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Evelyn S. Newlyn

**Tradition and Transformation
in the Poetry of Robert Henryson**



The predilection in the Middle Ages for a rigid structuring of reality appears in every aspect of medieval culture, including medieval poetry; poetic conventions exerted, in fact, an almost prescriptive power over the poet, so that one important measure of the truly distinctive medieval poem is its ability to transcend the limitations of traditional forms and subjects. This ability to transform conventional poetic modes and themes is, for example, one of the principal bases of Chaucer's creative genius. Although Chaucer influenced very considerably the poetry which appeared in the century after his death, paradoxically that influence worked merely to provide a newer sort of prescription as poets frequently attempted not to emulate Chaucer's inventiveness in using tradition, but instead to mimic his very forms, subjects, and treatments. A notable exception to this tendency is Robert Henryson, whose major works, "The Testament of Cresseid" and "The Morall Fabillis,"¹ have in recent years received considerable attention, and who has come to be counted among the best of the poets writing in the century following Chaucer's death.² And, as one might expect, one of the qualities responsible for Henryson's reputation is his Chaucer-like ability to employ tradition with freshness and creativity, an ability that is particularly evident in some of Henryson's shorter, "minor" poems.

Like all poets, Henryson works within received tradition, and his shorter, lesser-known works reveal his use of inherited form and subject.³ Consistently, however, Henryson's artistic stature is attested by the ways in which, thoroughly understanding the traditions he inherits, he is able to re-shape and thus transcend them. Three of Henryson's minor poems illustrate particularly well his poetic range and diversity, and his skill at refashioning received tradition. "Robene and Makyne,"⁴ which draws on several medieval literary forms, demonstrates not simply Henryson's skill at creating complex poetic structures, but also his ear for language and his ability to create and define character. "The Ressoning Betuix Aige and Yowth,"⁵ whose title suggests merely another reworking of a sometimes tiresome medieval idea, mutability, is a refreshingly original contribution to the genre of the "warning" poem; it also epitomizes one of Henryson's most distinguishing characteristics, his habit of rethinking and suggesting new perspectives on the accepted ideas of his time. Finally, "The Annunciation"⁶ reveals a kind of poetic intellectuality and abstraction that is more ordinarily associated with later metaphysical poets than with the medieval writers; indeed, departing as it does from the typical emotional appeal of medieval religious poems, "The Annunciation" shows that Henryson moves beyond both medieval poetic practices and medieval poetic theory.

"Robene and Makyne," one of Henryson's most delightful poems, and a poem which testifies particularly well to his creative use of tradition, has, unlike his other works, been often anthologized since early in the eighteenth century.⁷ Usually applauded for the wit and brilliance of its surface, the poem, though popular, has not received the kind of scholarly treatment that has been lavished on "The Testament of Cresseid" or even "The Morall Fabillis." Scholarly attention has tended to confine itself to the poem's form and its possible sources, including the question of French influence.⁸ This failure to consider seriously the possible meanings expressed by the poem may perhaps be attributable to the poem's delightful surface which, in its humor and wit, both dazzles us and deflects our attention from its less than humorous implications.

The humor and wit of the poem derive to some extent from Henryson's combination and transformation of two traditional medieval themes: the courting of a rustic by one who is more sophisticated, and the amorous opportunity which is rejected but then desired when it is no longer available.⁹ The poem's surface thus depicts a wryly humorous tale of love misaligned as first Makyne attempts unsuccessfully to make love to Robene and then Robene attempts unsuccessfully to make love to

Makyne. Henryson employs this comic situation, however, in the service of a much larger and more serious theme: the loss of innocence and the isolation that result from human emotional disjunction. This theme emerges, moreover, not from didactic authorial intrusions into the poem, but from incisive portrayals of character which disclose that the young people's lost innocence and their resulting isolation are created by their own individual psychologies which, perversely, prevent their achieving their desires. Such an attention to the psychology of his characters, and such a successful intertwining of theme and character, are in part what make Henryson so comparable to Chaucer and so unique among Chaucer's heirs. Like Chaucer, Henryson employs conventional subjects, but transforms them to illuminate fundamental truths about the human condition.

The poem's form also attests Henryson's ability to use creatively medieval literary traditions. Appearing to reflect the traditions of the lyric, the ballad, and the pastourelle, the poem takes the shape of a debate between the would-be lover and the reluctant love-object; unlike the traditional debate, however, which normally concludes with a victory for one participant or with a stand-off, Henryson's poem ends the debate part-way through the poem only to reverse the roles of the participants and begin the debate anew. The dialogue consists of a pattern of verbal persuasion and resistance which, in the middle of the poem, comes to be inverted as the roles of persuader and resistor are reversed; the poem's structure, then, overtly reflects the poem's psychological content.

The poem's structural reversal charts the course of parallel--but opposite--emotional changes in the two characters, changes which illustrate the difficulty of achieving human connection. To create a satisfying love relationship between two people usually requires a simultaneous and equivalent emotion in both, and Henryson's poem proves the difficulty, given the idiosyncratic nature of human psychology, of such an accomplishment. When this goal of love is not reached because the potential lovers are continually at cross purposes, never experiencing the same emotion at the same time, disillusionment results in both; that disillusionment in love symbolizes the greater loss of innocence which inevitably accompanies knowledge and maturity.

Although poems which concern the courting of a rustic by a sophisticate usually depict a shepherdess being wooed by a more worldly male character, Henryson reshapes this convention so that Makyne, the shepherdess, is the amorous aggressor while Robene, the shepherd, is the reluctant love object.¹⁰ Moreover, although the poem is set in the hills of Scotland

and although the characters are both rustics, the world of courtliness nevertheless intersects the world of rusticity, but not in the traditional form of an outside visitor; instead, courtly ideals, generated by love, spring from within these rustics' own selves, perhaps indicating Henryson's belief that true courtliness inheres in the individual rather than in an artificial system of behavior which one merely adopts. Thus Makyne, although she is but a simple shepherdess, has become aware of courtly love ideals through the force of her love for Robene; similarly, Robene changes in the course of the poem from rude country bumpkin to knowledgeable courtly lover,¹¹ a change attributable to the birth of his love for Makyne. This seemingly innate capacity for understanding courtliness does not, however, equate with the sophistication ordinarily associated with courtliness. Rather, Henryson's characters are both initially innocent and idealistic, and the eventual transformation of their innocence and idealism into cynicism and disillusionment is triggered by their individual experiences of unrequited love rather than by their falling prey to the beguilements of a courtly character from the outside world.

That the characters share innocence and idealism is established at the very outset. Robene's world is defined by his sheep, and when the tormented Makyne finally reveals to Robene that she has loved him two or three years and will die if he does not end her sorrow by loving her, Robene, in his ignorance, can respond only with bewilderment:

Robene ansuerit, "Be the rude,
 Na thing of lufe I knaw,
 Bot keipis my scheip vndir gone wid;
 Lo quhair thay raik on raw.
 Quhat hes marrit the in thy mude,
 Makyne, to me thow schaw,
 Or quhat is lufe, or to be lude?
 Fane wald I leir that law."

(ll. 9-16)

The level of diction here connotes an artless, rustic lad who speaks in simple, open sentences; completely unaware of the nature of Makyne's distress, he is truly naive. Yet, his concern for Makyne is evident; he wishes to know both what has upset her, and what love is. Henryson is thus careful to avoid making Robene a disdainful, unsympathetic character; the shepherd lad may be ignorant, but he is kind, and concerned for his unhappy friend.

Makyne, although a shepherd girl, displays an amazing ex-

pertise in the rules for courtly behavior as she attempts to instruct Robene in what he should do:

"At luvis lair gife thow will leir,
Tak thair ane A B C:
Be heynd, courtas, and fair of feir,
Wyse, hardy, and fre,
So that no denger do the deir,
Quhat dule in dern thow dre;
Preis the with pane at all poweir,
Be patient and previe." (ll. 17-24)

In contrast to the unsophisticated simplicity of Robene's speech, Makyne's advice reveals a high level of courtly knowledge and a significant command of language as she discourses knowledgeably about those qualities of nobility and sophistication that are desirable in the courtly lover. Evidently the experience of love provokes both lyricism in thought and facility in language, for just as Makyne displays these traits in the first half of the poem when she is in love, so does Robene exhibit them in the last half of the poem when he is in love. Yet Makyne's essential innocence and naivete are implied here by her trusting belief that the love she wants Robene to reciprocate will inevitably result if he behaves like a lover.

Robene's response to Makyne's instruction emphasizes the dominant elements of his character: his ignorance, his concern for Makyne, and his sense of duty. He does not himself understand her pain, since the weather is fair and the sheep are well. He fears, moreover, that the activity Makyne proposes for them might interfere with his duty to his flock: "'And we wald play ws in this plane, / Thay wald ws bayth re-proif'" (ll. 31-2). In response to his resistance, Makyne pleads more earnestly and the debate continues, with alternating stanzas devoted to her attempts to persuade Robene to make love, and to Robene's excuses for not doing so. Makyne, assessing the situation logically, explains the good to come from Robene's acquiescence--that he will have her "hairt all hail" and her "madinheid"--and the harm to come from his refusal--that unless she "daill" with him, she will be "bot deid" (ll. 35-40).

Half-heartedly Robene starts to promise to meet her in the morning, but then interrupts himself to fret about his sheep's safety if they should stray while he and Makyne are occupied. He will not, he confesses, hide what is in his heart, that he worries when his sheep begin to wander; but, clearly, his sheep are less a hindrance than his own reluctance to engage in this new activity. The increased tension between Robene

and Makyne is accentuated by the rapid verbal exchange of the stichomythia in the next two stanzas:

"Robene, thow reivis me roif and rest;
I luve bot the allone."
"Makyne, adew, the sone gois west,
The day is neir hand gone."
"Robene, in dule I am so drest
That lufe wilbe my bone."
"Ga lufe, Makyne, quhair evir thow list,
For lemman I bid none."

"Robene, I stand in sic a styll;
I sicht, and that full sair."
"Makyne, I haif bene heir this quhyle;
At hame God gif I wair."
"My huny Robene, talk ane quhyll,
Gif thow will do na mair."
"Makyne, sum vthir man begyle,
For hamewart I will fair."

(ll. 49-64)

Their speech here is in sharp contrast to the leisurely diction of their earlier exchanges when emotions were less heightened. Makyne, in true courtly tradition, details her inability to sleep and the torment she suffers from unsatisfied desire; Robene tries futilely to distract her, telling her that the sun has set, the day is ending, and she had best choose another lover since he does not himself participate. Brusquely rejecting Makyne's last pathetic plea that he at least stay and talk, even if he will do nothing else, and evidently having endured all he can of these importunate advances, Robene tells Makyne to find someone else, for he is going home.

While the characters are apart, the poet underscores the emotional dichotomy established between them while they were together; as Makyne goes home to weep, Robene, freed from a great burden, makes his way home "Als licht as leif of tre" (l. 66). Since, during the course of their debate, Robene's initial concern for Makyne has been entirely supplanted by his fear of Makyne's demands, he is greatly relieved to be free of this uncomfortable pressure; in consequence, no thought of Makyne's distress darkens his joy at escaping this sticky entanglement. Makyne, however, scorned and humiliated, cries aloud in her grief for an explanation of this treatment: "'Now ma thow sing, for I am schent; / Quhat alis lufe at me?'" (ll. 71-2).¹²

His characters having reached the peak of their respective emotions--Robene relieved and delighted to have escaped from love, Makyne sick with desire and grief-stricken over Robene's rejection of her--Henryson swiftly brings about the poem's peripeteia by indicating that, at some point in the evening after they have parted, Robene's inclination changes. When "sum pairte of Mawkynis aill / Outthrow his hairt coud creip" (ll. 77-8), he follows after her with the intention of making love. Although he has been an unconscionably slow study, Robene has absorbed both thoroughly and accurately the rules for lovers, as his address to Makyne indicates:

"Abyd, abyd, thow fair Makyne,
A word for ony thing!
For all my luve it salbe thyne,
Withowttin depairting:
All haill thy harte for till haif myne
Is all my cuvating;
My schein to morne quhill houris nyne
Will neid of no keping." (ll. 81-8)

His speech is lyrical and passionate; offering her all his love, he wishes only that her heart will accept his. His sheep, that previous obstacle to their love-making, will not, he observes, require his attention throughout the night. The experience of love seems to have improved considerably his linguistic abilities, as his speech displays a new sophistication in diction and syntax.

However, just as Robene has undergone a complete change from disinterest to desire, so, ironically, has Makyne experienced a total emotional reversal. No longer a lamenting, love-sick maiden, she has become a brittle, cynical, and even malicious woman with an acerbic tongue. She does not just refuse Robene but, salting his wounds, taunts him with his ignorance in refusing to accept her love when first offered:

"Robene, thow hes hard sounng and say
In gestis and storeis auld,
'The man that will nocht quhen he may
Sall haif nocht quhen he wald.'" (ll. 89-92)

Makyne does not, moreover, simply exact revenge by denying Robene the relief in love which he seeks, but she actively wishes bad fortune upon him and his future lovers:

"I pray to Iesu every day,
 Mot eik thair cairis cauld
 That first presis with the to play,
 Be firth, forrest, or fawld."

(ll. 93-6)

Although at first glance it seems curious that Makyne should wish ill luck on those women who might in future "play" with Robene, this impulse is, in fact, understandable as a reflection of her own self-disgust for having offered her love to one too ignorant to accept it. Ironically, while Makyne could now have what she formerly so fervently desired, Robene's love, her desire has now changed. Her need to restore her grievously injured pride and her desire for revenge have become the governing forces of her psychology. Since Makyne's emotional energy at this point is directed entirely toward revenge, saving face, and healing herself, Robene's ardor has no meaning for her whatsoever.

Robene does not, however, give up easily, and his continuing persuasive efforts prove his complete transformation into courtly lover. Again proposing amorous dalliance, he displays a lover's appropriate concern for the setting: the night, he points out, is "soft and dry," the weather "warme and fair," and there is in the "grene woid" no spying "ianglour" who might be "to lufe contrair" (ll. 97-102). Robene's new courtliness is clearly evident; although he began the poem as an ignorant country lad, he is now familiar with all the finer points of love, including the need for secrecy, a comfortable place, and a pleasant atmosphere. His lyrical diction and his sophisticated thought again sharply contrast the rough, stumbling simplicity of his first speech.

His efforts at courtship are, nonetheless, to no avail, as Makyne, again spurning his proposal, informs him of the magnitude of his former rejection; she asserts, moreover, that his indifference has irrevocably altered her world:

"Robene, that warld is all away
 And quyt brocht till ane end,
 And nevir agane thairto perfay
 Sall it be as thow wend,
 For of my pane thow maid it play,
 And all in vane I spend;
 As thow hes done, sa sall I say,
 'Mvrne on, I think to mend.'"

(ll. 105-12)

Clearly, for Makyne, Robene's rejection when she eagerly of-

ferred herself has not only caused, but has come to symbolize, her larger loss of innocence and idealism. That world which is "all away" and at "ane end" is the world of youthful hope, the world wherein desires expressed are fulfilled, where pain disclosed is ameliorated, and where proper behavior results in the desired end. The poem thus introduces a new, more serious theme, as the aborted love affair becomes charged with greater significance than we had been led to expect; the poem now comes to embody that thorough disillusionment which often accompanies the wisdom gained from bitter experience. Makyne's discovery that the world as she once envisioned it does not exist causes not only her loss of innocence but also regret and bitterness: regret that she spent herself in loving Robene, and bitterness that impels her to repay him in kind, to leave him to "mvrne on" while she, now, turns to other things.

Henryson's delineation of this impact of Makyne's experience on her psychology thus expresses one of life's tragic ironies as Makyne's experience of her own suffering in unreturned love does not result in her treating compassionately Robene's parallel, if later, distress; just as Robene, freed from the pressure to make love, was prevented by his own relief from sympathizing with Makyne in her frustration and anguish at his refusal, so does Makyne's own experience of pain create in her no sympathetic understanding of Robene's metamorphosis. Instead, that pain Makyne experienced crystallizes into an unassimilated bitterness which urges her, vengefully, to treat him as he has treated her. Although both characters have indeed mastered the law of love, and assumed the appropriate forms of behavior, the result was not perfect loving accord for them but greater emotional disjunction, implying, perhaps, the ultimate insufficiency of this particular law of love. Sadly, although Makyne and Robene have similar emotional experiences, those experiences do not give them access to, or understanding of, the other.

Robene, continuing to persist even in the face of Makyne's bitter and cruel words, pledges to her his eternal love and loyalty, vowing never to fail her as others might. Perhaps it is the irony of this last avowal that spurs Makyne abruptly to end his impassioned pleas with a pronouncement of chilling brevity and finality: "'Robene, with the I will nocht deill; / Adew, for thus we mett'" (ll. 119-20). The pattern established in the first half of the poem has at this point been reflected in reverse and completed:¹³ now it is Makyne who goes home, "blyth annewche" (l. 121), while Robene is left "In dolour and in cair" (l. 126).

The culmination of the poem's structural and thematic

reversal is signalled decisively by the poet's description at the last of his two characters' emotional states after they part: "Robene mvrnit and Malkyne lewche; / Scho sang, he sichit sair" (ll. 123-4). Whereas the opening of the poem had found Robene watching his flock on a "gud grene hill" (l. 1), the poem's ending portrays him keeping his sheep "vnder a huche, / Amangis the holtis hair" (ll. 127-8), the natural setting thus reflecting the progress of the poem in a pathetic fallacy which perhaps parallels not only Robene's state of mind, but the characters' transformation from innocence to painful wisdom, from optimism and hope to cynicism and despair.

Clearly, the structural reversal occurring in the poem delineates the dynamic characterizations of Robene and Makyne as it reflects the psychological changes that each character experiences. Robene undergoes an ordinary maturation process as he changes from the boorish lout, to the eager lover, to the wiser adult who has experienced disappointment and regret. Makyne's changes, by contrast, are more devastating; the trusting excitement of her innocent love for Robene does not simply suffer the despair and disillusionment that accompany rejection, but is dramatically transformed into a bitter cynicism toward life as well as love. We are obliged, then, to view both characters with sympathy; we certainly can sympathize with Makyne, who offers herself only to be rejected by this reluctant and uncomprehending bumpkin, but we must also sympathize with Robene, who learns what love is, but too late. Perhaps most important, though, is our recognition that the tragedy of the characters' emotional misalignment and the devastating consequences have meaning for all of us who find our emotions occasionally interfering with our own best interests. Henryson thus elevates his poem to a more profound thematic level as he presents the paradox of love's duality: ironically, even as the experience of love causes the lovers to soar to new heights of imaginative and expressive power, the forces of their individual emotional psychology, unsynchronized as those forces are, work against the lovers' achieving that connection which they each--but, sadly, at different times--desire.

Henryson's use of this love plot as a basis for the larger themes of the loss of innocence and the difficulty of human connection removes the poem from the realm of the ordinary and the familiar. In exemplary medieval fashion, the poem employs conventional forms and subjects, but Henryson's probing and insightful treatment places the poem within the tradition of works which seek, through the overt presentation of a simple human event, to define and illuminate subtle and complex psychological truths. Beneath the wit and brilliance

of the poem's surface, then, lies a dark and brooding presentation of human frailty.

Whereas "Robene and Makyne" shows particularly well Henryson's ability to draw upon but transcend conventional poetic forms, "The Ressoning Betuix Aige and Yowth" proves his ability to formulate and superimpose a new perspective upon conventional poetic subjects. Rather than presenting a monothematic sermon on the *memento mori* theme, Henryson's poem contains an unresolved argument in the tradition of debate poems. In subject and attitude it is akin to the debate of the Body and the Soul, a debate which, as Rosemary Woolf points out, was used "to demonstrate that all pride and prosperity must end in the grave," "to express in fictional form the philosophical relationship between body and soul," and to illustrate "the conflict during life between the senses and the reason."¹⁴ Also, whereas most warning poems speak about death itself as the end to be feared, and present the warning through the personified abstraction of death, Henryson's poem focuses upon the aging process: the youth attempts to deny time, but the old man persuades him that time is inexorable. Although Aige, by forcing the youth to recognize the traditional antithesis between *quod eram* and *quod sum*, compels Yowth to understand that the young must grow old, the narrator intrudes at the end of the poem, in a manner which departs from previous traditions, to reconcile the polarity by offering the balanced assertion that both disputants are right: "O zouth, be glaid in to þi flouris grene! / O zouth, thy flouris fadis ferlie sone!" (ll. 71-2). The poem thus presents three points of view on the subject of the disputation: the perspective of age, the perspective of youth, and the perspective of the narrator.

The poem establishes the conflict between the two disputants in its description of their contrasting physical appearances. The lovely description of nature which begins the poem reflects the fresh, youthful vigor of the young man:

Quhen fair flora, goddes of the flouris,
 Bayth firth and feild so fresche had ourfreit,
 And peirlie droppis of the balmy schouris
 All woddis grein had with thair watteris weyt,
 Moveand allone in ane morning I met
 Ane mirrir man, þat allone mirth cuth mein,
 Syngand this sang þat suttellie wes set:
 "O zouth, be glaid in to thy flouris grene."
 (ll. 1-8)

Fittingly, the scene has just been washed with rain, which

sustains life as it freshens and renews; the youth is similarly shown to be as fresh and vital as the natural setting in which he stands. However, as is traditional in such other warning poems as the Three Living and the Three Dead, he is engaged in a pleasurable activity, enjoying the glorious spring morning, when he is suddenly confronted by the old man with the placard. The incongruity of the contrast between the delightful and vigorous atmosphere of spring and the decrepit appearance of the old man makes Aige's grim message even more chillingly dramatic. The old man is described as the opposite of the youth in every way. Whereas the youth is referred to as "Ane mirrie man," his opponent is "ane captive" who leans on a staff (l. 10); while the youth sings a happy song, the old man's voice is "hais hostand" (l. 12), and he proclaims his message on a sign which he wears on his chest. His eyes are hollow, his cheeks sunken, and he coughs; his hair is gray, his use of a staff indicates his general weakness and infirmity, and his message, not surprisingly, is "'O youth, thy flouris fadis farlie sone'" (l. 16).¹⁵

The young man, delighting in his youth, wishes to enjoy its every aspect. He is active and strong, healthy and handsome, and he displays a confidence which is appropriate to youth:

"No grume on ground may my guerdoun degraid,
Nor of my pith may pair wourth half ane prene;
My face is fair, my figour will nocht faid."
(ll. 21-3)

In believing that he will never change from his present condition, however, he is unrealistic and arrogant. It is fitting that the youth enjoy his own healthy body, but his denial of time amounts to a declaration of immortality, and to that extreme even exuberant youth may not go. Upon this point the old man instructs the youth, declaring that he, like the youth, was once strong, healthy, and enthusiastic.

The dialogue of the two characters assumes the pattern of debate, with the youth making a pronouncement and the old man rebutting it. When the youth insists that his vigorous health will not change, the old man explains that although he, too, once thought thusly, time has changed him into a decrepit creature. The old man's rebuttal is in the tradition of the *Quod tu es, ego fui* poems,¹⁶ as he draws parallels between the young man's claims to eternal vigor and his own experiences which belie those claims. The old man proves that time is the subject of their disagreement; the human will is no match for time, and his loathsome body demonstrates time's passage as well as its power. The old man's insistence that the youth's "cors sall cling," that his "curage sall wax cold," and that

his "wittis fyve sall wane" (ll. 44-6), contains echoes of those warning poems which detail the Signs of Old Age and the Signs of Death, the latter focusing upon those physical indications that the body was failing and death was inevitable.¹⁷ The old man urges the youth to look at his aged body, to see what time can do.

The youth responds with even more gaiety and confidence; whereas before the youth emphasized the outer manifestations of his good health--his beauty and his strength--he now details the many ways in which his body is inwardly sound as well. He rejoices that his five senses are doubly acute and that his bodily energy, or "curage," is as robust as his inner organs. He offers his present vitality as evidence that he need not heed the old man's warning, and he reiterates his own motto:

"My hart is hale, my lever, and my splene;
Heirfoir to reid this bill I haue [no] ressoun:¹⁸
O youth, be glaid in to thy flouris grene."
(ll. 38-40)

Clearly, the youth still does not understand that present truth may not be future truth. His inability, or his refusal, to admit that time may affect him is exhibited in his statement that he has no reason to heed the old man's warning sign. The youth thus refuses to admit the reality of time's passage.

Disregarding the old man's insistence that age and disease will eventually alter both mind and body, the youth then tells of his fondest wishes for the future, to cut a dashing figure at court, and to enjoy love:¹⁹

"At luiffis layr ane quhyll I think to leit,
Clenely²⁰ to cramp in court with my clething,
To luik amang thir lustie ladeis sweet;
Off maryage to mell with our mouthis meit,
In sacreit wyse, quhair we may nocht be sene,
With birdis blyth in boure my baill to beit."
(ll. 50-5)

He wishes to experience sexual pleasure, to gratify his senses and his physical desires. It is amusingly ironic that these remarks finally provoke a response of anger from the old man:

"For all the crampyn thow sall cruik and cowre;
And all fleschlie lustie þow sall defy,
Quhen pane sall the depryve for paramour;
Than will na bird of the be blyth in bour;

Quhen thy manheid sall mynnis as the mone,
 Than sall þow say gif þat my sang be so[u]re:
 O ȝouth, thy flouris fadis farlie sone."
 (ll. 58-64)

The young man simply does not understand that amorous delight, most of all, will not last. For all his swaggering, the youth will eventually be made humble, himself renouncing bodily desires when ill health prohibits his participation in love affairs. As in poems concerning the Dance of Death motif, or in iconographical depictions of that theme, the salient point is that there is no escape or denial possible, no matter what one's social rank or degree of healthiness. And as the old man cruelly points out, no lady will be pleased with the youth when his sexual vigor diminishes like the moon.

This last attempt to deflate the young man's joy in his youth is successful: "This galȝart grutchit and began to greif, / And on full sone he went his wayis but wein" (ll. 65-6), evidently persuaded of the truth of the old man's claims. The old man, however, does not seem pleased with his victory: "This leyn man leuch nathing, bot tuik his leif" (l. 67). To be sure, he has brought low youth's high spirits and made the youth admit the realities of time and age, but this accomplishment does not seem to have cheered the old man. We are told tersely that he does not laugh. In applying a corrective, in instructing the youth on mutability, the old man, like the youth, goes to the undesirable extreme; whereas the youth wishes to ignore time, the old man believes one should think of nothing else. By completely dampening the youth's spirits, the old man causes the youth to assume an attitude inappropriate to the function and estate of youth, and this end is *not* proper. Perhaps for this reason the old man does not laugh when he seems to triumph; perhaps he realizes that for life to continue, youth must be "youthful."

Henryson uses the pattern of their argument to illustrate the extremes of both attitudes. Youth is happy, directed outward, and expresses its joy in song; age is depressed, concerned with inner maladies, and proclaims its message of doom on a placard. Youth is "lustie," robust, and ambitious; age is morose, frail, and without hope. Youth looks outward and to the future; age looks inward and to the past.

Although the debate comes to no formal end between the disputants, the old man appears to have won, having punctured youth's gaiety, having made him acknowledge mutability, and having driven him from the "woddis grein" in a depressed and unhappy state. The narrator, however, enters the poem with a concluding view which is more balanced than that of either of

the participants:

And I abaid amang thir leiffis grene:
That takkin suthlie, fra þat I had sein,
In treuth, me thocht, thay trevist in thair toun:
O youth, be glaid in to þi flouris grene!
O youth, thy flouris fadis ferlie sone!
(ll. 68-72)

After hearing both sides of the debate, the narrator concludes correctly that the disputants travel in opposite directions; however, by reiterating the refrain of both, the narrator thereby affirms the validity of both views. Both statements are in fact true: youth should rejoice in its youth, even as it is also true that youth ends all too soon.

Thus, although the poem treats the traditional "mutability subject"²¹ through the popular debate form, it also moves beyond the conventions ordinarily attached to these medieval types and *topoi*. Henryson transfigures the poetic form of the unresolved debate by the peripeteia of a third perspective which not only uniquely resolves the debate, but also synthesizes the antithetical views of the disputants into a statement of human truth. This transfiguration of form allows the poet to avoid the monotonous, monodical quality ordinarily found in the warning poem. The mutability theme also acquires new freshness through the dramatic tension created by Henryson's incorporation of three, rather than the usual two perspectives: the argument seems first to fall to the side of youth, then to that of age, and finally moves to a position of centrality as the narrator incorporates the opposing points of view into a new perspective. Henryson's creative use of form thus becomes the vehicle for a creative treatment of the traditional mutability subject. The aging process itself, the inexorability of time, and the inaccuracies in perception of both extreme youth and extreme age are the real focus of the poem. Unlike the ordinary warning poem, with its rather tiresome reiteration of *memento mori*, Henryson's poem offers a sane and affirmative perspective on life.

Henryson's ability, as shown in *The Ressoning Betuix Aige and Youth*, to revitalize and transform conventional materials is even more evident in *"The Annunciation."* Especially when we consider Henryson's poem against the background of other religious lyrics we are able to appreciate his ingenuity, imaginative power, and poetic skill. Whereas most medieval lyrics appeal not to the mind but to the senses, commonly assuming such forms as a hymn of praise to Mary or an emotional account of Christ's suffering, Henryson's poem appeals to the

intellect. Rosemary Woolf has shown that the medieval writers of religious lyrics made extraordinarily little use of wit, ambiguity, or paradox;²² Henryson's poem, however, reflects all of these techniques, seeming thus to align him more nearly with the poetic practices of the later metaphysical poets than with the customs of medieval poesy.

In addition to being unique in form and style, Henryson's poem is also distinguished from others of its type by the magnitude of its controlling idea and its concomitant thematic complexity. Although dealing ostensibly with the events of Luke 1:26-38, the Immaculate Conception, the poem soars far beyond this commonplace theme as Henryson extrapolates from it additional abstract ideas. The poet is actually attempting in the poem to achieve a coalescence of the knowable and the unknowable, the abstract and the specific, to the end of greater human understanding. By using a familiar form and subject, he is able to particularize and make accessible such abstruse and incomprehensible ideas as the nature of divine love and the continuity of time. These abstract ideas derive from, and are explained by, the narrative of the Annunciation.

In the course of the narrative, Mary is transmogrified from a humble, speechless maiden into the powerful queen of heaven; paralleling this narrative strand is the Salvation story, which describes the progression of Christ from seed in the womb to resurrected king. These parallel narratives exemplify the poem's two primary themes, the power of divine love and the continuity of time. Henryson explores these two abstract ideas through an intricate tripartite structure which unites and interweaves the narrative of the Annunciation, the Salvation story, and a series of typological events. The complexity of this structure, which is reinforced by paradox, ambiguity, and oxymoronic rhetorical tropes, clearly distinguishes the poem from the ordinary medieval religious lyric.

This complicated intellectual construct evolves from the relative simplicity of the Annunciation story, which is presented through a dramatic series of changing tableaux delineating Mary's transformation. In the first scene, when she learns of her destiny, Mary is portrayed as a meek, simple maid, shy to the point of speechlessness. She is referred to as "that myld" (l. 13), a substantive with the meanings of "gentle," "pleasant," and "meek." Gabriel's address to her further implies her innocence and her purity, for he assures her that, even though God will take "rest and rufe" in her body, this will occur "But hurt of syn or 3it reprufe" (ll. 10-11). This message causes Mary to marvel, although she "silence held but soundis" (l. 14). In Luke's account of the event Mary asks the angel the entirely reasonable question, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"²³ Henryson's

poem, however, emphasizes Mary's simplicity through her silence; she says nothing at all. Mary is thus characterized as modest, humble, and unsophisticated, a characterization which underscores the appropriateness of her selection as the mother of Christ--since she is so unspoiled--but which also provides a sharp contrast to her portrayal at the end of the poem, where she is addressed as the queen of heaven.

The second scene depicts Mary in her chamber, awaiting the birth of her child. She is no longer the frightened, wondering maiden of the first stanza, but rather the contented, acquiescent, expectant mother; we are told that she "Full plesandly applid is, / And blith with barne abidis" (ll. 28-9). Her function as protector of the "God in hir bosum" (l. 50), who in turn protects her, is underscored by the fifth stanza, which encompasses the story of Christ from Nativity to Resurrection. By implying that the accomplishment of the plan for Salvation depended upon Mary's nurturing of Christ, the stanza thereby attests the importance of her contribution to the divine scheme.

The poem's penultimate vision of Mary discloses her ability to intercede for human beings; this vision combines with her previous portrayals as innocent maiden, mother of a baby, and mother of the Saviour, to prepare us for the poem's fourth and final presentation of her as the queen of heaven. After glorifying Mary through an apostrophe couched in the terms of love poetry, the poet implores her to remove his sin, to save him from the devil, and to speed his soul on its way to heaven. This prayer creates a vision of Mary as a kind of Christian warrior who has the power to preserve us from the "Termigant" who hovers expectantly over the deathbed with his "cluke that kene is" (ll. 68-9). In combination with her functions as shown in the previous scenes, the revelation of these abilities of the Virgin serves to prepare the reader for the poem's ultimate pronouncement of Mary as the queen of heaven. The narrative of the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception is thus completed as Mary is transformed from maiden to mother to queen.

From this narrative of Mary's life Henryson draws his larger themes, the power of divine love and the continuity of time. The introductory section of the poem establishes the theme of love's power:

Forcy as deith is likand lufe,
Through quhom al bittir suet is;
No thing is hard, as writ can pruf,
Till him in lufe that letis;
Luf ws fra barret betis. (ll. 1-5)

The poem's very first lines are paradoxical,²⁴ stating that love is as strong as death, and that through love all that is bitter is made sweet. The *conjunctio*²⁵ which binds the bitter and the sweet implies change; that which is bitter actually becomes sweet, recalling to the Christian that the bitter death of Christ leads to the sweetness of salvation which he has purchased. Further, if bitterness can become sweet through love, then nothing is impossible for one who dwells in love; since the poem's narrative proves that Mary does indeed dwell in God's love, an atmosphere of credibility is established for the Immaculate Conception.

Having in the first stanza introduced both the Annunciation narrative and the theme of love, the poet draws upon his second picture of Mary as expectant mother to emphasize the power of divine love, which can make her both mother and maiden: Mary "Wox in hir chaumer chaist with child, / With Crist our kyng that cround is" (ll. 23-4). These lines present to us three of the central Christian paradoxes: the mother who is a virgin, the child who is a king, and the god who is human. In keeping, however, with the poem's intent to illustrate that divine love makes the impossible possible, the focus is on the poet's wonderment that from the "sidis" (l. 33) of this paradoxical being should be born God's son, "Quhilk erd, wattir, and hevinnis cleir / Throw grace and vertu gidis" (ll. 35-6). These last lines describing Jesus seem to echo the account in Genesis of the Creation, thereby affirming the eternal nature of the divine plan by linking past events with present ones. The poem's second theme, the continuity of time, is thus interwoven into the poem.

Having established the essential thematic structure, the poet provides, in the fourth stanza, a kind of gloss on those initial lines (ll. 1-5) which declare the power and strength of love. This stanza, recalling in its construction and substance the epic simile, allegorizes divine love as a river from which miracles flow,²⁶ and as a flame which burns but does not consume:

The miraclis are mekle and meit
 Fra luffis ryver rynniss;
 The low of luf haldand the hete
 Vnbrynt full blithlie brinniss.

(ll. 37-40)

The implicit equation of two such opposites is further proof that with God's love all things are possible, since that love itself can be both fire and water. The flame which burns but does not consume, an allusion to the Biblical account of Moses, was traditionally viewed as a typological event prefiguring

Mary, as were the flowering rod of Aaron and Gideon's fleece, to which the stanza also alludes:

Quhen Gabriell beginnis
With mouth that gudely may to grete,
The wand of Aaron, dry but wete,
To burioun nocht blynnis;
The flesch all donk within is,
Vpon the erd na drop couth fleit;
Sa was that may maid moder suete
And sakeles of all synnis.

(ll. 41-8)

The burning bush, the flowering rod of Aaron, and Gideon's fleece are all examples of God's ability to perform impossible tasks, but they are also symbolic events which prefigure Mary and the virgin birth.

In using such typological events in a poem to honor Mary, Henryson displays considerable originality. Woolf has found only one poem which presents such an accumulation of types²⁷ and that poem, "Mary, maide milde and fre," by William Shoreham (c. 1325) is primarily a list which calls Mary, among other things, "bosche of Sinai," David's "slinge" and "ston," Aaron's "yerd," and the "temple salomon."²⁸ Henryson's poem, in contrast, is particular in its choice of types, using only those which indicate God's selection of an individual for a specific purpose,²⁹ and which show the power of God's love to accomplish the impossible. Henryson's use of these types also supports the notion of time as a continuum, since the Old Testament, past time, is linked with the New Testament, present time, as these *figurae* are linked with the virgin birth. The stanza's last lines reiterate that just as these typological events prove the miraculous power of divine love, so is the conception of Christ accomplished while Mary remains innocent, free from all sin.

Whereas the poem's first four stanzas have focused upon the effect on Mary of divine love, the fifth stanza makes a correlation between that love which protects Mary and the love which Jesus has for humankind; the love of Jesus, of course, is proven by the Crucifixion. This stanza is highly dramatic, taking Mary from maidenhood to the motherhood of God, and simultaneously taking Jesus from conception through Crucifixion to Resurrection. The poet links these two narratives by introducing the stanza with a description of the relationship between Mary and Jesus, a relationship intensely reciprocal, since each is protected by the other:

Hir mervalus haill madinhede
 God in hir bosum bracis,
 And hir diuinite fra dreid
 Hir kept in all casis. (ll. 49-52)

The ambiguous syntax of lines 49 and 50 permit a dual reading: the construction can mean that Mary's "madinhede" embraces Christ in her womb and that the God within her encloses and preserves her chastity.

This discussion of the mutual protection between Mary and Jesus leads directly into the Salvation story, where Christ's role as Protector and Saviour to the larger body of humankind is made manifest. We are told that "The hie God of his gracis / Him self dispisit, ws to speid," and that "He panit for our peacis" (ll. 53-6). The poet thus presents the Crucifixion in a manner traditional in emphasizing Christ's suffering and sacrifice, but unusual in implying Christ's self-effacement as "the hie God" who lowers himself figuratively and literally to earth. This account, consequently, conveys both the temporal and the eternal quality of Christ, since he is simultaneously the human creature whose birth, life, and death in the course of ordinary time prove to us God's love, and the divine creature who, in the course of eternal time, briefly visits earth as part of God's plan to provide salvation. We are shown that that salvation is immediately available after the Resurrection:

Bot quhen he ras vp, as we rede,
 The cherite of his Godhede
 Was plane in euery placis.
 (ll. 58-60)

Christ's earthly tenure is thus completed; the gift of Salvation has been made available to humankind, and Christ himself is restored to his proper place in heaven.

The final stanza, then, returns to Mary; the completion of her transfiguration is juxtaposed with the completion of human time at the point of judgment. There is also in this stanza a completion of poetic time, as the poem's beginning and ending are united by the poet's allusion to Mary's particular characteristic of purity; the poet's appeal to her to make him "chaist" reminds us that her redemptive power derives from her function as the virgin mother of the Saviour; thus the beginning of the poem, which so carefully describes and emphasizes that purity which caused her selection, is linked with the poem's ending, where she is presented as the advocate for humankind.

Clearly, the poem reveals itself to be far more than a traditional paean to Mary which focuses upon the Annunciation. In demonstrating the temporal expressions of divine love--the Old Testament miracles, the virginity of Mary, and Salvation through Christ--the poem particularizes and makes specific the abstract. By interweaving typological events with the poem's chronological narrative of Mary's transfiguration, and by showing how Salvation was prepared for in the past, was made available to humankind in the present, and will be received by us in the future, the poet synthesizes time and timelessness. In this effort to make knowable these two unknowable themes of time and divine love, Henryson's poem far surpasses the received tradition of religious lyrics in which he writes.

In sum, a study of some of Henryson's lesser-known poetry reveals that whether he writes in the form of the pastourelle, the debate, or the lyric, he consistently transcends conventional materials as he reshapes the literary heritage to serve his own time and artistic purposes. His sophisticated manipulation of structure, his thematic expansion, his ingenuity in invoking the mediation of the reader's intellect, and his attempts to explain the significance of the abstract by means of the simple and familiar, clearly demonstrate Henryson's ability to use received forms and subjects, but to use them as vehicles for exploring complex and abstract ideas. The result is that tradition is thus renewed, revived, and therefore preserved, through creative transformation.

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NOTES

¹The most recent edition of Henryson's works is that of Denton Fox, *The Poems of Robert Henryson* (Oxford, 1981). Other editions are those of H. Harvey Wood, *The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson* (1933; rpt. New York, 1968); and Charles Elliott, *Robert Henryson: Poems*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1974).

²See the following studies for general assessments of Henryson, particularly in relation to Chaucer: Denton Fox, "The Scottish Chaucerians," in *Chaucer and Chaucerians*, ed. D.S. Brewer (Alabama, 1966), pp. 164-200; John MacQueen, *Robert Henryson: A Study of the Major Narrative Poems* (Oxford, 1967); and Florence Ridley, "A Plea for the Middle Scots," in *The Learned and the Lewd: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. Larry Benson (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 175-96.

³Henryson's lesser-known poems are considered by A.M. Kinghorn, "The Minor Poems of Robert Henryson," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 1 (1965), 30-40; by I.W.A. Jamieson, "The Minor Poems of Robert Henryson," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 9 (1972), 125-47; by Douglas Gray, *Robert Henryson* (Leiden, 1979), pp. 241-71; and by Robert L. Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, Twayne's English Authors Series 274 (Boston, 1979), pp. 163-80.

⁴"Robene and Makyne" is found in the Bannatyne Manuscript; references are to Denton Fox's edition, *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, pp. 175-79. Line references will be cited in the text.

⁵"The Ressoning Betuix Aige and Yowth" is the customary title for this poem. The poem is found in the Maitland Folio Manuscript, the Bannatyne Manuscript, and the Makculloch Manuscript; since the Makculloch version is incomplete, lacking four stanzas, and since the Bannatyne Manuscript's version shows evidence of editorial tinkering, the Maitland Folio version will be used, as edited by G. Gregory Smith, *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, S.T.S., vol. III (Edinburgh and London, 1908), pp. 121-3. Line references will be cited in the text.

⁶"The Annunciation" is found in the Gray Manuscript; references are to Denton Fox's edition, *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, pp. 154-6. Line references will be cited in the text.

⁷For a brief discussion of the poem's early history see G. Gregory Smith, ed., *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, S.T.S., vol. I (Edinburgh and London, 1914), pp. lv-lviii. See also Florence Ridley's bibliography of the poem in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500*, gen. ed. Albert E. Hartung, vol. 4 (Hamden, Connecticut, 1973), pp. 1157-8.

⁸W. Powell Jones discusses the influence of the Old French pastourelle in "A Source for Henryson's 'Robene and Makyne'?" *Modern Language Notes*, 46 (1931), 457-8. Arthur Moore points out that the poem concerns a universal theme and has no elements exclusively in the pastourelle tradition; see his "Robene and Makyne," *Modern Language Review*, 43 (1948), 400-03. Janet Smith also discounts the likelihood of a French source in *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (Edinburgh, 1934), pp. 42-4. Maureen Fries discusses the poem as an "anti-pastourelle" in "Besides Crisseid: Henryson's Other Women" in *Actes du 2^{me} colloque de langue et de littérature*

écossaises (Strasbourg, 1979), pp. 250-67. See also Kindrick's discussion of the points of comparison between the system of love in "Robene and Makyne" and the pastourelle tradition, pp. 164-6.

⁹See, for example, "The Not-Browne Mayd" in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, ed. Henry B. Wheatley (1886; rpt. New York, 1965), II, 179-99; and "The Murning Maiden" in *The Maitland Folio Manuscript*, ed. W.A. Craigie, S.T.S., vol. I (Edinburgh and London, 1919), pp. 360-4. G. Gregory Smith refers to Adam de la Halle's "Li Gieus de Robin et de Marion," in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, vol. I, p. lvi; and W. Powell Jones refers to a similar poem by Baudes de la Kakerie, pp. 457-8.

¹⁰G. Gregory Smith notes that while Makyne is "a common name for a woman or girl" in the pastourelle, the name was sometimes used as a synonym for "slut or wanton"; Smith, *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, vol. I, p. 59. Since we are told that Makyne has loved Robene for two or three years and that she is still a virgin, the use of the name by Henryson should not be construed as necessarily indicating promiscuity, although it may imply an earthiness which Makyne seems to embody. She is, however, well-versed in *amour courtois*.

¹¹David Murison comments on the "fine character study" of Makyne, but the study of Robene is equally interesting and as skillfully done, encompassing as complete a reversal as does the character of Makyne. See Murison's *Selections from the Poems of Robert Henryson* (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 47. Robene's characterization is also analyzed by Gray, pp. 266-8.

¹²John MacQueen translates line 72 as "What has love against me?" in his *Ballatis of Luve* (Edinburgh, 1970), p. 14.

¹³H. Harvey Wood has said that the poem contains a climax and an anti-climax, but in fact the poem reaches two separate culminations, one for each half of the poem, as the poem's second half is a mirror image of the first half. See Wood, *Edinburgh Essays on Scots Literature* (1933; rpt. Freeport, N.Y., 1968), p. 20.

¹⁴Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968), p. 89.

¹⁵Matthew P. McDiarmid describes Aige's attitude toward Youth as "a denigratory dismissal of its natural hopes," in "Robert Henryson in His Poems," in *Bards and Makars*, eds. A.J. Aitken, M.P. McDiarmid, and D.S. Thomson (Glasgow, 1977), p. 31.

¹⁶For a discussion of these poems on death see Rosemary Woolf, especially pages 309-55. See also A.M. Kinghorn's essay on the treatment of death in Scots poetry, "Death and the Makars: Timor Mortis in Scottish Poetry to 1600," *English Studies*, 60 (1979), 2-13.

¹⁷A poem detailing the Signs of Old Age is "Le Regret de Maximian" in *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford, 1932), pp. 92-100; a poem referring to the Signs of Death is "Proprietates Mortis," also found in Brown, p. 130.

¹⁸The Bannatyne Manuscript supplies the word "no" which should go between "haif" and "ressoun." See *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, ed. W. Tod Ritchie, S.T.S., vol. 2 (Edinburgh and London, 1928), pp. 137-9.

¹⁹This arrangement of the stanzas is another reason for choosing the Maitland Folio Manuscript; in Maitland the stanzas reflect an orderly progression in the young man's speeches from remarks about his outer appearance, to his inner condition, and then to his plans for enjoying his youthful vigor among the ladies at court. This arrangement of stanzas also provides a building of emotion in the old man, who finally explodes in anger after the youth's last speech about future love-making. The Bannatyne Manuscript has a different arrangement of stanzas; assuming that the verses in Maitland are numbered in order from 1 to 9, Bannatyne has the following order: 1-2-3-7-8-5-6-9. This order has the youth speak first of his outer appearance, then of his dreams of love at court, and then of his inner condition; the old man's angry outburst comes then not at the end of the poem but in the middle, so that the last third of the debate in Bannatyne (Maitland's stanzas 5 and 6) is anticlimactic. The Bannatyne Manuscript Draft has an even stranger arrangement, being arranged 1-2-3-7-4-8-5-6-9. See *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, S.T.S., vol. 1 (Edinburgh and London, 1934), pp. 68-71. The Makculloch Manuscript has stanzas 1-2-3-4-7 and is, of course, incomplete. See *Pieces from the Makculloch and the Gray Manuscripts together with the Chepman and Myllar Prints*, ed. George Stevenson, S.T.S. (Edinburgh and London, 1918), pp. 22-3.

²⁰The Maitland Folio Manuscript has "Cleinz"; Bannatyne supplies "Clenely."

²¹I.W.A. Jamieson discusses three characteristics in warning poems which are found in Henryson's work: the individual's physical decay, corresponding physical decay in nature, and the dramatic presentation of the threat in one who has experienced old age. Only the first and the last are factors in this poem. See Jamieson, pp. 127-8.

²²Woolf, pp. 11 and 129-34.

²³Luke 1:34.

²⁴Rosemary Woolf has shown that the techniques of typology and paradox, two traditional theological means of honoring Mary, were not widely transferred into religious lyric poetry. Henryson, however, employs both those techniques to develop the essential idea of his poem that, with divine love, all things are possible. See Woolf, pp. 130-1.

²⁵*conjunctio*: the linking of two contradictory things as though they were similar. Lee A. Sonnino lists the terms of classical rhetoric in *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (New York, 1968).

²⁶Although John Stephens asserts that Henryson has "generalized" conventional imagery which posited Christ as the well of salvation and Mary as the well of mercy or grace, Henryson seems, instead, to be working with unconventional imagery; the poem clearly states that "luffis ryuer" is the source of miracles "mekle and meit," among which miracles are the unconsuming flame, the flowering wand of Aaron, the moist "flesch" which lies upon the dry earth, and, of course, the Immaculate Conception. God's love is the source and substance of the river and the Old Testament miracles, the Virgin Birth, and Salvation through Jesus are all *products* of that river of love. See Stephens, "Devotion and Wit in Henryson's 'The Annunciation,'" *English Studies*, 51 (1970), 22.

²⁷Woolf, p. 130.

²⁸The poem can be found in *Middle English Lyrics*, eds. Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman (New York, 1974), pp. 185-7.

²⁹For a discussion of this point, see Charles A. Hallett, "Theme and Structure in Henryson's 'The Annunciation,'" *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 10 (1973), 169.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCOTTISH LANGUAGE AND
LITERATURE - MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE

Scottish Studies Centre of the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität
Mainz in Germersheim, 26-31 July 1984

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