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**COURTING LOVE:
COMEDY AND GENRE IN *ROBENE AND MAKYNE***

Caitlin Flynn

Robert Henryson's dexterous control of genre, form, and tone is often most closely associated with his longer narratives—the Aesopic *Fables*, *The Testament of Cresseid*, and *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Henryson's poetry consistently poses fraught questions about the creation of genre, narrative authority, and form. In these longer texts, he fuses formal rhetoric and didactic instruction with unstable narrative voices and perspectives. His shorter comic poems have come under less frequent scrutiny. However, the shorter narratives offer compelling case studies for the late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century trend towards comic innovation in Scottish imaginative literature. *Robene and Makyne* is a persuasive example of this innovative period in Scottish literature. Previously, the competing genres in *Robene and Makyne* have challenged modern scholars owing to the seamlessness of Henryson's weaving together of courtly and country, formal and frolicking.¹ This essay considers the two eponymous figures as they embody the generic confusion marking the formal qualities of the poem. That is to say, the two lovers take on amorphous forms, which play out a variety of typological stereotypes. In turn, these vibrant figures reflect the comic instability of the generic resonances within the text and point to wider trends in Scottish imaginative literature of the period.

Since *Robene and Makyne* is often only briefly mentioned in discussion of Henryson's work, a brief summary may be helpful. Makyne, a woman of indeterminate age and occupation, though it becomes clear she is somewhere on the scale of the *rusticani* derided by Andreas Capellanus in his

¹ See, e.g., Michael G. Cornelius, "Robert Henryson's Pastoral Burlesque 'Robene and Makyne' (c.1470)," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 28 (2002): 80-96, which focuses on Henryson's satirical treatment of "the courtly romance, the *pastourelle*, the *carpe diem* poem, the elegy, and the popular medieval convention of women wanting to rule men" (81), and seeks to reorient scholarship on the poem away from moralistic readings; Douglas Gray's short overview of the poem in *Robert Henryson* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 264-7; and, on Henryson's rhetorical style, Robert L. Kindrick, *Henryson and the Medieval Arts of Rhetoric* (New York: Garland, 1993).

commentary on courtly love, approaches a would-be beau and shepherd, Robene.² She proposes to teach the shepherd the ways of love in order to requite her own longing, but the encounter soon devolves into a debate over the logistical challenges of carrying out a sexual tryst while Robene is still on the clock, so to say. Unable to come to an agreement, they part ways, Makyne crying and cursing Robene as she leaves. Robene soon has second thoughts and chases after Makyne, though when he catches up she rejects him on the basis of his earlier dismissal. She cites a somewhat garbled proverb—one that rejects something when it is offered, can't expect to have it whenever they want—and claims that she cannot forgive or forget the humiliation of Robene's earlier rejection. Spurned, Robene sits desolately among his sheep under a cliff and Makyne skips laughingly away.

I. Individual vs Stereotype: Robene and Makyne as Lovers

Alessandra Petrina astutely observes that, in the context of pastourelle heroines, Makyne's character exhibits a novel amount of plasticity owing to her nimble and dynamic speech, so that "Makyne is neither the mannered *pasturella* nor a prototypical virago."³ In following up Petrina's comment, I would argue that the composite figures created by Henryson make comedy of central significance to this poem. Other scholars have noted that in Scottish poetry of this period female figures tend to defy typological or generic boundaries. In William Dunbar's *The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* (ca. 1507), for example, which has long been cited as epitomizing such defiance, the three women betray their courtly mien by reciting salacious and cunning tales of their manipulation of their husbands. Thinking about the various stereotypes recalled by Makyne—beyond the two cited by Petrina—allows us to see a deeper continuity tracing through the literature produced in Scotland during the period.

Two notable distinctions between Henryson's poem and other pastourelles are the absence of a narrator and the nature of the dialogue. On the one hand, the absence of the narrator is highly uncommon in the pastourelle genre as a whole, although, as William W. Kibler and James I. Wimsatt have pointed out, it occurs several times in the pastourelles in a manuscript codex at the University of Pennsylvania, referred to below as

² See Rosemary Greentree, "Literate in Love: Makyne's Lesson for Robene," in *Older Scots Literature*, ed. Sally Mapstone (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), 61-9. Greentree refers to Andreas Capellanus's work as a point of reference and notes some interesting implications of the protagonists' names.

³ Alessandra Petrina, "Deviations from Genre in Robert Henryson's 'Robene and Makyne,'" *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 31 (1999): 107-120 (117): <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol31/iss1/9/>.

Penn MS. Codex 902.⁴ In *Robene and Makyne*, the dialogue is distinct insofar as the lovers experience unrequited love with no relief from their beloved or a third party (at times the narrator proposes to remedy the unrequited love of the shepherdess in other pastourelles). There is no mutual or individual joy taken in love and the affair is wholly unsuccessful. The opening stanza establishes both deviations from and correspondences with the traditional features of the pastourelle:

Robene sat on gud grene hill
 Kepand a flok of fe.
 Mirry Makyne said him till,
 “Robene, thow rew on me!
 I haif thee lovit loud and still
 Thir yeiris two or thre.
 My dule in dem bot gif thow dill
 Doutles but dreid I de.” (ll. 1-9)⁵

Many pastourelle narratives open with the first-person narrator encountering the shepherdess as she goes about her business. This initial encounter is normally marked by a description of the physical beauty of the simple shepherdess. Henryson’s narrative, in contrast, is told in third-person and the shepherd rather than shepherdess is accosted in bucolic surroundings; neither Makyne’s nor Robene’s physical appearance is described at any point. Although the role-reversal is apparently unprecedented, the abruptness of the dialogue is not: the eighth pastourelle from Penn MS. Codex 902 opens, “Robin seoit et Maret a plains camps” (“Robin and Maret were sitting in the open field”) before launching into a dialogue between the

⁴ MS Codex 902 (ca. 1400; formerly catalogued as MS French 15), Kislak Center for Special Collections, University of Pennsylvania. See William W. Kibler and James I. Wimsatt, “The Development of the Pastourelle in the Fourteenth Century: An Edition of Fifteen Poems with an Analysis,” *Mediaeval Studies* 45 (1983), 22-78, esp. 24-7 and 58-61, characterizing the 14th-c. pastourelle poems from this manuscript as transitional examples that bridge the gap between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and later innovations on the genre by Jean Froissart. The pastourelles of Penn MS Codex 902, therefore, are in a unique position to show experimental compositions between two more established iterations of a single form. Cf. also James I. Wimsatt, “Chaucer and MS French 15 (Penn),” in *Chaucer and the Poems of “Ch,”* rev. ed. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/wimsatt-chaucer-and-the-poems-of-ch-chaucer-and-ms-french-15-penn>

⁵ Quotations from Henryson and in-text references below are from David J. Parkinson, ed., *Robert Henryson: The Complete Works* (Kalamazoo: TEAMS Middle English Text Series, 2010): <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/parkinson-henryson-complete-works-introduction>, with a direct link to *Robene and Makyne* at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/parkinson-henryson-complete-works-shorter-poems-stronger-attributions#rm>.

two. In that example Robin and Maret partake in an elaborate conversation regarding the experience of variously suffering lovers from classical literature.⁶ The final two-line refrain is reminiscent of another anonymous pastourelle in which the narrator encounters a shepherdess whose song forms the refrain of that poem: “*I’m in love and it holds me; / It will kill me soon, / It will kill me soon!*”⁷ Despite the dire words of her song, the narrator describes the *pastoure* as “singing and having fun” (l. 6).⁸ Unfortunately, the potential for comic dissonance is left undeveloped and the pastourelle is sparse and short at only 30 lines.

A series of pastourelle poems by Occitan poet Guiraut Riquier (fl. 1254-92) parallel the tone and pace of Henryson’s poem more closely than many others. Riquier’s series follows a chronological trajectory and the third pastourelle (1264), particularly, engages the didactic and comic tone so emblematic of Henryson’s poem. In Riquier the shepherdess chides the melodramatically lovestruck narrator for seeming not to recognize her and reminds him that he has pursued her unsuccessfully for four years:

“Girl, love begins
 With so much suffering
 That I need your help.”
 “Sir, timidly
 You have desired me
 For the last four years!”
 “Girl, I don’t believe
 I ever saw you before; don’t let it upset you,
 If now you are my lover.”
 “Sir, I can tell you for sure
 That you will make many people laugh.
 Don’t you recognize me?”
 “Girl, are you crazy?”
 “No, sir, nor mute!” (ll. 43-56)⁹

This pastourelle is perhaps the most similar in tone and language to *Robene and Makyne*, albeit with reversed roles and different circumstances. The

⁶ Translation from Kibler and Wimsatt, “The Development of the Pastourelle.”

⁷ Incipit: ‘D’Arés a Flandres alloie’ (‘From Arras to Flanders I was going’), quoted from William D. Paden, trans. and ed., *The Medieval Pastourelle*, 2 vols. (New York: Garland, Inc., 1987). Pastourelle 99. The French reads: “*J’ai amors qui me tiennent; / elle m’ociront jai, / elle m’ociront jai!*”

⁸ Originally: “*truix pastoure o lou cleir vis / ki chantoit et menoit joie*” (ll. 5-6).

⁹ See the third pastourelle by Guiraut Riquier in Paden, *The Medieval Pastourelle*, Volume II. (Numbered 136). The original Occitan reads: “*Toza, tant comensa / l’amors ab martire / qu’ops m’es vostr’ajuda.*” / “*Senher, ab temensa, / m’avetz en dezire / bien quatr’ans tenguda!*” / “*Toza, no m’albire / qu’ie-us vis mai; no-us tire / si ar etz ma druda.*” / “*Senher, be-us puesc dire / que-n faretz mans rire. / Suy desconoguda?*” / “*Toz’, etz esperduda?*” / “*Senher, non, ni muda!*”

shepherdess' rejoinders consistently undermine the language of love employed by the narrator, but in such a way that her frank rusticity is endearing and her unadorned responses belie her keenly accurate logic. Their banter proceeds, but the narrator remembers a sudden errand and must rush off, leaving the tryst unfulfilled. Riquier's pastourelles themselves are unusual since his series of six poems follows the shepherdess from her youth through her old age and show the two characters to have a consistent repartee that seems relegated to mutual flirting and debate and they never seem overly concerned with the actual consummation of a relationship. Although Riquier's pastourelles are unusual in their serial construction and in the delicate composition of the banter and characters, Henryson goes even further by swapping the roles of the two speakers and compressing their emotional rollercoaster of a debate into a single poem.

In Riquier's first pastourelle (1260) the narrator asks the shepherdess whether she knows about love: "I asked her, / 'Girl, have you ever been loved / Or do you know how to love?'" (ll. 15-7).¹⁰ In a reversal, a perplexed Robene asks Makyne to explain what it means to love or to be loved after she confronts him with her demands in the first stanza:

Makyne, to me thow shaw,
Or quhat is lufe or to be lude?
Fane wald I leir that law."

"At luvis lair gife thow will leir,
Take thair ane A B C: (ll. 14-8)

Where Riquier's narrator uses his question to pester the shepherdess into taking him as a lover, but with no instructive elaboration on the nature of love, Makyne immediately offers to teach Robene the amatory arts. While not evident in this first pastourelle, the didactic tone adopted by Makyne is more apparent in Riquier's second and third pastourelles, and Helen Cooper links her speech to a wider impetus to instruction in the pastourelle genre. She asserts that this "potential for instruction" equalizes the herdsman and the courtier by transferring "the idea that love ennobles the character and heightens the sensibility ... to the shepherd world."¹¹

Of course, it is rarely, if ever, the female protagonist engaging in this ennobling endeavor. Instead, she frequently demures by claiming her heart is given to another or that it is improper to engage in sexual relations with a stranger. In a number of pastourelle this demurral is refused and the

¹⁰ From the first pastourelle of Guiraut Riquier in Paden, *The Medieval Pastourelle*. (Numbered 134). Originally: "*Qu'ieu li fi demanda, / 'Toza, fos amada / ni sabetz amar?'"*

¹¹ Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer, 1977), 75.

shepherdess is raped.¹² Makyne's control of the situation is unusual in this respect and her immediate impulse to instruction suggests an elevation of the poem towards *fin'amor*. In fact, according to Moshe Lazar, "*fin'amor* exists in a context of sensual longing, verbal love games, separations, frustrated sexual expectations, [and] postponed physical union" among a range of other challenges.¹³ Makyne's exclamations, alongside her ABCs of love, evoke these markers of *fin'amor* thereby creating a tension between speaker, speech, and genre; this tension underpins the comic *frisson* so carefully crafted throughout the poem.

The apparently elevated tone introduced by Makyne's initial offer of amorous instruction is undercut by the fact that it is a single, apparently rustic, woman offering advice and by her almost immediate move to offering her virginity to Robene outright. This sets up a comic subversion, but it also subtly evokes the amorous instruction offered by wild, shape-shifting women as seen in the Loathly Lady tales. In *Robene and Makyne*, Makyne appears out of nowhere and approaches Robene with the offer of amorous knowledge. In return she expects Robene to requite her love by engaging in a sexual relationship. This sort of dealing, driven by the woman's aggressive claim to sexual knowledge, is demonstrated by the knight's encounter with the loathly lady of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. The knight finds the loathly lady sitting alone, not unlike a *pastorella*, but the old woman is of despicable ugliness.¹⁴ Nevertheless the knight asks her for the answer to the queen's riddle: "What thyng it is that wommen moost desire. / Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre hire" (ll. 1007-8); the woman responds immediately with assurances of her authority:

Lat se which is the proudeste of hem alle
That wereth on a coverchief or a call
That dar seye nay of that I shal thee teche (ll. 1017-9).

Makyne's direct and unashamed confrontation with Robene matches the confident claims of the loathly lady and is all the more striking for her unsolicited offer of such knowledge.

Another parallel occurs in the late-fifteenth-century poem *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell for Helpyng of Kyng Arthoure*. Arthur, challenged by the same riddle as the Wife of Bath's knight, meets a terrifyingly ugly woman in the woods, the eponymous Dame Ragnell. She

¹² See Kathryn Gravdal, "Camouflaging Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in Medieval Pastourelle," *Romanic Review*, 76 (1985): 361-73.

¹³ Moshe Lazar, "Fin'amor," in *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 74.

¹⁴ Quotations from Chaucer's works are from Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

approaches him and offers her assistance even before Arthur can explain the riddle or the circumstances of its occurrence: she says,

Speke with me, I rede, or thou goo,
 For thy lyfe is in my hand, I warn the soo—
 That shalt thou fynde, and I itt nott lett.” (ll. 255-7).¹⁵

Arthur is rather more dismissive and arrogant than the Wife of Bath’s knight, but Dame Ragnell persists:

For alle the answerys that thou canst yelpe,
 None of theym alle shall the helpe—
 That shalt thou knowe, by the Rood!

Thou wenyst I knowe nott thy counsell;
 Butt I warn the, I know itt, every deall—
 Yf I help the nott, thou art butt dead (ll. 261-6).

The circumstances of the meetings between the loathly ladies and knights are undoubtedly higher stakes, and they explicitly call on the supernatural associations of women found in the woods or countryside. Rather than being approached by a man in distress and in need of particular knowledge, Makyne independently accosts Robene and forces her lesson on him while demanding he solve her predicament, which is more in line with the sexually-aggressive male narrators of the pastourelles who similarly engage arbitrary, impulsive, and unrestrained arguments in order to capture the shepherdess. However, Makyne’s sexual and romantic availability naturally subverts expectations of the genre and thus recalls the wily sexuality of the loathly ladies. Further, Robene’s response to Makyne’s attempted seduction imprints these associations with loathly ladies more deeply when he dismisses her by bidding her “sum uthir man [to] begyle” (l. 63).

Some of the discontinuities evident in a comparison between Makyne and the loathly ladies find resonance in the young, rustic heroines found in comic writing. In comic genres, women frequently betray their unabashed lustiness, even when they are deeply naïve when it comes to sex or love or as they become the objects of sexual violence.¹⁶ The pastourelle plays with these boundaries between knowledge and ignorance, experimenting with the efficacy of clever, witty dialogue, and, in some cases, the final powerlessness of the shepherdess in the face of the knight’s sexual

¹⁵ Quotations from *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell for the Helpyng of Kyng Arthur*, in Stephen H. Shepherd, ed., *Middle English Romances* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 243-267 (250-251).

¹⁶ The Middle High German comic poem, *Das Häslein* (“The Little Hare,” ca. 1330-50), is a striking example of the naïve, yet sexually voracious heroine: see Klaus Grubmüller, ed. and trans., *Novellistik des Mittelalters* (Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2014).

advances.¹⁷ In the Scottish tradition of so-called folk festivity poems we find more ribald and light-hearted examples of comic heroines. This genre is marked by the impressionistic and vivid portrayal of peasants at play during festive occasions such as weddings, fairs, or country dances. Individual characters are normally portrayed in vignette-like moments that span anywhere from a line to a stanza.¹⁸ *Robene and Makyne* chiefly translates the frenetic pace, arbitrariness, and confusion inherent to festivity poems. One key example of the form, *Christis Kirk on the Grene* (ca. 1490-1500), offers a briefly sketched figure rather similar to Makyne. Gillie is both fatuous and cruel in her rejection of a suitor:

Scho skornit Jok and skraipit at him,
 And murionit him with morkkis;
 He wald haif luvit, scho wald nocht lat him,
 For all his yallow loikkis:
 He chereist hir, scho bad ga chat him; (ll. 31-5)¹⁹

Makyne's uncompromising rejection of Robene after he changes his mind about their relationship seems to find an answer in this episode from *Christis Kirk*. When Robene attempts to retract his denial, she scoffs:

For of my pane thow maid it play
 And all in vane I spend.
 As thow hes done sa sall I say,
 'Murne on'; I think to mend." (ll. 109-112)

And, in the final scene, Makyne's sudden and triumphant indifference to Robene's pleas reinforces this petty image—"Malkyne went hame blythe aneuche"; "Robene murnit and Malkyne lewche, / Scho sang, he sichit sair" (ll. 121, 123-4). Similarly to the way she resembles the loathly ladies, Makyne's behavior echoes that of rustic amatory women without comfortably or persistently embodying the archetype of the *pastorella* or the rustic girl as played out in *Christis Kirk*. The effect of this mixing is that her fit within any generic stereotype is precluded by the fact that she is not as extreme as any one example. Her emulation of any generic female figure is tenuous at best.

As critics, we often look to extremes in order to define and delineate texts and characters. Makyne's identity is a vaporous and amorphous cloud that recalls simultaneously any number of traditions. Further, the comic effect of

¹⁷ See Petrina, "Deviations from Genre," for an assessment of the pastourelle and its relationship to *Robene and Makyne*.

¹⁸ See Allan H. MacLaine, "The Christis Kirk Tradition: Its Evolution in Scots Poetry to Burns: Part I," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 2.1 (July 1964): 3-18: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol2/iss1/2/>; MacLaine, ed., *The Christis Kirk Tradition: Scots Poems of Folk Festivity* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1996).

¹⁹ Quoted from MacLaine, *The Christis Kirk Tradition*.

this (non-)identity is that she evokes the multiple tonal variations characteristic of each type. The text has a sense of giddiness—the fast-paced dialogue recreates something of the rollicking meter of the festive genre: Henryson’s use of alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines is combined with heavy alliteration and an *ab* rhyme scheme to achieve the jaunty eight-line ballad-meter stanza; the pastourelle role-reversal with Makyne as the “courtly” pursuer at once suggests a new sort of empowerment beyond the traditional bounds and also parodies a genre meant to be comic in its own right; finally, the knowledge she wields seems somewhat outside the clever repartee of comic poetry. She offers her knowledge to a man naïve about the amatory arts and thereby insinuates a connection with the wild viragos of the romance genre—no matter that her instruction hardly outlasts its delivery; in clarification to her lesson she bluntly offers Robene her “madinheid” (l. 36). The contradictions and instability of her character throws the narrative off-balance. The surprise evoked by these twists and turns supports the comic nature of the poem; each expectation is dashed and undercut by new expectations. The comic amplifies discontinuity and upsets the natural order of society. In this way, Makyne embodies a number of figures that function outside of social expectation and emanate from explicitly comic genres.

In counterpoint, Robene’s initially intractable ignorance of courtly love is offset by his later adoption of the suffering lover identity so essential to courtly experience. Notably, he immediately grasps the message underlying Makyne’s instruction: while he claims not to understand her charge to “Be heynd, courtas, and fair of feir, / Wyse, hardy, and fre,” (ll. 19-20) and its connection to loving or to being loved, he does see the implications of such a connection:

“I wait nocht quhat is love
 Bot I haif mervell in certane
 Quhat makis thee this wanrufe.
 The weddir is fair and I am fane,
 My scheip gois haill aboif,
 And we wald play us in this plane
 Thay wald us bayth reproif.” (ll. 26-32)

Robene’s astute summary of the situation deflates the overblown language of courtly love insisted by Makyne; he can’t very well let his sheep roam unattended for a quick roll in the grass. Despite his claims to be ignorant of love, he is acutely aware of Makyne’s underlying intent before she offers the physical rewards explicitly. His characterization, in fact, closely resembles that of the shepherdess in Riquier’s pastourelles. Furthermore, Robene’s attention to his occupation lends something to the comic nature of the exchange by portraying his simultaneous endearing innocence and canny understanding. Petrina notes that he avoids mere rustic simplicity in favor of

appearing to be an effective counterpoint to Makyne's relentless pleading. She cites the utter sincerity of his words to be one cause for this heightening of his character, while his unerring attention to the well-being of his flock adds a flair of reality to the pastoral "love story."²⁰ In essence, he is the straight-man to Makyne's urgent and emotional pleas.

But, just as Makyne's character is not static, neither is Robene's. After they part ways, each disgruntled by the intractability of the other, Robene seems to be infected by Makyne's "aill" (l. 77). With his change of heart and their consequent role reversal, he now signals his awareness of more than the rebuking glares of his sheep. As he declares his undying love, he entreats her:

"Makyne, the nicht is soft and dry,
The wedder is warme and fair
And the grene woid rycht neir us by
To walk attour all quhair.
Thair ma na janglour us espy
That is to lufe contrair,
Thairin Makyne, bath ye and I
Unsene we ma repair." (ll. 97-104)

This sudden awareness of the necessity of secrecy goes beyond the earlier concern for his sheep (though this concern is by no means far from his mind). We might also note that the physical location and circumstance of their tryst is now of central importance—he insists on the cover of the forest, a location well-established as a venue for secrecy and dealings outwith the confines and expectations of built structures or the controlled gardens of courtly romance. His worry now extends to the danger of observation by other people. This new social awareness signals that he has, on some level, absorbed Makyne's lesson as well as her so-called illness.

Robene's earnest and relatively realistic character—the qualities which elevate him beyond the country bumpkin normally found in the pastourelle, fabliau, or other rustic comedy—imbues his status as lover with a level of sincerity not apparent in Makyne's indignant attacks and demands, without elevating him above his station as peasant. It is not that his character displays deep wells of psychological nuance (a reading Petrina also cautions against in reference to Makyne), but it does add a level of complexity not normally observed among the shepherds and other peasants found in comic literature.²¹ However, Robene's wooing echoes that of the unnamed suitors

²⁰ Petrina, "Deviations from Genre," 118-9.

²¹ The bumbling and violent shepherds that mob one another in *Colkelbie Sow*, for instance, represent this sort of crude generic depiction of peasants in Scottish comic poetry. Cf. Caitlin Flynn, "Mobbing, (Dis)order and the Literary Pig in *The Tale of Colkelbie Sow, Pars Prima*," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 41.1 (2016), 47-61: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol41/iss1/9/>. In pastourelles, the shepherd

in another Scottish folk festivity poem, *Peblis to the Play* (ca. 1430-50). As the various country folk approach one another one young man calls out to the young women:

... 'Mirrie madinis, think not lang,
The wedder is fair and smolt.'
He cleikit up ane hie ruf sang,
'Thair fure ane man to the holt,'
Quod he,
Of Peblis to the play. (ll. 55-60)²²

The men then debate bluntly which maiden they will fondle—"The fairest fallis me; / Tak ye the laif and fone thame" (ll. 65-6). Robene's words are only slightly elevated by his attention to eavesdroppers and spies and by his declaration of love. Notably, in both cases the men immediately refer to the forest as a convenient and appealing location to undertake their trysts. In the festive example the interest expressed by the men is purely physical and their words do not attempt to elevate this sexual motive. This tonal difference, if not a great contrast in argument or logic, is further played out at the end of *Peblis to the Play* when Atkin tells his partner, Ales, 'My bird, now will I fayr' (l. 234) to which she responds by swooning "for kyndnes" (l. 239), that is, for affection or love. In the next stanza,

He fippillit lyk ane faderles fole;
'And be still, my sweit thing!'
'Be the halyrud of Peblis
I may nocht rest for greting.'
He quhissillit and he pypit bayth
To mak hir blyth that meiting: (ll. 241-6)

Atkin's long-suffering exclamation that he can get no rest for Ales's lovestruck weeping and his attempt to cheer her up with a song constitute the culmination of romance in the narrative. Robene's recourse to the more formal expression of dedication and steadfastness is even more apparently out of character, as it were, when he declares that his heart belongs to Makyne:

For all my luve it salbe thyne
Withowttin depairting.
All hailt thy harte for till haif myne
Is all my cuvating.
My scheip to-morne quhill houris nyne
Will neid of no keping. (ll. 83-8)

Robene's character surprisingly mixes his earnest, unadorned declaration with his more practical concerns. In this way he becomes an evolved version

sometimes appears armed with a club to fight off the narrator as he rapes, or attempts to rape, the shepherdess.

²² Quoted from MacLaine, *The Christis Kirk Tradition*.

of the *rusticani* or peasant wooer without attaining a more abiding plasticity or dynamism.

His final plea is perhaps the most evocative of amatory discourse and reflects vividly the sort of suffering that should be experienced by the lover:

Mawkyne, the houp of all my heill,
 My hairt on thee is sett
 And evirmair to thee be leill
 Quhill I may leif but lett,
 Nevir to fail as uthiris feill,
 Quhat grace that evir I gett. (ll. 113-118)

Robene's expression of love in this final plea is more fluidly and sincerely expressed than Makyne's selfishly-motivated rote recitation. In the opening lines of the poem Robene quickly revealed Makyne's lesson to be no more than a veneer of civility and refinement meant to mask (and thus elevate) her physical desires. In contrast, he promises to be loyal irrespective of the rewards for such dedication. Makyne's ultimate rejection of his offer contradicts the assurances given by the God of Love to the lover in Chaucer's *The Romaunt of the Rose*, for example. In this case, the God of Love tells the lover that his dedication will earn the pity of his lady and thus her love or at the very least a kiss:

I mene all save the lady free,
 Whom wakyng if thou maist asprie,
 Go putte thisilf in jupartie
 To aske grace, and thee bimene,
 That she may wite, without wene,
 That thou [a-]nyght no rest hast had,
 So sore for hir thou were bystad.
 Wommen wel ought pite to take
 Of hem that sorwen for her sake... (ll. 2664-72)

But Makyne's final exit, described above, seems to deny Robene any hope of relief. In this way, her unsuitability as a love object is glaringly and comically obvious. She is indeed a *rusticani* incapable of refined and honorable love; her laughter alone signals her immoral and unrefined character. Robene's choice to pursue her reflects badly on him, since he clearly does not understand that the choice of a beloved is equally as important as the lover's personal mien and behavior.

Moreover, Robene has gone about things backwards: rather than suffering over the course of months or years, he seeks his cure within moments of 'infection.' The God of Love's moral instruction—"A man loveth more tendirly / The thyng that he hath bought most dere" (ll. 2738-9)—has not in the least been met; Robene embarks on this stage of pining and despair *after* making the all-important confrontation instead of *before*: in a more appropriate order of events, he should, of course, spend a lengthy period of time in distant observation, veneration, and despair. In this way

Robene's courtship imitates certain features of more "courtly" forms of amorous pursuit, but fails to achieve anything beyond thin mimicry.

II. Amorous Instruction and *Moralitas*

The amorous instruction undertaken by Makyne and her utter unsuitability as a teacher finds a foil in the alliterative burlesque romance *The Tail of Rauf Coilyear* (ca. 1470). Rauf Coilyear similarly embodies peasant hard-headedness and courtly illiteracy while attempting to teach the qualities of courtesy and honor to a rather bedraggled Charlemagne. Owing to a terrible storm, Charlemagne seeks shelter in Rauf's humble abode where he is then beaten and verbally abused for his lack of manners and his awkwardness in the face of Rauf's hospitality. The romance is a skillful commentary on pride, hospitality, and courtly artifice, but in order to achieve this Rauf's character is firmly set in the brusque and violent peasant stereotype. We see him first admonish and abuse Charlemagne at the door to his residence:

He said, 'Thow art vncourtes; that sall I warrand.'
 He tyt the king be the nek, twa part in tene:
 'Gif thow at bidding suld be boun or obeysand,
 And gif thow of courtasie couth, thow hes forzet it clene.
 Now is anis,' said the coilzear ... (ll. 122-126)²³

The uncouth delivery of Rauf's lesson in courtesy recalls Makyne's instruction to Robene. While Rauf takes on the violent tendencies often attributed to male peasants in burlesque or folk festivity narratives, the discordance between the speaker and speech matches the discomfiting love lesson given by Makyne. Rauf's character is set as a foil to the heroic knight stereotype and masculine standards of etiquette. Makyne, on the other hand, mimics the feminine lover and beloved. Fittingly, her direct and dramatic demands for sex bring about a similar narrative dissonance:

Robene, tak tent unto my taill
 And wirk all as I reid
 And thow sall haif my hairt all haill,
 Eik and my madinheid. (ll. 33-6)

Thus Henryson's comic tale achieves its humorous purpose in a similar manner to the comedy of *Rauf Coilyear*: both texts focus on the discordant layering of speaker, speech, stereotype, and generic expectation to deliver both commentary and entertainment. This relatively short and unadorned pastoral comedy retains and even exemplifies Henryson's tendency towards ironic didacticism. It also fits into the wider canon of Scottish literature of the late-fifteenth century—the commonalities between Rauf and Makyne

²³ Quoted from Ralph Hanna, ed., *The Tail of Rauf Coilyear* [STS 5th ser., no.16] (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer for the Scottish Text Society, 2019).

suggest that the provocative and dynamic use of genre and form traced across the spectrum of literature produced in Scotland during the period.

Robene and Makyne does not end with a *moralitas*—a feature favored by Henryson in other works. Despite this absence, we might extrapolate an underlying commentary by setting the narrative against Cresseid's exclamation on the fickleness of lovers preceding her written testament in Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*:

“Lovers be war and tak gude heid about
 Quhome that ye lufe, for quhome ye suffer paine,
 I lat yow wit thair is richt few thairout
 Quhome ye may traist to have trew lufe agane.
 Preif quhen ye will, your labour is in vaine,
 Thairfore, I reid ye tak thame as ye find
 For thay ar sad as widdercok in wind. (ll. 561-7)

The courtship between the two figures in *Robene and Makyne* strikingly illustrates the truth in Cresseid's words. Furthermore, the comic context distorts the poignancy and subtlety attributed to *The Testament of Cresseid* as a response to Chaucer's work. If Makyne sets out to educate Robene in the ways of love, she also unwittingly embodies the importance of choosing an appropriate love object and the dangers of misplaced affection. She contravenes her own instruction on courtly behavior—she is in no way “heynd, courtas, and fair of feir, / Wyse, hardy, and fre” (ll. 19-20)—and she proves herself inconstant, petty, and cruel as an object of love.

Perhaps one of Makyne's greatest faults is that she lacks introspection. Cresseid's admonishment is given above as a sort of stand-in *moralitas* for *Robene and Makyne*, but her words, too, are unreliable. Alicia Nitecki, for instance, has argued that Cresseid's understanding of her situation is deeply flawed; she asserts that, through Cresseid's voice, “Henryson raises doubts about man's ability to impose order on his own experience.”²⁴ Where *The Testament of Cresseid* employs didactic forms such as the complaint, exemplum, testament, and epitaph,²⁵ and applies this formal mosaic to a popular medieval dramatic tale, Makyne's character is a mosaic of comic and transgressive types; she is a messy conglomeration of *pasturella*, rustic maiden, loathly lady, and virago. Her lack of psychological nuance and the total absence of self-reflection play a crucial role in the construction of the narrative's comedy.

This essay offers a view of *Robene and Makyne* as a kaleidoscope of stereotypes. In so doing, a number of other texts have been brought, however briefly, into conversation with Henryson's narrative. Rather than arguing for

²⁴ Alicia K. Nitecki, “‘Fenzeit of the New’: Authority in ‘The Testament of Cresseid,’” *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 15.2 (1985): 120-132 (120).

²⁵ Nitecki, “Fenzeit of the New,” 121.

any clear lines of inheritance or reference, the utter opacity of Henryson's composition is asserted to be the driving force behind the success of the comedy. The shifting and discontinuous stereotypes that both Makyne and Robene recall set the narrative as inherently unstable and fractious. This discordance, in turn, opens the space for comedy to be fully realized: surprise and confusion erupt from the unsuitability of the lovers as either pursuer or pursued, courtly lover or beloved. Against these character studies, Henryson's particular flair for ironic didacticism is apparent. While there is no formal separation of a *moralitas*, as is often favored by Henryson, the progression of the narrative retains the same sense of psychological or moral development. And beyond the hallmarks which distinguish the text as a compelling example of Henryson's style, *Robene and Makyne* fits snugly within the narrative trend towards poetic innovation anchoring Scottish literature in this late-medieval period. Whether set against such elevated burlesque poems as *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear* or, more broadly, the fluid contradictions of *The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*, *Robene and Makyne* presents an accomplished and dynamic interpretation of medieval comic stereotypes and genres.

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