

1982

## Tale-Moral Relationships in Henryson's Moral Fables

Stephan Khinoy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Khinoy, Stephan (1982) "Tale-Moral Relationships in Henryson's Moral Fables," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol17/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [digres@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:digres@mailbox.sc.edu).

*Stephan Kbinoy*

Tale-Moral Relationships in Henryson's  
*Moral Fables*



In the dream prologue of "The Lion and the Mouse," the centerpiece of Robert Henryson's *Moral Fables*, there is a bit of dialogue which points at the heart of Henryson's method. The dreaming narrator has just asked Aesop, his "maister venerabil," for one of his characteristic fables, "concludand with ane gude moralitie." But the ancient laureate demurs:

Schaikand his heid he said, "my sone, lat be,  
For quhat is it worth to tell ane fenyeit taill,  
Quhen haly preiching may na thing avail?"<sup>1</sup>  
(1388-90)

If the moral urgings of priests or friars have failed to heal the cankered world, what possible good can mere fiction do? But the dreaming Henryson persists, answering the question with a diffident question of his own:

"Quha wait nor I may leir and beir away  
Sum thing thairby heirefter may avail?"  
(1402-03)

Fiction need not rely, he suggests, on a frontal assault on the hearer's will or passions. He may carry away with him in-

stead "sum thing" which will have its effect afterwards. How this process works is the subject of this paper. The lingering effectiveness of Henryson's technique stems from the relationship between Henryson's fables and their morals, which is much more complex and much more interesting than has generally been thought.

With regard to the morals, the wheel of criticism has come full circle. Early critics, while praising the fables, decried the morals as excrescences.<sup>2</sup> More recently, the tales were thought simply to foreshadow the morals according to the principles of Biblical exegesis.<sup>3</sup> Lately, the morals have again seemed separate from the tales--either as more or less annoying distractions or as alternative points of view whose spirit contrasts with or complements that of the tales they accompany.<sup>4</sup> None of these views seems fully satisfactory. To say that the tales foreshadow the morals in any direct way is to oversimplify radically: in fact, quite frequently, the morals surprise, shock, even offend. But they are not at all arbitrary, either; and far from being detachable, they are central both to Henryson's view of his art and to our appreciation of it. Henryson, as we shall see, uses both the apparent dissonance and the real difficulty of his morals for two ends: to train his audience in proper interpretation of figural texts; and to teach his audience the proper perspective on life: the strenuous, lasting, and nearly impossible effort to rise above the level of Henryson's all too human beasts.

At the beginning of the Prologue to the *Fables*, Henryson adumbrates his method by an original combination of topoi:

Thocht feinyeit fabils of ald poetre  
 Be not al grunded upon truth...  
 (1-2)

--although pagan fables are both fictional and non-Christian--they are pleasing, and, more importantly

...the caus that thay first began  
 Wes to repreif the hail misleving  
 Off man be figure of ane uther thing.  
 (5-7)

--their original purpose is to reprove men's evil ways by their figural truths. The reader of such a fable, if he reads with diligence and right attention, like a farmer working a wild and stony field, will find both the flowers of delight and the nourishing wheat of instruction (8-14). Furthermore, says Henryson,

The nuttes schell, thocht it be hard and teuch  
Haldis the kirnill and is delectabill,  
Sa lyis thair ane doctrine wyse aneuch  
And full of fruit, under ane fenyeit Fabill.  
(15-18)

This familiar image of the nutshell had two common interpretations, both of which Henryson intends. The first, which can be traced back at least as far as Prudentius, is that the kernel is the sentence, the shell the fable. The more mystical interpretation, also well known, may be illustrated in Adam of St. Victor:

What is a nut if not the image of Jesus Christ?  
The green or fleshly sheath is His flesh, His  
humanity. The wood of the shell is the wood of  
the Cross....But the kernel of the nut from which  
men gain nourishment is His hidden divinity.<sup>5</sup>

The tough nut and its sweet kernel thus refer to two categories of Henryson's opening stanzas: in Aesop's classical and pagan world, natural moral law, which is apprehensible, lies beneath the unpromising exterior of pure fiction; while for the Christian medieval poet, spiritual truth inaccessible to the unaided intellect is hidden in the things of this world.

At the end of the Prologue, Henryson presents a third explanation of his figural terms:

This Nobill Clerk, Esope, as I haif tauld...  
Be figure wrait his buke, for he nocht wald  
Lak the disdane off hie nor low estate.  
(57, 59-60)

This is of course a traditional satiric disclaimer: "I don't want anyone to be angry at me, so I haven't written about anybody real--but if the shoe fits, wear it!" By this device, which is to be found in some of his sources, Henryson announces that he is in fact writing satire.

Thus Henryson's figural tales have three kinds of application. The first is to the world of natural law, to the kind of morality that was available to the ancients: the kernel of the nut as expounded by Prudentius. The second--Esope the satirist--is to the contemporary scene. Like the first, it will be understood by anyone who takes the trouble to look for it. The third application--the kernel as expounded by Adam of St. Victor--is to the spiritual world of Christian revelation. This application will be hidden, for it is not accessible to

unaided intellectual understanding or hard labor.

Henryson's style of moralization is instructively illustrated in the moral to the first fable, "The Cock and the Jewel." Throughout the fable, the animal nature of the Cock is kept before us. He is a real rooster who really lives on a barnyard dunghill and eats worms. As a result, his decision to reject the jewel he finds because it won't feed him is obviously cogent. He senses, and we are made to experience with him, the pathos of his situation, the disparity between us and the ideal, the hopelessness of a dunghill existence. Admittedly, since the jewel was a "marvellous" one, the Cock must have been wrong to reject it. But we only learn its nature after the end of the narrative. Henryson's moral, which likens the Cock to a fool and a scoffer at learning, may have a certain validity, but it does not reverse our earlier experience. There is a clear discrepancy, at this point, between tale and moral. A sympathetic creature is condemned for reasons clearly not his fault, and we ourselves seem to be condemned as readers for missing the point of the story. We may feel cheated. We may feel tempted to indulge in strained readings of the tale in order to force it into harmony with the moral. Most readers of Henryson have responded in one of these ways.<sup>6</sup> But neither response is appropriate. Henryson does provide us with clues for the correct interpretation; however, these come not in the body of the tale, but at the point of transition between narrative and moralization.

After the Cock has concluded his speech, Henryson describes the characteristics of the jewel:

This Jolie Jasp had properteis sevin:  
The first: of cullour it was mervelous,  
Part lyke the fyre and part lyke to the hevin  
It makis ane man stark and victorious,  
Preservis als fra cacis perrillous.  
Quha hes this stane sall have gude hap to speid,  
Of fyre nor water him neidis not to dreid.

(120-126)

What stone is referred to in this description, so clearly linked to the lore of medieval lapidaries? Henryson's "jasp" cannot be the jasper, which lacks all of the qualities which Henryson ascribes to the stone found on the dunghill: varying in color between the red or yellow of fire and the blue or grey of the heavens, strengthening men and preserving them in time of danger, serving as protection on travels, and guarding against fire and flood. (The jasper, in medieval lapidaries, is a green stone which aids women in labor.)<sup>7</sup> The dunghill

jewel is the jacinth, as it was also in John Lydgate's version of the fable,<sup>8</sup> although it was Henryson's own erudition and poetic invention which supplied the attributes and significance of the stone. The jacinth is the only stone in the medieval lapidaries which varies in color, ranging from red to yellow to blue: like the fire and like heaven. It was always a stone which protected travellers; it was usually a stone which made men bold; it frequently protected against the perils of water, and though I have not been able to find it cited as protection against fire, the stone itself frequently withstood fire's onslaught.<sup>9</sup> Henryson's generic word "jasp"<sup>10</sup> therefore denotes the jacinth.

The admittedly remarkable qualities of the jacinth still might not be of much use to a dunghill cock. Henryson, however, has selected the jacinth because it has three major allegorical meanings which an uninstructed reader cannot be expected to discover. First, the jewel stands (like the Cock himself, in some traditions) for Adam and his sin, and thus symbolizes and comments upon the main story, preparing us for the moral.<sup>11</sup> Second, it stands for the wisdom which the moral also extolls.<sup>12</sup> Finally--as if to answer those of us who might protest such a heavy load of figuration--the jacinth even stands for the type of poetry which the *Moral Fables* represents: the allegory which seems to have different kinds of meanings to different kinds of readers, but leads all of them eventually toward heaven.<sup>13</sup>

Henryson's Prologue, taken together with his opening fable, serves to instruct the reader in the main features of Henryson's technique. The depth of implication in the apparently explicit Prologue is supplemented by the brief narrative of "The Cock and the Jewel" and its extensive and richly crafted moral, revealing the following concerns:

1. a beast fable in which we experience the animal aspects of the human condition (explicit in the prologue; implicit in this fable);

2. an interpretation of this behavior as social satire (near-explicit in the prologue; implicit here);

3. a prudential moral, which may not apply to the animal as animal, but which does apply to a human being in the same situation (explicit both in the Prologue and in the moral to this fable);

4. Finally, a spiritual allegory--here, as so often, unstated, but explicitly called for in the Prologue and implied powerfully and with great artistry in the moral to the fable. This spiritual allegory, it must be noted, lifts us out of the general frustration and near-despair which we may experience at the other three levels.

"The Cock and the Jewel," I have suggested, is a paradigm of the *Moral Fables* as a whole. The remainder of this study will sketch how this style of moralization develops throughout the work. We shall focus on two main themes: the occurrence and significance of "hard" morals and the progressive widening of moral scope.

Only gradually does Henryson unveil the full range of his techniques. The concern widens from the prudential to the social and the spiritual. Henryson carefully establishes each mode of signification and uses "hard" or surprising moralizations, or moralizations of relatively greater length, to signal each shift of allegorical scope. Through this process of gradual instruction, he secures his audience's understanding of, and hence its active participation in, his interpretive modes. The result, as we shall see, is that the audience, compelled to acquiesce in Henryson's inexorably grim indictment of its own world, is driven to reach out itself for the rescue he suggests.

After "The Cock and the Jewel," the opening group of fables serves to reinforce our understanding of Henryson's methods. "The Two Mice" expands the realm of social verisimilitude with its literal portrayals of the rural home and the burgess house, as well as its gentle satire of social pretensions. Once again, like "The Cock and the Jewel," it seems to dodge the problem that the story raises. The moral recommends withdrawal from the world, but, in its stated terms, it suggests no practicable alternative. In the following tale, "The Cock and the Fox," there is essentially the same relationship between tale and moral as in "The Two Mice." It is true that the satiric tone is harsher. Sprutok's diatribe against the kidnapped Chantecler:

He wes angry and held us ay in aw,  
 And woundit with the speir of Jelowsy.  
 Off chalmerglew, Pertok, full weill ye know,  
 Waistit he wes, off Nature cauld and dry;  
 (516-19)

breaks through the surface of courtly lament and compels the agreement of Chantecler's other two wives:

"Sister, ye wait, off sic as him ane scoir  
 Wald not suffice to slaik our appetyte."  
 . . . . .  
 "Yone wes ane verray vengeance from the hevin;  
 He wes sa lous and sa lecherous..."  
 (524-5, 531-2)

But this increase of satiric acerbity poses no new problems for the reader. The warning that

Thir twa sinnis, flatterie and vaneglore  
Ar venomous; gude folk, fle thame thairfoir  
(612-3)

is balanced, like that of "The Two Mice," between the social and the prudential. But now a new element, implicit in "The Two Mice"--"The cat cummis, and to the mous hes ee" (384)--is made explicit. The Cock's pride is briefly likened to that of Hell--"Tak witness of the feyndis infernall" (595)--and the spiritual world has received its first explicit treatment in a moral. Henryson's preparation, however, has been so thorough that the reader barely notices the addition.

In "The Fox and the Wolf," however, a somewhat dissonant moral underscores the sharpness of the predicament in which Henryson's animals live. The story of the Fox's confession delicately balances a comic awareness of human (or vulpine) weakness and a tragic realization that one's nature is incapable. The Fox's fate is foretold by the stars.

Out off the wod unto ane hill he went,  
Quhair he micht se the twinkling sternis cleir  
And all the planetis off the firmament  
(628-30)

But Astrolab, Quadrant, or Almanak,  
Teichit off nature be Instructioun,  
The moving off the hevin this Tod can tak  
(642-4)

And to him self he said, withoutin mair,  
"Weill worth my ffather, that send me to the Lair.

My destenie, and eik my weird I ken,  
My aventure is cleirlie to me kend:  
With mischeif myngit is my mortall men:  
My misleving the soner bot gif I mend,  
It is reward off sin ane schamefull end.  
(647-53)

But according to medieval doctrine, since he is an animal, he lacks free will, and thus has no means of avoiding the evil that he foresees. He has no way to change himself. He is, by nature, a carnivore, a stealer of chickens.

But he is also a figure of Man. The Fox represents a cer-

tain kind of human effort to escape fate by means of worldly cunning or prudence. Insofar as human nature is animal-like, the effort is foredoomed. Thus the moral seems harsh, though we can't deny its applicability.

This suddand deith, and unprovysit end  
Of this fals Tod, without provision,  
Exempill is exhortand folk to amend,  
(775-7)

Suppose thay be as for the tym contryte,  
Can not forbeir, nor fra thair sinnis fle;  
Use drawis Nature swa in propertie  
Of beist and man, that neidlingis thay man do,  
As thay of lang tyme hes bene hantit to.  
(784-8)

Henryson is tightening the screws.

Thus individual efforts at reform have only a slender hope of success. In the fables which follow, Henryson widens his moral focus to include the social realm, which seems equally bleak. In "The Trial of the Fox," in which the marauding Fox and Wolf are emissaries from the court of King Lion to compel the attendance of the poor and virtuous Mare, the moral is surprising because it is a fully spiritual moral for a tale whose bearings are apparently social and political. The regal setting, the legalism of the language--

"Now, quod the Tod, 'Madame, cum to the King,  
The Court is callit, and ye are *Contumax*.'  
'Let be, Lowrence,' quod scho, 'your Courtlie Knax.'  
(1003-5)

--lead us to expect an application to court life or royal intrigue. In the event, we are only surprised to be told that "the Lyoun is the world be liknes" (1104); but when Henryson compares the contumax Mare with holy pilgrims, the wolf to sensuality, the fox to temptations--and, rather inconsistently, the Mare's hoof to "the thoct of deid" (1125), it becomes clear that Henryson is exercising his readers' wits. In "The Trial of the Fox," the spiritual emphasis of the moral reaches a peak, while the social bearing of the narrative prepares us for that emphasis in tales to come. This is a transitional fable.

In "The Sheep and the Dog," a relatively simple tale of legal oppression, the virtuoso double-barrelled indictment of Scottish justice makes the social application of the morals

quite explicit. As with "The Cock and the Jewel," the moral of this fable is relatively long; and as with that fable, "The Sheep and the Dog" is important because it introduces a new kind of interpretation, the social moral. The moral of "The Sheep and the Dog" would have been more shocking to Henryson's audience than it is to us. Some, at least, of his auditors, having smiled knowingly through his attack on the ecclesiastical courts, must have been discomfited indeed when the moral, instead of moving immediately to the expected general application, proceeded to excoriate the royal courts with the same righteous wrath.

But this is not all, for the narrator himself enters his own narration as a witness to the wrenching complaint of the Sheep, who

Quaikand for cauld, sair murnand ay amang  
Kest up his Ee unto the hevinnis hicht  
And said: "Lord God, quhy sleipis thow sa lang?  
Walk, and discern my cause, groundit on richt!"  
(1293-6)

Henryson compounds his audience's discomfiture by breaking the narrative frame, having his narrator bear witness to this cry. There is no justice, either from the Church or from the Crown; there is nothing but oppression and corruption in the world, and God mysteriously allows it all to happen. "God is gane to sleip" as that judge, the Fox himself, says later, in "The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman." Of what use, then, is the prudence which the fables have been preaching? And the next fable, "The Lion and the Mous," continues the panorama of inadequacy: if God slept in the one fable, the King, the Lion, sleeps, and is vulnerable to Fortune, in this one.

"The Lion and the Mouse," as the seventh tale of thirteen, occupies a central position in the collection. In the three central fables, the narrator is prominent. In "The Sheep and the Dog" and "The Swallow and the Other Birds," the sixth and eighth tales, he enters the tales as witness; here he is the dreamer of a vision in which Aesop himself tells a tale. Aesop is triply authoritative: he identifies himself as a lawyer (1372) and saved soul (1373)--someone familiar with both justice and mercy, which figure prominently in this fable (and, by implication, in the collection)--while the narrator salutes him as "maister" and "poet lawriate" (1377). Aesop seems more conscious of his first two roles, doubting the worth of mere rables when "haly preiching" itself fails to reform mankind. The narrator puts the case for literature: in hearing a figural narration, he may bear away with him

something which may avail "heirefter" (1403). The dialogue contains the possibilities for the whole of the Fables. There is a very restrained optimism about the possibilities of rational discussion, or figural discourse, in reforming a few instructed individuals, if not society as a whole.

The fable itself is set in the imperfect and unreformed world which Aesop has been discussing in the Prologue. King Lion sleeps and all his subjects run wild, even the lowly mice. Lion and mice, however, submit their natures to each other's reasoned discourse--arguably, for the only time in the entire Fables--and both survive as a result. The limited optimism of the Prologue seems to prevail. But the moral makes clear that the limitations are more severe than we might at first have thought.

The moral seems to be an "easy" one in the sense that a reader will feel little strain in moving between tale and moralization. (Some particular contemporary application, however, seems to be lost to the modern reader.) We note that, taken together, tale and moral provide a general indictment of Scottish society as it is, as well as a contrasting vision of the harmonious realm, founded on rational cooperation, which reform might make it. The moral level, in addition, suggests prudence, pity, and distrust of the world as useful virtues, implying that this visionary Scotland will most likely fail to materialize. The narrative is, after all, a dream, and at its conclusion Aesop, the spokesman for ideal temporal order, vanishes, never to return. With him departs from the world of the Fables the possibility of rational harmony here and now. The vision lasted only a moment--a central moment, it is true--and in general, a growing bleakness marks the remainder of the work.

"The Swallow and the Other Birds" begins with a confession of faith that the sleeping God is working somewhere, but he is barely discernible in the world of the fable itself. As the seasons advance toward winter, the improvident birds approach a brutal death at the hands of the Fowler. The moral, too, seems unfair to a modern reader. As in "The Sheep and the Dog," the narrator is onstage as witness to the bleakness. Of course the birds have been warned of their folly by the Swallow--but being birds, what are they likely to do? Furthermore, on the natural level, the Fowler, described in fascinating detail as he goes about his business, is both ominous and innocent:

The Lint ryipit, the Carl pullit the Lyne,  
Rippillit the bollis, and in beitis set;  
(1825-6)

His wyfe it span, and twynit it in to threid,  
Of quhilk the Fowlar Nettis maid in deid.  
(1830-1)

His Nettis hes he set with diligence,  
And in the snaw he schulit hes ane plane  
And heillit it all ouer with calf agane.  
(1843-5)

Now it is true enough, as J.A. Burrow argues, that this is a fable extolling prudence, and since it is clear from the start that the birds should follow the preaching of the Swallow, it is no surprise when the moral (which Burrow calls 'unpleasing') equates the fowler with the Fiend, as well as death, and extends the consequences of error into the life hereafter.<sup>14</sup> But for this to be proved on the frail and vulnerable birds, "for hunger famischit neir" (1866) and miserably exposed to the elements--this is a hard teaching. Henryson is relentlessly and systematically stripping his audience of their own self-excusing evasions--their weak natures, their needs, the injustice of society, the indifference of man and God--by which they permit themselves to give rein to their desires. Yet, though the appetites appear inevitable and irresistible, and the consequences seem dire, Henryson seems to offer no alternative. Through Henryson's artistry, we are forced to imagine ourselves in this group of fables as no more, no better, than talking animals, condemned to a life without justice or meaning, but with a grisly death as the inevitable punishment. This same attitude has, of course, been current in our own age, and inevitably it has been claimed as Henryson's final view.<sup>15</sup> The last group of fables wrestles with this bleak determinism. Nevertheless, Henryson prepares us, through the morals, to accept and understand a final resolution which rises beyond the animal world. This is to say more than that the morals offer conventional pieties; rather, they are an essential part of the art of the *Moral Fables*, much of which is devoted to structuring our understanding and acceptance of Henryson's resolution.

"The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger," which follows "The Swallow and the Other Birds," is a humorous and energetic restatement of the earlier fable's grim conclusions. The narrative ends

The Foxe in to his den sone drew him than  
That had betraisit his Maister and the man:  
The ane wantit the hering off his creillis,

The utheris blude wes rynnand over his heillis.  
(2199-2202)

The comic vitality of the narrative derives from the lifelike social portraiture, centering on the Fox, hated alike by high and low estate, who yet manages to eke out an ingenious living. But the humor is violent, for all that, and in the moral, we find that mankind itself is represented by the greedy and credulous Wolf, betrayed by this Fox of a world to death, the Cadger who "cummis behind/ To stryke..." (2226-7).

By contrast, the opening fable of the final group, "The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman," is more or less the first fable with what might be called an optimistic spiritual moral. The devil can be turned away by the poor man's good works, but he tempts the wicked man of power down to hell with the illusion of riches. This is a case in which we smile at both tale and moral: the tale for its comic realism and inventiveness, the moral for its homely ingenuity (hens as good works, indeed!).

But can the Devil be bought off so cheaply? "The Wolf and the Wether" will correct any easy optimism. This is yet another fable in which a sympathetic (and here essentially virtuous) animal character not only comes to grief in the story, but meets condemnation in the moral. I think that I.W.A. Jamieson's very good article overstates the extent of our involvement with the Wether.<sup>16</sup> Still, he was a loyal servant in a good cause, his end is sudden and horrible, and his condemnation in the moral is severe. This is another of Henryson's "hard" morals: it serves to remind us that poverty and the espousal of virtue do not preserve us. The moral is also unexpected in kind. It is a social moral where we were expecting a warning against spiritual pride, following, perhaps, a pointed fable about certain perils of the religious life or the path of virtue. Now frequently we have been given a prudential or quasi-spiritual moral when we were expecting a social one, but this is the first instance in which the reverse holds: the explicit moral is social, the implied moral is spiritual. Henryson has trained us to supply an appropriate spiritual moral on our own.

This training is crucial in "The Wolf and the Lamb," the next to the last of the fables. Beneath the harsh outline of the story, there are two levels of interpretation which are clearly "there," but not stressed in the moral. The first implicit level is that of merely social satire. Just as the Wether was proud of his fierceness and cunning, the lamb delights in his mastery of argument. He seems like a new assistant D.A. taking on the chief of the Mob: enjoying his

dialectical superiority, he seems blissfully unaware of his danger, until

"Na!" quod the Wolff, "Thow wald Intruse resson  
Quhair wrang and reif suld duell..."  
With that anone he hint him be the hals.  
(2693-4, 2699)

There is quite a different moral, as well, which is clear, but unstated. This is a lamb which dies, guiltless, for the sins of his ancestors, at the hands of that established devil figure, the Wolf. He is a Christ type, and Henryson has prepared his audience to see this association in the moral. Since Christ is present, redemption must be possible, and we as readers certainly must see this.

This understanding, in turn, is crucial for the last fable, that of the Mouse who must cross the river tied to the treacherous frog. Despite all promises, the frog insists on attempting to drown the mouse, who tries to struggle upward; in their struggle, a kite swoops down and makes his meal of the two of them. The fable is genuinely chilling, since even if we cannot immediately discern the precise moralization, we read it feelingly as a commentary on the nature of life: the need, the journey, the betrayal, the struggle, the brutal end. With his extended double moral, Henryson teases us a little, offering an appropriate but unsatisfying prudential moral--be careful in choosing your companions. Then come the real moral: Life is a journey to the Other Side, in which the frog, man's body, designed to swim the world's currents, is forever threatening to drown the frail mouse, its rider, the soul. The insatiable Kite, flaying and gobbling down his victims, is inevitable death. Without redemption, such an image would imply sheer despair. And for the animals, there is no redemption.

Henryson has "hard" morals, and good tidings which are marginal and unstated, because animals are incapable of salvation. To construct fables which too strongly implied the contrary would be to breach decorum. In addition, Henryson is showing us what we are if we let ourselves be brutalized. Brutalized is the precise world: made animal by habits, desires, customs, all the demands of the world in which we nevertheless must live:

Na mervell is, ane man be lyke ane Beist...  
(50)

[Quha] takis all the lust and appetyte  
 And that throw custum and daylie ryte,  
 Syne in thair myndis sa fast is Radicate  
 That thay in brutal beistis ar transformate.  
 (53-6)

Thus the common wisdom of the Prologue. True, perhaps, and perhaps we accept the point. But how to get people to experience this so vividly that they will begin and persevere in the almost impossible struggle against the whole world? Henryson, with unsparing verisimilitude, delineates an animal world which, for all its incidental pathos, is so bleak that we hunger for transcendence. At the same time, he carries on a slow process of instruction on how to recognize and value the stones we cannot eat. His "hard" morals and his implicit allegories are his means of training.

*College of Staten Island, SUNY*

#### NOTES

\*A version of this paper was presented at the Fourteenth International Congress on Medieval Studies, sponsored by the Medieval Institute of Western Michigan University, May 1979.

<sup>1</sup>*The Morall Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian*, in H. Harvey Wood (ed.), *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh and London, 1958). I have occasionally altered Wood's punctuation in the interests of clarity or expressiveness.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., "The moralizing, which is admittedly dull, is confined to the postscript," Wood (ed.), *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, p. xv.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., "...the fable and the moralitas, the visible world and its significance, have become one." Denton Fox, "Henryson's Fables," *ELH* 29 (1962), 356. Fox's study has been seminal for a generation of Henryson critics, as has John MacQueen's *Robert Henryson* (London, 1967), which in this respect takes a position similar to Fox's.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Charles Elliott, Henryson's most recent editor, finds the moralizations "blatant" (Robert Henryson, *Poems*, 2nd ed. [New York, 1975], p. xi). For moralizations as discordant with the narratives, cf. George Clark, "Henryson

and Aesop: The Fable Transformed," ELH 43 (1976): the real meanings of the tales are ultimately "quite inconsistent with their explicit moralizations" (p. 5); or I.W.A. Jamieson, "Henryson's *Taill of the Wolf and the Wedder*," SSL 6 (1969): "By matching the inflexible moralist against the too plausible weaknesses of human nature, Henryson may... suggest a golden mean..." (p. 240); or Daniel M. Murtaugh, "Henryson's Animals," TSL 14 (1972), who criticizes Fox and MacQueen for seeking "to harmonize fable and *moralitas* at all costs" (p. 408).

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, tr. Dora Nussey (New York, 1958), p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Philadelphia, 1958) feels cheated: "...we sympathize with the cock... Yet in the *moralitas* the cock is represented as a fool scorning science... It seems almost as if the poet has allowed his own colourful fable to run away with him, and is now returning to his duty..." (p. 40). Denton Fox, by contrast, argues that the Cock's position is undercut from the beginning, and that the sophisticated reader should have anticipated the moral (Fox, *op.cit.*, pp. 341-345).

<sup>7</sup>Augustine, *In B. Joannis Apocalypsim Expositio* (PL 35), says that the jasper "aquae colorem habet" to remind us of the Flood (col. 2422). Isidore of Seville derives its name from the Greek for "green" and "stone" (*Etymologiae* XVI, vii, PL 82, 571-572). Marbode, compiler of the most influential medieval lapidary, writes that the green, translucent variety is best, and that the jasp aids "mulierem parturientem" (*Liber Lapidum*, PL 171, 1742-3). Subsequent lapidaries agree.

<sup>8</sup>John Lydgate, "Isopes Fabules," *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, Part II: Secular Poems*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, Early English Text Society, O.S. 192 (London, 1954), pp. 566 ff. Lydgate approves of the Cock's rejection of the jasp as indicating acceptance of his humble station in life (p. 574, lines 213-7).

<sup>9</sup>Color: Marbode notes three varieties of jacinth: *granatus* or *rufus*, *citrinus* or *pallidus*, and *venetus*, or the color of the sea (PL 171, 1748).

Variability of Color: Isidore, PL 82, 584; Bede, PL 93, 201-202; Marbode, PL 171, 1774: "Jacinthus mutat colorem suum cum facie caeli..."; so also Augustus and Aemilius Borgnet (eds.), Albertus Magnus, *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1890),

XXXVIII, 277.

Protection of Travellers: Almost all medieval authorities on the properties of gems assert that the owner of a jacinth will travel safely. To take one example for many, the Anglo-Norman "First French Version" of Marbode:

Quel ke jagunce un ait sur sei  
Mult poet aler seurement

(*Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, eds. Paul Studer and Joan Evans [Paris, 1924], p. 42). See also pp. 90, 100, and 125; and Joan Evans and Mary S. Serjeantson (eds.), *English Medieval Lapidaries* (Early English Text Society, O.S. 190 [London, 1960], pp. 40, 94, 123).

Makes Men Bold: for example, in *English Medieval Lapidaries*, p. 61, Lydgate, "Isopes Fabules," line 158, "poant sur seis enemis," *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, p. 242.

Fire and Water: the property of withstanding fire derives from Damigeron: "nam si mittantur ad ignem et multum insufflentur, quanto plus insufflantur, eo amplius rubicundiores," quoted in *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, p. 373. I have not been able to find any specific references to withstanding water or protecting against flood, but in any case, the reference to fire and water is almost certainly a reminder of the two Judgments, cf. Augustine, cited above. Augustine's fire-colored stone is the sard, which is frequently equated symbolically with the jacinth, and commentaries on Revelations like Augustine's may be the ultimate source for Henryson's conflation of jasp and jacinth.

<sup>10</sup>Henryson's editors have all felt that "jasp: is a generic word for "jewel" in this passage, although the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* do not give this meaning.

<sup>11</sup>For example, the London version of King Philip's Lapidary says that the jacinth is "of the color of the reed erthe wherof God made the first man, Adam...and in that hit is the same colour, hit signifieth the synne of Adam, whereof all we be in peyne and traueile" (*English Medieval Lapidaries*, pp. 18-9).

<sup>12</sup>Bede (PL 193, 202), Marbode (PL 171, 1774), and Albertus Magnus (*Opera Omnia*, XXXVIII, 277) all interpret the jacinth in the light of various closely related passages in Corinthians, especially I Corinthians 2:6, "sapientiam loquimur inter perfectos," which all cite.

<sup>13</sup>cf. Marbode (*ibid.*): "Jacinthus...significat eos qui cum sapientibus sensu contendunt, ut secundum modum auditorum se aptent sicut dicit Apostolus: Sapientium loquimur inter perfectos (I Cor., 2:6). Ad eos qui parum sciebant dicebat: Non potui tanquam spiritualibus escam dare, sed quasi carnalibus lac vobis dedi potum, non escam (I Cor. 9:22). Iste Apostolus Jacinthus fuit, et ita [se] contemperabat omnibus ut omnia esset omnibus... (I Cor. 2:22).

<sup>14</sup>J.A. Burrow, "Henryson: The Preaching of the Swallow," *Essays in Criticism*, 25 (1975), 35.

<sup>15</sup>Murtaugh, for example, believes that the Fables show that we falsely distinguish ourselves from animals, that in the end the bondage and helplessness of the beasts is an image of the human condition as we experience it. ("Henryson's Animals," *TSSL* 14 [1972], pp. 405-21.) George Clark, in "Henryson and Aesop: The Fable Transformed," *ELH* 43 (1976), writes that Henryson's "animals and their world become symbols for Henryson's view of man: more suffering than sinning, less a free agent...than the victim of his inescapable environment" (pp. 5-6).

<sup>16</sup>"Henryson's *Taill of the Wolf and the Wedder*," *SSL* 6 (1969), pp. 248-57. I think that Jamieson is the first critic to argue that Henryson's moralizations are difficult in order to involve the reader.