</u>	<u>Modern Language Quarterly</u>
<u>MLR</u>	<u>Modern Language Review</u>
<u>MP</u>	<u>Modern Philology</u>
MSc.	Middle Scots
Med. Lat.	Medieval Latin
<u>NM</u>	<u>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</u>
<u>OED</u>	<u>Oxford English Dictionary</u>
OF.	Old French
<u>OLD</u>	<u>Oxford Latin Dictionary</u>
ON.	Old Norse

<u>PBA</u>	<u>Proceedings of the British Academy</u>
<u>PL.</u>	<u>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina prima</u> , ed. J.P. Migne (221 vols, Paris 1844-64)
<u>PMLA</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</u>
<u>PQ</u>	<u>Philological Quarterly</u>
<u>RES</u>	<u>Review of English Studies</u>
<u>RMS</u>	<u>Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum</u> , ed. J.M. Thomson, J.B. Paul and J.H. Stevenson (11 vols, Edinburgh 1882-1914)
<u>Rot. Parl.</u>	<u>Rotuli Parliamentorum</u> , ed. J. Strachey (6 vols, London 1767-77)
<u>Rot. Scot.</u>	<u>Rotuli Scotiae in Turri Londoniensi et in Domo Capitulari Westmonasteriensi Asservati</u> , ed. D. Macpherson <u>et al.</u> (2 vols, London 1814-19)
<u>SEL</u>	<u>Studies in English Literature</u>
<u>SHR</u>	<u>Scottish Historical Review</u>
<u>SLJ</u>	<u>Scottish Literary Journal</u>
<u>SP</u>	<u>Studies in Philology</u>
<u>SSL</u>	<u>Studies in Scottish Literature</u>
<u>STS</u>	<u>Scottish Text Society</u>
<u>TLS</u>	<u>Times Literary Supplement</u>
<u>Treasurer Accts</u>	<u>Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland</u> , ed. T. Dickson <u>et al.</u> (11 vols, Edinburgh 1877-1916)
<u>TSLL</u>	<u>Texas Studies in Language and Literature</u>
<u>UTQ</u>	<u>University of Toronto Quarterly</u>
<u>YES</u>	<u>Yearbook of English Studies</u>



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Manuscript Sources
2. Middle Scots Literature — General
3. Robert Henryson
4. William Dunbar
5. Sir David Lindsay
6. Medieval Literature, English and Continental
7. Other Works

/This Bibliography is essentially a list of works cited, and is not intended as a complete bibliography of Middle Scots literature. Only in a few cases have works not otherwise mentioned in the thesis been included./

## 1. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

DUMBARTON, Burgh Library

Dumbarton Charters and Documents, no. 63.

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