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Robert L. Kindrick

Henryson and Quintilian

Henryson's rhetoric clearly shows that he is a child of the Middle Ages. His reliance on the *ars poetriae*, the *ars dictaminis*, and the *ars praedicandi* demonstrates his debt to Medieval patterns of organizing his language and his subject matter. Yet John MacQueen is also accurate in pointing out that he has a debt to the renaissance.¹ While periodic concepts such as "renaissance" and "Medieval" are inadequate to reflect the rich texture of rhetorical studies and verse in the fifteenth century, they are useful tools in evaluating Henryson's role as a transitional figure, and the rediscovery of Quintilian may shed some light on this aspect of Henryson's contribution.

Henryson could not have derived his entire knowledge of rhetoric from Quintilian. Both his social and educational background would have subjected him to the influences of Medieval rhetorical traditions. Yet given his likely education and social background, it is certainly possible that he was exposed to the complete text of Quintilian rediscovered by Poggio in 1416 at St. Gall.

¹John MacQueen, *Robert Henryson* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 22-3. On the "transitional" nature of Henryson's verse and his debt to the renaissance, see Evelyn S. Newlyn, "Humanism and Theodicy: Oppositions in the Poetry of Robert Henryson," *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Scottish Language and Literature, Medieval and Renaissance* (Stirling/Glasgow), pp. 251-8. For some perspectives on the fifteenth century as an age of transition and a context for evaluating Henryson's work, see Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York, 1979); and John F. Tinkler, "Renaissance Humanism and the *genera eloquentiae*," *Rhetorica*, Vol. V, 3 (1987), 279-309.

First, if Henryson were educated in Scotland, as David Laing and Roderick Lyall contend,² the impact of Quintilian's rhetoric was transmitted to Scotland in the fifteenth century by at least one major Italian humanist, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini. F. H. Colson observes that his letter to the king of Bohemia (ca. 1450) is "full of Quintilian."³ Colson then demonstrates how Aeneas Sylvius borrows directly from Quintilian's ideas about education. As a papal legate, before he became Pope Pius II, Aeneas Sylvius visited Scotland during the reign of James I. It is clear from his commentaries on Scotland that he had wide access to the country. The direct degree of his influence is of course impossible to trace. Yet, in part because his mission was directed to the king, he was likely introduced to the important nobility and intellectuals in the country.⁴ If he did not provide for the interest in Quintilian in Scotland, he could certainly have alerted the Scottish learned classes to the interest on the continent.

Henryson's opportunities to become familiar with Quintilian would have been especially numerous if he were educated in Italy, as R. D. S. Jack believes.⁵ There is evidence that, after 1416, the complete text of Quintilian was rapidly promulgated in Italy. Poggio's discovery was immediately communicated to Brunetto Latini, who considered it a major scholarly event. Leonardo Valla notes that he almost knew Quintilian by heart by 1457, and Seigel contends that Valla used him to "carry out oratory's revenge on philosophy."⁶ Valla might, in fact, have been a linchpin in the relationship between Scotland and Quintilian since a manuscript of his work is found at Aberdeen.

There is further evidence of potential sources of contact in the widespread acceptance of Quintilian's ideas about education. Henryson's

²See David Laing, ed., *The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson* (Edinburgh, 1865), pp. xii-xiv, and Roderick Lyall, "Glasgow's First Poet: In Search of Robert Henryson," *College Courant*, 72 (1984), 13-6.

³M. Fabii Quintiliani, *Institutionis oratoriae*, ed. F. H. Colson (Cambridge, 1924), p. lxvii. See also *Selected Letters of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini*, trans., Albert R. Baca (Northridge, CA, 1969), especially pp. 9, 33, and 48.

⁴Hume Brown, ed., *Early Travellers in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1891), p. 24.

⁵R. D. S. Jack, *The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 1972), pp. 8-9.

⁶Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (Princeton, 1968), p. 143; on Valla's assertion about memorizing Quintilian, see Colson, ed., *Institutionis oratoriae*, p. lxiv and Seigel, p. 161.

career as a schoolmaster might have provided another opportunity for him to have been swept up in the general enthusiasm (noted by Colson as being somewhat artificial⁷) about Quintilian's work. In addition to the impact the rediscovery of his text had on rhetoric, it also had a pronounced effect on educational treatises. Even the mutilated text of Quintilian contained a significant portion of his comments on the education of the citizen-orator. The texts that circulated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries contained a version of the first two books, which outline how Quintilian organizes the education of the potential orator.⁸ The regimen he establishes is a rigorous one. His curriculum includes not only literature and grammar but also music, geometry, and acting, and he even shows a tolerance for gymnastics. He has very specific advice on classroom techniques and establishes a comprehensive goal for the preparation of the citizen orator (See for instance XII, ii, 1-4). Colson suggests that "Quintilian's own view, the strictly educational part [of the *Institutio*] is subordinate."⁹ In one sense, his assertion is correct, for the *Institutio* is a comprehensive rhetoric which had an extensive impact on rhetorical studies. However, Quintilian himself made a point of emphasizing his pedagogical contribution. He states that he has "no intention of passing over anything that has a genuine connexion with the practice of the schools, for fear that students may complain of the omission."¹⁰

If Henryson were influenced by the interest in Quintilian which occurred in the last eight decades of the fifteenth century, specifically what areas of contact are there between his verse and the *Institutio oratoria*? There are some areas of Quintilian's study of rhetoric that are so comprehensive as to offer little by way of specific discernible influence or even specific analogy with Henryson's verse. As Brian Vickers observes, "the range of Quintilian's work is so all-embracing that we find here almost everything we need to know."¹¹ Such is the case with three of the five major parts of rhetoric. Quintilian's approaches to style, memory, and delivery, tantalizing though they may be, are so thorough and encyclopedic that they encompass all of Henryson's interests and more. In addition, there is the added problem of

⁷Colson, ed., *Institutionis oratoriae*, p. lxvi.

⁸For comment on the text, see Colson, pp. lx-lxiii, and James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 359-63.

⁹Colson, *op. cit.*, p. xxv.

¹⁰*The Institutio oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, MA, 1930), II, x, 15.

¹¹Brian Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1988), p. 41.

attempting to trace the influence of statements on memory and delivery without a concrete statement of rhetorical principles from Henryson himself.

Other areas of the *Institutio* are more fertile. A complete study of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* in Henryson's verse would require several volumes, but a few examples should make the point that significant analogies exist. In addition to his interest in Quintilian's doctrines on education, Henryson might have been influenced by Quintilian's notions of invention, style, and organization. He would also have had to wrestle with Quintilian's concept of the essential morality of the orator. The latter issue may deserve consideration first because of its primacy in the nature of Quintilian's rhetoric. Henryson's attitudes in this regard are open to debate. The essential question is summarized by Quintilian himself. He boldly asserts that "no one can be a true orator unless he is also a good man . . ." adding perhaps somewhat preciously, "and, even if he could be, I would not have it so," (I, ii, 3). Leaving apart for the moment Quintilian's narrowly stipulative definition, his approach to the relationship between oratory and morality stands in direct contrast to Augustine's. The Augustinian attitude toward rhetoric indicates that even a moral reprobate can be successful if the ultimate result of his discourse is the salvation of the auditor.¹²

As a benchmark for analyzing Henryson, Chaucer's attitudes on these seem ambivalent, as illustrated by the "Pardoner's Tale." No matter what one may think of the pardoner as a character, there is no doubt that the tale he tells is a perfect *exemplum*,¹³ illustrating perhaps ideally Quintilian's notion that rhetoric is "action." Yet Chaucer's pardoner is hardly successful, as dramatically attested by the epilogue of his tale. Henryson's reaction to this rhetorical dilemma shows the same degree of ambiguity. On the one hand, few of his characters seem to be effective rhetoricians if they are not morally good creatures. Yet, on the other hand, the judgment about rhetorical effectiveness depends as much on the ultimate assessment of the audience as does the evaluation of Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale."

Henryson does indeed have characters of questionable moral character who are effective rhetoricians within the context of a given poem. Perhaps the outstanding example is his fox in *The Morall Fabillis*. Lowrence is able to persuade his stronger colleague, the wolf, to folly in a variety of fables. In the sense that he is able to persuade the wolf to descend into a well or ex-

¹²St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (New York, 1958), pp. 164-5.

¹³For only one recent example of the critical concerns involving the contrast between the character of the Pardoner and the nature of his tale, see Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 333-87.

amine a mare's hoof for a non-existent respite, he is effective in achieving his desired ends in the context of his tales. Yet, his speeches are hardly effective with the reader of the tales. Henryson establishes enough signals in his moral and narrative framework to alert the reader that sophistry is afoot. Lowrence is hardly an admirable character, and his arguments are acceptable, for the most part, only because he works his wiles on the wolf, a figure who hardly inspires sympathy. "The Trial of the Fox" illustrates vividly the unsavory fate that befalls such tricksters.

Other characters cut from the same mold are the cock in "The Cock and the Jasp" and the Paddock in "The Paddock and the Mouse." Yet, how do these characters and others succeed as orators in the definition espoused by Quintilian? In one sense, they must show that Henryson accepted the Augustinian thesis that even ethically unacceptable creatures could be effective rhetoricians in a limited context. The fox does indeed persuade the wolf to take foolish chances. The cock seems to persuade certain audiences to accept his perspective on the value of the jewel until Henryson intrudes on his rhetoric to point the way to salvation in the *moralitas*. The frog persuades the mouse to accept his crafty (but illogical and self-destructive) offer to ferry the mouse across the stream.¹⁴ From one viewpoint all of these characters have been effective in their pleas.

For dramatic purposes, Henryson does accept Augustine's premise that a bad person can be an effective orator, but he seems to find an accommodation with Quintilian's perspective as well. Quintilian's definition, after all, is clearly personally stipulative. Indeed even his over-insistence on his own point of view may suggest that Quintilian himself realized that it did not completely reflect reality. In point of fact he undermines his own thesis with a discussion of the "realities" of rhetoric at a number of points in the *Institutio*.¹⁵ Some of the contradictory or "realistic" elements of Quintilian's work caused Voltaire to describe the *Institutio* as a work on "Lying as a Fine Art for those fully conscious of their own rectitude."¹⁶ This kind of understanding of the *realpolitik* of oratory would have provided adequate latitude for Henryson's narrative needs. Like Chaucer, Henryson could not ignore the fact that demagogues and charlatans were often effective orators, at least for a limited audience and a limited period of time. But, like Quintilian, he believes that no bad individual will ultimately prevail through rhetoric, as re-

¹⁴See Elizabeth Jackson, "Henryson's Fable *The Paddock and the Mouse* as Wisdom Literature," *Unisa English Studies*, 21 (1983), 1-5.

¹⁵Specifically, see XII, i, 34 and IV, v, 5.

¹⁶Cited by Colson, *Institutionis oratoriae*, p. xxviii.

flected by his narrative ironies (in the case of the fox, the paddock, and the cock) and his sense of character evolution (Cresseid). Through the subtleties of his art, he ensured that the audience was alerted to the character of his speakers. His characters, like Chaucer's pardoner, may be effective in a limited context, but once the context expands, their moral deficiencies become apparent. In summary, while Henryson accepts Augustinian realism about the ethics of rhetoric, the moral nature of his art demonstrates that he ultimately agrees with Quintilian in the longer perspective.

Henryson could have learned much from Quintilian's approaches to invention. Quintilian provides a basis for audience analysis which would have dovetailed neatly with what Henryson would have learned from the Medieval arts of rhetoric. Quintilian's inventory of *topoi* would have provided Henryson with the tools that he needed in his rhetoric. Particularly in Henryson's use of the deliberative and forensic rhetoric of the *ars dictaminis* and the *ars notaria*, Henryson employs a number of Quintilian's techniques. Specific parallels might have derived from Henryson's interest in legal rhetoric, which would have been another reason for him to have studied Quintilian. Several of Quintilian's major techniques of invention appear in Henryson's verse.

Only one example of Quintilian's approaches to invention which could have been useful to Henryson involves legal rhetoric. In Book III, Quintilian enters into his discussion of legal bases a particular distinction which Henryson found to be a linchpin in his use of the *ars notaria*:

Thus in one case we shall have either two special *legal bases*, namely the *letter of the law* and *intention*, with the *sylogism* and also *definition*, or those three which are really the only *bases* strictly so called, *conjecture* as regards the *letter of the law* and *intention*, *quality* in the *sylogism*, and *definition*, which needs no explanation. (III, vi, 103)

Quintilian considers this point of law sufficiently important to comment on it throughout the *Institutio oratoria*, and he devotes a whole chapter to it in Book VII, where he defines the problem in greater detail.

Henryson makes use of the "letter-spirit" *topos* in a variety of the fables. In "The Wolf and the Lamb," for instance, it is the basis for the lamb's appeal for due process (*ll.* 2678-92). The wolf ignores the appeal and proceeds to devour the lamb. In particular, it also appears as the central *topos* for "The Tale of the Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman." In this fable, a farmer having trouble with his oxen in the field shouts in anger to his team, "The volff . . . mot haue 3ou all at anis!" (*l.* 2344). The wolf overhears this angry oath and, biding his time, plans to pursue his gift. In the meantime, the oxen begin to work more cooperatively, and the farmer makes good progress. On his way home, he is stopped by the wolf, demanding his team

of Oxen (as technically deeded to him by the letter of the law) from the farmer. The farmer appeals to the spirit of the law (fairness) in a reverse "consumer's rights" argument and, like the lamb, makes an appeal to due process:

'Schir,' quod the husband, 'ane man may say in greif,
 And syne ganesay fra he auise and se.
 I hecht to steill; am I thairfoir ane theif?
 God forbid, schir, all hechtis suld haldin be.
 Gaif I my hand or oblissing,' quod he,
 'Or haue 3e witnes or writ for to schau?
 Schir, reif me not, bot go and seik the law."
 (ll. 2273-79)

The wolf, however, continues to insist on the letter of the law. He couches his argument in terms of the spirit of the law, even quoting a proverb:

'Carll,' quod the volff, 'ane lord, and he be leill,
 That schrinkis for schame, or doutis to be repruuit—
 His sau is ay als sickker as his seill.
 Fy on the leid that is not leill and lufit!
 Thy argument is fals, and eik contrufit,
 For it is said in prouerb: "But lawte
 All vther vertewis ar nocht worth ane fle."
 (ll. 2280-86)

The farmer's response continues to make an appeal to the spirit of the law, also invoking matters of procedure by reiterating his call for a witness.

'Schir,' said the husband, 'remember of this thing:
 Ane leill man is not tane at half ane taill.
 I may say and ganesay; I am na king.
 Quhair is 3our witnes that hard I hecht thame haill?'
 (ll. 2287-90)

His comment "I am no king" may be an ironic comment on how class differences also make a difference in the application of the law. In response to the farmer's request for a witness, the wolf produces the fox, but, with the agreement of the farmer, the fox offers himself as a judge to give "sentence finall" (l. 2302). He then approaches the farmer about a bribe, commenting ironically on the legal system and the wolf's stinginess. Once assured of a bribe of six or seven hens, he then proceeds to trick the wolf into believing that his claim will be compensated by a large cheese, which is actually the reflection of the moon in the bottom of a well. Offering to go down himself to retrieve the cheese, the fox persuades the wolf to descend into the well

while simultaneously lifting the fox up. The tale ends with the wolf in water up to his waist in the bottom of the well and with a sense that the spirit of justice and the law are well served. The tale is not an outstanding example of Henryson's use of the *ars notaria* (particularly when compared with "The Sheep and the Dog"), but its narrative structure is organized at least in part around the question of the letter versus the spirit of the law, as Quintilian describes it. If indeed Henryson were introduced to Quintilian as a young notarial or legal student, this particular *topos* offered fertile ground for his imagination.

Henryson could also have learned some basic elements of *divisio* from Quintilian's *Institutio*. In this area, there are fewer specific parallels in part because of Quintilian's argumentative and expository framework, but nonetheless Henryson might have made good use of reading Quintilian, especially in some of his poems which rely heavily on dictaminal and notarial rhetoric. George Kennedy observes that Quintilian's view of arrangement "leads him into some repetition and confusion."¹⁷ There is clearly repetition in Quintilian's insistence on his pedagogical goals, his emphasis on drama and audience sensitivity, and even his approach to individual parts of rhetoric, but Quintilian's exhaustive review of the subject would certainly have made him useful for the student of legal rhetoric or the poet. A few potential areas of influence may help to illustrate how Henryson could have incorporated Quintilian's approach to organization in his poems. In his approach to the *exordium*, Quintilian emphasizes how important it is to render the audience "si benevolum, attentum, docilem fecerimus" (IV, i, 5). Quintilian's language might be compared with that of Alexander of Ashby who comments in his *De modo praedicandi* on the need to render the audience "dociles, benivoles, et attentos."¹⁸ There is also a parallel with Robert of Basevorn in Quintilian's emphasis on winning goodwill.

Another specific element of Quintilian's advice which Henryson might have found useful in a particular tale involves how to approach the *exordium* when confronted with a biased judge. Apparently the problem was sufficiently widespread that Quintilian felt obliged to deal with it in some detail. In IV, i, 18-22, he is clear about the alternatives when potential judicial bias is a problem. His particular comments on threats or requesting a change of venue show an affinity with a major point in "The Tale of the Sheep and the Dog." It will be recalled that after the sheep is summoned to court, he immediately challenges the court's competence to provide him a fair trial:

¹⁷George Kennedy, *Quintilian* (New York, 1969), p. 77.

¹⁸Cited by Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p. 312.

'Heir I decline the iuge, the tyme, the place.

'This is my cause, in motiue and effect:
The law sayis it is richt perrillous
Till enter pley befoir ane iuge suspect,
And 3e, schir Volff, hes bene richt odious
To me, for with 3our tuskis rauenous
Hes slanc full mony kinnismen off myne;
Thairfoir as iuge suspect I 3ow declyne.

'And schortlie, of this court 3e memberis all,
Baith assessouris, clerk, and aduocate,
To me and myne ar ennemies mortall
And ay hes bene, as mony scheipheid wate.
The place is fer, the tyme is feriate,
Quhairfoir na iuge suld sit in consistory
Sa lait at euin: I 3ow accuse for thy.'

(ll. 1187-1201)

While there are a variety of earlier precedents for this type of appeal, Quintilian would once again have been a good source for additional learning about this approach. Henryson's sheep finds his appeal unsuccessful, but it is nonetheless a device sanctioned by the *ars notaria* and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*.

In a general way, Quintilian's rhetoric also makes provision for Henryson's use of the *moralitas*. In commenting on types of emotional appeals in the peroration, Quintilian observes the basic distinction between *ethos* and *pathos*:

Emotions however, as we learn from ancient authorities, fall into two classes; the one is called *pathos* by the Greeks and is rightly and correctly expressed in Latin by *adfectus* (emotion); the other is called *ethos*, a word for which in my opinion Latin has no equivalent: it is however rendered by *mores* (morals) and consequently the branch of philosophy known as ethics is styled moral philosophy by us. But close consideration of the nature of the subject leads me to think that in this connexion it is not so much morals in general that is meant as certain peculiar aspects; for the term *moralis* includes every attitude of the mind. The more cautious writers have preferred to give the sense of the term rather than to translate it into Latin. They therefore explain *pathos* as describing the more violent emotions and *ethos* as designating those which are clam and gentle: in the one case the passions are violent, in the other subdued, the former command and disturb, the latter persuade and induce a feeling of goodwill... For as everything treated by the orator may be regarded from the ethical standpoint, we may apply the word *ethos* whenever he speaks of what is honourable and expedient or of what ought or

ought not to be done... The *ethos* which I have in my mind and which I desiderate in an orator is commended to our approval by goodness more than ought else...

(VI, ii, 8-9, 11, 13)

Quintilian's broad notion of *ethos* in the emotional appeal surely includes the general goals of Henryson's *moralitates*. As Henryson himself observes, the goal of the fables in particular is to be "full of prudence and moralitie" (l. 1381). Even within the context of legal pleading, Quintilian certainly sees a powerful role for this kind of peroration in stating "what ought or ought not to be done." Of perhaps exceptional interest is Quintilian's recognition of the proper use of irony in the *ethos* of the peroration:

More closely dependent on *ethos* are the skilful exercise of feigned emotion or the employment of irony in making apologies or asking questions, irony being the term which is applied to words which mean something other than they seem to express. (VI, ii, 15)

Quintilian's remarks reflect the multiple uses of irony which Henryson employed in his *moralitates*. Virtually every critic who has studied the fables has also commented on Henryson's ironic *moralitates*, as particularly to be found in "The Cock and the Jasp," "The Paddock and the Mouse," *The Testament of Cresseid*, and even the *Orpheus*.¹⁹

In part some of the questions about Henryson's ironic use of the *moralitas* could reflect a lack of understanding of his goals or foreshadowing. However, it must be acknowledged that Henryson sometimes seems to employ the *moralitas* in non-traditional ways, based on Medieval traditions. Perhaps some of the critical problems associated with his use of the *ars praedicandi* in this regard may be better understood in terms of Quintilian's reflections on the potential for ironic uses of *ethos* in the peroration. The implications for political irony in tales such as "The Lion and the Mouse" and "The Wolf and the Wether" are particularly rich, providing an opportunity for fruitful union with the exegetical tradition of the *ars praedicandi*. While the distinction is not new to Quintilian, his broad views would clearly have provided for Henryson's adaptation of his legal rhetoric to a poetic setting.

Quintilian's attention to flexibility in organization and his emphasis on the importance of circumstances and persons in rhetoric would appeal to the poet, as well as to the notary and schoolmaster. These two elements are also

¹⁹For only a few of the commentaries, see Stephan Khinoy, "Tale-Moral Relationships in Henryson's Moral Fables," 99-115; Clark, "Henryson and Aesop," 1-18; MacQueen, *Robert Henryson*, pp. 94-188; Douglas Gray, *Robert Henryson* (Leiden, 1979), pp. 70-159; Robert Kindrick, *Robert Henryson* (Boston, 1979), pp. 57-117; and Benson, 215-35.

supported by Quintilian's emphasis on the *narratio*. John D. O'Banion has demonstrated how central this part of discourse is to Quintilian's notion of argument.²⁰ The fact that the *narratio* is clearly dependent on powers of vivid, realistic description would clearly have made this aspect of Quintilian's approach to *divisio* of interest to a poet influenced by major trends of literary realism from the South.

There is no positive evidence that Henryson knew Quintilian at this time. Most of the parallels that suggest a relationship involve Quintilian's definition of rhetoric and the character of the orator, invention, and organization. The most powerful evidence is circumstantial. The major revival of interest in Quintilian that occurred just before Henryson's birth, Quintilian's emphasis on legal rhetoric (an interest clearly reflected in Henryson and likely associated with his profession as a notary), and the likelihood that Henryson would have had access to the doctrines of the *Institutio oratoria* through the impact of the rediscovery on either Scotland or Italy all suggest that Henryson might well have read Quintilian. In addition, specific analogies between Henryson's poetry and the *Institutio*, such as those outlined above, reinforce the arguments for potential influence. Even from the examples adduced here, it is obvious that the subject deserves additional attention.

If Henryson did know Quintilian, his use of the *Institutio oratoria* provides even further insight into his creative genius. His ability to weave the three major traditions of Medieval rhetoric into a comprehensive poetic demonstrates his refined eclecticism in his artistic craft. His additional use of Quintilian would represent an extension of that eclecticism and further reinforce his position as one of the most profound and satisfying poetic voices of the transitional fifteenth century.

University of Montana

²⁰John D. O'Banion, "Narration and Argumentation: Quintilian on *Narratio* as the Heart of Rhetorical Thinking," *Rhetorica*, V, 4 (1987), 325-51.