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Poetical Invention and Ethical Wisdom
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Lindsay's concern for morality and truthfulness, in an age when political and religious institutions were notoriously corrupt, earned him a considerable reputation in his lifetime. Indeed for later generations of Scottish readers, Lindsay's name became a byword for reliability and truthfulness, at times even rivalling divine Scripture. Douglas Hamer, in his edition of *The Monarche*, recounts "the well-known story of the Scottish farmer, who, when on his death-bed, was asked if he would like the Bible read to him, to comfort his passing. He replied with some vigor, 'Hout awa' wi' your daft nonsense [the Bible!] bring me Davie Lindsay.'"¹ While enthusiasm for *The Monarche* has since dropped off dramatically, Lindsay is still often read too simply in terms of his didactic intent. Murison, for

¹Hamer also notes a telling of the story with a slightly different retort: 'Hoot awa! bring me Davie Lindsay. That [the Bible]'s a made story!'" and cites two Scottish proverbs showing Lindsay as a standard of truth: "You'll no find that in Davie Lindsay," and "It's no between the brods o' Davie Lindsay." He goes on to point out that editions of Lindsay's *Works* far outnumber those of any other early Scottish poet. While Lindsay's later popularity rested largely on *The Monarche* and was confined to the "humble classes," it did last well into the eighteenth century. As the frequent references to Lindsay in Scott's novels demonstrate, Lindsay was accepted by the people "in two ways, as a standard of religious faith and truth and as a standard of poetry" (*The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount*, III, STS, 3rd Series, VI [Edinburgh, 1934], 242-5).

example, sees Lindsay as a vigorous but straightforward populist writer, whose "poetry and drama, overflowing with humour and satire, appealed to the eyes, the ears, the feelings of thousands whose minds remained cold and irresponsible to sermons and theological disquisitions."² Certainly Lindsay's message was remarkably consistent throughout his career, and clearly he meant that message to produce effective reformation of contemporary society. However, what is frequently obscured by the emphasis on the didactic content of Lindsay's satire is the important role played by poetic invention in recovering a truthful ethic for contemporary experience. While the content of Lindsay's satire remains remarkably consistent throughout his life, the literary methods he chooses to embody that message are constantly changing. For just as Lindsay's satire seeks to test out and recover what is good in inherited religious and political institutions, so too does it seek to recuperate traditional rhetoric and poetic invention. But the complex relationship that develops between signifier and signified in Lindsay's poetry is a recognition of the difficulties involved in imaginatively and actively incarnating such wisdom in the present moment.

A case in point is the early and neglected "Testament of the Papyngo." For the most part the poem is either ignored or compared unfavorably in terms of subject matter and popular appeal with Lindsay's later morality drama, *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis*. However, the fragmented nature of "The Testament of the Papyngo," its structural indeterminacies and tonal ambiguities, should rather be understood as a deconstruction of traditional forms of satire so that they can once again accurately mirror the highest truths. Traditional medieval satire sought to remind its audience of the essential interconnectedness of signifier and signified, of the Book of Nature and Scripture and the mind and will of God. Both human reason and feelings might be invoked when necessary, but only insofar as they could serve to bring our fallen understanding in tune with universal truth. The activities of the poetaster narrator in "The Testament," especially his emphasis on an eloquence founded entirely on a debased rhetoric and personal experience, find a comic exemplification in the subject he chooses for his poem. However, a recognition of the initial failings of the parrot and his tale-teller also serves to point out the nature of the parrot's success at the end of the poem. If by that point this most subjective and artificial of situations, through its concentration on the problems of "fenzit" and "unfenzit," of art and life, does express some truth about the contemporary Scottish situation, it is because we are now better able, as active participants in the narrative, to create an imaginative experience

²W. Murison, *Sir David Lyndsay: Poet and Satirist of the Old Church in Scotland* (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 203-4.

from which we derive wisdom. The depiction of the parrot as both fallen courtier-poet and unique voice for ethical truth forces the poem's readers into a new exploration of mimesis, one which acknowledges and incorporates into its poetic reality the disconnectedness of things, especially the disconnectedness of language and ethical behavior in this world. In this way the subtext of "The Testament" deconstructs and opens up the generically closed forms of allegory, complaint *speculum*, and analogizing satire in order to admit true reformation, thereby acknowledging the subversive power of human language (originating and arising in the subjective will) and the difficulty of synthesizing it with that other, higher language (arising from the pre-ordinate will of God).

Our first impression of the Prologue is a deceptively simple one: yet another conventionally immodest version of the modesty topos, a display of technical virtuosity masquerading as the search for a theme. Typically, in the first two stanzas of the Prologue we hear the individual voice struggling unsuccessfully to imitate the achievements of a golden past. We are asked to imagine poetical perfection—"Ingyne Angelicall," "sapience more than Salamonically," "I not quhat mater put in memorie" (1-3)³—only to be told that the old poets have already dealt sublimely with that. However, from the poet's opening "Suppose," his verbal pyrotechnics push us forward into present poetic efforts and keep our attention focused on this poet's technical virtuosity. The enjambement between the last and first lines of stanzas one and two, three and four, and the way in which the syntax of each two-stanza unit interlocks for rhetorical ebb and flow, give a driving force and vigor to the lists of poets. Indeed, stanzas five and six explode in a celebration of the concrete and the individual, as the established poetic hierarchy gives way to the present-day scramble of producing court poetry. The interlacing of name after name building up to the climax of Ballentyne echoes the very flux of artistic creation. And the unstable court provides a fitting background for these poets not yet stelled in the timeless immortality of the literary pantheon. Nor does the listing of "makars" in these stanzas achieve any rhetorical climax suggestive of calm, eternal truths. Instead it is the least secure reputation, that of "One cunning Clerk," who "now, of lait is start vpe, haistelie" (49-50), which ends the list. Indeed, Ballentyne's future depends not so much upon his own talent but upon events outside himself at court for

³Douglas Hamer, ed., *The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount*, I, STS, 3rd Series, I (1931), 55-90. All quotations from Lindsay's "Testament" are from this edition, with line numbers in parentheses in the text.

Gett he in to courte auctoritie,
He wyll precell Quintyng and Kennetic. (53-4)

Moreover, the Prologue's own attempt at "precellment," far from duplicating the "Ingyne Angelicall" and "sapience more than Salamonicall" of the old poets, appears to end in simple verbal and stylistic one-up-manship. Our poet, it seems, can produce nothing more than a tale of a parrot, the ultimate, it would seem, in style for its own sake.

The poet's concentration on verbal ingenuity and the search for a theme might be seen as no more than a particularly clear example of the limited role assigned to *inventio* in medieval rhetoric. According to Robert O. Payne,

The theory of knowledge which orthodox Christianity produced placed rigid limits on what man could discover, even through the best exercise of his rational faculties....Post-Augustinian rhetoric assumes on the one hand a constant human psychology and on the other a constant supra-human order of value. It is the business of the rhetorician-poet to choose from the variety of possible inconstant linguistic means the ones which will successfully connect the two.

Poetry as an art must remain, as long as the framework of medieval belief stood, a process of arousing favorable responses to a fittingly dignified statement of pre-existing truths...Thus *inventio*, if it remains in the discussion at all, becomes a process of verbal ingenuity or a search for a theme.⁴

But rhetorical invention in the Prologue subverts this prescription to portray universal truth. It very clearly leads us away from pre-existing truths, from any kind of objective meaning. Instead, this poet's approach to art is totally subjective. He writes, he insists, solely from his own experience, choosing in his tale of a wounded courtier-parrot the most artificial of fable-genres. And in stressing the arbitrary and subjective qualities of his subject the poet yokes both experience and artifice to his own desire for personal "precellment" and stylistic display. The Prologue ends, then, apparently caught up in the flux of the present moment, in the telling of a story as end in itself. In this way, its "invention" of a parrot-like poetaster places any discussion of poetic truth within an entirely fictive framework, and thus apparently within the context of an entirely meaningless game. In a pinch the poet can declare of his poem: "I maid it bot in mowis, / To landwart lassis quhilks kepith kye and 3owis" (71-2). The Prologue thus highlights the moral and theoretical inconsistencies inherent in contemporary poetic invention, apparently far removed from the method which, un-

⁴Robert O. Payne, *The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics* (New Haven, Conn., 1963), pp. 44, 46.

der Aristotle and Cicero, was used to make the best or most useful decisions about the type of question "about which, because of the nature of man and the universe, certainty is impossible or practical application of it open to doubt."⁵ The rules of the game here appear to establish the present fiction as the ultimate "other" situation. It is supposedly not written for our edification but rather as a totally inconsequential tale, far from our concerns and situations, whose genesis lies in the personal ambitions of the poet.

Certainly the initial, perhaps strongest, structural movement in the Prologue is this forward, downward spiral—from a formal, hierarchical golden past to the scrambling, subjective and fluid present. But within the deconstructing "game" of the Prologue's rhetoric lies another structure that is concerned with the invention of meaningful fiction, one embodying an eloquent wisdom that will address the type of question about which "certainty is impossible or practical application of it open to doubt." The opening two stanzas of the Prologue evoke first those unnamed Latin and Greek masters of the high style and then those masters of "our vulgare toung" (including not only the expected English triumvirate of Chaucer-Gower-Lydgate but the Scottish masters Kennedy and Dunbar as well). Stanzas three and four address the more recently dead Scots poets, those who "Thocht they be ded, *thar* libells bene leuand" (20), a group dominated by Gavin Douglas. The third grouping contains that explosion of names and individuals still living, and therefore not yet established, fellow court poets struggling for "precellment." Finally, the Prologue ends with the example of the present poet searching vainly for a subject in the barren soil of an exhausted present and finding only the complaint of a wounded parrot. Thus the Prologue's structure at its beginning and end emphasizes two contrasting and apparently contradictory images. First is the pantheon of long-dead and great poets, whose eternal fame reminds us of the presence of some kind of universal truth, a transcendent reality transcending our "dull Intellygence" (9). At the opposite extreme are the contemporary poets, caught in a present where traditional rhetorical invention seems to exist simply as an opportunity for poetic "precellment" and court advancement. Yet at the center of the Prologue, midway between the unattainable past and the unsatisfactorily vapid present, amongst those poets recently dead and not yet stellified, lies the example of Gavin Douglas's eloquent wisdom. Unusually, in the Prologue's list of "makars," it is the recently dead Gavin Douglas who is given pride of place and who receives many of the accolades traditionally reserved for the Chaucer-Gower-Lydgate triumvirate:

⁵Payne, p. 44.

in our Inglis rethorick, the rose,
 As of Rubeis the Charbunkle bene chose:
 And, as Phebus dois Synthia presell,
 So Gawane Dowglas, Byschope of Dunkell.... (24-7)

The poet draws attention to Douglas's "prerogatyue" when alive, "Boith in pratick and speculatioun" (30), and focuses in particular on his "trew Translatioun" (33) of Virgil and his "gret Ingyne, / Als weill in Naturall Science as Deuyne" (35-6). The example of Gavin Douglas's truthful eloquence is, at this point, a reminder of the existence of a larger, objective truth and of a significant, ethical role for the poet's rhetoric in realizing that truth in the contemporary world. In this way, perhaps, his presence at the center of the Prologue provides the possibility of linking individual poetic experience with the universal truth represented by the pantheon of dead poets, of imitative invention that goes beyond simple stylistic imitation.

It would appear, then, that Lindsay has in mind certain parallels between the poet's interpretation of experience and tradition and the translator's role as outlined and practiced by Douglas. If so, one must view Lindsay's handling of the fictive frame of his poem in light of Douglas's strictures about the need for poet/translator both to interpret and to revise a tradition in order to make it comprehensible and worthwhile *and* to remain true to its essential nature. Both in Douglas's prefaces to his translation of *The Aeneid* and in the *Palice of Honor*, the contemporary moment and the poetic self composing in it are seen as sites of danger, open to failure, ridicule, burlesque, and yet at the same time creative and real in their referential power, in their ability to signal a truly national and personal style and identity and to be truthful to the unique present situation. For Douglas, however, this depends upon the creation of a literary (and personalized) language and stylistic register that define and create themselves by multiple, simultaneous reference (to Chaucer, Virgil, the composing self, contemporary Scotland) but which ultimately are not trapped in any one of those references. Douglas creates his own literary register by manipulating his target language (Scots) into a competitive position with his source language (Virgil's Latin). In turn Virgil forms a shield against the influence of Chaucer (his other source "language" as a Scots poet writing in the vernacular). The result is a mixed style, neither popular Scots nor Chaucerian English, a style like Lindsay's in its fusion of high seriousness with humor.⁶

⁶I am indebted to Ruth Morse ("Gavin Douglas: Translation as Referral," unpublished paper delivered at the 24th International Congress, The Medieval Institute, Kalama-

Ultimately Lindsay's rhetorical goal is the innately conservative one of the traditional satirist: to recover and re-establish essential truths of ethical behavior that have been lost or subverted by contemporary society. But the *Book of Nature* cannot be read as simply and as easily as in a golden past (as the poet makes clear in his Prologue to "The Testament," the stars are very far from the experience of the present poet). Therefore it has become all the more important to focus attention on the act of translation/recuperation—both that of the poet (with poetic invention as prime medium of instruction and improvement) and that of the individual reader. The Prologue, then, in its collision of a closed formalist poetic with a more open idea of rhetorical process, provides a frame of reference for the satire of the poem as a whole. For the rest of the poem exists in tension between the need to discover objective truth in the fact of a common shared experience (the continued reference to serious "materie" outside the poem—Scottish history, the necessity for good governance both political, personal, and ecclesiastical) and the difficulty of seeing beyond a fragmented, subjective, and delusory reality. Because we are forced into an awareness of the importance of context, of the way in which intent and effect are matched or discrepant, we are forced to make our own translation of art and experience, as it were, because we cannot be content with this poet's, or his parrot's, paraphrases of reality and art.

The problems encountered by the poet in the Prologue are for the rest of the poem proper imaginatively incarnated in the figure of the Papyngo. The parrot is a complex referent that collapses into one figure a variety of stylistic and symbolic references. In the various rhetorical styles and genres she adopts to tell her story, she enacts the different types of poetic endeavor described in the Prologue—the received wisdom of old poets, Douglas's attempts to present truth in the contemporary moment, the struggle for "precellment" among contemporary poets, even the poetaster stylistics of the Prologue's narrator. Symbolically, the parrot's fall can also be read in a variety of ways: as a stylistic fall from high style to burlesque comedy, as a worldly fall (elaborated in the *O Fortune!* complaints that follow), and on a higher level, as a re-enactment of the first *felix culpa* (for out of the parrot's mortal error and fall comes the possibility of redeeming the body and language in the rest of the poem). Most important, perhaps, is the way in which the parrot as signifier remains so open-ended. Initially, the parrot, who "of hir Inclynatioun naturall, / . . . Countrafaitit all fowlis, les and more" (89-90), evokes the idea of simple mimicry, the debasement of language to meaningless sounds without symbolic power except in the

zoo, Michigan, 1989) and David Parkinson ("*Aeneid VI, Palice of Honour, and Eneados VI*," also delivered at Kalamazoo, 1989) for suggesting these uses that Douglas makes of the mixed style and translation.

most simplistic, "natural" way. But the parrot is also an apt figure of the complexities of the courtier/poet's situation. For as "simpyll servetoure" (85) to the King she tells people what they want to hear. Yet her language "artificall" (87), reminiscent of the "Ornate werkis" (45, 52) and "termes aureait" (16) of the poet in the Prologue, clearly has pretensions to the high style and its promise of a transcendent, meaningful artifice. Thus implicit in the doomed fall of the overweight parrot whose "kynd" it is to climb "aye, to the hycht" (162) is a complex figure of the human situation: a ridiculous fat body, heavy and earthbound, yet straining to soar heavenward.

The overwhelming effect of the poetry between the Prologue and the Papyngo's first epistle is bathetic. Whereas the Prologue had demonstrated a convention adapted by Lindsay and, stylistically at least, vigorously adopted by the poet, the beginning of the Complaint proper is at its best mediocre, "high-style" description, and at its worst shown to be radically at odds with its context. The poet who seven lines previously had been complaining of "mater . . . So rude / Off sentence, and Rethoricke denude" (64-5), opens the present complaint with the crudest possible kind of one-to-one moralitas-fable correspondence:

Quho clymmis to hycht, *perforce* his feit mon fail;
 Expreme I sal that be Experience,
 Geue that 3ow pleis to heir one pietous tail,
 How one fair Bird be faitell violence
 Deuorit was, and myght mak no defence
 Contrare the deth, so fail3eit naturall strenth:
 As efter I sall schaw 3ow at more lenth. (73-9)

In using a proverbial *sententia* to introduce his tale, the poet's implied assumption is that just as a proverb arises out of experiential wisdom, so too its use here will describe meaningfully what follows. But in the case of this example of an *O Fortune!* proverb it is difficult to tell which comes first, "sentence" or "mater," and indeed what relationship really exists between the abstract idea of Fortune and Boethian tragedy and this story of a self-indulgent parrot who falls because he is too fat. Our misgivings arise most likely from the easy "Expreme I sal that be Experience." What follows is a tissue of conventional responses, no more heart-felt experience it would seem than a proverb is necessarily expressive of universal truths. Both can be made to say and mean anything, something the poet appears intent on in turning a spoilt parrot into a tragic hero.

But the parrot-like aspects of the poet's eloquence most obviously manifest themselves in the background to the Complaint—the landscape, the day's astrological genesis, the bird's ascent and fall. This section is as

long as the Prologue, and in it the poet employs several highly conventional techniques to set the mood and show his poetic skill. But unlike the Prologue's success as illusion, this use of convention reveals an imitative mediocrity and a mawkishly "literary" self-consciousness. Lines 104-7, while creakily "poetic" in their use of alliteration and aureate diction ("flowris fresche, fragrant, and formose," "cloudis sabyll...Beamys amyabyll"), do not descend to outright burlesque. But the astrological motif that takes up three of the six introductory stanzas, and mentions nearly every planetary deity in the pantheon, amounts to literary overkill:

That day did Phebus...
 That daye Cupido...
 Uenus, that daye...
 That daye Neptunus...
 That daye dame Nature...
 And retrograde wes Mars in Capricorne,
 And Synthia in Sagitter assesit;
 That daye dame Ceres...
 That daye, be Iono... (122-34).

Such blatantly mismanaged *repetitio* strains the reader's credulity as much as the forced *sententia* that opened this section. "Of Rethoryke denude," indeed, are such attempts at the high style. Phrases like "So, mycht I saye, my schorte solace, allace" (148) collapse in self-parody when placed beside the tradition that they are attempting to echo.⁷ Throughout, these attempts at the literary high style are broken up by the comic intrusions of this fiction's reality, its undeniably low context firmly fixed in a material existence. Thus portentous statements like

Wardlie plesour bene so variabyll
 Myxit with sorrow, dreid, and Inconstance,
 That thare in tyll is no contyneuance (145-7)

raise expectations that cannot possibly be fulfilled (and are not) by the action that follows. The reader is made to feel a literary vagrant as he is forcibly lifted from one literary cliché to another: from paradisaical garden, to portentous astrological description, to proverbial moral, only to end in the thoroughly deserved and comically literal fall of a proud and fat parrot.

These tonal inconsistencies reach a climax in the description of the actual fall of the parrot. Once free of our gracious narrator the bird "began

⁷See, for example, a similar plaint from Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* (ll. 685-6): "...I have lorn / My blysse; alas, that I was born!"

to speill, rycht spedalie, / And in that tree scho did so heych ascende" (154-5). The narrator's genteel attempts to bring the bird down—

Sweit bird...Be war, mont nocht over hie;
Returne in tyme; perchance they feit may failze (157-8)

—collapse into absurdity with the intrusion of an unwelcome reality: "Thov art rycht fat, and nocht weill vsit to fle" (159). This arbitrariness of the narrator in describing the parrot's situation, attempting to turn it into something it is not, emphasizes the sententious qualities of the tale. The situation as described positively cries out for allegorical "significance" to be drawn from it. Statements like "It is my kynd to clym, aye, to the hyght" (162) and the interpretation of her fate in terms of a false, fickle Fortune (both by the poet and the parrot herself) elaborate the traditional image of the parrot as exemplar of the court's slavish and superficial mimicry of the whims of the King. But the parrot's grandiloquent claim "It is my kynd to clym, aye, to the hyght," is echoed by the poet's mythological tag, "Bot Boreas blew one blast..." (166). And we are reminded of the fact that the poet himself subscribes to the very vices that one might traditionally think satirized through the courtier-parrot. Both parrot and poet, then, are quickly brought down to earth with the rapid series of events culminating in her fatal wound. The sheer inconsequentiality of a fat, boastful parrot brought to grief by a broken branch undercuts the grandiloquence of the parrot's appeal to Nature—"For to complene my fait Infortunate" (178)—and the posturings of the narrator attempting to echo Lydgate viewing the Black Knight:

With sory hart, peirst with compassioun,
And salt teris distellyng frome myne Eine,
To heir that birdis lamentatioun
I did aproche, onder ane hauthorne grene,
Quhare I mycht heir and se, and be vnsene.⁸

⁸Cf. Lydgate, "A Complaynt of a Lovers Lyfe" (211-7):

Let hym of routhe-ley to audyence
With deleful chere and sobre contenaunce
To here this man, by ful high sentence,
His mortal wo and his [grete] perturbaunce:
Compleynyng now lying in a trauce
With loke[s] vp-cast and [with] ruful chere
Th'effect of which[e] was as ye shal here:

(John Norton-Smith, ed., *John Lydgate "Poems"*, Clarendon Medieval and Tudor Series [Oxford, 1966], p. 53).

Within such a context the parrot's lament, "O fals Fortune, quhy hes thov me begylit..." (192), challenges the universal validity of linguistic conventions in describing a situation. One is taken back by this ever-so-elloquent and rhetorical of laments to the questions about truth raised in the Prologue. For only in the most literal and least significant way can one claim the beguilement of false Fortune in the case of the parrot. Morally, her invocation of Fortune amounts to a kind of double-think, excusing her from responsibility for a situation that is her own fault. Rhetorically, the attempt to glorify the relatively tawdry plight of the parrot by recourse to a false fortune topos produces an effect more bathetic than pathetic. To broach weighty issues of fortune and free-will, appetite and reason, within the present highly ambiguous context of an artificial and personally motivated literary intent is to rob them of any absolute meaning. The poet's narrative posturings for rhetorical effect,

Quhydder that I wes strickin in extasie,
Or through one stark Imagynatioun
Bot it apperit, in myne Fantasie,
I hard this dolent lamentatioun (220-3),

indicate a glib expediency approaching cynicism. Such glaringly obvious and misapplied borrowings from poetic tradition provoke a radical scepticism about the naive poet and his subject that we carry with us to the "unfenzit" epistles of the parrot that follow. What began as a totally inconsequential, delightful situation has by its very inconsequentiality in approaching language and experience thrown into question our basic assumptions about poetic and experiential truth.

But this burlesque subjective voice dissolves as the parrot attempts to embody conventional wisdom in the familiar tropes of the complaints, seeking to become a transparent and true mirror of the past capable of translating and transforming a degenerate present. The first complaint, the epistle to the King, might be drawn directly from a contemporary *speculum principis*. It is full of good advice—"good" in the sense of having the weight of past authority behind it. But its thoroughly conventional wisdom, with its advocacy of past "ensamples" for current affairs, is not, like the previous use of courtly poetic conventions, undercut by a reductive comic tone. Indeed it is hard to distinguish the parrot here from a multitude of medieval complainers and advisers. The very abstraction and conventionality of these epistles, their "parroting" of medieval conventions and patterns of thought, has much to say about the effectiveness of complaint—first in describing, and then in reforming, contemporary vices. Together, the two epistles develop the idea of *speculum* in such a way as to

fit individual action and responsibility into a universal, objective pattern.
To the King,

The Cronecklis to knaw I the exhorte,
Quhilk may be myrrou to thy Majestie:
Thare sall thov fund both gude & euyll reporte
Off euerilk Prince, efter his qualytie:
Thocht thay be ded, thare deidis sall nocht dee.
Traist weill, thov salbe stylit, in that storie,
As thov deseruis putt in memorie.
Request that Roye, quhilk rent wes on the rude,
The to defend frome dedis of defame,
That no Poyte reporte of the bot gude:
For princes dayis Induris bot ane drame. (311-20)

There is, of course, an implicit comparison with his remarks in the Prologue about the universal, eternal quality of "good" poetry, that which is in the "memorie." Both manifest an analogizing approach to human action and history which reaches its climax in the second epistle. Here the parrot attempts her own chronicle, which is to be "Ane Myrrou of those mutabiliteis: / So may ze [i.e., the courtiers] knaw the courtis inconstance" (522-3). Everything obeys this thematic pattern. Contemporary experience is abstracted according to the conventions of complaint verse: "sum tyme," "sum in court,"

Fonde fenzeit fulis and flatteraris
For small seruyce optenith gret rewardis;
Pandaris, pykthankis, custronis, and clatterar is
Loupis vp frome laddis, sine lychtis amang lardis;
Blasphematours, beggaris, and commoun bardis
Sum tyme in courte hes more auctoritie
Nor deuote Doctouris in Diuinitie.... (388-94)

Description by type seems to go hand in hand with typical phrases and images. Similarly, when the parrot comes to Scottish history, the brief summary of each reign provides a pithy "ensample" of a high or low moment on Fortune's wheel and of the inevitable mutability of her court. Nor is this conventional poetry the laughable hackwork of the parrot's introductory plaint against Fortune. For there is real rhetorical skill in phrases like:

At morne, ane king with sceptour, sweird, and croun;
Att ewin, ane dede deformit carioun. (484-5)

Nor can one deny the abstract truth of these thematic patterns which reach their logical conclusion in that "constant court"

Quhar Christ bene king, quhose tyme interminabyll
 And heych tryumphant glore beis neuer gone.
 That quyet court, myrthfull and Immutabyll,
 But variance, standith aye ferme and stabyll.
 Dissimilance, flattray, nor fals reporte
 In to that court sall neuer get resorte. (613-8)

Certainly such an image of perfection is typical of the orthodox medieval view and should provide the calm center of universal validity for the pattern of action advocated by the parrot.⁹

But these statements come not from a disembodied, objectified tradition, nor even directly from the poet, but from the mouth of a parrot. Even when the poet speaks directly in the *Prolgoue*, the traditional ways for the poet to abstract and universalize are not exploited. "Memorie" is beyond this poet; he chooses the parrot's experience. His list of "makars" ends not in Christ's court but rather in the very flux of the present-day at the court of James V. In the parrot's final epistle there is a similar hec-toring, overly persuasive quality. She pulls out all the stops: exemplary chronicle follows abstract complaint and is in turn followed by a long line of *ubi sunt* examples, ending only with Christ's court and a repetition of "Traist well" and the assurance that "this is no fenzeit fare" (619). Yet at the same time the jocular "Adieu" of the parrot to Edinburgh, "Snowdon," and Falkland (626-46) forcibly reminds us that this is "fenzeit fare." The dissonance between the formal correctness of the complaints and their context, the sense one has of them as a series of discrete, detachable elements, would appear to question the effectiveness of the impersonal and overly conceptual nature of the complaint form and suggest its potential to function as a convenient escape valve that encourages inaction as much as action.

When the parrot re-emerges as embodied voice in the final beast-fable section of the poem, it is the literal body of the parrot which becomes the source of authority. It is now in the figure itself, not the symbolic reality which the figure is intended to embody, that we must search for truth. At this point the parrot is invoked as an exotic, eastern bird, embodying worldly experience (travel and popular wisdom and experience). Similarly, as an allegorist, whose "story" is one of known history and personal experience, the parrot in the final section also draws attention to the medium used to embody the message, thereby re-authorizing personal ex-

⁹Cf., for example, Dunbar's "Lament for the Makaris" (esp. ll. 93-100).

perience and phenomenological reality as sites of debate and meaning. Finally, when literally silenced, her body dismembered and devoured by the voracious carrion birds, the parrot remains an eloquent and speaking picture whose true meaning can only be voiced by the reader. The literal body of the trope thus bears out, embodies, the "meaning" expounded by it, and the audience's role (the role of subjective receptor) is acknowledged, challenged and valorized. In this way the world of experience (based on a sensory reality so often dismissed as mere "illusion" in the metaphoric translations of traditional satire) can be authorized as the site for a truth no longer reliably signalled by traditional institutions.

The examples of the Pie, Raven, and Kite show how the abstractions and transcendental patterns of the two epistles can be twisted to "reason" the individual into subjective excesses, how these objective truths when handled glibly can mask a merciless, because total, self-absorption. The Pie, for example, on meeting the dying Papyngo uses the easy relationship between signifier and signified found in the previous epistles in a way that now justifies a deceiving and fatal superficiality. "I am a canon regular," he declares, "my white rochet signifies my clean life, my black is a memorial of death; therefore, I think you should submit all your goods to my care for you now know I am a holy creature" (654-60). Faced with the formal, symbolic correctness of the three ecclesiastical birds, the Papyngo evades the closure of the traditional semiotic structure by articulating her suspicions in terms of subjective, phenomenological experience:

I did persaue, quhen preuelye ze did pyke
Ane chekin frome ane hen, vnder an dyke (678-9)

and later,

Ȝour facunde wordis fair,
Full sore I dreid, be contrar to Ȝour dedis.
The wyffis of the village cryis, with cair,
Quhen thai persaue Ȝour muow ouirthort thar medis (710-13)

finally concluding, "I heir men saye, ze bene one Ypocrite" (719). She longs for the "nobyll Nychtingall," the "gentyll Ia," the "Merle," and the "Turtur trew" (724-5) to be present. Moreover, at this point the parrot becomes herself a story-teller when the Kite asks her to

Declare to ws soom causis reasonabyll,
Quhy we bene haldin so abhomynabyll. (743-4)

For supposedly the Papyngo is specially endowed to be a satirist:

Be thy trauell thow hes Experience,
 First beand bred in to the Orient,
 Syne, be thy gude seruyce and delygence
 To Prencis maid heir in the Occident,

and therefore,

Thow knowis the vulgare pepyllis Iugement. (745-9)

The parrot agrees that

All that lysis in my Memoryall
 I sall declare, with trew vnfenzzeit hart. (767-8)

But it turns out that what rests in her memory as a result of long experience is a history of the Church that we all should know. What separates it from the kind of history given in the epistles is the very fact that this history now seems personally felt and experienced.

Earlier in the Complaint, the objective story of the Papyngo (her "high style" sententiousness) was in radical disjunction with the actual fable being enacted (the bathetic phenomenon of a fat, overblown parrot). Now, objective story (the history of the Church's degeneration) emerges out of personal experience, and, moreover, is tested out and proved by the phenomenological experience of the fable context being acted out before us. The parrot's personal experience as a result of her travels enacts in words the story of ecclesiastical history we all should know; personal story mirrors objective history. In turn, the present fable context validates both personal and general history, as the parrot is ruthlessly dismembered by an avaricious clergy. Moreover, the fact that truth is found in the literal figure rather than its allegorical significance (i.e., in the "real" story of a bird/parrot) authorizes our own personal stories and interpretations. We cannot remain blind to what is happening in the story/fable. Yet we are acutely aware that we are in danger of suffering the Papyngo's fate in our lives unless we maintain this multiple perspective on the narrative that is our own life story.

In this way Lindsay sets up a mirroring effect by means of which the parrot's story gains credence and force from its fable framework. For we are affected by the manner of her death. The concentration of the three birds on the "game" and its rules means that they have no time to feel its consequences in human terms. Their unconscious cruelty has a parallel in the cruel "japes" of the villains in the Cycle Passion plays. As Kolve has pointed out,

From the very beginning we can see two kinds of "substitution" shaping the action: these men decide in advance that Jesus is a jester, a trickster, an absurd imposter, and never properly see Him or hear Him as a result; and they constantly substitute games and jokes for the serious religious and legal examination that it is their proper duty to conduct. They examine Him, it is true, but they turn the examination into a witty and insulting series of games, with a few blows thrown in for good measure.¹⁰

The parrot's felt experiencing of history (to the point of dismemberment by the clergy) thus stands clearly distinguished from their kind of game. And this vindication of it as a "true" experience creates an impression of a reality in which "wordes moote be cosyng to the dede,"¹¹ a re-creation in our own experience of that golden age when "Doctryne and deid war both equouolent" (786). But the presence of a documented, factual history, truly "expremed by experience" also acts as a kind of "control experiment" for the fable. Without this impression of objective truth the highly affective cannibalism of the parrot would verge on the simply fabulous. If you will, this objective "story" (of the Church's degeneration) replaces the moralitas's function with regard to the fable. But equally, the "game," the affective realism of the fiction, translates this history into something unique for us in a way that the conventional complaints of the previous two epistles could not. And it is in the fusion of contemporary events and fictive reality that the shattering seriousness of this satire develops.

In the most artificial of images, a parrot, Lindsay's poetic finds a new method of exemplar, freer, more suggestive in its "game" than that of traditional complaint, but nonetheless "actions shaped like game, played as though they were game, that can, in fact be serious and real."¹² Ultimately, such a notion still derives from the example of Christ: "Where before there had been only the law, there was now an exemplar of goodness."¹³ But with the apparent breakdown of the "notion of analogy" (represented in the parrot's epistles), typified in the distrust of the traditional mediatory institutions of the Church, the new notion of exemplar described in this poem must be articulated solely in "this-worldly" terms if we are once more to re-create Christ's manifestation in the world of the

¹⁰V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, 1966), pp. 184-5.

¹¹Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, GP, l. 742.

¹²Kolve, p. 204.

¹³Kolve, p. 238.

"invisible things of God." By denying practical and total efficacy to such external, traditional "texts," the subtext of the poem focuses our attention always on the individual and on the poetic. Poetic art, because its province is the interstices between these two realities, is therefore the proper focus for satire. Thus in interpreting the "meaning" of the fable (and the poem as a whole) there are no authority figures in the traditional sense. Or rather the traditional authorities are exposed as fraudulent (or at least potentially as misleading as sensible reality). In the end, authority comes from the debased Papyngo (and the reader). Fixing the parrot as locus of meaning in the poem keeps the fable from having any fixed center of meaning outside the reader's experience of this tale. This forces an individual, subjective construction of meaning, a translation of this figure in terms of the reader's own "memorie." We then enact a further translation as that larger poetic experience we have created collides with the "real life" we turn back to after the experience of the poem. Paradoxically, then, it is only as authority is denied or reduced to a limited and potentially flawed individual experience that traces of it are also found in that very fluctuating individual experience. In this way Lindsay constructs an ethically active and guiding satire that can evaluate a confusing and changing Book of Nature without denying its ultimate connection with the pre-ordinate will of God. But this is by deconstructing the authority of the artist figure and the genres of "high style" poetics in a way that enables us to experience anew, to invent with him, and through such analysis of sensory experience and the figural language used to express it, to come to incarnate our own eloquent wisdom.

University of Alberta