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H. Harvey Wood. Two Scots Chaucerians. Writers and Their Work: No. 201. London. Published for the British Council and the National Book League by Longmans, Green & Co. 1967. 48 pp. Three shillings and sixpence.

Denton Fox
Victoria College, University of Toronto

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BOOK REVIEWS

H. Harvey Wood. *Two Scots Chaucerians. Writers and Their Work*: No. 201. London. Published for the British Council and the National Book League by Longmans, Green & Co. 1967. 48 pp. Three shillings and sixpence.

This recent addition to the British Council series consists of two short essays on Henryson and Dunbar, together with a very brief introduction and a concise bibliography. The essays are intended as introductions to the poets; they are neatly written, but are not likely to be of much interest to the scholar. A fair amount of space is devoted to plot-summaries of various poems, but there are also some sensible remarks, particularly in the essay on Dunbar. Mr. Wood's conclusions, that Dunbar was primarily a virtuoso, and that as poets he and Henryson could hardly have been more unlike, are certainly impeccable.

The worst thing that could be said about this pamphlet is that it might well have been written fifty years ago, to judge from its critical approach. The emphasis is entirely on the personalities of Henryson and Dunbar, as revealed by their poems. Henryson, for instance, turns out to be "curious and inquisitive" (because he is identified with the narrator of the prologue to "The Lion and the Mouse"), "not indifferent to his creature comforts" (because he is identified with the narrator of *The Testament of Cresseid*), and "a simmering revolutionary" (because of the *moralitas* of "The Wolf and the Lamb"). Poems are even valued according to the degree to which they "reveal the personality of the poet": the details of Dunbar's "Golden Targe," for instance, "are all of the slightest interest and of no autobiographical significance." But both Henryson and Dunbar are poets nearly anonymous: we know next to nothing about their lives, and they themselves had no interest in poetizing about their personalities. It would seem more useful, and essentially more complimentary, to view them as superb craftsmen, not as men parading their characters and emotions.

DENTON FOX
Victoria College
University of Toronto