

1999

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Recommended Citation

Petrina, Alessandra (1999) "Deviations from Genre in Robert Henryson's "Robene and Makyne"," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 31: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol31/iss1/9>

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Alessandra Petrina

Deviations from Genre in Robert Henryson's "Robene and Makyne"

Robert Henryson introduces the reader to his *Fables* with these lines from "The Prologue":

Thocht feingzeit fabils of ald poetre
Be not al grunded vpon truth, zit than,
Thair polite termes of sweet rhetore
Richt plesand ar vnto the eir of man;¹

What follows is a series of short poems, declared by the author to be of Aesopian descent, but set at a considerable distance from their model. The distance is particularly striking in the *moralitates*, or interpretations concluding the apologues, often straying from the traditional, moralizing allegory of the virtues and vices of man to plunge into political explanations, or offering, through the adventures of the animals, a miniature representation of Scotland. A more striking novelty, however, is constituted by Henryson's constant reflection on the tools of his trade: the poet had already warned the reader, in the Prologue, that he would find some fiction mixed with truth, but also that this mixture would be "richt plesand," provided the reader was aware of the presence of fiction, and of the interpreting problems this would create. Many of the *moralitates* appended to each of the fables will then reassert this principle,

¹*The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford, 1981), ll. 1-4. Further references will be to line number.

occasionally surprising the reader by presenting a conclusion opposite to the expected one (as is the case with “The Cock and the Jasp”), constantly shifting the relationship between *fabula* and *moralitas*.²

Such a metapoetic perspective, so explicitly declared at the beginning of his work, should make the critic wary of handling Henryson’s poems with the same interpretative categorizations used for Chaucer’s poetry to which he is supposedly so much indebted. Yet this seems to have been a frequent mistake. It is surprising to see, for instance, with how much condescension John Speirs writes, in his comment to “The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadgar”:

Henryson’s humour throughout the *Fables*...is quite simple “folk” humour.... The comic zest of that, the animal high spirits, is inherent in the language. The language shares the delighted physical energy of those whose speech it originally was.³

It is certainly amusing to observe how the Scottish poet has managed, in this particular instance, to baffle not only fifteenth-century readers, but twentieth-century critics. One of the pleasures involved in working on Henryson’s poems lies exactly in what I would call the deceptiveness of appearances. He continually deludes the reader with apparent straightforwardness, only to expose immediately afterwards the complexity hidden inside the “folk” exterior. His two major works, the *Fables* and *The Testament of Cresseid*, are the most explicit instances of this attitude, and have been extensively analyzed by readers and critics more acutely perceptive than Speirs. But it might be equally rewarding to examine in the same light less famous poems, such as the often ignored “Robene and Makyne.” I have chosen to analyze this poems, often considered no more than an eccentric imitation of French *pastourelles*, as an instance of Henryson’s sophistication, and of his ability to elude the boundaries imposed by genre, thus offering the reader a comment on the modes of poetry. I shall examine the poem with reference to the literary genre with which it has been most often associated, the *pastourelle*, and measure its distance from its models. This perspective will allow me to draw a number of observations on the text, and particularly on the representations of the two characters.

“Robene and Makyne” is a work that occupies an isolated place among Henryson’s literary productions; it does not refer back to any precise source, as most of his other poems seem to do, and it is not an Aesopian fable or an elaboration on Greek myth. It distinguishes itself by being, at least on a super-

²For some illuminating observations on this point, see A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 187-99. In the same passage, the critic, writing of *The Cock and the Jasp*, defines it, with a happy turn of phrase, “an allegory of allegorical interpretation” (p. 194).

³John Speirs, *The Scots Literary Tradition: An Essay in Criticism* (London, 1940), p. 42.

ficial level, merely the tale of two rustic lovers alternatively pursuing and rejecting each other, in the setting of the contemporary Scottish countryside. I hasten to add, though, that when we define "Robene and Makyne" as occupying an isolated place in the poet's canon it does not mean that there is any such thing as a typical production of Henryson's; none of his surviving poems allows us to make such a statement, since both longer and shorter poems have very few elements in common and they definitely carry a stronger relationship with the genre they belong to than with one another. Very little is known about Robert Henryson, so it is next to impossible to place "Robene and Makyne," or indeed any of his poems, against an adequate biographical background. Conversely, and because of this lack of information, none of his poems helps us to fill in the missing details of the biography. Apart from the generic assumption that Henryson lived and wrote poems in the second half of the fifteenth century, there is not much we can do in the way of chronology, and any attempt to establish what was written earlier and what later would be devoid of significance. Editors have usually been content with genre subdivisions, dividing the corpus into three main groups: the thirteen *Fables* with their Prologue, the two longer poems (*The Testament of Cresseid* and *Orpheus and Eurydice*), and the poems that, for lack of a better term, have been simply called "shorter," whose number depends on editors and their attributions. "Robene and Makyne" belongs to this last group, and is usually considered one of the finest. It has also been the victim of a critical misunderstanding, as Evelyn S. Newlyn notes when she writes that

Scholarly attention has tended to confine itself to the poem's form and its possible sources, including the question of French influence. 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.⁴

Newlyn then goes much farther than this and even calls the poem "a dark and brooding presentation of human frailty" (p. 43)—at which point it is frankly difficult to agree with her. Nevertheless, the poem confirms Spearing's and other critics' theory that there is much more than meets the eye in Henryson's poetic production, as I will try to show here.

The story told is that of Makyne (or Mawkyn, or Malkyne), a country girl, possibly a shepherdess, who has been "Thir zeiris two or thre" (l. 6) in love with Robene, a shepherd; now at last she goes to him, and in an unexpectedly abrupt fashion confesses her passion. Robene, in turn, confesses his ignorance of "quhat is lufe, or to be lude" (l. 15). This confession gives Makyne the opportunity to declaim "ane A B C" (l. 18) that answers all the require-

⁴Evelyn S. Newlyn, "Tradition and Transformation in the Poetry of Robert Henryson," *SSL*, 18 (1983), 34. Henceforth Newlyn.

ments of courtly love, and indeed appears almost out of place in the mouth of the shepherdess. Robene, however, is none too impressed, and claims that the well-being of his flock is much nearer his own heart. Makyne's expostulations are all in vain, though Robene would go as far as to propose a meeting for the following day, since, he candidly admits, "my scheip ma gang besyd" (l. 43). After a short and ineffectual debate, the two go their separate ways home, but once they arrive a change of heart takes place for both: Robene discovers himself in love with Makyne, and goes to woo her, while the woman, made wiser by the man's scorn, rejects him, pronouncing the two lines that have become justly famous:

"The man that will nocht quhen he may
Sall haif nocht quhen he wald." (ll. 91-92).

At this point there is nothing left for Robene to go home alone, "In dolour and in cair" (l. 126).

As we see, the story is a very simple one. It is because of this simplicity that it has often been linked to popular poetry, and in particular to a well defined type of popular poetry—the ballad. In fact, Alexander Keith, in his essay on Scottish ballads,⁵ goes as far as to call the poem a ballad *tout court*, though he admits that its literary origin gives it a special place with the genre, so it is important at this point to see what there is to sustain this hypothesis.

The poem consists almost exclusively of dialogue between the two characters, with little intervention on the part of the narrator, but some of the most obvious characteristics of ballads are missing: there is, for instance, no incremental repetition of motifs from one stanza to the other, and no refrain. These characteristics, however, are usually linked with ballads of the oral type, so their absence is not enough to determine the extraneousness of *Robene and Makyne* to the genre. On the other hand, some of the adjectives may remind us of the ballad—see, for instance, the "Mirry Makyne" (l. 3), or "a ful fair daill" (l. 75)—and the same could be said for common phrases and *sententiae*, such as the proverb quoted above, or the phrase, "als licht as leif of tre" (l. 66). The names of the two protagonists recur frequently in ballads, and both are significant: the male character shares his Christian name with one of the most famous heroes of the popular ballad, Robin Hood; as for Makyne, a diminutive of Matilda or Maud, it is a recurring name not only in ballads and poems but in proverbs, thus confirming the popular patina that this choice of names sets on the poem. The impression we retain, however, is that the popular patina we seem to detect is the result of Henryson's craftsmanship rather than a clue to a spontaneous of folk origin of the poem. We must remember that in this poem

⁵Alexander Keith, "Scottish Ballads: Their Evidence of Authorship and Origin," *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 12 (1926), 100-119.

Henryson is working with slightly different material from what he habitually uses. It goes without saying that this particular subject—Scottish countryside and countryfolk instead of figures deriving from the classical tradition or from Aesopian fables—requires a particular tone, and certainly Henryson has demonstrated in all his other works his literary skill, to the point that it is not difficult to credit him with the ability to reproduce ballad tones and cadenzas, even without supposing a closer relationship of *Robene and Makyne* with popular ballads. It must be remembered, furthermore, that no definite source has been assigned to this poem, in spite of scholarly research in this direction, so there is good reason to suppose the poem to be Henryson's own original creation.

The kinship with the ballad genre is not the only one we can trace—or perhaps we should say that, since the term ballad is such a generic definition, it is easy to find other genres that provide a useful definition for the poem under consideration. In fact, *Robene and Makyne* has often been labeled *estrif*, or *contrasto* (debate), which is not so much a genre in itself, but rather one of the forms the ballad has taken, and subsequently lent to other, more literary, types of poetry. In his *Dizionario di retorica e di stilistica*, Angelo Marchese defines the *contrasto* as "a discussion between the lover and the loved woman, often with jocular overtones and not without realism."⁶ This suits our purpose well, if we make allowances for the switch of gender Henryson operates, which constitutes one of the most important novelties in the poem—but we shall come back to this point later. Many critics agree in considering *Robene and Makyne* a hybrid form, sharing the characteristics of both the ballad and the *contrasto*, or even a ballad employing the *contrasto* structure. It is clear, however, that this poem can be considered a variation on the *contrasto* only as regards its structure. Neither the psychological subtlety in the delineation of the two characters, nor the language used by the two shepherds, can possibly belong to the cruder medieval *contrasto*, and we must assume relationships with other kinds of poetry. Henryson has borrowed his form from ballad and *estrif*; as for the language he is using, other influences must come into our discussion.

In order to illustrate this point let us consider, for instance, the previously mentioned A B C of love spoken by Makyne:

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. 19-24)

⁶My translation. Angelo Marchese, *Dizionario di retorica e di stilistica* (Milan, 1987), p. 66.

Occupying almost an entire stanza, this catechism of love marks a distinct pause in the compact rhythm that is typical of *contrasto*, and stands a little apart from the argument constituting the main motif of the poem, since Robene cannot, or does not choose to, answer it. In fact, it takes us away from popular themes and cadences and brings us into quite a different atmosphere—the one created by Guillaume de Lorris in his section of the *Roman de la Rose*:

Sociés cortois et acointables,
de paroles douz et resnables
et au granz genz et aus menues; (...)
Je ne tien pas a cortois home
qui orde chose et laide nome.
Toutes fames ser et honore,
en aus servir poine et labeure;
et se tu oz nul mesdisanz
qui aille fame despisant,
blame me et di qu'il se taise,
Fai, se tu puez, chose qui plaise
as dames et as demoiseilles,
si qu'eus oient bones noveles
de toi dire et racnoter:
par ce porras em pris monter. (ll. 2087-9; 2101-112)⁷

Once again, the little we know about Henryson does not allow us to state with any certainty whether the poet had actually read the *Roman de la Rose* or from which source he was borrowing when writing the lines quoted above—the model generally proposed by most critics for this passage is actually Pertelote's charge to Chauntecleer.⁸ Still, it is important to notice how with this one observation we have already moved away from ballads and Scottish popular poetry to discover another and quite different literary background to the poem.

So far we have seen possible relationships of *Robene and Makyne* with the ballad, the *contrasto* and with the more literary level of the courtly *roman*. In the following section we are going to see how the poem is linked with yet one

⁷Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris, 1973), I, 65. My translation follows:

Be courtly and agreeable, and let your speech be sweet and reasonable both to the great and the small...I do not consider gentle the man who has filthy habits and a foul name. Always serve fame and honor, and exert yourself in this service: and if you hear any slanderer who despises fame, blame him and bid him hold his tongue. If you can, do what can be pleasing to ladies both old and young, so that they will sing your praises, which could give you an advantage.

⁸See Arthur K. Moore, "Robene and Makyne," *Modern Language Review*, 43 (1948), 402. Henceforth Moore.

more genre, the *pastourelle*, and how in this case the relation between poem and genre can produce interesting results. We are, obviously, making assumptions on what Henryson could know and imitate of French literature. The *pastourelle* in fact links the Scottish poet with a French, and partly an Italian, tradition of poetry. It has even been suggested, if only with partial success, that there is one particular French source for Henryson's poem—a *pastourelle* by Baudes de la Kakerie (Moore, p. 402). Apart from this claim, which has gone largely unsupported, no other definite source has been found for *Robene and Makyne*—rather, it is possible to trace a distinct air of familiarity with the genre. A survey of what *pastourelle* means for fifteenth-century poetry will probably help us to focus more distinctly on this alleged familiarity.

A number of definitions have been offered regarding the *pastourelle*, from Piguet's claim that "la pastourelle est une chanson dialoguée dans laquelle un galant d'une classe élevée tente, avec ou sans succès, de séduire une bergère,"⁹ to Stephen Manning's definition, in the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, of the *pastourelle* as

a short lyric dialogue in which a self-confident knight attempts to seduce a naïve, greedy, or clever shepherdess. The outcome varies, but the knight is often outwitted. It uses three poetic structures—the amorous encounter, debate, and plaint—but depends heavily for its effect on the contrast in characterization.

This type of lyric is associated with the poetic production of the Provençal troubadours, and was also taken up by the Italian poets of the Dolce Stil Novo—a famous example being Guido Cavalcanti's lyric *In un boschetto trova' pasturella*, written the meter of the *ballata minore*. As with most of the troubadours' poetry, it was often accompanied by music—we might remember for instance Adam de la Halle (d. 1287) who wrote eighteen *jeux partis*, or *singspiele*, among which there is one, *Jeu de Robin et Marion*, a dialogue with twenty-eight songs. This overlapping of lyrical poetry, music, and drama—the *pastourelle* has also been likened to the *pastorale drammatica*, which is the first instance in medieval France of musical drama with a non-religious subject—has caused some confusion with in the genre, and has brought some critics to draw a not-too-well founded analogy between this and the pastoral poetry written by Tasso and Guarini almost a century after Henryson.¹⁰ In short, with the *pastourelle* we have entered quite a different realm for the two forms examined so far, the ballad and the *contrasto*. In Henryson's poem this

⁹"the *pastourelle* is a lyric dialogue in which a gallant knight or nobleman attempts, without success, to seduce a shepherdess" (my translation). E. Piguet, *L'évolution de la pastourelle du XIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Basel, 1927), p. 9.

¹⁰Kurt Wittig, for instance, calls "Robene and Makyne" a "remarkable precursor of pastoral drama," *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh & London, 1958), p. 52.

genre borrows some of its tone from popular poetry, particularly in the section devoted to the debate between the two protagonists, which in its turn is of course closely related to the *contrasto*. The relation between *pastourelle* and popular poetry has been suggested also by E. K. Chambers, who in *The Medieval Stage* wrote generically about folk-songs rather than ballads, suggesting the *pastourelle* as link between these and pastoral drama, which in its turn constitutes an evolution from the minstrelsy songs.¹¹ However uncertain this reconstruction may sound, it is an attempt to enlighten for us the literary and historical background of the genre we are considering.

Yet even when we have considered these possible links with popular literature, it is indisputable that what we are dealing with is a form of quite a different origin. Behind the fake *esprit populaire* of the genre we can detect the heritage of the *chanson courtoise*: "La pastourelle provençale procède d'une inspiration nettement aristocratique et il n'y a rien dans cette variété de poèmes qui ne dénonce l'œuvre de poètes de salons, l'amusement d'une société raffinée."¹² It might be important to stress the word "amusement," since, as it turns out, it is often an enjoyment at the expense of the shepherdesses and shepherds portrayed in the poems, especially of the shepherds, whose role is usually comic, creating a contrast with the knight. Not only does the genre derive its origin from quite a different social sphere than, let us say, the ballad, it is also aimed at caricaturing the lower class:

La pastourelle, qui nous montre un chevalier courtois, avec des succès divers, une jeune bergère, suppose très probablement, à l'origine, l'intention d'opposer malicieusement les deux classes, et de ridiculiser la grossièreté et la gaucherie paysannes.¹³

The theme is the opposition of two social classes, and the shepherdess herself, in spite of her charm, becomes little more than the prettiest beast in the fields. Even leaving sociological considerations apart, our short survey on the *pastourelle* helps us to define it as a more sophisticated form, with a very precise structure and recurring traits which quickly become conventional, such as the shepherdess's dreamy attitude before the arrival of the knight, or her initial

¹¹E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* (Oxford, 1903), p. 171.

¹²"The provençal pastourelle has an obviously aristocratic origin, and there is nothing in this genre which does not reflect the work of the poets of salons, the amusement of a refined society" (my translation). Edmond Faral, "La Pastourelle," *Romania*, 49 (1923), 204-205.

¹³"The pastourelle which shows us a knight courting, with varied success, a young shepherdess, most probably originally was meant maliciously to contrast the two classes, and to ridicule the peasants' vulgarity and gaucherie." (my translation). Alfred Jeanroy, *Anthologie des Troubadours* (Paris, 1974), p. 23.

rejection of the knight's proposals. It is only when we consider the strength of this convention that it is possible for us to appreciate the novelty of Henryson's poem.

It comes of course as no surprise that *Robene and Makyne* represents a parody of, or perhaps an experiment with, this Provençal form of poetry. As a matter of fact, this has not only been noticed by many critics, but often taken for granted. The attribution of the poem to this genre has given the opportunity for a rather quick cataloguing, and the impression with most of the generic type of criticism is that by calling *Robene and Makyne* a *pastourelle* the critic can spare him/herself many problems of genre analysis. For example, H. S. Bennett writes:

In *Robene and Makyne* Henryson gives us one of the earliest forms of the *pastourelle* that was to have so great a vogue. This charming piece of rustic wooing, with its *moralitas*, 'the man that wilt nocht when he may Sall have nocht when he wald,' is played out by Robene and Makyne on 'a gude green hill' amid the flocks feeding in 'a full fair dale.'¹⁴

We have already established that the *pastourelle* is in itself a sophisticated genre, deriving various elements from other kinds of poetry, and in some cases using the borrowed material, and the readers' awareness of the borrowing, in order to create sophisticatedly metapoetic moments. The complexity fits *Robene and Makyne*, and so does the multiplicity of influences. Hence it is easier for the unimaginative critic to consign Henryson's poem to the genre, without creating further problems of definition.

But we can also suppose that in the case of this poem Henryson has gone one step further, working as it were not inside the genre but using the genre as a useful tool, both for parodic purposes and to create a suitable foil to his own originality. This thesis is supported by what we know of Henryson's working methods with other genres, such as the Aesopian fable. We have seen with the help of Spearing's comments on *The Cock and the Jasp* that irony is one of the great resources of this poet. It is fair to assume that with *Robene and Makyne* Henryson is using the same irony towards a genre certainly not so time-honored as the fable was, yet a genre that was undoubtedly coming into fashion at that time, with which Scottish poets too must have been familiar. This second interpretation certainly suits the image of a poet who, as Spearing reminds us, has been the first to use in English the word "invention" to mean "literary creation."¹⁵ As Ian Jamieson rightly notices, the first element that makes us

¹⁴H. S. Bennett, *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Verse and Prose* (Oxford, 1947), p. 175.

¹⁵In *The Testament of Cresseid*, lines 64-7. "This appears to be the earliest use in English of the word 'invention' to mean 'literary creation,' and it is interesting to see the dignified term 'poet' used in the same line" (Spearing, p. 167).

aware of the distance Henryson has gone from the original *pastourelle* is his treatment of Makyne.

Of course, *Robene and Makyne* is coloured by the ballad form...but at base it remains a *pastourelle* nicely piquant with the contrast between the elements of *fine amour* in the third stanza and the deliciously earthy expression of Makyne's desire, an earthiness probably underlined by the very name Makyne."¹⁶

The particular light in which Makyne is represented finds its origin and motive in the reversal of the *pastourelle* scheme of love pursuit: instead of a knight or a shepherd declaring his love to a coy shepherdess, we see a shepherdess trying to persuade a reluctant shepherd to join her in the joys of love, and even taking the trouble to explain to him what love means—an unusual task for the shepherdess, who is generally, like Andreas Capellanus' *rusticani*, considered incapable of courtly love. The new pattern sharpens our interest in a female protagonist who is running so noticeably counter to tradition. Moreover, the name Makyne usually had a derogatory connotation in poems and proverbs, being used to indicate a prostitute, or the female pudendum. Having chosen to use this name of his heroine, Henryson is treading on a particularly perilous ground: a *pastourelle* female character with the name of a prostitute might lead all too easily to farce of the grossest kind. The fact that Henryson manages to avoid this trap, giving us an extraordinarily graceful treatment of a delicate theme, shows the poet's skill.

Another reason why Makyne constitutes an important novelty in the poem is the sudden declaration of her passion for Robene. In order to appreciate this novelty we should compare Henryson's lines on Makyne's apparition:

Robene sat on gud grene hill
Kepand a flok of fe;
Mirry Makyne said him till,
'Robene, thow rew on me! (ll. 1-4)

with the analogous lines in Guido Cavalcanti's famous *pastourelle*:

In un boschetto trova' pasturella
più che la stella—bella, al mi' parere.
Cavelli avea biondetti e ricciutelli,
e gli occhi pien d'amor, cera rosata;
con sua verghetta pasturav' agnelli,
discalza, di rugiada era bagnata;
cantava come fosse 'namorata;
er' adornata—di tutto piacere (ll. 1-8).

¹⁶Ian A. W. Jamieson, "The Minor Poems of Robert Henryson," *SSL*, 9 (1971-72), 146.

It must be stated beforehand that Cavalcanti's shepherdess belongs to neither of the categories hypothesized by Manning—she is not naïve, greedy, or clever, but simply amorous, which contributes both to the lingering tone of the poet's description and to the liveliness of the character. Yet the representation of the woman is even-mannered in its faithfulness to an established pattern of female charm. With her fair hair and pink complexion, Cavalcanti's shepherdess answers the model almost to perfection, while the landscape and colors surrounding her are correspondingly Arcadian. Another example, this time from troubadour poetry (Marcabru's *L'autrier jost'una sebissa*), tells us more on the stereotypical representation of the female protagonist:

L'autrier jost'una sebissa
 Trobei pastora mestissa
 De joi e de sen massissa,
 Si cum filla de vilana,
 Cap'e gonel'e pelissa
 Vest e camiza treslissa,
 Sotlars e caussas de lana (ll. 1-7).¹⁷

Makyne cuts quite a different figure. Nothing is said about her physical appearance or her garments, and the didactic tone of the catechism of love she imparts to Robene might make us think that she is rather older than her shepherd. I hasten to add that much has been made of the supposed maturity—both in age and in wisdom—of Makyne, but perhaps wrongly. We agree that the psychological subtlety used by Henryson in his representation of Makyne is one of the traits marking the development from conventional genres to a more authentic poetry. But a critic such as Newlyn who sees in Makyne a figure of "essential innocence and naivete" subsequently turned into "a brittle, cynical, and even malicious woman with an acerbic tongue" is possibly going too far (Newlyn, pp. 37, 29). On the other hand, we can recognize in Makyne more realistic traits than we find in Cavalcanti's shepherdess: her speech, often interwoven with proverbs, and the tight and quick argumentation of the central part of her debate with Robene in the seventh and eighth stanzas, are characteristics that, without making her psychological portrait too subtle, detach her from the constraining frame of tradition and endow her with a new plasticity. Thanks to this additional shade, Makyne is neither the mannered *pasturella* nor a prototypical virago, and it is possible for the reader to enjoy the contrast between the two characters even beyond the purely literary pleasure afforded by Henryson's new treatment of an old form.

¹⁷"The other day, near a hedge, I met a shepherdess, full of joy and good sense; she was the daughter of a peasant, wearing a cap, a gown and a coat, with a knitted shirt, shoes and woollen stockings" (my translation). J. M. L. Dejeanne, ed., *Poésies complètes du Troubadour Marcabru* (Toulouse, 1909), p. 137.

Robene, too, undergoes a decisive development: instead of the shepherd of convention, the reader is presented with a character possessing his own originality. Sometimes he appears as an uncouth rustic, whose presence is needed only to emphasize the gentility of the knight, while at other times he is a true wooer, desperate or eager or melancholic as the case may be. In Marcabru's and Cavalcanti's poems quoted above, to take one more instance, we have seen that the male wooers have reserved for themselves the role of narrators; the result is that their persona is only intuitively understood by the reader, since the wooer-narrator concentrates his attention on the shepherdess. Since she tends to react in a rather fixed manner, the poet can work on a much wider range in his treatment of the male character/s of the *pastourelle*. Once again we may state that Henryson's treatment of his shepherd is unique. Robene is, first of all, not a lover but a loved one, and a very passive one at that. In the case of Makyne we mentioned how the gender switch could easily have resulted in farce, and the same can be said with respect to Robene. The traditional rustic would appear not only uncouth, but downright stupid. In this case the farce would be helped by the shepherd's initial total incomprehension of Makyne's passion, and his subsequent confusion of being "in love" with being "marrit in thy mude." In this perspective, his final change of heart, taking place at the same time as Makyne's, would become nothing more than the finishing comical twist of the farce. Such an interpretation, however, would be reductive, and not take into account many small and apparently incidental insertions by Henryson that qualify Robene's character and behavior throughout the poem.

To begin with, it is important to notice the language spoken by Robene. We have seen how Makyne's is—until her final conversion—emotionally high-pitched and full of passionate eloquence, with even an occasional incursion into the language of courtly love. Robene's is much more down to earth, as suits his character, and often resounds with proverbial phrases or common tags—see for instance, his "raik on raw" (l. 12), or the heart-felt "At hame God gif I wair" (l. 60); he is, in a sense, more truly Scottish than Makyne. At the same time, the poet is careful not to use the shepherd's more common language in order to create one of the country bumpkins so abundant in the literature of all ages. This subtle balance is reached, paradoxically enough, by stressing Robene's absolute sincerity in the utterance of his feelings. A good example is where the shepherd, while refusing Makyne's invitation to join her, urges the woman to "make gud cheir" (l. 48), because "Quhat lysis on hairt I will nocht hyd" (l. 47). Newlyn has seen in this statement a proof that "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" (p. 36), but once again my feeling is that her analysis of the characters is over-subtle. It is difficult to see in Robene's statements, especially in the first part of the poem, all the kindness and concern Newlyn attributes to him. It is certainly difficult to see this attitude as directed to Makyne.

What Robene has, in fact, is a careful and healthy concern for something totally unrelated with the patterns of pastoral love—that is to say, the well-being of his flock. Henryson is careful to set him always, whatever his mood, against the background of his all-important sheep. Even in the last stanza, a prey to grief, he is "Kepand his hird" (l. 127). Every time he speaks, there is a reference to "my scheip." This concern informs all his sentences, even when he invites Makyne to join him on the morrow, when "peraventure my scheip ma gang besyd" (l. 43), or when he finally falls in love with the woman, declaring:

'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 scheip to morne quhill houris nyne
Will neid of no keping (ll. 81-88, italics mine).

The novelty in this passage consists in our realization that Robene's attention for something that has nothing to do with love or with the shepherdess is not seen by the poet as a mark of the farcical nature of his character. Readers are supposed to approve of this trait, not because it reveals a new seriousness in the rustic of the *pastourelle*, but because it makes him a real shepherd, behaving as shepherds do, and probably as many fifteenth-century Scots did. It is important to stress that there is no condescension on Robene's part; he is eminently practical in all his actions, and whether tempted by Makyne's offer of love, or consumed by love himself, he never forgets his duty. By means of this realism Henryson succeeds in keeping Robene well distinguished from the army of literary bumpkins. Robene does not understand "luvis lair," but he also the character who does not borrow his language from other social or literary spheres, remaining always true to himself. Appropriately enough, his final grief will be silent.

Thus Henryson has successfully united the well-mannered mockery of a stilted genre with a theme that rings truer to the setting chosen for the poem. In his book on the Scottish poet, John MacQueen has written:

Henryson must then be regarded as in some sense a humanist. But his humanism is not of the Italian type. He heralds the Northern Renaissance, whose continuity with the Middle Ages extended even into the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century—there was no decisive break with the past.¹⁸

¹⁸John MacQueen, *Robert Henryson. A Study of the Major Narrative Poems* (Oxford, 1967), p. 22.

Whatever the implications of this statement, it suits this analysis, confirming as it does the refusal on Henryson's part of literary convention *per se*, and the adoption of a more personal approach to literary tradition.¹⁹

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¹⁹I wish to thank here Anna Torti, of the Università degli Studi di Perugia, for her generous help.