Robert Henryson| a critical essay

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ROBERT HENRYSON: A CRITICAL ESSAY

by

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INTRODUCTION

The study of medieval poetry deserves the attention of both the scholar and the critic. So far, the scholar has been more interested in Robert Henryson than has the critic. All available texts of Henryson's poems have been edited, collated, and noted for textual variations, sources, and influences, linguistic singularities, and the like. Such research is necessary and useful when it helps in the reading of the poems themselves, but if we are to be content with information alone, then scholarship has been in vain.

Plainly, if Robert Henryson is to be taken seriously as a poet, if the labors of such men as David Laing and G. G. Smith are to be of value, his poems must sooner or later be considered as something other than medieval curiosities. We must read his poems as poems, subjecting them to meticulous critical appraisal. Since so far such a reading does not seem to have been done to an appreciable extent, a critical essay upon the worth of the poems ought to be useful and even necessary, if only to justify the research already done on the manuscripts. No one presents a case for Henryson as a major poet in the same
rank as Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Milton. He is probably at best a minor figure, and literary histories are correct in so rating him, even if, along with Dunbar, he is the most important poet in fifteenth century Scottish and English letters. Nevertheless, the standard critiques of Henryson seem, in the light of the poems themselves, superficial and inadequate. Judgment of Henryson is indubitably right, but not for the right reasons.

The test of time, for one, has justified a close reading of the whole of Henryson's output. The survival of Henryson's poems is a fact which demands attention in itself. Why were his verses not buried along with those of contemporary hacks? And yet, what keeps them from being "great" poems? How concerned is Henryson with the limitations of immediate popularity and approval, and how aware is he of the larger, more universal aesthetic values of poetry? A critical reading of the poems brings to mind such questions, but so far neither literary historians nor critics seem to have raised them.

This essay represents, then, a close reading of the poems, undertaken in an effort to judge their literary worth. Efforts toward establishing textual variations, sources, influences—the subjects of previous research upon Henryson—seem to have been adequately fulfilled; what remains to be done is to apply the knowledge gained from earlier research to a critical re-evaluation, in the hope that by so doing we can come closer to both the poems and to Henryson himself.

Henryson's work consists of a number of short poems predominantly on religious and devotional subjects, and two major works, The Moral
Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian and The Testament of Cresseid. The Testament, written partly as a conclusion to Troilus and Crisseyde, is far from Chaucer in spirit. As a Christian poet, Henryson has made the Testament an "exercise in Christian pity for sinners and unfortunates." Henryson is not a disgruntled rebel; like Chaucer, he accepts his world as he finds it without becoming particularly involved in it. In the Fables he is comparable to La Fontaine in taking the "bare bones" of the most traditional tales and making them so much his own that direct sources cannot be determined for them. In his essay on Dunbar and Henryson, Cruttwell appraises what he finds in Henryson:

Kindness and common sense, conformity to fundamentals and outspoken criticism of details, acceptance of authority and sympathy with the victims of its abuse: these are Henryson's qualities as a social commentator, and all shot through with a deep, unobtrusive Christianity.

Such observations are only partly valid, for they oversimplify, and sentimentalize the melancholy tone of much of Henryson's poetry. Henryson can be almost as harsh and bitter as Dunbar is said to be. Where Dunbar is hampered by an allegiance to the Scottish court, Henryson is no less hampered by avowed religious doctrines, which, far from always showing "unobtrusive Christianity," often warp and confuse his vision enough to turn what might have been a sensitive, good-natured poem, into a bitter one. For all too often Henryson loses his comfortable Christian spirit and becomes involved in false, mechanical doctrines which negate the simpler, more wholesome truths. The contradiction in Henryson--his obeisance to a
stringent, moralizing code which damn livingness, set against his genuine love of living things for their own sake--keeps his poetry from being first-rate.

This contradiction seems also to involve tension between an essentially comic and an essentially tragic world view. This is not to say that comedy necessarily affirms life and that tragedy denies it, but those poems of Henryson's which affirm are largely of a comic tone; those which deny, of a tragic one. In such a sense, the terms comedy and tragedy are not meant to define the "form" of Henryson's poems as much as the sort of ideas which seem to prompt them. That is, some poems, in the manner of comedy, are concerned with social criticism and satire. Other poems are of a metaphysical nature, exploring man's relationship to God beyond his affairs with other men. Such "tragic" poems insist on certain moral absolutes; those of a comic tone never do; their morality is of a more ambivalent, compromising sort. The tales of many of the fables are of a predominantly comic nature; most of the minor poems and Moralitas appended to the Fables of a tragic one. But, paradoxically, the moral absolutes stated in the "tragic" poems seem in the end false, whereas some of the "comic" poems are far more "moral." Finally, in the Testament of Cresseid, Henryson tries to resolve the paradox. Here he writes a poem which is a tragedy in form, tone, and idea, and yet possesses also the more genuine social comic concerns of such poems as the Fables.
The fact that Scottish writing had a tremendous backing in English works of
ever had or was to have until the time of Burns and Scott. But, in spite of
between 1490 and 1900, was producing literature of a better quantity than the
land, whose achievements swell by comparison. Scotland, especially the
the way is somewhat misleading, and tends to oversell the case for Scott-
England and a talent in Scottish literature, but to compare the two cultures in
It is a commonplace that the Scottish century represents a mehr in

Chaucerian Tradition.

England. Scotland. History, the use of allegory in the Middle Ages, and the
Herrickian lived and wrote. The spirit of the chapter will revolve chiefly
the historical, cultural, and literary background in the middle of which

But before turning to the poems, it is well to remind ourselves of

Middle Scots Language and Syntax.

poetry is considered as a subject demanding expert knowledge of the
matter pertinent to the critical discussion, it will of course be needed. The matter
has been said on the subject, but, whenever scholarly information seems
because of literary limitations, it does not pretend to account for all that
review all the scholarship that has been done on Herrick's poems partly
least partly, resolved in the testament. This essay does not intend to
worth of the poems is literature, and how the conflict is finally, or at
see what effect the conflict between them, when it exists, has upon the
light of the two disparate sides of ideas, the lines of comedy and tragedy.

This essay proposes, then, to examine Herrick's poems in the
the same period, one must ultimately compare even the best of fifteenth-century literature not just to what was contemporaneous to it, but to the general inheritance of English or even of world literature. We then see that Scottish literature of the fifteenth century is in a peculiar position: it is, among English letters, the best for its time, but less than what came before or after.

The years of the fourteen hundreds were politically troubled in England. England was at war with France; York and Lancaster were carrying on the War of the Roses; foreign trade had all but ceased. These distractions, and especially the Hundred Years' War with France (1337-1453), kept England from completing her long-attempted conquest of Scotland. Meanwhile, Scotland, which had never known the peace that England had, was infused in the fourteenth century with a hitherto unknown spirit of democratic patriotism when Robert Bruce and William Wallace led the peasants in organized rebellions against the encroaching English. English chivalry had never known such destruction as at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, and retreated southward to less spirited tasks. During the next decades relations between Scotland and England consisted largely of border warfare of a guerilla sort on the part of the Scots. Scottish history of the Middle Ages is never a peaceful record, but the fifteenth century shows as stable a climate as was to be found there. Times were always hard for Scotland--her land is not a gentle one--and yet when some of her people finally did find the quiet to write, their literature
was the stronger for their background. Trevelyan writes perceptively of the temper of Scotland in the Middle Ages:

Scottish independence was won at a heavy price, as most things worth having are won. For two centuries and a half after Bannockburn, Scotland remained a desperately poor, savage, bloodstained land of feudal anarchy, assassination, private war and public treason, with constant border warfare against England, with peculiarly corrupt Church, with no flourishing cities, no Parliament worth calling such, and no other institutions that seemed to give promise of a great future. Her democratic instincts had prevented her from being annexed to England, who would have given her wealth and civilization. But her democratic instincts had done nothing else for her politically, had not kept her feudal nobility in order, still less found expression for the national feeling in any representative system. Her alliance with France, useful militarily against England, was unnatural culturally, and could be no true substitute for the broken connection with her nearer neighbour. What then had Scotland gained by resisting England? Nothing at all, -- except her soul, and whatsoever things might come in the end from preserving that.

Political differences between England and Scotland by the fifteenth century are marked: England had by then long been an autonomous nation and was engaged in such aggressive quarrels as the war with France, whereas in 1400 Scotland was just beginning to assert herself, to organize definable national traits out of internal chaos. These observations have significant manifestations in the literature of each country. English writers set the pattern and the Scottish "makars" followed, but the difference in the manner of the Scots singles them out and raises them above their southern neighbors.

By and large, neither country saw anything "new" written; the Renaissance may have been hinted at but was not realized until the sixteenth
century. Instead, fifteenth century English and Scottish writers tried desperately to keep their grip on what Chaucer had already popularized, but as the writers of both countries "used" Chaucer differently, the contrast between them is significant in degree rather than kind. G. G. Smith sees resemblances in England between the cultural temper of the fifteenth and of the eighteenth centuries. What he has to say for England is as valid for Scotland as is any other comparison between the two countries. Both periods saw a bent toward prose, and a concern with satire and social criticism. Most important, each obeyed and borrowed from the aesthetic canon of an earlier century. The marked difference between the two is that whereas the obedience of the eighteenth century was controlled by reason, that of the fifteenth was unreasoning and incapable of understanding its own intellectual confusion. There would seem to be little praise implicit in such a judgment, but Smith finds that these conditions of the fifteenth-century intellectual temper offer a substantial critical lesson. During an era when the old is yielding to the new, albeit grudgingly, different principles in each may be seen in a clearer perspective. The fifteenth century helped more clearly to define the use of allegory and the influence of Chaucer.

For a cogent and readable explanation of the use of allegory in medieval literature, the student does well to go to C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love. The book describes the developments of courtly love and traces the rise and dwindling of the use of allegory. To do justice to the arguments,
one must read the whole book; for the purposes of this paper, a review of
the chief matters is enough. Since Henryson uses a sort of allegory in
many of his poems, it is necessary, in order to say anything about his
success or failure in using it, to understand what allegory meant to the
poet in the Middle Ages.

To picture one thing in terms of something else is after all the
very purpose of art; it is what Dylan Thomas means when he says "Man,
be my metaphor." Such a representation may be made either through
myth or through allegory. Myth, Lewis defines as "the attempt to read
that something else through its sensible imitations, to see the archetype
in the copy,"¹² as did Plato, and myth has nothing to do with allegory
proper. Allegory involves direct personification, a one-to-one corre-
spondence between the object and the thing represented. Lewis summarizes
the two by saying, "The allegorist leaves the given—his own passions—to
talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is fiction. The symbo-
list leaves the given to find that which is more real...for the symbolist
it is we who are the allegory."¹³ And again, "Symbolism is a mode of
thought, but allegory is a mode of expression."¹⁴

Allegory evolved when man got the idea that one is virtuous not
because he is innocent, but because he has been tempted to do wrong and
forced his better judgment to prevail. In Aristotle's view the really good
man is not tempted in the first place; virtue is the ease of doing rightly,
not the struggle to attain good.¹⁵ But as the tradition developed from
Roman religion to Christianity through the Middle Ages, the attainment of virtue became a struggle between forces of good and evil, and what better way to show this new introspection than to say that good is light (it has been since Homer and the Old Testament), or even a white knight, and evil is dark or a black knight, and that the two fight on the battlefield of the human soul. Applied to such areas of human experience as love, the method results in erotic debate and love allegory.

According to Lewis, Chrétien de Troyes' romances, especially the Lancelot, Guillaume de Lorris' part of The Romance of the Rose, and Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde stand as significant developments of allegory and courtly love. Chrétien, Lewis suggests, is concerned with both psychological and physical action, but when he is psychological he is also allegorical; the two interests lie side by side in the story without being confused. In Guillaume's Rose, narrative elements for the sheer sake of the adventure they describe are almost entirely left out, and all the action and characters (except the nurse) are "allegorical"; physical details have a one-to-one correspondence with psychological happenings. For instance, the scene is described in the poem as "at first, a river bank outside a walled garden; later the interior of the garden; and later still, a rose-plot surrounded by a hedge inside the larger garden." Allegorically, the scene is "at first, the river of life in general, in early youth; later, the world of courtly society; later still, the mind of a young girl living in the world of courtly society." Neither the youth nor the girl
ever appears as such; the "characters" on the stage are their meaningful parts. Belonging to the hero are Hope, Sweet Thought, Reason, etc.\textsuperscript{21} The most interesting and fully developed characters are those of the heroine: Bialacoi, Franchise, Pity, Danger, and others. These, and not the Youth and Lady themselves, argue out the case. Nor is the Rose the Lady, but her love.\textsuperscript{22}

Guillaume's Rose is an example of what Lewis means by "radical" allegory as opposed to allegory which is superficial or rhetorical.\textsuperscript{23} In radical allegory, all parts conspire toward the effect of the whole; neither the literal nor the non-literal story is unnecessary and neither predominates; nor is the poem satisfactory without both.\textsuperscript{24} Chaucer never wrote a radical allegory (except, of course, in so far as he translated the Romance of the Rose), yet succeeding poets looked to him as a model in the use of allegory. Instead, as in Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer has gone back to the direct presentation of Chretien, but with added, non-allegorical psychological actions which were learned from Chretien and the Rose. Traces of the love-allegory survive in Chaucer, and it is these that his followers read as radical allegory.\textsuperscript{25} Lewis summarizes his survey of the development of allegory from Chretien to Chaucer, as follows:

\ldots in Chretien, the story of external happenings and the story (already partly allegorized) of inner experiences, proceeded side by side. We have seen how the two elements fell apart, and how the second element was treated independently in the Romance of the Rose, and raised to a higher power. Guillaume de Lorris deepens, diversifies, and subtilizes the psychology of Chretien: the heroine of the Rose is truer, more interesting, and far more amiable than Guinevere, and Chaucer has
profited by her. He has profited so well, and learned to move so freely and delicately among the intricacies of feeling and motive that he is now in a position to display them without allegory, to present them in the course of the literal story. He can thus go back again, though he goes back with new insight, to the direct method. He can re-combine the elements which had fallen apart after Chrétien, because Chrétien's combination had been premature. Allegory has taught him to dispense with allegory....

Literary histories generally agree that Henryson is a Chaucerian. This judgment, if it is one, is no doubt historically convenient, but in order to reveal anything about Henryson's verse, it needs to be examined further. What does it mean to be Chaucerian in the first place? In what way, if any, is Henryson's verse like Chaucer's? Certainly Henryson had read Chaucer, but when he borrows from him, the differences seem often more striking than the resemblances.

To try to define "Chaucerianism" in terms of what Chaucer means to a present reader and what he meant to a reader of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is not necessarily the same task. What writers immediately after Chaucer found to emulate in him are largely qualities which seem of secondary importance now; and much of what delights us in Chaucer does not seem particularly to have impressed his followers. Whereas we tend to think of the essence of Chaucer as his "spirit," Henryson and others who sought to pattern their verses after his tried to copy his rhetoric. Such admiration would have been commendable had later writers had a fresh vision of their own to which to apply whatever rhetorical skills they may have gained from Chaucer. But, since they by and
large lacked this freshness, their verses seem stale now.

If Henryson was trying to imitate Chaucer in any sense, how might he have done so according to values a writer of the Middle Ages found in Chaucer? Allegory was one major rhetorical device which fifteenth century writers thought they could copy from Chaucer. One of Chaucer's earliest projects was to start a translation of the Romance of the Rose, but, by the time he wrote Troilus and Criseyde, of all his poems the one which seems most deeply to have impressed "Chaucerian" writers, he had quite consciously projected inner psychological activity into action, rather than into allegory. But radical allegory as found in the Rose, allegory as a story which can be translated into literal narration... without confusion, but not without loss, is not to be found in Chaucer. Instead, what must have appeared as allegory to Henryson when he read Chaucer, is of a rhetorical sort, extrinsic to the meaning of a given poem, rather than intrinsic and a necessary part of its full meaning.

Whereas the literal story of a radical allegory loses at least half its meaning when divorced from its analogous allegorical parts, the literal story of Henryson's poems stands quite well alone. Like Chaucer, Henryson is quite capable of projecting psychological motivation into direct action; but when he tries to divert it into pictures, a damaging distraction from the wholeness of a poem results. The ease with which Chaucer can tell a literal story and make it psychologically true, prevents him from writing meaningful allegory, so that for Henryson (or anyone
else) to look upon Chaucer's poems as models of allegory is misleading.

Bennet observes that part of the reason for the paralysis that set over fifteenth century English literature was that Chaucer died too soon for literary convenience. While he created a new tradition, Chaucer left it no heir, nor were his many admirers able to absorb Chaucer so as to profit by his spirit and range. Thus, in England the Chaucerians only rarely wrote verse that could be called poetry; instead it became paralyzed by borrowing, as poets grew convinced that by emulating technique they could succeed in recreating the spirit of the past. For instance, poems began with poets dozing over source books, with descriptions of the time of year, and with imitations of Chaucer's Prologue. The spirit of poetry following Chaucer was stale because it was not contemporary or individual. Nor did the English Chaucerians fare much better metrically, although they had tried to copy Chaucer's technique.

The case is different in Scotland, where in the fifteenth century there was a cultural climate different from that in England. As has been noted, Scotland was then just beginning to emerge as a nation, assert her own character, and attain a relative stability. As might be expected, Scotland's culture, particularly her literary art, was likewise late in developing. The poems of Thomas and some anonymous alliterative verse are all that remain of the thirteenth century; at the end of the fourteenth come Fordun, Hucheon, and Barbour, who reflect the political chaos of the times. Even the characteristically Scottish patriotic vein is missing
in their works. The Scottish literary efforts of the fifteenth century mark a break in the old tradition, an abandonment of the alliterative style. Instead, the poets picked up the tradition of Chaucer and allegory. Their use of the tradition had its faults, certainly, but they are not the same faults as are laid against the English Chaucerians. In Scotland a better poetry came out of the tradition than in England, because whereas Scottish poets looked to Chaucer as a model, they were sufficiently sensitive to the spirit of their own country to make the poetry theirs and an imitation of Chaucer only incidentally. The particular awareness of the Scottish poets of their own land, of its temper much as Trevelyan describes it, is the source of their strength, but keeps them from achieving larger, more universal proportions in their verse. Scottish literature may be fresh and picturesque, but it is too self-conscious, too aware of its own past, too domestic and irresponsible, and "never far from the village pump." Always concerned with movement and a multitude of detail, at its best it is never dull; yet neither does it resolve itself in thoughtful generalizations. Such characteristics are true in varying degrees for all of Scottish literature, and may be noted more particularly in Henryson's poems.
HENRYSON’S MINOR POEMS

Neither external nor internal evidence is sufficient to date Henryson’s poems.¹ Not only can they not be dated in time, but there is no way of telling in what order they were written. In the Preface to *Five Poems*, 1470-1870, E. M. W. Tillyard summarizes the general scholarly concensus of opinion on the matter:

In what year Henryson wrote the Testament of Cresseid we do not know. Skeat conjectured 1460; Gregory Smith, who edited Henryson for the Scottish Text Society, dated his working career 1470-1500. Thus 1470 is a possible date for the poem... (viii)

In 1508 Dunbar laments Henryson’s death, so all we can be sure of is that the poems were written before then. Tillyard’s dating of the Testament (arbitrary at best, because he wants 1470 to match the 1870 of Swinburne’s *Hertha* for the sake of the title of his book), suggests that Tillyard would place the Testament at the beginning of Henryson’s “working career,” but in terms of a comparative study of all of the poems, it seems more sensible to say that, whatever its date, the Testament is a more mature work than are the minor poems or even the Fables, and so probably came after them.
In reading Henryson's canon, then, it is apparent that in much of his poetry he fails to resolve certain moral contradictions so that the poems lack unity in thought and in execution. That is, sometimes (with joy and humor) he is sensitive and sympathetic to the physical world about him and shows a genuine concern for the human predicament on this earth. At other times, he denies earthly life, and with it gladness, love, sex, and even the possibility of human relationships, much less their worth, all in favor of death and speculations on heavenly bliss. To be sure, men have always been concerned with trying to reconcile life on this earth with some sort of heavenly model, and certainly he who professes to call himself Christian is particularly aware of discrepancies and conflicts between the orders of grace and of nature, so that to say that Henryson is plagued with the problem is really to state little more than a platitude. Nevertheless, whatever may have been his own personal debates, the quarrel in his poems between heaven and earth has a particular bearing on the success of his art.

The minor poems include a scattering of various attitudes toward the problem—from meditative pious lyrics to ribald burlesque verses. Most of the minor poems are unsuccessfully morbid: those on religious subjects offer little beyond didacticism; those on secular matters tend toward the obscene. Some of the lighter poems may have been early experiments, the graver ones may have come later in his career, or the
reverse may be equally true. But whatever their chronology, they represent a group of largely unsuccessful poems which at the same time as they state disparate moral views, are also artistic failures.

In all of Henryson's canon, only The Testament of Cresseid presents a single, unified world view, convincing both morally and artistically. Better than anywhere else, Henryson here comes to terms with what appear elsewhere as contradictions between earthly life and divine expectation, and at the same time writes a poem which as a poem holds together better than any of his others.

In terms of artistic achievement and organization of ideas, the Fables fall somewhere between the minor poems and the Testament. Whereas the minor poems largely treat the physical with mockery or disgust, the tales of the Fables are very much concerned with man as a physical and social being, and convincingly show the freshness of this earth for its own sake. But the Fables do not leave out theological applications of God's word. Appended to each tale is a Moralitas which, among other matters, discusses didactically what man's moral duty ought to be, and as often as not, the lesson denies and contradicts the values set up in the tales themselves. As poems, then, the Fables are uneven. They suggest much of what is artistically admirable in the Testament, and occasionally may even surpass it, but they also contain much that is as dull and false, both morally and poetically, as anything in the minor poems. And so, the present discussion of Henryson's poems is arranged not necessarily
according to chronological possibilities, but according to what seems reasonably to be a certain development in terms of ideas and technique, from the minor poems through the Fables to the Testament.

In point of idea and technique, then, the minor poems are as a group Henryson's most rudimentary and awkward work. Orpheus and Euridice stands by itself as the longest and most elaborate of the lot and the only one of his poems to rely entirely on classical mythology. Robene and Makyne and Sum Practys of Medecyne are distinguished by being entirely secular. Several of the poems have to do with old age and death: The Ressonying Betuix Aige and Yowth, The Prais of Aige, The Thre Deid Pollis, and The Ressonying Betuix Deth and Man. Three of the poems comment upon contemporary social and moral ills: Ane Prayer for the Pest, The Want of Wyse Men, and Aganis Haisty Credence of Titlaris. The Bludy Serk, a ballad and The Garmont of God Ladeis, a lyric, illustrate moral and religious precepts in terms of conventions of courtly love. The Abbay Walk and The Annunciacion are religious meditative lyrics.

If Robene and Makyne is an early poem, which its lack of overt moralizing and almost flippant tone may well suggest, it is an appropriate introduction to Henryson's work. But, whatever its chronological relationship to the others, it contains the germs of many themes, attitudes, and techniques found in more elaborate poems. The story is of Robene, a silly country bumpkin who would rather tend sheep than respond to Makyne's love-making, and only too late decides it might be sporting to try the second.
Certainly there is much that is conventional—it depends largely on pastoral elements and courtly love—but the poem itself is not altogether trite. It suggests Henryson's characteristic ability to freshen the commonplace. Nor are the conventions merely decorative. In terms of plot, the poem depends on a sympathy toward the courtly love tradition; in fact, Makyne recites a fairly accurate catalogue of courtly love precepts:

'be heynd, courtass, and fair of fair,
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.'

(19-24)

But Henryson himself plainly has no sympathy for any sort of love that toys with seduction. Applaud him or not as we may for mocking courtly love as a convention, he is also making implicit judgments against it, as he does to an extent in the fable about Chauntecleir. Robene objects to Makyne's overtures not only because it all seems to him trivial in the light of his graver duties as shepherd, but also because he senses something inherently wrong in sex. He argues that if he and Makyne should "play us in this plane," the sheep would reprove them. And even later, when he has changed his mind, Robene emphasizes the advantages of the woods as a hiding place. Now, to be sure, secrecy is no more than one of the by-laws of courtly love, but here Henryson implies a moral judgment in addition; one must hide in order not to be caught and shamed. Furthermore, Makyne's temptation speech to Robene is blunt and crude.
Henryson cannot speak of sex with Chaucer's good nature and delicate humor.

"Robene, tak tent unto my taill,  
And wirl all as I reid,  
And thow sall half my hait all haill,  
Eik and my mahnheid.  
Sen god sendis bute for baill,  
And for murning remeid,  
I denn with the, bot gif I daill,  
Dowtiles I am bot deid."

(33-40)

In this poem to copulate is wrong and ugly, and certainly not a subject either for humor or for tenderness as Chaucer would have it.

As implicit moral judgments condemn courtly love, so the hard facts of the practical world challenge the illusion of the pastoral world. The poem begins: "Robene sat on a gud grene hill, / Kepand a fock of fe," but ends leaving him "Kepand his hird under a buche, / amangis the holtis hair." The scene thus shifts from an idyllic pastoral landscape to a realistic, rough countryside. Indeed, part of the pattern of the poem is a rebuff of convention. As Robene ignores Makyne in favor of agricultural duties, so she retorts when he sounds the lover's complaint: "The man that will nocht quhen he may / sall half nocht quhen he wald" (91-92). Her remarks represent wit in the best sense, the sort the fox uses to unmask the wolf as a fool.

Written in eight-line ballad stanzas of alternating four- and three-stress lines, rhyming abababab, Robene and Makyne suggests that Henryson is self-consciously experimenting with the techniques of writing a poem.
In the tradition of the folk, if not always of the literary ballad, Robene
and Makyne is compact; few lines are devoted to comments or descrip-
tions. The poem is really a dialogue between Robene and Makyne—a
couplet, four lines, or an entire stanza devoted first to one and then to the
other. One stanza will suffice to indicate formal patterning and the sort
of elliptical compactness suggestive of the oral ballad.

'Rebene, thow reivis me roif and rest;
I love both the allone.'
'Makyne, adew, the sone gois west,
The day is neir hand gone.'
'Rebene, in dule I am so drest,
That lufe wilbe my bone.'
'Ga, lufe, makyne, quhair evir thow list,
ffor lemman I (bidi) none.'

(49-56)

As in most of Henryson's poems other than the Testament, Robene
and Makyne shows little concern for the development of image patterns.
Henryson tells the story, and that is that, unless one can see a consistent
use of the sheep as a gauge to Robene's sensibilities; When he is loathe
to love, he excuses himself by saying it is his duty to tend the sheep
and that they should rebuke the lovers; when he changes his mind, he notes
that the sheep are conveniently grazing.

But in the end, Robene and Makyne seems distressingly sterile,
partly because none of the several intents implied is ever realized, and
each cancels out the other. Love-making as a convention is ridiculed,
and as behavior vulgarized, yet no constructive basis for human
relations is proposed in its place. Henryson seems to sympathize with
Robene when he scorns Makyne's advances with "'I wait not quhat is love,'"
but if Henryson himself knows what love is, he is not telling; instead, he
condemns both sides of the argument, and lets the pair part—Makyne
gay and harsh as ever, and Robene in exactly the same condition as
when the poem began, a little sadder but not much wiser. The poem
mocks what it describes, but affirms nothing in its place; Henryson
seems to doubt not only that such a thing as love exists, but that human
beings can achieve any sort of understanding among each other at all.

Although certainly of a different intent and character, _Sum Practysis of Medecyne_ is similar to _Robene and Makyne_ in its entirely
secular preoccupation and in its vulgarity. But, whereas the pastoral
alludes only by implication to the contemporary scene, _Sum Practysis_
contains considerable social criticisms. More than any other single
poem, it shows Henryson directly aware of and commenting upon his
time by means of rather harsh satire against medicinal practices which
must have seemed ridiculous if not cruel even in the Middle Ages. Some
writers on Henryson praise these stanzas for a Rabelaisian sort of wit
and for a high degree of metrical skill. But, regardless of Henryson's
technical competence (the stanzas are in popular alliterative verse),
the humor depends so much on the digestive tract as often to sour into
little more than vulgarity. And certainly the humor here is not of the
same good nature that abounds in the _Fables_.

The high point of Henryson's skill in declamation as well as in general
verse was his skill in verse narrative in rhymed royal and representative
verse, as their best.

The Longer Poems, Orpheus and Pandora, the Fairy, and the Relent
ment demonstrates a self-conscious interest in technical aspects of poetry.

Henryson's over purpose in writing may be didactic, but he also
brought up the life of a woman whose life is composed of an
episode of the woman's life which is a quarter of an
hour from the hour in which she was married.

The woman who lives to converse a cove for him and answers him as follows:

"I am a witch (I am), Henryson becomes 'amended with the witch-
which is 'amended (I am)."

For his death-bed, as told in the "Kemston MS and quoted in C."

"In these lines seem to be a different tone from most of Henry-
son's writing, they are at least in keeping with the apocalyptic account"
poetic expression. But it is interesting to note the more various stanza patterns among the shorter poems, suggesting perhaps Henryson's experiments in versification in the search of a form that would suit his matter best. Six of the minor poems are written in eight-line stanzas of iambic pentameter rhyming ababbbc. The Want of Wyse Men is similar with slight variations, and the two hundred and eighteen lines of the Moralitas to Orpheus and Euridice are in heroic couplets. Perhaps Henryson's more intricate and precise accomplishments in Chaucerian stanzas may have grown out of such earlier practice in iambic pentameter. But his best verses in the Chaucerian stanza do more than conform to iambs. If, among the minor poems, the verses governed by iambic pentameter seem rather stiff (and they do), poems written in ballad meter suggest a possible source for the ease in the best of the rime royal.

For instance, The Garmont of Gud Ladeis allegorizes a woman's wearing apparel into the virtues she should have in order to win the favour of her lover, whose standards are more 'moral' than erotic. But, obviously didactic as the poem may be, it gains a certain charm in the ease with which details are catalogued:

Hir gown suld be of gudliness,
Weill ribband with renowne,
Purfillit with plesour in ilk place,
furrit with fyne fassoun.

Hir belt suld be of benignitie,
Abowt hir middil meit;
Hir mantill of humilitie,
To tholl bayth wind & weit.

(17-24)
The stanza pattern of *The Annunciation*, a religious lyric, is more intricate. Basically, it is an elaboration of the ballad with four- and three-foot lines sometimes alternated and sometimes repeated, with but two rhymes: one for the four-foot line and the other for the three-foot line. Throughout the poem, *-is* is added as a feminine ending to the three-foot lines, making them double rhymes (consistent only in a given stanza).

The scheme has a complicated yet fluid effect:

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This tithingis tauld, the messinger
Till hevin agane he glidis:
That princes pure, withoutyn peir,
Full plesandly applidis,
And blith with barne abidis.
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(25-29)

*Orpheus and Euridice* is a retelling of the Greek legend in six hundred and thirty-three lines. Its length and its use of familiar materials does not necessarily make this a bad poem—the *Fables* and the *Testament* are also lengthy reworkings of old stories. But *Orpheus and Euridice* is a bad poem. It would scarcely merit discussion at all except as in its failures it may help to explain more clearly Henryson's successes elsewhere. The *Orpheus* is first of all dull and tedious; there are just too many words for what is being said. Whereas the *Fables* and the *Testament* gain much through compression, through what is left unsaid, the *Orpheus* tries to tell everything as elaborately as possible: adventures, genealogies, theological postulations, catalogues of characters allegorized into virtues and vices, the mechanics of the music of the spheres, and so on. Certainly
no one would object to Henryson's wanting to retell an old story, but here he has failed to re-order his materials with the freshness and vigor that distinguishes the Fables and Testament.

As in Robene and Makyne, the subject-matter of Orpheus and Euridice makes writing about sex almost unavoidable, but, whereas in the shorter poem sex is at best unpleasant and condemned by implication, in the Orpheus sexual love becomes an object-lesson against the sin of lust.

The very progenitors of the hero are conceived in sin:

Quhilk Jupiter that goddess to wyfe can ta,
And carnally hir knew, and eftir syne,
upon a day bare him fair dochteris nyne.
(33-35)

The birth of nine daughters at once seems peculiar enough, but acceptable if Jupiter and a goddess called "Memoria" are to be parents. What is strange in these lines is that from such a sin as copulation should issue daughters so "fair" that Henryson must spend four stanzas extolling their virtues. Later, he is hard put to it to justify Orpheus' and Euridice's fancy for one another, but works himself out of embarrassment by making Orpheus so strong and handsome that even Euridice thinks it no shame to woo him "with wordes suneit and blenkis amorous." The point of the Orpheus legend, when Henryson tells it, is not that we should admire and pity one whose love was so strong that he lost his beloved because he could not restrain himself from gazing at her, but that Orpheus is being rightly punished for lust.

But, although Orpheus and Euridice may chiefly seem to illustrate
matters which Henryson handles better in other poems, it is not entirely
without some merit of its own, and so looks forward positively as well as
negatively to the major works. For instance, Henryson always enjoys
lists and catalogues; he likes to give factual information simply for its own
sake. (And so, of course, have many other poets, especially in Classical
antiquity and in the Middle Ages, and Milton for example in Paradise Lost
lists places, names, and diseases.) The planet portraits in the Testament
are such a compendium of knowledge. Scholars have used the portraits to
point out how well acquainted Henryson was with current beliefs about
mythology, astronomy, and astrology. And yet, in the Testament, the
planets represent more than encyclopaedic decoration; out of them Henryson
draws images to integrate facts with the central idea of the poem. But
elsewhere he is less skillful; the facts are there, and they may even be
gracefully arranged, yet they are not fused within a meaningful image
pattern. Thus the Orpheus devotes three stanzas to a technical description
of the music of the spheres which Orpheus hears on his way back to earth
after pleading his case with Venus and the moon. Then come the lines:

      Off sic musik to wryt I do bot doit,
      Thairfoir of this mater a stray I lay,
      For in my lyfe I cowth nevir sing a noit;

      (240-242)

The shift is abrupt, and certainly welcome. With a little humor, Henryson
indicates that although he enjoys catalogues, he has at the same time a
self-conscious concern for the design of the poem as a whole, even though this time the design is not particularly significant. There is a similar instance in one of the fables, that of the fox's trial, in which Henryson steps into the poem to try to rescue with humor what is becoming tedious. When even Henryson has had enough of the catalogue of beasts, he stops gracefully, apologizing that "mony kynd of beistis I couth not know" (920). But here the listing is somewhat in point—not as intricately pertinent as the planets in the Testament, but more so than the music of the spheres in the Orpheus. In the fable, Henryson is doing more than satisfying medieval conventions; he wants us to be aware of multitudes of particular creatures. For when the lion appears,

Seing thir beistis all at his bidding boun,
He gaff ane braid, and luikit him about;
Than flatlingis to his feit thay fell all doun,
For dredi off deith thay droupit all in douit.
(922-925)

By telling just who was thare, Henryson makes the intended majesty of such mass adulation and homage all the more effective.

"Complaint," one of the few lyric passages in all of Henryson's poems.

"O dulful herp, with mony dully string,
turne all thy mirth and musik in murning,
and seiss of all thy sutell songis sueit; now weip with me, thy lord and cairfull King, quhilk lossit hes in erd all his lyking; and all thy game thow change in gole, and greif, Thy goldin pynnis with mony teiris weit; and all my pame for till report thow priss, cryand with me, in every steid and streit, 'quhair art thow gone, my luve ewridices?'"
(134-153)
This is the first of five similar stanzas, each containing mostly stock images. But the refrain, "quhair art thow gone, my luve ewridicess?" seems all the brighter for its direct sincerity. Amid the cluttered clichés of love poetry, the one line injects Henryson's own warmth and saves the poem at least for a time. And it is more than a convenient refrain. At the end, when Orphens has finally lost Euridice for good, his anguish again reduces him to echoing the simple line: "Quhat art thow, luve, how sall I the defyne?" (401).

The use of climax is probably Henryson's most successful narrative device; in the Fables especially, his sense of timing and staging is at times enough to hold a story together almost by action alone. In her essay, "Feeling and Precision," Marianne Moore finds an instance of it in the Orpheus.

Chaucer and Henryson, it seems to me, are the perfection of naturalness in their apparently artless art of conveying emotion intact. In "Orpheus and Eurydice," Henryson tells how Tantalus stood in a flood that rose "aboif his chin"; yet quhen he gaipit thair wald no drop cum In;

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Toth gat he nocht his thirst (to slake) nor mend.
Befoir his face ane naple hand also,
fast at his mowth upoun a twynid (threid),
quhen he gaipit, It rollit to and fro,
and fled, as it refusit him to feid.
Quhen orphens thus saw him suffir neid,
he tuk his harp and fast on it can clink;
The wattir stud, and tantalus gat a drink.
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One notices...the gusto of invention, with climax proceeding out of climax, which is the mark of feeling.
But, effective as the passage may be in itself, it is in the poem little more than a 'purple patch'; how Tantalus gets his drink really contributes little to the total effect of the poem.

At least part of the difficulty with Orpheus and Euridice, part of the reason for its dullness, is the fact that Henryson does not really seem to be very much interested in his materials. When the verses come alive, as in the passages cited, it is because for the moment at least Henryson is convinced of Tantalus and Orpheus for their own sake, and has laid aside the matter of abstract didacticism. It might be suggested, then, that the poem is weakened by trying to accomplish two purposes: to tell a story and to develop religious ideas. In the tales of the Fables, when religious ideas are not particularly central, Henryson tells a good story and tells it well, but the obverse is not true, for when he tries to write a poem only on a moral or religious matter without narrative trappings, the result is seldom fine poetry. The Abbey Walk, a lyrical reflection on spiritual forbearance, is the most promising of the pious pieces, and yet somehow even it falls short of the sort of religious poetry George Herbert was able to write, nor is it as pointedly effective as the early thirteenth century quatrain:

Nou goth sonne under wod, -
me reweth, Marie, thi faire Rode.

Nou goth sonne under tre, -
me reweth, Marie, thi sone and the.
Henryson's poem begins, "Allone as I went up and doun / in ane abbay was fair to se." These lines particularize the poem as a personal experience, set it in a dramatic frame, and establish the tone as somber but not sad, quiet though not gloomy, and suitable to a thoughtful man's peaceful walk in a "fair" abbay. The subject of his reflections is simple and commonplace: a quest for what consolation is best in adversity, and much of what he finds written upon the wall of the abbey is of the same modest wisdom to be found in other poems. "Spurn nocht thy fute aganis the wall" must be a folk saying—the leper lady repeats it to Cresseid in the Testament—its ring of colloquial familiarity contributes to the poems's sincerity, its distinguishing characteristic, and helps to unify it. Such a remark, furthermore, intended not without humor, elevates the poem somewhat from mere didacticism and lends it gentle earnestness.

But, if The Abbey Walk is fairly consistent and unified in tone, it is less so in its general construction. The first four stanzas progress from general to particular instances of man's search for comfort. But the last three justifying forbearance are less effective because they depend only upon arbitrary didacticism. Had the poem ended without them, the implied paradox—that man must obey and thank God no matter how much he had rather rebel against unexplained seeming injustices—would have been central, and a rather effective, if commonplace, insight into the human condition. But as the poem stands, its basic idea is finally little more than a pious sermon on patience and forbearance. The tension has been weakened by moralizing.
All in all, Herryson’s minor poems offer dryly readable. To be

The prospect of death comes large for Herryson; in The
Resonance Pulpit

(fables, 1139-1144)

In short, gather we many as the face of God,
And help us up into thy heavenly hall,
To see the pain and perturbations all.

They call the child that we might be blessed,
Now overleaf, Lord, and King Celestial,
Their Mediator merciful and me.

At once are summarized at the end of the table of the fox’s feast,
God’s attributes as King and Judge to be revered, feared, and loved all.

(fables, 792-795)

Obey our deities, to wise themselves and
Open unto your God and ye shall understand.
Goes of your sin, resort your conscience,
Angels death may make man with reverence.

Before it is too late, for,

Christianity. Then is generally wicked and must pray to God and repent.

Breastly, Herryson’s religious premises are those of orthodox

present a consistent argument to reconcile what should be with what is.

and yet given in the area of Christian dogma, Herryson is not able to

reposest for statements about what man’s relationship to God should be.

The steady vision of the Testament. They are, among other things, a

are commonplace and monotonous, they lack the generality of the fables of

observe details, and note metrical effects, but on the whole the poems

sure, there are, as have been suggested, scattered passages of humor.

Alt in all, Herryson’s minor poems offer dryly readable.
Of trewth, me thocht, thay triumphit in thair tone:
'O yowth, be glaid in to thay floweris grene!
'O yowth they floweris failis fellown sone!' (70-72)

According to Wood, *triumphit* here means 'traversed, ran contrary,' which suggests that Henryson is at least skeptical about any charms youth may have. In *The Prais of Alge*, he denies youth as 'na gude' and ends each stanza, "The more of age the near heavynnis bliss." *The Resonong Betuix Deth and Man* is a graveyard dialogue in which man is persuaded that death is the way to heaven and assures death of his resolve "To lurk under thy Caip," which may be understood as either to be covered by death's mantle, or to be lapped in lead.7

Such, then, is the main trend of Henryson's statement of Christian dogma: a reverence for God, the infallible judge and king; a knowledge of man's sin and the necessity of his repenting; and a looking forward to the experience that comes with old age and to death as hopeful approaches to heavenly bliss.

But Henryson's constant concern with death as a way to heavenly bliss is not entirely without horror or distaste. To be sure, "*Timor mortis conturbat me*" belongs to Dunbar and not to Henryson, but some of Henryson's poems are not immune from the same sort of attitude as prompted Holbein's woodcuts of the *Dance of Death*. In his short poem, *The Resonong betuix Deth and Man*, Henryson meets death "Calland all man and woman to thair beiirs," and reminding them of what is in store:
"Edderis, askis, and wormis meit for to be." The Three Deid Pollis, again, addresses "O sinful man," that he "with gaistly sicht, Behold oure heidis thre, / Cure holkit ene, oure peilit pollis baier," which are "holkit and now, and wallowit as the weid."

O ladeis quhyt, in claithis corruscant, poleist with perle, and mony pretius stane; With palpis quhyt, and hals (so) elegant, Sircuit with gold, & sapheris mony ane; Your finyearis small, quhyt as quhailis bane, arrayit with ringis, and mony rubeis reid; as we ly thus, so sall ye ly ilk ane, with peilit pollis, and holkit thus your heid. (25-32)

Such images, while not violent, are certainly grotesque; Henryson cannot seem really to remove himself enough from the thought of death as physical decomposition to make its spiritual values finally convincing. He can only end his dialogue with Death: "Jesus, on the, with peteous voce, I cry, / Mercy on my to haif on domisday." In the seventeenth century, George Herbert also writes a poem using a similar idea of the dance of death. But in his poem, "Death," Herbert gets beyond the idea of death as being only a matter of grinning skulls. His eye is not on newts and worms, but on the Christian resurrection, when "all thy bones with beauty shall be glad." Herbert's personification of death is not laughable because he himself sees it partly as a joke.

But when Henryson speaks of death in terms of decay, there is nothing funny about it, and one may well ask why he cannot afford a joke. A sense of humor is dependent not only on innate intelligence and wit, but
also upon the firmness of a person's regard for his subject matter. One cannot comfortably make jokes about something one feels called upon to defend. Herbert looks forward to death for the "gay and glad" vision of doomsday; Henryson, unable to see beyond skulls and worms, cries desperately to be rescued from such sordidness. In principle, then, Henryson says death is a good thing, for it makes possible heavenly bliss which should be the purpose of earthly life anyway, but when it comes to the point, death is far from an attractive prospect.

Furthermore, Henryson not only indicates a mixed attitude toward death, but toward God as well. Although for the most part he writes in terms of orthodox Christian precepts, his God is not always a remote king infallibly judging "O wretchit man, O full of Ignorance" and trying to wrench him to goodness through pain and the threat of death. In Ane Prayer for the Pest Henryson gets a closer glimpse of God than pious platitude usually allows him. The poem has a certain sincerity of its own in the tone of an intimate conference with God: "Remember, Lord how deir thow hes us bocht / ... Puneiss with pety and nocht with violens." Here God takes on human qualities all the more human because Henryson can admonish him to be moderate. In the fable of the sheep and the dog, the tone is even more familiar, as in despair, the shivering animal cries, "'Lord God, quhy sleipis thow aa lang?' (1245), and again, "'Allace (gude Lord) quhy thalis thow it so?'" (1313). Even, God, it seems, is known to sleep when His creatures are desperate and perceive in God
only theoretical, casual and remote interest in them. Is man, then, doubly isolated from God--by his own sin (or 'ignorance') and by God's indifference to him? Only in the Testament does Henryson with any satisfactory firmness try to work out an honest and believable solution to the problem of man's relation to God, as well as to the problem of his relation to other people and to society.

To summarize, Henryson's minor poems are significant in that they indicate the sort of thing he is interested in writing about and in so far as they provide a clearer perspective with which to evaluate his major efforts. In the minor poems, we find Henryson characteristically making use of literary conventions and trying to refashion them for his own ends. He accepts courtly love, either, as in Orpheus and Euridice and Robene and Makyne, for the purpose of implicit condemnation, or, as in The Garmont of Gud Ladeis, as a vehicle for moral allegory. He criticizes social and moral ills--disease, fraud, lying, impiety, and the like. He is further trying varieties of metrical patterns which look forward to his mastery (which is not mere copying) of the Chaucerian stanza. Always his subject matter is old stories, easy lessons and commonplace ideas, not because he is too unimaginative to think up new materials, but because he knows his readers enjoy the comfort of the familiar. The difference, then, between his successful poems and his dull ones is a matter of the freshness he brings to old materials. Furthermore, the minor poems are philosophically contradictory; Henryson's quarrels between the orders of
nature and of grace pull his poems asunder. Because the minor poems lack freshness and unity of vision, they are inferior as poems to the Fables and certainly to the Testament.
THE FABLES

In the minor poems, Henryson seemed to be trying out several kinds of verse forms and stanza patterns, as well as exploring various subject matters of poetry--Greek legend, contemporary calamities, pastoral romance, Christian dogma, and personal anecdote. In the Testament he uses much of the same material, now reorganized into a clearer, firmer, and more convincing statement. But when he writes the Fables, Henryson is, as it were, in an in-between stage both in regard to what he is trying to say and how well he is able to organize it into poetry. What has been tentative in the minor poems is now more clearly stated, if not much better resolved.

In the Fables, then, Henryson is self-consciously aware of several areas of experience with which he tries to come to terms all at once, and even though he does little more than lose sight of a poem in contradictions, the opposites are often interesting in themselves. His awarenesses tend to group themselves into four categories. In the matter of literature, he claims that he writes to teach moral verities and to delight by the way,
but at their best, the Fables are entertaining in the finest sense. Secondly, Henryson has a general sympathy for the human condition and often a distinct social consciousness, and yet very little feeling for individuals apart from a certain detached amusement. In the matter of moral principles of conduct and religious ideas, he offers little but negative pronouncements which not only cancel out materials he has previously presented, but in themselves seem cold, matter-of-fact, and altogether unconvincing. And finally there is left in the Fables much poetry that is independent of anything Henryson either states or implies should be the ends of poetry. His best poetry is generally related to his own joyful response to the fertility of the earth and to the possible fullness of experience, even though happiness is always tempered in the end with sorrow.

Henryson writes two prologues to the Fables. In Wood's edition, one is printed at the beginning of the whole collection, and the other introduces the tale of the lion and the mouse. The prologues contain little more than cant, but they do suggest a good deal about how Henryson really writes a poem in contrast to how he says a poem should be written. The first prologue begins,

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Thocht fenyheit fabils of ald poetre
Be not al grounded upon truth, yit than
Thair polite termes of sweit Rhretore
Richt plesand ar Unto the eir of man;
And als the caus that thay first began
Wes to repreif the haill misleving
Off man be figure of ane uther thing.
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(1-7)
This is little more than a statement of conventional Medieval notions about the ends of poetry. Poetry should persuade man to behave virtuously; it should teach and delight, but not lose sight of teaching in the pleasures of delight. Like Scalinger half a century later, Henryson is repeating Horatian commonplaces. According to Henryson, poetry has nothing to do with either literal or moral "truth," except as it may serve to illustrate truth. On the other hand, Henryson admits that there is something to be said for polite terms and sweet rhetoric, aside from their being a sugar-coating to hell-fire when one is weary of the real thing. For after all, Henryson points out, even "Clerkis sayis it is richt profitabill / Amangis ernist to ming ane merie sport, / To light the spreit, and gar the tyme be schort." Furthermore, for the mind that is always busy "in ernistfull thochtis, and in studying: / With sad materis sum merines to ming, / Accordis weill." Henryson thinks in terms of the scholar's world; whatever pedlars and laborers he may write about, he is writing to a select audience of literate pupils if not scholars, who, in the midst of more serious (and worthwhile) "bookish" pursuits, need find no harm in occasional diversion.

To return to the introductory stanza; the "figure of ane uther thing" which is to illustrate man's short-comings, is, of course, the animal fable. Animals, he goes on to explain, are particularly appropriate because they point out the bestiality in man. Fables, then, may show "How mony men in operatioun, / Ar like to beistis in condiitoun." In the fable about
Chauntecleir, Henryson explains further that although animals are not able to reason as man can, and although each represents but a single type or aspect of character, they are in aggregate representative of such a variety of "inclinations," that all man's foibles may sooner or later be reflected in animal traits.

Such a definition of the appropriateness of animals for persuading man toward virtue has, however, its special prat-falls and limitations. In the first place, an animal can never be allowed to be of interest for its own sake; a sort of allegory needs to be at least implicit at all times. There must be, then, as much aesthetic distance as possible between the reader and the characters; we must not identify or sympathize with them. But, in the case of Henryson's fables at least, sometimes the disassociation breaks down; we find we do care about the animals in themselves and that we are disappointed when we are told that we must condemn them because they stand for what is despicable in human nature. That is, Henryson is taking away with one hand what he perhaps never should have given with the other. As a matter of fact, Henryson is in a dilemma when he even tries to write fables as all. If he were to follow the standard recipe for a fable he would have more rhetoric than poetry, but when he succeeds in writing poetry in a larger sense, (which he does), he is going beyond the bounds of the fable.

In the first prologue, Henryson commits himself to further difficulties:
In an age when Latin was the accepted language of educated men, and
certainly of any literature that pretended to art, it must have taken a
certain amount of courage to write in the vernacular. But Henryson does
not take himself as seriously as did Dante in his eloquent plea for the
nobility of his Italian. Henryson apologizes whimsically for writing in
homely and rude terms, "for quyf of Eloquence / Nor Retorike, I never
Understude." Dante affects no such pose; he knew literary Latin as well
as anyone (and so, no doubt, did Henryson, for that matter, if only
because he uses Latin quotations), but Dante argues that Italian is better
than Latin for his purposes, and not a poor substitute.

But there are other transparent poses in Henryson's passage. His
allegiance to a direct translation is more than doubtful, for although he is
certainly re-telling familiar tales, they probably stem more from general
knowledge than from direct texts, although the fact that scholars have
established no definite source does not of course mean that there was
none. But, whether presumptuous or not, Henryson has failed to erradi-
cate his "self" from the poems. Whoever his patronizing Lord may have
been (and his identity sounds as doubtful as that of the "translation"), he
certainly does not prompt the work as much as does Henryson's own
imagination. And even his "author, my Maisteris," turns out to be more of a fictitious character than a pedagogical source, for in the prologue to the fable of the lion and the mouse, Aesop himself appears in the poet's dream. Far from being a Greek slave, he is Poet Lauriate from Rome dressed in an elegant white gown, purple coat, scarlet hood "bordered well with silk," white beard, and curls below his shoulders. He is equipped with pen, inkworm, and roll of paper. A large man "with ane fairfull face," he approaches the poet, saying:

'God speid, my sone'; and I wes sone
Off that couth word, and off his cumpany;
With reverence I salusit him agane:
'Welcome, Father'; and he sat doun me by.
'Displeis you not, my gude maister, thocht I
Demand your birth, your facultye, and name,
Quhy ye come heir, or quhair ye dwell at hame?'

(1362-1368)

The conversation is certainly "couth"; if it is not impertinent to ask a stranger his "birth," his occupation, and his name, it is at least familiar, and a far cry from scholarly veneration. Henryson's pose here--his masking behind anonymity--breaks down because he has so succeeded in characterizing Aesop that the fabulist becomes not an abstract authority, but a poetic fiction in his own right, and instead of detracting from Henryson's own abilities, shows them up.

Pedantic as the basic intent of the general prologue may be, it is not without some suggestion of Henryson's more imaginative poetic skill.
The nuttes schell, thocht it be hard and teuch,
Haldis the kirmill, and is delectabill,
Sa lyis thair ane doctrine wyse aneuch,
And full of fruit, under ane fenyeit Fabill.

Certainly Henryson is making no startling observation—how often do we speak of the kernel of an idea, or of matters in a nut shell—and yet here the cliche works; we think of delectable nuts before we remember that we are being preached at. The freshening of the commonplace, the elaboration of the trite, is one of Henryson's frequent ways of using imagery.

The prologue ends:

(Aesop) nocht wald
Lak the disdane off hie, nor low estate.
And to begin, first of ane Cok he wrate,
Seikand his meit, quhilk fand ane Jolie stone,
Of quhorne the Fabill ye sawl heir anone.

And then begins the story of the cock and the jewel. Although the prologue is mannered at best, in these lines Henryson suggests that he is really more interested in particularizing a story that in generalizing upon theories of literature. / The underlying democratic spirit is worth noting; Dunbar may have been a court poet, but Henryson certainly is not limiting his subject matter to any particular social class; in fact, during the course of his poems, he writes about peasants, tradesmen, professional people, the clergy, and even, in the Testament, court life. ¹

Some of the fables seem to follow the conventional Aesopic story, or at least the oral tale as is generally though of. The Taill of the Uponlandis
Mous, and the Burgess Mous is typical of this group, for, although Henryson makes the two mice sisters instead of cousins, the story is much as we should expect it to be. The same may be said for The Taill of the Cok and the Jasp; and The Taill of the Lyon & the Mous. Several of the tales seem to originate in the Romance of Reynard the Fox rather than in the fable tradition. Not only does the character of the wily fox appear in each of these fables, but, as is the Roman de Renart, the emphasis of the story is on a certain esprit Gaulois. Fables in this group include The Taill of Schir Chantecler and the Fox, The Taill how this foirsaid Tod maid his Cofessioun to Freir Wolf Waitskaith. The Taill of the So[u]e & Air of the Foirsaid Foxe, callit Father wer; Alswa the Parliame (n)t of fourfutit Beistis, haldin be the Lyoun; The Taill of the Wolf that gat the Nekherig throw the wrikis of the Foxe that begylit the Cadgear; The Taill of the Foxe, that begylit the Wolf, in the schadow of the Mone. (That five out of thirteen fables should be similar to the tradition of the romance of Reynard the Fox, does not support Henryson's claim that he is translating from the Latin of Aesop.

It might be said that a general comic tone prevails among all of the fables mentioned so far; if they do not all have a "happy" ending in the ordinary sense, they are all chiefly concerned with man's relationship to other men rather than to God. These fables see man's social predicament with good humor if not always with optimism. The remaining five tales are probably in the general conventional fable tradition, but they are
distinctive from the rest in their solemn, gloomy, tone. They make a
sorrowful comment, showing characters whose joy and gaiety is quickly
and inevitably suppressed—sometimes with death, always with despair,
and all for no particular reason. The Preiching of the Swallow, the most
elaborate of all the fables, suggests the Testament. Fables similar to it
include The Taill of the Scheip `a (n)d the Doig; The Taill of the Wolf and
the Lamb; The Taill of the Wolf and the Wedder; and The Taill of the
Paddok & the Mous. In order to see how Henryson develops a tale, one
fable from each group will be discussed.

The Taill of the Uponlandis Mous, and the Burges Mous shows as
well as any Henryson's ability to freshen old material. Everyone knows
the story of the town mouse and the country mouse, and yet its familiarity
does not deprive Henryson's story of its "newness"; we know what is
going to happen, and yet are surprised when it does. No doubt Henryson
really means for the reader to take to heart his advice to stay home where
it is safe; but it is certain that he also intends that there be good humor
along the way.

But whatever merriment happens during the course of the story,
it is at best an incident; the story is framed in hard facts of everyday life.

This is the way the country mouse lives:

Soliter, quhyle under busk, quhyle under breir,
Quhilis in the corne, and uthre mennis skaith,
As outlawis dois, and levis on their waith.

(166-168)
And this is the house she lives in:

it was ane sober wane,
Off fog & farne full febltie was maid,
Ane sillie scheill under ane staidfast stane,
Off quhilk the entres wes not hie nor braid.
And in the samin thay went but mair abaid,
Withou fyre or candill birnand bricht,
For comonly sic pykaris luffis not lycht.

(197-203)

When the town mouse is on her way to her sister's, she travels:

Bairfute, allone, with pykestaf in hir hand,
As pure pylgryme scho passit out off town,
To seik hir sister baith oure dail and down.

(180-182)

On their way to town, the two mice must go through stubble, corn stalks, and under bushes, running in the day-time and sleeping at night. This is no vague, idyllic landscape Henryson describes; he very carefully includes precise details to insist on the hardiness and precariousness of existence, although there is humor in his pity. It is no wonder then, that just to see each other is such a treat; joys may be few and far between, but they are no less intensely felt.

When the town mouse is approaching her sister's hovel, she calls out:

'Cum furth to me, my awin Sister dier,
Cry peip anis!' With that the Mous culd heir,
And knew hir voce as kinnisman will do,
Be verray kynd; and furth scho come hir to.

The hartlie joy, God! geve ye had sens,
Beis kith quhen thir Sistieris met;
And grit kyndnes wes schawin thame betwene,
For quhylis that leuch, and quhylis for joy thay gret,
The sister's greeting is quite as "couth" as the meeting between Aesop and the poet. The mice find joy and surprise in the familiar; kinship, kindness, and open affection are things that count.

But when the country mouse brings out her peas and candle, her sister is dissatisfied; when the country mouse eats city food, she ends her meal in disaster. In the end, each mouse must admit that one can only be content by staying home, and apart from the other. But the lesson itself is told far less gloomily than that. At the sight of her sister's spread, the city mouse (ungrateful wretch):

  promptit forth in pryde,
  And said, 'sister, is this your dayly fude?'
  'Quhy not,' quod scho, 'is not this meit rycht good?'

(208-210)

The country mouse reminds her that after all she is poor, and is living in the style to which she was brought up. Her sister (who "Was Gild brother and made ane fre Burges"), politely but firmly insists on scorn-ing such fare:

'My fair sister' (quod scho), 'have me excusit,
This rude dyat and I can not accord.
To tender meit my stomok is ay usit,
For quhylis I fair alswell as ony Lord.
Thir wydderit peis, and nuttis, or thay be bord,
Wil brek my teith, and mak my wame fful sklender,
Quhilk wes before usit to meitis tender.

(218-224)

Certainly the main interest in these lines is in characterization, but Henry-
son also implies commentary upon social class distinctions in the city mouse's snobbery, which is more than a matter of delicate constitution.

But, in spite of the country mouse's best efforts, the city mouse "had lillill will to sing," and suggests that they go to her place, to which the country mouse agrees. Once there, the city mouse lays out her best fare—cheese and butter, plenty of flesh and fish (both fresh and salt) and meal and malt by the sack-full. Then,

Withoutin grace thay wesche and went to meit,  
With all coursis that Cukis culd devyne,  
Muttoun and beif, strikin in tailyets greit.  
Ane Lordis fair thus couth thy counterfeit,  
Except ane thing, that drank the water cleir  
In steid off wyne, bot yit thay maid gude cheir.  

(268-273)

Henryson plainly shows that he takes the mice seriously in the very care with which he insists on exact detail, and yet his humor is not tolerant sentimentality. Henryson never forgets that, after all, he is writing about mice, and that while they may talk and act very much as would two women of similar circumstances, still they are parodies and not real people. Earlier in the poem Henryson again indicates his happy narrative vantage point, with just the right proportion of bemusement when the country mouse "into hir butterie glyde, / And brocht furth nuttis, & candill in steid off spyce" (205-206).

But to return to the dinner-party. When Henryson tells us that the mice sat down without saying grace and that they "counterfeit" lords' fare, he is being whimsical on the one hand, but more than that, he is making
implicit judgments upon the rightness and wrongness of what is going on. There is something inherently false about mice or people pretending to social positions to which they do not belong. Beneath the gaiety of the scene--and there is no doubt that the city mouse at least is having the time of her life--there are forebodings of ill. Both cry out, 'hail yule, hail!' while chewing after-dinner candle, but the country mouse is skeptical:

'Ye, dame' (quod scho), 'how lang will this lest?'
'For evermair, I wait, and langer to.'
'Giff it be swa, ye ar at eis' (quod scho).

(278-280)

And sure enough, merriment does not last long, for in comes the spenser. "Thay taryt not to wesche, as I suppose." As Henryson is bemused at their revelry, so is he by their disaster. But the steward is only looking around and leaves without even seeing them. The city mouse soon recovers--what is a major disaster to her country sister is, after all, in the order of things for her--and cries out, "'How fair ye, sister? cry peep, quhair ever ye be'" (308). As for the country mouse, she "lay flatting on the ground" and is never really able to resume festivities with quite the same verve. The city mouse does her best to comfort her and the country mouse rallies enough to return to the table, only to be again interrupted by the entrance of the cat. This time the country mouse is not as lucky as before; her sister makes it to a hole, but she is caught in the cat's jaw.
The country mouse finally escapes to the safety of the top of a partition wall, but she has learned her lesson, and when the coast is clear, she hops away as quickly as she can, calling after, "'Fair weill, sister, thy feist heir I defy'" (343). It is easy to sense her happy comfort at being away from city dangers and back on familiar stubble.

This account of the country mouse's journey parallels her sister's earlier trip. But now, the country mouse's walk is an easy, happy one, whereas that of her sister had been tortured and arduous. (That Henryson does not make the contrast explicit but places the two passages as he does, is all to his credit as a story-teller.)

The conclusion of this fable is particularly skillful and appropriate. The juxtaposition of the world of men and of animals in the fables brought on by the animals' parodying human traits, calls for particular tact on Henryson's part. He must somehow gracefully work himself out of the fantasy in order to finish the story credibly and yet not quite
destroy the illusion that has been built. Henryson leaves the country mouse quite as tactfully as Beatrix Potter disposes of Mrs. Tiggy Winkle:

Lucie scrambled up the stile with the bundle in her hand; and then she turned to say "good-night," and to thank the washer-woman. --But what a very odd thing! Mrs. Tiggy-winkle had not waited either for thanks or for the washing bill! She was running, running, running up the hill—and where was her white frilled cap? and her shawl? and her gown—and her petticoat? And how small she had grown—and how brown—and covered with prickle! Why! Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle was nothing but a Hedgehog!

Of all the tales, that of the two mice is probably the gentlest. It is one of the few fables with a calm ending; in the country mouse's retreat to peace and quiet, Henryson seems to suggest how a bearable existence may be maintained in the midst of a cruel natural and social world. The country mouse likes chewing withered peas; the city mouse is skilled at hiding in the nick of time. Again, in the fable of the cock who finds a jewel on the dungheap and leaves to look for corn, we see a realistic, earthy, if non-intellectual individual. The cock feels that the jewel ought to be in a king's crown, but since he has no use for it himself, he has sense enough to leave it alone and acknowledge his own limitations, saying, "Thy color does but comfort to the sight, / And that is not enough my womb to feed!" (100-101). Neither he nor the mice will ever experience anything beyond the safety of things they know. But mice may be sure of quiet contentment as long as they do not visit
where they do not belong, even though such communion may bring laughter and kisses with tears; and cocks have a chance of surviving in a perilless, if obscure existence as long as they are content to scratch for corn on dungheaps. The fable of the two mice, then, may appear chiefly for its fun and good humor, but it is not without serious commentary. Henryson shows the dangers of pretense, the comforts of modesty and the security of accepting one's lot, rugged as such an existence may be.

The tale of the two mice is a part of Henryson's essay on joy, one of the main themes in the Fables. In this story he has shown one instance not only of how joy comes about, but how (inevitably) it is brought to woe. It is almost as though he were saying that joy is possible because in it one comes so close to misery, as though the keenest joy were nearest the bleakest woe. In the tale of the lion and the mouse, a nestfull of mice are making merry on the lion's belly while he lies asleep in the sun.

Merie and glaid thus dansit thay ane space,
Till at the last the Nobill Lyoun wokes,
And with his pow the maister Mous he tukes.
(1416-1418)

Thus, one preoccupation of the Fables is to show the inevitable dissolution of joy into woe. The fables mentioned so far treat the theme gently; for the cock, the fact that the jewel is too fine for him is merely a matter of reflection; the sister mice come to no real harm; and the mouse who is caught by the lion talks her way out of captivity and returns
one deed of mercy with another. But elsewhere the matter is more harshly treated in two ways. In the Reynard tales misfortune comes about, almost, it seems, by sheer chance. Neither "moral" nor "poetic" justice prevails; whoever comes to grief does so because he has been outwitted by someone who is wiliier, or because luck was against him at the time. In the group of fables typified by The Preaching of the Swallow, woe is dealt by the strong and knowing to the weak and naive. Whether justly deserved or not, joy is here doomed to end in cruelty or at least in sorrow.

The tales having to do with a fox appear to follow in spirit if not always in fact, the tradition of the Romance of Reynard the Fox. Henryson shows a fox who is by far the most intelligent character in all of his poems, and certainly in the Fables. The fox is good humored not so much because he wishes everyone well as because he is committed to nothing. He mocks everything, including himself. While he wishes no one ill on principle, neither would he risk anything to endanger his own precarious position. Living with others in society must be a matter of compromise if one is to survive; the "moral" code, if it is one, is of expediency. Henryson's fox, then, is very much an individual; he is clever, with a keen sense of humor, and an even keener sense of the precariousness of staying alive. In his refusal ever to compromise, he shows the hypocrisy of others, and in his cleverness, their dull stupidity. But, whereas the fox may prove others fools and liars, he himself
scarcely represents a norm, for he cannot take even himself seriously. To
the fox, his own death is a joke.

The Tale of the Fox and Wolf (The Tale how this foirsaid Tod
maid his Confession to Freir Wolf Waitskaith) is about a fox who,
realizing that time passes and that he will eventually die and be accountable
for his deeds, seeks out someone to shrive him. He finds Freir Wolff
Waitskaith who gladly takes on the task in a pedantic clerical fashion. If
in some of the minor poems Henryson indicates certain reservations
about the nature of God, in this fable he makes very clear his impatience
with clergymen who formalize religion into little more than self-agrand-
izement. The wolf is "Ane worthie Doctour in Divinitie," but his name
tells more truth than his title; he is one who waits for evil, not one
who seeks out the divine. Freir Wolf is bare-footed, pale and lean
cheeked. He wears a grey cloak and is seen coming from the cloister
toying with beads and saying his prayers. All this, the fox says as he
prostrates himself before him, "Schawis to me your perfite halines."

These are certainly outward and visible signs, but of what? The "con-
fession" begins:

'Art thow contrite, and sorie in thy Spreit
For thy trespas? 'Na, Schir, I caa aot duid:
Me think that hennis ar sa honie sweit,
And Lambes flesche that new are lettin bluid;
For to repent my mynd caa not concluid,
Bot off this thing, that I haif slane sa few.'
'Veill' (quod the Wolff), 'in faith, thow art ane schrew.'
'Sen thow can not forthink thy wickitnes,
Will thow forbeir in tyme to cum and mend?'
'And I forbeir, how sall I leif, allace,
Haifand name uther craft me to defend?
Need causis me to steill quhair evir I wend.
I eschame to thig, I can not wirk, ye wait,
Yit wald I fane pretend to gentill stait.'

(698-711)

There is being defined here a central problem in point of view. The fables are supposed to be written to teach man right from wrong, and yet how is the difference to be defined? The fox knows that by fair means or fowl, he must live, alas, and that life in itself is a good thing. On the other hand, his only means of sustenance is stealth, which society and the friar's dogma condemns. What, then, is he to do? His position is much as that of the country mouse who exists "As outlawis dois, and levis on their waith."

But there are several things to be said in favor of the fox. In the first place, he knows himself; he is far more honest than the wolf who condemns him. According to the wolf, all that is necessary for the remission of sins is to eat no meat until Easter; his penance sounds like no more than a business contract. But the fox knows that sin is a more complicated matter, and certainly sounds as though he were laughing at the wolf's simple-mindedness when he bargains for something "swa it wer licht, / Schort, and not grevand to my tendernes. And even with modified terms he is not a bit surprised to be baffled by the sight of a stream-ful of fish and overcome by a kid in the meadow. He reconciles the dilemma by killing the kid and dunking him in the stream, saying, "'Ga down, Schir
Kid, cum up Schir Salmond agane!"

Having resolved ecclesiastical and fleshly demands in a practical joke, the fox lies down:

To belk his breist and bellie he thocht best.
And rekleslie he said, quhair he did rest,
Straikand his wame aganis the sonis heit,
'Upon this wame set wer ane bolt full meit.'

(757-760)

However aware the fox may be of moral ambiguities, he is very sure of sensual delights; after his meal he is full, warm, and knows nothing but well-being of the right sort, for this is not greed or lust. His bliss is short-lived. The herder spies him and pins him to the ground with an arrow. But, as the fox knows others, so he knows himself. He admits that he made the mistake of speaking too soon:

'allace and wellaway!
Gorrit I am, and may na fether gang.
Me think na man may speik ane word in play,
Bot now on dayis in ernist it is tane.'

(768-771)

And that is that. "Right" and "wrong" are beside the point. It was simply his good fortune to find a kid and his bad luck (and negligence) to be himself killed while enjoying the feast. The moral cannot be that virtue is rewarded and vice punished, because in this case the two are not clearly defined to begin with, and punishment comes not because the fox has broken his fast but because he was careless in his ruse. Furthermore, what is supposed to be the point of the story--the horror of dying without full absolution--is lost sight of in regret for dying at all.
So it is a grim world to live in; one in which moments of joy are particularly precious because they are so fragile and short-lived. Delightful experiences, though they exist, are bound by a harsher world where cruelty is the law. In The Tail of Schir Chanticleer and the Foxe, right after a description of happy concord in the widow's hynyard, come the lines:

Ane lyttill ffra this ffoirsaid wedowis hows,
Ane thornie schaw thair wes off grit defence,
Quhairin ane Foxe, craftie and cautelous,
Maid his repair, and daylie residence;

(418-421)

Cruelty always lurks in the background. Whatever else life may have to offer must come about on the spur of the moment, when by wit or chance the drabness of terror is for the moment set aside, allowing merriment.

The only way to survive at all is through awareness and self-knowledge. This is the lesson both Chanticleer and the fox learn at the end of their adventure, when neither has won out.

'I was unwyse that winkit at thy will,
Quhairthrow almaist I lossit had my heid.'
'I was mair fule,' quod he, 'to be sa still,
Quhairthrow to put my pry in to pleid.'

(579-582)

The Preiching of the Swallow differs from the rest of the fables in several respects. Whereas the fables as a whole present man's condition in its social aspects, this fable suggests that there is a world of fate and time and metaphysical order beyond human society. Life means more than eating and escaping enemies. The story concerns a swallow who three
times warns a tree-full of little birds that they should peck out a farmer's flax crop lest he use the linen for rope and catch them in nets. But the birds would rather not go to all the trouble, so they ignore the swallow's warnings. Sure enough, just what the swallow foretold happens; the farmer builds his nets, catches the birds, and kills them all. Only the swallow is left to reflect:

This grit perrell I tauld thame mair than thryis;
Now ar thay deid, and wo is me thairfoir!
Scho tuke hir flicht, bot I hir saw no moir.

(1885-1887)

The lines remind one of Cassandra, and Troilus echoes them:

'I can no moir,
Scho was trntrew, and wo is me thairfoir.'

(Test. 601-602)

Indeed the fable has in it something of Greek tragedy and the Testament, for it shows the little birds' fall from happiness to woe and death thanks to their "selieness," their unwillingness to face the facts of their position and heed the swallow's warnings. But, unlike Creseid, they have no hope of Christian salvation. But to compare the two poems in this way is by no means to say that the fable is a better poem than the Testament because it conforms more closely to "classical" tragedy.

The fables usually begin with a reference to Aesop (as, "Esope, myne Author, makis mention / Of twa myis") or with a description of the main character, as "Ane cok sum tyme with fedfram fresche & gay," or "Ane cruell Wolff, richt ravenous and fell." In either case, there are no preliminaries to the action; the story begins at the beginning and goes
on until it stops at the end. But in the fable of the swallow, the main action, the story of the swallow and the other birds, does not begin until the sixteenth stanza. Prior to that is a long (and admittedly tedious) introduction, but it is not entirely without point. It has been said that the rest of the fables are not concerned with man's relationships outside of the social scene; this fable tries to suggest a broader scope and more interesting setting. The introductory stanzas seem to be in the poem for much the same reasons as are the character sketch of the poet and the convocation of the planets are in the Testament. In both poems Henryson is trying to suggest relationships that the characters have outside of their fictitious province. As in no other fable, in The Preaching of the Swallow Henryson is consciously trying to universalize experience, and if he is not entirely successful in doing so poetically, the attempt suggests a bridge between the fables and the Testament.

The poem begins:

The hie prudence, and wirking mervelous,  
The profound wit off God omnipotent,  
Is sa perfyte, and sa Ingenious,  
Excellent fisar all mannis Judgement;  
For quhy to him all thing is ay present,  
Ryght as it is, or ony time sail be,  
Befoir the sicht off his Divinitie.  

(1622-1628)

The argument continues in this vein, exploring the manifestations of God in the universe to prove "That God in all his Werkis wittie is" (1663). So far the subject matter has been no more than commonplace medieval
religious concepts; line 1678 begins with stock pastoral descriptions of
the seasons. The field is narrowing; from God's universe the argument
moves to the world of time with the coming and going of seasons, and
even localizes in a contemporary scene:

And Bachus, God of wyne, renewit hes
The tume Pyipis in Italie and France,
With wynis wicht, and liquour off plesance;
(1687-1689)

This may be the world of the fifteenth century, but it is still not
Henryson's.

And so the seasons progress, until Spring:

That samin seasoun, in to ane soft morning
Rycht blyth that bitter blastis wes ago,
Unto the wod, to se the fouris spring,
And heir the Mavis sing and birdis mo,
I passit ffurth, syne lukit to and ffro,
To se the Soill that wes richt seasonabill,
Sappie, and to resave all seidis abill.
(1713-1719)

Thus the poem moves easily from the conventional pastoral description
of the seasons in general to the immediate present. The transition is
gracefully done in the stanza above; the first lines merely bring pastoral
conventions into the experience of the poet, who is here of the same cut
as the dreamer in the Romance of the Rose or the lover in The Legend
of Good Women. But he does not remain so for long; by the end of the
stanza he is noting the world around him more in its practical agricul-
tural possibilities than in its merely decorative prettiness. And the
following stanza unmistakably locates the scene in the here and now, away
from both God's world of eternity and the pastoral never-never land.
Moving thusgait, grit myrth I tuke in mynd,
Off lauboraris to se the besines,
Sum makand dyke, and sum the pleuch can wynd,
Sum sawand seidis fast ffrome place to place.
The Harrowis hoppend in the saweris trace:
It was grit Joy to him that luifit corne,
To se thame labour, baith at evin and morne.

(1720-1726)

In terms of design, if the poem is to be an indication of God's wisdom on earth, then it is not inappropriate that the idea be first stated on the broadest terms and gradually work itself toward the particular and immediate. Granted that here the method is not entirely successful; the stanzas tend to become tedious. But, the unhurried opening in contrast to the quick surprises of most of the fables, gives this one a special dignity. The leisure furthermore allows for descriptive passages which are seldom to be found elsewhere, and here, although most of them say little beyond repeating conventions in an ordinary way, a few images do appear:

Queen Columbie up keikies throw the clay,

and

To se the Soill that was richt seasonabill,
Sappie, and to resave all seidis abill.

These lines represent about as much as Henryson ventures in the Fables in the way of imagery that is not statement of fact. Such lines occur but seldom, but when they do they suggest Henryson's imaginative perceptions that go beyond mere fact. In the second instance, we are suddenly aware that dirt is alive because it is capable, if metaphorically, of action. The word sappie is startling in suggesting that ground long
dormant is beginning to stir from within, as though in spring it were so fecund as scarcely to need cultivation. It is upon such a degree of surprise that the effect of Henryson's sharpest imagery depends; when tension is absent, his descriptions are only a series of tags.

The Rosis reid arrayit on Rone and Ryce,
The Prymeros, and the Purpoure violet bla;
To heir it wes aye poynit off Paradice,
Sic Mirth the Mavis and the Merle couth ma.
The blossummis blythe bryk up on bank and bra;
The smell off Herbis and off fowlis cry,
Contending wha suld have the victory.

(1335-1341)

The first five lines of this stanza are little more than a catalogue. But the last couplet suddenly shocks the scene into immediacy, as smells and sounds compete to assert the victory of life and growth. In such instances, Henryson has ventured from his characteristic insistence on literal, although pertinent details and moves into imaginative, metaphorical associations. Usually he is concerned with telling how seeds are sown, as in the passage cited earlier, or in the same fable, how flax is made, how fields are plowed, what people have to eat, and so on. All this he does with humor and precision, so that such accounts are not dull reading. But when he suggests that dirt can respond to the quickness of spring by wanting seeds, that plants of their own will kick against clay to come up, and that even sounds and smells of nature conspire for her rebirth, Henryson raises his poetry to high levels of imaginative art.

The fable of the swallow continues with the narrator sitting down under a hawthorn tree and overhearing the dialogue between the swallow
and the other birds in the branches. The birds leave unmindful of the warnings, and so does the poet.

I take my club, and hameward couth I carie,
Swa ferliand, as I had sene ane farie.

(1774-1775)

(To liken the experience to a dream may be just a matter of speaking, but the line also suggests Henryson's trying to keep a balance between the pretend world of animals and the actual world of people.) The next convocation of birds occurs in June when the swallow tries to persuade them to dig up the growing hemp. Finally, in winter, when the birds are taking refuge in the farmer's barn and helping themselves to his corn, the swallow tries for the last time to persuade them to caution with desperate urgency:

In to that calf scraip quhill your naillis bleid,
Thair is na corne, ye labour all in vane;
Throw ye yone Churill for pietie will yow feid?
Na, na, he hes it heir layit for ane tran;
Remove, I Reid, or ellis ye will be slane;
His Nettis he hes set full prively,
Reddie to draw; in tymbe war ffor thy.'

(1853-1859)

The swallow's warnings have been more and more urgent as the seasons progressed; now it is the end of the year and too late. (It might be worth noting that the seasonal progression throughout the story reflects the pastoral descriptions of seasons earlier.)

Finally the birds come to their expected cruel end when the farmer catches them in his net:
Allace! it wes grit hart sair for to se
That bludie Bowcheour beit they birdis doun,
And ffor till heir, quhen they wist weill to de,
Thair cairfull sang and lamentatioun:
Sum with ane staf he straik to eirth on swoun:
Of sum the heid he straik, off sum he brak the crag,
Sum half on lyfe he stoppit in his bag.

(1874-1880)

And that is the end of the little birds who would not heed the swallow's warnings. Among other things, the fable illustrates Henryson's preoccupation with the folly of being unknowing. God is "wittie!" and so, in a different sense of course, is the fox. But the little birds reacting to joy do so only in ignorance of crueler realities such as the swallow foretells and as finally happen. Their argument against scratching up flax seed is:

'We think, quhen that yone Lint bollis ar ryip,
To mak us Feist, and fill us off the seid,
Magre yone Churll, and on it sing and pyip.'

(1804-1806)

By insisting that characters are happy because at the moment they do not know any better and are unaware of crueler "realities," Henryson moralizes the rightness of joy's woeful end. The adjective selie often qualifies mice, sheep, cocks, and little birds who can know joy. The OED defines selie as "innocent," "foolish," "poor," "unhappy," all of which meanings apply to animals who dance and play irresponsibly, not suspecting that death lurks where least expected, and that gladness has its price. To be sure, the poet himself, while roaming over summer fields and reclining under Hawthorne trees, is in no pain, but his own enjoyment comes because he knows, reflects upon, and does
not participate in the active world about him, in contrast to the "selie" creatures who are all active and have no guard against stronger animals ready to eat them at the first opportunity. The "innocent" are not punished because they are bad, but because they allow themselves to forget that force and cruelty rule. The mice on the lion's belly, or the town mouse who assures her guest that there are no traps or dogs about, are for the moment not afraid; lack of fear permits both joy and woe. When the lion, mouse in paw, chides his captive for being off her guard, the mouse pleads negligence, which is certainly the worst that can be said for her, but, according to the existing laws of "kinde," enough to warrant her annihilation. The mouse must admit, "'Yes...I know; / Bot I misknew, because ye lay so law!'" (1431-1432). Rather than condemn joyous creatures as wicked, Henryson says they are foolish because they disregard natural laws which are ever present and cruelly threatening behind outbursts of joy.

Thus, Henryson is as sensitive to the fragility of gladness as to its intensity. Joy always ends in woe, which is brought on by the very nature of joy itself. Woe is the end of joy in Henryson's poems, not just for didactic convenience, but because it seems to Henryson to be morally and psychologically true that happiness cannot last for long. One might say that Henryson is fostering a grim world view, or one could look further and say that he is affirming his own moral and artistic integrity and so insists on going beyond the momentary ecstasy of joy to explore
its mutability. Furthermore, were woe not the end of joy, Henryson's ultimate humor, sympathy, and compassion would be uncalled for, and we should have lost the best of his thought and feeling.

As stories, then, the Fables demonstrate Henryson's understanding of the human predicament in social terms. In the Testament he tries to define man's relationship to God and to the larger metaphysical world beyond him. But in the tales of most of the Fables, Henryson confines the moral question to expediency, whereby everyone, by force or cunning, has an obligation to try to stay alive. Behavior within the society of the fables, then, is governed by a strict code of expediency, defining a sort of morality which has nothing to do, necessarily, with that found in Henryson's consciously religious verse. Precepts based on Christian principles are keyed to man's expectancy of life after death; those of the secular world of the fables aim at keeping people alive from moment to moment. In the fables the secular morality of expediency holds that physical survival is all-important and depends on wit and on strength.

The more admirable characters, like the fox, get along because they are able to fool dullards like the wolf. The wolf also wins his way, but Henryson criticizes him, not only because he relies on brute strength, but because he is, at bottom, stupid. Those who most often come to grief--mice, sheep, and the like--do so for one of two reasons: either they are not bright enough to sense and avoid danger, or they are unfortu-
mate and helpless victims of creatures such as wolves.

Proverbs and folk sayings scattered among the poems reinforce this code. When a fox comes upon the carcass of his father, he reflects, "'Now find I weill this proverb trew..."Ay rinnis the foxe, als lang as he fute hais."" (826-827). Such a matter-of-fact remark is in the same vein as the fox's tossing the body of his father into a peat-bog, but of a far different tone from that of Henryson's pious dedication, in religious poems, to death and repentance in hope of heavenly bliss. In the fable of the fox who is shriven by the wolf, the wolf allows the fox to eat flesh twice a week, "'for neid may haif na Law,'" and the fox rejoins, "'God yeild, yow, Schir, for that text weill I know'" (731-732). Indeed, the wolf's truism is certainly an understatement of the whole "lawless" morality of his society, driven by need and hunger and fear. Wariness is the great virtue: "Felix quem faciunt alium pericula cautu," observes the fox, and indeed it is partly because he is able to profit from the misfortunes of others that he survives as well as he does.

But having examined the tales of the fables, is only to have accounted for a part of the poems, for appended to each is a Moralitas which attempts to relate the fictitious animal world to that of human beings by explaining how animals illustrate moral precepts. Most of the Moralitas are didactic, some are concerned with social criticism,
but none are directly related to what goes on in the tales. The sermons have been blamed for their dullness, and in spite of the attempts of some writers to rescue them, so they seem indeed. But more serious than their tediousness is the fact that as often as not they not only are irrelevant to the story, but contradict it. Even though allegory seems stilted and unreal to the modern taste, it might have been acceptable in the Fables had there been some consistency of idea between the morals and the tales. But there seldom is, and for this reason they stand as artistic failures, as well as lapses in tone and in idea.

But before developing the case against them, it seems only fair to include a defense of the Moralitas. In his essay on Robert Henryson, Edwin Muir writes:

But in Henryson (allegory) assumes virtues of a rarer kind. Human snobbishness becomes touching and forgivable to him when he finds it in the Burgess Mouse. The crimes of the Fox and Wolf become imaginatively comprehensible, and to that extent excusable, since all the animals act in accordance with their nature. The result is that the animal allegory, when it is not employed satirically, runs the danger of making us indiscriminately indulgent to all the faults and crimes of mankind; and the more lively the imagination of the poet, the more completely he enters into the nature of his allegorical characters, the Lion, the Wolf, the Fox, the Cat, the greater this danger becomes. So the fable has to be followed by the Moralitas, that human proportion may be preserved.
Such an explanation may be true as far as it goes, but in the light of the poems themselves, seems to be an oversimplification.

Most of the Moralitas are pious sermons on Christian living, but not all of them are. Several contain Henryson's own comment upon his society, and demonstrate on his part considerable social consciousness and indignation of a buse. There was a hint of this in the minor poems—

Ane Prayer for the Pest is in behalf of the health of the "indigent and poor."

In the fable of the sheep, undone by the dog and corrupt courts and abandoned, Henryson criticizes the government, (presumably Scotland's).

The raven is a scheming bailiff, the wolf is "a sherrif stout" who uses his commission to extort fines from the innocent, while the sheep stands for the

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pure commonis, that daylie ar opprest
Be Tirrane men, quhilkis settis all thair cure
Be fals meinis to mak ane wrang conquest,
In hope this present lyfe suld ever lest.
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(1259-1262)

Similarly, in the fable of the wolf who murdered the lamb, the lamb represents "the poor people" for whom life is "half a purgatory" because they are ruined by such as the wolf "by violence, or craft in faculty" (2713).

The Moralitas of the fable of the lion and the mouse is a prayer that

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tressoun of this cuntrie be exyld,
And Justice Regne, and Lordis keip thair fay
Unto thair Soverane King, baith nycht and day,
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(1617-1619)

This plea summarizes Henryson's belief in the rightness of order and justice and his concern for the betterment of public life. He is not asking
for "democracy" or "equality" in our sense; instead, he sees goodness in a sort of ordered scale of being where there is nowhere treason, where justice reigns, and where rulers do not forget that while they may be titled "Lordis," they have a higher allegiance to "their Soverane King."

But, although such lines may demonstrate admirable social concern, they scarcely rise to poetry, nor are they functional in the total context of any poem.

In so far as the rest of the Moralitas are artistic failures, they bear out a tension between advocating expediency and orthodox Christianity, between wittily hanging on to this life and piously awaiting death in the hope of a glorious resurrection, and between tones of comedy and tragedy. The morality of the fables is designed to keep one alive on this earth because being alive is a necessary good in itself, and not in preparing one for doubtful goods after death. And so, in cases where the Moralitas contradicts the tale of the fable, it does so by insisting that what has been defended there is really to be despised.

The Tail of the Cock, and the Jasp, about the cock who finds a jewel on the dungheap and leaves it to scratch for corn, is a case in point. According to the Moralitas, the jewel betokens science, and the cock, any fool who scorns learning. The poet regrets that learning, and therefore goodness and godliness, are so neglected. In the text, however, his sympathies seem to have been with rather than against the cock. In
fact, instead of showing a cock who "at science makis bot ane moik and scorned" (143), he draws a character with admirable intellectual humility. The cock reasons that on the one hand, the jasp will not "do my stomok gude," and on the other, that he is not worthy of the jewel anyway. He concludes, "And thow agane, Upon the samin wyis, / For les availl may me as now despys" (97-98). Here the cock seems far more "moral" than the poet who chides him. The cock is aware of himself, his capabilities and limitations, accepts the world accordingly with cheerful good sense, and goes on looking for corn, leaving the jewel alone.

The fable of the lion and the mouse concludes with the obvious lesson which the animals learn out of the experience in the story.

Now is the Lyon fre off all danger
Lows and delyerit to his libertie,
Be lytill beistis off ane small power,
As ye have hard, because he had piety.

(1566-1569)

But Henryson, instead of stopping with this direct, simple observation upon the rewards of pity, goes on in the Moralitas to elaborate the proper relationship between rulers and subjects. The lion is likened to a ruler who should be a watchful guide and governor of his people, but instead "lis still in lustis, sleuth, and sleip." As for the mice, they

ar bot the commountie,
Wantoun, unwyse, without correcitioun.

... Thay draid na thynge to mak Rebellioun,
And disobey, for quhy thay stand nane aw,
That garris thame thair Sovranis misknow.

(1587-8; 1591-3)
All this may be praised for showing Henryson's social concern, but it really has nothing to do with the story itself, where there is no mention of any social relationship between animals, and certainly no such complicated autocratic scale as the Moralitas would suppose. (The prosiness of the lines hardly needs to be mentioned.) Of course, in blaming Henryson for wrenching such a foreign application out of his tale, we should remember that he was consciously following an accepted contemporary tradition... But even acknowledging such a lapse into a constant medieval habit does not excuse the lines as poetry.

Henryson again betrays one of his fondest and most wholly drawn characters in the Moralitas of the fable of the fox and wolf, when he damns the fox as "fals Tod." For the whole effect of the fable has been to show how the fox is the one character who is not at all "false," but candidly knows himself and by contrast shows up the falseness of others. After his admirable forthrightness, the concluding bit of advice in the Moralitas is no more convincing than Freir Wolff's spiritual guidance:

Cies of your sin, Remord your conscience,
Obey unto your God and ye sall wend,
Efter your deith, to blis withoutin end.

(793-795)

Unfortunately, bliss after death sounds sterile and less "moral" than the sensual ecstasy of the fox "Straikand his wame aganis the sonis heit" (759), and the suggested criticism of clerical hypocrisy gets lost in platitude. Again, the tale of Chauntecleir and the fox, has been about a lesson in
self-knowledge and watchfulness. Such a discovery is far more persuasive than the peremptory warning against flattery and vainglory in the Moralitas.

The Moralitas may perhaps be seen, then, to represent Henryson's way of making the secular animal story of the fable equate moral or religious parables in a human context, however jarring the correspondence may be. Their function is to carry out the promises laid down in the Prologue: to extract "ANE Morall sweit sentence, / Oute of the subtell dyte of poetry." In the introduction to this essay, it was said that by the fourteenth century, radical allegory as exemplified in the Romance of the Rose was no longer used, and that by the time Chaucer wrote Troilus and Criseyde, allegory had given way to the literal fable. Henryson represents, as it were, a regression in the allegorical tradition, for although he too tells a literal story in Chaucer's fashion, he superimposes an allegorical equation in order to give the story a meaning not part of the literal version. Thus, not only is Henryson not writing "radical" allegory in Lewis' sense, but as often as not he contradicts what seems to have been his original intentions.

A further objection may be made against the Moralitas, in addition to the fact that they interfere with the unity of the fables. As a conscious effort to relate the pretend world of animals to the actual world of human beings, they are superfluous, for there is never any doubt that
Henryson is speaking of human beings in the first place. So it is not a matter of preserving human proportions, as Muir would explain, for the proportions were never lost. Nor is it a question of excusing human foibles through indulgence in those of animals. Cannot human snobbishness be "touching and forgiveable" in human beings quite as easily as in animals? And, because something is forgivable is no sign that it is to be condoned.

Indeed, part of the success of the Fables lies in their satire, and in this respect they reflect a comic spirit. Behind the satire is a steady norm; living in Henryson's day may have been a harsh matter, but it was not chaotic. Nor is it necessary to go to the Moralitas to find this norm—it is clearly stated and implied in the tales themselves. Henryson is upholding the sort of social behavior that he does, not so much because it is in itself Utopian, but because it offers the most sensible way to stay alive and content, if not to be always excessively happy. The cock who knows himself and respects his limitations is probably the nearest single statement of such a norm. But Henryson also admires the wit of the fox, the wisdom of the swallow, the joy of the visiting mice, and, among human characters, the industry of the farmers and ploughmen. He roundly condemns the lust, hypocrisy, and stupidity of wolves, the thoughtlessness of little birds, and the treachery of the frog who drowns the mouse after offering to take her across a river. And, especially, Henryson has pity for the victims of abuse, whether their misfortunes come about through
the cruelty of others or through their own gullibility. There is pathos
in the plight of the sheep forced to sell his wool in winter to appease a
lying dog. The sheep in the end: "Naikit and haur syne to the feild couth
pas" (1259). Or again there is pity for the lamb whom the wolf devours,

Syne drank his blude, and off his flesche can eit,
Qhill he wes full, and went his way on pace.
Of his murther quhat sall we say, allace?
(2702-2704)

Indeed, there is nothing at all to say. Henryson is not a social reformer,
but that does not mean that he is not concerned for human suffering. He
is very much so, and yet his is that sort of wisdom, melancholy though
it may be, which knows that "Human life is everywhere a state where
much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed." The remark as applied
to Henryson is all the truer (and sadder), because he is very much aware
of the joyous in human life which can never quite assert itself as per-
manently as the sorrowful. But all this Henryson is quite capable of
saying through the medium of satire in the tales of the fables; he needs
no apologue to explain otherwise.

The Fables, then, stand as Henryson's comic statement, and
it is essentially not very different from his more accomplished "tragic"
statement in the Testament. That what Henryson ultimately has to say
in the Fables does not quite come off as poetry the way it does in the
Testament may be an indication that he prefers the tragic view to the
comic. It is not just a matter of whether or not to be funny or dramatic,
whether to expose the ridiculousness of dunking a goat in a stream in
order to eat it as fish, or to explore the irony of Troilus and Cresséid's meeting at the gate. Part of the superiority of the Testament to the Fables is due to the fact that it is more in keeping with Henryson's temperament to see the human condition in large, metaphysical, even Christian terms, than in social relationships. For satire is not enough. Henryson does not append a Moralitas to the fable in order to straighten out the story in case the reader was detracted from the real point by the poetry. The moral is clear enough; what is not satisfactory for Henryson is to say that man is essentially a social creature who makes a fool of himself, but whose mistakes can be remedied and forgiven. This is all true, but it is not the whole truth. Human beings are also, Henryson insists, a part of God's more infinite, more complicated, and more stable universe than man's society can ever be. In the end, Henryson is more convinced of metaphysical absolutes than in social compromise as the governing agent of man's lot. Which is all a way of saying that Henryson has done more than to write a collection of fables. He has gone beyond the simple unpretentious confines of the traditional animal tale into the larger, more complicated territory of poetry. If the Fables are not totally successful as poems, they at least achieve a degree of competence which demands that they be judged by higher standards than those to which they say they pretend.
THE TESTAMENT OF CRESSEID

To turn from the Fables and minor poems to the Testament of Cresseid is to come upon Henryson's peaceful settlement of hitherto disparate notions. No longer is the human predicament easily reduced to the didacticism of a Moralitas or to the caricature of an animal fable; in the Testament Henryson reconciles such opposites into a single world view, at once both moral and realistic. The poem suggests how, through the right sort of self-knowledge, humility, and love, it is not only possible but necessary to combine the earthly and divine in human experience. The poem is about particular people learning, through suffering, what they must know about their relationship to God. It is without question a thoroughly Christian poem, appropriately entitled a testament not only because it represents Cresseid's willing of her soul to the gods, but because it is also, in a sense, Henryson's own reworking of what until now have been opposing and only partly true assertions, into a firm and convincing Christian statement.

But the Testament is not a poem of rosy piety. In the Fables Henryson shows a society which, although corrupt, still has a certain
vigor and hold on life. In the moralizing poems he tries to deny such life as evil and seeks "heavenly bliss." The Testament does not really contradict either point of view; perhaps in keeping with the temper of the age, and certainly with Henryson's it is a sorrowful poem, regretting the loss of something that was once beautiful and good, and which now, because of ugliness, must of necessity surrender itself to the greater power of God. Of course God is good and heavenly blessings are to be desired, but in the Testament, Henryson admits that one earns peace and goodness with pain and not with the mere gloss of a moral lesson, and, above all, with regret for the earthly beauty that has been forfeited. The ubi sunt motif is strong. The world, while well lost, is not to be despised.

Another way to define the shift from the rest of Henryson's poems to the Testament is to say that one moves from a point of view that is by turns didactic and comic, to one that is uniformly tragic. In the Fables, where a comic tone prevails, Henryson seems to have an ambivalent attitude toward moral values. For the fox to drown a kid is funny; for a wolf to slay a lamb, wicked. Norms vary; there are few absolutes. The didactic pieces, while supporting absolute standards, do so arbitrarily, with little regard for human actualities. But the Testament convincingly brings the physical world of human beings into direct contest with certain absolute standards of Christian doctrine and morality. And so it may be fairly said that the Testament is a "tragic tale" not only
because, in the medieval sense of tragedy, it shows a fall from felicity to misery due to bad fortune, but because the poem also presupposes that human beings are governed by absolute moral standards with which they must come to terms, if sorrowfully, although the question might fairly be raised as to whether a poem in a Christian context can be "tragic" in the classic sense.

In the Fables Henryson says he intends to write "ane Morall sweit sentence, / Oute of the subtell dyte of poetry." In the Testament he also intends to "point a moral and adorn a tale", but more than that, he is writing a defense of Cresseid herself. After reviewing all legendary evidence against her—that she was untrue to Troilus, turned out by Diomed, and rumored to have turned prostitute—Henryson declares, "I have pietie thou suld fall sic mischance" (84). He resolves, not to exonerate her, but to review her case and to defend her against unfair gossip.

Yet nevertheless quhat ever men deme or say
In scornefull language of thy bruikelnes,
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 wicikt langage to be spilt.
(85-91)

The Testament, then, is far more than an imitation of or a sequel to Chaucer's poem, although the Troilus is certainly implicit in the background,² for the basic intent of Henryson's poem is quite different from that of
Chaucer's.

The story of the Testament is quickly told. Cresseid, having forsaken Troilus for Diomede, who in turn abandons her, is rumored to have turned prostitute, and, finally, returns to her father, Calchas, priest of the temple of Venus and Cupid. In despair, Cresseid vents her wrath upon these deities of love, and so enforces them that in her dream they call forth a convocation of all the planets, the sun, and the moon to judge her case and to dispense retribution. Saturn and the moon, delegated to the task, visit Cresseid as she sleeps in the temple, and curse her with poverty and leprosy. Thus afflicted, Cresseid commiserates with her father and retires to the leper house in the next town. One day, while she is begging outside the town gate, Troilus and a company of knights ride by on their way home from a victorious campaign. So grotesquely disfigured is Cresseid that Troilus does not recognize her, nor she him, but something about her so reminds him of her, that he gives Cresseid especially generous alms. That evening, as Cresseid and the other lepers are dividing the day's gains, she finds out from them that it was Troilus who had passed by, and is overcome with a new grief, for added to her own misery, is the knowledge that Troilus has remained true to her. She dies soon after. At her bidding, the lepers bury her decently and send her ruby ring to Troilus, who places an inscription over her grave as a sorrowful tribute to their love.
When compared to the *Fables*, or even to *Orpheus and Euridice*, the *Testament* represents a marked departure, or even, perhaps, a development, in Henryson's poetic technique. While his other tales depend largely on plot for their substance, are little concerned about character development, and use imagery at best incidentally, the *Testament* is unified with themes developed by sustained images. The poem, then, is more than a formal arrangement of largely independent episodes; through recurring symbols and images Henryson deliberately develops characters and themes. Typically, Henryson draws upon a scattered range of references for his materials: Chaucer's text, Greek legend, Roman mythology, courtly love, Christian doctrine, the contemporary Scots scene, and even a character sketch of himself. But he manages so to order the mélange that the story is gracefully told without bothersome incongruities.

What are the central issues with which the poem is concerned? Cresseid has sinned and must atone in order to work out her own salvation. Although Henryson does not baldly state a case against Cresseid for having loved Troilus, for having forsaken him in favor of Diomede, or for having been found "sum men sayis into the Cort commoun," neither does he ignore these issues. Certainly in his very choice of the story in the first place, he implies criticism against a whole code of society, and it is a far more serious and severe criticism than is suggested against courtly
love in *Robene and Makyne* or *Orpheus and Euridice*. But, more serious than her social actions are Cresseid’s moral transgressions: she has given away to pride and wrath and for that she must be punished.\(^3\) She blames the gods for her misfortunes, and cries out against Venus and Cupid:

> 'Allace that ever I maid you Sacrifice.

. . .

> O fals Cupide, is name to wyte bot thow.
> And thy Mother, of lufe the blind Goddess!

(126, 134-5)

This is blasphemy of the worst sort: Cresseid is not only indulging in despair and self-pity, but she is accusing the gods for what should be her own responsibility. The poem is in a sense the story of Cresseid’s proper sacrifice, of her discovering the source of her own blindness, and of her final acceptance of the falseness within herself. Through suffering, Cresseid finally works out her salvation in three stages. First, she realizes that it does not pay "'With fraward langage for to mufe and steir / Our craibit Goddis!'" (But there is really little progress here beyond resignation. By calling the gods crabbed, she belies her spite.) Secondly, Cresseid learns to accept her penance, and, if only out of necessity, to take her cup and clapper and join the other begging lepers. Finally, when she admits her own guilt, she is a candidate for redemption; her most desperate grief, her self-accusing cry, "Fy, fals Cresseid,
O trew Knicht Troylus' "suggests her redemption and salvation.

But the change in Cresseid is not just a matter of professing guilt or preaching to other women against her own folly. The poem is moral because it is about Cresseid's growth into humility out of pride and anger through pain and suffering. Her conviction that, because she was "the flour and A per se / of Troy and Grece," no harm should befall her; that the gods are responsible for her well-being; and that she is too high-born to beg with other lepers, exhibits such monstrous pride as not only to grieve Troylus, but to upset the very heavens.

The ubi sunt motif runs strong in the Testament. As a result of her sin and pride, Cresseid loses her beauty and mirth; in short, all that made her attractive to others and happy in her own right. In the despair of poverty and disease Cresseid remembers her happy times in the gay courtly world, and it is not only the phrasing of her "Complaint" that reminds one of Villon's "Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?"

Quhair is thy Chalmer wantoultie besene?
With barely bed and bankouris browderit bene,
Sypcis and Wyne to thy Collatioun,
The Cowpis all of gold and silver schene:
The sweet Meitis, servit in plaittis clene,
With Saipheron sals of ane gud sessoun:
Thy gay garments with mony gudely Goun,
Thy pleseand Lawn pinmit with goldin prene:
All is areir, thy greit Royall Renoun.

'Quhair is thy garding with thir greisiss gay?
And fresche flowris, qhilk the Quene Floray:
Had paintit plesandy in everie pane,
Quhair thou was wont full merilye in May,
To walk and tak the dew be it was day
And heir the Merle and Mawis mony ane,
With Ladyis fair in Carrolling to gane,
And se the Royall Rinkis in thair array,
In garmentis gay garnischit on everie grane.

(417-433)

To be sure, the loss of the gay and beautiful is compensated for by what

to a Christian must be greater goods: self-knowledge, humility, and the

hope of salvation. And yet Henryson cannot deny the essential goodness

of original loveliness; he does not pretend not to be sorry to see it

sacrificed for pain. Cresseid's plight in part echoes his own; at the

start of the poem he describes himself as growing old, having lost the

fire of youth "Of whom the blude is flowing in ane rage," and so he must

build a blaze in the fireplace, supplying himself a "Physike quhair that

nature faillit." He knows both youth and age, and yet, content as he is

with the latter, he cannot help regretting the passions of his own lost

youth. There is, then, in this poem, a basic tension, for balanced

against a Christian soul's moral victory in redemption, is sorrow and

regret for beauty and mirth that has had to be sacrificed.

The Testament is remarkable in the degree of technical care with

which it is organized. The almost whimsical musings of the old poet

whiling away a cold evening, and the convocation of the gods may appear

extraneous

to be and yet such is not the case, for Henryson depends upon these details

to help establish the tone and to work out the themes of the whole story.

Indeed, one of Henryson's most significant accomplishments in the

Testament in terms of his own poetic achievement, is the success with
which he organizes the ideas and materials in terms of image patterns.

One way to see how imagery works in the poem is to examine rather carefully how Henryson describes Cresseid and what happens to her.

In Cresseid are combined the charms and failings of womankind which fate works to her undoing. Cresseid is the apogee of femininity—"Quhilk was sa swelt, gentili and amorous"—and yet her charms are her undoing. She defines herself as "the flour and A per se" and it is in terms of plant and flower imagery that she is described throughout the poem. When she curses Venus and Cupid for betraying her she elaborates her own image.

The seed of lufe was sawin in my face,
And ay grew grene throw your suppilie and grace.
Bot now allace that seed with froist is slane,
And I fra luifferis left and all forlane.

(136-140)

Love, then, is central to Cresseid's existence, and, in these lines defined in terms of plant growth. Love brought into being her romance with Trollus, and it was for love that she went to Diomede. Through perverted love she is undone in Diomede's hands. Even after her despair, love makes existence possible and brings about her redemption.

Like the milk-maid in the nursery rhyme, Cresseid's face is her fortune, so that for her to suffer leprosy is a particularly cruel punishment. When she wakes from her dream,
than rais scho up and tuik
Ane poleist glas, and hir shadow culd luik:
And quhen scho saw hir face sa deiformait
Gif scho in hart was wa aneuch God wait.

(347-350)

Again, Henryson's precise skill in leaving things unsaid makes her grief all the more terrible. But what is mainly important in Henryson's use of ideas and images of love and beauty is his connecting them with ideas of growing vitality and destructive fragility. Bringing to life and killing, fire and frost, green and black, seeds and flowers, are consistent and related images threaded through the poem.

To the extent that Henryson draws these images from a motley assortment of details and consistently relates them to central ideas in the poem, he is doing something which he has done nowhere else. The account of flax preparation may be more accurate, and that of the mice dining more amusing, than anything in the Testament, but neither amounts to more than one in a series of incidents. The total effect of the Testament, then, is more than the result of an accumulation of single episodes. Details in the Testament—and they are often no less matter-of-fact than what is found in the Fables—add up to more than their sum. Because Henryson includes them not only for their own sake but often as symbols as well, the poem gains singular depth. Such images as seeds and flowers, fire and frost, green and black, bringing to life and killing, are consistently related and function ironically to expand the poem beyond simple statement of fact.
The Testament opens on a dreary evening with frost and hail and cold north winds, an appropriate time for the telling of a tragic tale. The poet is standing at the window watching the sun set and Venus rise, but, because of the cold, he must withdraw to the fire against his will. Then follow his whimsical reflections on an old man's loss of inner fire and passion and his subsequent need to kindle a wood fire. Fire, representing physical vigor and well-being, is again referred to when Cynthia, the moon, invokes her punishment on Cresseid: "'Fra heit of bodie I the now depreyve'"; and when Saturn changes her mirth into melancholy: "'Thy Moisture and they heit in cald and dry.'" When Troilus leaves her at the gate, although neither has recognized the other, he is overcome by the same sort of passion as Henryson says he has lost at the first of the poem.

Ane spark of lufe than till his hart culd spring
And kendlit allhis bodie in ane fyre.
With hait Fewir ane sweet and trimbling
Him tuik, quhill he was reddie to expyre.

(512-515)

The heavenly consort of planets allows Henryson further scope to develop his poem not only in terms of plot and theme, but more especially in imagery; the descriptions of the planets may be seen as an elaboration of all that Cresseid represents. In fact, the planets might almost be projections of Cresseid herself; it is appropriate that Saturn and Cynthia thus be delegated to dispense heavenly wrath upon Cresseid, for they are compounded of the very frost that Cresseid, in her blasphemy
against them, claims is killing her seed of love. Saturn, with skin like lead, hollow eyes, pale lips, lean cheeks, and grey costume, is hoary with frost and ice. "The Iceschoblis that fra his hair doun hang / Was wonder great, and as ane speir als lang" (160-161). Likewise Cynthia is black, full as lead, opaque, and "of colour nothing cleir," borrowing light from her brother the sun. Her garments too are grey,

    and ful of spottis blak,
    And on his breist ane Charle paintit full evin,
    Beirand ane bunche of Thornis on his bak,
    (260-262)

This rather ghoulish decoration is an allusion to the Man in the Moon, but it is not an idle detail. The thorns, which may well suggest the suffering to be inflicted on Cresseid, contrast to the flowers to which she likens herself.

In opposition to the destructive colorless chill of Saturn and Cynthia, other planets champion color, warmth, and creativity. Mars is the "God of Ire," yet at least he is not cold. If the fire which kindles Troilus represents love of the right sort, then Mars is its opposite—heat that has turned to wrath. Mars is described as having a red face; he brandishes a rust-red sword, "And at his mouth ane bullar (bubble) stude of somes / Lyke to ane Bair quhetting his Tuskis kene." Phoebus the sun, with "Lantern and Lamp of licht," comes to engender life with warmth but not to burn it up, to provide man, beast, fruit, and all growing matter with Heaven's comfort of life. Most benign of all is Jupiter, far
different from his father Saturn. Jupiter's hair is of gold, not silver, and his hood is green instead of black. His chief distinctions as "God of the Starnis in the Firmament" is that he wears "Upon his head one garland, wonder gay, / Of flowers fair, as it had been in May." Mercury, the good-natured bookcarrying messenger, wears a red cloak. If Saturn and the moon represent powers of darkness about to destroy Cresseld, then Mars, Phoebus, and Jupiter suggest attributes of Cresseld which affirm her existence as a creature of flesh and blood and good nature. Color schemes are especially significant in the descriptions of the planets. Red, as opposed to greys of Saturn and Cynthia, brings to mind fire and energy, present in Cresseld both as potential imaginative creative good of Mercury, and as possible anger of Mars. Jupiter's green hood and crown of flowers reflects what has been most attractive in Cresseld, and reminds us of how she says she "grew green" in love and is herself a flower.

Of all the planets, Venus and Cupid, as prosecuting deities, most suggest Cresseld herself. Cupid,⁵ calls the convocation together by ringing a silver bell, surely a forerunner of the one Cresseld is to clap before the leper gate. If Jupiter suggests her charms, then Venus represents Cresseld's shortcomings as a woman. Venus is all variety and changeableness. She smiles, but with cold deceit; loves, but is quickly moved to anger; laughs, but weeps at the same time. Her gown is half green and half black, a combination of colors which engender and destroy
life. And finally, like Cresseid, her face gives her away, for there is to be found, "great variance, / Quhiles perkyte truth, and quhiles Incons-
stance." Her combination of humors heralds what is to happen to those of Cresseid when her moisture and heat are to be changed into cold and dry, according to the decree. Venus appears

Mingit with cairfull Joy and fals plesance,
Now hait, now cauld, now blyth, now full of wo,
Now grene as leif, now widerit and ago.
(236-238)

The careful description of the planets, then, serves to suggest attributes of Cresseid herself as well as to represent avenging deities. In this consort they appear as gods with Roman names, (reminding us perhaps, that when people in the Middle Ages thought of classical anti-
quity, even though their stories might ostensibly be laid in Greece, they drew their materials ultimately from Rome). But the planets are not merely disembodied deities; in their human attributes they are a vain lot, displaying "garmonts gay," silver and gold, frosted locks, armor, and whatever finery and paraphanalia is at their command. Their motiva-
tion is often not far removed from human foible; Venus arrives "Hir Sonnis querrell for to defend and mak / Hir awin complaint, cled in ane nyce array." Surely Henryson intends humor here; he means us to smile at Venus' vanity, at the general incongruity of the whole convocation, and especially at "Cupide the King ringand ane silver bell." The Testament as a whole is too sober a poem to allow the planets to become comic in the same sense as parts of the Fables which approach farce, but certainly
there is here a lightness of tone that allows the poem to develop gradually into sorrow.

Nor is the scene of the planets structurally isolated from the rest of the poem. It was prepared for at the very start when Henryson, from his window, watches "fair Venus, the bewtie of the nicht / Upres," and oppose "God Phoebus direct descending doun." Thus Phoebus, who provides life and banishes night, is replaced by Venus, the star of night, and so begins the contrasts of night and day, dark and light. Here Venus wins out as a star, as she is later to as a goddess. After watching the sun set and evening star rise, Henryson turns from his window to think about Venus as the queen of love and even for a moment toy with the idea of praying to "Hir hie Magnificence." This too, is said not without humor, and ironically heralds Cresseid's actual desperate prayer to Venus in the temple. From the temple of the deity it is an easy move to the deity herself, who, not surprisingly, is quite as "human" as those who invoke her. Finally, at the end of the poem, when interest has been established in human characters to the exclusion of the divine, Cresseid writes in her "testament," "My Spret I leif to Diane quhair echo dwellis, / To walk with hir in waist Woddis and Wellis." It is appropriate that she should leave her soul in care of the goddess of virginity and furthermore ironic that she should also be the very moon goddess who punished her, and yet fitting too, for it shows not only that Cresseid has learned the lesson of humility, but also because it brings the theme of flowers around
full circle. Now Cresseid can look forward to walking in green woods forever, having earned her own particular heaven. And the idea of walking with, it might be added, has appropriate Biblical connotations.

Cresseid's fragility makes her especially vulnerable because it leaves her defenseless in the loneliness which fortune has delegated to her. No one can reach out to help her; Calchas tries, but his sympathy and comfort are of little avail, and he can finally do no more than to leave her the victim of her charms and the wheel of fortune. Indeed, Cresseid first appears in the poem fleeing home to her father,

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  destitute
  Of all comfort and consolation,
  Riche privelie, but fellowship, on fute.

(92-94)
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Even her past status has isolated her; a paragon has no peers. When she enters the "Kirk" of Venus, in the depths of despair, she retires momentarily as far as one may both physically and spiritually,

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  into ane secrete Orature
  Qhailair scho micht weip hir wofull desteny,
  Behind hir bak scho cloisit fast the dure
  And on hir kneis bair fell down in yr.

(120-123)
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But her loneliness is due not just to fate; it is the fault of her own pride as well. She knows she is supposed to be the flower of Greece and Troy, and expects the gods to grant her special favors accordingly. She cannot bear the shame of her ruined features, and says to Calchas: "Father I wald not be kend. / Thairfoir in secrete wyse yet let me gang / Into yone
Hospital at the tounis end" (380-382). Her pride, then, works both for and against her; it is at once ennobling and blasphemous.

Yit thay presumit for her hie regard
And still murning, scho was of Nobill kin:
With better will thairfoir they tuik hir in.

But meit or drink scho dressit hir to ly
In ane dark Corner of the Hous alone.
And on this wyse weeping, scho maid her mones;

(397-9, 404-6)

In this scene at the spital house, then, deformed as she is past recognition, there is still something about Cresseid's proud grief to draw respect from the lepers, the same sort of special quality about her that Troilus later recognizes. And yet this pride at the same time isolates her from the other lepers. Again she crawls into a dark corner, as she had into the temple, and weeps her "complaint" alone.

But still she is not humbled. Her Complaint is full of self-pity by means of which she refuses to accept the consequences of her own actions. Although she has withdrawn personal indictments against particular deities, Venus and Cupid, she rationalizes to herself, "Fell is thy Fortown, wickit is thy weird (fate)." Now it is fate that is at fault, which neither removes the blame from the gods nor rests it on herself. The only improvement in her attitude is that she accepts what she cannot help more sweetly than she had earlier resigned herself to the "crabbed" gods. She says:
This Lipper Ludge tak for thy burelie Bour.
And for thy Bed tak now ane bunche of stro,
For wailit Wyns, and Maltis thou had tho,
Tak mowlit Breid, Peinnie and Ceder sour:
Bot Cop and Clapper, now is all ago.

(438-442)

But still she is proud, and wants to hide her shame. The first stanza of the Complaint ends:

Under the Eirth, God gif I gravin wer:
Quhair none of Grece nor yit of Troy micht heird.

(414-415)

The syntax of these lines allows for certain ambiguity in meaning. Stearns renders them as: "God grant that I may find a grave somewhere / That none of Greece or Troy may desecrate," making grave the object of desecrate and implying that Cresseid is hoping eventually to be decently buried. But the order of the words in the original, and the context in which the lines are found—Cresseid's self-pitying lament—favor the intent of the lines to be a desperate urge to get away from it all. The following is another possible translation: "Under this earth, God, if I were buried, / Where none of Greece nor yet of Troy might hear it." Cresseid seems to be saying that she wishes she were dead and buried in the ground where no one might hear of what she has done (and not that no one will sack her grave). If such a reading is a sensible one, it places these lines as the lowest depths of Cresseid's despair. She has crawled into a corner to hide in her misery even from the lepers, and she wishes she were dead. This is not to carry the matter
beyond a manner of speaking—Cresseid is not flirting with suicide—but the Complaint as a whole and these lines in particular come at the point when she is most discouraged. At the end of the lyric, the leper woman persuades her to beg with the rest, and Cresseid comes away from her hiding place and her indulgence in self-pity and is on the first stage toward possible redemption, for she has made a gesture of peace with society. Cresseid's last reserves of false pride are dispelled by remorse when she can say, "None but my self as now I will accuse" (574). And so at the end she can also lose some of her loneliness and isolation by a little charity on her own part. She leaves what goods remain to her, her cup and clapper "And all my gold" to the leper folk "to burie me in grave." Modest charity changes her whole tone and outlook; whereas earlier she had wanted a secret grave as a means of escape from public censure, now she is grateful for whatever decent burial the lepers may provide.

Whatever humor there was earlier in the poem, is gone by the end. The Testament concludes on a final note of sorrow and regret. But this is not a melancholy poem, for the Christian paradox, that he who loses his life shall find it, is at work even though in this case, Cresseid does not find her life until she must lose it. Indeed her victory, if it be one, is that by learning humility in the same way as she had to learn to clap her clapper, she achieves self-knowledge and the promise of redemption. When she defiled the gods, she defiled herself as the flower of Greece, but by the end of the poem, when she admits that she knows her great unstable-
ness, that she is, (like Venus) "Brukkill as glas," she has regained her
own self-respect and so is worthy too of God's mercy, or at least of
Diana's care. Earlier she had seen her reflection in polished glass in the
temple, but, whereas that mirror showed her physical deformity, she
was not yet ready to realize the deeper truth of her nature. Now she sees
her fragility not as irresponsible, flowery prettiness, but as moral
brittleness. Paradoxically, she can commend her contrite soul, now whole
because it has been broken, to Diana, and hope to walk forever "in waist
Woddis and Wellis."

When Troilus gets the ring, all he can say is, "'I can no moir,
/ Scho was untrew, and wo is me thairfoir" (601-602). His words almost
exactly repeat those of the swallow in the fable, who had to stand by,
watching the little birds be slaughtered because they would not heed warn-
ings. As a matter of fact, this fable and the Testament are comparable
in their tragic themes: both poems show the fall from mirth to woe, and
both show too the sorrowful helplessness and regret of those who, like the
swallow and Troilus, are in a knowledgeable position and yet can do nothing
but grieve after disaster is all over.

On the whole, the Testament is, as has been suggested, a poem
gentle in tone, pious in the best sense, sad but not melancholy, and while
essentially tragic, not unrelieved by whimsy. But lest one be entirely
concerned with Henryson's gentle sorrow and Christian piety, it is well
to point out some undertones in the poem suggesting that he was well aware
of the horrors of the world from which it was perhaps necessary to retire
in order to survive at all. Cressida's redemption becomes less simple
when compared to the social world as she knew it.

Quhen Diumeid had all his appetyte,
And mair, fulfillit of this fair Ladie,
Upon ane uther he set his hailt dalyte.

(71-73)

And Cressida comes home to tell her father,

'Fra Diumeid had gottin his desyre
He wox worie, and wald of me no moir.'

(101-102)

Here Henryson has achieved the art of leaving things unsaid, while
suggesting the horrors of utter lust and satiety. Restraint rules the poem,
and keeps the account of Cressida's stay at the leper house from becom-
ing as sordid as it might well be, but neither is Henryson forgetting
nor avoiding the grimness, for if Cressida's father had not sent her food,
and if she had not stooped to begging, she would have starved. In her
testament, Cressida wills her "corps and Carrioun / With wormis and
with Taidis to be rent." Whatever woodlands her soul may find, Henry-
son cannot keep from insisting on the physical horrors of death and disease.

And Cressida's last words before dying, which break in on her lyrical
looking forward to Diane, are:

'O Diumeid, thou hes baith Broche and Belt,
Qhilk Troylus gave me in takning
Of his trew lufe,'

(589-591)
In spite of the promised joys of heavenly bliss, Henryson seems to be saying over and again, that they are won only at the price of suffering, anguish and horror.

The construction of dramatic scenes is an important source of effect in the Testament, as it is in the Fables. When Cresseid wakes up from her dream in the temple, and discovers how the gods have punished her, she is overcome with weeping and lamentations.

Be this was said ane Child come fra the Hall
To warne Cresseid the Supper was reddy,
First knokkit at the dure, and syne culd call:
'Madame your Father biddis yow cum in hy.
He hes mervell sa lang on groaf ye ly,
And sayis your prayers bene to lang sum deli;
The goddis wait all your Intent full weill.'

(358-364)

There is considerable dramatic irony in what the child says, for the gods know her thoughts all too well, and had Cresseid never entered the temple to pray, she would not be in the state she is in. The child suggests the outside world of common-sense intruding and breaking the spell of super-human horrors. Again, after her long Complaint, Cresseid's weeping is interrupted by a leper lady who tells her to take up her cup and bell and start begging with the rest, if she expects to eat. The woman begins, "'quha spurnis thow aganis the wall, / To sla thy self, and mend nathing at ale'" (475-475). The remark is the same as the saying written on the wall in "The Abbay Walk," and, like the child's calling her to supper, is homely enough to contrasts with her more tragic agony.
But the scene at the leper gate deserves to stand beside the best of Chaucer, or any poet. The lepers clammer about Troilus and his rich company as they ride by.

Than to thair cry Nobill Troylus tuik heid,
Having pietie, neir by the place can pas:
Quhair Cresseid sat, not witting quhat scho was.

Than upon him scho kast up baith hir Ene,
And with ane blenk it come into his thocht,
That he sumtime hir face befoir had sene,
Bot scho was in sic pyle he knew hir nocht,
Yit than hir luik into his mynd it brocht
The sweit visage and amorous blenking
Of fair Cresseid sumtyme his awin darling.

For Knichtlie pietie and memoriall
Of fair Cresseid, and Gyrdill can he tak,
Ane Purs of gold, and mony gay Jowall,
And in the Skirt of Cresseid doun can swak;
Than raid away, and not ane word (he) spak,
Pensive in hart, quhill he come to the Toun,
And for greit care oft syis almaist fell doun.

(495-504; 519-525)

The scene is admirable not only in terms of Aristotelian psychology, but also in the delicate restraint with which it is told, in the effect of what is not said and does not happen.

The Testament of Cresseid stands, then, as the high point of Henryson's poetry. In its construction it is unique in the canon not only for telling a story as a dramatic sequence of scenes, but for developing themes by means of central images consistently sustained and bearing upon one another. This Henryson may have tried to do in the Fables, but there the synthesis is rudimentary. For instance, in the fable of the mouse about to
cross the stream, he mentions a piece of string three times: the mouse uses it to tie herself onto the frog's back, the bird uses it as a handle to pluck both the frog and mouse out of the water, and, in the Moralitas, it stands for the thread of life. But, when compared to the use of bells, flowers, and fire in the Testament, the thread seems awkwardly mechanical.

But the Testament represents, in Henryson's canon, more than a maturation of his poetic technique. It is also, as has been suggested, a synthesis of his world view, a unification of his vision of good and evil. And it is necessary that such a synthesis be, for Henryson, a tragedy, for he could not really convince himself that the comic vision of life is the final one. Henryson does not contradict himself in the Testament, nor does he need to append a Moralitas, for the whole intent of the poem has been moral. He tries to make his poem specifically a lesson in womanly constancy; Cresseid concludes as much in her Complaint, for the last stanza begins, "Now, worthie Wemen." But didacticism is brief; this time Henryson's heart is not in it, and he ends the poem, "Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir." Like Chaucer, Henryson cannot excuse Cresseid, although he tells us he would if he could, but he treats her with all tenderness, and certainly never betrays her with scorn or mockery. Nor does he try to allegorize her life; in this respect Cresseid is like Makyne, a woman through and through. The lines which Troilus is reputed to have written on her tombstone must be among the most moving in all literature, and are no mean tribute to the sum of Henryson's poetry.
'Lo, fair Ladyis, Crisseid, of Troyis toun,
Sumtyme countit the flour of Womanheid,
Under this stane lait Lipper lyis deid.
(607-609)

The words deserve to be written, as they were, in gold, and, if the
mention of gold here is reminiscent of Jupiter's golden hair in the planet
portraits, then the connection is appropriate, for the tombstone indeed
suggests that powers of light are replacing those of darkness.

Henryson began to write the Testament, he tells us, "in middis of
the Lent," and, indeed, it is a particularly Lenten poem, a litany, the
story of a soul's self-discovery and painful preparation for the promise
of redemption. But there are no hosannas at the end; Cresseid is dead
and nothing more is to be said. Nor need there be. She has fulfilled her
spiritual obligations, and there the matter ends. Henryson is too sorrow-
ful at what she has lost and suffered to bother with speculations about
heavenly bliss.

Indeed, the Testament is "one of the most Christian of poems." The
planets represent classical gods, and as such are "a blend...of pagan
mythological deities with planetary rulers."9 In addition, the stars are
"instruments of God, and to study them is to study the workings of his will."10
Thus the use of the planet portraits gives the poem contemporary fresh-
ness but also dramatizes the working out of God's will.

But it is to Henryson's credit as a poet that it should be possible
and necessary to justify the machinery of the planets on further grounds
if the Testament is to be both "Christian" and a successful poem. It is quite legitimate to describe a religious experience not only in terms of external factors operating from a remote deity, but also in terms of inner psychological action or states of mind. Thus Satan in *Paradise Lost* says that "The mind is its own place" to define heaven and hell. Likewise in the Testament, what happens inside of Cresseid's mind is at least as important as what is attributed to deities above and beyond her. The planetary consort, is, after all, part of her dream. (It would be silly, of course, to push the matter so far as to suggest that her leprosy were the result of psycho-somatic disorders.) What is important, though, is that Henryson is quite as interested in Cresseid's story as it works out of her mind as he is in its external applications. Again, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton is trying to emphasize the reality of a heaven in the mind, a "paradise within, lovelier far" than Eden, but, at the same time, insists on a physical garden out of which Adam and Eve are driven at a slow walk. In like manner, Henryson's planets may be understood to represent not only manifestations of God's will as a force outside of Cresseid (which is the main argument as Tillyard and Stearns present it), but also aspects of Cresseid's own personality and understanding as well, her self-discovery, judgment, and eventual acceptance and forgiveness. In this manner, what the planets decree is not just something remote, only the results of which are known to Cresseid, but a personal religious experience, particularly Christian because its origins as well as its results rise at least in part
within Cresseid's own mind. Her redemption comes, then, not just when Diane or the gods, or even Henryson's God forgive her, but when Cresseid is ready to own her guilt and can accept herself as she is without trying to rationalize her actions as caused by external forces.

Cresseid, then, stands as a symbol for all human beings (which is a way of saying that Henryson at once particularizes and universalizes her experience), but she is not allegorized into an Everyman or woman. The Testament remains a story about a particular woman living in fifteenth century Scotland, at a time when death and disease were nearer at hand than friends, when women counted for little beyond the fortune of their face, and when the only real solace, such as it was, might be found in the "Kirk" where "As custome was, the pepill far and neir" came "devoit in thair maneir." Whatever the ephemeral classical setting of the story or the planetary machinery, or any other extraneous details may add to the poem, they do not detract from its basic meditative nature.

The Testament is not a sequel to a romance; it is a religious poem standing as Henryson's own testament of Christian charity. And, as a poem, it is an impressive statement of artistic achievement.
CONCLUSION

To have read Henryson's canon is to have met some very fine poetry but no "great" poems. It goes without saying that Henryson is at best a minor poet, albeit often a very good one, but he is not a Chaucer or a Shakespeare, nor did he mean to be. Part of Henryson's limitations as a poet must arise from what appears to be his own failure to take seriously poetry as an art form. When Henryson says that he would include "naught of (himself) for vain presumption," we are obliged to an extent at least, to take him seriously. It is easy enough to see that his statement is not altogether true, that there is a great deal in his poems that is individual, fresh, and very much his own; but what he says in the Prologue is not mere pose, and one is finally driven to admit that to the degree that he succeeds in anonymity, he has made his poetry tepid. There is a difference between Henryson and Chaucer in this respect. Whatever we are supposed to make of Chaucer's retraction to the Canterbury Tales and of the palinode to Troilus and Crisseyde, they come after and not before the major works, so that at least until we get to the apologies, we have the
right to suppose that the Tales and the Troilus were written as conscious works of art. But such is not the case with Henryson, who retracts before he even begins to write.

It seems an unnecessarily harsh judgment to say that whatever poetry arises in Henryson does so by accident; nevertheless, to state a moral lesson is plainly his first intent. To be sure, he says it is well "Amongst ernst to ming ane merie sport," but merriment and delight are never to interfere with graver, even didactic wisdom. Certainly better poets than Henryson have also been concerned with the moral view, and even with emulating earlier writers, but, in so far as they were poets, they were not trying to shame their own genius. Milton's Paradise Lost is in many ways as didactic as a poem can be, and yet at his best, Milton's first end is poetry, whatever the subject, and not incidental to it. But, however fine isolated passages of Henryson's verse may be, his poetry is finally limited (in part), by his own lack of unreserved commitment to art.

Whereas Henryson may have been a half-hearted artist, he did not spare himself as a moralist. Of course art cannot finally exist in an amoral vacuum; the best of it is, in one way or another, concerned with moral issues. And yet Henryson devotes so much of his verse to didacticism that the scope of his work as a whole is cramped. A second limitation to his poetry, then, is due to his binding his vision of the human condition by reducing it too easily to the formula of a Moralitas.
A measure of Henryson's poetic vision is often the degree of compassion he allows. He shows much sensitivity toward mice, toward little birds, sheep, and toward Cresseid, and because he believes in them, so does the reader. His compassion is not merely pity; it goes beyond characters and situations of the moment and sees the irony of their smallness in the larger significance of things, and yet at the same time, their bigness which they themselves do not realize. Chaucer knew that poetry depends upon such a largeness of poetic vision, upon an ability to believe in the subject at hand and at the same time to see its ironic relationship to the more complicated world about it. At the end of the Prioress's tale, when the travelers are for the moment silenced by the story of the little boy murdered by the Jews, Chaucer the traveler remains apart from the crowd, and Chaucer the poet knows that he has shown not only the Prioress but the rest of the company as well for the lost souls that they are. Throughout the Tales Chaucer answers no questions and offers no remedies. It is no wonder that when the Host calls him in his turn to tell a story, he seems to be lost counting rabbits, and has no easy remark to make of the Prioress's story, for its implications are too great for any but the poet to appreciate.

Henryson, on the other hand, finds no need for rabbit counting, for the world he draws is too simple to demand wonder at the contradictions. Although he shows complicated human dilemmas, he seldom seems to know that he has done so. The animals in the Fables present one code,
akin to that of Chaucer's "goddess of kinde." Each is frankly concerned with his own survival and bears no particular grudge against anyone else. Even thieves assert themselves morally; their existence is as much in the order of things as the sower's. But Henryson at best only observes them, and rather than draw a fuller significance, chokes them with a moralizing system in which they do not fit at all. Henryson lacks the vision to see beyond the immediate object and the courage to admit that what he sees is not always definable. There is always a limit, then, to Henryson's image because there is a limit to his view of the human predicament.

But, in spite of whatever objections may be raised against part of Henryson's poetry—that it tends too much to moralize, that it is apt to lack technical finesse, and that it is sometimes dull—much remains that is good reading. The Testament is certainly Henryson's best work; it is unmistakably a very fine poem. Cruttwell says of it: "The poem stands as one of the most moving, the most completely accomplished, in the canon of medieval English." And it has received a fair share of attention; Tillyard, Smith, and Stearns are among the scholars to praise it. The poem has even been rendered into modern English by Marshall W. Stearns, so that it is easily available to the general reader. That it is very much a medieval poem should not therefore make it necessarily distasteful to a present-day reader; much of what made it a good poem in the fifteenth century does the same now, nor, for that matter, should its faults be excused as quaint products of contemporary conventions. The
Testament deserves to be praised for its assured unity of tone, sympathy, and general purpose, for its firm diction and dignified verse, and for its fresh and complicated use of imagery. The reader who is acquainted with the rest of Henryson's work can see in addition that the Testament is a particular achievement in his canon by attempting to synthesize disparate predilections into a single world view.

To be sure, the single vision has perhaps been too firmly drawn to be entirely convincing. One might perhaps challenge the introductory verses describing the poet by his fire-side, or the description of the planets. Delightful as these passages are, could the poem have been written more directly and economically? It may be questioned whether the very leisurely pace Henryson purposely sets up for the poem may not lapse sometimes into mere tediousness. But on the whole, the Testament is good reading; much of what Henryson has to say about his bachelorhood and about the planets is entertaining in the best sense, and certainly other parts of the poem—the scene in which the child comes to call Creeseid to supper, or that of the meeting between Creeseid and Troilus before the leper gate, or the epitaph—are written in lines as moving as may be read anywhere.

But it does not seem quite fair that the Testament should be Henryson's only poem to receive appreciable scholarly and critical attention. With the possible exception of Robene and Makyne and The Abbey Walk, the rest of his canon, admittedly, deserves little more than to be read by special students of Middle English verse. And yet, such should not be the
fate of the *Fables*, for there is much in them deserving the attention and pleasure of the general reader. It is too bad that they are so little known.

In the end, then, it seems fair to say that what keeps Henryson's poetry from being first-rate is the tension in his world view—his obeisance to a stringent, moralizing code which damned livingness as against his genuine love of living things for their own sake. To the degree that Henryson is able to relax the tension, to see that an awareness of living things is not contradictory to moral truths, to that extent his poems are convincing in their ideas and in their poetry. It is further possible to speak of this tension in terms of a comic as against a tragic view. Henryson is quite capable, often brilliantly so, of writing comedy that is satirical, good-humored, and downright funny. But the comic vision never really seems to satisfy him, for finally Henryson is driven to admit that people are committed to relationships beyond those with each other. Man, then, is part of a larger context of God's world, and his predicament must be seen in metaphysical rather than merely social terms.

Among the minor poems, those concerned with secular and potentially "comic" matters are superficial; those having to do with religious and potentially "tragic" matters are conventional to the point of triteness. The minor poems as a whole seldom do more than to elaborate the dullest sort of commonplaces. In the *Fables* the tension between the two views is still present, but the contradictory elements as localized in the tales and
in the Moralitas, are sufficiently distinct and separate to allow each to be viewed more clearly. Thus the Fables help to clarify the nature of the tension, for if the tales are better poetry, the Moralitas seem to be for Henryson more convincing statements of moral truths. Finally, in the Testament Henryson is able to take the genuine human sympathy that belongs to his comic vision and to place it in a larger "tragic" context, resulting in a work that is both morally and poetically true. It has been the intention of this essay, then, to describe the tension within Henryson's work and to suggest what is its effect upon the quality of his poetry.

Henryson's best poems are good enough to be read and compared to the literature of any age, yet his poetry also has something to say about his own time, and, conversely, some knowledge of the fifteenth century is useful in reading his work. Certainly there is a difference in tone between Henryson's and Chaucer's poetry, although both use comic as well as tragic elements. If Chaucer shows himself "our supreme poet of happiness" Henryson stands, perhaps, as a poet of sadness. Such a temperament is no doubt partly individual; but Henryson shares it also with other fifteenth century poets. The opening lines of The Towneley First Shepherd's Play are similar to much of Henryson's work in their undertone of sorrow.

Lord, they are well off who are dead and gone,
For they do not suffer vicissitudes.
Here is much unhappiness, and it lasts long,
Now in sickness, now in health, now in wet, now in blast,
Now in care,
Now in comfort again,
Now in fair weather, now in rain,
Now in heart full of gladness, 
And after sorrow.

Thus goes this world, I say, on every side, 
For after our play follow bitter sorrows,  
(1-10)

For even when Henryson's heart is full of gladness, as it is in parts of the
Fables, sorrow always follows after. But, though the fifteenth century
may have been an age of sadness, misfortunes were not really complicated
enough to bring about utter despair. Tillyard ends his essay on the Testament: "The age of Henryson had its full share of difficulties, yet... you
knew where you were in the biggest matters; you had time to take stock
and think; and the pains of a major reorientation were for the time unknown."6
It may be said of Henryson as Cruttwell says of Dunbar, that "the age he
lived in, though standing on the edge of chaos, still held together and held
him with it."

Whereas the fifteenth century may have been a low point in English
cultural achievement, it is not quite a literary wasteland, but offers a few
poems to stand with Henryson's. Little of what is left of the Chaucerian
tradition is probably even very good poetry, but it was the fifteenth century
that, after all, gave rise to The Second Shepherd's Play and Everyman;
the latter especially, deserves the recognition it receives by being staged
for our audiences. The lyric, too, continued in vigor and freshness; such
songs as "When Christ Was Born of Mary Free" and "The Boar's Head
Carol are sung today. Dunbar and James I of Scotland (or whoever wrote The Kingis Quair), are sometimes said to be better technicians, more exact "Chaucerians" than Henryson, and yet it is doubtful whether in the end they are better poets. Henryson's poems deserve to stand among the best literature that their age produced.

And yet it seems improbable that Henryson was an influential poet, one whom others, even in an age as fond of models as his, would have emulated. For where, one might ask, was there to go from Henryson? He does about as much as could be accomplished in reworking old materials, so that there is little in him to emulate, unless it be the copyist's skill, and this seems unlikely. The sort of thing Henryson was trying to do with poetry works at least in part for him, but afterwards a renaissance seems almost inevitable if literature is to have any vigor at all. Smith suggests that "there is a certain foretaste of the Renaissance in (Henryson's) choice of such a theme as Orpheus, in his transcription of Aesop, and in his fondness for pagan illustration; but the real divergence from the old ways is seen in his emphatic tendency to moralize his fancy and in the way he does it." But whatever hints there may be of the Renaissance in Henryson's poems—the idea really seems too tenuous to bear more than passing mention—he is still very much a medieval poet, but a poet who demonstrates, among other things, the point beyond which the medieval spirit in poetry could not go and still survive as poetry.
Finally, a critical study of the poems of Robert Henryson should have value beyond that of an academic exercise in affording some understanding of Henryson's own work and a certain critical lesson in the nature of poetry itself. To this end, a minor poet may even, perhaps, be a more useful subject than would be a recognized major writer, for the work of a minor poet is likely to be uneven in quality, and therefore representative of more levels of artistic achievement than the works of a better writer. By trying to define what is good and poor in Henryson's work and why, one may perhaps grow to be a more sensitive reader generally. But, whatever broad critical lessons a study of Henryson's poetry may afford, they should not be an "excuse" for such a study. To attempt a serious evaluation of Henryson's achievement seems, in the light of the poems, a legitimate task in itself, if only to suggest that Henryson's poems deserve to be read not as medieval curiosities, but as poems, worthy of the same sort of critical respect as would literature of any age.
NOTES

Introduction.

1. c. f. William York Tindall, "Scholarship and Contemporary'; "Criti-
cism differs from scholarship in that criticism concerns literature and
scholarship concerns what concerns literature. Criticism and scholarship
overlap in that they both concern meaning...Research is needed for sound
criticism, as criticism is needed for intelligent scholarship." English
Institute Annual 1940 (New York, 1941), p. 42.

2. David Laing, The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson, Now First
Collected (Edinburg, 1865), 3 vols. and G. Gregory Smith, ed. The Poems

3. Patrick Cruttwell, "Two Scots Poets: Dunbar and Henryson," in The
Age of Chaucer, ed. Boris Ford, A Guide to English Literature (London,
1954), I, 186.

4. Ibid. Henryson appears to have used the Latin verse collection that
was printed by Wynkyn de Worde as Esopi Fabulae in 1504. William Henry
Schofield, English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer


6. "Of Dunbar's life we know almost nothing. He was born about 1460 and
had died by 1513. He lived and wrote for the court of James IV; his life
was that of a court-poet which, it would seem had little use for poetry. His
verse shows all the uneasiness, the spiritual discomfort and self-disgust,
the financial anxieties, the bitter brew of envy and contempt for those
more favored, which seem the inevitable lot of the artist who must be
also a courtier." Cruttwell, p. 175.

7. For a discussion of the reasons for the lack of literature in England
in the fifteenth century, see H. S. Bennett, Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century
(Oxford, 1947), Chapter IV.


10. Ibid.

Introduction.

12. Lewis, p. 45.

13. Ibid.


16. Lewis, pp. 23-32.

17. Lewis, pp. 112-156.

18. Lewis, pp. 176-197.

19. Lewis, pp. 113-114.

20. Lewis, p. 119.

21. Lewis, p. 121.

22. Lewis, p. 129.

23. Lewis, p. 166.

24. Lewis writes: "By radical allegory I mean a story which can be translated into literal narration, as I translated the first part of the Romance of the Rose ... without confusion but not without loss." p. 166.


26. Lewis, pp. 177-178.

27. Lewis summarizes Chaucer's immediate influence as follows: "When the men of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries thought of Chaucer, they did not think first of the Canterbury Tales. Their Chaucer was the Chaucer of dream and allegory, of love-romance and erotic debate, of high style and profitable doctrine. To Deschamps, as everyone remembers, he was the 'great translator'--the gardener by whom a French poet might hope to be transplanted--and also the English god of Love. (v. Deschamp's Ballade to Chaucer, lines 11 and 31.) To Gower, he is the poet of Venus; to Thomas Usk, Love's 'owne trewe servaunt' and 'the noble philosophical poete.' (Gower, Conf. Amantis, viii, 1st version, 2941; Usk, Testament of Love, III, iv (p. 123 in Skeat's Chaucerian and other Pieces). In the age that followed the names of Gower and Chaucer are constantly coupled. Chaucer's comic and realistic style is imitated by Lydgate in the Prologue to the Book of Thebes, and by an unknown poet in the Prologue to the Tale of Beryn;"
but this is small harvest beside the innumerable imitations of his amatory and allegorical poetry. And while his successors thus showed their admiration for his love poetry, they explicitly praise him as the great model of style. He is to them much what Waller and Denham were to the Augustans, the 'first finder' of the true way in our language, which before his time was 'rude and boustous'. (Hoccleve, Regement of Princes, 4978 (cf. Ibid. 1973, Booke of his ornat endyting That is to al this land enlumynyng); Lydgate, Troy Book, iii, 4237. 'For he (a. Chaucer) oure English glit with his sawes, Rude and boistous first be olde dawes That was ful few from al perfeccion Til that he cam.') Where we see a great commedian and profound student of human character, they saw a master of noble sentiment and a source of poetic diction." p. 162.

28. Lewis, p. 166.

29. "The Compleynt unto Pite and the Compleynt to His Lady illustrate the use of personification at its lowest level--the most faint and frigid result of the popularity of allegory. Not only do the allegorical figures fail to interact, as in a true allegory; they fail to be pictorial: they become a mere catalogue:

And fresshe Beauteee, Lust and Iolitee,
Assured Manez, Youthe, and Nonesteene,
Wisdom, Eestaet, Dreede, and Governaunce.

(Compleynt unto Pite, 39 et seq.)

--where it is not only the cadence of the last line that reminds us of Lydgate." Lewis, p. 167.


32. Smith, Scottish Literature, p. 41.

33. Citations from Henryson in my text are to The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson, ed. H. Harvey Wood (London, 1933).
Minor Poems.

1. "Of (Henryson's) literary career we have not a scrap of evidence, bibliographical or 'internal.' An attempt has been made to date the Fables and to divide them into chronological groups, but it remains, in respect of its entire lack of proof and some confusion in argument, unconvincing." G. G. Smith, The Poems . . . Of Robert Henryson, I, xxvii.


5. With some knowledge of Middle Scots, it would no doubt be an enlightening study to examine Henryson's use of alliteration and other matter of poetic technique depending on detailed points of linguistics. But, it is obvious on even a superficial reading of his poetry that Henryson is consciously using alliteration and balancing vowel sounds. He tries twice to write what seems to be alliterative verse in the traditional sense: in the seven thirteen-line stanzas of Sum Practysis of Medecyne and in the last three stanzas (lines 65-88) of Ane Prayer for the Pest. c.f. George Saintsbury, History of English Prosody. (London, 1923), I, 271-272.


The Fables

1. The last lines of the Prologue suggest further Henryson's general control over his materials, the energy with which he dispatches what he has to say. For when he is telling a story and is himself taken imaginatively with what is at hand, he is never wordy; verbosity comes only in his didactic verses. When he is through with a tale, he stops. The third from the last line of one fable is: "Heir endis the Text; thair is na nair to tell" (2424). Granted that this is a tag, a manner of speaking, at least Henryson is true to his word, and not, as Chaucer sometimes is, getting second wind to go on for another several hundred lines. The same sort of tag is particularly effective at the end of the Testament. Referring to Cresseid, Henryson says: "Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir."

2. "'haill yule, haill'" is one of several lost medieval lyrics to which Henryson refers. Others include "'wes never wedow sa gay'" (515) which Sprutok sings after Chauntecleer's disappearance, and the Cadgear's song, "huntis up, up, upon hie" (2083).

3. The Lint ryippit, the Carly pullit the Lyne, 
   Rippillit the bollis, and in beitis set, 
   It stepit in the burne, and dryit syne, 
   And with anebittill knokkit, and bet, 
   Syne swingillit it well, and hekkillit in the flet; 
   His wyfe it span, and twynit it in the threid, 
   Of quhilk the Fowlar Nettis maid in deid. 
   (1825-1831)

4. Sa happinnit him in streiking tyme off yeir 
   Airlie in the morning to follow ffurth his feir, 
   Unto the pleuch, bot his gadman and he; 
   His stottis he straucht with 'Benedicit©.'

   The Caller cryit: 'how, haik, upon hicht; 
   Hald draucht, my dowis;' syne broddit thame ffull sair. 
   The Oxin wes unusit, young and licht, 
   And ffor fernes that couth the fur fforfair. 
   (2234-2241)


6. G. G. Smith thinks otherwise; he sees Henryson's tendency to moralize as "a declension in the spiritual force of allegory. It remains as a poetical form, but it is becoming no longer self-sustained as a motif—as a mystical expression of the love-fervours of the Middle Ages. This change in its character does not necessarily imply a dulling of the poetic spirit for
The Fables

it is most observable in the times of revival—in Scotland at the close of the century, and in a more advanced phase in the yet greater outbursts in Elizabethan England. A comparison of Henryson with say, Lydgate will show certain differences in the process of deterioration. If Henryson is even less in touch with the old allegory, he has at least a greater appreciation of its literary qualities; and so he escapes from the numbing dullness which settled down on English verse when the old inspiration failed. He is more moral than the 'moral' Gower, and never hesitates to expound his dreams in a way which even Lydgate, had he dreamt as successfully, would not have done; and yet he is less open to the charge of being a tiresome pedagogue masquerading as poet. Not only is the lesson kept apart from the allegory, but the allegory itself, which might have become a mere pastiche, is treated anew. This aptitude for the pictorial, which characterizes the early Renaissance, begins to appear in Henryson. In a skillful way he makes use of the outworn machinery of the allegory; he treats it as a matter of technique and discovers in it those possibilities of vivid effect which find their fullest expression in the processional panels of the Elizabethans. In other words, he and his contemporaries transform what was originally a mystical cult into a literary engine, and save it from the wreck of mere platitude and "profitable sayings" into which it tended to fall, and did fall, in the hands of Chaucer's English successors." Smith, The Transition Period, pp. 44-46. Be that as it may, Henryson does not really seem to have improved his poems by the use of allegory.
The Testament.


3. For an examination of Cresseid's sin as being based on pride and anger and her salvation according to the Christian scheme, see Tillyard, pp. 16-18.

4. Stearns in *Robert Henryson* says of the planet portraits that Henryson "exercised considerable originality and perception by discarding for the most part the ancient mythological qualities of the gods and substituting the astrological qualities of the planets in which his age believed. In so doing, he was following Chaucer's example and conferring realism upon his narration" (p. 96). For an explanation of the astrological qualities of the planets, see pp. 70-96.

5. Tillyard explains Cupid's function in the poem as being two-fold: he is "the traditional ruler of the orders of lovers," and he is "a superior pagan God who conveys a court of other pagan gods, who are also the planets." p. 15.

6. See also Tillyard, pp. 10-11.

7. Diane is also the goddess of chastity, and Tillyard emphasizes this aspect of her mythology, concluding that "in other words, (Cresseid) aspires, as far as she can, to the monastic life," but that her aspirations are cut off by death. pp. 17-18.

8. Stearns, 97-105.


10. Ibid.
Conclusion.


3. See also Tillyard, pp. 27-29.

4. Lewis, p. 197.

5. The translation is from Ford, The Age of Chaucer, p. 439.

6. Tillyard, p. 29.

7. Cruttwell, p. 182.


9. Smith, Transition Period, p. 44.
LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED


____. ed. Specimens of Middle Scots. Edinburgh, 1902.

____. The Transition Period. New York, 1900.


