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*Clausdirk Pollner*

### *The Complaynt of Scotland: Some Textlinguistic Remarks*

*The Complaynt of Scotland* (CS) is one of the earliest examples of a fully Scots prose text; its treatment in the selection of histories of Scottish literature consulted for this paper is curiously uneven. Henderson devotes some ten pages to CS but talks mainly about the various writers who have been mentioned over the years as possible authors. Apart from this he has a lengthy synopsis of the work, which he characterizes as "indirect and desultory."<sup>1</sup> Wittig<sup>2</sup> only mentions CS in passing and in a number of footnotes, referring mainly to the lists of ballads, songs and dances for which CS is famous and useful. Watson calls it "the most colourful early prose in vernacular Scots" and goes on to say:

[It is] the nearest to imaginative writing in that it follows the allegorical-verse tradition by including a dream vision and using ornate descriptive language.

...  
But the sheer garrulousness of *The Complaynt* must have been something of a trial for the "vulgar pepil" who were supposed to be reading it, even if future scholars have cause to bless its documentary zeal.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>T. F. Henderson, *Scottish Vernacular Literature*, 3rd edn. (Edinburgh, 1910), p. 307.

<sup>2</sup>Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London, 1984), pp. 92-3.

Like Watson, Lyall comments on its style and language: "the more overt political sections are in a relatively straightforward though always carefully structured, form of Scots."<sup>4</sup> Lyall mentions "Latinated diction, binary phrases and relatively complex syntax" (p. 175) in order to characterize the style of *CS*.

So what we have here is quite a range: from "desultory" to "garrulous" to "carefully structured." But controversy is usually more interesting than critical unanimity—so let us look at *CS* in more detail.

In his introduction to the Scottish Text Society's edition of *CS*, Stewart talks about "the author's technique of weaving a dense texture."<sup>5</sup> "Texture" can be two things: a) a technical term describing the consistency of a material or surface (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*: "The degree of roughness or smoothness . . . of a surface"; "the way in which threads of a cloth have been woven"—note Stewart's choice of the word *weave*); and b) a technical term in text linguistics. Halliday and Hasan explain the term in the following way:

The concept of texture is entirely appropriate to express the property of "being a text." A text has texture [and it] derives this from the fact that it functions as a unity with respect to its environment (p. 2)

Characteristically we find variation in texture, so that textuality is a matter of more or less [not a matter of all or nothing]. In some cases there will in fact be . . . a very close texture which serves to signal that the meanings of the parts are strongly interdependent and that the whole forms a single unity. In other instances, however, the texture will be much looser (p. 296).<sup>6</sup>

*CS* seems to me to be an interesting example of the concept of "text," because it vacillates between having a loosely structured and a densely structured textual form. Before I go on to exemplify this, let me mention briefly and in an edited form Beaugrande and Dressler's "seven standards of textuality"<sup>7</sup>: 1) Cohesion is the connection of the components of the surface text—the actual words one sees/hears and their order. 2) Coherence concerns the way that the concepts underlying a surface text are accessible and

<sup>4</sup>R. J. Lyall, "Vernacular Prose before the Reformation," in R. D. S. Jack, ed., *The History of Scottish Literature . . . Origins to 1660* (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 174.

<sup>5</sup>A. M. Stewart, ed., *The Complaynt of Scotland*, STS, 4th Series, 11 (1979), xlvii.

<sup>6</sup>M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London, 1976).

<sup>7</sup>R. de Beaugrande and W. Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London, 1981), pp. 3 ff.

relevant,—cf. e.g. the causality or temporality of the elements concerned. "Coherence is clearly not a mere feature of texts, but rather the outcome of cognitive processes among text users" (p. 6). 3) Intentionality is about the text producer's attitude towards attaining a particular goal with his text. 4) Acceptability concerns the text receiver's attitude toward the constitution of a cohesive and coherent text. "Text producers often speculate on the receiver's attitude of acceptability and present texts that require important contributions in order to make sense: (p. 8). 5) Informativity is about the properties of the text being "expected"/"unexpected" or "known"/"unknown" to the receiver. 6) Situationality "concerns the factors which make a text relevant to a situation of occurrence" (p. 9). And finally: 7) Intertextuality is "responsible for the evolution of text types as classes of text with typical patterns of characteristics" (p. 10). As author and reader one has to realize the text's position vis-à-vis a textual tradition.

Intertextuality seems to me to be a good stepping stone, from where one can start a brief textual analysis of *CS*. Its title is not just a kind of summary of what follows but an indication of a late Medieval/early Renaissance text-type as well. Shipley<sup>8</sup> defines the text-type "complaint" as follows: "Usually a monologue in which the poet 1) bemoans the unresponsiveness of his beloved . . . or 2) seeks relief from his unhappy lot . . . or 3) pictures the sorry state of the world."

In other words, even the title *Complaynt of Scotland* expresses a clear intention of the writer as far as text-type goes: in this particular case, Shipley's items two and three are, however vaguely, fulfilled—by bemoaning the deplorable state of Scottish affairs in the middle of the sixteenth century, the author may hope to alleviate not his own but his country's unhappy lot; he certainly offers a picture of the sorry state of Scotland.

Incidentally, it is noteworthy and ironical that "complaint" texts usually take the form of a monologue. The very sub-section of our text that is so entitled—"Ane monolog of the actor," (chap. 6)—is really an excursus within the actual complaint, which takes the form of an extended dialogue between Dame Scotia and her three sons. The standards "acceptability" and "informativity" appear to be violated here: the knowledgeable reader of the sixteenth century would have found "unexpected" material in this monologue, whereas the actual complaint happens somewhere else.

As far as the other standards of textuality go, I would like to concentrate here on nos. (1) and (2): "cohesion" and "coherence," because these cover the surface elements and the underlying cognitive processes that hold a text together and indeed constitute "a text."

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<sup>8</sup>J. T. Shipley, ed., *Dictionary of World Literature* (Totowa, NJ, 1964).

In Halliday and Hasan we find five types of elements that carry textual cohesion:

a) Reference (personal: pronouns; demonstrative: deictic elements such as *this, these*, etc.; comparative: *same, identical, similarly, identically*, etc.) b) Substitution (nominal: *one, ones*; verbal: *do*; clausal: *so, not*, etc.) c) Ellipsis (substitution by zero element) d) Conjunction (additive: *and, or, besides*, etc.; adversative: *yet, but, however, rather*, etc.; causal: *so, then, because, for*, etc.; temporal: *then, next, after that, secondly*, etc.) e) Lexical cohesion (e.g. repetition/reiteration of lexical elements, collocation, semantic fields, etc.).

Even though this is a model referring almost exclusively to twentieth-century English (apart from a few Elizabethan examples) it appears to be a good working model for an analysis of a Renaissance text such as *CS*, because, at least in theory, Middle Scots possessed most of the cohesion-elements listed in Halliday and Hasan, albeit in different graphemic/lexical realizations. Let us look briefly at the text's first two sections, the Dedication and the Prologue, in terms of cohesion.

Halliday and Hasan's five cohesive categories can be grouped into two broader ones: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Concerning grammatical cohesion, there are only very few examples of reference in the Dedication: reference is conspicuously absent. (I am not counting here, of course, reference items used within the boundaries of a sentence—they do not constitute textual cohesion.) For conjunctive elements the picture differs slightly; about twelve sentences in the Dedication begin with items like *and, ande, ande nou, bot, for* and *siklyke* (the latter being one of the author's favorite conjunctive elements in the text as a whole): mainly additive and a few comparative conjunctions.

This is what one could call quite loose cohesion. On a grammatical/syntactic level we have a collection of examples rather than textual unity: "examples", that is, of the courageous acts of Mary, her father and her family on behalf of the realm of Scotland.

But let us look at the other type of cohesion, lexical. Here we have a completely different situation. In keeping with the text's intentionality, the author produces a dense network of lexically cohesive items. The tone is set by the repeated expression *our(e) ald enemeis* and *the volfis of ingland*, to be followed by a dense net of items referring to Mary and her family: *magnanime, precius germe, nobilite, illustir, vertu, honorabil, verteouse, dignite, heroyque* and, above all, *vailzeant/vailzeantness*, etc. What we have here is not unlike an excerpt from a Scots thesaurus, with *vailzeant* and its noun as head entry. The final page of the Dedication offers another good example of this kind of cohesion via vocabulary. Here the author compares his offering

with other gifts given to kings and queens and we get a page full of *riche present, gyft, to present, sacrefeis, oblatione, offrit, offrandis*, etc.

Section II, the "Prolog to the Redar," covers pp. 6-14 in the STS edition; in textual terms the author repeats his cohesive style: few elements of textual reference, rather more of conjunction. But let us look at p. 13, which contains the famous passage where the author defends his use of Scots as his written medium. This page shows in a rather extreme way what I consider to be a consistent characteristic of *CS* as a whole: it has no element of grammatical cohesion, apart from a repeated *I*, which "does not normally refer to the text at all; its referent is defined by the speech role of speaker . . . and hence [it is] normally interpreted exophorically, by reference to the situation."<sup>9</sup> But making up for this lack of grammatical cohesion is an extremely dense net of items referring to the semantic field of language: *barbir agrest terms, exquisite terms, domestic scottish langage, translatours, compilaris, vlgare langage, oncoutht exquisite termis, reuyn fra lating, sillabis, verkis, lang tailit vordis, termis, consaitis, beuk, preceptor, comont langage, vordis of antiquite, tracteit, translatit, scottis langage, phrasis, oure langage, fra lateen, scottis tong, lating tong, compilation, scottis terme, signifeis*, etc., some of these items being repeated.

There is a better term than "semantic field" to describe this kind of lexical net, namely van Dijk's term "frame," which is "a subsystem of knowledge about some phenomenon in the world. . . . [It] contains information about component states, actions or events, about necessary or probably conditions and consequences. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Talking about the Scottish language in the sixteenth century clearly made such terms as *vulgar language, common language, barbarous terms, domestic language* necessary; equally clearly it would require mentioning the *Latin tongue*, almost automatically, as a possible alternative to Scots. *Latin* in turn would require items such as *long tailed words, preceptor, translation, compiler*. And the general frame "language" entails the use of *word, syllable, works, conceits, terms, books*.

My initial hypothesis before reading *CS* closely had been that the four sections constituted four different units in textual terms. They don't; Section III (the Complaynt proper) repeats the author's strategy of generally loose grammatical and generally dense lexical cohesion within certain frames. The only exception is the "Author's Monologue" with its list-style: here we find onomatopoeic lists of animal noises and mariners' calls and encyclopedic lists of Scottish stories, songs and dances, of astronomy and medicinal herbs, etc.

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<sup>9</sup>Halliday and Hasan, p. 48, slightly edited.

<sup>10</sup>T. van Dijk, *Text and Context*, 2nd edn. (London, 1982), p. 135.

It is mainly in Section III that another type of cohesive device occurs; one that I would like to call "rhetorical cohesion." By this I mean the again rather excessive use of some tropes such as parallelism, anaphora, repetition/reiteration, alliteration and assonance. These devices are textually cohesive in that they carry the reader across the surface text. Page 19 of the STS edition affords a good example of almost no grammatical cohesion combined with a very dense network of rhetorical figures—syntactic parallelism and lexical repetition. On this one page alone one can count some 30 occurrences of the following type: *thou sal be cursit, the lord sal send, thou sal spouse, thy ox sal be slane, I sal visee, your enemeis sal eit it, there sal be no men, I sal gar*. This is really a non-textual enumeration—given some kind of texture by the repetition of the verb *sal* and the repeated syntactic pattern. The allusion to biblical language is obvious.

Another example of the same kind of cohesion follows on p. 20, where we find an interesting mixture of enumeration, encyclopedic list and verbal repetition in the sentence beginnings: *the kyng anchises lamentit, the queene rosaria regrettit, the prophet hieremye vepit, kyng daud lamentit, the consule marcus marcellus regrettit, crisp salust regrettit, the patriarche Iacob lamentit, the kyng demetrius regrettit, zong octouian lamentit*. Even the summarizing final sentence of this passage follows the same pattern: *thir nobil personagis deplorit. . .*"

Let us finally look at some instances of the above-mentioned binary phrases—adjectival hendiadys kind of constructions, which consist of two synonymous or near-synonymous elements, used by the author as a rhetorical device to create textuality. Page 55 has the following occurrences of this device to describe the rotten state of Dame Scotia's cloak (i.e. of her outward appearance): *(maid & vrocht), reuyn & raggit, (vrocht ande brodrut), brokyn ande roustit, spilt ande destroyit, barran & stirril, troublit ande disaguisit, reuyn & raggit*, this last phrase being repeated a few times. This is followed immediately by a dense net of lexical items within the frame of sadness: *dolorous, piteous, greuously, langorious, trublit, desolat, disparit, lamentabil, affligit* (all on p. 56). Another entry from the Middle-Scots thesaurus!

From a textlinguistic point of view, there can be no doubt that it is precisely this extraordinary mixture of very loose (or sometimes non-existent) grammatical cohesion and very dense lexical and rhetorical cohesion that makes authors like Henderson and Stewart view CS so differently: it is an example of a text that is "desultory" and "densely textured" at the same time.