

complete and  
full with numbers

the narrative poetry  
of robert henryson

by john macqueen

pythagoras

# Complete and Full with Numbers

***Scottish Cultural Review  
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# Complete and Full with Numbers

## The Narrative Poetry of Robert Henryson

John MacQueen

This mery musik and mellifluate,  
Complete and full with nowmeris od and evyn,  
Is causit be the moving of the hevyn

*(The Tale of Orpheus 32: 237–39)*



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## Note

Henryson quotations are from Fox ed. 1981. I have substituted *y* for *z*, and treated Fox's punctuation with some freedom. Occasionally I have substituted or adapted a variant reading, always acknowledging the fact in the notes. References are by stanza-number in the individual poem, followed by the line-reference in Fox ed. 1981.

For Henryson's bibliography, see Gray 1996; also the appropriate sections of *The Year's Work in Scottish Linguistic and Literary Studies*, until 2000 issued annually by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies as a supplement to *Scottish Literary Journal*. Critical assessments of earlier scholarship will also be found in Gray 1979 and Kindrick 1979. The best study of Henryson's sources is Jamieson 1964.

Biblical quotations are from the Authorized or King James version, save where that differs substantially from the Latin Vulgate familiar to Henryson. For such passages I have made my own translation. Where the Vulgate reference differs from that in AV, both are given. Chaucerian references are to Robinson ed. 1957; Shakespearian to Craig ed. 1943. For the *Divina Commedia* I have used Sayers tr. 1949, 1955, 1962 (the final volume completed by Barbara Reynolds). Sayers' English maintains a close lineal correspondence with the Italian. For works in Greek or Latin (with Plato the chief exception) I have usually referred to editions in the Loeb Classical Library, where text and translation appear on facing pages; for Plato I have used Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961, also giving the customary references to the pagination of the Stephanus edition (1578).

I am grateful to the many people and groups with whom I have discussed Henryson over the years, and in particular to Dr Ian Jamieson, the late Dr Tom Scott, the late Professor Denton Fox, Professor R.D.S. Jack, Dr Sally Mapstone, Mr R.W. Smith, Dr Sarah Dunnigan, Professor Jim McGonigal, Dr John Corbett, my former colleagues in the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, and the members of the Robert Henryson Society. I am grateful to Dr Gavin Miller for assistance and advice in the preparation of this book, and to Dr Sergi Mainer, who has compiled the index. The staff of the Edinburgh University Library and the National Library of Scotland have been unfailingly helpful. My wife has assisted me in more ways than I can enumerate. The faults of the book are entirely my own.



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# Introduction

## 1. Henryson: Life, Times and Works

The working life of Robert Henryson occupied the middle to late years of the fifteenth century (see Fox (ed.) 1981: xiii–xxv; Gray 1996: 155–60; and my own article in *Oxford DNB*). We know nothing of his date of birth or place of origin, and details of his education are sparse. On 10 September 1462, when he was incorporated in the recently founded University of Glasgow, presumably as a teacher of law, he is described as licenciate in Arts (i.e., he held the degree of MA) and bachelor of Decrets (Canon Law) (*Munimenta* 1854: 2: 69); the latter, as a higher degree, following on the first. He is also called *vir venerabilis*, “a venerable man”, a phrase which suggests that by then his first youth was already well past. His degrees he did not obtain from any Scottish or English university. In the Aesopic fable *The Lion and the Mouse*, he makes Aesop claim to be a Roman and to have studied canon and civil law in the schools of Rome, a claim elsewhere unparalleled. Rome maintained schools of canon and civil law for poor foreign students throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and it is at least plausible that Henryson projected elements of himself onto a character in his poem, and that he had himself obtained his bachelorship from the Roman schools (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1957: s.v. “Universities”). The poems provide abundant evidence that he had completed the various stages of a medieval professional education, the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic), the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music), philosophy, and finally canon and civil law.

Henryson may have written at least one of his longer poems, *The Tale of Orpheus*, during his time at Glasgow. The narrative is based on the version of the legend found in bk.3, metrum 12 of the *Consolations of Philosophy* by Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c.480–524); the long *Moralitas* on the gloss to the text written by the English friar Nicholas Trivet (1258–1328). *Liber Boetii cum glossa Treuet* is one of the items held during the fifteenth century in the library of Glasgow Cathedral (*Registrum* 1843: 2: 334–39). Glasgow University, the founder of which had been the bishop of Glasgow, William Turnbull (c.1410–54), was closely associated with the cathedral and its chapter.

Henryson is usually connected not so much with Rome or Glasgow as with Dunfermline, where he was “schoolmaster” – chief master, that is – of the ancient grammar school attached to the abbey. He may have moved there from Glasgow in 1468 at the invitation of Richard Bothwell, abbot 1444–70, who had Glasgow connections, and who in that year provided a house and land for the schoolmaster (*Munimenta* 1854: 2: 69; Bliss, W.H. ed.: 12: 297).<sup>1</sup> Although Henryson retained a concern for law, and retained some connection with it, his general humanistic interests may have better suited him for grammar-school work. He was certainly resident in Dunfermline during the 1470s and probably the 1480s. Acting professionally as a notary public, he witnessed on 18 and 19 March and 6 July 1478, three grants of land made by Bothwell’s successor, the abbot Henry Crichton (1470–82).<sup>2</sup> An act of 1469 affirmed that James III had the right to “create notaries public (hitherto the prerogative of the pope and the emperor); henceforth notaries created by the emperor were to have no authority within Scotland” (Nicholson 1974: 483–84). Henryson with his legal qualifications may have been appointed as one of the replacements for the imperial notaries. His death in Dunfermline is mentioned by William Dunbar in his poem with the refrain “*Timor Mortis Conturbat Me*”, first extant in a black-letter tract of undetermined provenance and date, but approximately contemporary with the earliest known products of a Scottish printing press, the Chepman and Myllar prints (1508; Beattie ed. 1950). The poem was written just after the death on or about 15 July 1505 of another poet, John Reid of Stobo. By then, it is likely that Henryson had been dead for some considerable time.

As master of arts and bachelor of decreits, Henryson almost certainly was at least in minor clerical orders. Probably he was a priest. One feature from his poems is perhaps relevant. The first-person narrator in *The Testament of Cresseid* possesses an oratory (*oratur*, l.8) on the east side of his house, from which he prays to Venus as her planet rises. The oratory is fairly obviously a private chapel rather than the other possible meaning of the word, “a place of private study”. Elsewhere Henryson uses the word only once (l.120),

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1. The location of the house is indicated in Beveridge (ed.) 1917: nos 280, 287, 324, 336. I owe these references to the late Father Anthony Ross, OP, and to Durkan 1962: 157.

2. NLS, Advocates MS 34-1-3a, no. 480, f.64a; names of witnesses are not included in the printed version, Innes (ed.) 1842.

for the chapel in the house of the pagan priest Calchas to which Cresseid retires, not to pray but to upbraid the planetary gods who have inflicted on her the disease from which she eventually dies. The parallel between the two is plain and deliberate. The existence of an oratory presupposes the presence of a priest, in the latter instance Calchas, in the former, the first-person narrator, who in some sense is to be identified with Henryson.

It may seem incongruous that a celibate Christian priest should pray to Venus for renewal of his youthful potency, but evidence is not lacking that such a thing was possible, even probable. The early-thirteenth-century theoretician of love, Andreas Capellanus (Andrew the Chaplain), puts priests at the top of the social scale and praises their celibacy. He notes however that their life leads them into greater temptations than other men and advises that “if any cleric wishes to undertake the contests of love in a way fitting his ancestral rank or his station ... let him use his appropriate way of speaking and strive to apply himself to the service of love” [*Si aliquis clericus amoris voluerit subire certamina, iuxta sui sanguinis ordinem sive gradum, ... suo sermone utatur et amoris studeat applicari militiae*] (Battaglia ed. n.d.: 256). Many priests followed his advice. Henryson may have been one.

Henryson’s working life, so far as we know, falls entirely within the reign of the enigmatic and autocratic James III (1460–88).<sup>3</sup> On several occasions his poetry seems to comment on that reign, in particular on the Lauder Bridge episode of 1482, when James was taken prisoner by members of the nobility and immured for a time in Edinburgh Castle, an incident to which *The Lion and the Mouse* probably refers. This is not the place for any extended account of James, for which the reader may be referred to Dr Macdougall’s excellent study (Macdougall 1982); a few relevant points will suffice. The word “Emperor” twice occurs at significant points in Henryson’s narrative poetry, the Moralities of *The Trial of the Fox* and *The Lion and the Mouse*, in both cases with reference to the figure of the Lion. One would expect an identification with the Holy Roman Emperor, in Henryson’s time

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3. There is a possibility that *The Bludy Serk*, a poem doubtfully attributed to Henryson, refers to the penance undertaken by James IV after the death of his father, James III; see Macdougall 2001: 54. Note also the action of James III’s supporter, Lord Forbes, who in an attempt to raise sympathy carried “the late king’s bloody shirt on a lance through Aberdeenshire” (Macdougall 1982: 277).

Frederick III (1452–93). As early as 1469 however James had expressed imperial ambitions, claiming “ful jurisdictione and fre empire within his realme” (Macdougall 1982: 98). On his last silver coinage James is portrayed with the imperial crown (Macdougall 1982: 98).<sup>4</sup> A consequence of the claim, from which Henryson probably benefited, was the expulsion of notaries appointed by the German emperor.

In Henryson the king of beasts, the Lion, has strong heraldic associations with the King of Scots, brought home, for instance, by the Lion’s assertion in *The Trial of the Fox*: “I lat yow wit, my micht is merciabill / And steiris nane that ar to me prostrat”, an adaptation of the motto attached to the royal arms of the Scottish king, *Parcere prostratis scit nobilis ira leonis*. The Lion, in other words is king of Scotland as well as king of beasts. In the fable he has to deal with powerful enemies or opponents. Throughout James’s reign his relations with the nobility and church dignitaries were strained; in the course of only twenty years he “alienated, attacked, killed, forfeited or removed” one duke, ten earls, eight barons, one archbishop, three bishops, and the abbots and convents of Paisley and Jedburgh (Macdougall 1982: 308). His death was an unforeseen consequence of one of the frequent aristocratic conspiracies against him.

Lack of justice was a common complaint during the reign, but the supreme civil court, from 1468 composed of the lords of council, was a popular and much frequented institution (Macdougall 1982: 98–99, 133–35, 202–4, 299–300). Henryson satirises local miscarriages of justice, but always treats the king’s own court with respect.

Several of his works have already been mentioned. In this book I shall discuss *The Testament of Cresseid*, *The Tale of Orpheus*, and the thirteen (more properly perhaps eleven) individual tales later gathered together as *The Morall Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian* (as noted above, Henryson’s Aesop is *not* a Phrygian). Of these, eight, properly speaking, are Aesopic, five belong more to the tradition of beast-epic, in which the central character is the cunning fox, who outwits all the other animals, most frequently the stupid wolf. In this world the ultimate authority is the lion, at whose court the animals sometimes assemble (for texts see Roques ed. 1948–63). Formally all the poems are fables, that is to say, each consists of a narrative, followed by a

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4. See too Stewart 1967: 65. A portrait-coin of the type mentioned is shown on the dust-wrapper of Dr Macdougall’s book.

Moralitas which offers a generalised, usually moral, interpretation of figures and events. Least conspicuous is that in the *Testament*, where it consists of the final stanza, a kind of epilogue; others are definitely indicated in the course of the text. These Moralities have often been derided, Harvey Wood, for instance, remarking on their dullness. "The moralising", he says apologetically, "which is admittedly dull, is confined to the postscript" (Wood ed. 1958: xv). One of my purposes in writing this book is to show that Henryson was in fact a moralist of some scope and power.

Predominantly the poems are fables. Some however combine this with another literary form, the dream-vision, in which (to put it simply) the narrator falls asleep, often in a *locus amœnus*, and has a dream which turns out to be of personal or universal significance. Dream-visions of this kind are most familiar to the modern reader from fourteenth-century examples, *Piers Plowman*, *Pearl*, and several of Chaucer's early works. *The Kingis Quair* belongs to the early fifteenth century in Scotland. Most closely akin to these is *The Lion and the Mouse*, but the *Testament* and *The Preaching of the Swallow* share some characteristics.

Fables in the tradition of the beast-epic often come close to fabliau.

The Moralitas to *The Tale of Orpheus* is composed in five-stress rhyming couplets. With that exception, all Henryson's poems are stanzaic, for the most part using the seven-line rhyme-royal stanza of *The Kingis Quair*, *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Parliament of Fowls*. Occasionally more elaborate structures are found, mainly in more or less lyrical interludes, but sometimes, apparently, as simple variations. Whatever form is taken, the individual stanza is Henryson's main poetic building block.

No surviving copy of any poem belongs to Henryson's lifetime. The Makculloch MS, which contains the *Prologue* and *The Cock and the Jasp*, belongs to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Chepman and Myllar printed *The Tale of Orpheus* and two shorter poems in or about 1508. The Asloan MS (c.1515–25) once included texts of seven *Morall Fabillis* together with *The Tale of Orpheus*, but now only the last and a single fable, *The Two Mice*, survive. Thynne's 1532 edition of Chaucer includes a text of *The Testament of Cresseid*. Otherwise the major sources belong to the latter part of the sixteenth-century, the Bannatyne MS (1568), with ten *Morall Fabillis*, *The Tale of Orpheus* and several short poems; the Charteris print (1570), the Bassandyne print (1571) and BL MS, Harley 3865 of roughly the

same date, all with thirteen *Morall Fabillis*, and finally the Charteris print (1593) with *The Testament of Cresseid*.

## 2. The Fable as a Literary Form

Harvey Wood describes the Aesop of pre-Henrysonian versions as “the slow-pacing moralist of medieval tradition” (Wood ed. 1958: xv). Almost the reverse is the case. In Henryson’s main source, the twelfth-century Latin verse-*Romulus* of Gualterus Anglicus (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: 7–66), the usual length for an individual fable is some twenty lines. The longest, *De Cive et Equite* (no. lxxviii, not used by Henryson), has 92 lines. Henryson’s longest, *The Preaching of the Swallow*, has 329 lines, to which corresponds *De Hirundine et Avibus* (no. xxv) with 18. Henryson’s *The Two Mice* has 235 lines, expanded from the corresponding *De Mure rustico et urbano* (no. xii) with 36. *The Lion and the Mouse* has 301 lines, *De Mure et Leone* (no. xviii) 28. Henryson’s versions are much richer than their Latin counterparts, but also more leisurely, allowing the opportunity for greater sophistication.

Medieval concepts of Aesop, and of the fable as a genre, vary, but in general differ from our own. The fables were pap for infants (infants however who knew Latin), but only because they shaped the mind for life. In his Latin treatise on classical mythology and poetic composition, *The Genealogy of the Gods*, the Italian poet, prose-writer and scholar, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75), describes their almost miraculous effect:

I once heard Giacopo Sanseverino, Count of Tricarico and Chiaromonte, say that he had heard his father tell of Robert, son of King Charles – himself in aftertime the famous King of Jerusalem and Sicily – how as a boy he was so dull that it took the utmost skill and patience of his master to teach him the mere elements of letters. When all his friends were nearly in despair of his doing anything, his master, by the most subtle skill, as it were, lured his mind with the fables of Aesop into so grand a passion for study and knowledge, that in brief time he not only learned the Liberal Arts familiar to Italy, but entered with wonderful keenness of mind into the very inner mysteries of sacred philosophy. In short, he made of himself a king whose superior in learning men have not seen since Solomon. (1497. *Genealogie Joannis Boccatii libri XV*. Venice; Osgood tr. 1956: 51)

The original Aesopic fables were oral prose-narratives, but from early times there was a tendency to regard them as poems, or at least

as material for poetry. Socrates in prison versified some in an attempt to fulfil the command given to him in a dream that he should make music.

I began with some verses in honour of the god whose festival it was. When I had finished my hymn, I reflected that a poet, if he is to be worthy of the name, ought to work on imaginative themes, not descriptive ones, and I was not good at inventing stories. So I availed myself of some of Aesop's fables which were ready to hand and familiar to me, and I versified the first of them that suggested themselves. (*Phaedo* 61b.1–7; Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: 19–44)

The passage is partly ironic, and has not received a great deal of comment, but if Socrates during his final days gave himself such an occupation, he, and probably also Plato, who recorded the incident, must have regarded the fables as possessing genuine intellectual and imaginative substance, providing potential material for poetry.

Many later adaptations are in verse, usually not very distinguished. In Greek, for instance, we have the *Aesopic Mythiambos* of Babrius; in classical Latin the versions of Phaedrus and Avianus. Later comes the tenth-century prose-*Romulus*, dedicated by the supposed translator Romulus to his son Tiberinus, the twelfth-century *Novus Aesopus* of Alexander Neckam and the verse-*Romulus* of Gualterus Anglicus. The French vernacular versions, the *Isopets*, are also in verse.<sup>5</sup> Henryson made use of the verse-*Romulus* in a text which may have been accompanied by a version in French resembling the *Isopet de Lyon* (MacQueen, J. 1967: 201–5).

The Greek word used by Socrates and translated “fable” is μῦθος (*mûthos*) from which the English word “myth” is derived. It has a wide application, also being used of the enormously influential Platonic myths, embodiments of numerological as well as philosophic doctrine in vivid narrative form. The best-known example is the highly numerate vision of Er the Pamphylian which concludes the *Republic* (X, 614b–621d: Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: 1153–1211). Almost equally celebrated, and with an even stronger numerological element, is the creation-myth found in the *Timaeus* (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: 1153–1211). The vision of Er in particular is written in a prose which comes close to poetry, and which directly or

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5. For texts of *Novus Aesopus* and Avianus see Bastin (ed.) 1929–30: 1: 3–30; 2: 67–82. See too Perry (ed.) 1965; also Hervieux 1893–99; Perry (ed.) 1952; Gray 1979: 31–62.



indirectly affected many later poems, for instance, the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the verse-passages in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (Stewart and Rand eds: 1918), and the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris (Dronke ed. 1978; Wetherbee tr. 1973). To end his own *Republic*, Cicero composed another poetic prose-myth, *The Dream of Scipio* (Willis ed. 1970a; Stahl tr. 1952), which contains strong numerological elements, and which was later adapted as poetry by Chaucer in *The Parlement of Foulys* (Brewer ed. 1960: 17–19, 133–37).

The “myths” of Aesop belong to the same general category. In a defence of the philosophic use of story, the early-fifth-century writer Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius refers to Aesop, whose fables he classifies as first of a kind which promotes virtue – in other words, which stand in some relationship to moral truth. He commends their elegance (*illae Aesopi fabulae elegantia fictionis illustres*), but adds, rather disappointingly, that because both the setting and the plot are fictitious, the material is finally unsuitable for the philosopher. Fables, he allows, “serve two purposes; either merely to gratify the ear or to encourage the reader to good works” (Stahl tr. 1952: 84–85; Willis ed. 1970a: 1.2, 7–9; 5–6). He does not seem to allow for any combination of the two. For the second kind he prefers the name “fabulous narrative” (*narratio fabulosa*) and cites “the stories of Hesiod and Orpheus that treat of the ancestry and deeds of the gods, and the mystic conceptions of the Pythagoreans” (Stahl tr. 1952: 85).

Much later his position was modified by Boccaccio, who established a link between myth, in the Platonic and other senses, and narrative poetry in general. Almost all narrative he regarded as myth. In *The Genealogy of the Gods*, he used this doctrine to defend the introduction of classical stories into poetry written by Christians. He took almost for granted the idea that such stories give pleasure. To answer the charge that they are untrue, he followed the romance of Euhemerus (c.300 BC), according to which the Gods had originally been historical human figures, to whom divine honours were paid after their death. With this he combined the sometimes fantastic, sometimes naturalistic, allegorical rationalisations offered by earlier writers such as Hyginus, Fulgentius and “Alberic of London” (Munckerus ed. 1681). His first thirteen books analyse stories of gods and heroes in terms of their supposed ancestry – hence the title of the treatise. The fourteenth and fifteenth books form a more general defence of narrative poetry involving fictitious characters and events.

For narrative poetry he uses the term *fabula*, “fable”, the Latin equivalent of Greek *mûthos*, defined as “a form of discourse, which, under guise of invention, illustrates or proves an idea; and, as its superficial aspect is removed, the meaning of the author becomes clear” (Osgood 1956: 48). The element of fiction is a disguise for the underlying ideas, which are themselves factual because, in the widest sense, philosophical.

Boccaccio makes a fourfold division, the first section of which is dominated by Aesop. This kind of narrative

superficially lacks all appearance of truth; for example, when brutes or inanimate things converse. Aesop, an ancient Greek, grave and venerable, was past master in this form; and though it is a common and popular form both in city and country, yet Aristotle, chief of the Peripatetics, and a man of divine intellect, did not scorn to use it in his books. (Osgood 1956: 48)

He regards the form, that is to say, as appropriate for philosophical use. In confirmation he quotes a biblical example, the story of the trees choosing a king (*Judges* 9: 8–15). It is not quite clear whether he regarded Aesop’s fables as poetry or prose, but the examples which he gives under the other three categories are all poetry. Notably he describes Aesop as grave and venerable.

Second he puts the fable of transformation, exemplified by the stories told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. These sometimes have a physical explication – they belong as much to natural as to moral philosophy. It should be noted however that one of the stories told by Ovid is that of Orpheus and Eurydice (*Metamorphoses* 10, 1–63).

Third is the Virgilian fable, with a possible moral, political, philosophic, and even theological reference. Here the main reference is to epic poetry, but also included are the comedies of Terence and Plautus and the New Testament parables.

Platonic myth fits under the second and third categories.

The fourth kind need scarcely be considered, for “it contains no truth at all, either superficial or hidden, since it consists only of old wives’ tales” (Osgood tr. 1956: 49). The sole purpose is to provide pleasure.

Boccaccio does not mention it, but an ever-present feature, at least of the Aesopic fable, is the *Moralitas*, the allegorical exposition appended to the narrative. In other kinds of fable it is sometimes present, sometimes only implied, but subsequent commentators took pains to render it explicit, as, for instance, Macrobius on Virgil in the

*Saturnalia*, the interpretations imposed on Ovid by the anonymous author of the *Ovide Moralisé*, and Nicholas Trivet's treatment of the story of Orpheus in *The Consolation of Philosophy* (de Boer and van't Sant eds 1915–54; Willis ed. 1970b; Fox ed. 1981: 384–91, taken from BL Addit. MS 19585, ff.61b–63b).

Douglas Gray makes a useful distinction between “clear” and “dark” forms of *Moralitas*. He refers exclusively to Henryson, but his remarks also apply to the fable in general. The *Moralities* of *The Two Mice* and *The Cock and the Jasp* will illustrate. In the first –

although the fable suggests much more, it is perfectly reasonable and natural for the *moralitas* to point out that life is full of adversity, and particularly for those who “climb up high”, and are not content “with small possessionn”.

– the connection between narrative and morality is clear. In the second –

After Henryson's careful staging of the scene and the cock's eloquent speech, most readers will think that the cock is showing a wise disregard for a useless jewel ... But the *moralitas* tells us that the ‘inward sentence and intent’ is quite other than we had supposed” – the connection is obscure or dark (Gray 1979: 121–22; cf. Jack, R.D.S. 2001).

*Moralities* of the second kind are also found in *The Preaching of the Swallow*, *The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger*, and *The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman*. In the opening two branches of *The Talking of the Tod*, the relatively short *Moralities* are clear; that of the third and final is longer and dark. Both kinds are found in the double *Moralities* of *The Paddock and the Mouse*, where the first is clear, the second dark.

As the *Ovide Moralisé* and Nicholas Trivet's commentary illustrate, “dark” *Moralities* are also characteristic of non-Aesopic fables. Gray stresses their wit (Gray 1979: 123), which he likens to Rosamund Tuve's “imposed allegories” – the meaning found by later generations in ancient stories, but of which the original story-tellers were themselves quite unconscious. Examples may be found in the classical as well as in the biblical and Christian tradition with which Tuve was more concerned (Gray 1979: 124; Tuve 1966: ch.4, esp. 285–300; Lambert 1986). She devotes much of her discussion to a work with some relevance for Henryson, *l'Épître d'Othéa* of Christine de Pisan (c.1364–c.1430), in which there are three parts, the verse epistle, which gives the work its title, and two prose commentaries, styled

respectively “glosses” and “allegories”. The epistle itself is advice given by the goddess Othea to the Trojan hero Hector in his youth, advice clarified and expanded by the glosses and allegories appended to each of the 100 sections.<sup>6</sup> Christine explains her method thus:

Othea vppon the Greke may be taken for the wisdom of man or woman, and as ancient pepill of olde tyme, not hauyng yit at that tyme lyght of feith, wurschidip many goddes, vnder the whiche lawe be passid the hiest lordes that hath ben in the worlde, as the reaume of Assire, of Perse, the Grekes, the Troyens, Alexander, the Romaynes and many othir, and namely the grettest philosophres that euer were, soo as yit at that tyme God hadde not openyd the yate of merci. But we Christen men and wommen, now at this tyme be the grace of God enlumyned with verray feith, may brynge ayen to morall mynde the opynyones of ancient pepill, and there-vppon many faire allegories may be made. (Bühler ed. 1970: 6)

Despite their paganism, the pronouncements of ancient philosophers have a validity, upon which the modern Christian may build an allegorical structure. Christine’s glosses reveal the ethical implications of the text, her allegories the theological. She emphasizes the range of possibilities open (“*many faire allegories*”). Generally speaking, the glosses are clear, the allegories dark.

Christine, it may be added, uses numerical composition to reinforce both glosses and allegories. 100, the total number of sections in her book, is the second limit of numbers and thus an indication of wholeness. Sections 6–100 are each introduced by 4 lines of epistle. The verse introductions to the first 5, however, are considerably longer, and specifically related to the 4 cardinal virtues, with Prudence given the primacy, and the Guardian Angel assigned to the individual, coming 5th, representing divine Grace. The 7 following sections deal with the 7 planets. Next come the 3 theological virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, followed by the 7 Deadly Sins. Each of the 12 articles of the Apostle’s Creed is assigned to the apostle traditionally held to have formulated it. Next come the 10 Commandments. The remaining sections are more miscellaneous, but their number, 56, the product of 8 and 7, is singled out by Cicero as the rounder out of destiny, and by Macrobius as the basis for an extended discussion of individual numbers within the first decad (Stahl tr. 1952: 71, 95–117). Section 100 appropriately concludes Christine’s work with the vision given by

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6. I have been able to consult only a late Middle English translation: Bühler ed. 1970. The French text may be found in Roy ed. 1886–96.

the Tiburtine Sybil to Augustus of a Virgin and Child enthroned in the sun, a prophetic vision of the birth of Christ and the establishment of an age of peace.<sup>7</sup>

Although Christine does not mention Aesop, his *Moralities*, as the ethical comments of an ancient philosopher, fit her scheme. She discusses the non-Aesopic but Henrysonian figures of Orpheus and Eurydice (sections 67 and 70), Troilus, Calchas and Cresseid (sections 80, 81, and 84). Her treatment differs from Henryson's, but further illustrates the importance of these exemplary figures for the fifteenth-century poet, and the options available for their interpretation.

### 3. Number and Ratio in Poetry

Much of this book is occupied with the way in which numbers and ratios function in Henryson's poetry. They correspond to aspects – moral, philosophic, legal, scientific – of the created universe – “Thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight” (*Wisdom of Solomon* 11: 20). To the medieval mind such a correspondence implied beauty, which was essentially a matter of harmonious proportions and relationships mirroring the harmonious order of creation. Beauty itself was a divine attribute. In the proem to *The Preaching of the Swallow*, Henryson presents God as “gude, fair, wyis, and bening”. One might compare the title of a later poem on the nature, attributes and works of God, “An Hymne of the Fairest Faire”, written by William Drummond (1585–1649), a poem in which numeric structure appropriately reflects the subject (Macdonald ed. 1976: 117–26; cf. MacQueen, J. 1982: 17–26).

Beauty is an unfamiliar concept to the modern literary scholar or critic, but there can be little doubt that Henryson regarded his narratives as beautiful in their intricate correspondence of diction, stylistic level, the sound-patterns of individual lines and stanzas, subject-matter, overall structure, to the order, physical and moral, of the created universe. The realisation that such was his intention puts the moral rigours of *The Testament of Cresseid* into a new perspective and brings out the strength latent in the apparent simplicity of the animal tales. Many factors are conjoined. The beauty of the poems is

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7. This story was known in fifteenth-century Scotland; see MacQueen and MacQueen eds 1993: [II.20] 214–15.

composite – what Gerard Manley Hopkins (like Henryson a priest) called “pied” beauty:

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim. (Bridges ed. 1930: 30)

All the poems to be discussed in this book have some kind of mathematical basis. Some are Platonic, with mathematics, philosophy and science modulating into justice and law. This combines with religious symbolism in the most thoroughly Christian among the poems, *The Two Mice*, *The Wolf and the Lamb*, and *The Nekhering*. Mimesis is a constant factor, diction and structure both mirroring subject or theme. Numbers appear in what German scholars have called “numerical composition”, *zahlenkomposition*, in terms of which they mirror and bring out the subject of the verse. This is closely akin to onomatopoeia, in which the sound of the words mirrors the subject, a common enough figure of speech, but often (especially nowadays) regarded as unimportant, sometimes indeed dismissed as a subjective illusion. Yet it has featured in major poetry at least since classical times – Ennius’ *at tuba terribili sonitu taratantara dixit*, “the trumpet with a terrible sound said ‘taratantara’” (Steuart ed. 1925: [Fragment 18] 18), comes to mind as a minor example, as does the Virgilian *quadripedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum*, “the hoof struck the crumbling plain with a galloping sound” (*Aeneid*, VIII, 596). In both instances the figure is untranslatable, and internally indicated by the word *sonitus*, “sound”. Tennyson provides a more extended instance, this time in English, the description of Sir Bedivere carrying the dying King Arthur down the ridge to the edge of the lake:

Dry clash’d his harness in the icy caves  
 And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
 The bare black cliff clang’d round him, as he based  
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
 Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels –  
 And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,  
 And the long glories of the winter moon. (*Morte D’Arthur*, 186–92)

These instances are brief, but, sometimes at least, the figure extends over entire poems. *Morte D’Arthur* as a whole is onomatopoeic, as is much else in Tennyson and in Tennyson’s master, Virgil. For Pope the great exemplar is Dryden’s ode on the feast celebrating Alexander the

Great's conquest of the Persian Empire, *Alexander's Feast, or, The Power of Music*, where the central figure is not Alexander, but the poet and musician Timotheus. The word "sound" again receives prominence:

Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,  
 The sound must seem an Echo to the sense ...  
 Hear how Timotheus' varied lays surprize,  
 And bid alternate passions fall and rise!  
 While, at each change, the son of Libyan Jove  
 Now burns with glory, and then melts with love;  
 Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,  
 Now sighs steal out, and tears begin to flow:  
 Persians and Greeks like turns of nature found,  
 And the world's victor stood subdu'd by Sound!  
 The pow'r of Music all our hearts allow,  
 And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now. (*An Essay on Criticism*, 365–6, 374–83)

Pope regarded the ode as an onomatopoeic structure, and took for granted the ultimate identity of poetry and music.

Sound is linked to sense in many other poems, both earlier and later than Dryden's – for instance, in Spenser's *Epithalamium*, Milton's twin odes, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, and his elegy, *Lycidas*, the odes and elegies of Gray, Collins and Keats. In some of these numerical structure is an additional related factor (Hieatt 1960; MacQueen, J. 1985: 108–12, 118–25).

Onomatopoeia sometimes combines with numerical structure in a much later poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, an adherent of Herder's onomatopoeic or imitative theory of language. He believed that many words "rhyme" with the texture, shape and sense-impressions of the things they stand for. By grouping and combining such words he achieved intricate correspondences of sound and sense, correspondences which he regarded as bringing out the "inscape" of things or events, inscape defined as "the inner core of individuality, perceived in moments of insight by an onlooker who is in full harmony with the being he is observing" (Mackenzie 1981: 233). "Instress", another of Hopkins' coinages, is closely related.

Numerical composition forms part of this inscape/ instress in the earliest of his mature poems, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (Bridges ed. 1930: 12–23), commemorating 5 Franciscan nuns drowned under particularly tragic circumstances on 7 December 1875, the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The Franciscan order, like

Hopkins himself, always had a particular devotion to Mary, whose own Immaculate Conception made the Incarnation possible, indeed inevitable.

The day of the feast is 8 December. In terms of date, 7 and 8 are both thus important, as is 5, in terms of the 5 nuns representing the 5 wounds of Christ on the Cross. St Francis, the founder of their order, had himself received the stigmata, the impression of these wounds. The number 5 helps to make the suffering and endurance of the nuns part of the Passion:

Five! the finding and sake  
And cipher of suffering Christ.  
Mark, the mark is of man's make  
And the word of it Sacrificed.  
But he scores it in scarlet himself on his own bespoken,  
Before-time-taken, dearest prized and priced –  
Stigma, signal, cinquefoil token  
For lettering of the lamb's fleece, ruddying of the rose-flake.

Joy fall to thee, father Francis,  
Drawn to the Life that died;  
With the gnarls of the nails in thee, niche of the lance, his  
Lovescape crucified  
And seal of his seraph-arrival! and these thy daughters  
And five-lived and leaved favour and pride,  
Are sisterly sealed in wild waters,  
To bathe in his fall-gold mercies, to breathe in his all-fire glances. (stanzas 22–23)

The lovescape is the inscape of the Crucifixion, embodied in the number 5. The penultimate line of stanza 5 reads “His mystery must be instressed, stressed”. Nor is it accident that the full exposition of 5 occurs in stanza 22, a number which in biblical terms represents the fullness of the Divine utterance.

In each stanza the number of lines is 8, one of the significant numbers mentioned, and the total number of stanzas is 35, the product of two others, 7 and 5. The poem has two sections. Part the First consists of 10 (5×2) stanzas and serves as prologue. Part the Second, contains the main narrative, 25 (5×5) stanzas. The subject of the first is salvation through participation in Christ's victory in suffering – by means of the 5 wounds. As Second Person of the Trinity, Christ is first mentioned in stanza 2, while God the Father and the Holy Ghost as Dove occupy stanzas 1 and 3 respectively. The Trinity itself is adored



in stanza 9 (3×3). The development is completed with the contrasting conversions to salvation of the 2 saints, Paul and Augustine:

Whether at once, as once at a crash Paul,  
Or as Austin, a lingering-out sweet skill,  
Make mercy in all of us, out of us all

Mastery, but be adored, but be adored King. (stanza 10)

The concern is with salvation rather than suffering, but with salvation gained through the suffering on the Cross.

The 25 stanzas of Part the Second again emphasize 5 and the stigmata of suffering. Death is evoked in the opening lines, followed by the description of the blizzard, the “widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps”, and the wreck (stanzas 13–14). Hope is abandoned in stanza 15 (5×3). Even God comes to appear hostile:

They fought with God’s cold –  
And they could not and fell to the deck  
(Crushed them) or water (and drowned them) or rolled  
With the sea-romp over the wreck (stanza 17)

17 is a prime number, and as such regarded as unfortunate or ill-omened. Plutarch in *De Iside et Osiride* is very specific:

The Pythagoreans ... entirely abominate this number. For the number seventeen, intervening between the square number sixteen and the rectangular number eighteen, two numbers which alone of plane numbers have their perimeters equal to the areas enclosed by them, bars, discretely separates them from one another, being divided into unequal parts in the ratio of nine to eight. (Griffiths ed. 1970: 185)

16 is the square of 4; a square, each of whose sides is 4 inches, has a perimeter of 16 inches and an area of 16 square inches. A rectangle with sides of 3 and 6 inches has a perimeter of 18 inches and an area of 18 square inches. 17 is 9 plus 8, and 9:8 is the discordant musical interval of a tone. Hopkins, as classical scholar, later to be Professor of Greek in University College, Dublin, would be familiar with the text.

The transition, a “madrigal start”, makes its appearance in the median stanza of the poem, 18, following the appearance of the tall nun, the prophetess – “What can it be, this glee?”. Stanza 25 (5×5) contains the first reference to the story of Christ’s rebuking the storm on the Sea of Galilee and so rescuing his disciples (*Luke* 8: 22–25). It

is in the final long line of the climactic stanza 33 that he makes his full appearance as risen Saviour:

With a mercy that outrides  
 The all of water, an ark  
 For the listener; for the lingerer with a love glides  
 Lower than death and the dark;  
 A vein for the visiting of the past-prayer, pent in prison,  
 The last-breath penitent spirits – the uttermost mark  
 Our passion-plunged giant risen,  
 The Christ of the Father compassionate, fetched in the storm of his strides. (stanza 33)

33, the number of years King David reigned in Jerusalem, is the Old Testament type of the number of years in Christ's Incarnation, his age at the Crucifixion, and so of Christ himself.

Christ is associated with three biblical images of redemption from water – Noah's Ark (*Genesis* 6: 14ff.), the passage from *Luke* already mentioned, and another from *Matthew* (14: 22–33), in which he walks on the sea to save the storm-tossed disciples. Stanzas 34 and 35 form a kind of epilogue, Stanza 34 celebrating the compassion of the birth from the Immaculate Conception, and the final stanza paralleling the earlier conclusion to Part the First with a prayer for the reconversion of England.

James Milroy observes that Hopkins achieves "a unified effect of phonetic, syntactic and lexical structure", and quotes Susanne Langer to the effect that a poem

"is not the literal assertion made in the words, but the way the assertion is made, and this involves the sound, the tempo, the aura of associations of the words, the long or short sequence of the ideas, the wealth or poverty of transient imagery that contains them ... and the unifying, all embracing artifice of rhythm." (Milroy 1977: 114–15)

Numerical structure, one may feel, should be added to the list.

Elsewhere I have discussed numerical structure in certain Scottish poems, *Altus Prosator*, *The Kingis Quair*, and *An Hymne of the Fairest Faire* (MacQueen, J. 1982: 17–26; 1985: 51–55, 98–99, 113–16). The last combines numerology with an occasional obvious onomatopoeia, for instance, in the lines:

our Thought  
 No chime of time discernes in them to fall,  
 But three distinctlie bide one Essence all. (140–42)

where the independence of the Trinity from time is brought out by the contrasting feeble clock-chime at the beginning of line 141. In Drummond numerical structure may sometimes seem limited in effect; the correspondence, for instance, between the 9 orders of angels and the 9 couplets, 18 lines (163–80) in which they are described, or the 30 lines (203–32) describing the planets enclosed by the 30-year orbit of the outermost, Saturn, may seem no more than decorative, the precise number of lines adding nothing to the meaning. Yet even here the effect is cumulative, linked as it is to other more extended features. The 336 line of the poem correspond to the 3 hundredweights, each of 112 pounds, the metaphoric weight of the creation (“measure and number and *weight*”). Line 162 marks the division between uncreated and created being in the ratio 162:336, or 54:112, this last representing, on the one hand the sum of the numbers in the basic Lambda formula (see Appendix A), on the other the hundredweight of the material cosmos. Lines 163–80 (18 lines) are devoted to the 9 orders of angels, ranked highest among created beings. The 3×52 patterning of the final 156 lines, devoted to the 13 spheres of the lower creation, is based on a measurement of time, the number of weeks in the solar year. The repeated 3 denotes the Trinity. The structure opens a dimension of meaning not otherwise readily accessible. Immaterial entities – the Trinity, the Soul as related to the Body of the World, Eternity as related to Time – as well as the material creation, achieve the reality in abstraction which Plato believed they must necessarily possess. So too in Henryson the Soul of the World becomes as important as the fallen Orpheus and Eurydice, Justice and Necessity almost as vivid as Cresseid.

#### 4. Numerical Composition – History

Numerical composition has a long history. It is intimately related to metaphysical and physical concepts of world-order. The crowning idea that morality, as much as music and cosmology, has a numerical basis was worked out by Plato, elaborating earlier Pythagorean doctrines. His last work, the *Epinomis* (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: 1517–33), a continuation of the *Laws*, considers the method by which governors may obtain Wisdom or Prudence, supreme among the 4 Cardinal Virtues (Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice), and thus supremely important for the task of government. Wisdom, the

Athenian Stranger, who is principal speaker in the dialogue, rather surprisingly concludes, is attainable only by astronomers as a consequence of their profound training in the mathematics of the movement of the heavenly bodies. The heavens move by arithmetic, and as a consequence his juxtaposition in a single phrase of the fear of God and the true nature of numbers is not paradoxical. Towards the end of the passage, “will enumerate” is somewhat inadequate as a translation of the Greek διαριθμήσεται: “will count and classify” is better, but perhaps “will assess in terms of number” comes closest of all. The passage reads as follows:

Perhaps when a man considers the arts, he may fancy that mankind needs number only for minor purposes – though the part it plays even in them is considerable. But could he see the divine and the mortal in the world process – a vision from which he will learn both the fear of God and the true nature of number – even so ‘tis not any man and every man who will recognize the full power number will bestow on us if we are conversant with the whole field of it – why, for example, all musical effects manifestly depend upon the numeration of motions and tones – or will take the chief point of all, that ‘tis the source of all good things, but, as we should be well aware, of none of the ill things which may perhaps befall us. No! unregulated, disorderly, ungainly, unrhythmical, tuneless movement, and all else that partakes of evil, is destitute of all number, and of this a man who means to die happy must be convinced. And as for the right, the good, the noble, and the like, no man who has given his adherence to a true belief, but without knowledge, will ever enumerate them in a way to bring conviction to himself and to others. (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: [977e–978b] 1521).

As has already been noted, Plato gives details of his cosmic numerology in the myth of Er which concludes the *Republic*, and in the account of the creation of the world and the World Soul in the *Timaeus* (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: [614b–621d] 839–44; [29d–47e] 1162–75). Several Latin works helped to transmit such doctrines to the Middle Ages and beyond, most notably *Scipio’s Dream*, the final book of Cicero’s otherwise lost *Republic*, together with the commentary on it by Macrobius, and the commentary on the *Timaeus* itself by Calcidius (Waszink ed. 1962). An important late Greek work, the *Theology of Arithmetic*, is attributed to the Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus (c.250–c.325), (de Falco ed. 1922; Waterfield tr. 1988).

Both Plato and Cicero probably made conscious literary use of the symbolism of numbers. The *Republic* and the *Laws*, Plato’s most substantial dialogues, are both divided into books; for the *Republic*, 10, the decad; for the *Laws*, 12, the number of divisions in his ideal

city (Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: 1323–31 [737e–47a]; MacQueen, J. 1985: 39–40). The 9 chapters of *The Dream of Scipio* correspond to the 9 celestial spheres.

As much as Greek, biblical ideas of world-order affected later generations. The most immediately relevant passage, “Thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight”, is to be found in the apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon* (11: 20). *Wisdom of Solomon* was composed as late perhaps as c. AD 40, and is almost certainly affected by Greek ideas, but similar less formulated expressions are to be found earlier, for instance, in *Isaiah* and *Job* (*Isaiah* 40: 12; *Job* 38: 4–7). So too the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, 22, through which creation, the word of God, might be expressed in written language, gained both a symbolic meaning and a structural potential, which found expression, for instance, in the number of verses of a poem, or of chapters in a prose composition. The Hebrew Bible, the sum of all utterance, was held to contain 22 books. Lesser poems and prose works based on the number are to be found in the Old and New Testament (examples include several among the *Psalms*, the verse sequences making up the chapters of *Lamentations*, and the number of chapters in *Revelation*) and in writings of the early Christian period (MacQueen, J. 1985: 10–13).

The significance of numbers such as 1 (the One God), 3 (the Trinity), 6 and 7 (the 6 days of creation and subsequent sabbath of rest), 9 (the 9 orders of angels), 10 (the 10 Commandments, the Law), 12 (the 12 tribes of Israel, Christ’s 12 disciples), 33 (the years of David’s reign in Jerusalem (2 *Samuel* 5: 5; *1 Kings* 2: 11, etc.), assumed to be those also of Christ’s Incarnation), and 40 (the 40-year pilgrimage of the Children of Israel through the wilderness to the Promised Land; Christ’s 40-day fast in the wilderness) depends for the most part on fairly obvious scriptural authority. Rather more esoteric is 11, the number of transgression (2 *Samuel* 5: 5; *1 Kings* 2: 11), etc.<sup>8</sup>

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8. 10 is the number of the 10 Commandments; 11, which transgresses or passes over that number by 1, represents the transgression of one or more of the commandments. Cf. “The number eleven undoubtedly symbolizes the transgression of the Law, since it oversteps ten; and so it is the symbol of sin” (Bettenson tr. 1972: [XV 20] 633); “The number 11 has nothing in common with the divine or the heavenly: it has no contact with, nor ladder leading to higher things, nor any merit. It is the first number to pass 10, signifying those who transgress the 10 Commandments” (Bongo 1591: [“De Numero XI”] 377). The significance of 11 is one of the most consistently observed *leges allegoriae* in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

and 23, which derives its significance, “vengeance on sinners”, from Vulgate *Exodus* 32: 28, the climax of the episode of the Golden Calf, when Moses sends the sons of Levi to punish the idolaters, “and there fell on that day about twenty-three thousand men” (Bongo 1591: [De Numero XXIII] 441–43).<sup>9</sup> 23 is a simplified form of 23000.

All the numbers from 1 to 10 came to be regarded as meaningful in a variety of ways,<sup>10</sup> some of which will become more evident in the course of this work. Odd numbers are masculine, even numbers feminine; the conjunction of the two becomes generative. The first “perfect” number 6, the factors of which add up to the number itself, and which is also the number of days taken by God for the Creation, the first masculine cube, 27, and the second perfect number, 28, together with the climacterics, 49, 81, and 63 (the square of 7, the number of the body, the square of 9, the number of the intellect, and the product of 7 and 9),<sup>11</sup> have a particular importance, as do ratio and balance generally, with emphasis most obviously falling on the mid-point, the median.

Also significant are primes, numbers with no factors other than themselves and unity. These were often regarded as unfortunate. 11, 17 and 23 have already been mentioned. 19, the number of years in the lunar cycle established by the Athenian astronomer Meton (5th century BC), most commonly used in the Middle Ages to help calculate the date of Easter, was also often regarded as unfortunate.<sup>12</sup>

9. Bongo also refers to *Numbers* 25: 9, where he says 23000 men are said to have been slaughtered in one day because they coupled with Midianite women and became initiates of Belphegor. The Vulgate reading however is 24000: *Et occisi sunt viginti quatuor millia hominum*. Bongo had in mind the Pauline reference to this passage (*I Corinthians* 10: 8), where the reading is 23,000: *neque fornicemur sicut quidam ex ipsis fornicati sunt et ceciderunt una die viginti tria milia*.

10. See especially Waterfield (tr.) 1988.

11. See the introductory material in Waterfield (tr.) 1988. One might add the “Scipionic” climacteric, 56 (7×8). On perfect numbers see Bongo 1591: 460–64, “De Numero XXVIII”; on climacterics, 344–45, “De Numero IX”, and 567, “De Numero XXCI”.

12. Bongo 1591: [“De Numero XIX”] 423–24, “The number 19 is neither triangular, nor cubic, nor spherical, nor perfect, nor, in a word, does it possess any kind of mathematical elegance, but since it is prime and incomposite, like the other numbers of this kind, it is also bound to vices and punishment”. Bongo had a particular dislike of prime numbers. For the terms used, see the glossary in Waterfield (tr.) 1988: 117–22.

The number 5 will illustrate. It is the prime number which marks the midpoint between unity and the first limit of numbers, the decad, 10. As a consequence it sometimes appears in contrasting pairs – for instance, the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins of the New Testament parable (*Matthew 25: 1–13*) – forming a combined total of 10 and symbolizing opposites; in the case of the virgins the redeemed and the damned at the Last Judgement. From at least one point of view it is thus unfortunate. As the sum of 2, the first feminine number, and 3, the first masculine, 5 represents the power of generation, on the one hand producing salvation, emblemized by the 5 wise virgins or the pentangle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Tolkien and Gordon eds 1967: 18–19),<sup>13</sup> on the other damnation, emblemized by the 5 foolish virgins, victims of sensuality, the abdication of intellect in favour of the 5 corporeal senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell). As itself possessing a median (3), it sometimes represents Justice. And of course it may emblemize the 5 wounds of Christ on the Cross. The dominant meaning in any particular episode where 5 appears may usually be established by context, but the others are always, as it were, subliminally present.

Series and ratios are also important, in particular the Fibonacci and other similar series, the Golden Section (Division in Extreme and Mean Ratio), and the Platonic Lambda formula for the Soul of the World and the individual human soul. These are described in Appendix B.

The practice of using such numbers and ratios, whether biblical or Platonic, continued into later Latin and vernacular literatures (MacQueen, J. 1985: 9–13). Macrobius and Calcidius remained well-known in the Middle Ages. As additional channels of transmission, Émile Mâle mentions “the *Liber formularum* of St Eucherius ... the *Liber numerorum* of Isidore of Seville ... the *De universo* of Rabanus Maurus ... and the *Miscellanea* of Hugh of St Victor” (Mâle 1984: 12).<sup>14</sup> Additions to this list might easily be made. Authors utilise line-, stanza-, chapter-, and book- divisions.

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13. The account of the pentangle occupies the 27th and 28th stanzas, both significant numbers.

14. Referring to Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 50, cols. 727–72; 83, cols. 179–200; 177, cols. 469–899. The first edition of the French original, *L'Art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France. Etude sur l'iconographie du moyen âge et sur ses sources d'inspiration*, was published in Paris in 1898.

As the poetry of Spenser and Drummond of Hawthornden illustrates, the practice of numerical composition continued into the Renaissance and the seventeenth century. Treatises of various kinds belong to the period; I have made particular use of Pietro Bongo's *Numerorum Mysteria* (2nd ed. Bergamo, 1591), but one might for instance have used *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658) by Sir Thomas Browne (1605–82), in effect a study of the number 5, but also embracing a much wider range of numerological lore. Neither practice nor theory adapted to the intellectual climate of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries. Effectually the process was forgotten, but eventually, as the example of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* illustrates, something of it was recovered. Cultural historians recognised it in terms mainly of art and literature. Émile Mâle, for instance, after some discussion of individual numbers, observes: "We might say that in all the great works of the Middle Ages, there is something of this sacred arithmetic. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is the most famous example. That great epic is built on numbers" (Mâle 1984: 13). (As a consequence, parallels from the *Divine Comedy* will often be cited in the course of this study). Later landmarks include V.F. Hopper's influential study, published in 1938 (Hopper 1938). Ten years afterwards E.R. Curtius demonstrated the importance of numbers for Latin prose and poetry of the earlier Middle Ages (Curtius 1953: 501–14),<sup>15</sup> a process more recently taken further by D.R. Howlett and Charles Thomas (Howlett 1995; Thomas 1998).<sup>16</sup> We have also had good analyses of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century as well as medieval vernacular prose and poetry (Heatt 1960; Fowler 1964; Butler 1970; Fowler ed. 1970; Eckhardt ed. 1980).

In mainland Britain, Chaucer made some use of the technique (MacQueen, J. 1985: 95–96). The most consistent exponent however was the anonymous author of *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (MacQueen, J. 1985: 70–71, 96–98). In Scotland James I used it in *The Kingis Quair* (MacQueen, J. 1985: 98–99).

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15. The German original, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, was published in Berlin in 1948.

16. Thomas's book deals with monumental inscriptions of the sub-Roman period.



## 5. Number and Ratio in Henryson

Henryson combines numerical structure with patterns of sound, syntax and meaning. The further combination with allegory completes his attempt to embody in language the Christian Platonic inscape of the world he is describing. The result may sometimes be felt as odd, eccentric, even grotesque – for some readers this is particularly true of *The Tale of Orpheus* and the planetary portraits in *The Testament of Cresseid*, but it may also be felt, for instance, in the description of the toad in *The Paddock and the Mouse* or even in the fact that the mouse has no horse which would enable her to cross the river. As in Hopkins, the grotesque, however, is an essential part of the allegory and so of the inscape, the ultimate beauty.

Henryson's use of numerological technique first impressed itself upon me when I was considering the three stanzas in *The Tale of Orpheus* (30–32: 219–39) where the component ratios of classical musical theory constituting the Platonic Soul of the World become embodied, partially at least, in the person of Orpheus, and the poem thus becomes in some sense a reflex of the Lambda formula. This realisation led to a paper, "Neoplatonism and Orphism in Fifteenth-Century Scotland. The Evidence of Henryson's *New Orpheus*" (MacQueen, J. 1976). In *The Tale of Orpheus*, the long Moralitas must be excluded from the scheme, but later I observed that in another poem, *The Preaching of the Swallow*, a proem in 13 stanzas, followed by a narrative in 25 (5×5) stanzas, and 9 stanzas of Moralitas, suggested that numerical composition governed the whole. The stanza-totals including Moralities – 40, 28, 23 – of other poems, *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger*, *The Paddock and the Mouse*, *The Wolf and the Lamb*, and *The Wolf and the Wether*, all pointed in the same direction. *The Testament of Cresseid* also appeared to be numerical in structure (MacQueen, J. 1988: 67–70; 2001). One of my aims in writing this book was to discover how far these and the remaining poems were open to such analysis. Rashly thinking that Henryson's use of such techniques was limited, I once wrote that

Elaborate numerological form is one aspect of Henryson's "high style", and tends to appear only in poems with a strong philosophic or theological emphasis. *The Lion and the Mouse*, for instance, seems to contain nothing of the kind, although it is a sequel to *The Preaching of the Swallow*. (MacQueen, J. 1988: 70)

As the course of the book shows, my opinion has changed. In Henryson numerical composition is ubiquitous.

The most obvious property of any fable is the pleasure given by the story; second, and from the point of view of medieval theorists like Boccaccio or Christine, more important, is that, in a surface way or more subtly, it should demonstrate moral and theological truth. Henryson accepted this position:

Thocht feinyeit fabils of ald poetre  
 Be not al grunded vpon truth, yit than  
 Thair polite termes of sweit rhetore  
 Richt plesand ar vnto the eir of man;  
 And als the cause quhy thay first began  
 Was to repreif the of thi misleuing,  
 O man, be figure of ane vther thing.

In lyke maner as throw the<sup>17</sup> bustious eird,  
 Swa it be labourit with grit diligence,  
 Springis the flouris and the corne abreird,  
 Hailsum and gude to mannis sustenance,  
 Sa springis thair ane morall sweit sentence  
 Oute of the subtell dyte of poetry  
 To gude purposis, quaha culd it weill apply. (*Prologue*, 1–2: 1–14)

Although truth is the ultimate objective of poetry, it is often hidden under the veil of fiction. The effort of discovery enhances both pleasure and profit. Truth so recovered produces its own pleasure and may become an instrument of moral rehabilitation.

The inherent properties of numbers helped to forge an instrument suitable for such a purpose. Henryson most clearly shows his awareness of their importance in the passage from *The Tale of Orpheus* (30–32: 219–39) already mentioned, a phrase from which has given this book its title. In *The Preaching of the Swallow* (8: 1674) he quotes the text, already mentioned, from *Wisdom of Solomon*.

The *Fabillis* contain other indications, for instance in the word *figure*, the dominant sense of which is “image, representation, appearance”, but which, as in modern English, can also mean “a

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17. Fox ed. 1981: 3 follows the Makculloch and Bannatyne MSS in reading “a”. I have adopted “the” from the Bassandyne and Charteris prints as making better sense.

number used in arithmetic” or “a geometrical diagram”,<sup>18</sup> of the kind used by Euclid to illustrate, among other things, the concept of ratio. An early example of the latter usage is to be found in Chaucer’s *The Book of the Duchess*, where there is a reference to the ninth-century Arabic mathematician Al-Khwarizmi (*Argus*), whose works, through the intermediary labours of Fibonacci, introduced Hindu-Arabic numerals and the concepts of algebra to European mathematicians:

thogh Argus, the noble countour,  
 Sete to rekene in hys countour,  
 And rekened with his figures ten –  
 For by tho figures mowe al ken,  
 Yf they be crafty, rekene and noumbre,  
 And telle of every thing the noumbre –  
 Yet shoulde he fayle to rekene even  
 The wondres me mette in my sweven. (435–42)

It is still possible to feel in these lines something of the intellectual excitement caused by the appearance of Al-Khwarizmi’s work. Notice too how Chaucer upholds the Platonic idea that everything *has* a number.

Henryson deliberately exploits the range of meaning in the word *figure*, for instance in the final line of the first of the two stanzas just quoted. Another example occurs later in the same *Prologue*:

This nobill clerk, Esope, as I haif tauld,  
 In gay metir, as Poete Lawriate,<sup>19</sup>  
 Be figure wrait his buke, for he nocht wald  
 Tak the disdane off hie nor low estate. (9: 57–60)

Fox in his edition (Fox ed. 1981: 193) notes that the word presupposes readers at two levels – “The sense is that the *gay metir* will please some readers, and the *figure* others” – but does not

18. *DOST*, s.v. *figour*, a variant spelling of *figure*. The editors give no reason for treating the variants under separate heads. There is no etymological difference. *OED* treats both senses together.

19. Fox ed. 1981: 5, “and in facound purpurate”, the reading found in the Makculloch MS and the Charteris print. I have adopted “as Poete Lawriate”, the reading of the Bassandyne print, the Harleian MS, the Smith print of 1577, and the Hart print of 1621. The Bannatyne MS reads “facound and purperat”. One or other reading may indicate a Henrysonian revision of the text. For Aesop as poet laureate, cf. the description in *The Lion and the Mouse*, quoted below, 155.

comment on the deliberate ambiguity of the term *figure*. Compare too the more ambitious, if also clumsily-expressed, first stanza of the *Moralitas* to *The Wolf and the Wether*:

Esope, that poet, first father of this fabill,  
 Wrait this parabole, quhilk is conuenient,  
 Because the sentence wes fructuous and agreabill,  
 In moralitie exemplatiue prudent;  
 Quhais problemes bene verray excellent,  
 Throw similitude of figuris, to this day  
 Geuis doctrine to the redaris of it ay. (5: 1349–55)

The conjunction of “problemes” and “figuris” at least suggests that Henryson had some sort of geometric proof, even a geometric diagram, in mind.

Henryson uses the Lambda formula, but not the Fibonnaci series. He does however make constructive use of five other cognate series. In the list which follows, I have italicized the portions relevant to his poetry:

- (a) 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29, 47 ... (*Preaching of the Swallow, Testament of Cresseid*).
- (b) 1, 4, 5, 9, 14, 23 ... (*The Cock and the Jasp, The Wolf and the Wether*)
- (c) 1, 5, 6, 11, 17, 28 ... (*The Paddock and the Mouse*).
- (d) 1, 6, 7, 13, 20, 33, 53, 86 ... (*The Two Mice, Testament of Cresseid*)
- (e) 1, 8, 9, 17, 26, 43 ... (*The Lion and the Mouse*).

The length in stanzas of a poem sometimes indicates that it is influenced by such a series. Golden Section then becomes potentially part of the structure.

Much variation is possible, even in the use of a single number. This may be illustrated by the 13-stanza proems to *The Kingis Quair* and *The Preaching of the Swallow*, in both of which the 13 stanzas correspond to the 13 spheres of the created universe. The referent is thus identical, the effect however substantially different. In *The Kingis Quair* a fairly wide gap separates numerology and narrative. Only the seeds of later developments are planted in the proem, where the words “sphere” and “providence” are nowhere used. Stanza 1 however mentions the circular form of the heavens, two zodiacal signs, and the movement of a planet (by implication in its sphere) from one sign to the other. The supposed action of the 13 stanzas occupies the night hours during which the movement of the spheres is most clearly visible, and concludes with the matin bell, proclaiming the office

which heralded dawn. Throughout, the spheres are, as it were, subliminally present, while inside his bed-chamber the narrator reads the discussion of Fortune in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, realizing that his own life-story partly resembles that of Boethius. The reader is meant to recollect that Boethius emphasises divine government through and by the stars and planets in their spheres, ideas and images fully developed only later in the poem, but already to some degree present in the prologue. And of course the structure of the poem is, if not spherical, at least circular, with the last line of the penultimate 196th stanza, “Hich in the hevynnys figure circulere”, echoing the first of the poem. The effect is compounded by the fact that 196, which completes the circle, is also a perfect square ( $14 \times 14 = 196$ ), and that the total number of stanzas, 197, is a prime, which like all others has no factor save itself and 1, but which belongs to a class of primes the members of which represent the sum of two squares ( $14^2 + 1^2 = 197$ ).

In Henryson’s poem the 13 spheres are listed in stanza 6 (as noted, the first perfect number and the number of the days of creation), but the poem is concerned with them only in so far as they demonstrate something of the nature of God, and the route by which human beings, in exercising natural reason, are enabled to participate consciously in the work of providence, the only aspect of divinity accessible to unaided reason. Providence operates through the spheres, which thus come to express the Prudence, supremely present in God, to which in a limited way humans themselves may aspire by observation of the way in which the spheres operate. The pageant of the seasons in stanzas 9–14 indicates that the 13 months of the lunar year contribute to the same effect. The relationship of 13 to the poem and the poem as a whole is thus oblique, but fully explicated. The reader need do no more than read intelligently the words on the page.

The number of stanzas is 47, a number which enables Henryson also to make use of one of the series listed above.

Other numbers and ratios Henryson deploys with equal individuality. Consider, for instance, 8 as Justice in *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman*, and *The Testament of Cresseid*. Consider too the range of applications found in Henryson’s treatment of 23, “vengeance for sinners”.

Henryson’s Aesop, like Henryson himself, is well-suited to be the poet of such a genre. He is not the deformed figure of popular

tradition (Gray 1979: 39–41)<sup>20</sup>, but “the fairest man that euer befoir I saw” (*The Lion and the Mouse* 4: 1348). He is a university graduate, grave and venerable:

His gowne wes off ane claith als quhyte as milk,  
 His chymmeris wes of chambelate purpoure broun,  
 His hude of scarlet, bordowrit weill with silk  
 On hekillit wyis vntill his girdill down,  
 His bonat round, and off the auld fassoun;  
 His heid wes quhyte, his ene wes grit and gray,  
 With lokker hair quhilk ouer his schulderis lay. (5: 1349–55)

The dreamer addresses him as poet laureate; if the term is used precisely, someone like the Italian poet Petrarch, whose achievement had won official recognition from a university, and who, as token of the doctorate, had been awarded a laurel crown (Wilkinson 1961: 24–29). Henryson’s Aesop is a poet, wears the doctor’s bonnet and hood, and is the grave and venerable figure mentioned by Boccaccio. The intellectual status of his poetry is taken for granted.

The description occupies stanza 5, a number whose varying significances has already been discussed. Here in all probability the indication is perfection – the 5 wise rather than the 5 foolish virgins.

Even if one grants, as seems necessary, that some at least among medieval readers and listeners counted lines and stanzas in the automatic way that a musician now counts the bars of a musical score, it must have been beyond the grasp even of the most skilled to comprehend at first attempt the complexities of a sustained poem. The structure presupposes meditative reperusal, with the corollary that such poetry is often unusually memorable. In the experience of one reader at least, it haunts the recollection, sometimes spontaneously bringing to mind features previously un-noted, but confirmed by consultation of the text. The poems are at once arts of memory as expounded by Dame Frances A. Yates (Yates 1966), and works of memorable art.

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20. Curiously enough, the woodcut portrait forming the frontispiece to the Bassandyne print follows the popular tradition, as does the attribution of authorship to “Esope *the Phrygian*”.

## 6. Plan of the Book

The book follows a fairly simple pattern. Henryson's best-known work, *The Testament of Cresseid*, is the subject of Chapter One. Subsequent chapters are devoted to the purely Aesopic among the *Morall Fabillis*, those, that is to say, based on the verse-*Romulus*. First is *The Cock and the Jasp*, together with the *Prologue*, but, for reasons set out in Appendix B, I have not otherwise attempted to follow the order found in most printed editions, the order found in the Charteris and Bassandyne prints and MS *BL*, Harley 3865. Next come fables in the Beast-epic tradition. The final chapter is given over to the poem with the most highly elaborated and Platonic numerological structure, *The Tale of Orpheus*. In the Conclusion I attempt to draw together the various strands of the argument.

Numerology, obviously, is important throughout, but any interest the book may have is not, I hope, confined to that subject. My intention, at least, has been to write a critically balanced book on Henryson's narrative poetry.

## **Tragic Fable**



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# Chapter One

## *The Testament of Cresseid:* Justice, the Virgin, and the Prison of the Planets

### 1. Plot and Structure

*The Testament of Cresseid* has a simple narrative outline. Cresseid abandons Troilus for Diomeid, then is herself rejected and turns to prostitution. Eventually she seeks refuge with her father, the priest Calchas, who receives her kindly. When she discovers that as a consequence of her behaviour she has fallen victim to leprosy, he sends her, at her own request, to a near-by spital, from which she goes begging with her fellow-sufferers. One day the group encounters Troilus. He does not recognise the disfigured Cresseid, nor she him, but her glance somehow reminds him of his faithless lost love, and in a surge of grief he flings her his purse. When Cresseid learns the identity of her benefactor, she is overwhelmed with remorse, makes her testament, and dies.

Style is more elaborate than plot. The narrative is first-person throughout. A seasonal prologue gives details of the narrator and the sources of his story – Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, together with “ane vthir quair”, relating the closing episodes of Cresseid’s life. A long dream-vision of her trial before Cupid and the seven planetary gods forces Cresseid to acknowledge that she has contracted leprosy. She twice engages in rhetorically complex laments, the first of them composed in nine-line stanzas contrasting with the rhyme-royal of the remainder of the poem.

In an earlier book on Henryson I noted the formal arrangement in 8 parts (MacQueen, J. 1967: 45–46):

- (1) Prologue (Narrator, Chaucer and “ane vthir quair”), 10 stanzas, 70 lines.
- (2) First narrative episode (Cresseid in Calchas’s manse), 10 stanzas, 70 lines.
- (3) Dream allegory (Cresseid, Cupid and the planetary gods), 29 stanzas, 203 lines.
- (4) Second narrative episode (Cresseid goes to the spital), 9 stanzas, 63 lines.
- (5) “The Complaint of Cresseid”, 7 9-line stanzas, 63 lines.
- (6) Third narrative episode (meeting of Cresseid and Troilus), 10 stanzas, 70 lines.
- (7) Fourth narrative episode (self-realization, testament and death of Cresseid), 10 stanzas, 70 lines.
- (8) Epilogue, 1 stanza, 7 lines.

In terms of the action of the poem, 8 is an appropriate number. It represents Justice:

The Pythagoreans, indeed, called the number 8 Justice because it is the first number that may be divided into two equal even numbers and divided again into two more equal numbers. It is also the product of equals: 2 times 2 times 2. Since it is the product of equal even numbers and may be divided equally, even down to the unit, which does not admit of division in mathematical computation, it deserves to receive the name Justice. (Stahl tr. 1952: [I, v, 17–18] 98–99)

It is appropriate also because Christ rose on the 8th day, first of the new week, after Good Friday and Holy Saturday had brought the 40 days of Lent to an end, and because the 8th Age of the World, bringing Redemption or Damnation, will begin when the previous 7 Ages finish at the Day of Judgement.

4 and 40 are both related to 8 and both almost equally involved in the structure. 4 is a harmonious number, the first to possess two means – 2 and 3 (Stahl tr. 1952: [I, vi, 23] 104). So too it often represents Justice: “Anatolius [St Anatolius of Laodicea, d. c.282, author of *The Elements of Arithmetic*, of which fragments survive] reports that it is called ‘justice’ since the square which is based on it is equal to the perimeter” (Stahl tr. 1952: [I, v, 17–18] 98–99).

40, the number of days in the church season of Lent, is important for the prologue and provides a calendrical setting for the dream-vision. The immediate occasion of the latter, Cresseid’s denunciation of Venus and Cupid as sole causes of her misfortune in the course of the April festival of these divinities, occurs in stanza 20 (40/2). In stanza 40 Cupid demands that she should be punished. In stanza 80 (40×2) Cresseid finally accepts responsibility for her own misfortune – “Nane but myself as now I will accuse” (80: 574).<sup>1</sup>

Part 8, the epilogue, consists of a single stanza and so differs markedly from the others. From this point of view, the total number is 7+1 rather than 8. 7 and its multiple 70 thus become prominent. Parts

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1. Notice however the comment by T.W. Craik, that the line “should be taken in its context, where it clearly means that she will tax no woman with inconstancy but herself; it has nothing to do with her attack on Cupid and Venus ... or her complaint against Fortune ... and so it does not mean that she is here accepting the whole responsibility for her misfortunes.” (Craik 1977: 25). Obviously I disagree. Cresseid goes a stage further than anything she has previously said. A few faithful women, she says, may exist, but in general the sex is fickle. She will not base her defence on any such ground, but accepts full personal responsibility for her actions.

1 and 2, the introduction to the narrative, each of 10 stanzas, 70 lines, balance the conclusion, parts 6 and 7, each also of 10 stanzas, 70 lines. Part 4, with 9 7-line stanzas, mirrors part 5, with 7 9-line stanzas. The mirror effect helps to convey the change of direction produced by the first attempt of Cresseid, in her "Complaint", at self-knowledge.

On this 8-fold structure a number of additional symmetries have been superimposed. The 29 stanzas, 203 lines, of part 3, the dream-vision, make up precisely one-third of the poem *minus* the epilogue, to which correspond the 29 stanzas, 203 lines, of the combined parts 1, 2, and 4, in which Cresseid shows no signs of self-knowledge, and the 27 stanzas, 203 lines, of the more introspective parts 5, 6, and 7, which bring self-knowledge and death. This division into thirds is itself proof that the epilogue should be regarded as a separate 8th part.

86, the total number of stanzas, belongs to the Fibonacci-related series 1, 6, 7, 13, 20, 33, 53, 86. Stanzas 33 and 53, as points of Golden Section, mark significant points in the narrative. The 29 stanzas of the dream-vision form a separate series, 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29, with stanzas 11 (31) and 18 (38) having a similar special prominence.

Important also are the median point (44: 308), and the climacterics, 49, 56, 63, 70, and 81.

## 2. Prologue and First Narrative Episode

The *sententia* which introduces *The Testament of Cresseid* establishes a parallel, not only between the poem and the assumed season of its composition, but between prologue and main narrative: "Ane doolie sessoun to ane cairfull dyte / Suld correspond and be equialent." (1:1–2). The season is that of the church as well as the year, Lent as well as Spring. The subsequent brilliant little cameo, occupying the first 4 stanzas, introduces much of the poem's metaphoric and numerical content, not least the theme of the blasted spring. The evening is clear but bitterly cold. The sun, which has just set, is in Aries, the first spring sign of the zodiac. It is the middle of Lent. The planet of Venus rises, shining brilliantly. Henryson's elderly narrator, a cleric, stands at the eastward-facing window of his unheated but properly orientated oratory and half-humorously attempts a prayer to the goddess for the restoration of his youth. The cold defeats him and he retreats to the comfort of his inner room.

Lent, the Christian season of penance, occupies the 40 days preceding the Easter festival, the date of which is established by the first full moon after the vernal equinox. The sun, it was conventionally believed, entered Aries at the vernal equinox, in the late fifteenth-century 11 March. It is likely however that here, as in *The Tale of Orpheus*, Henryson used a poetic “ideal” calendar, according to which the equinox was on 16 March, the middle day of the month. The sun he would then regard as remaining in Aries until the corresponding day of the next month, 15 April.

The prominence of Venus is important, not only for the prologue but the main body of the poem. She is the goddess of love, and, almost paradoxically, Lent was the season of love as well as penance. One of the thirteenth-century Harley Lyrics, *Lenten ys come with loue to toune* (Brook ed. 1956: 43), turns on this idea, as does the Wife of Bath’s story of her early dealings with Jankyn, her future fifth husband:

And so bifel that ones in a Lente –  
 So often tymes I to my gossyb wente,  
 For evere yet I loved to be gay,  
 And for to walke in March, Averill, and May,  
 Fro hous to hous, to heere sondry talys –  
 That Jankyn clerk, and my gossyb dame Alys,  
 And I myself, into the feeldes wente.  
 Myn housbonde was at Londoun al that Lente;  
 I hadde the bettre leyser for to pleye,  
 And for to se, and eek for to be seye,  
 Of lusty folk. (D, 543–53)

The repetition of “Lente”, and much else, makes it clear that Venus and love were in the forefront of her mind; “For certes, I am al Venerien / In feelynge” (D, 609–10).

The association with love comes from the root-meaning, “spring”, still preserved in the German cognate *lenz*. *Die Liebe lockte den Lenz*, “love decoyed the spring”, Siegmund remarks to Sieglinde (Wagner *Die Walkure*, I, iii). Tradition in fact held that April, the 4th month, the opening days of which usually formed part of the church season of Lent, belonged specially to Venus, the poet Ovid for this reason devoting to her the 4th or April book of the *Fasti* (Frazer ed. 1929), his uncompleted attempt at a calendrical epic, based on Roman religious festivals. If a later Roman poem, the *Pervigilium Veneris*, is to be trusted, the festival, the vigil of Venus, occupied the first three

nights of the month – began, in other words, after sunset on 31 March. The familiar refrain, *cras amet qui numquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet*, indicates that the beginning of the festival is to be on the morrow; the opening words of the first strophe, *ver nouum*, “new spring”, a technical term, refer specifically to the month of April. Indications of the length and nature of the festival come later in the poem:

Now on the three nights of the festival the troops of dancers are to be seen gathered in multitudes to go through your woodlands, among the garlands of flowers, among the myrtle huts. Neither Ceres nor Bacchus nor [Apollo] the god of poets is absent. The whole night of the vigil must be occupied with songs. Rule Dione [Venus] in the forest! Draw not near, Delia [Diana, goddess of virginity]! (Schilling ed. 1944: 7: 42–47; my translation)

The date intended by Henryson for the opening cameo is thus very probably the evening of 31 March / 1 April, the beginning of the festival of Venus. He can scarcely have known the *Pervigilium*, unrecorded in surviving ancient records, first mentioned (by Erasmus) in 1507, *editio princeps* 1577 (Schilling ed. 1944: esp. ix–xii, xxxiii–xxxix, xlv, n.1), but the *Fasti*, familiar throughout the Middle Ages, would have provided him with enough information. His main authority, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, also begins, it will be remembered, with a religious festival held on 1 April, the Trojan Palladion, in the course of which Troilus mocks the behaviour of the followers of love, only to fall an immediate victim himself.

Henryson’s elderly narrator attempts a more subdued but related role. In the propitiously numbered stanza 4, he tries to take advantage of the time with a prayer to Venus. He has served her in youth, now he wishes her to give him back the vigour of his earlier days, to restore his vanished spring:

For I traistit that Venus, luifis quene,  
 To quhome sum tyme I hecht obedience,  
 My faidit hart of lufe scho wald mak grene,  
 And therupon with humbill reuerence  
 I thoct to pray hir hie magnificence;  
 Bot for greit cald as than I lattit was  
 And in my chalmer to the fyre can pas. (4: 22–28)

Weather more appropriate to winter than spring forces him to retreat with his prayer unanswered.

The “solempne day” (16 [4×4]: 112), on which in the main narrative the Greeks flock to the temple of Venus and Cupid, is probably also the 1st of April, the vigil of Venus, agreeing in all but weather details with the season described in the prologue. The time however is morning rather than evening. Cresseid’s outburst (17–20), leading to the dream-vision of the planetary gods, at once parallels and stands in contrast to the abortive prayer of the narrator, who decides to accept the limitations of his humanity. Cresseid does not, and her outburst is apparently presented as the cause of her leprosy.

The 4th month is generally presented as harmonious, benevolent. In the prologue however it is hostile, the cruellest month. By nature it should be warm and moist, but instead the two opposite qualities, cold and dry, predominate. There are no clouds because the northern wind has purified the air, and any showers are of hail. The chill of the blasted spring forces the narrator to retire to his more comfortable *chalmers*, “living-and-bed-room”. Love (Venus and Cupid) may be hot, but for an old man on a cold night it takes some kindling. When nature fails, he must take to physic – his place by the fireside, a drink, and his reading of Chaucer.<sup>2</sup>

Venus opens her month in a hostile position, numerically as well as astrologically. She first appears in stanza 2, a number which often signifies duplicity. Doubleness is likewise a feature of her portrait in the later parliament of the planets, particularly emphasized in stanza 33 marking, as already noted, a point of Golden Section.<sup>3</sup> As Douglas Gray notes: “The description of the goddess embodies the traditional paradox of the duality of love, and expresses her own ‘doubilnes’, which delights to bring sorrow after joy” (Gray 1979: 186) – not an astrological feature. Her position as she rises, however, is astro-

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2. Fox’s note (Fox ed. 1981: 342) and Nitecki’s subsequent comment, “failing in this avenue of sexual rekindling [the prayer to Venus], he tries another in the aphrodisiac methods of drink and fire” (Nitecki 1985: 124), unduly limit the meaning of the word “corage” in the line, “And in the auld the curage doif and deid” (5: 32). At most “sexual desire” forms only a part. Cf. “Thai ar lordis of thar awn curage, And haldis thar lustis at serfage” (*DOST*, s.v. “Curage”). The basic meaning is “mind, disposition, spirit”; cf. “Than tuik ane drink, my *spreitis* to comfort” (6: 37, italics mine). The narrator attempts to compensate for the drawbacks of age, rather than rekindle his former potency. Cf. Andreas, *De Amore*: “After men reach sixty, and women fifty, ... the only comfort left for them is food and drink” (Battaglia ed. n.d.: I, 5).

3. 33 also signifies Christ, often as Judge.

logically threatening; she is in direct opposition to the sun, the source of light and warmth. The angle of 180 degrees between the two planets is, as has often been noted,<sup>4</sup> astronomically impossible, however symbolically appropriate.

The planets collectively have power over “all thing generabil”, a phrase first used in stanza 22,<sup>5</sup> power, that is to say, over everything compounded of the 4 elements and subject to generation and decay. When Venus at the beginning of her month is in opposition to the sun, the outlook for her particular servants – the narrator as well as Cresseid – is not promising.

The presence in the narrator’s house of an oratory equipped with expensive glass windows suggests that he is a priest with a comfortable benefice. His house anticipates that of Calchas, Cresseid’s father, the *mansioun* (14: 96), “manse, parsonage”,<sup>6</sup> which stands beside the temple or kirk of which he is *keiper* – “provost” might be the best translation, with the likely implication that Henryson visualized the temple as a collegiate establishment. As a Christian kirk might be dedicated to Our Lady as Mother, so that of Calchas is dedicated to Venus and her son, Cupid.

The manse is visualized in some detail. Calchas’ *chalmer*, with private oratory attached, forms part of it. Cresseid normally worships in the kirk, but on this morning of high festival, to avoid making a humiliating show of her abandonment by Diomeid, she goes instead to

4. Sir Francis Kinaston (1587–1642) is first on record to do so. Interestingly, in the notes to his MS Latin version of *The Testament of Cresseid*, completed in 1639 (Smith ed. 1914: 1: cxlvii–cxlviii), he refers to Galileo and Kepler. Cf. Fox ed. 1981: 341; Gray 1979: 166–67.

5. 22 indicates a completeness of divine utterance; see above, 28.

6. Denton Fox is rash, I think, to cast doubt (Fox ed. 1981: 347) on G.G. Smith’s suggestion that “*Mansioun* may convey the special meaning of an ecclesiastical residence” (Smith ed. 1914: 1: 46). Fox remarks that in English the meaning appears on record no earlier than the sixteenth century; in Scots first in 1597. This is mere accident. The vernacular usage is presupposed, and regarded as established, in the Latin of the *Vitae Dunkeldensis Ecclesiae Episcoporum* of Alexander Myln (1474–1548), whose life partly overlapped with Henryson’s. Robert Boswell, for instance, who in 1500 left his position at Dunkeld to become dean of Restalrig, is said by Myln to have built part of the precentor’s manse: *reliqua mansi edificia Magister Robertus Boswell construxit*, and to have repaired the manse of the prebendary of Fungarth: *mansionem ejusdem prebendae Magister Robertus Boswell succentor honeste reparavit* (*Vitae Dunkeldensis* 1831: 58, 62). The words are used in the same sense on several other occasions – the use was standard in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. See too MacQueen 1991; Cowan with Yellowlees 1994: 139, 140–41.



the oratory, closing the door behind her. Instead of praying, she denounces the festal divinities. Immediately afterwards in a swoon she dreams that she is before the planetary court, which to punish her for her blasphemy imposes the sentence of leprosy. On waking she finds that the reality corresponds to the sentence. A servant knocks on the door to tell her that supper is ready in another part of the building, the hall, but she remains in the oratory to ensure that only her father knows her plight. When he sends her to the leper-hospital, situated in a village half-a-mile away, she leaves by a private door.

Henryson saw Calchas in terms reflecting his own age, a worldly but conscientious priest in a position of importance, who, as was not uncommon in fifteenth-century Scotland or Europe, had fathered an illegitimate daughter, with whose interests he was much concerned. He knew of her affair with Diomeid the king, and was perhaps pleased with the possibility of social advancement which it offered, yet after her rejection and subsequent bad behaviour he was still prepared to welcome her home. To a degree, his behaviour recalls that of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son (*Luke* 15: 11–32) – Cresseid too is a prodigal. When she becomes ill, he tries to provide for her immediate needs in the leper-house. Eventually he disappears from the action.

The sympathy for Cresseid expressed in the prologue may be the result of a perceived similarity between the position of the narrator and Calchas. It is rash, but tempting, to suspect an element of autobiography. I find myself in agreement with Douglas Gray: “To make him [the narrator] into an autonomous character quite separate from his creator is as much an exaggeration as the simplest ‘biographical’ reading” (Gray 1979: 169).

The church season of Lent remains thematically important. Penance for past sin leads to the redemptive Eastertide, a pattern the outlines of which become visible in the course of the poem. Sin is established by the deliberate echoes of Henryson’s main source, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, with stanzas 8 and 9 in particular turning on the alternate grief and joy (corresponding to the double face of Venus) of Troilus after the departure of Cresseid for the Greek camp. Both emotions result from her *behest*, “pledge, promise”, that she will keep faith and return to Troy. In Chaucer, the exchange between the lovers culminates in the vow to keep troth sworn by Criseyde and involving almost every supernatural power – suspect perhaps because of its very elaboration:

For thilke day that I for cherisyng  
 Or drede of fader, or of other wight,  
 Or for estat, delit, or for weddyng,  
 Be fals to yow, my Troilus, my knyght,  
 Saturnes doughter, Juno, thorough hire myght,  
 As wood as Athamante do me dwelle  
 Eternalich in Stix, the put of hell!

And this on every god celestial  
 I swere it yow, and ek on ech goddess,  
 On every nympe and deite infernal,  
 On satiry and fawny more and lesse,  
 That halve goddes ben of wildernesse;  
 And Attropos my thred of lif tobreste,  
 If I be fals! Now trowe me if yow leste!

And thow, Symois, that as an arwe clere  
 Thorough Troie rennest ay downward to the se,  
 Ber witness of this word that seyde is here,  
 That thilke day that ich untrewed be  
 To Troilus, my owene herte fre,  
 That thow retourne bakward to thi welle,  
 And I with body and soule synke in helle! (IV, 1534–54)

Her subsequent acts breach everything she has promised. Two of the three stanzas conclude with what might seem to indicate Criseyde's likeliest destiny, the word "hell(e)". By implication all the planetary deities, with many others, are called upon to witness the oath.

Criseyde puts "cherisyng ... of other wight" and "weddyng" among the temptations which might seem likely to hinder her return to Troilus. Both phrases apply to Diomeid, who initially offers her a relationship approximating to betrothal or marriage, which he can end only by a formal legal document, the *lybell of repudie* (11: 74), "bill of divorcement", the *libellum repudii* twice mentioned during the discussion of divorce in Vulgate *Deuteronomy* 24: 1–4. In Chaucer's poem Criseyde comforts herself with the words "To Diomedes algate I wol be trewe" (V, 1071), a resolve which Henryson makes her keep until in her turn she finds herself betrayed and abandoned.

The number of transgression, sin, is 11 (above, 28). After the proem in 10 stanzas, the 11th introduces the main action of the *Testament* with a double act of transgression, betrayal of Cresseid by Diomeid and self-betrayal on the part of Cresseid:

Quhen Diomeid had all his appetyte,  
 And mair, fulfillit of this fair ladie,  
 Vpon ane vther he set his hail delyte,  
 And send to hir ane lybell of repudie  
 And hir excludit fra his companie.  
 Than desolait scho walkit vp and doun,  
 And sum men sayis, into the court, commoun. (11: 71–77)

Cresseid's original fault, her desertion of Troilus, is compounded when she allows herself to become a courtesan, a common prostitute. *And mair* is enough to show that Diomeid had overstepped the mark even before he sent the *lybell of repudie*.

### 3. Dream-Allegory and Legal Process

8 represents justice, which lends significance to the fact that part 3, the longest, is devoted to the trial and condemnation of Cresseid by a king in his parliament of the 7 planetary gods. The trial takes place in a dream which has no more than a subjective reality. When Cresseid falls into her swoon, it is “be apperance” only that she hears Cupid ringing the bell, the official summons to the assembly (21: 143–44); when she recovers, “all that court and conuocatioun / Vanischit away” (50: 346–47). But still there is some reality to it. In brief, it represents an unconscious recognition of what has already happened and the implications for Cresseid's future. It is the most important episode for the full understanding of the poem.

Already, before the dream-vision, Cresseid possessed some kind of awareness that a disfiguring disease had her in its grip. She had persuaded herself that she had been chosen by the gods to enjoy the eternal flower of love. Her initial position is that unseasonable frost had inequitably changed that destiny:

Ye caussit me always vnderstand and trow  
 The seid of lufe was sawin in my face,  
 And ay grew grene throw your supplie and grace,  
 Bot now, allace, that seid with froist is slane,  
 And I fra luifferis left, and all forlane. (20: 136–40)

At this point, there has been no direct mention of leprosy, yet to say that the seed of love sown in Cresseid's face has been slain by frost at least suggests some change – that she has already suffered some

physical, facial, disfigurement. She does not say that she has deserted Troilus and been deserted by Diomeid, but rather “I fra Diomeid and nobill Troylus / Am clene excludit, as abiect odious.” (19: 132–33). *Abiect* means “outcast”, and may imply no more than that her time as a prostitute has made reunion with either of her former lovers inconceivable. If so, and particularly in terms of the accompanying adjective “odious”, the turn of expression is strong – too strong, one might think. More probably she already recognises the early symptoms of her disease. For this reason she has kept from sight during her “disagysit” journey to Calchas’ manse and afterwards during the sacrifice in the kirk. Even her anger against Cupid and Venus seems better motivated if she is already at some level aware of the disease which is to kill her.

The allegorical force of her appearance before the gods, her trial, depends on this awareness. Cresseid’s charge against Venus and Cupid, breach of contract, assumes that the breach has already occurred. Cupid retorts with the successful countercharge of “sclander and defame iniurious” (41: 284). The gods had no contract with Cresseid; the idea is ludicrous.

She has forgotten her position as a mortal, a “thing generabill”. Not so much her words as her “leuing vnclene and lecherous” (41: 285) constitutes the slander and defame which she has inflicted on the gods. This entails its own natural penalty. The gods are the forces who bring it to pass. They are 7 in number, but are summoned by an 8th figure, Cupid. The pattern again is 7+1, a point to which I shall return.

A trial should be an impersonal legal proceeding. Here the impression of malignant bias on the part of the celestial judges is strong. Astrologically, the planets are divided into three classes, *boni*, the benign, *mediocres*, the median, benign in association with the benign, malignant with the malign, and *maligni*, the malignant. Only two, Jupiter and Venus, are by nature benign, a number here reduced to one by the hostility of Venus. The presentation of Jupiter and Phoebus is benignant in terms of the words used to describe them, but they take no part in the trial. Mercury, and the Moon are median and so under present circumstances malignant. The Moon is Cynthia/Hecate rather than the Delia or Diana whose attendance at the vigil of Venus is forbidden; her description conveys no suggestion that she acts as the patron of virginity, outraged by the actions of Cresseid. The malignant by nature are Saturn and Mars, the Greater and Lesser

Infortunes (Eisner 1980: 177). Saturn in particular is very prominent. The language in which both are described is uncouth and vigorous.

At the suggestion of Mercury, Cupid refers the case to the legal process of arbitration, a process of which Henryson makes more extended use in *The Sheep and the Dog* and *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman* (below, 116, 177). In cases so referred, the decision reached was final; no appeal was possible. The arbiters, Saturn and Cynthia “rypelie degest” (44: 303) the matter; the implication is that, as lawyers, they consult the appropriate legal authorities, in particular, the *Digest*, the collection of texts in Roman law compiled on the instructions of the emperor Justinian (483–565) and used as a textbook of law throughout the Middle Ages and after. “Of Civile Law volumes full mony thay revolve, / The Codies and Digestis new and ald” (*The Sheep and the Dog*, 11: 1216–17).

The verdict which finally they reach is entirely Saturnian:

O cruell Saturne, fraward and angrie,  
Hard is thy dome and to malitious!  
On fair Cresseid quhy hes thow na mercie,  
Quhilk was sa sweit, gentill and amorous? (47: 323–6)

No such outburst is aimed at Cynthia after her “sentence diffinityue” (48: 333), which gives a precise application to the general penalty imposed by Saturn.

Saturn is chief of the planets by virtue not only of his astronomically highest position, but also of the interpretation placed on his name and legend. Saturn in Greek is Kronos, a name which was early identified with Chronos, “Time”. The legend that he devoured his own children was taken as an allegory of Time devouring his sons. Time as opposed to eternity was proper to the mutable lower world over which Saturn accordingly held sway. As Father Time he was inevitably portrayed as a being of immense, almost senile, antiquity, whose grotesqueness the heavily alliterative and onomatopoeic terms of Henryson’s description heighten:

His face fronsit, his lyre was lyke the leid,  
His teith chatterit and cheuerit with the chin,  
His ene drowpit, how sonkin in his heid,  
Out of his nois the meldrop fast can rin,  
With lippis bla and cheikis leine and thin,  
The ice schoklis that fra his hair down hang  
Was wonder greit, and as ane speir als lang. (23: 155–61)

Saturn here is as much Old Age as Time. The stanza-number, 23, “vengeance on sinners”, indicates his vengeful nature. He “gawe to Cupide litill reuerence” (22: 151). Time, in other words, has small respect for individual love or desire – the very point made in the prologue. So too the weapons of Time kill with the cold of age:

Ane busteous bow within his hand he boir,  
Vnder his girdill ane flasche of felloun flanis,  
Fedderit with ice and heidit with hailstanis. (24: 166–8)

The emphasis on winter and cold again links planetary portrait with the prologue and with the dominant metaphor of the blasted spring. Saturn is the power by whom spring is blasted.

Cynthia, the Moon, as almost always in medieval and later poetry, represents Change, Mutability. “Sentence diffinityue”, involving extreme physical change, is left to her. In the planetary court she is the dempster, the proclaimer of doom.

One benign and one median planet might have been expected to defend Cresseid. First is Jupiter, “nureis to all thing generabill” (25: 171), whose defence of humanity against the weapons of Saturn is by sword and spear:

Ane burelie brand about his middill bair,  
In his richt hand he had ane groundin speir,  
Of his father the wraith fra vs to weir. (26: 180–82)

As is made clear by a passage from the “Microcosmos” of Bernardus Silvestris, these weapons symbolise the human genitalia:

The lower body ends in the wanton loins, and the private parts lie hidden away in this remote region. Their exercise will be enjoyable and profitable, so long as the time, the manner, and the extent are suitable. Lest earthly life pass away, and the process of generation be cut off, and material existence, dissolved, return to primordial chaos, propagation was made the charge of two genii<sup>7</sup>, and the act itself assigned to twin brothers. They fight unconquered against death with their life-giving weapons, renew our nature and perpetuate our kind. They will not allow what is perishable to perish, nor what dies to be wholly owed to death, nor mankind to wither utterly at the root. (Wetherbee tr. 1973: 126; cf. Lewis 1936: 97)

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7. “The masculine and feminine aspects of creativity latent in matter” (Wetherbee tr. 1973: 164).

Cresseid has not allowed her own genius to exercise its natural function; in particular, her prostitution has ensured that time, manner, and extent have all been unpropitious. Jupiter, in effect, is barred from coming to her defence.

Jupiter is separated from the second possible defender, the median Phoebus, the Sun, by the Lesser Infortune, Mars, presented with the same grotesque vigour as Saturn. He is the war-god, and war is responsible both for the separation of Troilus and Cresseid and for their eventual brief reunion.

The description of Phoebus (29–31: 197–217) ends with the account of his steeds, dismissed by J.A.W. Bennett as pedantic; “pedantry intrudes in the two stanzas devoted to the horses of the sun” (Bennett 1974: 7). This may be so, but the stanzas have a purpose, to some degree already indicated. Saturn is Time, the daily and seasonal passage of which is marked by the movements of the Sun, Phoebus, producing the divisions of the day and year. The passage of time causes the blasting of Cresseid’s spring. The prologue sets the tone by putting Venus in triumphant opposition to the Sun, the power of which wanes as it sets – “God Phebus direct descending down” (2: 14) – a figure echoed in the reference to the horse of the setting sun which concludes the portrait (see below, 59). Phoebus, if not actively malignant, is at least diminished in any power of assistance. A hostile Venus appears in the next stanza.

Mercury as poetry or poetic justice suggests that the punishment of Cresseid should be left to Saturnian Time and lunar Change. Cupid approves. The parts of Cresseid affected by the sentence are precisely those by which she is most obviously linked to the benign Jupiter – her golden hair, her crystal eyes, and her clear voice, all properties which she shares with the divinity: “His voice was cleir, as cristall wer his ene, / As goldin wyre sa glitterand was his hair.” (26: 176–77). The median point of the poem comes at line 308, “And to all louers be abhominabill”, concluding stanza 44, the general judgement passed by Saturn and the Moon before they proceed to give their more detailed individual sentences. It is not fully carried out. For Troilus Cresseid, even as a leper, is not simply “abhominabill”.

The detailed sentence passed by Saturn is abstract. His planetary attributes are reason and understanding (below, 266), and consequently his sentence is expressed in terms of universals. Cresseid’s sanguine temperament is changed to melancholy, her moisture and heat to cold and dry. More specific, but equally abstract

in expression, are the disease, need, and penury which he inflicts on her. Leprosy is not directly mentioned.

In the lunar sphere, the soul descending to incarnation acquires the function of moulding and increasing bodies (below, 266). The Moon's sentence is thus directed more to specific bodily attributes. She mentions heat, but it is "heit of bodie" (48: 334). In the next stanza, 49, 7x7, the bodily climacteric, she precisely lists the symptoms of the disease with which Cresseid is to be afflicted. Her sentence ends the dream-vision with the first dramatic appearance of the word *lazarous*, "leper" – not the only word available to Henryson with this meaning, and almost paradoxically carrying with it New Testament overtones of resurrection and redemption. The primary reference is to the parable of Dives, who is condemned, and Lazarus, who is redeemed (*Luke* 16: 19–31). With this is combined a subordinate reference to the raising of Lazarus, the dead brother of Martha and Mary (*John* 11: 1–44). Cresseid's assignation, nevertheless, is the leper-house.

The process allegorized by the assembly is one which in realistic terms would occupy a considerable time. Henryson meant his audience to appreciate this, to notice the earlier suggestions of physical change in Cresseid, but to realize their full significance only with the completion of the dream-vision. Because it deals in universals, the internal time-sequence of medieval allegory seldom precisely corresponds to external reality. In the *Testament* the dream-vision includes not only the future of Cresseid, but also the significance of her behaviour since she deserted Troilus.

#### 4. Dream-Vision and Cell Fantastic

The dream-vision occupies precisely one-third of the poem apart from the epilogue. One aspect of this may be illustrated from another poem, *The Preaching of the Swallow*, which has three parts, each representing one aspect of Prudence, as directed towards past, present, or future (see below, 131). The human head was regarded as the home for three powers, each occupying its own compartment, at the front the cell fantastic, the home of imagination in all senses of the word, in the middle the cell rational (reason), and at the rear the cell memorial (memory). Similarly, in book 2 of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the occupants of the turret (the head) in the house (the body) of Alma (the soul) are three counsellors. Their names are Greek in form, that of the



first Phantastes, obviously referring to the fantasy; he is described (canto ix, stanza 52) in terms which recall Henryson's portrait of Saturn. Although the second is nameless, the visiting knights take great pleasure "to see / His goodly *reason* and graue personage" (stanza 54). The names of the occupants of the third, Eumnestes, "Well-remembering" and his servant Anamnestes, "Recollecting" (stanza 58), both refer to memory, the latter with distinctively Platonic overtones. Each has a function:

The first of them could things to come foresee:

The next could of things present best aduize;

The third things past coulde keepe in memoree. (canto ix, stanza 49)

In Spenser, that is to say, the human head corresponds to the triple head in Titian's *Allegory of Prudence*, the cell fantastic concerning itself with the future, the cell rational with the present, and the cell memorial with the past. The first, governed by "oblique *Saturne*" when he 'sate in the house of agonies', is at least partly involved with supernatural grotesqueries, and of the three is the least reliable:

His chamber was dispainted all within,

With sundry colours, in the which were writ

Infinite shapes of things dispersed thin;

Some such as in the world were neuer yit,

Ne can deuized be of mortall wit;

Some daily seene, and knownen by their names,

Such as in idle fantasies doe flit:

Infernall hags, *Centaurs*, feendes, *Hippodames*,

Apes, Lions, Aegles, Owles, fooles, louers, children, Dames. (canto ix, stanza 50)

What Cresseid sees in her dream is the product of the cell fantastic, partial ("thin") knowledge of the future, presented in terms which are related to reality, but at the same time, as in the portrayal of individual divinities, grotesque and even distorted. The truth of her vision is at best only partial. Saturn proclaims that Cresseid will "as ane beggar die" (26: 322). Beggars however have no cause to do as Cresseid does and make a last will and testament. Part of the sentence passed by Cynthia is that "Quhair thow cummis, ilk man sall fle the place" (29: 341). Troilus does not flee, and his behaviour changes the entire course of the poem.

The scene of parts 1, 2, and 4, is indoors, the house either of the narrator or of Calchas. The emphasis is very much on the narrative

present. Parts 5, 6, and 7 are more concerned with the past, with memory. The *ubi sunt?* motif, recollecting lost luxuries, predominates in part 5, “The Complaint of Cresseid”. It is recollection, “memoriall / Of fair Cresseid” (73: 519–20), which forces Troilus to make his gift, thus producing in Cresseid the total recall and repentance which forms the prelude to her death.

The dream-vision marks the subconscious stirrings of self-knowledge in Cresseid, and is directed towards her future. The later analysis of Troilus’s behaviour, when he simultaneously recognises and fails to recognise the leper, goes some way to show Henryson’s awareness of such subconscious processes directly affecting human actions and behaviour, processes taking place in the fantasy, the cell fantastic, able at once to inform and to delude the outer senses:

The idole of ane thing in cace may be  
 Sa deip imprentit in the fantasy  
 That it deludis the wittis outwardly. (71: 507–9)<sup>8</sup>

The “wittis” are the five corporeal modes of perception – sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell. So it is earlier in the poem. In her dream-vision Cresseid has subconsciously come to recognize the inevitable result of her own failing, a recognition which is to achieve full consciousness only with Troilus’s act of charity. Her wits have been deluded into producing the fantastic dream-detail.

The vision is apparently caused by Cresseid’s angry outcry against Cupid and Venus, but underlying this is the entire recent course of her life, her unhappy affairs with Troilus and Diomeid, and in particular the “leuing vnclene and lecherous” (41: 285) which followed. The faint suggestion – “sum men sayis” (11: 77) – that her prostitution had been a matter of rumour only, is swept away by the stanza which follows:

O fair Cresseid, the flour and A per se  
 Of Troy and Grece, how was thow fortunait  
 To change in filth all thy feminitie,  
 And be with fleschelic lust sa maculait,  
 And go among the Greikis air and lait  
 Sa giglotlike, takand thy foull plesance!  
 I haue pietie thow suld fall sic mischance! (12: 78–84)

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8. For details see Fox ed. 1981: 377–78.

Here is the real source of the leprosy, which Henryson almost certainly regarded as a venereal disease. Notice too the recurrence of the motif of the blasted spring.

The effect, even here so early in the poem, is of catastrophic change, mutability, and is brought about by Henryson's controlled and powerful use of alliteration. The stanza is bound together by the repetition of *f*, to which is subordinated *l*. The key words begin with *f*. In the first line they are *fair* and *flour*, words with no immediately unpleasant or tragic overtones, beyond the fact that the fairness of flowers is traditionally short-lived. In the next line, *fortunait*, a word usually positive, calls up the figure of the fickle goddess Fortune. In the next lines the change is defined; it is from *feminitie* to *filth* by way of the *flesh*; the *l* sound which has been subordinate in *flour*, *filth* and *fleschlie* becomes dominant in *lust* and appears in *maculait*, which in turn has contrasting overtones of the Immaculate Virgin. *Foull*, strengthened as it is by the assonance of *fall* in the last line, completes the transformation. Semantically it is the complete reverse of *fair*, and phonetically it combines *f* and *l*. *Giglotlike*, an unusual word brought into further prominence by the subordinate alliteration with *go* and *Greikis*, stresses the harlotry in terms of which the development is to be seen.

Notably however in the final line the most striking words are *pietie* and *mischance*, the first indicating the narrator's pious sympathy with a fellow human being, the second recurring to the theme of *fortunait* and Fortune, and so in a measure reducing Cresseid's responsibility for her own suffering.

From the long perspective of the fifteenth century, the narrator is almost as much concerned to refute Cresseid's evil posthumous reputation as to tell her story, a point taken up in the next stanza, which has offered difficulties to many commentators:

Yit neuertheles, quhat euer men deme or say  
 In scornfull langage of thy brukkilnes,  
 I sall excuse als far furth as I may  
 Thy womanheid, thy wisdome and fairnes,  
 The quhilk Fortoun hes put to sic distres  
 As hir pleisit, and nathing throw the gilt  
 Of the, throw wickit langage to be spilt. (13: 85–91)

(I have capitalized "Fortoun" and in the last line altered Fox's punctuation.) The point is not that Cresseid is guiltless. So far as the narrator is able (the qualification is important), he will defend her

womanhood (the *feminitie* of the previous stanza), her intellectual capacity, and her beauty, qualities, as the result of circumstance rather than innate perversity, long and universally slandered. He is probably thinking how Chaucer, from the beginning, stacks the cards against her – she was left defenceless by the desertion of her father to the Greeks, she is timid by temperament, she is much influenced by her uncle, Pandarus, her exchange for Antenor is compulsory, and it is mere chance that Diomedes is the leader of the Greek party to escort her from Troy to the Greek camp. He is also perhaps allowing the prospect of redemption.

## 5. The Prison of the Planets

At least in the part of the *Testament* which precedes the dream-allegory Cresseid has much the same function as Eurydice in *The Tale of Orpheus* (see below, 263). She represents the fallen appetitive soul. The narrator admits, as she does herself, that her prostitution afforded her “foull plesance”. In the “Complaint” she recollects only the sensually affecting among her former delights – the wanton decorations in her chamber, her fine clothes, the gold and silver cups from which she drank, and the cleanliness of the plates from which she ate sweetmeats (60: 416–24). Cresseid however possesses both intellectual and moral potential, an ability to see facts, however dreary, simply as facts and to act on them. Eurydice remains a lay figure.

As it does in the 86 stanzas of the poem as a whole, Golden Section plays a part in the 29 stanzas of the vision, here however in terms of the series 1, 3, 4, 11, 18, 29 . . . . The 11th (stanza 31) completes the portrait of Phoebus, the Sun, in terms of the four horses of his chariot, particularly the fourth, associated with sunset: “The feird was blak, and callit Philogie, / Quhilk rollis Phebus down into the sey”. This is immediately followed by the portrait of Venus, a sequence echoing the imagery of stanza 2 which, as was noted at the beginning of this chapter, sets the tone for much of the poem.

The 18th (stanza 38) completes the portraits of the planetary divinities. The trial proper begins in the next stanza. Mercury is appointed Speaker, and it is probably deliberate choice on Henryson’s part that the median stanza of the vision, the 15th, depicts him as god of poetry and eloquence, dispenser of poetic justice by his choice of

Saturn and the Moon to assess the penalty which Cresseid is to pay. His secondary role as physician, described in stanza 36, 16th of the vision, hints perhaps at the dreadful therapy she is to undergo.

In the final stanza of the dream-vision, 49th of the poem, corresponding to the bodily climacteric, Cynthia passes the definitive sentence on Cresseid in terms of her bodily afflictions. The consequence is the entrance to her prison, the leper-house, in stanza 56, which may be regarded as the Scipionic climacteric – 7×8 (Stahl tr. 1952: [I. vi, 83] 117).

Prison and imprisonment are recurrent images in Henryson's poetry – in *The Paddock and the Mouse*, *The Preaching of the Swallow*, *The Lion and the Mouse* – most strikingly of all perhaps in *The Tale of Orpheus*, when Orpheus at last reaches “hellis house”, Eurydice's place of imprisonment:

O dolly place and grondles depe dungeon,  
 Furnes of fyre wyth stynk intollerable,  
 Pit of dispair wyth-out remission;  
 Thy mete venym, thy drink is poysonable,  
 Thy grete paynis to compt vnnownerabil;  
 Quhat creature cummys to duell in the  
 Is ay deyand, and newir more may dee. (43: 310–16)

Leprosy and the leper-house form the prison to which Cresseid is sentenced.

In the “Complaint”, Cresseid, however grudgingly, accepts the sentence and attempts to see it as part of the universal operation of Fortune: “Fortoun is fikkill quhen scho beginnis and steiris” (65: 469). To this extent she follows the lead already given by the narrator. In a sense, stanza 63, part of the “Complaint” and representing the bodily and intellectual climacteric, is a repetition of stanza 49, but in her imprisonment Cresseid is now speaker rather than auditor, emotionally and intellectually fully aware of what has happened:

My cleir voice and courtlie carolling,  
 Quhair I was wont with ladyis for to sing,  
 Is rawk as ruik, full hiddeous, hoir and hace;  
 My plesand port, all vtheris precelling,  
 Of lustines I was hald maist condng –  
 Now is deformit the figour of my face;  
 To luik on it na leid now lyking hes.  
 Sowpit in syte, I say with sair siching,  
 Ludgeit amang the lipper leid, “Allace!” (63: 443–51)

Her subsequent appeal to the ladies of Troy and Greece universalizes the situation. She accepts the advice of the “lipper lady” (66: 474) and allows herself to follow the leper way of life, “leif efter the law of lipper leid”, becoming “ane rank beggair” (67: 480–83). This implies that she gives up the support previously supplied by her father or at least that she divides it equally among her fellow-lepers – to her own detriment. The only possessions which she now acknowledges are the cup and clapper forming, as it were, her uniform.

#### **4. Justice and the Ogdoadic Nature**

The reader nevertheless is left with some sense of resentment at the behaviour of the “craibit” (51: 353) gods, their pursuit of a limited Saturnian justice rather than the equity, elsewhere eloquently expounded by Henryson (see below, 162). I cannot do better than quote Douglas Gray:

In the manner of a Senecan tragedy, it generates in the reader an immense sense of unfairness, to which the narrator gives expression in his choric outburst. In the manner of a tragedy it holds contraries in tension. Its pattern of justice will not be a simple one. The gods are disinterested, and yet they are not; “they care and yet they do not care.” (Gray 1979: 192)

But the dream-vision is not the final word; it leaves problems unresolved.

29, the number of stanzas both in the dream-vision and in the combined parts 1, 2, and 4, is a prime, associated with the 29 years taken by Saturn to complete his circuit of the zodiac, and with the 29 days from one New Moon to the next. By contrast, 27, the number of stanzas in the remaining third, has trinitarian associations ( $3 \times 3 \times 3$ ), and is a major constituent of the Lambda formula for the perfection of the soul. The 27 final stanzas thus provide an opportunity, numerologically at least, for spiritual transformation. Some trace of this is already apparent in the “Complaint”; it is carried a stage further by Cresseid’s acceptance of the advice of the “lipper lady”: “Go leir to clap thy clapper to and fro, / And leif efter the law of lipper leid.” (67: 479–80).

It is essential to her penance (and to the poem) that she should accept to the full all the consequences of her leprosy.

The 8 parts of the poem suggest both Judgement and the 8th Age of the World – redemption or damnation. 4 may be even more relevant, especially when combined with 10. Because 10 is the first limit of numbers and embraces all numbers, Pythagoreans and Neoplatonists regarded it as especially powerful. The sum of the first four integers is 10 ( $1+2+3+4=10$ ); consequently 10 was often regarded as a form of 4 and called “tetractys”. The tetractys in turn was the perfect form of the soul: “The Pythagoreans ... have made a religious oath from it: “by him who gave the quaternary number to our soul” (Stahl tr. 1952: [I vi, 41] 107). Each of the 4 10-stanza units is thus in itself 4-fold, because it is a tetractys. Each individually contains something relevant to the perfection of the soul, as does the group regarded as the sum of its members. In addition, 40 ( $4\times 10$ ) was regarded as “a sort of glorified tetractys” (Hopper 1938: 45), with additional biblical connotations already noted – 40 days and nights of rain leading to the Flood, 40 years of wandering by the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land, 40 days of Christ’s fast in the wilderness and of Lent.

Because 7 is the number of the body, 10 7-line stanzas aptly represent the time during which body and soul are normally associated, the biblical and Pythagorean three-score years and ten during which the soul should move towards its perfection. “When anyone exceeds this age”, Macrobius comments, “he is retired from active duty and devotes himself solely to the exercise of wisdom” (Stahl tr. 1952: [I.vi, 75] 115). The elderly narrator of the first 10 stanzas is someone who has reached, or is on the point of reaching, such a term. By contrast, Cresseid’s leprosy would seem to bar her from any possibility of such perfection, a calamity symbolized by the image of the blasted spring, the unnatural defacement of the progress of the 4 seasons of the year. The figure, together with the word Lent, appears at the beginning of the first tetractys. Specifically related to Cresseid, it recurs at the end of the second tetractys in the passage about the seed of love already quoted (20: 136–40). Thereafter it is frequent until its final muted appearance at the end of the final tetractys:

Lo, fair ladyis, Cresseid of Troy the toun  
 Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid,  
 Vnder this stane, lait lipper, lysis deid. (85: 607–9)

The number 70 however makes two important appearances in direct association with Cresseid. It is in stanza 70 that her half-blind glance rouses in Troilus the emotion which leads to his act of charity, and so to her testament and death. The two legal documents around which the poem is built, the “lybell of repudie” (11: 74) and the testament (81–83: 577–91), are separated by 70 stanzas.

After stanza 70 ( $7 \times 10$ ) the emphasis moves from 7 to the number of intellect, 9. The testament which gives the poem its title begins in stanza 81 ( $9 \times 9$ ), the intellectual climacteric. By way of another’s charity and her own degradation and humiliation, Cresseid in the line immediately preceding has attained self-knowledge, “Nane but myself as now I will accuse” (80: 574) – knowledge required for the expression of charitable intention *in articulo mortis*.

Macrobius analyzes the full significance of the number 8, of the combination  $7+1$ , and of the individual numbers 1 and 7. Because it is the first cube, 8 is the first number to produce a three-dimensional solid, and so may be regarded as full. Macrobius goes further: 8 additionally “is also without doubt intimately related to the harmony of the spheres, since the revolving spheres are eight in number” (Stahl tr. 1952: [I.v, 15] 98).

The created universe, enclosed by the sphere of the fixed stars, regarded by him as *primum mobile*, “first mover”, and maintaining the principle of plenitude by including within its bounds no emptiness, is the ultimate material form of the solid, the supreme embodiment of the number 8 which, like all numbers, precedes creation. The planets, the wandering stars, occupy 7 of these 8 spheres; the total may thus be regarded as  $7+1$ . Henryson intended a particular relationship between the spheres and the 8 ( $7+1$ ) sections of the poem, the longest of which is the dream-vision of Cupid and the 7 planetary gods. In the dream-vision Cupid takes the place of the *primum mobile*.

In terms of a belief widespread in late antiquity and still influential during the Middle Ages, when the soul finally escaped the prison of the flesh, it passed upward through the 7 planetary spheres, and at the 8th assumed the nature usually styled ogdoadic, “eightfold”, which is its perfection, and in which it is united with the empyrean gods (MacQueen, J. 1985: 59, 62, 138–39; Mâle 1984: 14–15, 413–14). Compare the final ascent of the soul to the portal of the gods in Capricorn in *The Tale of Orpheus* (below, 270). By the end of the poem Cresseid has escaped the prison of the flesh and the slightly more open prison of the spital, the leper-house. It is less obvious that



she has attained the ogdoadic nature, but much of the evidence has yet to be considered.

How far Cresseid initially falls short is conveyed by way of the 7 planets, or rather the intelligences which animate them, as they appear in the dream-vision. In my earlier study (MacQueen, J. 1967: 71–72) I set them in the context of a passage from Gilbert Murray’s *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, a book in some ways outdated, but still perceptive:

The various Hermetic and Mithraic communities, the Naasenes described by Hippolytus, and other Gnostic bodies, authors like Macrobius and even Cicero in his *Somnium Scipionis*, are full of the influence of the seven planets and of the longing to escape beyond them. For by some simple psychological law the stars which have inexorably pronounced our fate, and decreed, or at least registered the decree, that in spite of all striving we must needs tread their prescribed path; still more perhaps the Stars who know in the midst of our laughter how that laughter will end, become inevitably powers of evil rather than good, beings malignant as well as pitiless, making life a vain thing. And Saturn, the chief of them, becomes the most malignant. To some of the Gnostics he becomes Jaldabaoth, the Lion-headed god, the evil Jehovah. The religion of later antiquity is overpoweringly absorbed in plans of escape from the prison of the seven planets. (Murray 1935: 146–47)

B.P. Copenhaver parallels this in a note to his translation of “Poimandres”, first treatise of the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum*:

**region of the ogdoad:** Literally, “the ogdoadic nature” (*phusin*), which was the eighth sphere of the fixed stars, next in order after Saturn. In Valentinian and other Gnosticisms the common post-Aristotelian cosmology of concentric and countable spheres gave rise to rich theological elaborations. The Hebdomad, seven planetary heavens created by a maleficent Demiurge, constitutes the lower world that imprisons the Gnostic, who wishes to escape to the next highest level, the Ogdoad, which is the eighth level counting up from the earth. (Copenhaver tr. 1992: 117)

The Gnostics were heretical Christians who based their cosmology on Plato’s *Timaeus*, but made one major change. The Platonic Demiurge became an evil intermediate power, attempting to deprive souls of their birthright by confining them to his secondary creation, the prison of the seven planets, from which they strive to escape to the Ogdoad.

Copenhaver refers only to Gnosticism, but it is a Hermetic passage on which he is commenting, one which stands in reverse correspondence, as it were, to Macrobius’ account of the descent of the soul from the portal of men in Cancer:

Thence [i.e. from life on earth] the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone [the Moon] surrendering the energy of increase and

decrease; at the second [Mercury] evil machination, a device now inactive; at the third [Venus] the illusion of longing, now inactive; at the fourth [the Sun] the ruler's arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth [Mars] unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth [Jupiter] the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone [Saturn] the deceit that lies in ambush. And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human enters the region of the ogdoad; he has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns the father. (Copenhaver 1992: ["Poimandres": 25–26] 6)

The planets are obviously evil. The region of the ogdoad beyond them corresponds to the Plain of Truth on the outside of the world in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

Such beliefs were not confined to the pagan world and to heretics; they formed part of Christian orthodoxy. Paul is thinking of the planetary powers when he describes human beings before the Incarnation as necessarily "in bondage under the elements of the world" (*Galatians* 4: 3), and asserts that as Christians "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (*Ephesians* 6: 12). Throughout he is referring to the planets.

The 7 planets act, not in isolation, but at the summons of an 8th figure, Cupid, son of Venus, who as king summons them to try Cresseid. His position, and his relationship to Venus: "my mother, / To quhome I schew my grace abone all vther" (41: 286–7), which parallels that of Christ, Second Person of the Trinity to his human mother, the Virgin Mary,<sup>9</sup> shows that in some sense he represents the ogdoadic nature – in terms of medieval belief Christ, "the love that moves the sun and the other stars" (Dante *Paradiso*; Sayers tr. 1962: [33, 145] 253), as Divine Providence acting through the planets, of whom Saturn is the most potent and the most malignant, a close approximation to Jaldabaoth. The planets are merely *deificait*, "created as gods", but they are *participant of deuyne sapience* (42: 288–89), participate, that is to say, in the wisdom of the ogdoad, further equated with Noys, "Mind, Intellect", second person of the Neoplatonic trinity.<sup>10</sup> Like the God of the Ten Commandments, Cupid is a jealous god as he draws Cresseid's offence to the attention of the

9. Cf. the dedication of Calchas' temple, above, 218.

10. This answers Bennett's point that "Henryson does not present these planetary forces as 'under God'" (Bennett 1974: 12).

planets – but in the Ten Commandments, it should be noted, God is also merciful (*Exodus* 20: 5–6).

The Cupid of *The Testament* is a creation of Cresseid's unregenerate fantasy, very different from the pretty, albeit powerful, God of Love in the tradition of *amour courtois* (I quote the Chaucerian translation of the *Roman de la Rose*):

This God of loue of his fassoun  
 Was lyke no knave, ne quystroun;  
 His beaute gretly was to pryse,  
 But of his robe to devise,  
 I drede encombred for to be;  
 For nought yclad in silk was he,  
 But all in floures and flourettes,  
 Ypaynted al with amorettes,  
 And with losenges and scochouns,  
 With briddes, lybardes and lyouns,  
 And other beestis wrought ful well. (885–95)

At first glance he seems also distinct from the benevolent cosmic Love developed by Chaucer from Boethius, Bernardus Silvestris and Dante, who appears, for instance, in the philosophic lyrics of *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>11</sup> This Love is a cosmic force – the “world”, which in Chaucer he renders concordant, is not so much Earth as the created universe. The benevolence of this presentation superficially differentiates it from Henryson's outraged figure, apparently intent only on revenge, but nevertheless still the Ogdoad.

Henryson's Cupid and Chaucer's Love are descended from a long line of philosophic and literary ancestors. In the *Theogony* of Hesiod (c.700 BC; Evelyn-White ed. 1967: 116–22), Eros, whose name was afterwards rendered as Latin *Cupido*, is the first of gods, appearing from the original Chaos together with Earth and Tartarus, and tyrannising over the later races of gods and men:

Verily, at the first Chaos came to be, but next wide-bosomed Earth, the ever-sure foundation of all, and dim Tartarus in the depth of the wide-pathed Earth, and Eros, fairest among the deathless gods, who unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them. (Evelyn-White ed. 1967: 87)

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11. See, e.g., Boethius. *Consolation of Philosophy* (Stewart and Rand eds: II, metrum VIII; IV, metrum VI); “Megacosmos”, c.1 (Wetherbee tr. 1973: 67); *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 1–49, 1744–71; cf. *Knights Tale*, A2987–93.

As a cosmic power, he seems arbitrary and irrational, a feature which persists in a parody telling how Eros appeared from the cosmic egg found in a play by the Athenian comic dramatist Aristophanes (c.450–c.385 BC), *The Birds* (Dunbar ed. 1995: [693–702, 819] 88, 93). The cosmogony parodied was presumably more serious, but carried much the same implications. Eros, as eldest of the gods, plays a part in the philosophical scheme of Parmenides (c.515–c.450 BC), the disciple of Pythagoras who influenced Plato (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. “Eros”).<sup>12</sup> Later he enters romance literature, as for instance in a prose-poem from *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus (? 2nd century AD):

“My dear children! Love is a god, and he is young and fair, and he can fly. And so he takes pleasure in all youth and seeks out beauty and causes souls to grow wings. As for his powers, he has such power as even Zeus has not:

“Love rules the elements,  
Love rules the stars,  
Love rules the gods, his peers –” (McCail tr. 2002: [II, 7] 27–28)

Empedocles (c.493–c.433 BC) gave the place of Eros to the gentler Philotes, “love”, with a meaning tending more towards “friendship” than “desire”. This afterwards became the Stoic universal harmony in accord with which the philosopher strove to live out his life (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. “Empedocles”; Jackson ed. 1930: 20–21). It was adopted by later Platonists and by Christian philosophers like Boethius, and so eventually passed to Dante, Chaucer, and their successors. The most celebrated formulation comes in the concluding line of the *Divina Commedia*, already quoted, Christ, who is love and who controls by his love the movements of the spheres which govern the lower world. Eros is transmuted into the Second Person of the Trinity.

Another development is found in the Hermetic fragment entitled *Kore Kosmou*, “Eye” (less probably “Daughter”) “of the Universe” (Nock and Festugiere eds 1980: [38.11] 12).<sup>13</sup> Here discarnate souls fall from grace and as a consequence are imprisoned in human bodies,

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12. Cf. Plato, *Symposium*, “Parmenides writes of the creative principle, ‘And Love [Eros] she framed the first of all the gods’” (Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: [178b] 532–33). For a translation of Parmenides’ poem, see Cornford 1939: ch.2, esp. 49–52.

13. The text is not translated in Copenhagen tr. 1992.

subjected to the opposed powers of Eros and Necessity, which under the supreme God together rule and govern everything. The souls are contrasted with the planetary intelligences who appear before the supreme God to announce the gifts and punishments which they will bestow on the prisoners. The passage calls to mind Henryson's pageant and Macrobius' description of the descent of the soul through the planetary spheres (Stahl tr. 1952: [I.xiii, 1–13] 133–37). The Moon and Kronos (Saturn) appear in succession; the Moon promises Terror, Silence, Sleep, and the Memory which will bring humankind no advantage. Kronos gives them his children, Justice and Necessity. Ares (Mars) is unfavourable, but the Sun, Zeus (Jupiter), and Aphrodite (Venus) are more benevolent. Hermes (Mercury), who is presented as the ultimate source of the narrative, is the immediate agent of the supreme God, "soul of his Soul, and sacred Intellect of his Intellect", and the supreme benefactor of humankind, creating human nature, to which he adds the gifts of Wisdom, Temperance, Persuasion, and Truth. He promises special favour to mortals born under his zodiacal Houses, Virgo and Gemini, the Virgin and the Twins (Stahl tr. 1952: [28.24–29.16] 8–9). Hermes is, of course, to be identified not only with the planet, but with the supposed author of the Hermetic treatises and source of all revelation, Hermes Trismegistus.

As in the case of the Gnostic heresies, Plato's *Timaeus* is one source of *Kore Kosmou*, some details of which are projections, externalizations, of internal psychological factors which Plato describes. Eros and Necessity, for instance, are both derived from a single sentence (*italics mine*):

Now, when they [the newly created souls] should be implanted in bodies by *necessity* and be always gaining or losing some part of their bodily substance, then, in the first place, it would be *necessary* that they should all have in them one and the same faculty of sensation, arising out of irresistible impressions; in the second place, they must have *love*, in which pleasure and pain mingle. (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: [42a] 1168–69)

The word for "love" is *eros*. One agent in the process was certainly the tradition of Eros as the first god who reduced Chaos to a somewhat wilful Cosmos.

In the *Symposium* Plato makes Agathon deliberately upset accepted beliefs by contrasting Necessity, as eldest of the gods, with Eros, the youngest (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: [195a] 547). Temporal priority is not a matter of great importance; the significant thing is that

for Agathon, as for others, Love and Necessity, under the supreme God, are the dominant powers of the created universe. Together they form “the faire cheyne of love” mentioned in *The Knight’s Tale* (A, 2988), “Luffis ordinance / That has so many in his goldin cheyne” (*The Kingis Quair* 183: 1277–78), in both of which the chain represents Platonic Necessity. As a general rule Love is the stronger, the more inclined to harmony, but also apparently the more arbitrary and tyrannical. The chain need not always seem fair or golden.

*Kore Kosmou* suggests something like a physical embodiment, at least of Necessity, who with Justice is the child of Saturn (Kronos), both notions suggested, one presumes, by the slow, inexorable progress of the planet through the zodiac. Eros too, as child of Venus (Aphrodite), sometimes is given a planetary association. The idea of Eros born without parent easily coexists with that of Eros child of Aphrodite. In general however Necessity is the operation of the planetary and stellar spheres, while Eros is the harmony superimposed by their motion, a harmony not always apparent to human eyes. Eros, Love, possesses many of the attributes of Fortune, and neither Cresseid nor the narrator find it easy to distinguish one from the other. Ultimately he is benevolent, the instrument of harmony.

Henryson demonstrates one side of the relation between Love and Necessity by the hostility which Saturn feels towards Cupid: “And first of all Saturne gaue his sentence, / Quhilk gaue to Cupide litill reuerence.” (22: 151–52). Necessity and Justice have little respect for Cupid. It is Saturn, representing both, who in conjunction with the Moon passes sentence on Cresseid. As has been noted, his justice is abstractly severe, expressed only in general terms, to which the Moon, as subordinate, gives precise physical enactment. Cresseid’s excesses have made her punishment inevitable and so, in terms of the laws of the material universe, necessary. It so happens that they have also roused Cupid’s anger.

Mercury is given some prominence. He is chosen Speaker of the parliament, and as a consequence is first to address Cupid. It is he who suggests that Saturn and the Moon should assess the penalty to be imposed on Cresseid. His attributes include some non-astrological, but potentially benevolent, elements. As Alastair Fowler has noted, he has close associations with the number 4. He is the 4th god of the planetary week, the guardian of Wednesday, *Mercredi, dies Mercurii*. “Apparently because he was the fourth god of the week, all the meaning with which the tetrad was endowed – such as its doctrine of

the true proportion of the double mean [see above, 42] – accrued to Mercury himself. Four was his number, and so he became known as the *quadratus deus* (“god of the square”) and the god of true proportion” (Fowler 1964: 156). Professor Fowler does not connect Mercury under this aspect with Hermes Trismegistus, and indeed a considerable gap separates him from the figure in *Kore Kosmou*. The gap may not however be unbridgeable.

## 5. Justice, Suffering and Redemption

Justice is a major theme of *The Testament of Cresseid*, caricatured, it may be, by the planetary participants in the dream-vision, but nevertheless carried out in the 8 parts of the poem as a whole. The sentence passed by Saturn on Cresseid is just but merciless. The narrator comments on its cruelty, but makes no complaint of injustice. Nor indeed does Cresseid.

Although Justice in the full Platonic sense involves suffering,<sup>14</sup> it still differs considerably from the kind administered by Saturn:

In euerie iuge mercy and reuth suld be,  
As assessouris and collaterall;  
Without mercie iustice is crueltie. (*The Lion and the Mouse*, 22: 1468–70)

The presence of these qualities in ultimate divine justice is indicated by the presence of the harmonious 4 in the overall ogdoadic framework. Saturn and the Moon, the assessors whose duty it is to *modify*, “assess”, Cresseid’s penalty (23: 299),<sup>15</sup> have no relationship, numerical or otherwise, to mercy and ruth.

The number 8 is important for a complete understanding of *The Testament of Cresseid*, even more so considered as 7+1. Macrobius is again the most accessible authority. He describes 8 as “the sum of two numbers that are neither begotten nor beget, namely one and seven” (Stahl tr. 1952: [I.5, 6] 98).<sup>16</sup> A number cannot be begotten if it is a

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14. *Republic* II: “The just man will have to endure the lash, the rack, chains, the branding-iron in his eyes, and finally, after every extremity of suffering, he will be crucified.” (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: [361b–e] 608–9).

15. Note the connotation of the stanza number, “vengeance for sinners”.

16. cf., e.g., Philo Judaeus, “On the Creation”, 99 (XXXIII), (Colson and Whitaker eds 1929: 78–81).

prime, and cannot beget if as a factor it does not produce a number within the decad. 3 and 5, the other primes within the decad, thus cannot be begotten, but since  $2 \times 3 = 6$ ,  $3 \times 3 = 9$ , and  $2 \times 5 = 10$ , both numbers are capable of begetting, and are thus to be distinguished from 7.

The combination  $7+1$  is further analyzed. Unity is at once odd and even, and therefore at once male and female (cf Cornford 1939: 6–7). It is “itself not a number, but the source and origin of numbers” (Stahl tr. 1952: [I.6, 7] 100) and thus may refer to any member of the Neoplatonic Trinity, from each of which some kind of plurality takes its origin.

7 is especially important in conjunction with 1. “Be not disturbed”, counsels Macrobius,

that although the monad seems to surpass all numbers, it is especially praiseworthy in conjunction with seven; the incorrupt monad is joined with no number more appropriately than with the Virgin. The reputation of virginity has so grown about the number seven that it is called Pallas. Indeed it is regarded as a virgin because, when doubled, it produces no number under ten [i.e., it cannot beget], the latter being truly the first limit of numbers. It is Pallas because it is born only of the multiplication of the monad [i.e., it is a prime], just as Minerva alone is said to have been born of one parent. (Stahl tr. 1952: [I.6, 10–11] 101–2).

7 is also the number of the body, and the bodily penalty which Cresseid pays is made specific in the sentence passed on her by the Moon in stanza 49 ( $7 \times 7$ ), marking the bodily climacteric. In stanza 56, 49 lines, 7 stanzas later, Cresseid accepts her degradation by entering the spital. 56, the climacteric product emphasized by Scipio Africanus, represents the fulfilment of justice in the body. In stanza 63, the bodily-intellectual climacteric, again 49 lines, 7 stanzas later, Cresseid acknowledges her physical transformation.

It is in combination with 1, the monad, that 7 signifies the virginity which transcends the physical – specifically the motherless virginity of Minerva (Pallas Athene), who sprang fully-armed from the head of Jupiter, her father. Minerva is primarily goddess of wisdom, Jupiter the supreme divinity;  $7+1$  thus signifies Wisdom as an emanation of the supreme divinity.<sup>17</sup> To attain wisdom is to attain the ogdoadic state.

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17. Cf. the role of Minerva in *The Kingis Quair* 124–51: 862–1057.



Henryson's numerical allegory is strengthened by the presence of a second wisdom-figure in the person of Mercury (Hermes), whose gifts to mortals, especially these born under his zodiacal signs, include wisdom. Henryson may have intended a reference to the same tradition when in the second part of *The Talking of the Tod* the planetary configuration on which the outcome depends includes Mercury in his exaltation in Virgo, the Virgin. One planet at least of the seven is favourable to wisdom, but the fox instead chooses to exercise cleverness, and so comes to disaster (below, 223).

Almost the reverse is true, I suggest, of Cresseid. She loses what we may regard as her original virgin status<sup>18</sup> through folly and weakness, but learns wisdom by way of the event described in stanza 70, 7 stanzas, 49 lines after stanza 63, when Troilus draws rein beside the group of lepers. This parallels the scene in *Troilus and Criseyde* (ii, 610–51) where Criseyde sees Troilus as he rides through the town after a successful encounter with the Greeks. Despite Bennett (1974: 5), I feel sure that Henryson intended us to feel the reversal of situation as ironic:

Than vpon him scho kest vp baith hir ene,  
 And with ane blenk it come into his thocht  
 That he sumtime hir face befor had sene,  
 But scho was in sic plye he knew hir nocht;  
 Yit than hir luik into his mynd it brocht  
 The sweit visage and amorous blenking  
 Of fair Cresseid, sumtyme his awin darling. (70: 498–504)

The stanza immediately preceding combines with this, and these following, to show, in effect, divine grace operating through an unconscious, or only partly conscious, act of charity to restore a form of virginity, or at least of intellectual chastity, to Cresseid.

When the lepers see Troilus and his followers approaching, they make their appeal in distinctively Christian terms. Troilus responds appropriately:

Thay gaif ane cry, and schuik coppis gude speid,  
 "Worthie lordis, for Goddis lufe of heuin,  
 To vs lipper part of your almous deid!"  
 Than to thair cry nobill Troylus tuik heid,

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18. Henryson makes no reference to Cresseid as a widow.

Hauand pietie, neir by the place can pas  
 Quhair Cresseid sat, not witting quhat scho was. (69: 491–97)

Notice “*quhat scho was*” (italics mine) – her leprosy supersedes her humanity. The word “*pietie*” corresponds semantically to the modern “*piety*” as well as to “*pity*”.

Troilus’ response is transformed by her glance, and as a consequence his gift of alms, described as *greit humanitie* (74: 534), is far more generous than it would otherwise have been:

For knichtlie pietie and memoriall  
 Of fair Cresseid, ane gyrdill can he tak,  
 Ane purs of gold and mony gay iowall,  
 And in the skirt of Cresseid doun can swak.<sup>19</sup> (73: 519–22)

Note the repetition of “*pietie*”. Even after surrendering much of the gift in the equal distribution of alms, Cresseid still emerges from beggary to become reasonably well-to-do, although no less a leper. Her memory of earlier events achieves a new clarity and she is thus in a position where it is legally and morally incumbent upon her to make her last will and testament.

The gift is given and accepted in mutual semi-blindness – “And neuertheles not ane ane vther knew” (72: 515). In the climactic 70th stanza, Troilus fails to recognize Cresseid when “vpon him scho kest vp baith hir ene”. These eyes are now purblind orbs in a disfigured face, but with their “*amorous blenking*” they had been the original cause of his downfall:

Lo, he that leet hymselfen so konnyng,  
 And scorned hem that Loves peynes dryen,  
 Was ful unwar that Love hadde his dwellyng  
 Withinne the subtille stremes of hir yen;

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19. Nitecki comments on this monosyllable: “the use of the vernacular here, jarring as it does with the courtly language, and combined with the fact that the gesture is preceded by sexual arousal, suggests that Troilus’ action is prompted by passion, by rage, and renders ambiguous the meaning of the explicit motivation, ‘*knichtlie Pietie*’” (Nitecki 1985: 129). It does not seem to me that “*sexual arousal*” gives an adequate, or indeed an accurate, account of stanza 72, nor does “*swak*” necessarily have the violent connotations suggested. For Troilus on horseback, keeping himself at a little distance from the lepers, the only possible action is to throw the purse into the lap of the unrecognized beggar-woman. Compare in *Luke*, 17: 12 the ten lepers who “stood afar off” and called to Jesus for healing.

That sodeynly hym thoughte he felte dyen,  
 Right with hire look, the spirit in his herte.  
 Blissed be Love, that kan thus folk converte! (*Troilus and Criseyde*, I, 302–8)

Cynthia has altered them – “Thy cristall ene mingit with blude I mak” (49: 337) – together with her entire appearance. She can scarcely see Troilus. Grief too has made him unrecognisable (a point made by Bennett 1974: 13).

Iwis, myne owene deere herte trewe,  
 I woot that, whan ye next upon me se,  
 So lost have I myn hele and ek myn hewe,  
 Criseyde shal nought konne knowen me. (*Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 1401–4)

Irony and compassion are combined in the account of their final meeting. One recalls too Cresseid’s insulting language about Venus: “O fals Cupide, is nane to wyte bot thow, / And thy mother, of lufe the blind goddes!” (20: 134–5). This is an insult which Cupid makes central to the case which he puts to the planets (41: 282–83). In a sense, the final meeting of the pair completes the revenge he sought, even as it brings about the moral revolution in Cresseid – which was also perhaps his intention.

The discovery that her benefactor was Troilus has a moral and intellectual as well as emotional impact. Stanza 77 is the first of two contrasting herself with Troilus and introducing a lament which occupies 4 stanzas and ends with the line already quoted, “Nane but my self as now I will accuse” (77–80: 547–74). She is close to death and for the first time sees both his and her past conduct as it were *sub specie eternitatis*. For the first time she acknowledges her own prostitution, contrasting it with Troilus’ fidelity:

For lufe of me thow kept contynence,  
 Honest and chaist in conuersatioun;  
 Of all wemen protectour and defence  
 Thou was, and helpit thair opinioun;  
 My mind in fleschelic foull affectioun  
 Was inclynit to lustis lecherous:  
 Fy, fals Cresseid; O trew knight Troylus! (78: 554–60)

She is “seik in bodie, bot hail in mynd and spirit and of rype memorie” (Gouldesbrough 1985: 15). Such clarity of mind and memory *in articulo* forms the essential preliminary to the making of a will.

During the Middle Ages and afterwards, in Scotland as elsewhere, the first point of the actual testament was recommendation of the soul to God; next arrangements for the disposal of the body. This was followed by the nomination of executors and listing of the legacies for which they were to be responsible. (Gouldesbrough 1985: 15)

Cresseid's testament, though preserving the standard features, is humbler. Her acceptance of responsibility, shows that her mind and memory are both sound. She regards her body with almost total contempt, but makes arrangements for its disposal – her first legacy is to the lepers, who are in effect her executors, to enable them to bury her. Her second is to Troilus, the ruby ring which he had earlier given her. The fate of her soul, unusually, comes last, perhaps because her expectations for it are so limited. She commends it to the maiden-huntress, the goddess Diana (not to be confused with Cynthia, the Moon), in the *Pervigilium* specifically excluded from the festival of Venus: “My spreit I leif to Diane, quhair scho dwellis, / To walk with hir in waist woddis and wellis.” (82: 587–88). The picture presented is desolate, corresponding to Cresseid's state of mind, but shows that metaphorically and allegorically she has rediscovered a measure of moral and intellectual integrity, some form of virginity. Diana's company was one of virgins.

Cresseid's last words lament the fact that Diomeid is in possession of her other gifts from Troilus, perhaps given by her, but more probably taken by her violent lover as a gift for his new sweetheart.

As has been noted, the stanza in which she begins her testament, 81, marks the third or intellectual climacteric. 70 stanzas separate it from stanza 11 in which Diomeid sent her the *lybell of repudie* which set her finally on the course of destruction. One legal document is balanced against the other. The metaphoric recovery of virginity takes place in the virgin 7th section of the poem. The single final stanza may indicate that at her death Cresseid attains the ogdoadic nature – in terms used in earlier critical discussions, that she attains, almost as Troilus does in Chaucer's poem,<sup>20</sup> salvation through suffering. Henryson however is more restrained than Chaucer; he maintains at the end a Hermetic silence: “sen scho is deid I speik of hir no moir” (86: 616). The reader is left to pass final judgment.

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20. *Troilus and Criseyde*, 5, 1807–27. Note particularly the lines (italics mine): “His lighte goost ful blisfully is went / Up to the holughnesse of the *eighthe* spere.” (5, 1808–9). The spirit of Troilus is in bliss in the Ogdoad.

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## **The Aesopic Fables**

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## Chapter Two

### The Jasp of Wisdom: *Prologue and The Cock and the Jasp*

Unlike the later fables, *The Cock and the Jasp* has no story to speak of. A cock pecking about on his dunghill finds a jewel, which he rejects on the ground that it will do him no good. He grants however that others might find it of value. The Moralitas equates the jewel with heavenly wisdom and the cock with the scriptural fool.

Henryson compensates for the lack of action by a series of brilliant little cameos, the cock, for instance, “richt cant and crous, albeit he was bot pure” (10: 65). Maidservants such as those described in the second stanza were to be found in many houses and streets of Glasgow or Dunfermline:

damisellis wantoun and insolent  
That fane wald play and on the streit be sene,  
To swoping of the hous thay tak na tent  
Quhat be thairin, swa that the flure be clene. (11: 71–74)

So too some of his students probably resembled the fool,

Quhilk at science makis bot ane moik and scorne,  
And na gude can; als lytill will he leir –  
His hart wammillis wyse argumentis to heir. (21: 143–45)

This form of presentation is much more vivid than anything in Henryson’s main source, *De Gallo et Jaspide*, first fable in the verse-*Romulus* of Gualterus Anglicus (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: 8), or its more extended offspring, *Dou Poul et de la Jaspe*, which occupies first place in *Isopet de Lyon* (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: 86–87).

In the *Prologue* Henryson illustrates his own version of the theory of fable set out in my introductory chapter. He quotes one line from the prologue to the verse-*Romulus*: “Thus Esope said, I wis, / *Dulcius arident seria picta iocis*.” (4: 27–28).

There is an interesting textual aspect to this. The reading in most MSS of Gualterus is *Dulcius arident seria mixta jocis*, “serious things smile more sweetly mingled with the light-hearted”. Three MSS however, like Henryson, read *picta* for *mixta*, with a consequent



change of meaning, “serious things embroidered with the light-hearted smile more sweetly”, a reading which mirrors Henryson’s way of presenting serious, even tragic, issues by way of comedy – *verborum levitas morum fert pondus honestum* (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: 7).<sup>1</sup> He refers to the verse-Romulus, it will be noted, as “Esope”, with which one should compare the gloss in an early edition quoted by Bastin (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: ii), *Galterus Anglicus fecit hunc librum sub nomine Esopi*, “Gualterus Anglicus wrote this book under the name of Aesop”.

As has already been noted, the first hint of numerical composition occurs in a phrase from the *Prologue*: Aesop “be figure wrait his buke” (9: 59).

The basic theory set out is at once older and more complex than anything found in Gualterus. Some aspects have already been discussed. It is encapsulated in a celebrated couplet (333–34) from the *Ars Poetica* of Horace: “*Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae; / Aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae.*” “Poets want either to benefit, or to delight, or to say what is at once pleasant and relevant to life”. The third is the option which poets should adopt.

The doctrine was much developed in later antiquity. It underlies Macrobius’ *Saturnalia* and *Commentary*. In *Super Thebaiden*, a commentary on the *Thebaid* of Statius attributed to the Fulgentius already mentioned, is to be found the metaphor of the shell and kernel, adopted by Gualterus and Henryson:

*Testa insipida est, nucleus saporem gustandi reddit: similiter non littera, sed figura palato intelligentiae sapit* [The shell is tasteless; the kernel gives the flavour of taste; thus not the literal but the figurative has a flavour for the palate of understanding] (Helm ed. 1898: 180).

Boccaccio made further developments. To a greater extent than Fulgentius he argued that the pleasure derived from poetic fiction is wholesome and recreative. To a greater extent too he emphasized the “subtlety” of allegory as promoting the ultimate “sweetness” of poetry. *Subtilitas*, often to be equated with “obscurity”, is a recurrent

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1. “the lightness of the words carries a decent measure of morality.” One of the MSS with *picta* for *mixta* (Lyon, Bibl. du Palais des Arts, 57) is the sole surviving MS of *Isopet de Lyon*, a MS which contains an expanded French text as well as the Latin. I think it likely that Henryson was acquainted with this or a similar MS; see MacQueen 1967: 200–7.

term in his critical vocabulary (Atkins 1952: 171–75). One notes Henryson’s “subtell dyte of poetry” (2: 13), and the emphasis – “swa it be *labourit* with grit diligence” (2: 9; italics mine) – put on effort as necessary for full comprehension. To comprehend “dark” Moralities requires such an effort, and indeed the first example of these quoted by Gray is the Moralitas to *The Cock and the Fox* (Gray 1979: 121–22).

The importance of the *Prologue* is not limited to a theory of narrative poetry. Henryson’s *persona*, the narrator or commentator who appears in many of the tales, uses the modesty topos to make a rhetorician’s disclaimer of rhetorical skill:

In hamelie language and in termes rude  
 Me neidis wryte, for quhy of eloquence  
 Nor rethorike I neuer vnderstude,  
 Thairfoir meiklie I pray your reuerence,  
 Gif ye find ocht that throw my negligence  
 Be deminute, or yit superfluous,  
 Correct it at your willis gracious. (6: 36–42)

The terms used in this modesty topos indicate with some precision the stylistic level aimed at, neither “deminute” nor “superfluous”, middle, rather than low or high. So far as one can judge over a gap of five centuries, this fits the fables as a group, although, when occasion demands, the style may modulate into high or low, or even into burlesque, the mock-heroic.

In terms of the series 1, 4, 5, 9, 14, 23 ..., which applies both to the *Prologue* and to the combination of *Prologue* and fable, the 9 stanzas of the *Prologue* divide at a Golden Section. The introduction of Aesop in stanza 4 leads to the discussion of his fables which occupies stanzas 5–9. The narrator instances the transforming and corrupting power of “carnall and foull delyte” (8: 51) as justifying the convention that animals mimic the non-rational behaviour of human beings. Henryson’s chief concern is the subjection of man to the 5 bodily senses, with the consequence “that he in brutal beist is transformate” (8: 56). Brutality, in the modern sense of the word, need not be involved. As is brought out by a phrase in the introduction to *The Talking of the Tod*, “Thocht brutall beistis be irrationall” (1: 397), the root meaning is “stupid, unreasonable”, the opposite of “rational”, the adjective denoting the possession of the distinctively human attribute, “reason”. In *The Talking of the Tod* the noun used for this quality is *discretioun* (1: 398), “judgement, the ability to make a rational

choice”, opposed to the animal *inclinatioun*, “natural disposition, instinct”. Elsewhere Henryson uses such terms as *ressoun*, *prudence*, *wit*, *science*, and *wisedome*, often in the context of the Old Testament and the usually apocryphal books attributed to Solomon. In these Wisdom is more a divine than a human quality. “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was” (*Proverbs* 8: 22–23).

Correspondingly elsewhere the Henrysonian narrator speaks of “The hie prudence and wirking meruelous, / The profound wit off God omnipotent.” (*The Preaching of the Swallow*, 1: 1622–23), where “wit” implies “wisdom”, and “prudence”, as often elsewhere, carries with it overtones of “Providence”, the divine power to see in every action its consequences, a power in which the human intellect to a limited extent is able to participate.

The same sense is conveyed by the opening lines of an appropriately numbered stanza in *The Cock and the Jasp*: “This gentill iasp, richt different of hew, / Betakinnis perfite prudence and cunning.” (10: 127–28). Perfect prudence is divine wisdom. “Cunning” has none of the pejorative overtones the word now has; it means “knowledge, skill”. The stanza-number, the decad 10, is “in itself, and not by our contrivance or by chance, the kind of thing which creates the finished products of the universe, and is a foundation-stone and was set before God who created the universe as a completely perfect paradigm” (Waterfield tr. 1988: 112).<sup>2</sup> The number represents divine wisdom or prudence, the source of the equivalent human virtue, which

makis men in honour ay to ring  
Happie, and stark to haif the victorie  
Of all vicias and spirituall enemie. (10: 131–33)

The effect, it will be seen, is spiritual and intellectual rather than material. Rejection of the jasp is a rejection of reason, of wisdom. As a consequence the cock becomes the type of the scriptural fool:

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2. The author at this point summarizes the second part of “a polished little book” (now lost), *On Pythagorean Numbers*, by Speusippus, nephew and immediate successor of Plato as head of the Academy in Athens.

His hart wammillis wyse argumentis to heir,  
 As dois ane sow to quhome men for the nanis  
 In hir draf troich wald saw the precious stanis. (12: 145–47)

The reference is to a *Proverbs*-like verse from the Sermon on the Mount: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (*Matthew 7: 6*). The literary significance is made clear by a passage from the *Anticlaudianus* of Alan of Lille:

For in this work the sweetness of the literal sense will caress the puerile hearing, the moral instruction will fill the perfecting sense, and the sharper subtlety of the allegory will exercise the understanding nearing perfection. But may the approach to this work be barred to those who, following only the sensual motion, do not desire the truth of reason, lest a thing holy be defouled by being offered to dogs, or a pearl trampled by the feet of swine be lost, if the majesty of these things be revealed to the unworthy. (Bossuat ed. 1955: 56; English trans. Robertson 1963: 60)

To this passage Denton Fox makes an oblique reference (Fox ed. 1981: 200), noting that the verse was often quoted to justify figurative expression and allegory. In Henryson however the image is more than a scriptural echo; it has been transformed into the new and comically derogatory figure of a sow *wambling*, “feeling sick”, because her trough has been filled, not with the fodder she desires, but with precious stones. The sow resembles the cock in the fable.

“Brutality” is universal. In stanza 7 (the number of the body) Henryson seems to lay particular emphasis on those who have been educated in methods of dialectic, the use of the Aristotelian syllogism, which effectively means university-trained clergy (in the quotation I have made a small change to the punctuation in Fox’s text):

My author in his fabillis tellis how  
 That brutal beistis spak and vnderstude,  
 And to gude purposis dispute and argow,  
 Ane sillogisme propone, and eik conclude,  
 Putting exempill and similitude  
 How mony men in operatioun  
 Ar like to beistis in conditioun. (7: 43–49)

Disputation and the use of the syllogism were the particular tools of the scholastic theologian. Henryson seems to have felt that their fine distinctions and intricate arguments hindered rather than helped true religion. But if such people are beasts, who can be human?

The numerical structure of the *Prologue* and *The Cock and the Jasp* is straightforward. In the *Prologue*, 9, the total number of stanzas, itself represents intellect, wisdom. Within that total, an introductory group of stanzas culminates at a Golden Section in stanza 4 with the quotation from “Aesop” already given. The literary theory set out in these first 4 stanzas is one of balance, harmony, between the elements of pleasure and instruction. The tetrad or tetractys, 4, is the number of harmony, especially as applied to the human spirit:

Once there are the first four numbers – 1, 2, 3, 4 – then there is also the category of soul, which these numbers encompass in accordance with musical principles. For 4 is double 2 and 2 is double 1, and here is the octaval concord; 3 is one and a half times 2, a sesquialter, and here is the fifth; and 4 is sesquitercian to 3, and here is the fourth. If the universe is composed out of soul and body in the number 4, then it is also true that all concords are perfected by it. (Waterfield tr. 1988: 63)

Henryson refers to these concords in *The Tale of Orpheus* and, as here, they are implicit in much of the remainder of his work.

The centre of attention in the remaining 5 stanzas is the metaphorical transformation of men into beasts when they permit the 5 corporeal senses to dominate, a reference reiterated in the 5 stanzas (3–7) of *The Cock and the Jasp*, in which the cock rejects the jasp on sensually plausible but rationally insufficient grounds:

I had leuer go skraip heir with my naillis  
 Amangis this mow, and luke my lifys fude,  
 As draf or corne, small wormis, or snaillis,  
 Or ony meit wald do my stomok gude,  
 Than of iaspis ane mekill multitude. (14: 92–96)

The rejection, not of one jasp only, but of a great multitude, in favour of *stomok*, preeminently the organ of sensual appetite, is emphatic in itself and because it appears in the middle stanza of the speech, the 5th in the tale. In the overall scheme of *Prologue* and fable it too marks a Golden Section (1, 4, 5, 9, 14, 23). And of course 14 is twice 7, the number of the body.

In general the 5 corporeal senses are balanced against the 5 interior sensitive powers – commonsense, phantasy, imagination, the estimative, and the memorative (Pegis ed. 1945: [Q.78, Art. 4] 1: 742) – the 5 senses, as it were, of the soul, harmonious cooperation among which forms the essence of wisdom. In this context the parable of the wise and foolish virgins is often relevant, the 5 wise virgins

representing the concord of the interior senses, and by extension the redeemed, the 5 foolish the corporeal and the damned (Mâle 1984: 202–3). Both references are implicit, with one or the other immediately predominant. The cock behaves like the 5 foolish virgins, but the 5 wise virgins possess the jasp.

The fable proper contains 14 stanzas. Fox follows the Makculloch and Bannatyne MSS in making the Moralitas begin in stanza 18 (Fox ed. 1981: 177–78), thus giving 8 stanzas of narrative and 6 of Moralitas. The remaining witnesses divide at stanza 19, and give 9 stanzas of narrative, 5 of Moralitas. This seems more convincing. The 9 narrative stanzas correspond to the 9 stanzas of the *Prologue* and carry the same significance. They are divided 2, 5, 2 – 5 stanzas of speech, and 4 of (minimal) narrative. The speech occupies the median stanzas.

Stanza 18 is descriptive rather than interpretative, and so more appropriate to story than Moralitas. It also emphasises the number 7 – *This iolie iasp hes properteis seuin* – although it must be admitted that there is some difficulty in making out the precise properties intended. The reference here is not to the body, but more probably to the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost as set out in the Vulgate text of *Isaiah* 11: 2–3 – Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord.

There is at least one New Testament reminiscence in the stanza which I have already quoted:

As damisellis wantoun and insolent  
 That fane wald play and on the streit be sene,  
 To swoping of the hous thay tak na tent  
 Quhat be thairin, swa that the flure be clene;  
 Iowellis ar tint, as oftymis hes bene sene,  
 Vpon the flure, and swopit furth anone –  
 Peraduenture sa wes the samin stone. (11: 71–77)

The negligence of the girls is implicitly contrasted with the pains taken by the woman in the parable who, when she loses one of her ten pieces of silver, lights a candle and sweeps the house until she finds it (*Luke* 15: 8). The piece of silver is the lost sinner, found again when he repents, but inevitably one also thinks of the various parables in which the discovery of a hidden treasure represents the attainment of heavenly wisdom and the kingdom of heaven itself.

The carelessly efficient sweeping also recalls the parable (*Matthew* 12: 43–45; *Luke* 11: 24–26) of the evil spirit expelled, but returning to

his old home and finding it swept and garnished. “Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first”.

In the median stanza of the 5-stanza Moralitas, where the cock is compared to the scriptural fool, the primary reference is certainly to the 5 external senses. For the remainder, the emphasis falls rather on the jasp and, by inference, the 5 internal senses. References to Wisdom literature and to the New Testament abound. I shall give only a few examples. With “Mair excellent than ony eirthly thing” (19: 130), compare *Proverbs* 8: 11, “For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it”. With “Quha can gouerne ane realm, cietie, or hous, / Without science? No man, I yow assure.” (20: 136–37) compare, “By me [i.e. Wisdom] kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth” (*Proverbs* 8: 15–16). A subsequent verse (8: 18), “Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness”, is echoed in the following line of the same stanza, “It is riches that euer sall indure”, which in the next line again, “Quhilk maith, nor moist, nor vther rust can freit”, is taken up, as it were, into the Sermon on the Mount: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (*Matthew* 6: 19–20). The last line, “To mannis saull it is eternall meit”, contains a Johannine reminiscence, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you” (*John* 6: 27). The jewel is food, but not of the kind sought by the cock.

Henryson’s reason for retaining the word “jasp” for the jewel is probably a passage from the Apocalypse (*Revelation* 21: 10–11), where the New Jerusalem of the redeemed is described as a jasp (Latin *iaspis*, rendered in the Authorized Version as “jasper”):

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

The light is produced by the wall and the first foundation of the city, both made of jasper.

To attain Wisdom is to attain the City of God. Henryson follows the Augustinian tradition of contrasting that city with the realm of sensual desires, the City of the World:

I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will. I also call these two classes the two cities, speaking allegorically. By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil. (Bettenson tr. 1972: [xv.1] 595)<sup>3</sup>

All this, implicit here, is more fully developed in other fables and tales. The loss or attainment of Wisdom forms a recurrent theme, the first possibility given additional emphasis by 23 – “vengeance on sinners” (above, 29) – the number of stanzas in *Prologue* and tale taken together.

The allegory is situational rather than narrative, turning on the contrast between the jewel and the dunghill on which it is found, and the attitude of the cock to both. The jewel is divine wisdom, the dunghill the world of the physical senses; as a type of the unregenerate human being, the cock rejects the first and chooses the second. Other fables – *The Preaching of the Swallow* is a good instance – offer more elaborate developments of the same theme. *The Cock and the Jasp* is, as it were, the overture, giving a first hint of melodies to be played fully only later in the opera.

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3. The Latin text may be found in Levine ed. 1966.



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## Chapter Three

### Of Mice and Men (1): *The Paddock and the Mouse*

In two Aesopic fables, *The Paddock and the Mouse* and *The Two Mice*, the small size and vulnerability of the mouse provided Henryson with a suitable image for the human soul in its dealings with the world. The plots of both tales he derived from the verse-*Romulus*. By his expansions and additions Henryson transformed the first, *De Mure et Rana* (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: 9–10), into a much more complex achievement. He retained the basic plot. A mouse wishes to cross a large body of water. A frog (in Henryson a toad, “paddock”) offers to carry her across. They bind their legs together and leap into the water, where the frog attempts to drown the mouse. Their struggle in the water attracts a kite, which snatches both and kills them.

In *De Mure et Rana* the tale is followed as usual by a *Moralitas*, together with an *Additio*, in effect a second *Moralitas*. Henryson follows the same pattern; his *Moralitas* is divided metrically in two sections, 3 8-line stanzas with a refrain (20–22: 2910–33), followed by 6 stanzas in the rhyme-royal of the main narrative (23–8: 2934–75), introduced by the words: “This hald in mynd; rycht more I sall the tell / Quhat by thir beistis may be figurate.” (23: 2934–35).

In the verse-*Romulus* the body of water which the animals must cross is a lake, in Henryson primarily the symbolic river of life. Occasionally he uses terms (e.g. *brym*), which usually refer to a larger body of water, but which here reflect the point of view of the mouse. There are a few verbal reminiscences of the Latin. In general Henryson’s treatment of the material is more copious, less gnomic, than Gualterus’s.

Gualterus was mainly interested in the frog as an example of malignant hypocrisy eventually bringing the hypocrite to share the bad end which he had planned for another. Henryson’s first *Moralitas* begins similarly, although even here the tone is subtly different; the initial “My brother”, for instance, stresses common humanity, which is warned of the danger of finding itself in the same position as the mouse, “matchit with ane wickit marrow” (20: 2917).

Henryson is more concerned with victim than villain. He interprets the mouse in two ways, both differing from Gualterus; first (20–22) as

a human being linked with an evil partner; second and more unexpectedly (23–28), as the human soul linked during her time in this world (the crossing of the river) to the corrupt body (paddock), from which she is disentangled only by the intervention of death (the gled or kite). The point of view is Platonic, *sub specie aeternitatis*. In the final stanza Henryson suggests, half ironically, that further interpretations are possible, interpretations which he leaves to the preaching friars.

Long ago I suggested that he is here exemplifying two of the three levels of medieval allegorical interpretation, the tropological and the level of allegory proper, “whan a man understandith bi a bodili thyng that he redith of in story an other gostli thyng that is betokened therbi” (Owst 1961: 59n.5; cited in MacQueen, J. 1967: 112). The second is roughly equivalent to Gray’s “dark” form of Moralitas. It is the third, the anagogical, by which the narrative is to be understood as a figure of future glory, that he leaves to the friars, with a hint that they are all too ready to expound that state in detail. Henryson’s Addition is at the level of allegory proper.

The Addition is entirely Henryson’s and thus likely to be significant.

Much the same may be said of the first part of the narrative, the dialogue between mouse and paddock at the river’s edge, to which Henryson devotes no less than 13 stanzas (2–14: 2784–2874), and which culminates in the mid-stanza 14 with the oath sworn by the paddock and the binding together of their legs. In Gualterus such a dialogue is no more than implied by the adjective “talkative” (*loquax*) applied to the frog, and by the phrase “Frog made a verbal arrangement with Mouse” (*Rana sibi Murem verbis confoederat*).

The lack of effort which in Gualterus is needed to persuade the mouse indicates that the centre of concern is the treacherous frog. Henryson’s approach is different; his mouse is terrified, both by the amphibious life of the paddock, and by her ugly appearance. She consents to receive help only on condition that the paddock swear the “murthour aith” (13: 2865, a term not found elsewhere – note that it

occurs in the unlucky 13th stanza)<sup>1</sup> that in the course of the journey no attempt will be made on her life. The mouse is also something of a natural philosopher, puzzled by the paddock's ability, although she is neither fish nor water-bird, to exist in the river ("How can thou fleit without fedder or fin?"). So too her skill in the science of physiognomy, as established in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* and the *Phisionomia* of Michael Scott,<sup>2</sup> leads her to regard the paddock with proper suspicion:

For clerkis sayis the inclinaioun  
 Off mannis thoct proceidis commounly  
 Efter the corporall complexioun  
 To gude or euill, as nature will apply;  
 Ane thrawart will, ane thrawin phisnomy,  
 The auld prouerb is witnes of this *lorum*:  
*Distortum uultum sequitur distortio morum.* (8: 2826–32)

Her language is precise; she does not pretend that physiognomy is universally valid, but at best "proceidis commounly". She thus leaves herself open to the paddock's sophistries in the following stanzas. Looks are given by nature. "The face may fail to be the hartis takin" (9: 2837). The ultimate source of all differences is God, operating through Nature. The paddock cites the scriptural Absalom, favourite son of King David: "Were I als fair as iolie Absolon, / I am no causer off that grit beutie." (10: 2842–43). She cites only his beauty, not mentioning the more relevant fact of his treachery to his father. The references to God and the Old Testament appropriately appear in stanza 10. Her argument in stanza 11, that beautiful people may behave as badly as the ugly, deliberately avoids the point at issue. The stanza number indicates transgression, deceit. It is also a point of Golden Section in the 28 stanzas of the poem (1, 5, 6, 11, 17, 28...).

The mouse is not wholly convinced. It is hunger rather than the paddock's skill in argument which forces her to continue the

1. Cf., e.g., Bongo "De Numero XIII et XIV": "For Pythagorean, Hebrew, and Greek theologians the number 13 is to be placed among those associated with guilt" (Bongo 1591: 399). He gives many illustrations, including the fact that 13 exceeds 12 by 1, and signifies transgression of the doctrine of the 12 Apostles. The Last Supper, signifying the death of Christ, was eaten on the 13th of the moon (Maundy Thursday).  
 2. "Certeyn Rewles of Phisnomy" in Manzaloui ed. 1967: 14; Thorndyke 1965: 91; Pope 1979. For the "auld prouerb" quoted by the mouse, see Walther 1963–67: no. 6026. Cf. too Sanderson 1987; Mapstone 1994.

discussion, and her lingering suspicion of the scheme involving the “doubill twynit threid” (12: 2857) which makes her insist on the “Murthour aith”.

In stanza 14, despite her earlier biblical references, the paddock (like the fox in stanza 11 of *The Nekhering* (below, 186)) swears by Jupiter, “off nature god and king” (14: 2869), to bring the mouse across the water. The word “nature” varies in connotation, but in the context particularly of a pagan divinity it signifies the power governing the senses and the passions rather than the higher realms of fidelity and truth – *natura maligna* rather than *benigna*. Like Edmund in *King Lear* (see esp. Danby 1961), the paddock, by way of Jupiter, takes this Nature for her divinity. Her oath means the opposite of what she seems to promise, but at the same time contains an equivocation which, she thinks, will allow her, whatever the outcome, to claim that it has been fulfilled. She swears simply “that I / This lytill mous sall ouer this watter bring” (14: 2869–70). As a consequence the mouse binds her leg to that of the paddock, whose intention is to drown her before they reach the opposite bank. No question of motive or profit arises; the paddock is intrinsically evil, hostile to everything represented by the mouse, who in turn fails to see “the fals ingyne of this foull crappald pad” (14: 2873), and so falls in with the scheme. The realm of nature still however maintains a crude form of justice, ensuring that the paddock too becomes a victim of her scheme.

The narrative and thematic importance of stanza 14 is shown by its position halfway through a 28-stanza poem.

Significantly, as will presently appear, it is the mouse who must originate the decisive action when she “tuke threid and band her leg, as scho hir bad” (14: 2874). The allegorical quality of the ensuing struggle in the water is made plain by the final call of the mouse, however inappropriate it may at first appear, for a priest to hear her confession and administer the final rites of the church. The Christian reference forms a contrast with the paddock’s appeal to Jupiter, and in the context of the struggle suggests that the mouse has some chance of salvation. The issue is at best doubtful; one might see the final lines of the poem:

Now Christ for vs that deit on the rude,  
Of saull and lyfe as thow art Salviour,  
Grant vs till pas in till ane blissit hour (28: 2973–75)

as deliberately contrasting the happy ending, desired by the Christian and suggested by the stanza number (28, the second perfect number), with the fate of the mouse in a world where Jupiter appears to be the final authority.

There is a close link between the two parts of the poem which are uniquely Henryson's, the dialogue on the river bank and the Addition. In the early as in the later stanzas the mouse is soul, the paddock body, and the river the world. In my earlier study I assumed that the case had been proved, deducing that "the discussion on the bank is outside time, and should not thus be regarded as occupying time. It is the instantaneous opposition of soul and body at their joint conception" (MacQueen, J. 1967: 118).

Denton Fox, in the notes to his edition, refused to accept this reading. "This allegorical interpretation", he remarks, "is not intended, surely, to be applied to the whole fable; it is absurd to think of the paddock and the mouse arguing on the bank as the body and soul before birth" (Fox ed. 1981: 325).<sup>3</sup>

Fox's point is internally refuted early in the poem, where the identification of the paddock as body, and by implication of the mouse as soul, is made explicit:

"Help ouer! Help ouer!" this silie mous can cry,  
 "For Goddis lufe, sum *bodie*, ouer the brym".  
 With that ane paddok, in the watter by,  
 Put vp hir heid and on the bank can clym. (2: 2784–87; italics mine)

The word "bodie" implies the literal sense found in the Addition; the appeal for a body is immediately followed by the appearance of the paddock. The paddock later uses the word in a context making the mouse understand it as referring to herself:

"Thow wait", quod scho, "ane *bodie* that hes neid,  
 To help thame self suld mony wayis cast.  
 Thairfoir ga tak ane doubill twynit threid". (12: 2854–56)

This however is an example of the paddock's "fals ingyne"; the "neid" to which she refers is her own rather than the mouse's. The word "bodie" again refers to the paddock.

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3. Not all subsequent scholars have agreed. See Greentree 1991: 481–87.

Nevertheless, my previous reading requires some modification. The basis for it was provided by two passages in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas; Question 118, Third Article, “Whether human souls were created together at the beginning of the world?”, and Question 75, Sixth Article, “Whether the human soul is corruptible?” (Pegis ed. 1945: 1: 1088–89, 691–93). The first, with its attempted demonstration that the soul is created together with the body, is the more important, and follows directly from Aquinas’ adoption of Aristotelian ideas about form and substance. The soul is form, the body substance, both necessarily created simultaneously. His argument shows that when he wrote, Platonic ideas about the association of soul and body, derived from the *Timaeus*, were current and required the effort of refutation (Pegis ed. 1945: 1: 705). These show in the Platonism, associated with the abbey-school of Chartres, as well as in much other Latin and vernacular poetry:

But if someone were to say that it is not natural to the soul to be united to the body, then we must seek the reason why it is united to a body. And the reason is either because the soul so willed or for some other reason. If because the soul willed it – this seems incongruous. First, because it would be unreasonable of the soul to wish to be united to the body, if it did not need the body; for if it did need it, it would be natural for it to be united to it, since nature does not fail in what is necessary. Secondly, because there would be no reason why, having been created from the beginning of the world, the soul should, after such a long time, come to wish to be united to the body. For a spiritual substance is above time, and superior to the heavenly revolutions. Thirdly, because it would seem that this body was united to the soul by chance; since for this union to take place, two wills would have to concur, namely, that of the incoming soul, and that of the begetter. If, however, this union be neither voluntary nor natural on the part of the soul, then it must be the result of some violent cause, and would be for the soul something penal and afflicting. This is in keeping with the opinion of Origen, who held that souls were embodied in punishment of sin. (Pegis ed. 1945: 1: 1089)

Aquinas sees as improbably long the interval between the creation of the individual soul at the beginning of the world and its eventual desire for embodiment. The Platonic concept of repeated incarnation was for him impossible. This, and the other chief matter at issue – why a pre-existent soul should join itself to a body to which it is antipathetic – turn on the Platonic concepts that in this world all human knowledge is recollection of another, more perfect, world in which we have already existed, and to which there is some possibility of return, and, secondly, that in this life the body is a prison or tomb for the soul, “that prison which now we are encompassed withal, and

call a body, fast bound therein as an oyster in its shell” (*Phaedrus* 246a–259d; Hamilton and Cairns eds: 493–96).<sup>4</sup>

The words just quoted form part of the famous myth narrated to Phaedrus by Socrates of the soul as winged charioteer, whose wings are not strong enough to obtain adequate pasturage, and eventually become ineffective, forcing the soul to sink to lower regions. There it joins itself to the body and feeds upon the food of semblance – food, that is to say, which contains nothing more than the semblance of truth, gained by way of the five senses. The wings of the soul thus cannot be directly reinvigorated and the soul has to endure a long series of incarnations before it can return.

The soul’s original pasture lies outside the created universe. The Neoplatonists held that it descended to incarnation through the stellar and planetary spheres, gaining at each some quality necessary for earthly existence (Stahl tr. 1952: [I.xii, 1–13] 133–37). In Dante’s cosmology the souls of the blessed are associated with these same spheres, each of which has a part to play in the transmission to the lower world of the ultimate providential design. The properties transmitted correspond to the virtues of the souls which come to inhabit them. There is a reverse correspondence with the Neoplatonic idea just mentioned.

When Dante has ascended to the lowest paradisaic sphere, that of the Moon, as a good Thomist he is tormented by the suspicion that Plato might after all have been right, that with death each purified soul returns to the “star” in which it had been created before its incarnation. Beatrice recognizes and dismisses the problem, leaving open however the possibility that Plato had symbolically expressed another aspect of the truth:

A further puzzle gives thee food for thought:  
 These souls which, as it seems, complete their course  
 Returning to the stars, as Plato taught ...

That which Timaeus of the soul doth tell  
 Is not like things shown here for thy behoof,  
 For what he says he seems to think as well.

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4. cf. *The Preaching of the Swallow*, 2: 1629–35.



He says the soul at death returns above  
 To its own star, from which it was divided  
 (He thinks) when Nature made a form thereof.

Yet he may not have meant men to be guided  
 By the word's surface sense, and thus might claim  
 Another purport, not to be derided.

If it's their influence, whose praise or blame  
 He would refer back to these wheeling stars,  
 His bow may not have wholly missed its aim. (*Paradiso* 4: 22–24, 49–60)

Dante reads Plato (by way of Calcidius) using an analytic method like that of Boccaccio in dealing with pagan mythology – he aims for the kernel rather than the shell. But even this fails to dispel doubts totally. Earlier in the poem, the four Cardinal Virtues, who form part of the pageant on the summit of Mount Purgatory, the Earthly Paradise, imply that the soul of Beatrice herself had enjoyed a heavenly pre-existence:

Here are we nymphs, and stars we are in heaven;  
 Ere she came down to dwell on mortal ground  
 Were we to Beatrice as handmaids given. (*Purgatorio* 31, 106–9)

The soul of Beatrice, that is to say, had descended to incarnation from the sphere of the Fixed Stars.<sup>5</sup>

Even more relevant to Henryson is a passage from the twelfth-century *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris (Wetherbee tr. 1973: 94), a passage which occurs during the journey through and beyond the spheres undertaken by Nature – here *Natura benigna* – in her quest for Urania. She needs help in “the generation of the human soul, and the creation or installation in this soul of the radiance of eternal vitality” (Wetherbee tr. 1973: 94). When she makes her journey, that is to say, the first human has not yet been created. Yet when Nature reaches the zodiac at the point where it meets with the two tropics, she has a strange encounter:

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5. For the stars of the Cardinal Virtues see Sayers tr. 1955: 1: 22–24. They have sometimes been identified with the constellation of the Southern Cross, invisible from northern latitudes.

Here she saw a numberless throng of souls clustered about the abode of Cancer. All these, it appeared, wore expressions fit for a funeral, and were shaken by weeping. Yes, they who were destined to descend, pure as they were, and simple, from splendor into shadow, from heaven to the kingdom of Pluto, from eternal life to that of the body, grew terrified at the clumsy and blind fleshly habitation which they saw prepared for them. (Wetherbee tr. 1973: 95–96)

The souls exist from eternity, before the creation of the first individual human being, and are aware of their future union with the body, a union which they await at the Portal of Men in the zodiacal constellation Cancer (below, 270). They are terrified to see the body, which they regard as apparel for the kingdom of Pluto, ruler of the infernal regions, here equated with life on earth.

It is in such terms that the dialogue of paddock and mouse is to be read. The gradual eclipse of the mouse's power of understanding has been indicated; her complaint about the food on her side of the river as opposed to that on the other refers to the food of semblance, the best now available to her, and the "pasturage proper to her noblest part" only to be found on the Platonic Plain of Truth situated beyond the spheres of the fixed stars and the *Primum Mobile*, to which she can now return only by way of the ordeal of incarnation. Everything of course is seen through the eye of a mouse:

"Seis thow", quod scho, "off come yone iolie flat,  
Of ryip aitis, off barlie, peis, and quheit?  
I am hungrie, and fane wald be thair at,  
Bot I am stoppit be this watter greit;  
And on this syde I get na thing till eit  
Bot hard nuttis, quhilkis with my teith I bore;  
Wer I beyond, my feist wer fer the more". (3: 2791–97)

In terms of Christian Platonism, the Plain of Truth is "the *heuinis bliss*" of the Addition (26: 2961).

The 13 stanzas of dialogue which begin the poem represent the descent of the soul from beyond the zodiac through the 13 spheres towards incarnation on earth, an incarnation which begins in the mid-stanza 14 with the oath subjecting the pair to the god of nature and the subsequent binding together of body and soul. The generally unlucky properties of the number 13 contribute to the effect.

The paddock as an amphibian is an effective symbol for the body, belonging to the material world, but still a possible receptacle for the soul. The forced union of the two is symbolized by the "doubill twynit threid" (12: 2856) used by the mouse to bind her leg to that of the

paddock. The phrase is no more than distantly paralleled in the verse-*Romulus*: “*audit / Nectere fune pedem* [dares to bind her foot with a cord]” (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: 9). “Doubill” implies duplicity. More important, the word refers to the twin agents by which in Platonic and subsequent theory the intellectual soul is united to body, the so-called sensitive and nutritive souls. “The intellectual soul is incorruptible, whereas the other souls, namely the sensitive and the nutritive, are corruptible” (Pegis ed.: 1: 704). The latter two form the thread and correspond to the two winged steeds of the *Phaedrus* myth. The doctrine is most fully expounded in the *Timaeus*, when the Demiurge entrusts the created gods with the task of creating mortal animals:

They, imitating him, received from him the immortal principle of the soul, and around this they proceeded to fashion a mortal body, and made it to be the vehicle of the soul, and constructed within the body a soul of another nature which was mortal, subject to terrible and irresistible affections – first of all, pleasure, the greatest incitement to evil; then, pain, which deters from good; also rashness and fear, two foolish counselors, anger hard to be appeased, and hope easily led astray – these they mingled with irrational sense and with all-daring love according to necessary laws, and so framed man. Wherefore, fearing to pollute the divine any more than was absolutely unavoidable, they gave to the mortal nature a separate habitation in another part of the body, placing the neck between them to be the isthmus and boundary which they constructed between the head and the breast to keep them apart. And in the breast, and in what is termed the thorax, they incased the mortal soul, and as the one part of this was superior and the other inferior, they divided the cavity of the thorax into two parts, as the women’s and men’s apartments are divided in houses, and placed the midriff to be a wall of partition between them. That part of the inferior soul which is endowed with courage and passion and loves contention, they settled nearer the head, midway between the midriff and the neck, in order that being obedient to the rule of reason it might join with it in controlling and restraining the desires that are no longer willing of their own accord to obey the word of command issuing from the citadel. (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: [69c–70a] 1193)

The seat of the immortal intellectual soul is the head; the heart is that of the superior part of the mortal soul, the sensitive, the liver that of the inferior part, the nutritive.

The gled, Death, seizes paddock and mouse (18: 2899–2902) by this double thread, and his first act on bringing them to land is to break it (“syne lowsit thame”), thus killing the mortal soul and breaking contact between soul and body.

The concept of the body as prison and tomb for the soul appears in the words of the mouse when she contemplates the possibility of binding herself to the paddock:

Suld I be bound and fast, quhar I am fre,  
 In hoip of help? Na, than I schrew vs baith,  
 For I mycht lois baith lyfe and libertie! (13: 2861–63)

The evidence, it seems to me, is overwhelming that the fable begins with the dialogue between pre-existent soul and bodily potential, held before conception or birth.

There are 28 stanzas in the poem, 19 of narrative and 9 of *moralitas*, with the latter subdivided into the 3 stanzas of the first *Moralitas*, 6 of the Addition. As the final stanza forms a kind of epilogue, 28 may also be regarded as 27+1.

28, as has already been mentioned, is the second perfect number. Perfect numbers gain additional symbolic value from their excessive rarity; between 1 and 40,000,000 only seven (6; 28; 496; 8128; 130,816; 2,096,128; 33,550,336) are to be found, a sequence in which, it will be noted, the final digits alternate between the first two perfect numbers, 6 and 28. A total of only thirty such numbers has been discovered (Singh 1997: 307).

Alastair Fowler comments:

Because it neither exceeds its divisions nor fell short, a perfect number symbolised virtue: symbolically a desirable total for the years of a life ... In Biblical exegesis 28 denoted the dimensions of the Temple, so that the completion of the spirit's dwelling would be meant. (Fowler 1975: 35)

I have noted elsewhere that the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* fits the same theme (MacQueen, J. 1985: 23–24), with the number forming an appropriate symbol for the *terra repromissionis sanctorum* sought by Brendan in his voyage. Brendan and the mouse have a common desire to cross the water and reach the paradise beyond – with which one may also compare the Virgilian *tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore* [And they stretched out their hands in longing for the farther shore] in the Platonic Book VI of the *Aeneid* (VI. 314). The correspondence between the perfect number 6 (of stanzas in the Addition) and 28 provides further evidence that the allegorical interpretation given in the Addition applies to the poem as a whole.

The stanzas marking the factors of 28 (1:2:4:7:14) indicate the development of the allegory. Stanza 1 introduces the mouse, stanza 2 the paddock. (The number 2, it will be remembered, often indicates duplicity.) In stanza 4 the paddock proposes her solution to the mouse's problem; in stanza 7 the mouse sees, and correctly interprets, the ugliness of the paddock. In stanza 14 the paddock swears the false

murder-oath and the mouse binds her leg to the paddock's. The binding marks the instant of entry, just as stanza 15 marks the beginning of the struggle against the world of material and sensual things:

Than fute for fute thay lap baith in the brym,  
 Bot in thair myndis thay wer rycht different:  
 The mous thoct na thing bot to fleit and swym;  
 The paddok for to droun set hir intent. (15: 2875–78)

The life of conjoined body and soul occupies 5 stanzas (15–19: 2875–2909), here representing the lower world of the 5 senses in which the struggle of body and soul takes place. Stanza 17, marking a second Golden Section, indicates the climax of the struggle.

The narrative, ending with the death of the paddock and the mouse, occupies the same number of stanzas (19) as the first episode of *The Tale of Orpheus*, which ends with the capture of Eurydice, the appetitive soul, and the maddened grief of the rational soul, Orpheus. 19 is the sum of the first five of the seven integers on which the Platonic Lambda formula is based (below, 281), the formula which represents both the Soul of the World and the individual human soul. If we regard the overall stanzaic structure as 27+1, the addition of 8, the number of stanzas remaining in the main structure, penultimate in the Lambda formula, produces 27, the final number of the series. 27, the sum of the previous numbers, may be taken to represent the series as a whole, and thus the individual soul as well as the Soul of the World. The symbolism has an obvious relevance to the part allegorically played in the fable by the mouse.

19, it should also be remembered, is an unlucky number.

The number 19 is neither triangular, nor cubic, nor spherical, nor perfect, nor, in a word, does it possess any kind of mathematical elegance, but since it is prime and incomposite, like the other numbers of this type, it is itself also bound to vices and punishments (see above, 29n12)

28, finally, is closely associated with the Moon. The number represents the lunar year, the number of days taken by the Moon to complete a circuit of the zodiac – in other words, a month. It is only when the soul in its descent from the zodiac reaches this lowest of the celestial spheres that it acquires the power of moulding and increasing bodies (see below, 266), a power which the mouse first exercises when she binds her leg to that of the paddock in stanza 14, the

midway point of the poem. The subsequent conjoint life of body and soul is passed beneath the Moon. The same lunar symbolism is to be found in Hamlet's question to his father's ghost:

What may this mean,  
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel  
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,  
Making night hideous; and we fools of nature  
So horridly to shake our disposition  
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls? (I. iv, 51–56)

The mouse is visiting the glimpses of the moon and suffering the vicissitudes which necessarily accompany the experience.

“Henryson has taken the image of the paddock and mouse struggling in the water and then caught up unawares by the kite, and has made it into a powerful and gloomy symbol for man's earthly life” (Fox ed. 1981: 325). The gloomy power remains if one also includes the narrative preliminaries. It is only slightly relieved by little humorous points of detail which come for the most part in the earlier stages of the story, and which often themselves bear a symbolic or allegorical significance (MacQueen, J. 1967: 114–16; italics mine):

Ane lytill mous come till ane reuer syde:  
Scho nicht not waid, hir schankis wer sa schort;  
Scho culd not swym, *scho had na hors to ryde.* (1: 2778–80)

or

Do my counsall, and I sall find the way,  
Withoutin hors, brig, boit, or yit galay,  
To bring you ouer saflie, be not afeird -  
*And not wetand the campis off your beird.* (4: 2801–4)

or

“*Let be thy preiching*”, quod the hungrie mous. (11: 2851)

The mouse's final cry for a priest (stanza 17) also goes a little way to alleviate the gloom, not least because it receives emphasis from its position at a Golden Section.

The numerological structure is perhaps the best indication that Henryson's intentions were more positive. The action develops in terms of the sublunary world of change; the overall structure, with its

emphasis on 27 and 28, and that of the Moralitas, with its emphasis on 3, 6, and 9, presents a Christian version of the unchanging world of mathematical Ideas, alive in terms of the Soul of the World, perfect in terms of the perfect numbers, 6 and 28, Christian finally in terms of the Trinity and the 9 orders of the celestial hierarchy.

## Chapter Four

### Of Mice and Men (2): *The Two Mice*

*The Two Mice*, or, as it is styled in some authorities, *The Tail of the Vponlandis Mous and the Burges Mous*, is a version of the familiar story of the Town and Country Mouse. In Henryson the Town Mouse visits her sister in the country, is hospitably received, but is disgusted by the poor quality of the food on offer. She invites her sister to visit her in town and sample the kind of food she enjoys there. The Country Mouse accepts and they go together to the Town Mouse's home in the well-stocked larder of an inn. The Country Mouse is rather grudgingly impressed. But she is terrified by the entry first of the spenser and then of the cat, who plays with her and almost makes her his victim. Luckily she escapes and when the cat has gone, she denounces her sister's perilous way of life before returning to her own quiet nest in the countryside.

The Moralitas of *The Two Mice* is in 8-line stanzas with refrain. It is tropological, "clear", setting those "quhilk clymmis vp maist hie" in an unfavourable contrast to those who are "content with small possessioun" (30: 371–72). In form and manner it resembles the first Moralitas of *The Paddock and the Mouse*, which is followed, it will be remembered (above, 90), by a "dark" Moralitas at the level of allegory proper. Nothing similar is present here, but the form of the poem as a whole suggests that one is at least subliminally present.

*The Two Mice* has 33 stanzas, of which the tale occupies 29, the Moralitas 4. Generally 33 represents the incarnate Christ, descendant of the King David who reigned in Jerusalem for 33 years (2 *Samuel* 5: 5; 1 *Kings* 2: 11, etc.). At the Crucifixion, it was widely believed, he was 33 years old. The reference of the number varies – divine mercy and human salvation do not always have priority. Augustine, for instance, wrote his *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* in 33 books to proclaim his Christian orthodoxy against the dualistic Manichees. Cassiodorus wrote an account of Christian education, the *Institutiones Divinarum et Saecularium Litterarum*, also in 33 books (Curtius 1953: 505).

Jesus Christ is named in the 3rd and 33rd stanzas of *Le Grand Testament* by Henryson's near-contemporary, François Villon



(Moland ed. n.d.: 20, 33), a poem which parodies the form of a legal document. Both references occur in the context of the Last Judgement.

Mercy, divine Grace, is more prominent in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In stanza 32 Gawain is alone in the wilderness on Christmas Eve. He prays for the opportunity to hear matins and mass on Christmas Day, a feast of obligation which he seems bound to miss. He crosses himself as he appeals to the Cross, combining, as it were, the Birth with the Passion of Christ:

He rode in his prayere,  
 And cryed for his mysdede,  
 He sayned hym in sythes sere,  
 And sayde “cros Kryst me spedre” (32: 759–62)

When he has 3 times made the sign of the Cross, the castle of Bertilak suddenly appears. *Concatenatio*, a verbal device characteristic of the poem, seen here in the repetition of the word *sayned*, emphasizes the immediacy of the response: “Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot thrye, / Er he watz war in the wod of a won in a mote.” (33: 763–64). The apparition is a miracle, a supernatural response to prayer, as Gawain formally acknowledges (33: 773–75), on the part of Jesus and his saint. The 33rd stanza is the appropriate place for such an event. In the MS, the stanza is singled out by one of the smaller coloured initials, extending over three lines, which occur only five times in the poem, always at the beginning of stanzas regarded as particularly significant (Tolkien and Gordon eds 1967: xii; Howard 1968: 51–52).

Dante’s *Divina Commedia* is more complex. The “Letter to Can Grande”, a discussion of the theory of allegory together with an exposition of the first canto of the *Paradiso*, contains 33 sections, deliberately echoing one structural aspect of the *Commedia*. If we regard canto 1 as prologue, each subsequent canticle, *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, contains 33 cantos. The total number of cantos, 100, is a round number signifying the completeness, the perfection, of the scheme (Mâle 1984: 13, 413; Singleton 1954–58). Each canticle ends with a progressive reference to the intermediate forces of destiny, the stars and planets, described in the final line of the entire poem as moved and controlled by divine love, by Christ himself:

Came forth to look once more upon the stars. (*Inferno* 34: 139)  
 Pure and prepared to leap up to the stars. (*Purgatorio* 33: 145)

The love that moves the sun and the other stars. (*Paradiso* 33: 145)

This is further linked to Christ by the fact that the action of the poem begins before sunrise on Good Friday, and extends through Holy Saturday and Easter Day to the Thursday in Easter Week. Dante and Virgil enter Hell on Good Friday evening, the time of Christ's burial; they emerge in the southern hemisphere at the foot of Mount Purgatory at the hour of the Resurrection, dawn on Easter Day. From the summit of Mount Purgatory, reached after an ascent occupying three days and nights, Beatrice conducts Dante upwards through the celestial spheres to the Beatific Vision, the presence of Christ himself. Each canticle represents one aspect of the relationship between the human soul and Christ. The three together represent the full consequence of the Incarnation, "Man, as by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of his free choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing Justice" (Sayers tr. 1949:15; citing "Letter to Can Grande").

All this may seem a far cry from *The Two Mice*. There are clear indications however that the total of 33 stanzas is meaningful in terms of Christian doctrine. The mid-point is the last line but one of stanza 17, itself the middle stanza of the fable. For the first time the country mouse has experienced town luxuries. Her burgesse sister is triumphant:

With blyith vpcast and merie countenance  
 The eldest sister speirit at hir gest  
 Giff that scho thocht be ressoun difference  
 Betuix that chalmer and hir sarie nest.  
 "Ye, dame", quod scho, "bot how lang will this lest?"  
 "For euermair, I wait, and langer to".  
 "Giff it be swa, ye ar at eis", quod scho. (17: 274–80; italics mine)

There is an ominous reminiscence of the remark made by the foolish rich man in the New Testament parable (*Luke* 12: 19–20): "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee".

The Moralitas echoes another New Testament text:

O wantoun man, that vsis for to feid  
 Thy wambe, and makis it a god to be,  
 Luke to thy self; I warne the weill on deid,  
 The cat cummis and to the mous hes ee. (32: 381–84)

This refers directly to *Philippians* 3: 18–19:

For many now walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.

Despite the consistently humorous treatment, whether realistic or by projection on the animals of human qualities, the mice, particularly the burgess, are sinners, enemies of the cross of Christ, whose god is their belly. Their end is destruction, represented by the cat. At first glance it is the country mouse who pays the penalty, but, as the first of the two preceding quotations indicates, she has a better sense of reality than her sister, and although in the short term she fares worse, she is finally prepared to abandon the deceitful luxuries offered by her sister, leaving one to conjecture on the latter's eventual fate.

The life of the rural mouse is compared to that of *owtlawis* (1: 168). Stanza 2 insinuates that the privileges usurped by the comfortable burgess mouse put her on the same level:

This rurall mous in to the wynter tyde  
 Had hunger, cauld, and tholit grit distres;  
 The vther mous, that in the burgh can byde,  
 Was gild brother and made ane fre burges,  
 Toll-fre als, but custum mair or les,  
 And fredome had to ga quhair euer scho list  
 Among the cheis and meill, in ark and kist (2: 169–75)

In other words, she is as much a thief as her sister, but has better opportunities to employ her talent. No actual burgess ever legally possessed such a range of privileges, although Henryson may imply that a few had obtained them by keeping the law at some distance to windward.

As a pair the mice are described as *pykeris*, “petty thieves”, who avoid daylight (6: 203). But they are most obviously types of sinful humanity in their neglect of common Christian observance. When they reach the town: “*Withowt God speid* thair herberie wes tane / In to ane spence with vittell grit plenty” (15: 262–63; italics here and in subsequent quotations mine). God-speed is eventually and ironically provided when the cat makes the entrance so nearly fatal to the rural mouse:

Quhen in come Gib Hunter, our iolie cat,  
*And bad God speid.* The burges vp with that,  
 And till hir hole scho fled as fyre of flint;  
 Bawdronis the vther be the bak hes hint (24: 326–29)

It should be noted that the associations of 24, the number of the latter stanza quoted, are apocalyptic – the four-and-twenty elders seated round the throne in *Revelation* 4: 4, and the midnight hour, 24th of the day, when the arrival of the bridegroom found the five foolish virgins unprepared (*Matthew* 25: 6). There is more than a hint of Judgement Day itself.

The mice fail to say grace before their meal: “Efter, quhen thay disposit wer to dyne, / *Withowtin grace* thay wesche and went to meit” (16: 267–28). The primary meaning of the word *grace*, “grace before meat”, carries with it overtones of the more theological concept “divine grace”, which indeed appears to abandon the mice when they are interrupted, first by the spenser, afterwards by the cat, but which returns with the providential escape of the country mouse. As a consequence she recovers her sense of proportion and goes back to her old way of life.

The church year is part of the picture. Easter forms the basis of a metaphor used by the town mouse, the effect of which, both in itself and in terms of the line immediately following, is distressingly secular: “My Gude Friday is better nor your Pace, / My dische likingis is worth your haill expence.” (13: 248). *Pace* is Easter Day, the Eighth Day of the Resurrection, the feast-day which crowns the Christian year. It is preceded by a strict fast on Good Friday, the day of the Crucifixion. Particularly in the context of 33, the adverse implications of the boast are strengthened by the way in which it combines Crucifixion and Resurrection with a reference to dish lickings.

There is at least a part-parallel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain enters Bertilak’s castle on Christmas Eve (like Good Friday a strict fast), where he is entertained with a superb range of fish-courses of the kind permissible at such times. Gawain reacts courteously, calling the meal a feast:

The freke calde hit a fest ful frely and ofte  
 Ful hendely, quhen alle the hatheles rehayed hym at onez,  
 “As hende,  
 This penaunce now ye take,  
 And eft hit schal amende”. (37: 894–98)

To Bertilak's servants the fast-day meal, however well regarded by Gawain, is no more than a penance, a preparation for the true feast on the following day, Christmas. The exchange is light-hearted, even humorous, and the implied boast contains little hint of the sacrilegious as found in *The Two Mice*.

Ten stanzas later the country mouse returns to something like her sister's metaphor:

I had leuer thir fourty dayis fast  
 With watter caill, and to gnaw benis or peis,  
 Than all your feist in this dreid and diseis. (23: 320–22)

The country mouse will extend her strict fast to the entire 40 days of Lent rather than continue to endure the perils of her sister's hospitality. Her underlying attitude, although still secular, is more in touch with the reality of the situation in terms either of mice or human beings. Lent is not only a prelude to Easter, it also commemorates Christ's forty-day fast in the wilderness at the climax of which he declines the temptation to turn stones into bread or to become master of the world and its wealth by worshipping Satan. The latter is particularly pertinent. To an extent the country mouse still makes her belly her god, but it is with markedly less enthusiasm than that shown by her town sister.

These references appear in stanzas 13 and 23, numbers usually significant in terms of justice and retribution.

The double reference to Eastertide, and especially the immediacy of the phrase "*thir* fourty dayis", might seem to suggest that Henryson regarded the action as taking place in Lent. So too the journey of the burgesse mouse to visit her sister might be seen as bearing some resemblance to a Lenten pilgrimage of the kind undertaken, in a passage already quoted (above, 44), by Chaucer's secular Wife of Bath:

Bairfute, allone, with pykestaf in hir hand,  
 As pure pylgryme, scho passit owt off town,  
 To seik hir sister, baith oure daill and down. (3: 180–82)

Against this must be set the "Haill, Yule, haill!" (19: 289) with which they mark the completion of their meal in town, just before things start to go wrong. The occasion now appears to be the other great feast of the Christian year, Christmas. One need not attempt any reconciliation

with the earlier references to Lent and Easter. Henryson, I suggest, deliberately refers to the most significant events in the earthly life of Christ, Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. It is another indication of the mice's fallen state that in their parody of Christmas celebrations they use the ultimately pagan term Yule.

The mice are sinners, on course for damnation. By the end of the fable one remains devoted to that fate; the intervention of divine grace has given the other a second chance. The description of the cat's play with the captured mouse combines realistic observation with verbal reminiscences of stock descriptions of Fortune and her wheel:

Fra fute to fute he kest hir to and fra,  
 Quhylis vp, quhylis doun, als tait as ony kid;  
 Quhylis wald he lat hir rin vnder the stra;  
 Quhylis wald he wink, and play with hir buk heid;  
 Thus to the selie mous grit pane he did,  
 Quhill at the last throw fair fortune and hap,  
 Betwix the dosor and the wall scho crap. (25: 330–36)

This differs from the usual presentation in that Fortune finally turns fair and the mouse is able to escape. Important here is the phrase used earlier, when the spenser or steward appears, but makes no attempt to catch the mice: “Bot, as God wald, it fell ane happie cace: / The spenser had na laser for to byde.” (21: 302–3). The phrase “happie cace” parallels “fair fortune”, but is put into a more extended context by the preceding “as God wald”. For Boethius, it will be remembered, the power of Fortune was only apparently capricious; the philosophic mind recognized in it an aspect of divine providence, even divine grace (Stewart and Rand eds 1918: IV, 7). Something of the kind is true of the situation in *The Two Mice*.

Henryson's version is unique in that the mice are twice interrupted, first by a human figure, secondly by an animal, the cat. As their feast is taking place in the spence or larder, the intrusion of the first, the spenser, is appropriate. His sudden appearance particularly terrifies the country mouse, who has no place to hide, but she suffers no physical harm. Because the spenser is in a hurry, he leaves the door open behind him, thus making the entry of the cat possible. His main function, one might say, is that of a catalyst – to loose the cat on the country mouse, with initially painful, but ultimately beneficial consequences. A spenser is a distributor, someone who dispenses the goods in the larder – the etymological connection with the dispensations of providence fits the context.

The first stanza of the *Moralitas* superimposes further New Testament associations:

As fitchis myngit ar with nobill seid,  
 Swa intermellit is aduersitie  
 With eirdlie ioy, swa that na state is frie  
 Without trubill or sum vexatioun,  
 And namelie thay quhilk clymys vp maist hie,  
 And not content with small possessioun. (30: 367–72)

The *fitchis* are the “tares” of *Matthew* 13: 25: “But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way”. The enemy is Satan. At the Day of Judgement the tares are destined to be gathered into bundles and burnt, but the wheat to be stored in the Lord’s barns, in Paradise. Henryson initially glosses *fitchis* as “adversity, trouble, vexation”, linked to the desires and ambitions of those who are intent on clambering up on the wheel of Fortune. This generalized meaning makes it necessary to reconsider the reference two stanzas later to *Philippians* 3: 18–19. The belly, the god of sinners, becomes the appetitive organ, concerned not only with food and drink, but with all kinds of sensual desire, including the lust for power. These desires are the *fitchis* which hamper the soul, and may eventually bring it to damnation. Compare in the *Moralitas* of *The Preaching of the Swallow*:

This carll and bond, of gentrice spoliare,  
 Sawand this calf; thir small birdis to sla,  
 It is the feind, quhilk fra the angelike state  
 Exilit is, as fals apostata,  
 Quhilk day and nycht weryis not for to ga,  
 Sawand poysoun and mony wickit thocht  
 In mannis saull, quhilk Christ full deir hes bocht.

And quhen the saull, as seid in to the eird,  
 Geuis consent in delectatioun,  
 The wickit thocht beginnis for to breird  
 In deidlie sin, quhilk is dampnatioun. (40–41: 1895–1905)

The town mouse consents to such delectation; the country mouse is tempted, but bitter experience, which in fact is the intervention of divine grace, makes her abjure the possibility. She returns to her former position:

I keip the ryte and custome off my dame,  
And off my syre, levand in pouertie,  
For landis haue we nane in propertie. (8: 215–17)

This is more than a recognition that the mice belong neither to the nobility nor to the gentry – the landed classes. They are types of humanity regardless of social class, descendants of Adam and Eve, with no ultimate right to the privileges which the town mouse has usurped. The poem satirizes all such privileges, and does so in the context of the Fall, the possibility of Redemption by way of Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgement. As in Dante, 33 includes rewarding or punishing Justice (above, 105), Christ as he will appear at the Last Day.



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## Chapter Five

### Justice and Retribution: *The Sheep and the Dog, The Wolf and the Wether, The Wolf and the Lamb*

Thematically Justice, under one form or another, is virtually omnipresent in Henryson. Some aspects have already been discussed in chapter 1, where, among much else, I quoted Anatolius of Laodicea to the effect that 4

is called “justice” since the square which is based on it is equal to the perimeter; for the perimeter of squares before it is greater than the area of those squares, and the perimeter of squares after it is less than the area, but in its case the perimeter is equal. (Waterfield tr. 1988: 63)

That is, in a square with sides of 4cm, the total length of the 4 sides is 16cm, and the area of the square is 16cm<sup>2</sup>. In a square with sides of 3cm, the total length of the sides is 12cm, but the area is 9cm<sup>2</sup>. In a square with sides of 5 cm, the total length of the sides is 20cm, but the area is 25cm<sup>2</sup>.

Relevant also to the theme is the biblical four-square priestly breastplate of judgement, described in *Exodus* 28: 16–21:

Foursquare it shall be being doubled; a span shall be the length thereof, and a span shall be the breadth thereof. And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones ... And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve.

12 is not a square number, but a multiple of 4, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. The number 4, and the concept of squareness, is closely linked to the idea of right judgement, and so of justice.

Although 4, the first even square, is in this context the pre-eminent number of justice, all other squares have the same significance: “so if there is any number which is equal-times-equal, then it would form and be receptive of justice. Every square number is equal-times-equal” (Waterfield tr. 1988: 69).

Even numbers are feminine and the allegorical figure of justice is usually, but not invariably, female. Spenser provides a contrary example. Book V of *The Faerie Queene* is “The Legend of Artegall or of Justice” (see Fowler 1964: 34–35, 192–221). For the male Artegall

an odd number, 5, is more appropriate. The basis is partly biblical, partly classical. The first 5 books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, make up the Torah, the Law, setting out the full requirements of divine justice. The 5 wise and the 5 foolish virgins represent the redeemed and the damned at Judgement Day. 5 as a number occupies the middle position in the sequence of numbers below 10; it is preceded and followed by 4 others – 1, 2, 3, 4: 6, 7, 8, 9. In effect it is the point of balance between the two groups:

It is a kind of justice, on the analogy of a weighing instrument. For if we suppose that the row of numbers is some such weighing instrument, and the mean number 5 is the hole of the balance, then all the parts towards the ennead [9], starting with the hexad [6] will sink down because of their quantity, and those towards the monad [1], starting with the tetrad [4], will rise up because of their fewness, and the ones which have the advantage will altogether be triple the total of the ones over which they have the advantage [i.e.,  $1+2+3+4=10$ ;  $6+7+8+9=30$ ;  $30=10\times 3$ ], but 5 itself, as the hole in the beam, partakes of neither, but it alone has equality and sameness.

The sequence represents the scales of Justice, with 5 as the pivot, the controlling element. Other related names are “Nemesis” and “Providence” (Waterfield tr. 1988: 114).

In medieval poetry the best-known numerical treatment of justice is found in Dante’s *Paradiso*. This combines the numbers 5 and 6 – the latter the first perfect number, called “neighbour of justice” (Waterfield tr. 1988: 73). The account of the 6th heaven, that of the planet Jupiter, the heaven of the just, begins at line 60 ( $6\times 10$ ) of canto 18 ( $6\times 3$ ), and is dominated by a text from the Apocrypha, 5 words long, *Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram*, “Love justice, ye that judge the earth” (*Wisdom of Solomon*, 1: 1), the 35 ( $5\times 7$ ) letters of which are successively formed by the lights which are the spirits of the just rulers who inhabit the sphere. Dante emphasizes the number: “In consonants and vowels five times seven / Those signs displayed themselves” (18: 88–89). M, the final letter of the fifth word *terram*, is transformed into the heraldic figure of an eagle, whose eye is represented by 6 lights, 1 forming the pupil, the other 5 marking the eyebrow. The pupil is the soul of the biblical King David; the other 5 are the souls of 5 particularly just rulers, Trajan, Hezekiah, Constantine the Great, William II of Naples, and Ripeus, the just Trojan mentioned in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (2: 426–28). The first and last, it should be noted were pagans who gained redemption by their virtuous way of life.

5 is prominent throughout, although usually subordinated to its neighbour 6. The symbolism of the letter M, from which the eagle is formed, is primarily alphabetic. As well as being the final letter of *terram*, the earth in which the rule of justice should prevail, it is the first of *Monarchia*, “monarchy”, central to Dante’s concept of the actual rule of justice. Numerically it represents 1000 and the millenium. M is also the central letter of the Italian alphabet, which has no W. 12 letters, A–L, precede it, and 12, N–Z, follow. M thus occupies a position similar to that of 5 in the sequence from 1 to 9; it is the pivot, the hole in the beam of the balance, and so too symbolizes justice. As it is the 13th letter of the alphabet, the number 13 can sometimes have the same significance.<sup>1</sup>

The number 23, as has already often been mentioned, signifies vengeance on sinners, an aspect of retributive justice.

Thematically and numerically, justice and just deserts figure prominently in the fables now under discussion. In *The Wolf and the Wether* the guilty party receives his harsh but just deserts, whereas in *The Sheep and the Dog* and *The Wolf and the Lamb* the equivalent parties do not – not at least in terms of the present dispensation.

*The Sheep and the Dog* satirises justice as practised in courts of law, particularly during the apparently equitable process of legal arbitration. The context is ecclesiastic, the consistory court, presided over by the archdeacon of the diocese, more usually later by the Official (Ollivant 1982). These courts were regarded as nests of corruption, as may be shown by the cynical revelations made by one of Chaucer’s Canterbury pilgrims, the Summoner, himself an officer of the court, corresponding to the Apparitour in *The Sheep and the Dog*:

And if he foond owher a good felawe,  
 He wolde techen him to have noon awe  
 In swich caas of the ercedekenes curs,  
 But if a mannes soule were in his purs;  
 For in his purs he sholde ypunished be.  
 “Purs is the ercedekenes helle”, seyde he. (*General Prologue*, 653–58)

(The *ercedekenes curs* is excommunication, pronounced by the court.)  
 The narrator’s immediate ironic disclaimer heightens the effect;

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1. For this and the preceding paragraph, see Waterfield tr. 1988: 81; Hopper 1938: 86, 115, 180, and the notes to the edition and translation of Dante cited above.

But wel I woot he lyed right in dede;  
 Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede,  
 For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,  
 And also war hym of a *Significavit*. (659–61)

*Significavit* is the opening word of a writ remanding to prison an excommunicated person. Imprisonment and fines together are more potent than excommunication, or indeed the reverse process of *assoillyng*, “absolution”. The dominating force is money.

The opening of *The Friar’s Tale* gives a rapid overview of the multiple responsibilities of the medieval consistory court:

Whilom ther was dwellynge in my contree  
 An erchedeken, a man of heigh degree,  
 That boldely dide execucioun  
 In punysshyng of fornicacioun,  
 Of wicchecraft, and eek of bawderye,  
 Of diffamacioun and avowtrye,  
 Of chirche reves, and of testamentz,  
 Of contractes and of lakke of sacramentz,  
 Of usure, and of symonye also. (D, 1301–9)

Somewhat surprisingly to a modern mind, the word “contracts” indicates a main area of the court’s business. “The moral importance attached to oaths gave the church a potential interest in almost every agreement or contract undertaken with a sworn pledge, and it was this interest which lay behind a great part of the court’s daily business” (Ollivant 1982: 85–93). In passing one may note that “testamentz”, like that of Cresseid, also fell within the court’s jurisdiction.

*The Sheep and the Dog* is “the best account we have of the jurisdiction and form of process of the Consistorial Court” (Innes 1872 cited in Ollivant 1982: 2). The source, the brief *De Cane et Ove*, fable IV of the *verse-Romulus* (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: 10–11), contains no suggestion that the case is heard in such a court. Nor is there any recourse to the process of arbitration so prominent in *The Sheep and the Dog*. In both however the legal emphasis is strong. The plots have the same outline, and the cast is very similar – sheep, dog, kite, wolf, and fox (to which Henryson adds a vulture). In the *verse-Romulus* kite, fox, and wolf figure as advocates for the dog; the judge (in Henryson a wolf) has no animal identity. The point of dispute is a loaf of bread. The sheep is put at a severe disadvantage by having no advocate. When the judge finds in favour of the dog, the sheep is able

to meet his obligation only by selling the fleece from his back, although it is winter.

In the verse-*Romulus*, the Moralitas contains a play on the words *inertia*, “lack of art, simplicity”, revealed by the sheep, and *arte*, “by art, (underhand) cleverness”, represented by the dog and his lawyers. “*Saepe fidem falso mendicat inertia teste, / Saepe dolet pietas criminis arte capi*” (9–10). Often simplicity beggars [i.e., fails to gain] belief when the witness is false. Often holiness grieves to be trapped by the cleverness of the accusation”. The Addition is an attack on lying witnesses.

Henryson expanded the material, linking it more closely to his own contemporary circumstances. As has been said, the trial takes place in a consistory court. The officers have excellent professional qualifications. The wolf is judge, playing the part of the archdeacon or Official; his description of himself in the citation as “maister Volff” (2: 1155) implies that, like Henryson himself, he is a graduate, *Magister* or Master of Decrets, Canon Law. The dog’s lawyers, the kite and vulture, are “aduocatis expert in to the lawis” (5: 1176). The clerk to the court is the fox, because (again like Henryson himself) he is a notary public (5: 1174), “authorized to draw up, attest and record contracts, and to attest other proceedings and transactions of a legal nature” (*DOST*, s.v. Notar). Henryson introduces three new characters, as summoner the raven, whose title ‘schir’, indicates that he is a priest with no academic degree, and two arbiters, bear and brock (badger), who are obviously thoroughly at home with the *minutiae* of canon law. The sheep, feminine in the verse-*Romulus*, is masculine in Henryson, and is, as I have pointed out elsewhere (MacQueen, J. 1967: 128n.1), also a priest, addressed in the citation as ‘schir Scheip’ (2: 1158), and thus liable to the pains of interdiction, suspension, and excommunication, the second of which applied only to clerics in possession of a benefice. The defence which he mounts, although legally watertight, is unavailing.

The transition from Latin to Middle Scots allowed Henryson to give the fable a new connotation. When a dog (*doig*), rather than a *canis*, acts against a sheep who is also a priest, in a dispute about a loaf of bread, and wins his case by clever legal manoeuvre, it is difficult not to associate him with an Old Testament character, Doeg, Saul’s chief shepherd, who used the priestly shew-bread as evidence which enabled him to dispossess and kill the priest Achimelech. The tone of the fable, particularly the line “And simonie is haldin for na syn” (24:

1310), suggests that Henryson intended a contemporary reference, perhaps involving someone with the surname Doig. For this however I have found no direct evidence. The details fit the hypothetical case of someone deprived by the court of benefice or office in favour of another prepared to pay for the privilege.

In narrative and *Moralitas* alike, the predominant theme is justice, which “few or nane will execute” – a remark which occurs in the 23rd stanza (23: 1302). Structure echoes theme. Square numbers, 4 in particular, predominate. The narrative advances in 4 groups, each of 4 stanzas. The first covers the summons to court. In the second, stanzas 5–8, the sheep questions the competence of the court to hear the case. In stanzas 9–12, the bear and the badger, as arbiters, use legal learning to cover the impropriety of their verdict. In stanzas 13–16 the final decision goes against the sheep, and he is forced to sell his fleece to meet his obligations. The total number of narrative stanzas is thus also a square, 16.

The *Moralitas* contains 9 stanzas, also a square, as is the overall total, 25, the square of 5, another number representing justice. This introduces another aspect. The ratio of the square roots of these numbers, 4:3:5, is that of the sides of a right-angled triangle in which the area of the square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the areas of the squares on the other two sides ( $16+9=25$ ). The order 4:3:5, rather than the usual 3:4:5, may suggest that Henryson had in mind some such figure as the L-shaped carpenter’s square, essential in the building of any stable structure, and so an appropriate emblem for justice. The right-angled triangle was particularly associated with the Platonic Nuptial Number, failure to observe which resulted in degeneracy for the individual and the State. With this may be associated the failure of justice central to the fable.

It is a mark of the sheep’s simplicity, his lack of art, that he allows his defence to depend, not on the immediate matter at issue, but on points of order. His confidence that these are “groundit on richt” (22: 1296) is so strong that he obtains for himself no legal assistance, which in any case he is too poor to afford. He makes three valid points: that the judge and other officers of court are his hereditary enemies, and that the hearing is taking place, first, far from his home, and second, in the evening, a time of day regarded as illegal, “quhen Hesperus to schaw his face began” (4: 1173).

The court responds cleverly. The word for “judge” in the verse-*Romulus* is *Arbiter*, but there is no suggestion that the legal action

described involves arbitration, a legal process by which the sheep submits his arguments to the judgement, not of the court, but of arbiters approved by both parties. Because arbitration was intended to be amicable, and the parties were on oath to accept the outcome, there was no right of appeal:

The effect of arbitrie is, that the sentence thair of sall stand, and be obeyit, quhither the samin is justlie gevin or not, swa that it be not gevin expreslie aganis the law, or be fraud and deceipt done and committit be ony of the arbitris; for ilk arbiter sould be void of all fraud and guile. (McNeill ed. 1962–63: 2: 415).

In *The Sheep and the Dog*, the wolf-judge claims to be “partles off fraud and gyle” (2: 1155). If the sheep’s objections were not accepted, the court might then proceed, in the most literal terms, to fleece him. Under a smokescreen of legal terms and references, the arbiters find against the sheep, who is then turned over to the mercies of the court. His lack of an advocate now symbolises his helplessness rather than his confidence. The case reaches its inevitable outcome.

The consistory keeps strictly to the letter of the law. The raven, for instance, as apparitor or summoner, serves his writ in the presence of witnesses, and as proof endorses it. The judge does not dismiss the points raised by the sheep, but instead proposes the appointment of arbiters. The arbiters are apparently scrupulous in their duties:

For prayer nor price, trow ye, thay wald fald,  
Bot held the glose and text of the decreis  
As trew iugis, I schrew thame ay that leis. (11: 1220–22)

This ironic comment occurs in the 11th stanza, with 11, as 10+1, representing transgression. The arbiters transgress in their very devotion to the letter of the law. “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 *Corinthians* 3: 6).

The ironic or indignant voice of the narrator tends, as here, to appear in the final line of a stanza – “Thocht it wes fals, thay had na conscience” (5: 1180). (Arbiters, it may be noted, should proceed with a good conscience (below, 178).) There are suggestions of dialogue between narrator and audience, “Off quhome the namis efter ye sall heir” (9: 1209); there are hints too that some members of the audience are clerics whose sympathies should be with the sheep, “On clerkis I do it, gif this sentence wes leill” (12: 1229). Later interventions extend over the last three lines of a stanza (14: 1241–43; 15: 1248–50). In the last of these, the narrator expresses his feeling by locking verb and



object – “dampnit” and “innocent”, “iustifyit” and “wringous iugement” – in a violent oxymoron.

In the first three stanzas of the *Moralitas* the narrator’s voice becomes more insistent. It is he who makes the point that tyrants behave as if this present life would last for ever. It is he who equates the practices of the consistory court with these of corresponding secular institutions, the sheriff court and the justice ayre or circuit court, in both of which the coroner (*crownar*) plays a part corresponding to the ecclesiastical role of the summoner or apparitor. His chief duty is to arrest miscreants. His token of office is the wand with which he touches those whom he arrests. His victims however are not necessarily offenders. For a consideration he is prepared to alter the names on his roll of citations, the *porteous of the inditement* (19: 1273).

The narrator makes no wholesale condemnation of the circuit courts, only of the official who performs the preliminary services. With the sheriff court it is different. The sheriff is himself corrupt, and is aided and abetted by a corrupt jury, a *curisit assyis* (18: 1267). Possibly relevant here is a statute passed in 1397 in a general council held at Stirling (Thomson and Innes eds 1814–75: 1: 570).

The sheriffs were to be ordered to proclaim ... that crimes of violence were to be punished by death ... Those offenders who could find no sureties were forthwith to be brought before an assize; if found guilty, they were to be “condampnit to the deid” (Nicholson 1974: 210)

Obviously this opens the possibility of corruption. How to link it (as Henryson does) with forfeiture of land by a tenant is a more difficult problem, no doubt well within the ingenuity of the medieval legal mind:

This volf I likkin to ane schiref stout,  
 Quhilk byis ane forfalt at the kingis hand,  
 And hes with him ane curisit assyis about,  
 And dytis all the pure men vp on land;  
 Fra the crownar haif laid on him his wand –  
 Suppois he be als trew as wes Sanct Iohne –  
 Slane sall he be, or with the iuge compone.

This rauin I likkin to ane fals crownair,  
 Quhilk hes ane porteous of the inditement,  
 And passis furth befor the iustice air,  
 All misdoaris to bring to iugement;

Bot luke gif he be of ane trew intent  
 To scraip out Iohne, and wryte in Will or Wat,  
 And swa ane bude at both the parteis skat. (18–19: 1265–78)

(Notice in the last line the word *bude*, “bribe”.) These are not allegorical interpretations of the narrative text; rather Henryson is extending his satire to include all courts, apart from that of the king himself, the High Court, which, here by implication and elsewhere specifically, he always treats with respect.

In *The Preaching of the Swallow* the narrator overhears the various disputes among the birds, and witnesses their fate. In the closing verses of the present fable he overhears the sheep’s complaint, his cry to God to wake from sleep and amend the injustices of the world. The cry resembles the conclusion of the Peterborough chronicler’s account of the anarchy in England during the reign of Stephen (1135–54): “They said openly that Christ and his saints slept. Such and more than we can say we endured during nineteen years for our sins” (Plummer ed. 1892: 1: 265).

This, like the sheep’s complaint, is based on *Psalms* 44 (*Vulgate*, 43). Despite their adherence to God’s word, the innocent Jewish people are like sheep in their suffering:

Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen ... Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever. (11: 22–23)

The sleep of the Lord permits the suffering of his sheep, whether Jews, English, or Scots. For Henryson’s sheep, love, loyalty, and law have all been exiled. No one will exercise justice. The greed of the rich crushes the poor. The world is upside-down. Conduct no longer involves “gentrice” and piety, in place of which simony and usury reign supreme. Suffering is the result of sin, but fails to produce a reformation. For the poor the only hope of justice is eventual rest in heaven.

The tone resembles that of parts of *Piers Plowman*; the sheep’s complaint bears all the marks of being directed towards contemporary circumstances. It is a complaint of the times, made the more poignant by the numerical representations of justice with which it is surrounded and in which it finds expression. The 5 stanzas of complaint combine with the overall total of 25 to form the emblem of justice in the context of its opposite.

The significance of 23, vengeance on sinners, has already often been mentioned (above, 29). *The Wolf and the Wether* and *The Wolf and the Lamb* each contains 23 stanzas. In both the sequence of events makes the number appropriate.

The setting of *The Wolf and the Wether* – the shepherd with his flock near a forest – carries immediate allegorical conviction; the state or church under a good ruler with the forces of evil lurking in the immediate background. No other fable provides an exact parallel, but one may compare the “thornie shaw” adjacent to the widow’s house in *The Cock and the Fox*, or the “wildernes” of *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger*. The wether, a castrated ram, introduces a surprising new feature by making an offer to the shepherd, whose hound has died, to disguise himself in the hound’s skin, and so protect the flock against marauding beasts. At first he is very successful.

New Testament imagery appears when the wolf sneaks into the flock and steals a lamb: “Yit happinit thair ane hungrie volff to slide / Out throw his schein, quhair thay lay on ane le” (9: 2511–12). The word “his” in “his schein” refers to the wether, regarded as in effect the shepherd. The real shepherd disappears from the action after accepting the wether’s proposal with the ill-omened words, “Quha sayis ane schein is daft, thay lieit of it” (6: 2492).

The wether is negligent in allowing the wolf to come anywhere near the flock, but at least initially he behaves like a good shepherd and attempts to rescue the stolen lamb. By stanza 12: 2532 he has forced the fleeing wolf to drop his prey. His duty has been done. Unfortunately, in stanza 10: 2524 he has presumptuously made a vow to God that he will “have” the wolf, a vow which the stanza-number indicates will be fulfilled, although not as the wether had expected. Pride takes control when he continues his pursuit of the wolf, crying “It is not the lamb bot the that I desyre” (12: 2535). The cry takes new meaning from the paschal associations inherent in the figure of the lamb. The wether is abandoning good and offering himself to the power of evil – exposing himself to the certainty of vengeance upon sinners. Significantly he does so in the mid-line of the mid-stanza of the poem.

In stanza 13 both wolf and wether suffer physical humiliation, the wolf when the terror of the supposed hound makes him thrice foul himself, the wether when his disguise is suddenly wrenched off, and he finds himself once more a sheep:

Sone efter that, he followit him sa neir  
 Quhill that the volff for fleidnes fylit the feild,  
 Syne left the gait and ran throw busk and breir,  
 And schupe him fra the schawis for to scheild.  
 He ran restles, for he wist off na beild;  
 The wedder followit him baith out and in,  
 Quhill that ane breir busk raif rudelie off the skyn. (13: 2539–45)

The wether “has” the wolf when the latter turns, but it is a wolf suddenly transformed into the master whom he has bitterly offended. The wether’s vow is consummated when the wolf declares, before killing and eating him, “Bot sikkerlie now sall we not disseuer” (19: 2585).

The 13th stanza is the catastrophe, the turning-point. A minor correspondence with *The Wolf and the Lamb* is that there too the catastrophe occurs in the 13th stanza, which is also the close of the narrative part of the fable. The significance of 13 in terms of justice has already been indicated (above, 91n). In general it is also an unlucky number.

The loss of his disguise, his mask, transforms the wether into a poltroon, abjectly pleading that his pursuit of the wolf was only play, a phrase which the wolf takes up with savage irony. It particularly rankles that he was forced to soil himself by someone so palpably his inferior. He returns the wether to the scene of the crime to display to him the unsavoury evidence of his *lese-majeste*:

“Cum bak agane, and I sall let you se”.  
 Then quhar the gait wes grimmit he him brocht:  
 “Quhether call ye this fair play or nocht  
 To set your maister in sa fell affray  
 Quhill he for feiritnes hes fylit vp the way?”

Thryis, be my saull, ye gart me schute behind:  
 Vpon my hoichis the senyeis may be sene;  
 For feiritnes full oft I fylit the wind.  
 Now is this ye? Na, bot ane hound, I wene!  
 Me think your teith ouer schort to be sa kene.  
 Blissit be the busk that reft you your array,  
 Ellis, fleand, bursin had I bene this day”. (16–17: 2562–73)

The execution follows in stanza 19, a number chosen, perhaps, simply to leave 4 stanzas for the *moralitas*, with 4 again representing justice. 19 however is an unlucky, incomposite prime, bound to vices and punishments. It also has cyclic associations by way, for instance, of

the 19-year Metonic lunar cycle (above, 29). The destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem brought the 5th Age of the World to an end in the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar (*2 Kings* 25: 8; *Jeremiah* 52: 12). The 19th stanza of the poem appropriately completes the cycle of the wether's activities.

Golden Section also plays a part, in terms specifically of the series 1, 4, 5, 9, 14, 23 ... . The first crisis, the theft of the lamb, occurs in stanza 9. The second, the reaction of the wolf to the realization that his pursuer is not a dog, "To God I vow that ye sall rew this rais", occurs at the end of stanza 14.

Henryson sometimes reserves the particular rather than the general application of a fable to the *Moralitas*. So it is here. The wether is interpreted, aptly enough, as a poor man made presumptuous by fine clothes, and so coming to a bad end at the hands of his betters. There may be a reference to the three royal servants, Thomas Preston, Thomas Cochrane, and William Roger, later often described as favourites of James III, hanged in July 1482 at Lauder Bridge, when the king himself was arrested and imprisoned by some of his nobles. There is a possible reference to the king's imprisonment after Lauder Bridge in *The Lion and the Mouse* (below, 171). The story of the execution of the presumptuous favourites however was so much magnified and distorted by sixteenth-century chroniclers that I should not like to put forward as more than a possibility any such reference here.

In *The Wolf and the Wether* vengeance is wreaked on the sinner at the end of his life on earth. By contrast, in *The Wolf and the Lamb*, the stanza-total conveys an apocalyptic reference to the Day of Judgement and the pains of hell. The story is simple. A lamb drinks from a river, unaware that upstream a wolf is also quenching his thirst. The wolf wants to eat the lamb but at the same time have some legitimate excuse for so doing. He brings three false charges against him, all of which are easily refuted. Eventually he simply devours his victim.

Henryson extends and makes more specific the brief *Moralitas* appended to the version in the *verse-Romulus*: "*Sic nocet innocuo nocuus, causamque nocendi / Invenit. Hi regnant qualibet urbe lupi* [Thus the wicked man hurts the innocent, and invents a reason for doing so. These wolves reign in every city]" (Bastin ed. 1929–30: 2: 9). Henryson's narrator reacts more intensely and at much greater length. The wolf "betakinnis fals extortioneris / And oppressouris of

pure men” (14: 2710–11): “Of sic wolfis hellis fyre sall be thair meid.” (15: 2720).

He addresses the extortioner directly, with the threat of punishment in the hereafter:

Thow suld be rad for richteous Goddis blame,  
For it cryis ane vengeance vnto the hevinnis hie  
To gar ane pure man wirk but meit or fe. (21: 2760–62)

For til oppres, thow sall haif als grit pane  
As thow the pure with thy awin hand had slane. (22: 2768–69)

The references are to metaphorical wolves who in three different ways are devourers of lambs. In one group are lawyers “with nice gimpis and fraudis intricait” (16: 2722), who profess high moral standards, but accept bribes from the rich to do down the poor (one might compare the lawyers in *The Sheep and the Dog*); on the other, two kinds of heritors, land-owners whose greed leads them to oppress their tenants either by expulsion without compensation before their tack (short lease) has run its term, or by the exploitation of the dues paid in labour and kind, and the imposition of additional grassums, the sum paid on entry to, or renewal of, a tack.<sup>2</sup> 5 stanzas of precise and vivid denunciation are devoted to such heritors, forming, together with *The Sheep and the Dog*, Henryson’s most searing and sustained criticism of social abuse:

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2. “In the earliest surviving rental of a lay landholder conditions of tenure were certainly insecure. This rental of 1367–8, compiled for Sir James Douglas of Dalkeith, covered extensive lands in Lothian, Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbright, Fife, Moffatdale and Liddesdale. In these scattered lands, brought somewhat accidentally under the estate-management of Sir James, a uniform policy was being applied. In each barony the various holdings, corresponding to modern farms, were assessed, presumably in the local baron court, and were leased to tenants, sometimes described as husbandmen, on tacks that were nearly all for only a year at a time. While it was not unusual for one person to be granted a tack, it was more common for a group of men to combine as joint tenants [*and settis to the mailleris ane village, / And for ane tyme gressome payit and tane* (19: 2744–45)]. In one case a township was leased to eight husbandmen for two years; in other cases of communal cultivation the groups of joint tenants varied in number from four to ten, and paid a joint rent that averaged about £1 for each person in the group. Each tenant, whether he shared a tack with others or undertook it alone, had to find a person as his pledge that the rent would be paid. Although rents paid in cash were now typical, they might still be paid in the form of produce and labour.” (Nicholson 1974: 262).

Ane vther kynd of wolfis rauenus  
 Ar mychtie men, haifand aneuch plentie,  
 Quhilkis ar sa gredie and sa couetous  
 They will not thoill in pece ane pureman be:  
 Suppois he and his houshald baith suld de  
 For falt of fude, thairof thay gif na rak,  
 Bot ouer his heid his mailling will thay tak.

O man but mercie, quhat is in thy thocht?  
 War than ane wolf, and thow culd vnderstand!  
 Thow hes aneuch; the pure husband richt nocht  
 Bot croip and crufe vpon ane clout of land.  
 For Goddis aw, how durst thow tak on hand –  
 And thow in barn and byre sa bene and big –  
 To put him fra his tak and gar him thig?

The thrid wolf ar men of heritage,  
 As lordis that hes land be Goddis lane,  
 And settis to the mailleris ane village,  
 And for ane tyme gressome payit and tane;  
 Syne vexis him, or half his terme be gane,  
 With pykit querrellis for to mak him fane  
 To flit or pay his gressome new agane.

His hors, his meir, he man len to the laird  
 To drug and draw in cairt and cariage;  
 His seruand or his self may not be spaird  
 To swing and sweit withoutin meit or wage;  
 Thus how he standis in labour and bondage  
 That scantlie may he purches by his maill  
 To leue vpon dry breid and watter caill.

Hes thow not reuth to gar thy tennentis sweit  
 In to thy laubour, with faynt and hungrie wame,  
 And syne hes lytill gude to drink or eit  
 With his menye, at euin quhen he cummis hame?  
 Thow suld be rad for richteous Goddis blame,  
 For it cryis ane vengeance vnto the heuinis hie  
 To gar ane pure man wirk but meit or fe. (17–21: 2728–62)

No Cotter's Saturday Night in Henryson country!

Damnation is the retribution. God as final source of justice is named 8 times in the *moralitas*. In the final stanza, the solemn triple repetition of the name, together with the prayer for the king and his possible intervention, gives expression to the hope that protection and punishment will be extended in this world as well as the next:

God keip the lamb, quhilk is the innocent,  
 From wolfis byit, I mene extortioneris;  
 God grant that wrangous men of fals intent  
 Be manifest, and punischit as effeiris;  
 And God, as thow all rychteous prayer heiris,  
 Mot saif our king, and gif him hart and hand  
 All sic wolfis to banes of the land. (23: 2770–76)

The biblical phrase “God save the king!” is associated with ceremonies of royal inauguration (2 *Kings* 11: 12, etc.). Its use here may suggest that the fable was written in or shortly after 1469, when James ended his minority and assumed full royal power.

Although his main point is the contempt shown by oppressors for eternal justice, the reference shows that Henryson also hoped for secular amendment, with which indeed, on one level, his narrator may appear more concerned. Within the narrative a complex point of view gradually emerges. The wolf is determined to kill and eat the lamb, but because he is aware of an authority higher than his own, he would prefer to maintain at least the appearance of legality. His speech and actions caricature a trial in which he is himself at once plaintiff, judge, and executioner. The lamb is innocent but not ignorant; his pleas in his own defence, although ineffective, are very much to the point. Henryson had in mind the baron courts of inferior franchise in which the baron himself held the right of jurisdiction over his tenants.<sup>3</sup>

As plaintiff, the wolf makes 3 attempts to show that the defendant, the lamb, had forfeited his life by committing a criminal offence. On each occasion the lamb formally rebuts him in terms respectively of natural, moral, and civil law, the 3 systems under which the lower creation should ideally operate. Under the first his defence is successful. The wolf calls the language of the rebuttal rigorous, which it is, although not quite in the sense intended. The lamb dismisses the charge that he fouled the wolf’s drinking water by a rigorous syllogism based on Aristotelian natural law:

All heuie thing man off the self discend,  
 Bot giff sum thing on force mak resistance;  
 Than may the streme on na way mak ascence

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3. A baron court was “an inferior franchise court in mediaeval Scotland. A baron had a right to hold a court for his tenants only if he had an express royal grant of the jurisdictional right. The court was usually held at the *caput*, or principal seat of the baron” (Walker, D.M. ed. 1980: s.v. Baroncourt).



Nor ryn bakwart; I drank beneth you far:  
*Ergo*, for me your streme wes neuer the war. (5: 2646–50)

The argument, based on the evidence of the 5 external senses, is appropriately placed in the 5th stanza. 5, of course, is also a number associated with justice.

The wolf instantly shifts ground, replacing personal offence with the more primitive idea of hereditary feud. The lamb himself may be innocent, but he is the son of a father whose successful but undefined exorbitant and froward plea (against the wolf, his feudal superior in the barony) the speech of his son now echoes. The son therefore inherits the father's guilt and deserves punishment. The lamb's reply is biblical (*Ezekiel* 18: 1–20; Fox ed. 1981: 317), based on the moral law:

“Haif ye not hard quhat Halie Scripture sayis,  
 Endytit with the mouth of God almycht?  
 Off his awin deidis ilk man sall beir the pais,  
 As pyne for sin, reward for werkis rycht;  
 For my trespas quhy suld my son haue plycht?  
 Quha did the mis, lat him sustene the pane”.  
 “Yaa”, quod the volff, “Yit playis thou agane?” (8: 2665–71)

8, the number of the stanza, is also to be equated with justice, more particularly with that which will be administered on the Day of Judgement.

The wolf's immediate baffled response may be paraphrased, “Are you up to your legal tricks again?” He makes a clumsy attempt to adapt another biblical text to justify his proposed action (*Exodus* 20: 5; Fox 1981: 317), and continues with pure fantasy which, even had it been true, would have been open to the same objection as the previous charge. He returns to the lamb's father who, he alleges, had attempted to poison him by spewing into his drinking water. The lamb dismisses both points with dignity and offers to subject himself to a fair trial in the superior royal court. It is the wolf's duty as the offended party to issue a legal summons to the lamb to appear at this court:

Set me ane lauchfull court; I sall compeir  
 Befoir the lyoun, lord and leill iustice,  
 And be my hand I oblis me rycht heir  
 That I sall byde ane vnsuspect assyis.  
 This is the law, this is the instant wyis;

Ye suld pretend thairfoir ane summondis mak  
 Aganis that day, to gif ressoun and tak. (11: 2686–92)

This appeal to reason occurs in stanza 11, a number usually associated with transgression, which is precisely how the wolf sees the proposal. It goes against his dominant idea that might is right, the definition of justice proposed by Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic* (only to be refuted): "The just is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger" (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: [338c] 588). From this point of view, the lamb's proposal is treason, the most heinous of capital offences:

"Ha", quod the volff, "thou wald intruse ressoun  
 Quhair wrang and reif suld dwell in propertie.  
 This is ane poynt and part of fals tressoun,  
 For to gar reuth remane with crueltye.  
 Be Goddis woundis, fals tratour, thow sall de  
 For thy trespas, and for thy fatheris als". (12: 2693–88)

His unjust oath, made more emphatic in the middle stanza of the poem, is by the wounds of the Paschal Lamb, Christ, whose flesh and blood are offered in the eucharistic sacrifice. The figure extends into the next and final narrative stanza (significantly the 13th), where, after killing the lamb, the wolf "drank his blude and off his flesche can eit" (13: 2702). This is his central iniquity; in effect, he partakes of the sacrament while in an unregenerate state. In so doing he becomes the type of the sinner condemned by Paul (*I Corinthians* 11: 26–29, part of the Epistle for Maundy Thursday, the commemoration of the Institution of the Eucharist):

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgement unto himself, if he discern not the body.

It is thus that the wolf, together with his various avatars listed in the *Moralitas*, brings guilt and final punishment on himself. The eucharistic concept impregnates and transforms the social criticism at the heart of the fable.

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## Chapter Six

### Prudence and Imprudence: *The Preaching of the Swallow*

The 47 stanzas of *The Preaching of the Swallow* make it the longest of the unitary fables. Aesop is not given much prominence; indeed he is not mentioned until the first stanza of the Moralitas. The poem begins with a philosophic and theological prologue in 13 stanzas on Prudence as an attribute of God and the corresponding faculty in human beings. The 25 stanzas of narrative are governed by the progress of the 4 seasons. In spring the narrator visits a *locus amoenus* where he overhears a swallow urging the other small birds to eat up the hemp seed just scattered by the fowler. She is ignored. In summer he returns to find her urging them to root out the growing crop. Again she is ignored. In autumn the fowler harvests his crop, from which he manufactures rope and nets. In winter he sets the nets in the snow and scatters chaff over them. The swallow sounds a warning, but is again ignored. The birds settle on the chaff, the fowler draws his nets and stuffs the captured birds into his bag. The swallow bewails their fate and flies away.

The Moralitas is largely concerned with the growth of sin through use and consuetude. The fowler is Satan, sower of the original seed, the birds are the wretches who allow it to come to maturity and so eventually consign themselves to damnation. The swallow is the preacher whose wise words fall on deaf ears.

The poem, as John Burrow has demonstrated (Burrow 1975: 36), is an “ethical construct” on the theme of Prudentia, the Latin term both for one aspect of God, corresponding to the Old Testament and Apocryphal figure of Wisdom, and for the related human faculty which allows us to look before and after, to make plans with an element of foresight, and in a limited way to participate in divine providence. Prudentia is also one of the ultimately Platonic and Aristotelian 4 Cardinal Virtues. Burrow discusses it in terms of the 3-faced image found in Titian’s painting, the *Allegory of Prudence*, as interpreted by Erwin Panofsky. One face looks back in recollection of the past; one looks out at the viewer, and the way in which his world of the present is organized; the third looks forward to the future (Burrows 1975: 31; referring to Panofsky 1970). The ultimate source

of the image is Plato's statement that the three parts of time, past, present and future, "imitate eternity"; the relationship with Prudentia is clarified by Cicero and elaborated by Augustine to suggest that in the three parts may be seen a "vestige of the Trinity". Henryson's prologue begins with the Trinity, in terms particularly of the past and Creation; the body of the tale relates to the present state of the world, and the Moralitas to the likely future of a substantial part of humanity.

The title, *The Preaching of the Swallow*, is established by the last line, "And thus endis the preiching of the swallow" (47: 1950). "Preaching" is a common enough word, but for its use here, as for much else in the poem, Henryson is indebted to the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and Apocrypha, most of which was attributed to the king, regarded as the type of human Prudentia, Solomon, obliquely mentioned in the Moralitas: "The swallow, quhilk eschaippit is the snair, / The halie Preichour weill may signifie" (44: 1923–24). Harvey Wood, I am sure, was right to preserve the initial capital in "Preichour" (Wood ed. 1958: 67). The reference is to Solomon who introduces *Ecclesiastes* with the phrase, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1: 1). The name is afterwards several times repeated (1:2, 12; 7: 27; 12: 8, 9, 10). 12: 8 in particular, "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity", with its echo of the phrase in 1: 2, marks the completion of the work; the remaining verses have been added by another hand. A single verse – "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare: so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them" (9: 12) – may have helped to transform the rather jejune fable found in the verse-*Romulus* (Bastin 1929–30: [no. xxv] 2: 26), which lacks any reference to preaching or preacher, into the more elaborately symphonic *The Preaching of the Swallow*. The dark tone of *Ecclesiastes* is repeated in the poem, particularly in the Moralitas, where the words *vain* and *vanity* almost form a refrain.

The prologue may seem more optimistic. The practical wisdom (*wit*) of God omnipotent combines the craftsmanship (*wirking*) shown in his creation with the intellectual grasp (*prudence*) shown in his providence. It is *ingenious* as well as perfect, as may be seen from the thirteen harmonic spheres of his creation, the material universe. Nine of these, the *primum mobile*, the spheres of the fixed stars and the seven planets, are superterrestrial; the remainder – the spheres of fire, air, water and earth – make up the sublunary world we inhabit:

The firmament payntit with sternis cleir,  
 From eist to west rolland in cirkill round,  
 And euerilk planet in his proper speir,  
 In mouing makand harmonie and sound:  
 The fyre, the air, the watter, and the ground -  
 Till vnderstand it is aneuch, I wis,  
 That God in all his werkis wittie is. (6: 1657–63)

Creation as the 6-day masterwork of a witty God is appropriately presented in stanza 6. In the preceding and following stanzas other aspects of the creation lead to the further conclusion that God is good, fair, and benign.

Human beings possess lesser, but still related, intellectual attributes, which for the most part (and here the pessimism begins) have been crippled by sensuality and its accompanying fantasies. Even so, these attributes are still sufficient for a partial, inductive Prudentia. The doctrine set forth is ultimately Pythagorean and Platonic, but the immediate sources, as Denton Fox suggests (Fox ed. 1981: 277ff.), may well be the apocryphal *Ecclesiasticus*, not attributed to Solomon, and *Wisdom*, which is. The latter, while it holds that the limitations of the flesh make God ultimately unknowable to humanity (9: 13–17), also open the possibility of certainty concerning the material creation:

For he hath given me certain knowledge of the things that are, namely to know how the world was made, and the operation of the elements: the beginning, ending, and midst of the times: the alterations of the turning of the sun, and the change of seasons: the circuits of years, and the positions of stars: the natures of living creatures, and the furies of wild beasts: the violence of winds, and the reasonings of men: the diversities of plants, and the virtues of roots: and all such things as are either secret or manifest, them I know. (7: 17–21)

Such knowledge involves a partial understanding of the divine mind. Henryson's argument from creation to divinity in stanzas 5–13 may be regarded as an elaboration of this passage, although other philosophical and theological influences are also present.

Henryson once directly quotes *Wisdom*:

All creature he maid for the behufe  
 Off man, and to his supportatioun  
 In to this eirth, baith vnder and abufe,  
 In number, wecht, and dew proportioun. (8: 1671–74)

The first three lines refer to the creation (*Genesis*, 1: 26–30), a passage which has proved a thorn-in-the-flesh of present-day conservationists, but the last corresponds to *Wisdom*, 11: 20, the verse mentioned in the introductory chapter: “But thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight”, quotation of which often indicates the presence of numerical structure in a poem (above, 26, 28). Numbers and ratios indicate the measure, number and weight built into creation, with which the structure of a poem may be made to correspond. It is thus probably significant, not only that the number of the stanza in which the line occurs is 8, the number of the Ogdoad, but also that the transition of emphasis from the limitations of fallen humanity to the possibilities for human knowledge suggested by the quotation, occurs somewhat earlier in a stanza with the generative number 5, “in divine and intelligent productions, the mother of Life and Fountain of souls” (Keynes ed. 1968: [c.5] 207):

Nane suld presume be ressoun naturall  
 To seirche the secretis off the Trinitie,  
 Bot trow fermelie and lat all ressoun be.

Yyt neuertheles we may haif knowlegeing  
 Off God almychtie be his creatouris. (4–5: 1647–51)

This is followed in stanzas 6 and 7 by a survey of the creation which in *Genesis* occupies 6 days (the first perfect number), and which was confirmed as good by the resting of the Creator on the 7th. Stanza 6 presents creation, stanza 7 evidence for divine goodness. The prologue, the first 13 stanzas of the fable, moves from a pessimistic and near absolute contrast of God with the human creature to a more optimistic, but still qualified, proclamation of the possibility of human understanding. The 13 stanzas, I suggest, correspond to, and emblemize, the 13 spheres of creation. The reference is mainly to the past. The number however also carries overtones of misfortune (Hopper 1938: 130–33).<sup>1</sup>

“All creature” (8: 1671) – the phrase includes the material as well as the biological creation, and the passage of time physically indicated by the revolution of the celestial spheres. All these concord to human opportunity (8: 1676), harmonise to indicate to human beings what

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1. Bongo goes so far as to ignore the *primum mobile* in making 12 rather than 13 the overall number of the spheres.

they ought, what is opportune for them, to do. Within both the prologue and the main body of the tale, the 4 seasons of the year provide a focus. These depend on the apparent annual movement of a single planet, the Sun, against the fixed stars of the zodiac, while the success or failure of seasonal crops was held to depend on the balance of the 4 elements and on the benignant or malignant influence of the stars and planets singly and in combination. In the prologue the 4 seasons are portrayed in 5 stanzas (9–13), summer, autumn (*harvest, hairst*), and spring each occupying a single stanza, but winter 2, the number of duplicity. The number 4, as containing two means (2 and 3), represents concord, but the intrusion of 5 indicates the generative power of the sequence, and that the seasons belong to the world of the 5 senses. The emphasis on winter anticipates the dark conclusion of the poem. The final season mentioned is not winter but the life-producing spring; the last creature named in the spring stanza is the lark, who in the tale becomes the type of the improvidence which leads to destruction.

The prominence of 5 in the prologue is repeated in the 25 (5×5) stanzas of the main narrative, also built round the sequence of the 4 seasons, but this time reaching its climax in winter.

The portrayal of the seasons is partly conventional, but sometimes vivid and original, as in the precision of the word *stilland* (“distilling”) in the final line of the summer stanza: “With heit and moisture stilland from the sky” (9: 1684). The harvest stanza has the pagan exuberance of a Renaissance painting, combining Ceres and Bacchus with the filling of *tume pyipis* (“empty wine-barrels”) in France and Italy, and the cornucopia of Amalthea. In the spring stanza the reference to the song of the mavis, blackbird and lark is conventional enough (although, as noted, the lark has a special significance); more original is the metaphor used by Henryson to describe the season: “Syne cummis ver, quhen winter is away, / The secretar off somer with his sell” (13: 1706–7). Denton Fox comments: “spring is thought of as the secretary, or agent, of summer, and so is shown as carrying his seal ... But *secretar* may also have here the meaning ‘one entrusted with secrets’, and *sell* the meaning ‘token’” (Fox ed. 1981: 280). Notice the suggestion of resurrection in the happy alliterative combination of *columbie* (“columbine”, *Aquilegia vulgaris*, now relatively rare as a wild flower), *keikis* (“peeps”), and *clay* in: “Quhen columbie vp keikis throw the clay.” (13: 1706–7).



There is an element of pageant, even still life, in each of these seasonal portraits. The winter stanzas are rougher, as may be seen in the choice of presiding deity, which for summer had been Flora, goddess of flowers, and Phoebus, the sun; for autumn Ceres, goddess of crops, and Bacchus, god of wine. The corresponding winter power is Aeolus, ruler of the winds, presented, as usually in Henryson, under his most northerly and destructive aspect:

Syne wynter wan, quhen austerne Eolus,  
 God off the wynd, with blastis boreall  
 The grene garment off somer glorious  
 Hes all to-rent and ruin in pecis small. (11: 1692–95)

The dominant words, *austerne*, *blastis*, *boreall*, *to-rent*, *ruin*, stand in marked contrast to the more ornamental terms in the two earlier stanzas – *purfellit* (“decorated”), for instance, *payntit*, *benit* (“bounteously furnished”, or perhaps “filled”), *renewit*. Winter is hostile to all forms of life, flowers, birds, trees, and animals. The landscape too suffers. The only consolation is the return of spring, although even that occurs in the unlucky 13th stanza.

In the main narrative, winter is the season for the destruction of the birds, a destruction which results from the blindness, brought about by sensuality, which prevents them from heeding the warnings of the swallow. Winter is imaginatively associated with the ultimate source of the blindness, original sin, of which the existence of 4 distinct seasons was sometimes believed to have been a consequence. The Garden of Eden enjoyed a perpetual spring, but, as Milton points out, after the Fall angels altered the celestial frame:<sup>2</sup>

Some say he bid his angels turn askance  
 The Poles of Earth twice ten degrees and more  
 From the Sun’s Axle; they with labour push’d  
 Oblique the Centric Globe: Some say the Sun  
 Was bid turn Reins from th’ Equinoctial Road  
 Like distant breadth in *Taurus* with the Sev’n  
*Atlantic Sisters*, and the *Spartan Twins*  
 Up to the *Tropic Crab*; thence down amain  
 By *Leo* and the *Virgin* and the *Scales*,  
 As deep as *Capricorn*, to bring in change

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2. Notice that in Dante’s anthropic cosmology by contrast the obliquity of the ecliptic exists for the benefit of humanity (*Paradiso* 10: 13–21 (Sayers tr. 1962)).

Of Seasons in each Clime; else had the Spring  
 Perpetual smil'd on Earth with vernant Flow'rs,  
 Equal in Days and Nights. (*Paradise Lost*, x: 668–80)

Winter is part of the punishment inflicted on humanity for the first transgression.

The prologue speaks with a double voice. It proclaims the wisdom, goodness, beauty, and loving-kindness of God as seen in creation:

Luke weill the fische that swimmis in the se;  
 Luke weill in irth all kynd off bestyall;  
 The foulis fair, sa forcelie thay fle,  
 Scheddand the air with pennis grit and small;  
 Syne luke to man, that he maid last of all  
 Lyke to his image and similitude:  
 Be thir we know that God is fair and gude. (7: 1664–70)

The spheres of the three lowest elements, earth, water, and air, show their divine origin by the beauty of their inhabitants, and by the relation established between these creatures and the image of God shown in man. When participating in the universal scheme, humanity is the supreme exemplar of the divine attributes in the lower creation. When however the aftermath of the Fall forces one to consider humanity as opposed to divinity, the emphasis inevitably falls on sensuality, blindness, and delusion – “mannis saull is lyke ane bakkis ee” (3: 1637) – the transcendence of which remains no more than a possibility. Winter shows that evil and the potential of damnation have forced their way into the realm of the 5 senses.

In the prologue the narrator is the voice of humanity. His characteristic pronouns are *we*, *us*, and *our*; the first-person singular appears only once in the rhyming tag *I wis* (6: 1662). When he turns from past to present, he becomes an individual who in a beautiful transition steps out from the pageant of an archetypal spring into an actual spring morning:

That samin seasoun, into ane soft morning ...  
 I passit furth. (14: 1713, 1717)

The movement is apparently to the present, to the here-and-now, where an individual takes his stick and goes out walking to see how the countryside has survived the winter. The illusion is preserved for a little while; the narrator has a keen eye, noticing for instance the

*sappie* (“moist”) quality of the soil, and the peculiar motion of the harrow, *hoppand* as it is dragged in the footsteps of the sower. He is interested in the processes - dyking, ploughing, and harrowing - by which the soil is prepared for the seed.

Even at this stage however it is impossible to ignore parallels with New Testament episodes, in particular the parables of the Sower and of the Tares, conjoined in Matthew 13: 3–30, a passage also important for *The Lion and the Mouse*. Henryson plays variations on the metaphor which informs the text. The soil represents the individual human soul, “*sappie, and to resaeue all seidis abill*” (14: 1719) – seeds, that is to say, of tares as well as corn, Satan’s teachings as well as Christ’s. The sowing of corn is the only activity mentioned at this point, but a few lines later the swallow indicates that a different kind of sowing is also under way: “*se ye yone churll’, quod scho, ‘beyond yon pleuch / Fast sawand hemp – lo se! – and linget seid’*” (18: 1743–44). Hemp and flax as material for the manufacture of nets correspond to tares in the parable.

The churl, later identified as a fowler, introduces a complementary biblical image. His part is that of the fowlers in *Psalm* 123: 7, who attempt to capture the soul, in the psalm unsuccessfully. “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers”. Not so in the fable. The image of the soul as a bird trapped in Satan’s net is a biblical commonplace; it appears, for instance, in the text already quoted from *Ecclesiastes* (9: 12).

“The sower soweth the word” (*Mark*, 4: 14), in anticipation of harvest, when some will produce an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty, but when too the tares will be bound in bundles for burning, as the wheat is gathered into the barn. The implications of the swallow’s message are clear enough.

The external image of the hemp seed and the fowler is internalized in the *Moralitas* to represent the process of spiritual corruption. In summer the birds think of the crop which the fowler’s seed will produce as nourishing and attractive. They are tempted by the prospect:

Yone lint heirefter will do gude,  
For linget is to lytill birdis fude.

We think, quhen that yone lint bollis ar ryip,  
To mak vs feist and fill vs off the seid,  
Magre yone churll, and on it sing and pyip. (26–27: 1802–6)

To them at this stage the fowler is no more than a figure of fun. The narrator later expounds the true position:

And quhen the saull, as seid in to the eird,  
 Geuis consent in delectatioun,  
 The wickit thocht beginnis for to breird  
 In deidlie sin, quhilk is dampnatioun;  
 Ressoun is blindit with affectioun,  
 And carnall lust grouis full grene and gay,  
 Throw consuetude hantit from day to day. (41: 1902–8)

The birds, as symbols of the misguided soul, anticipate enjoying the fruits of the fowler's labours, in place of which he uses his harvest to make nets, and tempts them to their own destruction with the left-over chaff. At the same time, the soul is the soil in which the seed is planted, and eventually harvested as destruction.

The half-submerged presence of allegory in stanzas 14 and 15 comes closer to the surface in stanza 16 with the introduction of conventions more usually found in dream-vision poetry. The narrator has a remarkable experience, apparently when he is awake. Like the dreamer in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls*, he finds himself in the presence of a company of small birds who speak his own language. One, the swallow, perches high in a hawthorn tree; the others, chief among whom is the lark, distribute themselves through the adjacent hedge. Metaphorically and literally, the swallow has the wider view. The hawthorn tree is a pulpit from which she addresses the other birds, who are singularly unmoved by what she has to say. An illustration which comes immediately before the text in the Harley MS of the *Fabillis* (fo.43b) shows a human preacher in a pulpit addressing a congregation of birds assembled in a bush (reproduced in Smith ed. 1914: 2: facing 121). The subject of his sermon appears to the right in the form of a hand, presumably that of the fowler, holding up a dead bird. The scene on the left is less clear, but seems to be a grassy mound on which a sleeping figure, probably intended to be the narrator, reclines. The illustrator, who included the title "preiching of the swallow" in the frame, top left, presumably regarded the poem as a dream-vision. The emblems of the hand holding the bird and the preacher in the pulpit are also found separately to the right and left of

the figure of Aesop on the title-page of the Bassandyne print.<sup>3</sup> These illustrations accord well with the pictorial and emblematic qualities of the landscape as presented by Henryson.

The words by which the swallow is introduced – “Amang the quhilkis, ane swallow loud couth cry, / On that hawthorne hie in the croip sittand” (17: 1734–35) – seem to make her represent Wisdom as she appears in *Proverbs*: “Doth not Wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths” (8: 1–2). This enhances rather than contradicts the identification with Solomon, the Preacher. Wisdom is an attribute of divinity, “set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever earth was” (8: 23). She is thus the “hie prudence” of God, mentioned in the first line of the poem. But she may also be an attribute of human beings. *Proverbs*, the summation of Old Testament wisdom, is attributed to Solomon, wisest of kings.

Appropriately, the swallow’s sermon and the lark’s response are both couched in proverbial terms. They thus have the appearance of wisdom. The proverb however can be double-edged. The lark releases a veritable flood of irrelevant sayings:

The lark, lauchand, the swallow thus couth scorne,  
 And said scho fischit lang befor the net –  
 “The barne is eith to busk that is vnborne;  
 All growis nocht that in the ground is set;  
 The nek to stoup quhen it the straik sall get  
 Is sone aneuch; deith on the fayest fall.”  
 Thus scornit thay the swallow ane and all. (21: 1762–68)

In 5 lines the stanza contains 5 proverbs, all aimed at the swallow rather than relevant to the danger which threatens the birds. Each of the 5 pertains to the world of the 5 senses, thus echoing the importance given to that number in prologue and main narrative alike.

Essentially the lark’s counsel is *dolce far niente* – let things take their course; what will be, will be. She is twice described as laughing – “schir Swallow’, quod the lark agane, and leuch” (18: 1741), as well as in the stanza just quoted. “Giggle” would perhaps be a better rendition. In Henryson laughter of this kind invariably indicates stupidity, whether momentary or permanent, combined with an

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3. Wood, *Poems and Fables of Henryson*, frontispiece. The illustration is missing in the reprint of Wood’s first edition (Wood ed. 1958).

element of moral failure. Compare in *The Cock and the Fox* Chanteclair's reaction to the fox's flattering but treacherous approach: "Knew ye my father?" quod the cok, and leuch" (8: 446). His reaction results from a mental and moral aberration which in his case is only temporary, but nevertheless allows him to fall into the fox's clutches; later he recovers his wits and escapes. Freir Wolf Waitskaith, who in the next branch of *The Talking of the Tod* grants the same fox an over-easy absolution, is more to be regarded as a moral imbecile: "'A, selie Lowrence', quod the volf, and leuch, / 'It plesis me that ye ar penitent'" (*The Fox and the Wolf*, 11: 684–85). The savage kick which he receives from the mare in the third branch, *The Trial of the Fox*, is the appropriate reward for his earlier behaviour.

By contrast, the swallow quotes a single Latin proverbial expression, appropriate as forming a link between circumstances which now seem pleasant and the catastrophe which will be their inevitable consequence. Notice the emphasis on prudence as an *inwart argument*, "an internal process of reasoning", which looks towards the future rather than remaining content with the present. The warning begins in stanza 18, a point of Golden Section in the sequence 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29, 47:

"Se ye yone churll", quod scho, "beyond yone pleuch  
Fast sawand hemp – lo se! – and linget seid?  
Yone lint will grow in lytill tyme in deid,  
And thairoff will yone churll his nettis mak,  
Vnder the quhilk he thinkis vs to tak.

"Thairfoir I reid we pas quhen he is gone  
At euin, and with our naillis scharp and small  
Out off the eirth s craip we yone seid anone  
And eit it vp, for giff it growis we sall  
Haue cause to weip heirefter ane and all,  
So we remeid thairfoir furth-with, *instante*,  
*Nam leuius laedit quicquid praeuidimus ante.*

"For clerkis sayis it is nocht sufficient  
To consider that is befoir thyne ee;  
Bot prudence is ane inwart argument  
That garris ane man prouyde befoir and se  
Quhat gude, quhat euill, is likelie for to be  
Off euerilk thingis at the fynall end,  
And swa fra perrell ethar him defend." (18–20: 1743–61)

Burrow notes that the Latin (quoted from a standard school text of the time, the *Disticha Catonis*) “stands at the mathematical centre of the poem – at line 133 in a poem of 266 lines (excluding the *Moralitas*)” (Burrow 1975: 43). I should myself use slightly different terms. The mathematical centre of the narrative comes between stanzas 19 and 20; the Latin proverb quoted completes the first half of the narrative, although not of the poem. The word *praeuidimus*, incidentally, is etymologically closely related to *Prudentia*.

The “affection” (41: 1906) of the birds for the world of the 5 senses, where the fowler is at work, is the first stage of their descent to damnation. “Affection” is a stronger term than in modern usage and has a wider field of reference. It is a non-rational faculty of the human soul concerned with emotion and volition. It includes Love in the forms both of Eros and Agape, Venus Pandemos or Urania. The part played by affection in human conduct is an important theme, not only in the *Fables*, but also in *The Tale of Orpheus* and *The Testament of Cresseid*. Morally the faculty is precariously neutral; the discipline of reason may direct it upwards, but if that fails, its inclination is the reverse, towards sensuality and ultimate damnation. In *The Tale of Orpheus* the process is set out in the allegorical relation of the two main characters. Eurydice is affection, Orpheus the intellect which tries to find her in the contemplative life of the heavens when in fact she has followed the world and become the captive of the infernal powers. I have already suggested that the swallow corresponds to the Preacher of *Ecclesiastes* and to the figure of Wisdom; she corresponds also to Orpheus. The other birds follow the path of Eurydice.

The narrator’s reaction to his apparently supernatural experiences in this first episode resembles that of the *madin* who witnessed the abduction of Eurydice; still more that of the amazed and incomprehending dreamer (Will, for instance, in *Piers Plowman*) wakened from his vision: “I tuke my club, and hamewart couth I carie, / Swa ferliand as I had sene a farie” (22: 1774–75). In the first episode the birds accept the truth of the swallow’s warning, but assume that it relates to a period so distant as to be negligible. Henryson shows his instinct for psychological development in the next summer episode, which takes place in the same *locus amoenus*, now representing the consuetude of sin and the dangerous fantasies which accompany it. As has been noted, the stanzas of the poem total 47, a prime number, itself the sum of prime numbers, 23+1+23. With a threatening 23

(“vengeance on sinners”) stanzas on either side, the birds return in the stanza marking the mathematical centre of the poem:

And as I stude, be auenture and cace,  
 The samin birdis as I haif said yow air –  
 I hoip because it wes thair hanting place,  
 Mair of succour, or yit mair solitair –  
 Thay lichtit down, and quhen thay lichtit wair,  
 The swallow swyth put furth ane pietuous pyme,  
 Said, “Wo is him can not bewar in tyme!” (24: 1783–89)

They look on the hedge as a place where they are protected and where they are far from the possibility of external interference. They do not see the contradiction when they positively reject the swallow’s advice on the grounds that the fowler’s crop is likely to provide them with a supply of tempting food, and that the fowler himself is a subject for jokes (stanzas 26–27: 1802–61). The lark is no longer singled out as speaker. The birds respond with one voice. They are already entangled in the snare of sin which has become their consuetude, their *hanting place*.

The swallow’s reaction is that of a Christian, sober and vigilant, who knows that her adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Stanza 28, with its concluding reference to God and the Cross, indicates that as a consequence of her faith her intellect can interpret the past and look into the future with unclouded precision. 28 is the second perfect number, made up of the sum of its factors. Alastair Fowler has pointed out that it symbolises virtue (above, 99):

The awner of yone lint ane fouler is,  
 Richt cautelous and full off subteltie;  
 His pray full sendill tymis will he mis  
 Bot giff we birdis all the warrer be.  
 Full mony off our kin he hes gart de,  
 And thocht it bot ane sport to spill thair blude;  
 God keip me fra him, and the halie rude. (28: 1811–17)

The full significance of this is brought out in another appropriately numbered stanza, stanza 40, the second of the *Moralitas*, where the fowler is specifically equated with the fiend,

quhilk fra the angelike state  
 Exylit is, as fals apostata,



Quhilk day and nycht weryis not for to ga,  
 Sawand poyoun and mony wickit thoct  
 In mannis saull, quhilk Christ full deir hes bocht. (40: 1897–1901)

The association of 40 with the period spent in the wilderness by the Children of Israel and with Christ's endurance of temptation in the wilderness has already been indicated (above, 28) and will be discussed more fully in chapter nine. Stanzas 28 and 40 both end with references to Christ.

The *locus amoenus* is the site for the spring and summer episodes, which together occupy 16 stanzas. By the last, stanza 29, the birds have abandoned themselves to the consuetude of sin, a development marked by a second point of Golden Section (1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29, 47). The episodes in the remaining 9 stanzas are set on the fowler's lands. Like 25, 16 and 9 are square numbers ( $4 \times 4$ ,  $3 \times 3$ ), and thus directly related to the concept of justice.<sup>4</sup> The 3 square numbers also recall the Pythagorean right-angled triangle in which the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. I shall discuss the possible significance of this in a later chapter.

Autumn (*Harvest, Hairst*), which is not named, but represented by the gathering of the lint and the manufacture of the nets, occupies a single stanza (30: 1825–31; the number 30 is associated with the parable of the Sower (Hopper 1938: 104)); the remainder deal with the winter plight of the birds and their eventual capture and death, which takes place despite the swallow's warnings that the food spread by the fowler to attract them is only chaff. The swallow speaks in 3 stanzas, 34, 35, and 38. In stanza 35 the 3 proverbial expressions which she uses are all directed at the birds' folly, their lack of prudence, a theme the repetition of which in the final narrative stanza (38) completes the overall logical structure. In this stanza the swallow herself comments that she had given her warning "mair than thryis" (1885). 3 is thus a number associated with the swallow; there is perhaps a reference to the 3 faces of Prudentia, and the 3 parts of the poem.

The total of 25 ( $5 \times 5$ ) narrative stanzas echoes and reinforces the effect of the earlier 5-stanza pageant which represents the predominance of the 5 senses, and so of sensuality, in the fallen world of the 4 seasons. The more extended version is also the darker,

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4. "So if there is any number which is equal-times-equal [i.e., a square], then it would form and be receptive of justice" (Waterfield tr. 1988: 69).

concluding as it does with the slaughter of all the little birds except the swallow. It is difficult to reconcile this with the demonstration attempted in the prologue that God is good, fair, wise, and benign – one is more inclined to remember Holy Willie’s divinity, who

Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell,  
     A’ for thy glory!  
 And no for ony gude or ill  
     They’ve done before thee. (Kinsley, J. ed. 1968: 1: 74–78)

But Henryson is not a Calvinist before his time. The birds have sinned more by omission than commission, which Henryson would seem to regard as the human norm, but they remain responsible for their own downfall. The swallow gave them fair warning. At one stage they half accepted the truth of what she said.

Henryson does not say that birds with a single exception are all doomed to destruction. This can be demonstrated in a number of ways. In stanza 7, for instance, he offers as proof that God is fair and good the power of flight, the mastery of air as an element, which characterizes the genus as a whole. This is scarcely consistent with the idea that they are all damned. In stanza 23: 1779, despite the implication of vengeance for sinners conveyed by the stanza number, “the quailie craikand in the corn”, the corncrake, a game bird, is used as a symbol of peace and security. Henryson invariably describes the swallow’s congregation as “small birds”, in ventry and gastronomy a technical term used to distinguish such creatures as larks, finches, blackbirds, and thrushes, from the larger birds constituting the class of winged game – corncrake, woodcock, partridge, pheasant, and the like (*Larousse Gastronomique* s.v. “Game”). Henryson had particularly in mind, it would seem, the little man, with small opportunity of committing grave sins, who is more particularly open to sins of omission or negligence. *Gula*, “greed”, is his closest approach to major wrongdoing:

Thir hungrie birdis, wretchis we may call,  
 Ay scraipand in this warldis vane plesance,  
 Greddie to gadder gudis temporall,  
 Quhilk as the calf ar tume without substance. (43: 1916–19)

In certain respects the small birds are to be compared with mice, both these already discussed and the “commoutie, / Wantoun, vnwyse, without correctioun”, of *The Lion and the Mouse* (27: 1587–88);

alternatively, with the “maill men, merchandis, and all lauboureris” of *The Wolf and the Lamb* (14: 2708). The fable, that is to say, is not general in its application, but aimed at members of a single social group for which Henryson elsewhere expresses concern. *The Wolf and the Lamb* emphasises the pathos of the sufferers, represented by the lamb, but the lamb, unlike the birds, is not in any sense a sinner. I shall make more of this point later. The “maister mous” of *The Lion and the Mouse* more closely resembles the birds, but she redeems herself, first by the intellectual power of her defence, second by her rescue of the lion who, like the birds, is entangled in a net. Unfortunately for themselves, the birds are neither martyrs nor heroes.

The narrative, it may even be argued, is more concerned with the eternal fate of the typical individual soul than with the salvation or damnation of an extended group or the human race. In the *Moralitas* (stanzas 41 and 42) the ripening of the fowler’s crop is interpreted with some subtlety as the series of stages by which the soul permits the growth within itself of sensuality, which in turn becomes the instrument through which Satan establishes his complete domination; “*La sottise, l’erreur, le péché, la lésine, / Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps.*” [Folly, error, sin, stinginess, engage our minds and torment our bodies.] (Labarthe 1946: 11). The actions of the birds run parallel; initially they are kept safe by the hedge, where they are addressed by the swallow, whose words they foolishly mock or attempt to rebut. Later the chaff tempts them into the open field where the fowler has laid the nets which he has manufactured from the fruits of his harvest. They are trapped and killed. By this interpretation the drama is internal, centred on developments in a single soul, although admittedly one that must be taken to typify the majority. Henryson’s approach is still pessimistic, but not perhaps quite to the same degree as before.

These features go at least a little way to reconcile the gory fate of the birds with the image of a benevolent Creator set out in the prologue.

The work of Satan, who wearies not, is set out with meticulous realism of detail in the harvest stanza of the narrative. The devil, it will be noted, also has his Dam:

The lynt ryipit, the carll pullit the lyne,  
Rippillit the bollis, and in beitis set,  
It steipit in the burne, and dryit syne,  
And with ane bittill knokkit it and bet,

Syne swingillit it weill, and hekillit in the flet;  
 His wyfe it span, and twynit it into threid,  
 Off quhilk the fowlar nettis maid in deid. (30: 1825–31)

This harvest stanza stands to the earlier in a balance which also involves a contrast. The season is presented, first in the 10th, secondly in the 30th stanza. 10 completes the perfection of the decad; appropriately therefore the 10th stanza celebrates the perfection of the year in harvest. The effect is slightly, but I think deliberately, qualified by the fact that the portrayal is in terms of pagan divinities, Ceres, Bacchus, and Amalthea. In stanza 30 by contrast the harvest is presented as the source of destruction. 30, like 10, marks the completion of a decad, but this may not be its main significance. I shall return to the point a little later.

Harvest and winter now constitute a single image. The realistic detail with which the harvesting operations were described is continued. The fowler clears a space for his nets in the snow and scatters chaff. When the starving birds flock to the worthless food, he catches them by drawing his nets, after which he bludgeons them to death. The narrator's sympathy is shown by the unexpected but powerful "heart-sore" with which he begins his response:

Allace, it wes grit hart sair for to se  
 That bludie bowcheour beit thay birdis down,  
 And for till heir, quhen thay wist weill to de,  
 Thair cairfull sang and lamentatioun.  
 Sum with ane staf he straik to eirth on swoun,  
 Off sum the heid, off sum he brak the crag,  
 Sum half on lyfe he stoppit in his bag. (37: 1874–80)

This realism underpins the subsequent allegorical exposition, which opens with the same "Allace", but concerns itself with the moment of death as part of the general human condition. The fowler sees the birds as food for himself or others; the culinary image is extended to the *Moralitas*. There the body becomes food for worms, the devil devours the soul, and the chaff, the temporal goods regarded as feeding body and soul, is revealed in all its worthlessness. The soul will be taken from the net and put into Lucifer's game-bag; afterwards it will be hung in hell to make it ready for the pot:

Allace, quhat cair, quhat weiping is and wo,  
 Quhen saull and bodie partit ar in twane!  
 The bodie to the wormis keitching go,

The saull to fyre, to euerlastand pane.  
 Quhat help is than this calf, thir gudis vane,  
 Quhen thow art put in Luceferis bag,  
 And brocht to hell, and hangit be the crag? (45: 1930–36)

The repetition with inversion of the final “crag” / “bag” rhyme from stanza 37 is particularly effective.

The swallow as preacher always stands apart. She utters her final warning perched on a little branch from which, as the trap is sprung, she flies up into a tree – perhaps the hawthorn from which her first two sermons were preached. Unlike Wisdom in *Proverbs* who says “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (1: 26), she laments the fate of the other birds before she flies away.

The original identification of the swallow with wisdom and foresight may have resulted from the bird’s migratory habits, her disappearance during the hardest months of the year (for differing views, Fox ed. 1981: 275–76; Hill 1987: 30–31). The status of the lark may follow the apparent neglect of responsibility shown by the bird while singing, poised high in the air.<sup>5</sup>

The structure of the poem may be seen under two complementary aspects. Without the Moralitas, it resembles an arch formed with 18 (9×2) stanzas on either side. The median pair, stanzas 19 and 20, with the quotation from the *Disticha Catonis*, forms the keystone. The first 18 stanzas establish a general world-picture, and the place within it occupied by the birds. In stanzas 19 and 20 the swallow applies to the birds the doctrines set out in the opening stanzas. The final 18 stanzas show the failure of the birds to grasp the message and the consequences of that failure. The structure is thus (9×2)+2+(9×2). The first group of 9 stanzas begins with the high prudence of God, the second (stanza 10) with the general description of harvest, the third (stanza 21) with the stream of inappropriate proverbs by which the lark casts doubt on the swallow’s call to action, the fourth (stanza 30) with the account of the fowler’s harvest labours. The Moralitas provides a fifth group of 9 stanzas, thus further emphasizing the importance of the number 5, as well as that of 9.

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5. Cf., e.g., Autolycus’ song in Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*, IV. 2:

The lark, that tirra lirra chants  
 With, heigh! with, heigh!, the thrush and the jay,  
 Are summer songs for me and my aunts,  
 While we lie tumbling in the hay.

9 is generally associated with the structure and government of the universe. The 9 spheres of the planets, the fixed stars, and the *primum mobile* make up the heavens. In the concluding episode of Plato's *Republic*, the myth of Er the Pamphylian, the 9-fold Spindle of Necessity, which is also the frame of the universe, is used to spin the destinies of human beings (Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: [617d] 840–41). According to the *Somnium Scipionis* (with its 9 chapters),

The whole universe is composed of nine circles, or rather spheres. The outermost of these is the celestial sphere, embracing all the rest, itself the supreme god, confining and containing all the other spheres. (Stahl tr. 1925: [1.17.2] 155)

In the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, the deity governs creation through the mediation of the 9 orders of angels (*Oxford Dictionary Christian Church*, s.v. “Dionysius (6), the Pseudo-Areopagite”). The 9 circles of hell form the dark side of the picture.

From the slightly differing point of view already suggested, the overall structure may be seen as a representation of the created universe. The 13 stanzas of the prologue correspond to the spheres from the *primum mobile* to the surface of earth. The subsequent 25 narrative stanzas represent life on earth, subject to sin, and governed by time (the 4 seasons), and the 5 senses. The 9 stanzas of the *Moralitas* represent one possible eternal destiny, the 9 circles of hell. There is also a subliminal reference to the 9 orders of angels. The climax comes when the birds are trapped in stanza 36, 23rd of the narrative. The significance of 23, “vengeance on sinners”, has already been indicated (above, 29). The birds netted in the 23rd stanza correspond to the 23000 idolaters slaughtered by the sons of Levi.

The first direct reference to Satan (Lucifer), the antagonist of Christ since before the world, comes in stanza 40, 2nd of the *Moralitas*. The association of 40 with the temptation in the wilderness has already been mentioned; it is worth noting in addition that the number 2 is often associated with division, discord; the dyad “represents ‘the evil principle of the unlimited.’ Since it broke away from unity, the dyad was by some authors accused of rebellion; sometimes it even came close to being dualistically opposed to the One” (Cornford 1923: 2; cited in Fowler 1964: 5). This matches with some precision the terms applied to the fallen archangel:

This carll and bond, of gentrice spoliante,  
Sawand this calf, thir small birdis to sla,

It is the feind, quhilk fra the angelike state  
 Exylit is, as fals apostata,  
 Quhilk day and nycht weryis not for to ga,  
 Sawand poyssoun and mony wickit thoct  
 In mannis saull, quhilk Christ full deir hes bocht. (40: 1895–1901)

Before his rebellion, Satan, as archangel, formed part of the aristocracy of heaven. He lost his *gentrice*, “the character or behaviour natural to one of gentle birth or rank” (*DOST*, s.v.), when he apostatized, broke away from God, the One. He cannot now hunt like a gentleman; instead he continues his attempt to nullify Christ’s sacrifice by action appropriate to a much lower social level, that of a serf, or bondman. He sows poison in the field of the human soul. The subsequent harvest allows him to manufacture the nets of sin; the chaff, the worthless by-product of the process, is the temptation which entangles the soul, and so provides the fowler and his family with an unsavoury meal.

Although sin and its consequences dominates the *Moralitas*, there are again some less negative features. The Swallow is explicitly identified with the Preacher, by whose agency it becomes possible for the human being to avoid the trap set by the chaff and nets. The metaphorical significance is made clear. It is possible to take thought for one’s latter end. The poem concludes with a reinstatement of the harmonious number 4 as constituting the objects of prayer; the final word is not Satan, but the unfallen angels:

Pray we thairfoir quhill we ar in this lyfe  
 For four thingis: the first, fra sin remufe;  
 The secund is to seis all weir and stryfe;  
 The thrid is perfite cheritie and lufe;  
 The feird thing is, and maist for our behufe,  
 That is, in blis with angellis to be fallow.  
 And thus endis the preiching of the swallow. (47: 1944–50)

Macrobius makes Eusebius, one of the disputants in his *Saturnalia*, say of the poet Virgil:

following no other leader than nature herself, mother of all things, he fashioned this [i.e., the *Aeneid*] as a concord of discords, as in music. Indeed, if you diligently examine the universe itself, you will find a great similarity between the divine work on the one hand, and, on the other, the poetic ... Forgive me, and don’t call me extravagant because I have compared Virgil to the order of the universe. (Willis 1970b: [5.1., 18–20] 243)

His opponent, Euengelus, smiles at the comparison of a poorly educated Venetian rustic, as he styles Virgil, to the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*. The point is immediately challenged by a third speaker, Eustathius, who cites, among other things, Virgil's copious knowledge of philosophy and astronomy. Macrobius nowhere positively states that Virgil made use of the techniques of numerical composition. Notably however the language which he uses is Platonic with its references to musical and mathematical ratios as the building blocks of the universe. The concept of a poem which would represent the philosophic and moral order of the universe by a structure of numbers and ratios is at least subliminally present. Later poets, notably the sixth-century St. Columba in his *Altus Prosator* (Raby ed. 1959: 59–68; MacQueen, J. 1985: 51–55), still more Dante in his *Divina Commedia*, brought the concept to full realization. *The Preaching of the Swallow* belongs to the same tradition.



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## Chapter Seven

### Prudence, Pity and Piety: *The Lion and the Mouse*

Most sixteenth-century and modern editors have obscured the fact, already briefly mentioned (above, 13), that the 43 stanzas of *The Lion and the Mouse* form a dream-vision – a poem, that is to say, with formal characteristics resembling those found in Chaucer's *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls*, or in *The Kingis Quair* of James I of Scotland. In European literature from the later thirteenth to the early sixteenth century this was almost the predominant literary kind. The subject was often some aspect of courtly love, but *The House of Fame*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and the anonymous *Pearl* show that in England at least this was not a prerequisite. The opening verses generally set out a dilemma of some kind, the solution to which is indicated when the narrator falls asleep and receives guidance in a dream.

*The Lion and the Mouse* shares many features with the genre. It is written in the first person. The main action, which involves the development of a philosophic theme with some immediate political application, takes place in the course of a dream. Unusually, in this case the development occurs in a fable with Moralitas told to the dreamer by a dream personage, the poet Aesop. The main thematic content is remarkably similar to that found in the medieval Debate of the Four Daughters of God and the trial scene in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, with a particular subordinate application to Henryson's Scotland. The place where the narrator falls asleep stands in a symbolic relationship to the events and discussion in the dream.

The scene is set and the effect prepared in the 4 introductory stanzas. The narrator wakes on a June morning and goes walking in a paradisaical forest. He experiences what is in effect a complete synaesthesia of bodily pleasure:

Sweit wes the smell off flouris quhyte and reid,  
The noyes off birdis richt delitious,  
The bewis braid blomit abone my heid,  
The ground growand with gresis gratious;  
Off all plesance that place wes plenteous,

With sweit odouris and birdis harmony;  
The morning myld; my mirth wes mair for thy. (2: 1328–34)

The 5 senses intertwine, an effect heightened by the intertwining of the heavy alliteration. Scent, colour, and sound predominate, but touch is present in “The morning myld”, and taste is at least implied in “delitious”. The senses however are often deceitful, and the reader will recollect that 2, the number of the stanza, is usually associated with doubleness, deceit.

When the heat of the day increases, the narrator composes himself to sleep under a hawthorn tree, like that from which the swallow speaks in *The Preaching of the Swallow*. There is a sense of deliberation, even expectancy, about his action. He crosses himself, thus ensuring that any dream is likely to be heavenly, rather than a mere phantasm. The landscape of the dream, as of the fable which forms part of it, is still the forest.

In most dream-allegories a guide is provided for the perplexed dreamer. In *The House of Fame* it is the Eagle, who carries him from earth to the actual House of Fame; in *The Parliament of Fowls* it is Africanus, about whom the dreamer had been reading before he fell asleep. In *The Kingis Quair* it is, first, the supernatural light and the accompanying explanatory voice which brings him to the celestial court of Venus, afterwards, Gude Hope, who leads him to the palace of Minerva in “the contree dyvine” (Norton-Smith ed. 1971: 38, l.1055),<sup>1</sup> the Empyrean beyond the spheres of the created universe. In each instance the relationship between guide and problem is given reasonably direct expression. Henryson works more indirectly. He includes a memorable guide in the person of Aesop, but waits for his final words, spoken in the *Moralitas*, to identify the problem, which nevertheless is implicit in the earlier narrative and its setting.

The narrator begins by putting all sleep and sloth aside (1: 1326), yet when he has gone, specifically without a guide, to the paradisaical forest, he composes himself to sleep, with full Christian preliminaries. The chief difference now is the setting, the actual forest. As the *Moralitas* shows, its nature is part of the problem, whether in terms of waking or sleeping experience. It stands in close relation to the *selva oscura* in which Dante begins the action of his *Divina Commedia*, and

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1. James clearly indicates that the palace of Minerva is *above* the firmament; cf. MacQueen 1988: 59.

which Sayers described as “the image of Sin or Error” (Sayers tr. 1949: 75). The wood is less paradisaical than at first appeared:

The fair forest with leuis, lowne and le,  
 With foulis sang and flouris ferlie sweet,  
 Is bot the warld and his prosperitie,  
 As fals plesance, myngit with cair repleit.  
 Richt as the rois with froist and wynter weit  
 Faidis, swa dois the warld, and thame desauis  
 Quhilk in thair lustis maist confidence hauis. (38: 1580–86)

The mutability of the seasons, the image which underlies the stanza, dominates *The Preaching of the Swallow*, and indicates some thematic continuity between the two poems. Like the birds, the lion and the mouse show a lack of foresight, of prudence, in giving themselves over to the immediate pleasures of the world. This almost leads to disaster, which both escape by the exercise of a virtue outside the range encompassed by *The Preaching of the Swallow*, pity or piety – both senses are included in *pietie*, the word used by Henryson.

Aesop appears at the very end of stanza 4, is fully described in stanzas 5 and 6, and reveals his name at the end of stanza 8. As already noted, he is not the traditional deformed slave exemplified by the woodcut which serves as frontispiece to the Bassandyne print. He is “the fairest man that euer befor I saw” (4: 1348). In dress and appearance he bears all the marks of scholarship and academic distinction. He claims to be a Roman of gentle blood and to have received training in law at Rome. He is now a citizen of heaven, and as such has clearly come in response to the sign of the cross made by the narrator as preparation for his falling asleep.

It is as poet, poet laureate, not as lawyer or heavenly citizen, that he is greeted by the dreamer: “O maister Esope, poet lawriate, / God wait ye ar full deir welcum to me!” (9: 1377–78). A poet laureate, if the term is used precisely, is a poet whose distinction has received official recognition from a university, originally in the form of a laurel crown. The award thus granted was regarded as equivalent to a master’s degree; Henryson appears to think of it as a mastership at the higher level, subsequent to graduation in arts, and more usually called the doctorate. His Aesop wears the *pileus*, the “bonat round, and off the auld fassoun” (5: 1353), and the scarlet hood appropriate to the degree. In appearance he resembles Mercury in *The Testament of Cresseid*, the planetary divinity of eloquence and spokesman of the gods, also presented as poet laureate: “His hude was reid, heklit atouir

his croun, / Lyke to ane poeit of the auld fassoun” (*Testament of Cresseid*, 35: 244–45). The phrase “of(f) the auld fassoun”, common to both descriptions, carries the implication that the laureation of poets, together with the appropriate garments, had their origin in classical antiquity. In imperial Rome a poetic contest had been held every five years on the Capitoline Hill, the winner of which, it was erroneously believed, had received a laurel crown. It was believed, also erroneously, that the last classical poet thus laureated had been Statius (c.45–96 AD), whom Dante at least regarded as a convert to Christianity and to whom he gave some prominence in the *Purgatorio* (Wilkinson 1961: 24).<sup>2</sup>

The best-known laureate of the Middle Ages was the Italian poet Petrarch, who was crowned on 8 April 1341, appropriately in the audience hall of the Senatorial Palace on the Capitoline. He wore a robe of honour given to him by King Robert of Naples (1309–43), the same Robert whose boyish dullness had been transformed by the reading of Aesop (above, 14).

Before Henryson’s time the phrase “poet laureate” had become familiar in England and Scotland. Chaucer calls Petrarch “Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete” (*Prologue to The Clerk’s Tale*, 31). James I refers to

Gowere and Chaucere, that on the steppis satt  
Of rethorike quhill thai were lyvand here,  
Superlatyue as poetis laureate. (*The Kingis Quair*, 197: 1374–46)

More interestingly, at least from the point of view of the present chapter, Lydgate has

the poete laureate,  
Callid Isopus dyd hym occupy  
Whylom in Rome. (MacCracken ed. 1911, 1934: 2: 8–10)

Denton Fox commented that Henryson used the word “loosely for ‘distinguished’, ‘pre-eminent’” (Fox ed. 1981: 266). The remark may be true in the second example quoted; Chaucer probably realized the full significance. Whether or not it was grasped by Lydgate, it is difficult to say; his lines clearly stand in some fairly close relationship to Henryson’s usage. It may be because he thought of Aesop as a poet

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2. For Statius see Sayers tr. 1955: 22: 61–93.

who had won the laurel crown that he makes him an inhabitant of Rome. Henryson certainly was well aware of the full context. Costume indicates that his Aesop has won the academic right to be regarded as a great poet. It may be that Lydgate and Henryson share a common source, as yet unidentified.

With the possible exception of the *Prologue* (9: 58), where Fox adopts the reading “and in facound purpurate” without discussing the main alternative, “as Poete Lawriate” (Fox ed. 1981: 193; above, 34n), *The Preaching of the Swallow* is the only other poem in which Henryson so describes Aesop:

Lo, worthie folk, Esope, that nobill clerk,  
 Ane poet worthie to be lawreate,  
 Quhen that he waikit from mair autentic werk,  
 With vther ma, this foirsaid fabill wrate,  
 Quhilk at this tyme may weill be applicate  
 To gude morall edificatioun,  
 Haifand ane sentence according to ressoun. (*Preaching of the Swallow*, 39: 1888–91)

This does not imply that Aesop had merely deserved laureation, rather that he had won the honour by composing poetry of appropriate literary excellence. Henryson allows that the fable lacks authenticity, in the Macrobian and Boccaccian sense that it unrealistically allows animals to possess the power of speech, but argues that the *sentence*, the allegorical meaning, renders the form worthy of attention. Much the same point is made in *The Lion and the Mouse*, when the dreamer directly addresses Aesop:

Ar ye not he that all thir fabillis wrate,  
 Quhilk in effect, suppois thay fenyeit be,  
 Ar full of prudence and moralitie? (9: 1379–81)

In Henryson’s vocabulary of literary theory, the term *fenyeit*, “imaginary”, is the inverse of *autentik*, “based on fact”, but does not imply any absolute condemnation. The fables are still full of prudence and morality. The word “prudence”, incidentally, contains an obvious reference to *The Preaching of the Swallow*.

Henryson is writing in the tradition of Socrates, Macrobius and Boccaccio, accepting that Aesop as a writer was “grave and venerable” (above, 17). He clearly intends the presentation to heighten the reader’s expectations. To suggest, as he does in the quotation from *The Preaching of the Swallow*, that Aesop had composed poems in

other modes may involve a concealed reference to his own poetry not written in the Aesopic format, *The Tale of Orpheus* and *The Testament of Cresseid*. Henryson often seems to identify himself with Aesop. As in Boccaccio, the unusual way in which Aesop is portrayed may be part of the attempt to lend dignity to the poems. The laureate Aesop was a Roman citizen trained as a lawyer whose works and acts had eventually earned him a place in heaven.

Henryson plays with the conventions of the literary form which he uses. It is part of the dream-ambience that a poet-laureate in ceremonial dress should come through the forest at a sturdy pace and sit down to begin a conversation, but the event is still recognized by the dreamer as extraordinary, even initially frightening. His anxieties are partly offset by the visitor's pious greeting, "God speid, my sone" (7: 1363; contrast above, 106). He reacts courteously but cautiously, using the polite second-person-plural form of address. He does not wish to offend his visitor, whom he recognizes as a Master, a Doctor, though he does not know in what university or faculty, but he has a positive need to discover his background and status. "Demand", the verb which he uses, and which is made emphatic by its position at the beginning of a line, is stronger than "ask"; the first sense given in *OED* is "to ask for (a thing) with legal right or authority; to claim as something one is legally or rightfully entitled to". The dreamer indeed is afraid that his peremptory question will cause offence:

Displeis yow not, my gude maister, thocht I  
Demand your birth, your facultye, and name;  
Quhy ye come heir, or quhair ye dwell at hame. (7: 1367–69)

Harvey Wood appreciated the vernacular impact – "Anyone who has travelled by train in the Kingdom of Fife, in the same compartment as one of the natives of that kingdom, knows that last line by experience" (Wood 1958: xviii) – but fails to bring out the full significance.

The answer relieves the dreamer, partly because it establishes his visitor as a gentleman (palpably not a slave), trained in civil law at Rome, but chiefly because he claims that he is now one of the blessed – "And now my winning is in heuin for ay" (8: 1374). He is thus, in Shakespeare's phrase, a spirit of health rather than a goblin damned. The fact that the dreamer is in effect addressing a ghost does not seem to surprise him. That the visitor is also a civil lawyer gives him authority to speak, as he later does, on matters of state. The number of the stanza in which he reveals his profession and blessed estate is

peculiarly appropriate. As the first cube, 8 ( $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ) represents the ogdoadic state of the redeemed, represented by the cubical New Jerusalem of *Revelation* 21: 16. It is also the Pythagorean number of Justice, and so pre-eminently suitable for a lawyer.

None the less, it is primarily as poet-laureate that he is welcomed, just as Dante welcomed the appearance of his guide, the supreme poet, Virgil. As is natural in the circumstances, the dreamer requests a tale, which in the context of the dream-vision will provide the rationale of the poem.

Aesop's initial refusal has a biblical basis, with another side-reference to *The Preaching of the Swallow*. The word "preiching" in stanza 10 recalls the figure of Solomon, the Preacher, and suggests, half-ironically, that preaching ought to be a more effective moral instrument than story-telling. The failure of the swallow to save the other birds by her preaching has already shown the inadequacy of that idea. The reasons are set out in the next stanza, 11, a number associated with sin and transgression:

Now in this world me think richt few or nane  
 To Goddis word that hes deuotioun;  
 The eir is deif, the hart is hard as stane;  
 Now oppin sin without correctioun,  
 The e inclynand to the eirth ay doun.  
 Sa roustit is the world with canker blak  
 That now my taillis may lytill succour mak. (11: 1391–97)

This highlights Aesop's function as celestial guide or messenger. He refers to the immediate present of the poem, at the same time echoing a New Testament verse (*John* 12: 40), referring to the failure of the Jews to acknowledge the miracles by which Christ had revealed his gospel, his good news: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Ears or hearing are not mentioned, but both are present in the source of the passage, the words of the Lord when Isaiah's lips have been cleaned by a live coal from the altar, and he has volunteered to become God's messenger – "here am I; send me". The response is harshly ironic:

Go and tell this people, Hear and fail to understand; and see a vision and fail to comprehend. Blind the heart of this people, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes lest by chance they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and



understand with their heart, and be converted, and that I should heal them. ([*Vulgate*] *Isaiah* 6: 9–10)

The passage is often quoted or paraphrased in the New Testament, most significantly with reference to the first parable recorded in the three synoptic Gospels (*Matthew* 13: 3–23; *Mark* 4: 3–20; *Luke* 8: 5–15), that of the Sower, where Christ uses it to comment on the general failure to grasp the spiritual and moral meaning of the story. The Sower, perhaps because it is the first, is also the only parable to be accompanied by a full allegorical commentary. In *Acts* 28: 25–28, Paul uses the same text to condemn the chief Jews in Rome when they had failed to accept his message. The context is always the same. Isaiah, Christ, and Paul are messengers whose word from God has been rejected by the recipients. The stanza in Henryson modestly but effectively sets the poet laureate beside the great biblical figures, and gives him a similar mission. It is only because the dreamer is eager to learn, wishes as a consequence of listening to do some good, if only to himself, that Aesop agrees to continue.

As has already been indicated (above, 138), the Sower and the closely associated parable of the Tares are elements in the metaphorical structure of *The Preaching of the Swallow*. The penultimate line of the stanza develops and modifies this association. Two images are combined. The world is suffering from canker, primarily a disease of plants, sometimes also called rust. The cankered plants correspond to the tares. The growth of sin makes the world like a field of such plants. Rust however is primarily associated with metals, in particular iron. The word “roustit” thus introduces the biblical and classical figure of the age of iron into which the original golden age has finally degenerated. The dreamer belongs to the Iron Age.

This forms an apt introduction to the actual fable. In terms of biblical and classical metaphor alike, human blindness and deafness prevent the exercise of Prudentia, the human faculty by which, in terms of the present, we are to a limited extent enabled to participate in divine Providence. The lion should have known better than to sleep by day in the forest, “beikand his breist and belly at the sun” (13: 1407). The phrase recalls the fox’s reckless behaviour in the second branch of *The Talking of the Tod*, immediately before he is shot by the keeper of the kid, transformed by the fox into salmon and devoured:

Vnder ane busk, quhair that the sone can beit,  
 To beik his breist and bellie he thocht best;  
 And rekleslie he said, quhair he did rest,  
 Straikand his wame againis the sonis heit,  
 “Vpon this wame set wer ane bolt full meit.” (52: 256–60)

The lion’s blindness does not produce so immediately drastic an effect, but it provokes the act of lese-majesty committed by the mice, and in a longer perspective indicates the carelessness which will allow him to be trapped in the hunters’ nets, corresponding to the fowler’s nets of sin in *The Preaching of the Swallow*.

The mice should have foreseen the consequences of dancing over the sleeping lion’s body. Awareness of culpability is shown by the language which the captive “maister mous” employs to defend herself. In addressing her, the lion, as superior, uses the familiar, even contemptuous, second-person-singular pronoun, “thow”. Both by what she says, and by the way in which she says it, the mouse acknowledges her social inferiority as well as her guilt; she uses the respectful second-person-plural, “ye”:

“Knew thow not weill I wes baith lord and king  
 Off beistis all?” “Yes”, quod the mous, “I knaw,  
 Bot I misknew, because ye lay so law.” (16: 1430–32)

“Knew” in the present tense has a perfective sense, implying that the mouse had always known the king’s status, although the reality has only now come home to her. The preterite “misknew” carries the implication that on one past occasion she had made an error of judgement. In the *Moralitas* the word is again used, but this time of the *commountie*, the “common people”, and in the present tense, implying habitual action, with the additional emphasis of final position in the stanza:

Thir lytill myis ar bot the commountie,  
 Wantoun, vnwyse, without correctioun;  
 Thair lordis and princis quhen that thay se  
 Of iustice mak nane executioun,  
 Thay dreid na thing to mak rebellioun  
 And disobey, for quhy thay stand nane aw –  
 That garris thame thair soueranis misknaw. (39: 1587–93)

The lion’s immediate response shows his blindness, at once regal and legal. He claims that even if he had been killed, and his skin

afterwards stuffed with straw, the mice should have given his image the homage legally due to the royal person. The mouse should now suffer the penalty due to a traitor, and be dragged (behind horses!) by the feet to the gallows, there to be hanged. This happened, for instance, to the good Sir David Brechin, as well as other guiltier conspirators against Robert Bruce, after the Black Parliament of 1320 (Barrow 1976: 430).

The lion however is not totally deaf. He is prepared to listen to the mouse's well-turned plea, which eventually opens his eyes to reason.

The total number of stanzas in the poem is 43, a prime; the middle stanza is the 22nd, with 22, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, representing some aspect of the totality of the divine utterance (above, 28). In this stanza the mouse claims that her trial should involve not merely the strict rule of law, *strictum jus* or *rigor juris*, but also equity, *aequitas*, "the application to particular circumstances of the standard of what seems naturally just or right, as contrasted with the application to those circumstances of a rule of law, which may not provide for such circumstances, or provide what seems unreasonable or unfair" (Walker ed. 1980: 424, s.v. "Equity"). She thus introduces the quality of mercy, which stands to the judge in the relationship of a colleague or assessor, "in Roman law, an experienced lawyer who sat beside the governor of a province or other magistrate to assist and advise in the administration of the law" (Walker ed. 1980: 86, s.v. "Assessor").<sup>3</sup> In terms of theme as well as arithmetic, the mouse's claim is central to the poem:

In euerie iuge mercy and reuth suld be  
 As assessouris and collateral;  
 Without mercie, iustice is crueltie,  
 As said is in the lawis spirituall.

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3. Paul C. Ferguson remarks of the ecclesiastical courts: "Judges could, of course, make use of legal experts and assessors to supplement their knowledge" (Ferguson [1997]: 176); cf. H.L. MacQueen "A statute of 1488 appointing justiciars also directed 'that our soverane lord send certane wise lordis and persouns of his consale ... to be assessouris and consalouris to thaim.' This may well reflect what had been normal practice in the past. For example, in 1349 several members of the king's council were with the justiciar of Scotia north of Forth when he held full court at the standing stones of Rayne in the Garioch. Again, in 1466 most of the royal council seems to have been in court at the Dumbarton tolbooth when Gilbert lord Kennedy and Robert lord Fleming litigated before the justiciars south of Forth." (MacQueen, H.L. 1993: 64).

Quhen rigour sittis in the tribunall,  
 The equitie off law quha may sustene?  
 Richt few or nane, but mercie gang betwene. (22: 1468–74)

Rigour stands opposed to the equity which is the proper object of law and which requires the infusion of mercy. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* puts the matter in the religious context which Henryson's stanza number also indicates:

Though justice be thy plea, consider this:  
 That in the course of justice none of us  
 Should see salvation. (IV. i. 195–97)

This central stanza calls to mind the paradox proposed in *Psalms* 85: 10 (*Vulgate* 84: 11): "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness (*Vulgate*, *iustitia*, "justice") and peace have kissed each other", a text which gave rise to the medieval Debate of the Four Daughters of God. The most powerful version is to be found in *Piers Plowman* (C-text, Pearsall ed. 1978: passus XX, 114–470), where it begins, as usually, immediately after the death of Christ on the cross, and continues through the Harrowing of Hell. The paradox is finally resolved when Christ leads from hell the patriarchs, prophets, and other people of the Old Testament, whom his merciful death has liberated from the guilt of sin. Truth's oath by Jesus is wholly appropriate:

"Trewes", quod Treuthe, "thow tellest vs soeth, by Iesus!  
 Cluppe we in couenaunt and vch of vs kusse othere!"  
 "And lat no peple", quod Pees, "parseyue that we chydde,  
 For impossible is no thyng to hym that is almyhty."  
 "Thowe saiste soeth", saide Rihtwisnesse, and reuerentlich here custe,  
 "Pees, and Pees here, *per secula seculorum*."  
*Misericordia et veritas obuiauerunt sibi; iusticia et pax osculate sunt.* (XX: 462–68)

(I have put inverted commas around l.467 to indicate that these words are spoken by Righteousness to accompany the liturgical Pax, the Kiss of Peace, which the four sisters exchange, and which in fact *is* one of them. The Pax was absent from the liturgy on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, but returned on Easter Day (*Oxford Dictionary Christian Church* s.v. "Kiss of Peace, also Pax"). Langland's usage obviously fits the occasion – the dreamer, Will, awakens from this vision to hear the ringing of the bells on Easter morning.) The equity demanded by the mouse is more than merely forensic; it is central to human salvation.

The exchanges between lion and mouse take place during a trial in which the mouse is charged before the king with treason, which she knows (15: 1433–35) to be a capital offence. She attributes her crime to negligence rather than malice or treachery, a defence which, had they been given the opportunity, might also have been offered by the birds in *The Preaching of the Swallow*, a defence too at which the swallow hints when she cries “O blind birdis, and full of negligence!” (25: 1790). The mouse is able to appeal for “grace and remissioun” (17: 1439), words which are recurrent in the fable and which, like “mercy” have a religious as well as a legal significance, which moves closer to the surface as the lion reaches his verdict:

Quhen this wes said, the lyoun his language  
 Paissit, and thocht according to ressoun,  
 And gart mercie his cruell ire asswage,  
 And to the mous grantit remissioun,  
 Oppinnit his pow, and scho on kneis fell down,  
 And baith hir handis vnto the heuin vpheid,  
 Cryand, “Almichty God mot yow foryeild!” (27: 1503–9)

Apart from Aesop’s greeting to the dreamer, the significance of which has already been indicated, the last line contains the sole reference to God in the course of the poem. The effect is like that in *The Paddock and the Mouse* where the mouse *in extremis* cries for a priest – it makes specific a dimension which in the rest of the poem is only implicit. The allegorical subject is remission of sin by way of divine mercy or grace, the action of which is not arbitrary, but depends on a cooperation between human prudence and divine providence – “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.” The lion is persuaded to think “according to ressoun”, which includes not only an understanding of the relation between justice and mercy, but also the proper appreciation of such incongruities as the relative strength of mouse and lion (23–24) and the dietary efficacy of mouse flesh for a leonine constitution (25). The sensory experience of the lion, actual as well as potential, predominates in stanza 25, the square of the number at once of the 5 senses and of justice.

The mouse encourages the lion to exercise his powers of foresight:

For oft is sene, ane man off small stature  
 Reskewit hes ane lord of hie honour,  
 Keipit that wes, in poynt to be ouerthrawin  
 Throw misfortoun: sic cace may be your awin. (26: 1499–1502)

The mouse is in her way a prophet – although, one might say, given such a lion, his future is easy to foretell. Nevertheless, in releasing the mouse, the lion does display a modicum of the prudence earlier preached by the swallow.

The importance of stanza 26, completing the mouse's speech in her own defence, is marked by a point of Golden Section in terms of the sequence 1, 8, 9, 17, 26, 43 ... . Significantly, the rhyme-scheme in the earlier point, stanza 17, emphasises the key-words "neglygence" and "remissioun".

27, the number of the stanza in which the lion changes his mind and the mouse asks God to reward him, is at once the final number and the sum of all the other numbers in the Lambda formula. It frequently represents the entire series, and so the individual soul as well as the Soul of the World. "The soul is a number moving itself" (Stahl tr. 1952: [I.vi.5] 100).<sup>4</sup> The fate of the lion's own soul, as well as that of the mouse, is determined by his change of heart in stanza 27.

The mouse's encomium of mercy comes in the central stanza 22, numerically and thematically related to 11, the number of the stanza in which Aesop complains of the blindness and deafness of the times. The latter presents the deadening power of sin. 22 stands in almost complete opposition. The Old Testament, as the Jewish priest and historian Josephus (c.37–c.105) had stated (Thackeray ed. 1926–65: 1: 178–81; cf. MacQueen, J. 1985: 9–11), contains 22 books, corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Jerome (c.340–420), translator of the *Vulgate*, added the comment: "There is a total of 22 books, by which, as if beginning with letters, the as yet tender and unweaned infancy of the just man is made wise in the doctrine of God" ("Prologus Galeatus". *Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis*: v). 22, in other words, represents the Old Testament, and marks the middle stage of a progress from stanza 11 to full New Testament enlightenment. A text from the Old Testament *Micah* will illustrate: "He hath shewed thee O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (6: 8). The king of beasts is persuaded to become merciful, and as a consequence the cruel act of justice which seemed bound to follow his prideful language is *paissit*, "moderated", into an act, the consequences of which for himself he does not yet

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4. Based on Plutarch, *De Animae Procreatione in Timaeo* 1012D (Cherniss ed. 1976: 13: 162–63).

fully recognise. Portia's words are again appropriate, although they go further than anything Henryson at this stage is prepared to allow.

Mercy

                  is twice blest,  
 It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
 "Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes  
 The throned monarch better than his crown.  
 His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,  
 The attribute to awe and majesty,  
 Wherein doth sit the fear and dread of kings;  
 But mercy is above this sceptred sway,  
 It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,  
 It is an attribute to God himself,  
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
 When mercy seasons justice. (IV. i. 183–94)

During the Middle Ages, as we have seen, *Psalm* 85: 10 was interpreted in terms of the redemptive sacrifice on the cross to reconcile divine justice with mercy. With this the number 33 was particularly associated. In *The Lion and the Mouse* stanza 33, and the two which follow (the three corresponding to Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Day), deal with the liberation of the lion from the nets of the hunters, a liberation accomplished with marvellous ease and rapidity:

And suddanlie it come in till hir mynd  
 That it suld be the lyoun did hir grace,  
 And said, "Now wer I fals and richt vnkynd  
 Bot gif I quit sumpart thy gentilnes  
 Thow did to me", and on with that scho gais  
 To hir fellowis, and on thame fast can cry,  
 "Cum help, cum help!" and thay come all in hy.

"Lo", quod the mous, "this is the samin lyoun  
 That grantit grace to me quhen I wes tane,  
 And now is fast heir bundin in presoun,  
 Brekand his hart with sair murning and mane;  
 Bot we him help, off souccour wait he nane.  
 Cum help to quyte ane gude turne for ane vther;  
 Go, lous him sone", and thay said, "Ye, gude brother."

Thay tuke na knyfe, their teeth wes scharpe anewch;  
 To se that sicht, forsuith, it wes grit wounder –  
 How that thay ran amang the rapis teuch,

Befoire, behind, sum yeid abone, sum vnder,  
 And schuir the rapis off the mastis in schunder;  
 Syne bad him ryse, and he start vp anone,  
 And thankit thame; syne on his way is gone. (33–5: 1545–65)

Given the difference of style and genre, I do not think it extravagant to compare the effortless Harrowing of Hell described in *Piers Plowman*:

“What lord artow?” quod Lucifer. A voys aloude saide:  
 “The lord of myhte and of mayne, that made alle thynges.  
 Dukes of this demme place, anon undoth this yates  
 That Christ may come in, the kynges sone of heuens.”  
 And with that breth helle braek with alle Belialles barres;  
 For eny wey or warde, wyde open the yates.  
 Patriarkes and profetes, *populus in tenebris*,  
 Songen with seynt lohan, “*Ecce agnus dei!*”  
 Lucifer loke ne myhte, so liht him ablende;  
 And tho that oure lord louede forth with that liht flowen. (C-text, XX: 360–69)

This is not however to make a full identification of the mouse as a Christ figure. Before the formal Moralitas requested by the dreamer, Aesop spontaneously makes the more general moral comment (36: 1566–69) that the lion was released as a result of his *pietie*, “piety” as well as “pity.” The appropriate biblical text is the fifth Beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy” (*Matthew* 5: 7). The Christological overtones present in the number 33 make the point that the validity of the Beatitude depends on the redemptive sacrifice which permits the judgement of the individual soul to be equitable rather than retributive. The mouse is an agent rather than a principal.

As Fox has noted (Fox ed. 1981: 271), the lamentation of the captive lion (31–32: 1531–41) recalls “The Complaint of Cresseid” after her entry to the spital as a leper (*The Testament of Cresseid*, 59–65: 407–69). In the first stanza and in the final line, Cresseid puts the total blame for her downfall on Fortune. The same suggestion is made in the Moralitas of *The Lion and the Mouse*, this time however accompanied by a more perceptive account of the full state of affairs. A lack of prudence, foresight, a blindness similar to what is found in *The Preaching of the Swallow* (the final line of the quotation echoes stanza 17: 1739 of that poem), leads Fortune’s apparent victim to his own downfall:

Quha wait how sone ane lord of grit renoun,  
 Rolland in wardlie lust and vane plesance,



May be ouerthrawn, destroyit, and put down  
 Throw fals Fortoun, quhilk off all variance  
 Is hail maistres, and leidar of the dance  
 Till iniust men, and blindis thame so soir  
 That thay na perrell can prouyde befoir? (41: 1601–7)

Blindness inhibits foresight. That of Cresseid is physical, the consequence of her disease, as well as moral; the lion's is entirely the latter, but he, as much as Cresseid, by his lack of foresight comes into the prison of sin. Under such circumstances the power of Fortune is malignant. But moral blindness may be cured. Cresseid's spiritual eyes are opened by the effect of her blind physical eyes on Troilus, although he fails to recognize her:

Than vpon him scho kest vp baith hir ene,  
 And with ane blenk it came into his thocht  
 That he sum time hir face befoir had sene,  
 Bot scho was in sic pleye he knew hir nocht,  
 Yit than hir luik into his mynd it brocht  
 The sweit visage and amorous blenking  
 Of fair Cresseid, sumtyme his awin darling. (70: 498–504)

Stanza 33 of *The Lion and the Mouse* echoes this stanza of *The Testament*, but in terms of hearing rather than of sight, thus returning to the passage from *Isaiah* already quoted. The mouse reacts to the lion's roars as Troilus did to Cresseid's glance: "suddanlie it come in till hir mynd / hat it suld be the lyoun did hir grace." (33: 1545–46). Divine grace impels the mouse to return the earlier gracious act of the lion. She summons her people and in an instant the lion is freed.

Stanza 28, the second perfect number, completes the lion's act of mercy, but indicates that it produces no immediate change in his way of life. His pride continues unabated. He persists with the actions which had previously resulted in a minor humiliation when he had fallen into an exhausted sleep. He still hunts and slays "baith tayme and wyld, as he wes wont, / And in the cuntrie maid ane grit deray." (28: 1512–13). As a consequence the local people combine to inflict on him the ultimate humiliation, to trap and kill him. The stanza, that is to say, completes the first part of the action in which the lion fails to learn to walk humbly with God, and initiates the second with its miracle of redemption.

The dream contains 39 stanzas, the first 8 introducing Aesop as lawyer and poet, the following 23 containing the fable, with the

Moralitas included in the final 8. The number 8 is associated with justice (see esp. above, 42) and 23 with the vengeance for sinners (above, 29) which the *pietie* of the lion enables him at least temporarily to avoid. The number of introductory stanzas, 4, sometimes also represents justice, but as the first number to contain two means, it is primarily harmonic.

The general allegory is supplemented by a particular which surfaces in the action from time to time. Dr R.G. Nicholson was first to suggest that the phrase “slew baith tayme and wyld” alluded to James III “energetically preying upon his tame (Lowland) and wild (Highland) subjects”, with reference to “such events as the forfeiture of the Boyds and the king’s acquisition of the earldom of Ross” (Nicholson 1974: 500, n.203; MacQueen, J. 1967: v). This suggestion Denton Fox subsequently dismissed in a rather facile way: “There seems no need to postulate any topical reference here, especially since James III was hardly a lion-like king” (Fox ed. 1981: 270). A lion who allows mice to run over him is himself, one might say, hardly lion-like. Fox moreover fails to take into consideration either the connotation of the phrase “tayme and wyld”, or the symbolic and heraldic force of the lion figure for Henryson and his contemporaries, or indeed any other possible references to the king in the course of the poem. Here, as sometimes elsewhere, he shows small awareness of the distinctive circumstances of social and political life in the fifteenth century. At least in the Lowlands, the distinction between tame and wild Scots was a commonplace. To illustrate, one may cite the fourteenth-century chronicler, John of Fordun, whose words his fifteenth-century successor, Walter Bower, abbot of Inchcolm in the Firth of Forth, repeated without alteration. They are easily paralleled from other sources:

The people who speak Scots occupy the coastal and lowland regions, while those who speak Gaelic live in the mountainous regions and the outer isles. The coastal people are docile [*domestica*, “tame”] and civilised, trustworthy, long-suffering and courteous, decent in their dress, polite and peaceable, devout in worship, but always ready to resist injuries threatened by their enemies. The island or highland people however are fierce [*ferina*, “wild”] and untameable, uncouth and unpleasant, much given to theft, fond of doing nothing, but their minds are quick to learn and cunning. They are strikingly handsome in appearance, but their clothing is unsightly. They are always hostile and savage not only towards the people and language of England, but also towards their fellow-Scots because of the difference in language. They are

however loyal and obedient to the king and the kingdom, and they are easily made to submit to the laws, if rule is exerted over them. (MacQueen, J. and W. eds 1993: [II., 9] 185)<sup>5</sup>

Notice the emphasis not only on the wildness of the Highlanders, but also on their loyalty to the king and submission to his laws when well administered – both points relevant to *The Lion and the Mouse*.

As is made clear in stanzas 69 and 77 of *The Talking of the Tod* (below, 230), the figure of the lion was in Scotland more or less automatically identified with the King of Scots. Stanzas 19 and 37 of the present poem identify him more specifically with James III. In the first, the lion makes absurd claims for the respect due to him:

I put the cace, I had been deid or slane,  
 And syne my skyn bene stoppit full of strae,  
 Thocht thow had found my figure lyand swa,  
 Because it bare the prent off my persoun,  
 Thow suld for feir on kneis haue fallin doun. (19: 1449–53)

In stanza 37, first of the *Moralitas*, Aesop interprets the lion in terms of different kinds of monarchy found in Europe, but rhyme and line-position make the emphasis fall primarily on emperor and king:

As I suppois, this mychtie gay lyoun  
 May signifie ane prince or empiour,  
 Ane potestate, or yit ane king with croun. (37: 1573–75)

Elsewhere (MacQueen, J. 1967: 152–53), I have suggested a reference to the Emperor Frederick III (1452–93). Dr Norman Macdougall however raises a different possibility: “From the start of his active rule in 1469, King James had displayed an alarming belief in the sanctity of his office, and it is not at all inconceivable that he thought in imperial terms” (Macdougall 1982: 97–98; cf. 273). In an act of 1469 the king claimed “ful jurisdictione and fre impire within his realm” (Macdougall 1982: 98). Included, as has already been noted (above, 10), was what certainly became for Henryson a matter of personal import – the right to create notaries public, hitherto an imperial or

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5. Cf. John Major, *A History of Greater Britain* (1521): “Those we call men of the Highland, but the others men of the Lowland. By foreigners the former are called Wild Scots, the latter householding Scots.” (Mackay ed. 1892: 49). Major says “by foreigners”, but his words obviously echo Fordun.

papal appointment. In the last silver coinage of James's reign the king is portrayed wearing, not the coronet of earlier issues, but the imperial crown. James obviously set great importance on the status which he claimed, an importance which foreshadows the later Stewart doctrine of the divine right of kings.

Fox does not mention another parallel between lion and king, the fact that both suffered imprisonment, the king after the affair of Lauder Bridge in 1482. His release from Edinburgh Castle came about largely through the efforts of the provost of Edinburgh, Patrick Baron, three bailies, the dean of guild, the treasurer, clerk, twelve councillors, and "the whole community" of the burgh, a group which the master mouse and her companions might well represent. In return for their services the king granted the town the right to hold its own sheriff courts. Dr Macdougall allows that the assistance of the mice is aptly paralleled by that of the burgesses (Macdougall 1982: 98).

The trapped lion regards the nets as a prison for a crowned head (*italics in the quotation are mine*):

In bandis strang heir man I ly, allace,  
Till I be slane; I se nane vther grace.

Thair is na wy that will my harmis wreik  
Nor creature do confort to *my crown*.  
Quha sall me bute? Quha sall my bandis breik?  
Quha sall me put fra *pane off this presoun*? (31–2: 1536–41)

The *Moralitas* is original to Henryson – it owes virtually nothing to the single couplet of the verse–*Romulus*:

*Tu qui summa potes, ne despice parua potentem, / Nam prodesse potest, si quis obesse nequit* [You whose power is supreme, don't despise him whose power is small, for he can help, if nobody gets in the way]

It is even further from the four lines of the Addition.

The *Moralitas* falls naturally into two parts. The first, stanzas 37–39, is straightforward exposition. The lion is an imperfect ruler, the forest is the world, the mice are the commons. The second, stanzas 40–43, is more oblique. Aesop addresses it, not initially to the king, but to "lordis", whom he urges to practice the virtue of prudence in case they too should become victims of Fortune at the hands of "thir rurall men, that stentit hes the net" (42: 1608). The word "king" appears, with some abruptness, only towards the end:

Mair till expound, as now, I lett allane,  
 Bot king and lord may weill wit quhat I mene:  
 Figure heirop oftymis hes bene sene. (42: 1612–14)

The words which follow could scarcely be clearer in their indication that the subject matter is topical and involves treasonable action on the part of the nobility (again italics mine):

Quhen this wes said, quod Esope, “My fair child,  
 Perswaid the kirkmen ythandly to pray  
 That tressoun *of this cuntrie* be exyld,  
 And iustice regne, *and lordis keip thair fay*  
*Vnto thair souerane lord baith nycht and day.*”  
 And with that word he vanist and I woke;  
 Syne throw the schaw my iourney hamewart tuke. (43: 1615–21)

In “this cuntrie” the accent surely falls on the first word, “this”. Aesop, or rather Henryson speaking through the mask, is talking about Scotland in his own time. He probably realised that the prayer recommended was unlikely to be offered or fulfilled.

*The Lion and the Mouse* is a companion piece and sequel to *The Preaching of the Swallow*. In both the construction is similar. The latter is not a dream-vision, but it incorporates many features of the genre, opening with a longish preliminary narrative, after which the narrator goes to a *locus amoenus*, dominated by a hawthorn tree, where, under the guidance of a swallow, he has a number of remarkable waking rather than sleeping experiences. *The Lion and the Mouse* begins in June, “in ane mornyng betuix mid day and nicht” (1: 1325); the June episode of *The Preaching of the Swallow* begins “betuix midday and morne” (23: 1780); in both the unusual phraseology indicates mid-morning. Although the mice have a more positive eventual role, their initial behaviour and the general interpretation offered brings them close in character to the little birds. In *The Preaching of the Swallow* no figure corresponds to the lion; the action is confined to the *commountie*. *The Lion and the Mouse* has the greater range of social reference; *The Preaching of the Swallow* has wider philosophic and theological implications. Together they combine moral content with a satirical but sympathetic overview of society as a whole in the late fifteenth century.

## **The Beast Epic**

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## Chapter Eight

### The Equivocation of the Fiend: *The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman*

With the exception of *The Wolf and the Wether*, the fables so far discussed have been based on Book I of the verse-*Romulus* (fables 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 18 and 19). Henryson's versions correspond in plot and occasional verbal reminiscence. No such correspondence exists for the tales now to be discussed.<sup>1</sup> Like *The Wolf and the Wether*, *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman* is probably based on Caxton's *Aesop* (Jacobs ed. 1889).<sup>2</sup> The tale however is not Aesopic, but belongs rather to the tradition of beast-epic, as do the others still to be discussed. These are affiliated to another of Caxton's publications, *The History of Reynard the Fox* (1481), and to the earlier French beast-epic, the various episodes ("branches") of which constitute the *Roman de Renart* (Roques ed. 1948–63; MacQueen, J. 1967: 208–21).

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1. In *De Equo et Leone*, fable 41 of the verse-*Romulus*, a horse, approached by a lion who purports to be her physician and enquires after her health, says she has a thorn in her hoof. When the lion stoops to examine it, she knocks him unconscious with a kick to the head. This resembles the fate of the wolf in branch 3 of *The Talking of the Tod* (below, 236). There is no evidence however that Henryson knew any more than Book 1 (the first twenty fables) of the verse-*Romulus*.

2. Other works might seem to provide a possible source for *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman* – the early-twelfth-century *Disciplina Clericalis* of Petrus Alphonsus, its thirteenth-century French translation, *le Castoiment d'un Père a son fils*, Steinhöwel's *Ásop* (1480), its French translation by Jules de Machault (1483) – but *prima facie* Caxton is likeliest. Two further indications clinch the matter. Only Henryson and Caxton use the word "shadow" for the bright reflection of the moon in the well. Both have the same exchange between wolf and fox as one descends into the well, the other rises. Denton Fox raises two objections, neither substantial. "Shadow," he says, "is Henryson's normal term for 'reflection' or 'reflected image'" (Fox ed. 1981: 306, 307). Henryson in fact only once elsewhere uses the word (*Testament of Cresseid* 50: 348), but even then in a slightly different sense, "reflected image" rather than "reflection of a bright object". The latter sense apparently remains unparalleled until Coleridge's archaising 'And on the bay the moonlight lay, / And the shadow of the moon' (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, VI, 65–66). Fox's subsequent erudite demonstration of the self-evident, that the exchange between wolf and fox has a proverbial basis, misses the point – not that a proverb is employed, but that it appears in the same place, in the same story, in works by two more or less contemporary authors, and not in other versions.



Caxton's book itself ultimately depends on this. In beast-epic the plots of individual episodes are usually more complicated than in Aesopic fable, and tend more towards the ribald; the central character is the wily and unscrupulous fox, whose butt, more often than not, is the stupid wolf, and who consistently flaunts the authority of the king of beasts, the lion. In one episode at least, the *Couronnement de Renart*, he succeeds in usurping the lion's authority.

In the earliest-written episodes of the *Roman de Renart* the fox is no worse than an agreeable rascal; later the tone darkens and he becomes an embodiment of evil. In the Moralitas to *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman* he is simply "the Feind" (29: 2431).

*The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman* combines two motifs, that of the rash oath, in which the husbandman in a moment of temper consigns his unruly plough-oxen to the wolf, and the clever method by which the fox subsequently traps the wolf at the bottom of a well in pursuit of an illusory kebbock or cheese. The two are linked in a characteristically Henrysonian manner when the fox uses the legal process of arbitration, already mentioned (above, 119), to bring about a deceptive reconciliation between husbandman and wolf.

The plot of Chaucer's *The Friar's Tale* is, so to speak, topologically identical with that of Henryson's narrative, both exploiting the theme of the rash oath, in Chaucer that of the carter who angrily assigns horses, cart, and hay to the devil. A single defence – "The carl spak oo thing, but he thoghte another" (D, 1568) – covers both. The wolf and his equivalent in Chaucer, the summoner, alike pay the subsequent penalty. The points of resemblance become still more striking if one takes into account the interpretation of the characters offered by Henryson in his Moralitas (29–30: 2427–35): the wolf, like the summoner, a wicked oppressor; the fox, like Chaucer's mysterious yeoman, the Fiend; the husbandman, like the carter or the widow, a virtuous citizen.

The dispute is still a matter of justice, a question of contract, with the point at issue ownership of the draught-oxen. The husbandman begins the day with a blessing ("Benedicete", 1: 2237), thus proving his basic piety, but when his team of young oxen prove recalcitrant, he angrily assigns them to the wolf – in effect, to the devil. The wolf accepts the fox's advice to pursue the matter, and in the evening, at the end of the day's work, legally challenges ownership by asserting that the husbandman is a cattle-reiver: "Quhether dryuis thou this

pray? / I chalenge it, for nane off thame ar thyne!” (5: 2259–60). The legal point is emphasized by its position in the 5th stanza.

Simultaneously the wolf attempts to bypass the law by forcing the husbandman to treat the matter as one between heads of state, whose word, at least in theory, is their bond. As he puts it, “yone carlis word as he wer king sall stand” (3: 2251). The husbandman relies on the law:

“Gaif I my hand or oblissing”, quod he,  
“Or haif ye writ or witnes<sup>3</sup> for to schaw?  
Schir, reif me not, but go and seik the law”. (7: 2277–79)

The argument from kingship he refutes, then repeats his call for a witness, only to be taken aback when one actually appears:

“I may say and ganesay; I am na king.  
Quhair is your witnes that hard I hecht thame haill?”  
Than said the volff, “Thairfoir it sall nocht fail.  
Lowrence”, quod he, “cum hidder of that schaw,  
And say na thing bot as thow hard and saw”. (9: 2289–93)

The fox’s words are in fact quite different. It is fairly evident that from the beginning he intends to trap the wolf rather than the husbandman; for the present he merely equivocates by unexpectedly turning the handling of the dispute towards arbitration.

The phenomenon of arbitration ... underlines the point ... that law was only one aspect, however important, of the way in which claims of property were worked out in the Middle Ages, and that a picture which focuses exclusively on legal rules and court decisions will be necessarily incomplete. (MacQueen, H.L. 1993: 20).

Arbitration is often mentioned in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century documents (cf. McNeill ed. 1962–63), but the fullest discussion known to me occurs in a work which appeared some two-hundred-and-fifty years after Henryson’s time, Bankton’s *An Institute of the Laws of Scotland in Civil Rights*. A few quotations will show the relevance.

In Henryson the fox extends an invitation to the disputants:

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3. I have adopted the Harleian text.

Bot wald ye baith submit yow heir to me  
 To stand at my decreit perpetuall,  
 To pleis baith I suld preif, gif it may fall. (11: 2303–5)

### Compare in Bankton:

Arbitration, which is by a submission [Henryson, *submit*], and a Decree Arbitrall [*decreit perpetuall*] is “a solemn transaction by interposition of friends, authorised by the parties for that purpose”. A Submission is an agreement, between two or more persons, to stand to the determination of arbiters. (McDouall [1751–53] 1993–95: 1: 453)

The fox uses the phrase *decreit perpetuall* because his decree arbitral will be binding for all time to come. He presents himself hypocritically as a friend of both parties with the words “Now I am iuge amycabill” (12: 2310), a condensed version of the phrase “Juge arbitratour and amicabill compositour”, often found in the documents listed by Balfour in his *Practicks*. The solemn nature of the submission receives just emphasis (the fox is the speaker):

“Ye sall be sworne to stand at my decreit,  
 Quhether heirefter ye think it soure or sweit”.  
 The volff braid furth his fute, the man his hand,  
 And on the toddis taill sworne thay ar to stand. (12: 2311–14)

The fox’s tail, it must be said, is a comically inadequate substitute for the Bible, on which oaths were usually sworn. The husbandman is following Christ’s precept by making to himself a friend of the mammon of unrighteousness (*Luke* 16: 9).

Bankton lays great emphasis on “good conscience” as governing the conduct of the arbiter:

Arbiters are not tied to the strict rules of law, but may, and ought to proceed according to equity and good conscience ... it is for this reason, I presume, that the preamble of a decree arbitral generally bears That the arbiters have God and a good conscience before their eyes. (McDouall [1751–53] 1993–95: 2: 454)

### The fox more than once refers to his conscience:

Bot I am laith to hurt my conscience ocht. (13: 2319)  
 Wald I tak it vpon my conscience  
 To do sa pure ane man as yone offence? (17: 2348–49)  
 Schir, trow ye not I haue ane saule to keip? (19: 2363)

The fox, of course, has no conscience, and his arbitration is neither friendly nor disinterested. The number, 11, of the stanza in which he makes the proposal represents transgression of the law, not an alternative process of justice.

The fox's abrupt change of attitude at the beginning of this stanza 11 indicates that something is amiss. He had been with the wolf when both overheard the husbandman's rash words. He himself originated the suggestion that they should be taken literally. The wolf has every reason to expect that he will serve as a witness. His equivocal response can only be intended for his own profit and the wolf's ultimate detriment. In the *Moralitas* (29: 2431–33), as has been noted, he is equated with the Fiend; in a lesser way his words parallel the equivocation of the fiend which led to Macbeth's downfall.

His conduct as arbiter is throughout suspect. Even before his appointment, the fox uses the word *bud* (3: 2249), "gift", but with strong overtones of "bribe", and he conducts his negotiations with the husbandman entirely on that basis. The idea is first tentatively introduced in terms of the likely expense of the procedure: "This will not throw buit grit coist and expence" (13: 2321). Notice the unlucky number of the stanza. The proverbial obscurities of the next convey a meaning which the husbandman instantly takes:

"seis thow not buddis beiris bernis throw,  
 And giftis garris crukit materis hald ful euin?  
 Sumtymis ane hen haldis ane man in ane kow;  
 All ar not halie that heifis thair handis to heuin".  
 "schir", said the man, "ye sall haue sex or sevin  
 Richt off the fattest hennis off all the floik –  
 I compt not all the laif, leif me the coik". (14: 2322–28)

*Bud* in the plural form *buddis* reappears, and in the second line is metamorphosed into *giftis*. The kind of gift desired by a fox, a hen, becomes clear in the third, and in the fourth the fact that, despite his office, the fox is open to such gifts.

Stanza 15 shows how clearly the fox understands his own position. A judge should not be susceptible to bribes, but because it is now evening and the time is feriate (*The Sheep and the Dog*, 8: 1199), God has gone to sleep. He will take no notice of such minor matters: "God is gane to sleip as for this nycht; / Sic small thingis ar not sene in to his sicht" (15: 2332–33). This forms an ironic counterpart to the sheep's cry in the other fable where arbitration plays a role: "Lord, quhy sleipis thow sa lang? / Walk, and discern me my cause groundit on

richt” (*The Sheep and the Dog*, 22: 1295–96). The sheep complained about the dog’s greed, his covetousness, but here the fox is himself covetous, and exploits the same quality in the wolf to the latter’s severe ultimate disadvantage. The wolf abandons his claim in return for a kebbock, a cheese with qualities as illusory as those of the Nekhering, discussed below (below, 185, 188). The kebbock at the foot of the well is as difficult for the fox to handle as, in the other episode, was the gigantic fish: “‘It is sa mekill’, quod Lowrence, ‘it maisteris me; / On all my tais it hes not left ane naill’” (26: 2408–9). The inevitable consequence of the wolf’s attempt at assistance is his own humiliation.

The final scene occupies the night which follows the arbitration and is played by moonlight, which itself possesses a quality of illusion, heightened by emphasis, not so much on moonlight, as on the moon’s reflection on water – *the schadow off the mone* (24: 2392) which shone in the well and so formed the miraculous kebbock. The Moralitas brings out another aspect of the symbolism. The wolf immerses himself in the Platonic shadow of a shade. The well in which he finds himself trapped is the deceitful well of covetousness with illusory wealth at the foot. To this even the adjective *pennyfull* applied to the moon (23: 2385) is relevant. Consider the final lines:

Dryuand ilk man to leip in the buttrie  
That dounwart drawis vnto the pane of hell –  
Christ keip all Christianis from that wickit well! (32: 2452–54)

They show that the descent of the wolf is in fact the descent to hell of the unregenerate soul. Henryson may have had in mind the hoist, used to transport supplies to and from the underground buttry or storage cellar.

The fox compares the reciprocal action of the buckets to that of Fortune: “‘schir’, quod the foxe, ‘thus fairis it off Fortoun: / As ane cummis vp, scho quheillis ane vther doun’” (27: 2418–19). For the descent to hell by way of Fortune’s wheel, compare in *The Kingis Quair*:

And vnderneath the quhele sawe I there  
An vgly pit, depe as ony helle,  
That to behald thereon I quoke for fere,  
But o thing herd I, that quho therein fell  
Com no more vp agane, tidingis to telle.

Of quhich, astonait of that ferefull syght,

I ne wist quhat to done, so was I fricht. (Norton-Smith ed. 1971: [162: 1128–34] 41)

Fortune, it will be recollected, is not an independent power, but an aspect of divine providence, whose will she carries out, in however obscure a way. Retributive justice forms part of her work.

The wolf is damned, just like the birds in *The Preaching of the Swallow*, with the difference that his sins are more of commission than omission. He is a wicked man, rich and powerful, *Quhilk dois the pure oppres in euerie place* (29: 2428). At the same time, he is stupid, a pawn in the fox's schemes. The image of the hunter's net, found in *The Preaching of the Swallow* and *The Lion and the Mouse*, recurs as a feature of the woods of wicked riches through which the wolf wanders with the fox until the discovery of the well:

The wodds waist, quhairin wes the wolf wyld,

Ar wickit riches, quhilk all men gais to get:

Quha traistis in sic trusterie ar oft begyld,

For mammon may be callit the Deuillis net,

Quhilk Sathanas for all sinfull hes set.

With proud plesour quha settis his traist thairin

But specciall grace lychtlie can not outwin. (31: 2441–47)

A relevant text is *1 Timothy* 6: 9–10: “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtfull lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil”. In the *Vulgate* the term translated as “love of money” is simply *cupiditas*, “covetousness”.

The instruments of vengeance, the moon, the well, and the buckets, are first mentioned in stanza 23, where the number has its usual significance. The final joint venture of fox and wolf occupies 8 stanzas (21–28), and 8 is Justice, particularly in terms of the soul's eternal destination. There are in total 28 narrative stanzas, with 28 the second perfect number and, in context a more important feature, the number of days in the lunar month. It underlines the part played in the narrative by the moon and its reflection.

32, the total number of stanzas, is the product of 4 and 8, either number representing justice. More important is the connection with Christ, whose judgemental and redemptive death and resurrection was believed to have taken place when he was 33 years old. As  $33-1=32$  the latter number sometimes carries the same significance. The text contains two indications that this is so; first, the phrase from the last

line of the penultimate stanza, *but speciall grace* (31: 2447), “without [the intervention of] particular grace”. The theological meaning is precise; the fallen human being can escape the power of sin, and his own consequent damnation, only by particular grace on the part of Christ, a point confirmed by the prayer in the final line of the next and final stanza, *Christ keip all Christianis from that wickit well* (32: 2454). The Moralitas is thus made applicable to all Christians. As well as a wicked rich man, the wolf represents the potential for evil of the ordinary human being, subject to temptation, and enabled to reach salvation only by divine intervention. The wolf becomes more akin to the small birds in *The Preaching of the Swallow*, although for him there is no equivalent of the swallow to point out the error of his ways.

The phrase *speciall grace* has about it a certain flavour of Calvinism.

Adam, by reason of the Fall, lost the gifts of grace and of his initial communion with God; man has become the child of wrath. Thenceforth self-love binds him so that he is not aware of the misery of his condition. The Law itself was given to man to show him how far he is from the right path. In the Law we see, as in a mirror, our sins and our condemnation. Thus it is the consciousness of sin that leads us back towards God, who grants us his grace anew in Jesus Christ, provided we receive it with faith. The knowledge of our sin, and the faith which enables us to benefit by the mercy of God, are free gifts. (Wendel 1963: 132)

The same flavour is to be found in the preceding stanza, an interpretation of the husbandman’s behaviour when he bribes the fox by promising him some of his own hens:

The husband may be callit ane godlie man,  
 With quhome the feynd falt findis, as clerkis reids,  
 Besie to tempt him with all ways that he can.  
 The hennis ar warkis that fra ferme faith proceidis. (30: 2434–37)

Two features here, unfortunately, are suspect. Elsewhere in Henryson there is no other instance of the word *godlie*, more characteristic, as Denton Fox noted (Fox ed. 1981: 308), of post-Reformation, for the most part distinctively Calvinistic, Scottish writing. Calvinistic emphasis on justification by faith rather than works seem to be present in the final line quoted. “The faithful, after their calling, are acceptable to God even in regard to their works” (Wendel 1963: 261). It is entirely possible that the sense of the Moralitas has been distorted, or at least modified, by the Protestant reviser whose hand has also been

detected elsewhere in the fables. The changes however may have been no more than superficial, leaving the general sense unaffected.



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## Chapter Nine

### The World, the Flesh, the Devil and Lent: *The Nekhering (The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger)*

Henryson sometimes uses the last line of the *Moralitas* to indicate the title of the preceding poem – in *The Wolf and the Wether*, for instance, “Bot think vpon the wolf and on the wedder”, more obviously in *The Preaching of the Swallow*, “And thus endis the preiching of the swallow”. The final words of the present fable resemble those of *The Wolf and the Wether*; “Quhairfoir I counsell mychtie men to haif mynd / Of the nekhering, interpret in this kynd” (40: 2229–30). The Harleian manuscript and the Bassandyne and Charteris prints give a longer title, *The Taill of the Wolf that gat the Nekhering throw the wrinkis of the Foxe that begylit the Cadgear*, in which the word “Nekhering” is still prominent.

The meaning has recently been elucidated by R.W. Smith (Smith forthcoming).<sup>1</sup> In the Scottish fishing trade the Neckherring is or was “the best individual fish, placed on top of the barrel to catch the attention of the buyer” – with the obvious possibility that the remainder would fail to match the top item and that the unwary purchaser would be disappointed. The term thus defined, although not otherwise recorded until long after Henryson’s day, has an almost blinding relevance to the fable, where the *creillis* (12: 2028) of the cadger or itinerant fish-seller serve the same purpose as the barrels of later times. These creels have a *stoppell*, “stopper, plug” (19: 2079), which implies that the wickerwork concealed the contents, and that the first fish examined would be the Nekhering. The fox claims to have been too weak to pull out the wonderful specimen and so calls upon the stronger wolf for the assistance which is to prove his downfall.

Denton Fox has produced some slight, but not negligible, evidence for an alternative use of the term to mean “a blow, buffet”, which, *pace* Fox, might or might not be on the neck – compare the modern

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1. In a paper forthcoming in the *Proceedings* of the seventh conference of the International Association for Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature, held in 1996 at St Hilda’s College, Oxford.

phrase “get it in the neck” (Fox 1981 ed. 294–95). This usage is perhaps metaphorical from the effect on the unwary purchaser of the discovery that the Nekhering is the only good fish in the creel. Henryson, like the cadger and the fox, exploits the ambiguity of the term.

It takes some time however for herring, whether actual or figurative, to become important in the narrative. The poem opens with an awkward meeting of fox and wolf in a wilderness far from the sea. The fox obviously wishes to have nothing to do with the wolf and is offended by his proposals; the hungry wolf is determined to take advantage of the fox’s proverbial cunning in taking poultry and sheep. The emphasis is on meat, not fish. The hostility felt by the fox towards the stronger wolf makes him hypocritically deny his own abilities and protest his gentlemanly feelings:

“Yis”, quod the volff, “throw buskis and throw brais  
Law can thow lour to come to thy intent”.  
“Schir”, said the foxe, “ye wait weill how it gais;  
Ane lang space fra thame thay will feill my sent;  
Than will thay eschaip, suppois thay suld be schent;  
And I am schamefull for to cum behind thame,  
In to the feildis thocht I suld sleipand find thame”. (5: 1979–85)

When the wolf becomes angry and threatening, the fox finds a new excuse, recalling an episode in the second branch of *The Talking of the Tod* (below, 218) and contradicting everything said before. It is Lent, the 40 days of fasting before Easter, when one should abstain from meat. Like the other fox, he has no abilities as a fisherman, a declaration ironically contrasted with his later success in obtaining fish from the cadger’s creels. If it were only Easter, he would gladly exercise the skills denied only a few lines earlier and bring the wolf “kiddis, lambis, or caponis” (8: 2005).

The wolf is not appeased and Lowrence at last (stanza 10) agrees to be his steward. The wolf’s mistake at this point is to insist on an oath of loyalty. Like the paddock in *The Paddock and the Mouse* (above, 92), the fox swears fidelity by the name of Jupiter, a pagan oath which, in the context of Lent and Easter, means in effect the reverse of what it seems to say: “Be Iuppiter, and on pane off my heid, / I sall be treu to you quhill I be deid.” (11: 2026–7). True means false, and the head which is to suffer belongs, not to the fox, but the wolf.

The pagan effect is strengthened by the stanza in which the oath occurs – 11, the number of transgression. The immediately subsequent

entry (stanza 12) of the cadger, fishmonger and by way of fish instrument of the fox's triumph and the wolf's downfall, marks the beginning of the fulfilment of the oath, which reaches completion as a consequence of the cadger's second entry 20 stanzas later.

The first entry leads to the feigned death of the fox, whose "carcass" the cadger throws onto his creels, thus allowing him to plunder the creels and escape, a process completed in stanza 20 with the first mention by the enraged cadger of the Nekhering. The second entry forms part of an echo sequel (stanzas 30–32), separated by 20 stanzas from the initial group (stanzas 10–12). The wolf decides to emulate the fox's trick and so obtain the Nekhering mentioned by the cadger. Stanza 30 is the mock-blessing bestowed on him by the fox, a blessing which marks the culmination of the stewardship earlier forced upon him. Included is the promise that the wolf "sall de na suddand deith this day" (30: 2157), with the covert suggestion that his sufferings will instead be long and painful. In stanza 31 the wolf allows his concupiscence to obscure all possibilities of disaster or betrayal:

Als styll he lay as he wer verray deid,  
Rakkand na thing off the carlis fauour nor feid,  
Bot euer vpon the nekhering he thinkis  
And quyte foryettis the foxe and all his wrinkis. (31: 2164–67)

He thus brings about the fulfilment-in-reverse of the oath in stanza 11. The re-entrance of the cadger in stanza 32 introduces the catastrophe which significantly occurs in stanza 33.

20 and 33 are obviously structurally important. The word *Nekhering*, first used in stanza 20, completes the first half of the poem. As already noted, it is put in the mouth of the cadger, who invites the fox to complete the success of his scheme by waiting for the *Nekhering* which is worth more than all the rest of his gear put together – an obvious attempt to exploit the ambiguity of the term, although the fox is too clever to be tempted. As a consequence, in stanza 22, 10 stanzas after his first and before his second appearance, the cadger cuts the holly-wood cudgel, with which in stanza 33 he is to give the wolf a figurative *Nekhering*. Like stanzas 30–32, stanzas 20–22 echo the sequence in stanzas 10–12.

As shown earlier, 33 represents the incarnate Christ in relation to "Man [the Wolf] as by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of his free choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing Justice". 22,

representing as usual the completeness of the divine utterance, is an appropriate stanza for the preparation of the actual Nekhering, the cudgel.

The word *Lentring*, “Lent”, used in the first line of stanza 8, is unique in Henryson’s poetry, and paralleled only by the more usual word *Lent* in the first stanza of *The Testament of Cresseid* (Fox ed. 1981: 511–96), a tragedy of appetite appropriate to the Lenten season of the church. Correspondingly, *The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger* is Lenten comedy, involving no actual death, but ending with an appropriately austere morality.

The chief numerical emphasis hitherto has seemed to be on 20. Lent however is a 40-day fast, occupying the 36 weekdays of the six weeks before Easter, together with Ash Wednesday and the three days immediately following.  $36+4=40$ . This corresponds to the 40 stanzas of the tale, 36 of narrative and 4 of *Moralitas*. Significant events tend to occur in stanzas the position of which is governed by the arithmetical factors of 40 and by their multiples, in particular the numbers 4, 5, 8, 10 and 20. Several instances have already been given.

Henryson may have wished his readers to regard the action as actually taking place on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. The fox’s comment on the Nekhering, “It wald be fische to us thir fourtie dayis” (25: 2120), suggests that the period is just beginning. (The number of the stanza, incidentally, 25,  $5 \times 5$ , has strong overtones of the sensuality, the subjection to the 5 senses, characteristic of the wolf in particular, but supposed to be curbed during Lent.) Less specific is the phrase “thir fasting dayis” (12: 2034), and the deliberately ambiguous: “Get ye that hering sicker in sum place, / Ye sall not fair in fisching mair quhill Pasche.” (29: 2152–53). Both of these imply that Lent had at least some considerable time still to run.

Fish, like Lent, are first mentioned in stanza 8 ( $8 \times 5=40$ ; 5 is the number of the senses); they reappear with the cadger in stanza 12 ( $4 \times 3$ , a factor multiplied), and are identified as herring. The word recurs in stanzas where it has no particular structural significance, but within the narrative framework the last appearance is in the last stanza, 36, a multiple ( $4 \times 9$ ) of a factor of 40, and the number of days in Lent if Ash Wednesday and the three subsequent days (the *Moralitas*) are left out of the reckoning.

The first reference specifically to a Nekhering is in stanza 20. It is also mentioned in stanza 24 ( $4 \times 6$  or  $8 \times 3$ ). The reference in stanza 31 has already been noted. 31 is itself an unlucky prime. The word makes

a climactic reappearance in the final line of the final 40th stanza: “Quhairfoir I counsell mychtie men to haif mynd / Of the nekhering, interpret in this kynd.” (40: 2229–30). Stanza 37, which begins the *Moralitas*, gives fox, wolf and cadger an allegorical significance. The next stanza is largely devoted to the *Nekhering*, moralized as the gold which brings the wolf, already explicated as “ane man” (37: 2206), to disaster. Both terms are used with the widest connotation. “Ane man” is humanity, Mankind. Gold is wealth and power on a national and international scale, the source of war and destruction:

The hering I likkin vnto the gold sa reid,  
Quhilk gart the wolf in perrell put his heid –  
Richt swa the gold garris landis and cietieis  
With weir be waistit daylie, as men seis. (38: 2213–16)

The fox is defined (37: 2205) simply as the World, which here and elsewhere is regarded as a major cause of sin:

The warld, ye wait, is stewart to the man,  
Quhilk makis man to haif na mynd of deid,  
Bot settis for winning all the craftis thay can. (38: 2210–12)

“The friendship of the world is enmity with God” (*James* 4: 4). Notably however it is the man who forces the world to become his steward; the ultimate responsibility is his.

The cadger is the wages of sin, Death, to which all orders of created life (including fish) are subject:

The cadgear, Deith, quhome vnder all men preis –  
That euer tuke lyfe throw cours of kynd man dee,  
As man, and beist, and fische in to the see. (37: 2207–9)

The wolf’s sin is greed, concupiscence. The beating given to him by the cadger is a comic representation of his death as a consequence: “He that of ressoun can not be content, / But couetis all, is abill all to tyne.” (35: 2189–90). Lent and the disastrous result of succumbing to temptation thus form the related themes of the fable. Characteristically Henryson makes reason the best Lenten defence against concupiscence.

The development of the narrative turns on the almost frenetic activities of the fox; it might indeed appear that their very intensity precludes identification of him with something apparently passive,

like the World. In medieval literature however the World seldom appears alone. From early times it had been associated with more obviously active powers, the Flesh and the Devil. The three had come to be regarded almost as one, an unholy trinity, actively hostile to mankind. By the early fifteenth century they were well established in the vernacular. “Behold the Werld, the Devyl, and me!” says Caro (Flesh) in the morality play *The Castle of Perseverance* (c.1425; see Eccles ed. 1969):

Wyth all oure mythis, we kyngys thre,  
Nyth and day besy we be  
For to distroy Mankende. (266–68)

They form an evil counterpoint to the three kings who brought their gifts to the stable at Bethlehem. Later, when Mankind has reached the apparent security of the Castle of Perseverance, Malus Angelus swears, in an oath which recalls that of the fox:

Nay, be Belyals bryth bonys,  
Ther schal he no whyle dwelle.  
He schal be wonne fro these wonys

Wyth the Werld, the Flesch, and the Devyl of hell. (1715–18)

As World, Henryson’s fox embodies features of the other two abstractions. With his red coat and rank smell he is fleshly himself and preys on the fleshly appetites of the wolf, most of all, perhaps, when he portrays the Nekhering as salmon, the most savoury kind of fish:

It is ane syde of salmond, as it wair,  
And callour, py pand lyke ane pertrik ee:  
It is worth all the hering ye haue thair. (26: 2126–29)

When the cadger finds the fox lying in the road, his misquotation of a proverb identifies the fox with the Devil: “Heir lysis the Deuyll”, quod he, “deid in ane dyke; / Sic ane selcouth sau I not this seuin yeir”. (17: 2063–64). The Devil of course is not dead; the proverb is advice to the unwary and runs “seldome lyes the divel dead by ane dycksyd” (Wood 1958: 245). In the fable the Devil is still very much alive.

Lent is a period for the restraint of appetite to enable one to conquer temptation. The Gospel read at the Eucharist on the first Sunday is the story (*Matthew* 4: 1–11) of Christ’s 40-day fast in the wilderness and

his subsequent successful resistance of three temptations, involving the World, the Flesh, and the Devil – to satisfy physical hunger by turning stones into bread, to give way to spiritual pride by throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, trusting that angels would be sent to the rescue, and to receive “all the kingdoms of the world” in return for worshipping Satan. In the fable the most obvious parallel is the temptation to the wolf to satisfy his physical hunger by theft rather than miracle, but the *Moralitas* hints at the others:

And as the foxe with dissimulance and gyle  
Gart the wolf wene to haif worship for euer,  
Richt swa this world with vane glore for ane quhyle  
Flatteris with folk, as thay suld failye neuer. (39: 2217–20)

The scene of Christ’s temptation was the wilderness. Correspondingly, the opening line of the fable sets the scene in a wilderness:

Qwhylum thair wynnit in ane wildernes,  
As myne authour expreslie can declair,  
Ane reuand volff. (1: 1951–53)

The difference between New Testament and fable is that the wolf is a native of the wilderness, whereas Christ was not, but was brought there by the power of the Holy Spirit. The adjective *reuand*, “plundering”, indicates the wolf’s appetitive nature, which the season of Lent, properly observed, would give him some chance to subdue. He fails the opportunity. The fox (stanza 13) mentions the possibility of buying or begging fish legitimately from the cadger, only to reject it because it would be demeaning for the aristocratic but impoverished wolf. The cadger is a churl and a chuff (“miser”) who would certainly refuse. The wolf stands on his dignity and makes no attempt to beg or buy herring.

Pride, a sense of his social importance, is one of the wolf’s main weaknesses, assiduously cultivated by the fox. When they meet, the fox bows and kneels to kiss his hand. The wolf’s response is courtly, but peremptory:

Ryse vp, Lowrence! I leif the for to stand.



Quhair hes thow bene this sesoun fra my sicht?  
 Thow sall beir office, and my steward be,  
 For thow can knap doun caponis on the nicht – (2–3: 1964–67)

(The word “sesoun”, incidentally, is a direct reference to Lent.) Notice that Lowrence is given no choice, and that there is no suggestion of reward for his services; the justification, as the wolf sees it, for his behaviour is that every lord must have a steward whose duty it is to oppress the tenants so that the lord may live in comfort. The parable of the Unjust Steward (*Luke* 16: 1–9) comes to mind (below, 218), as does the Moralitas of *The Wolf and the Lamb*.

The oath of loyalty which eventually follows is particularly relevant to fifteenth-century Scottish circumstances; in effect it is a bond of manrent by which “a man of lesser rank undertook to assist a more powerful one” (Donaldson and Morpeth 1977: s.v. “Bonds of Manrent, Maintenance and Alliance”).<sup>2</sup> Such bonds were sometimes reciprocated by a bond of maintenance, promising the man of lesser rank protection, but no doubt there were exceptions. Certainly nothing of the kind is present here. Ranald Nicholson’s comment is relevant: “From about 1460 onwards there is increasing evidence of the bonds of alliance and manrent by which men of rank sought in shifting times to achieve, at the least, security, and, at the most, political power and the prizes that went with it” (Nicholson 1974: 410). The wolf’s conduct fits later-fifteenth-century Scottish circumstances.

The interpretation of the cadger as Death is present from the beginning, where his entrance suggests to the fox the ruse of a death, albeit a feigned one. His re-entrance in stanza 32, armed with a cudgel and riding on his pony, is recognizable as a parody of the fourth horseman in the Apocalypse: “And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death” (*Revelation* 6: 8). In *Revelation*, his arrival signifies the great day of the wrath of the Lamb, a day which for the poem dawns in the following stanza, the appropriately numbered 33. His first appearance makes him seem almost simple-minded, singing or talking to himself as he leads his pony with its laden creels. The word “death”, with its derivative “dead”, figures prominently in the narrative, sometimes with the extra

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2. It should also be noted that “steward” is the name of the Scottish royal family, descended from Walter, High Steward of Scotland, who married Marjory, daughter of Robert I Bruce, and so became ancestor of the House of Stewart. A contemporary reference may be intended.

emphasis supplied by rhyming position (italics in the quotations are my own):

And still he lay, as straucht as he wer *deid*. (15: 2055)  
 “Heir lyis the Deuyll”, quod he, “*deid* in ane dyke”. (17: 2063)  
 Than will the cadgear carll trou ye be *deid*. (28: 2144)  
 That ye sall *de* na suddand *deith* this day. (30: 2157)  
 Als styll he lay as he wer verrey *deid*. (31: 2164)

The wolf gains his deserts, and is almost killed, in the final couplet of stanza 33, a couplet which contains the word *suelte*, “died”, and rhymes with “deid”: “And hit him with sic will vpon the *heid* / Quhill neir he swonit and *suelte* in to that *steid*.” (33: 2180–81).

A further hint comes in stanzas 16 and 18, when the cadger leaps with joy at the idea that he can protect his hands from the rigours of his trade by turning the fox’s pelt into mittens of the kind fishmongers still use. He is determined not to sell the skin to any pedlar with Flemish connections but to make it keep his hands warm. One is almost forced to remember that a main characteristic of personified Death is his icy hand. As the cadger pushes forward with the fox at work on his creels, he sings with unconscious irony “Huntis vp, vp” (19: 2083).

The transformation to the full potential of the cadger’s role, comes at the midpoint of the poem, stanza 20, where he reaches a physical and metaphorical boundary in the shape of a stream. Life and death are often regarded as separated by such a stream, the Styx, for instance, or the water which in *Pearl* (l.107) separates dreamer and maiden, and which the dreamer is unable to cross. The cadger naturally pauses (there is no bridge), and the fox takes the opportunity to leap from the creels and run away. The cadger recovers his wits too late and roars out the invitation to wait for the Nekhering, insultingly declined. The cadger, realizing that he has no means of offence, takes the practical step (stanza 22) of cutting himself a cudgel (above, 187). He is now armed, and as the fox’s inroads have considerably lightened his pony’s load (32: 2169), he completes the transformation by mounting his steed. The stream marks the boundary between the realm of the World, where the fox initiates the action, and that of Death, where the cadger takes matters into his own hand.

To a great extent the reader’s pleasure derives from the brilliant diction used to present the fox’s cleverly immoral behaviour. One might compare the combination of language and action in another

comedy about a fox, Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, which however ends with the downfall of the villain/hero and the bitter remark as he is sentenced: "This is called mortifying of a fox" (V.8). Henryson allows his fox to trick both wolf and cadger, and leaves him in triumphant possession of the herring.

Is the moral basis of the fable completely undermined by this unholy victory? R.D.S. Jack has expressed the dilemma in terms of the morality and miracle plays of Henryson's time: "How could one dramatise the full threat of evil by presenting its power to please without running the danger of the evil character becoming more powerful than the virtuous ones, Satan stealing the show from God?" (Jack, R.D.S. 1989: 14). In Henryson the situation is worse to a degree. None of his three characters is virtuous; two are undoubted villains, and the cadger has at least a tendency to foolishness. The eventual victor is the worst of all.

Such an attitude results from a misreading of the text. The events of stanza 33 show that the wolf is a figure of erring humanity, subject to judgement by Christ. The action centres on this one figure, more affected by the benefits which he thinks can accrue to him through the fox, the World, than by the advantages likely to result from the proper observation of Lent. He is *fons et origo* of the action, a confirmed sinner who eventually receives punishment at the hands of the cadger, Death. The fox throughout follows his orders or suggestions – it is the wolf who first expresses interest in the nekhering (24: 2112–16). The fox as much as the cadger is an instrument of divine justice. Lent is implicit throughout; for the unwary reader the dark Moralitas may come as a shock, but it convinces.

The supremacy of virtue is also indicated by a numerical counterpoint. 40, the number of Lent, is made up of 36 and 4, the number of stanzas in fable and Moralitas respectively. Each of the three numbers is significant in ways additional to these already mentioned, and makes at least a subliminal contribution to the final effect.

36 and 40 are multiples of 4, which as a base provides them with much of their significance.

4 is the number of justice, and also "became the symbol of the elements of number, which in turn were regarded by Pythagoreans as

the elements of all things”.<sup>3</sup> It forms an essential part of the tetractys. It is also the “genial tetrad” of Heiric of Auxerre (c.840–76).<sup>4</sup> In terms of the 4 constituent elements, earth, water, air and fire, of the pre-seventeenth century lower universe, this had cosmological implications; it was accepted that the harmony of the 4 elements was derived from the harmonic, “genial” properties of the number 4. For the same reason the 4 Gospels were believed to constitute a harmony. Other examples might easily be provided. A *Moralitas* in 4 stanzas possesses an element of cosmological harmony.

Something similar applies to 36 and 40. The first is the great quaternion, the sum of the first 4 odd and the first 4 even numbers ( $[1+3+5+7]+[2+4+6+8]=36$ ). The left-hand side of the equation may be regarded as a derived form of the tetractys, thus constituting another potent instrument of harmony.<sup>5</sup> Because it involves multiplication as well as addition, ( $[1\times 4]+[2\times 4]+[3\times 4]+[4\times 4]=40$ ), 40 is more powerful still. It is a sort of glorified tetractys.<sup>6</sup> The 40 days of Lent are associated, not only with Christ’s temptations in the wilderness, but with the 40 days and 40 nights of rain which caused the Flood (*Genesis* 7: 12), and the 40 years which the Israelites spent in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land (*Numbers* 32: 13). Both were regarded as Old Testament types of the New Testament event, and both involved the endurance of suffering leading to the emergence of a new order – on the one hand, the rainbow covenant and the division of the world among the sons of Noah, on the other, the restoration of the Israelites to their ancestral home. The number 40 primarily typifies salvation not damnation, the outcome rather than the endurance of suffering. Suffering however, even damnation, remains a possibility. Noah and his family alone survived

3. Stahl tr. 1952: 107, n.38, commenting on the tetractys as pertaining to the perfection of the soul.

4. So called in the “Praefatio” to book 6 of his metrical *Life of Germanus* (MacQueen, J. 1985: 59).

5. Hopper 1938: 45; Fowler 1964: 182; both based on Plutarch, “De Iside et Osiride” 381F–382A (Babbit ed. [1936]: 179); cf. *De Animae Procreatione in Timaeo* (Cherniss ed. 1976: 269–71).

6. Hopper 1938: 45; Fowler 1964: 189–90, again both based on Plutarch, *De Animae Procreatione in Timaeo*, 1019A–B. Plutarch is in fact stating that the Platonic Lambda formula for soul, with its many ramifications, is more powerful than the Pythagorean tetractys, to which nevertheless it is closely related.

the Flood, and of the Israelites who escaped Egypt, not even Moses lived to cross Jordan and enter the Promised Land.

## Chapter Ten

### The Process of Degeneracy: *The Talking of the Tod* (*The Cock and the Fox, The Fox and the Wolf,* *The Trial of the Fox*)

#### 1. Decline and Fall – the Pentad and Other Numbers

Henryson regarded three of his animal tales – *The Cock and the Fox*, *The Fox and the Wolf*, and *The Trial of the Fox* – as forming a continuous narrative unit, a miniature beast-epic in three branches. Each branch has some correspondence with one or more episodes in the earlier French *Le Roman de Renart*, the first to *Renart et Chantecler* (Branche IIIa; Roques ed. 1957), the third to *Le Jugement de Renart* (Branche I; Roques ed. 1951). For the second, in which the fox makes his confession to the wolf-friar, Denton Fox remarks, “The fox makes numerous confessions in *Le Roman de Renart*” (Fox ed. 1981: 222). The action is continuous, occupying three successive days. Degeneracy is a recurrent theme, illustrated by the behaviour of the fox in branches 1 and more particularly 2, by the charge laid against the cock in branch 1 (10: 462), and by the name and behaviour of Father-war in branch 3.

In the Bannatyne MS the three are separated from Henryson’s other fables, and come between the anonymous *Book of the Howlat* and *The Tale of Orpheus* (below, 284). They are introduced by the words “The Tod fallowis”, a title echoed by the final line of the third tale, *The Trial of the Fox*, “And thus endis the talking of the tod” (107: 1145). This last may indicate that Henryson thought of the poem as *The Talking of the Tod* rather than simply *The Tod*; compare the final lines of *The Preiching of the Swallow*, *The Wolf and the Wether*, and *The Tale of Orpheus*, in each of which a title is given. The title may have been intended as a translation of *Le Roman de Renart*, with “Talking” used in the sense “tale, story”, but in addition it almost certainly refers to the power of clever speech which the foxes exploit, always, as they mistakenly hope, to their own advantage.

The number of stanzas is 107, a prime; the action ends in stanza 100 with the execution of the second fox, Father-war. The middle stanza is 54, which completes the narrative part of branch 2 with the death of

the first fox. It is also the 23rd stanza of the second branch and, significantly, ends with the word *recompence*. The climacterics, 49, 56, 63 and 81, receive some emphasis. 6 of the final 7 stanzas form a Moralitas, but the last stands separate, formally invoking the intercession of the Virgin Mary on behalf of sinful humanity. At such a point, a pair of primes, 7, “the Virgin” (above, 71), and 107, is particularly appropriate.

The first branch is 31 stanzas in length, 2 forming a proem, 25 the narrative and 4 the Moralitas. The second is 26 stanzas in length, 23 narrative and 3 Moralitas. The third is 50 stanzas in length, 43 narrative, 6 Moralitas, and 1 of final invocation. Virtually all these numbers contribute something to the reader’s understanding.

100 (10×10), the second limit of numbers, is obviously appropriate for an action which in philosophic and theological terms is of some magnitude (MacQueen, J. 1985: 95ff.). The stanzas corresponding to individual decads (10, 20, etc.), and the intermediate pentads (5, 15, etc.) mark significant points of development. The fox’s first sight of the cock, Chanteclair, and his resolve to outwit him, occurs in stanza 5. The fulcrum of his strategy, the accusation that Chanteclair has degenerated from the standards of his ancestors in musical performance, appears in stanza 10. Stanza 15 introduces Pertok’s feigned grief at the assumed loss of her husband, while stanza 20 begins Toppok’s retaliatory moral condemnation. In stanza 25 Chanteclair makes his inspirational escape from the fox’s jaws. Stanza 30 interprets the first fox allegorically.

Stanza 35 belongs to the second branch and features the horoscope which controls the action of that branch. In stanza 40 the fox approaches Freir Volff Waitskaith as a suitable confessor. During the administration of the sacrament, in the final couplet of stanza 45, the fox parodies the words of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16: 3), “I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed”: “I eschame to thig, I can not wirk, ye wait, / Yit wald I faine pretend to gentill stait.” (45: 710–11). The steward, it will be remembered, regained his lord’s favour by making himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness (cf. above, 192), a path which presumably the fox has in mind to follow. The scriptural reference, together with the disastrous outcome, gives the words a particularly ironic overtone.

The efficacy of the sacrament is nullified when in stanza 50 the fox steals a little kid. Stanza 55 points the moral.

In stanza 60, early in the third branch, Father-war reveals the extent of his corruption when he is happy to find his father dead. The point is underlined by the following stanza of rhetorical denunciation. Stanza 65 begins the proclamation of the parliament which is to affect all the fox's subsequent activities. Stanza 70 introduces the catalogue of animals in attendance, a catalogue completed in stanza 75. Stanza 80 gives the fox's despairing reaction to the proclamation of the king's peace. Stanza 85 introduces the contumacious "gray stude meir", who in stanza 90 uses her hoof on the fox's gullible fellow-ambassador, the wolf. The fox gives details of the incident to king and parliament in stanza 95, and seems to have won their favour. Everything has changed by stanza 100, in which he is executed.

This steady development by pentads carries with it a suggestion of inevitability. So too 5 is associated with the bodily senses, and thus, as in *The Preaching of the Swallow* (above, 140, 144), with sensuality, the bodily appetites which drive both foxes. The word figures prominently in the final comprehensive *Moralitas*. There the wolf is equated with sensuality (104: 1118); the hoof of the mare is "the thoct of deid" which is able to break sensuality's head (105: 1125–27; note that this is the 5th stanza of the *Moralitas*). The fox is the temptation to worldliness or sensuality which assails men of religion, and which is put to flight by the thought of death (106: 1132–38). Appropriately the poem ends with the invocation of the Virgin, symbol of purity, as intercessor with Christ on behalf of weak humanity.

Degeneration forms a major theme, most fully expressed in stanza 2 of branch 3, where the nature of the bastard Father-war is analyzed in terms of natural reason and the 3 degrees of adjectival comparison, *euill*, *war*, and *werst* ("ill", positive; "worse", comparative; and "worst", superlative):

It followis weill be ressoun naturall,  
 And gre be gre off richt comparisoun,<sup>1</sup>  
 Off euill cummis war, off war cummis werst of all;  
 Off wrangus get cummis wrang successioun.  
 This foxe, bastard of generatioun,  
 Off verray kynde behuifit to be fals;  
 Swa wes his father, and his granschir als. (59: 803–9)

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1. Fox misses the point when he comments that "*off richt comparisoun* is hardly more than a verse-filler" (Fox ed. 1981: 234).



The three degrees correspond to the actions of the foxes in the three branches of the poem, in the first *euill*, in the second *war*, and in the third *werst of all*. Although no *granschir* makes an appearance, Henryson perhaps intended us to think of the protagonist in *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman* and *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger*.

The position of the stanza as 2nd in the branch is probably deliberate. 2 is often regarded as a number with evil potential. It represents duplicity and “matter, change and corruption” (Stahl tr. 1952: 103n.25). The activities of Father-war are throughout discreditable, and his death shameful.

## 2. Zoogonic Triangle, Nuptial Number, and the Significance of 31

Other numbers and ratios also contribute to the total effect. Pythagoras’ well-known theorem (Euclid, *Elements*, I, 47) states that in any right-angled triangle the square which is described on the side subtending the right angle is equal to the squares described on the sides which contain the right angle, or, more familiarly, that the square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares on the other two sides. The respective lengths of the three sides may most simply be represented by the sequence 3, 4, and 5. The sum of the squares of the first two then equals the square of the third;  $9+16$ , that is to say, equals 25, and 50 represents the sum of all the squares ( $9+16+25=50$ ) and so the triangle itself.

In the first branch the episode of the widow’s swoon and the subsequent disputation of the three hens (original to Henryson) occupies 9 stanzas, leaving 16 for the remainder. 25 stanzas divided into 16 and 9 may be regarded as an abbreviated version of the complete formula.

In the second branch the total number of stanzas is 26, the last of which is an admonitory epilogue addressed by the narrator or commentator to his audience. The tale with *Moralitas* thus contains 25 stanzas.

In the third branch the total number of stanzas is 50.

The right-angled triangle was called zoogonic (generative), and was held to govern the increase of life. As a consequence it was particularly associated with the Nuptial Number, discussed by Plato in a notoriously difficult passage:

Now for divine begettings there is a period comprehended by a perfect number, and for mortals by the first in which augmentations dominating and dominated when they have attained to three distances and four limits of the assimilating and the dissimilating, the waxing and the waning, render all things conversable and commensurable with one another, whereof a basal four thirds wedded to the pempad yields two harmonies at the third augmentation, the one the product of equal factors taken one hundred times, the other of equal length one way but oblong – one dimension of a hundred numbers determined by the rational diameters of the pempad lacking one in each case, or of the irrational lacking two; the other dimension of a hundred cubes of the triad. And this entire geometric number is determinative of this thing, of better and inferior births. And when your guardians, missing this, bring together brides and bridegrooms unseasonably, the offspring will not be well-born or fortunate. (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: [*Republic* VIII: 546b–d] 775)

I shall not attempt discussion beyond indicating the prominence of one hundred, of the pempad (5), together with the numbers 3 and 4. It is usually assumed that the zoogonic triangle forms an important underlying element.<sup>2</sup> Degeneracy is at least a side-property of the number.

Philo of Alexandria, the early-first century Jewish theologian and philosopher, interpreted the Nuptial Number as 50 (Fowler 1964: 36). Much later, in his dissertation on the Quincunx, Sir Thomas Browne put it as low as 5, perhaps because in *The Theology of Arithmetic* the pentad is called nuptial (Waterfield tr. 1988: 65).<sup>3</sup> Browne in *The Garden of Cyrus* interestingly associates title and number with the Wise and Foolish Virgins – the latter presumably representing the possibility of degeneration:

He that forgets not how Antiquity named this [i.e. 5] the Conjugall or wedding number, and made it the Embleme of the most remarkable conjunction ... may hence apprehend the allegoricall sense of the obscure expression of *Hesiod*, and afford no improbable reason why *Plato* admitted his Nuptiall guests by fives, in the kindred of the married couple.

And though a sharper mystery might be implied in the Number of the five wise and foolish Virgins, which were to meet the Bridegroom, yet was the same agreeable unto the Conjugall Number, which ancient Numerists made out by two and three, the first

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2. The definitive discussion will be found in Adam 1929: 2: 201–9, 264–312). Briefer accounts in Findlay 1974: 197–98; Fowler 1964: 36.

3. The number 5 combines 2, the first female (even) number, with 3, the first male (odd) number. “Since 5 is associated with Venus and the senses and is merely a sum, it implies worldliness and cupidinous marriages” (Peck 1980: 24).

parity and imparity, the active and passive digits, the material and formall principles in generative Societies. (Keynes ed. 1968: [ch.5] 206)<sup>4</sup>

The words “marriage” and “nuptial” do not themselves appear in *The Talking of the Tod*. Obviously however relations between Chanteclair and his wives are not good. Of the other main characters, Father-war is a bastard, product of extramarital relations, and stanza 59 (already quoted) at least suggests the same origin for his father and grandfather. Indeed, the word “marriage” makes only a single appearance in the corpus of Henryson’s poetry, and that in a non-narrative poem and an unfavourable context:

#### Yowth

Ane vthir vers this yungman yit cowth sing:  
 “At luvis law a quhyle I think to leite,  
 In court to clamp clenely in my clething  
 And luke amangis thir lusty ladeis suet;  
 Of marriege to mell with mowis meit,  
 In secreitnes quhair we may nocht be sene,  
 And so with birdis blythlie my baillis beit:  
 O yowth, be glaid in to thi flowris grene!”

#### Aige

This austryne man gaif ansuer angrily:  
 “For thy crampyn thow sall bayth cruk and cowl,  
 And thy fleschly lust thow sall defy,  
 And pane the sall put fra parramour –  
 Than will no bird be blyth of the in bour,  
 Quhen thi manheid sall mynnis as the mone;  
 Thow sall assay gif that my sang be sour:  
 O yowth, thy flouris fadis farlie sone!  
 (“The Ressoning betuix Aige and Yowth”, 33–48)

Youth, it should be noted, appropriately states his case in the 5th stanza of the poem. From Henryson’s point of view, it would seem that the chances of bringing bride and bridegroom seasonably together were no better than slim.

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4. The references are to Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 698: “Let your wife have been grown up four years, and marry her in the fifth” (Evelyn-White ed. 1936: 55); Plato, *Laws VI* (Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: [775a] 1351).

31, the number of stanzas in branch 1, is a prime. Multiplication by 3, the number of branches, produces 93, the number of stanzas, excluding Moralities, in *The Talking of the Tod* as a whole. The body of the first fox disappears into a bog-hole in stanza 62 ( $31 \times 2$ ). Father-war makes the fatal mistake of killing a lamb in stanza 93 ( $31 \times 3$ ). Structurally, that is to say, 31 and its multiples forms an element likely to be significant.

In biblical terms 31 is meaningful. Joshua, for instance, an Old Testament type of Christ, defeated 31 kings in his conquest of the Promised Land (*Joshua* 12: 7–24). The good King Josiah, whose actions had been prophesied three hundred years before (*1 Kings* 13: 2), and whose reforms stemmed from the discovery by the High Priest Hilkiah of the book of the law, reigned for 31 years (*2 Kings* 22: 1; *2 Chronicles* 34: 1). In both cases the number is associated with the establishment of a new and better order of things.

Something similar is to be found in Dante. The numerically organized *Vita Nuova*, for instance, which deals with the transformation of the poet brought about by the life and death of Beatrice, contains a total of 31 poems. In the 31st *terzina* of the seventeenth canto of *Purgatorio*, the mid-canto of the *Commedia*, Virgil begins the argument which controls the structure of the poem:

So he began: "Never, my son, was yet  
 Creator, no, nor creature, without love  
 Natural or rational – and thou knowest it". (XVII: 91–93)

Natural love, which is innate, cannot err in its object, unlike that which has its source in the possible intellect ("rational"), uniquely characteristic of the human creation:

The natural cannot make an erring move;  
 The other may, either by faulty aim  
 Or else by too much zeal, or lack thereof. (XVII: 94–96)

Love of God, which is innate, the possible intellect cannot affect, but love of creatures is subject to its power. There are three ways in which it can misdirect such love, by concentration on self to the exclusion of everything else ("by faulty aim"), thus producing Pride, Envy, and Wrath; by lapsing towards indifference ("lack [of zeal]"), thus producing Sloth; or by obsessive concentration on other creatures ("too much zeal"), thus producing Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust. The

seven root sins, that is to say, are all products of love distorted by the exercise of human free will, a property of the possible intellect.

*Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are built around these seven sins, of which the chief is Pride, for which the lowest circle of Hell, the ninth, and the lowest cornice of Purgatory, the first, are reserved. *Paradiso* correspondingly is built around seven virtues, of which the lower four, Fortitude, Justice, Temperance, and Prudence, are classified as cardinal, the higher three, Faith, Hope, and Charity, as theological. The cardinal virtues occupy the seven lower spheres of *Paradiso*. The first three (Moon, Mercury, and Venus) lie within range of earth's shadow, and are occupied by souls whose characteristic was Fortitude, Justice, or Temperance, but whose practice of the virtue had in some measure been deficient. The next four (Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) exist beyond earth's shadow, and are occupied by souls whose characteristic had been unalloyed Prudence, Fortitude, Justice, or Temperance. Faith, Hope, and Charity are reserved for the ogdoad, the eighth sphere of the Fixed Stars, and beyond. Charity, dominant in the ninth sphere, the Primum Mobile, and in the Empyrean, receives its final expression in the famous line with which the *Commedia* ends, "The love that moves the sun and the other stars" (*Paradiso* XXXIII: 145).

The association between 31 and this complex of ideas also appears in the individual cantos so numbered. Dante reaches the lowest circle of Hell in *Inferno* XXXII, the 31st canto after the prologue. To signify personal beatitude, Beatrice finally turns her unveiled smiling face to him in *Purgatorio* XXXI. In *Paradiso* XXXI, Bernard directs Dante's eyes to the vision of final beatitude, Mary's smile at the centre of the white rose of the Church Triumphant:

I saw there, smiling to their sports and to their songs, a beauty which was gladness in the eyes of all the other saints. (XXXI: 133–36; Wicksteed and Dellsner tr. 1931: 383)

The allegorical subject of the poem is "Man, as by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of his free choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing Justice" (see above, 105). The order overthrown is that of earthly life, replaced by a new order in eternity.

The pattern has a direct relevance to *The Talking of the Tod*, where the actions of both foxes, governed by free-will and misdirected appetite ("rational" love), lead to judgement and death, for Father-war by way of the full temporal judicial process. The power of the stars

and planets, which plays a particularly important part in branch 2, is admonitory at the beginning, but later becomes executive.

### 3. The Cock and the Fox

The nature of fable is to deal in a simplified, almost diagrammatic, way with important moral issues. Alternatively, if we consider the tale as beast-epic, we are dealing with it as a form of mock-heroic, which differs from epic primarily in that it is satiric, and so treats great matters obliquely rather than directly. "A small man is not in himself a ridiculous object: he becomes so when he is dressed in a suit of armour designed for a hero". So Ian Jack in a discussion of Dryden's mock-heroic *MacFlecknoe* (Jack, I. 1952: 46). He might have added that a small man so dressed is an adverse comment on the society which allows him to dress in this way. The condemnation is intensified when the society is portrayed in terms of animals, who remain beasts, but at the same time mimic human customs and behaviour. The cock in branch 1 is a nobleman of distinguished ancestry. He is also a gullible barnyard fowl. The foxes are tricksters, endowed with a form of Prudence which allows them to see something of the future, but which at critical moments is overwhelmed by the brute instincts which lead to their destruction.

Although Henryson knew the *Roman de Renart*, the proximate source of branch 1 is *The Nun's Priest's Tale* of Chaucer (MacQueen, J. 1967: 221; Fox ed. 1981: 211). The plot here is essentially the same as in Henryson, although length, style, and treatment are very different. Other probable influences may also be detected. D.W. Robertson drew attention to marginal illustrations in fourteenth-century religious manuscripts (Robertson 1963: 213, 251–52; fig. 78), more particularly the Ormesby Psalter (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 366, f.7.v), written somewhere about the year 1300. There the fox appears in the right-hand bottom margin, running away with the cock in his mouth; the widow, distaff in hand, stands centre, gesticulating after him. The text immediately above is Vulgate *Psalm* 51, vv. 3–7 (AV, *Psalm* 52, vv.1–5), which may be translated thus:

Why do you glory in malice, you who are powerful in iniquity? All day long your tongue has meditated injustice: like a sharp razor you have devised treachery. You have preferred malice to goodwill, injustice rather than speaking equity. You have loved all words of headlong haste, deceitful tongue. Wherefore God will destroy you

in the end; he will thrust you out and banish you from your tent, and your root from the land of the living.

The relevance lies obviously in the figure of the fox whose deceitful tongue won him the opportunity to capture the cock. (There is also the implication that the same deceitful tongue will bring the fox to a bad end.) The supposed occasion for the composition of the psalm is described in verse 2 of the Vulgate version (curiously not included in the Ormesby Psalter; the equivalent in AV is treated as a rubric): "When Doeg the Idumaeon came and announced to Saul: David has come into the house of Achimelech". The reference is to Vulgate *I Kings* 21: 1–9; 22: 9–23 (AV, *I Samuel* 21: 1–9; 22: 9–23). When David fled from Saul, he came on the Sabbath to the house of Achimelech in Nob, the city of priests, where he pretended to be on a secret mission for the king. Achimelech innocently provided him with bread and a weapon, the sword of Goliath, both taken from the priestly holdings. The bread was the shewbread, dedicated for the week just past, but now replaced by a new offering. Only priests were allowed to eat it. (The incident is also mentioned in the synoptic Gospels, *Matthew* 12: 3–4; *Mark* 2: 25–27; *Luke* 6: 3–4.) Present in the house at the time was Doeg, the chief among Saul's servants. Doeg afterwards used his deceitful tongue to feed Saul's suspicions of a conspiracy in favour of David by giving a deliberately misleading account of the affair, making Achimelech a fellow-conspirator with David. Achimelech was summarily condemned, and when Saul's guards refused to take any action, Doeg himself killed Achimelech with his family and the other priests, sacking the city of Nob. There is some suggestion that he was motivated by the wish to become chief priest himself. Only Achimelech's son Abiathar escaped and brought the news to David. In a sense the cock who escaped the fox is the equivalent of Abiathar. The psalm was believed to have been composed when word of the massacre reached David's camp.

The possible relevance is not restricted to the story of Doeg, as may be illustrated by other manuscript illuminations reproduced in Robertson's work and elsewhere. In a fourteenth-century French *Hours* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 62, f.7; Robertson 1963: fig. 101), an illustration similar to that already mentioned, but with the widow and her distaff right, the fox and the cock centre, bottom margin, illustrates a simple prayer for grace and salvation to be used at vespers. The same grace saved the cock. Compare:

Then spak the cok, with sum gude spirit inspyrit (24: 558)

and:

This tod, thoct he wes fals and friuolus,  
 And had frawdys, his querrell to defend,  
 Desaut wes be menis richt meruelous,  
 For falsset failyeis ay at the latter end. (25: 565–68)

In the Flemish *Somme le roi* of the early fourteenth-century (London, British Library, MS Add. 28162, f.7v; Robertson 1963: fig. 79) the personified female figure of Équité crushes beneath her feet the fox with the cock still in his mouth, perhaps in the very act of escape. The crushed fox symbolizes the triumph of Equity over her rival Félonnie whose malicious activities are illustrated in the balancing panel. The relevance to *The Cock and the Fox* is again clear.

The cock's premonitory dream, already important in the *Roman de Renart*, becomes almost the dominating element in Chaucer's tale. Not surprisingly, there is no trace of it in the manuscript illuminations nor, rather more unexpectedly, in Henryson. Both however agree with Chaucer in making the owner of the cock a poor widow. In the *Roman de Renart*, by contrast, he belongs to a rich peasant, Coutenz des Noes, whose wife makes a brief appearance when the cock is stolen.

In *The Cock and the Fox* particularly, the development of the narrative is at two levels. On one it deals with farmyard matters. The other is more courtly. The cock is a nobleman, proud of his distinguished ancestry, who imagines himself skilled in the arts of courtly love, and who is accustomed to the devotion of retainers. The fox presents himself as a loyal family servant, perhaps a distant kinsman. The cock is certainly a layman:

To our purpose this cok weill may we call  
 Nyse proud men, woid and vane glorious,  
 Of kin and blude quhilk is presumptuous. (28: 590–92)

The fox poses as a clergyman; note the claim that he attended the deathbed of the cock's father and sang the *dirige* at the funeral (8: 447–49). When he addresses the cock as "my fair sone", the tone he adopts is priestly, as it might be that of a domestic chaplain of a great family addressing the heir who has recently succeeded. Compare too his seemingly mild clerical oaths, "be my saull" (6: 436), and "be my saull and the blissit sacrament" (9: 455). These roughly correspond to



the “God bless my soul!” of the conventional vicar in later comedies, although in the present context the implications are more serious.

His sin at this point is motivated mainly by hunger, by physical greed, rather than by any spiritual failing.

Early plot development turns on the cock’s belief that the world owes him respect because he is the heir of noble “progenitouris” (7: 440),<sup>5</sup> and in particular of a noble father, now dead in uncertain circumstances. The fox captures his interest when he brings him news of the actual death:

“Knew ye my father?” quod the cok, and leuch.  
 “Yea, my fair sone, forsoth I held his heid  
 Quhen that he deit vnder ane birkin beuch;  
 Syne said the Dirigie quhen that he wes deid.  
 Betuix vs twa how suld thair be ane feid?” (8: 446–50)

The cock’s laughter here, as usually in Henryson (above, 140; below, 244), is evidence of the shallowness, the lack of perception, which allows him to be deceived by the fox. The feud mentioned is the blood-feud, theoretically impossible between adherents of the same family group, but generally a reality in relation to cocks and foxes. The fox presents himself as an extravagantly devoted old retainer who worships every symbol of his master’s hereditary distinction:

Quhen I behald your fedderis fair and gent,  
 Your beik, your breist, your hekill, and your kame –  
 Schir, be my saull and the blissit sacrament,  
 My hart warmys, me think I am at hame.  
 Yow for to serve, I wald creip on my wame  
 In froist and snaw, in wedder wan and weit,  
 And lay my lyart loikkis vnder your feit. (9: 453–59)

In the alliterative and emotional rush of the language, the reader almost misses the sinister ambiguity – whatever the weather, the fox would employ all his wiles as a hunter to have Chantecleir, like his father before him, firmly between his jaws. The *Moralitas* makes the situation plain:

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5. Compare the use of the word (and of its feminine equivalent, “progenitrys”) in *The Tale of Orpheus*, stanzas 2 and 10.

This fenyeit fox may weill be figurate  
To flatteraris with plesand wordis quhyte,  
With fals mening and mynd maist toxicate. (30: 600–2)

The fox has still to play his strongest card. The tone changes when in stanza 10, the completion of the first decad, he insinuates that the cock fails to maintain the standards of his ancestors – “Ye ar, me think, changit and degenerate” (1.462; note the emphasis on the final word). The volume of the cock’s crowing partly satisfies him, but he reserves his ultimate thrust for stanza 11, a number which, as has often been noted, usually indicates transgression:

“Ye ar your fatheris sone and air vpricht,  
Bot off his cunning yit ye want ane slicht”.  
“Quhat?” quod the cok. “He wald, and haif na dout,  
Baith wink, and craw, and turne him thryis about”. (11: 470–73)

The shallowness of the cock is revealed by his false pride, his determination to outdo the deeds of his ancestors and avoid degeneracy. It is this that leaves him open to the fox’s sudden assault:

The cok, inflate with wind and fals vane gloir,  
That mony puttis vnto confusioun,  
Traisting to win ane grit worschip thairfoir,  
Vnwarlie winkand walkit vp and doun,  
And syne to chant and craw he maid him boun –  
And suddandlie, be he had crawin ane note,  
The foxe wes war, and hint him be the throte. (12: 474–80)

The cock in fact shows some degree of degeneracy in the very attempt to disprove it. A failing, characteristic of feudal society in general, is indicated by the fact that the fox is prepared to adopt such Machiavellian tactics to achieve his treacherous aim.

Henryson delays the transition to the latter part of the action, and introduces an interlude of 9 stanzas in a way which combines realism with courtly convention. The widow’s reaction to the theft is more or less appropriate to her social level, quite different from that claimed by her cock. Only the beating of her breast may seem a little excessive. Her subsequent swoon is on the whole more appropriate to a courtly level, although one should not miss that she is sweating like a peasant as well as swooning like a lady:

As scho wer woid, with mony yell and cry,  
 Ryuand her hair, vpon hir breist can beit:  
 Syne pail of hew, half in ane extasy,  
 Fell down for cair in swoning and in sweit. (14: 488–91)

Stylistically the swoon belongs to an aristocratic milieu, like that of *The Testament of Cresseid*, where Cresseid swoons in her oratory (*Testament of Cresseid* 21: 141–42). Here too the swoon is followed by a debate or parliament, with the important difference that the parliament is not one of planetary deities but of hens. Charles Muscatine writes interestingly on passages of this kind in twelfth- and thirteenth-century French courtly romance:

Extraordinary emotions have their appropriate actions and gestures. Sorrow, for instance, is accompanied by sinking of the head, weeping and sighing, failure of the voice and swooning, and more passionate gestures, as wringing and beating the hands, striking and scratching the face, pulling on hair and beard, ripping garments, and so forth. Again the modern reader must be careful not to look at these apparently crudely described motions for physiological accuracy – though some may be accurate enough, for all we know – or for refined discrimination of tone. When the *Eneas* poet writes, as he often does,

A icest mot perdi l'aloine  
 et pasma soi ...

“With this her breathing failed, and she fainted”.

he is indicating an emotional climax, but we must not expect him to deal with it in realistic, medical terms. Like the poetically elevated speech which often precedes or follows it, this kind of action has only an emblematic relation to the facts of life. It is like the patterned and formal gestures that must have accompanied Greek tragedy, for which the conditions of performance would seem to have made naturalistic subtleties of action impossible. (Muscatine 1957: 29)

*The Testament of Cresseid* proves that Henryson knew and exploited the convention so described. In all probability, that is to say, the fact that Pertok's lament, a poetically elevated speech, follows the widow's swoon, shows that Henryson intended this poem to be read, as satire certainly, as mock-heroic, but as a mock-heroic which exploits the same convention. (The lament, incidentally, begins in stanza 15, marking the second intermediate pentad.) The critic's problem is to interpret the emblematic relationship borne by speech and swoon to the poem as a whole. There are several possible approaches.

In the first place, the plot demands a certain rehabilitation of Chantecleir after his fall to the flattery of the fox. Unlike the cock in *The Tale of the Cock and the Jasp*, he is not completely a fool; under God's grace he can use his wits to rescue himself, even from the fox's mouth. On one level, the widow's swoon and Pertok's lament, appropriate as they are to the death of a courtly hero, serve to re-elevate Chantecleir to something of the height from which the fox had dethroned him.

Against this one may urge that the heightening of style and convention serves only as a prelude to a second deflation in the remarks of Sprutok and Coppok, and in Pertok's revision of her first opinion. Pertok's lament does indeed include the suggestion of degeneracy, a point later much elaborated by Sprutok: "In paramouris he wald do vs plesing, / *At his power*, as nature list him geif." (16: 506–7; italics mine). This in turn refers back to an earlier suggestion that Chantecleir's powers were inadequate to the demands made on him by his wives: "Chantecleir, in to the gray dawing, / Werie for nicht, wes flowen fra his nest." (5: 425–28). Denton Fox's comment on the penultimate phrase is apposite: "weary because of the night' ... during the night he must keep awake ... and also try to fill the insatiable appetites of his hens" (Fox ed. 1981: 213). Pertok knows his inadequacies, but is at first unwilling to make anything of them – she gives him, as it were, E for effort. Sprutok makes her sweep away such hypocrisy; the final comment is:

Sister, ye wait off sic as him ane scoir  
 Wald not suffice to slaik our appetyte,  
 I hecht yow be my hand, sen ye ar quyte,  
 Within ane oulk, for schame and I durst speik,  
 To get ane berne suld better claw oure breik. (19: 525–29)

The "paramouris" of stanza 16 has become "claw our breik", appropriate for a farmyard bird, but the very reverse of courtly lament.

Sprutok moves the terms of the debate from courtly to fabliau. Coppok goes farther in her speech beginning with stanza 20, last of the second decad. She adopts a strongly moralistic tone and introduces questions of divine providence which are important here, but in terms of the second and third branches still more so. Her morality turns on the idea of Chantecleir as a great sinner who has ignored the Commandments and thus necessarily laid himself open to God's vengeance. She uses the word "God" more than once:

Prydefull he wes, and ioyit off his sin,  
 And comptit not for Goddis fauour nor feid,  
 Bot traistit ay to rax and sa to rin,  
 Quhill at the last his sinnis can him leid  
 To schamefull end and to yon suddand deid.  
 Thairfoir it is the verray hand of God  
 That causit him be werryit with the tod. (21: 537–43)

The final couplet may have a hidden significance, but in isolation the stanza is ridiculously inapposite, especially when the moralist has herself been a partner in the excesses of the sinner, a barnyard fowl, still alive and planning his escape from the fox's jaws. Coppok describes him as if he were a villainous fox – with “traistit ay to rax and sa to rin” compare “Ay rinnis the foxe, als lang as he fute haise” (62: 827), the proverb used in branch 3 by the second fox to commemorate his dead father.

Coppok nevertheless is the first to see in the action the possible operation of the hand of God. The fox too thinks he sees possibilities of divine intervention. When the widow recovers from her swoon at the end of the interlude, she at once realizes, as her hens have failed to do, that Chanteclair may still be alive, and releases her hounds to attempt an improbable rescue. Under pressure of pursuit, the fox utters a kind of silent prayer, addressed to the cock, but also directed to God: “Vnto the cok in mynd he said, ‘God sen / That I and thow wer fairlie in my den’” (23: 556–57). 23, the number of the stanza, represents vengeance on sinners. The fox makes a mistake when he invokes God for help in his nefarious enterprise. The prayer produces its effect, but it is the reverse of the fox's desire; in stanza 24 it produces the providential initiative by which Chanteclair exploits the power of hypocritical utterance, which he has learned from the fox, to outwit his enemy. In particular, Chanteclair appears to sympathize with the fox's hunger and weariness, while maintaining the fiction that the two are joined by a bond of friendship. He is literally inspired:

Then spak the cok, with sum gude spirit inspyrit,  
 “Do my counsall and I sall warrand the.  
 Hungrie thow art, and for grit trauell tyrit,  
 Richt faint off force and may not ferther fle:  
 Swyith turne agane and say that I and ye  
 Freindis ar maid and fellouis for ane yeir.  
 Than will thay stint, I stand for it, and not steir”. (24: 558–64)

The fox's earlier prayer was a mental utterance; now he opens his mouth to speak, and the cock escapes by using the one attribute, his wings, which gives him some physical advantage. It is in the 25th stanza, the third intermediate pentad, that he escapes, while in stanza 27, the final number of the complete Lambda formula for the soul, the immediate task of Providence is completed with the cock's recognition of his own earlier folly in the words "I wes vnwyse that winkit at thy will" (27: 579). The fox, although he has been duped by the use of his own technique, shows his degeneracy by a clumsy repetition (stanza 26), thus confirming that "falset failyies ay at the latter end" (25: 568). It is a mark of Chantecleir's new-found prudence that after another appeal to God, he flies home (stanza 27), rather than run the risk of a journey on the ground. Cocks very rarely take to the wing.

To be deceived by flattery and hypocrisy is, it would seem, a venial rather than a mortal sin; the role of Providence is to help rather than condemn. The sins of the fox however are still outstanding when the first branch comes to an end.

#### 4. The Role of the Narrator

The narrator as generalising commentator appears briefly in stanzas 1 and 2 of *The Cock and the Fox*. Animals lack the power of rational judgement, but instead are driven by *inclinatioun*, "natural disposition", to a particular kind of behaviour which may on occasion, or even usually, seem rational. The fox thus is "fenyteit, craftie and cawtelous", the dog is guardian of the house (1: 402–3). A few lines later (3: 417; cf. 15: 498–501) it becomes evident that one natural function of a cock is to tell the time, to act as if he had, or as if he were, a clock. His crowing, which plays such a part in the action, is his way of doing so.

All three *inclinatiounis* play their part in the tale which follows and which the narrator, like the author of a scientific treatise, offers as a specimen case:

For thy as now, I purpose for to wryte  
 Ane cais I fand quhilk fell this ather yeir  
 Betwix ane foxe and gentill Chantecleir. (2: 408–10)

Notice, incidentally, the immediate emphasis on Chantecler's gentility.

During the subsequent unravelling of events, the narrator's voice only once reappears, in a remark which looks forward to the *Moralitas* with its emphasis on vainglorious pride: "The cok, inflate with wind and fals vane gloir / That mony puttis vnto confusioun —" (12: 474–75).

The actual *Moralitas* is wholly in his voice, speaking to an assumed literate audience, prepared to cope with such concepts as *typis figurall*, *sentence*, and *fenyeit termis textuall* (28: 587–89). Their social standing is relatively high; they are addressed as *worthie folk* (28: 586) and *gude folk* (31: 613). In the stanza which completes the third deced they are warned against the kind of pride which led to the fall of Lucifer, and against the attention of flatterers. The phrase "worthie folk" is repeated:

All worthie folk at sic suld haif despite  
For quhair is thair mair perrillous pestilence  
Nor gif to learis haistelie credence? (30: 604–6)

The audience is more likely to be lay than clerical; prosperous burgesses and local lairds would seem to be indicated. The question of audience is closely linked to that of patronage. Many fifteenth-century Scottish literary works were written at the request of local dignitaries who presumably also supplied the initial audience (MacQueen, J. 1977: 196–99). The same may be true of Henryson.

In the *Moralitas* the tone in some measure derives from the significance already attributed to the number 31. The mock-heroic is abandoned. Chantecler's failing is treated as the most extreme distortion of love, Pride, based in the first instance on kindred and ancestry, but ultimately to be identified with the sin which caused the fall of Satan and his angels, described with Henryson's characteristic alliterative vigour:

Tak witnes of the feyndis infernall,  
Quhilk houndit doun wes fra that heuinlie hall  
To hellis hole and to that hiddeous hous,  
Because in pryde thay wer presumptuous. (29: 596–99)

The final word, "presumptuous", repeated from the previous stanza, forces the identification on the reader.

Chanteclair however recognizes his failing in time to escape with a new set of priorities. The fox is less fortunate. He personifies flattery, which too may be regarded as a form of pride: the flatterer tries to satisfy his own desires by the deliberate use of falsehood to manipulate others, whose existence has no purpose, he believes, or even reality, save insofar as it impinges on himself and his appetites. The narrator ends the *Moralitas* with a broad hint that further misfortunes await the fox:

For thy, *as now* [italics mine] schortlie to conclude,  
 Thir twa sinnis, flatterie and vaneglore,  
 Ar vennemous; gude folk, fle thame thairfoir! (31: 611–13)

Notably he gives flattery precedence over vainglory. He regards them nevertheless as two sides of a single coin.

## 5. The Fox and the Wolf

The narrator is more prominent in the second branch, *The Fox and the Wolf*, which he introduces using the editorial “we”, embracing both himself and his readers:

Leif we this wedow glaid, I yow assure,  
 Off Chanteclair mair blyith than I can tell,  
 And speke we off the fatal auenture  
 And destenie that to this foxe befell. (32: 614–17)

The fox is to have a fatal accident, the result not of mere chance, but of destiny, which in turn is part of divine providence. In these words the narrator sets out in brief the entire subsequent action, of which he seems to have an intimate knowledge. In a sense, he *is* the fox, or at least part of his personality is represented by the fox. It is not therefore surprising that he introduces himself as a shadowy participant at crucial moments of the action. The fox, for instance, gives him precise information about the planets and constellations of the zodiac on the night following the unsuccessful attempt on the cock:

Out off the wod vnto ane hill he went,  
 Quhair he micht se the twinkling sternis cleir  
 And all the planetis off the firmament,  
 Thair cours and eik thair mouing in thair speir,



Sum retrograde and sum stationeir  
 And off the zodiak in quhat degre  
 Thay wer ilk ane, as Lowrence leirnit me. (34: 628–34)

The fox has a trained eye which not only can distinguish between stars and planets, but can also judge the motion of the planets against the fixed stars, and the details to a degree of their position in the zodiac, each sign of which occupies 30 degrees of the 360 degree circuit. Stanza 35, marking the fourth intermediate pentad, presents a selection of the information given by him to the narrator; the lament in stanza 38 is also presumably addressed to him, since he is still present when the fox begins his confession to Freir Volff Waitskaith. The word “God” reappears in stanza 40, when the wolf is addressed as “my gostlie father vnder God” (40: 672). The narrator steps aside to preserve the seal of the confessional, but returns to overhear the discussion between the pair on the state of the fox’s mind and the penance to be undertaken. For the remainder of the action he scarcely appears. He returns in the *Moralitas* to state the high value of the sacrament of confession which the action has already emphasized. Once again the *Moralitas* is addressed to “gude folke”:

Ceis of your sin; remord your conscience;  
 Do wilfull penance here; and ye sall wend  
 Efter your deith to blis withouttin end. (57: 793–95)

The fox’s destiny as written in the spheres is fulfilled when he least expects it. But previously even he had realized that individual freewill, properly directed, is able through grace to counteract the spheres, in his case by way of the sacrament of penance:

My destenie and eik my weird I watt,  
 My auenture is cleirlie to me kend,  
 With mischeif myngit is my mortall fait  
 My misleuing the soner bot I mend;  
 Deid is reward off sin and schamefull end.  
 Thairfoir I will ga seik sum confessour  
 And schryiff me clene off all sinnis to this hour. (37: 649–55)

The stanza which follows is prophetic of his own fate, even more that of his bastard son:

“Allace”, quod he, “richt waryit ar we theuis:  
 Our lyif is set ilk nicht in auenture,

Our cursit craft full mony man mischeuis,  
 For euer we steill and euer alyk ar pure;  
 In dreid and schame our dayis we indure,  
 Syne “Widdinek” and “Crakraip” callit als,  
 And til our hyre ar hangit be the hals”.<sup>6</sup> (38: 656–62)

For much of the narrative the possibility of redemption remains open for him, despite the imperfect way in which the wolf administers the sacrament. The fox makes his approach in stanza 40, which completes the fourth decad and which in the Bible and elsewhere marks the completion of an important development (MacQueen, J. 1985: 19–20). In *The Talking of the Tod* stanza 40 is the fulcrum for the remainder of the action.

In the present instance the priest consulted is a friar, and specifically a Franciscan, as is shown by his “russet coull off gray” (41: 679). His basic irresponsibility is revealed by his inappropriate laugh or giggle (42: 684), when he is approached by the fox. The fox appears to accept, and hopes to exploit, the popular belief that friars had greater power of confession, and gave easier penance than the secular clergy, a belief most easily illustrated by Chaucer’s words about the Friar in the *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*:

For he hadde power of confessioun,  
 As seyde hymself, moore than a curat,  
 For of his ordre he was licenciat.  
 Ful swetely herde he confessioun,  
 And plesant was his absoluccioun:  
 He was an esy man to yeve penaunce,  
 Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce. (218–24)

In Henryson the fox provides the wolf with no “pitaunce”, but certainly the latter’s absolution is easily obtained, although perhaps not quite so easily as the modern reader might suppose.

As normally understood, the three parts of the sacrament of penance are *Contritio*, *Confessio*, and *Satisfactio*.<sup>7</sup> The wolf says to the fox:

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6. Compare in Lindsay’s *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* the final speeches of Thift before he is hanged. Included are the lines “Repent your lyfis, ye plaine oppressouris, / All ye misdoaris and transgressouris: / Or ellis gar chuse yow gude confessouris, / And mak yow forde” (Hamer ed. 1931: 359, ll.3990–93).

7. Cf., e.g., Chaucer, *Parson’s Tale* “Now shaltow understande what is bihovely and necessarie to verray perfite Penitence. And this stant on three thynges: Contricioun of herte, Confessioun of Mouthe, and Satisfaccioun” (Robinson ed. 1957: 107–8).

thow wantis pointis twa  
 Belangand to perfyte confessioun;  
 To the thrid part off pennance let vs ga. (46: 712–14)

It may seem natural to suppose that he refers to *Contritio* and *Confessio*, and that he is about to proceed to *Satisfactio*. As the fox is found wanting in this also, it would seem that the wolf's absolution has no grounds whatever. But this is to misread the evidence. The narrator does not indicate any lack in the fox's *Confessio*, which indeed he goes out of his way to treat seriously. In fact, the third part mentioned has nothing to do with *Satisfactio*. As indicated by the wolf's questions, the "pointis twa" seem rather to belong to the dialogue between priest and penitent which forms an essential prelude to *Satisfactio*. He is found lacking in the first requirement, *Contritio*, "contrition, repentance". The astrologically inspired panic leading to his confession was for his own future safety and did not involve any repentance for earlier evil deeds:

"Art thow contrite and sorie in thy spreit  
 For thy trespas?" "Na, schir, I can not duid.  
 Me think that hennis ar sa honie sweit,  
 And lambes flesche that new ar lettin bluid,  
 For to repent my mynd can not conclud,  
 Bot off this thing, that I haif slane sa few". (44: 698–703)

To the second, future forbearance and amendment, the answer is again negative. To justify himself, the fox, as has been noted (above, 198), parodies the words of the Unjust Steward, "I eschame to thig, I cannot wirk, ye wait, / Yit wald I fane pretend to gentill stait." (45: 710–11).

The third point is slightly different. The fox is prepared to accept *Poena*, "pain, penalty", provided it is not too heavy. Initially the penalty is severe, particularly for a fox. The wolf instructs him to abstain from flesh until Easter, some eight months in the future, if we accept the astrological evidence shortly to be discussed. In response to his urgent pleas, the fox is permitted twice a week "to eit puddingis, or laip ane lyttill blude" (48: 727), an indulgence given in terms of the dangerous proverb, "neid may haif na law"<sup>8</sup> (48: 731). The fox

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8. *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, s.v. "Necessity (Need) has (knows) no law." *Necessitas non habet legem* is a legal maxim; for the status of such "pithy formulations" see *Oxford Companion to Law*, s.vv. "Maxims, legal", "Necessity".

responds with another almost blasphemous reference to God: “God yeild yow, schir, for that text weill I knaw” (48: 732).

The three points of penitence mentioned are thus (a) contrition, (b) forbearance and amendment, (c) pain, two of which the fox denies or refuses, the third of which he is at best conditionally prepared to accept. His absolution is cheaply, but not quite gratuitously, gained – and is lost even more cheaply.

In the first branch the cock escaped by the intervention of Providence, but, save for inspiration, the methods used by providence received little attention. *The Fox and the Wolf* is more specific. It begins with the stanzas in which the instruments of Providence, the stars and planets, warn the fox of his likely fate. The fox is presented as an astrologer instructed by nature, but also, it would seem, by the fact that his father had sent him to school. We are perhaps to understand that his school was nature:

But astrolab, quadrant, or almanak,  
Teichit off nature be instructioun,  
The mouing off the heuin this tod can tak,  
Quhat influence and constellatioun  
Wes lyke to fall vpon the eirth adoun;  
And to him self he said, withoutin mair,  
“Weill worth the, father, that send me to the lair”. (36: 662–68)

The fox uses no scientific instruments or reference books, but his powers of observation are superhuman – the planets mentioned in the previous stanza are not all visible at once in the zodiacal positions to which they are assigned. As Denton Fox notes, with the Sun in Leo just set, both Mars in Aries and Venus in Cancer are below the horizon (Fox ed. 1981: 224).

Almost certainly the stanza should not be read simply with the eye of an astrologer. The final effect is of a different and more pictorial symbolism. Nevertheless such astrological concepts as planetary houses have their importance. Each planet is particularly associated with one or two signs of the zodiac, its solar (day) or lunar (night) house. The first group of houses, generally solar, were those in which the planets were created at the beginning of the world. The Moon had priority, for to her was assigned Cancer, the Crab, from which the others follow in regular order; the Sun in Leo, the Lion; Mercury in Virgo, the Virgin; Venus in Libra, the Scales; Mars in Scorpio, the Scorpion; Jupiter in Sagittarius, the Archer; Saturn in Capricorn, the Sea-goat. The signs from the summer solstice in Cancer up to, and

including, the winter solstice in Capricorn, are thus each assigned to a planet. It is not appropriate for the Sun to have a lunar (night) house, or the Moon to have a solar (day) one. The remaining five signs were allotted as night houses to the other planets in reverse order; to Saturn Aquarius, the Water-carrier; to Jupiter Pisces, the Fishes; to Mars Aries, the Ram; to Venus Taurus, the Bull; to Mercury Gemini, the Twins. The annual cycle is thus completed and the entire zodiac assigned to individual planets. Astrologically, a planet was held to be particularly powerful when it occupied its own house.

The power of a planet increased when it was in its exaltation, but weakened in its depression. Here too the signs of the zodiac are involved. For present purposes it is sufficient to note the unique position of Mercury, whose exaltation is in his day house, Virgo, which he occupies.

As has already been noted, two of the planets – Saturn and Mars, the Greater and the Lesser Infortunes – were regarded as maleficent. Jupiter and Venus were beneficent, the Sun, Mercury and the Moon common, beneficent, that is to say, with the beneficent, maleficent with the maleficent (above, 51).<sup>9</sup>

The stanzaic form produces its own constraints and emphases; one must make allowance for the difficulty of including all the planets, each in a zodiacal house, within a single seven-line stanza, meantime retaining a strict metrical and rhyme scheme. It is the more remarkable therefore that Henryson introduced them in the accepted order of their distance from the central terrestrial globe, with the sole exception, for which there is good rhetorical justification, that the Moon and Mercury exchange places. From Saturn to Venus, that is to say, the order is the same as that found in the planetary parliament of *The Testament of Cresseid*. There two, Saturn the highest and the Moon the lowest, stand out as the assessors chosen to fix Cresseid's punishment. In *The Fox and the Wolf* there is a similar effect, but with three – Saturn, Phoebus, and Mercury – rather than two planets in

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9. Cf. the slightly different account given by the classical astronomer Ptolemy: "The ancients accepted two of the planets, Jupiter and Venus, together with the moon, as beneficent because of their tempered nature and because they abound in the hot and the moist, and Saturn and Mars as producing effects of the opposite nature, one because of his excessive cold and the other for his excessive dryness; the sun and Mercury, however, they thought to have both powers, because they have a common nature, and to join their influences with those of the other planets, with whichever of them they are associated" (Robins ed. 1980: [I.5] 39).

positions of importance at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the stanza. First is Saturn, the Greater Infortune, in a position of power, his own day house in the zodiacal sign of Capricorn, depicted with the foreparts of a goat, the hindquarters of a fish. The middle line is given to Phoebus, the Sun, in his house Leo, a position where he is generally regarded as *Sol iustitiae*, the sun of justice (Panofsky 1955: 66; cited in Fowler 1964: 70). The final couplet is given to Mercury, described as god of eloquence (which includes tricky speech; Mercury is also the god of thieves). He is in his day house, which is also his exaltation, Virgo, normally identified with the maiden Astraea, Justice, who fled from earth at the end of the Golden Age. Virgo additionally was regarded as having power over the appetitive organs, the abdomen, diaphragm, and intestines.<sup>10</sup> Two other planets are each given a single line. Jupiter, a benign influence, is in his day house, Sagittarius. Mars, the Lesser Infortune, is in his night house, Aries, “which commonly expects death from bloodshed or iron, as by the butcher” (Thorndyke 1965: 97; tr. Scott’s *Liber Introductorius* from Munich, Staatsbibliothek MS, cod.lat. 10268). Venus and the Moon each receive only a half-line; Venus is in Cancer, the Crab, the Moon in Aquarius, the Water-carrier. Neither is in her own house or exaltation, but both have associations with water, Venus specifically with the sea.

In the account of the movement of the planets (34: 632) some are said to be stationary, some retrograde; none is in the direct motion against that of the firmament which is the primary reason for the name *planets*, etymologically “wanderers”. This is so unusual that Henryson must have meant it to be noticed. Retrograde movement is astrologically unfortunate. Four planets – Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, and the Sun – are described (the Sun impossibly) as moving in this direction. The evil potential of the Greater and Lesser Infortunes is thus increased; correspondingly the potential for benevolence in Jupiter is decreased. The Sun and Mercury, as common, are also to be regarded as maleficent.

It may also be significant that the catalogue occupies the 4th stanza of the branch. Because 4 is the first number to contain two means, it represents proportion, balance. In the context now established that can only mean retributive justice:

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10. See, e.g., the figure taken from Vienna, Nationalbibliothek MS 5327, f.160r, in Seznec 1953: 66.

Than Saturne auld wes enterit in Capricorne,  
 And Iuppiter mouit in Sagittarie,  
 And Mars vp in the Rammis heid wes borne,  
 And Phebus in the Lyoune furth can carie;  
 Venus the Crab, the Mone wes in Aquarie;  
 Mercurius, the god off eloquence,  
 Into the Virgyn maid his residence. (35: 635–41)

All the action of the final six stanzas of the narrative may in a sense be related to this single stanza. The fox's adventures have an unhappy but deserved outcome in which may be seen the power of the Greater and Lesser Infortunes (Saturn and Mars), and of Justice (Phoebus in Leo, Virgo as Astraea). He is terrified at the sight of the sea (Cancer and Aquarius both have some relevance), and breaks the condition of his absolution by stealing (Mercury) a kid from a goat, which by the use of clever language (Mercury) he thought he was able to transform into a fish (Capricorn, the Sea-goat), and so to eat without infringing the terms imposed by the wolf-friar. After his meal he lies down in the sun (Phoebus), which has now risen, and makes the clever remark (Mercury) about his well-filled belly (Virgo) and an arrow (Sagittarius), which leads to his being shot in the belly by an archer, using an arrow, presumably with an iron tip, which causes bloodshed (Aries). The fox dies with a clever speech (Mercury). The final couplet of the stanza, showing Mercury at his greatest power in association with the virgin of Justice, is most obviously prophetic.

Mercury is clearly the predominant force. It is not unreasonable to deduce from the stanza that the fox was born under that planet. If so, it must have been in a dishonourable position. Ptolemy says of the unfortunates born under such circumstances:

he [Mercury] makes them utter rascals, precipitate, forgetful, impetuous, light-minded, fickle, prone to change their minds, foolish rogues, witless, sinful, liars, indiscriminating, unstable, undependable, avaricious, unjust, and, in general, unsteady in judgement and inclined to evil deeds. (Robins ed. 1980: [III.13] 361)<sup>11</sup>

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11. Cf. Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, IV.3: "My father named me Autolycus; who being as I am, littered under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles." Henryson's foxes usually bear some resemblance to Shakespeare's Autolycus, and to Homer's who "surpassed all men in thievery and (ambiguous) swearing" (*Odyssey*, 19, 394ff.), by favour of Hermes (Mercury) whose son he was, according at least to later accounts (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. "Autolycus").

Most of these characteristics are recognizable in the fox.

That is not however to say that the death of the fox was absolutely predestined. The stars and planets establish only “Quhat influence and constellatioun / *Wes lyke* to fall vpon the eirth adoun” (36: 645–46; italics mine). The fox realises that that by the exercise of his own free-will he is still able to win divine grace, offsetting the adverse constellations, and it is for this reason that he seeks a confessor. The absolution which he so unworthily gains would still have been sufficient to enable him to escape his apparent destiny. He fully intends to do penance:

The foxe on fute he fure vnto the flude;  
To fang him fisch haillelie wes his intent.  
Bot quhen he saw the walterand wallis woude,  
All stonist still in to ane stair he stude,  
And said, “Better I had biddin at hame  
Nor bene ane fischar, in the Deuillis name”. (49: 734–39)

Stanza 49 represents the bodily climacteric (7×7). The reference to the Devil at such a point of crisis shows how the fox’s body is misdirecting his intellect. His method of transforming kid flesh into fish is amusing and exploits his power of manipulating language, but under the circumstances it is at best cleverly foolish. The fox is playing into the hands of the planets and their houses:

fra the gait he stall ane lytill kid.

Syne ouer the heuch vnto the see he hyis,  
And tuke the kid be the hornis twane,  
And in the watter outhier twyis or thryis  
He dowkit him, and till him can he sayne,  
“Ga doun, schir Kid, cum vp, schir Salmond, agane”,  
Quhill he wes deid, syne to the land him drewch,  
And off that new-maid salmond eit anewch. (50–51: 746–53)

It is in the 50th stanza, the completion of the fifth decad, that he steals the kid, thus invalidating his reception of the sacrament of penance and beginning the movement towards damnation, further advanced in stanza 51 by the parody of baptism and the transubstantiation of the consecrated elements in the eucharist. The wit with which he performs should not blind the reader to the now inevitable consequences.

By nature the fox is a nocturnal creature. After the disastrous conclusion of his morning attempt against Chantecleir, which should



have served as a warning, he hid himself “als lang as leme or licht wes off the day” (32: 619). Later he is “Merie and glade that cummit wes the nicht” (33: 627). Subsequent events all take place by night. By the time he has devoured the new-made salmon, however, daylight has returned, and the power of the planets in their day houses is at the highest. The unconsciously perceptive remark “Vpon this wame set wer ane bolt full meit” (57: 760), allows Saturn, Jupiter, Phoebus and Mercury to bring about his destruction in an appropriate way.

It will be remembered that in *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger* the fox took particular exception to the cadger’s proposal to skin him and make mittens of his hide. The goatherd does what the cadger had only intended, and flays his dead victim.

The branch has a straightforward internal numerical construction. The first episode, setting the astrological situation, occupies the first 7 stanzas (32–38), corresponding to the 7 planetary spheres, and representing bodily desires. The fox’s confession and absolution occupy 10 stanzas (39–48), corresponding to the 10 Commandments. The denouement, in which the fox’s destiny is so perfectly fulfilled, occupies 6 stanzas (49–54). 6 is the first perfect number. The narrative ends in the central stanza, 54, of *The Talking of the Tod* as a whole. It is also the 23rd of the branch. This latter number, signifying vengeance on sinners, has already been discussed in other contexts. Here stanza 23 appropriately ends with the death of the fox and the strongly relevant word *recompence*:

The hird him hynt, and out he drew his flane,  
 And for his kid and vther violence  
 He tuke his skyn and maid ane recompence. (54: 772–74)

The stanza itself deals with the recompence yielded by the fox. The succeeding branch 3 also deals with ultimate recompence for the misdeeds of Father-war. Note too the phrase *and vther violence*, which refers, not only to the earlier encounter with Chanteclair, but also presumably to other unspecified episodes involving the goatherd. The theft of the kid is no more than the climax of the fox’s criminal career.

In the first branch his evil scheme is the consequence of bodily hunger. In the second bodily needs are important in themselves, but they also force him to violate a spiritual compact – he sins in the soul as well as the body. The Moralitas perceptively analyzes the failure:

Sum bene also throw consuetude and ryte  
 Vincust with carnall sensualitie:  
 Suppose thay be as for the tyme contryte,  
 Can not forbeir, nor fra thair sinnis fle.  
 Vse drawis nature swa in proprietie  
 Of beist and man that neidlingis thay man do  
 As thay of lang tyme hes bene hantit to. (56: 782–88)

As the number 25 is important for *The Talking of the Tod*, it is probably intentional that this analysis occupies the 25th stanza of the branch. The three branches correspond, as I have already said, to the positive, comparative, and superlative degrees of the adjective *euill*. The movement from physical to spiritual offence is the justification for this, so far as the first two branches are concerned.

Henryson analyses the fox's progress in terms of scholastic moral psychology, but its relevance is universal and other approaches are possible and rewarding. It is commonly held, for instance, that there are three stages in the progress to destruction of the Greek tragic hero. First is *hybris*, "wantonness" or "wanton violence", usually brought about by overwhelming confidence in his own abilities. Second is *koros*, "satiety", the feeling that he has now done everything, and that no power in the world is able to do him harm. Third is *ate*, "infatuation, reckless impulse", leading inevitably to destruction. Something of this pattern is to be found in each of the first two branches, more prominently in the second, which includes as an additional preliminary the fear caused in the fox by his reading of the heavens, a fear which causes him to attempt an apparently virtuous course, which in turn is the prelude to his *hybris*, the transformation of kid to salmon. He is in a state of literal *koros* when he lies down to bask in the sun. The commentator himself underlines the recklessness of the impulse, the *ate*, which prefigures his imminent death:

And rekleslie he said, quhair he did rest,  
 Straikand his wame aganis the sonis heit,  
 "Vpon this wame set wer ane bolt full meit". (52: 758–60)

In view of the astrological complexion of this branch, it may well be more than coincidence that the position of the stanza as 52nd corresponds to the completion of the sun's journey through the zodiac in 52 weeks, the solar year. The central stanza of the entire poem, 54, in which the fox meets his death, is the summation of the Lambda

formula for the individual soul as well as the *Anima Mundi* ( $1+2+3+4+9+8+27=54$ ).

## 6. The Trial of the Fox

In branch 3 the pattern is more elaborate. The first act of *hybris* on the part of the second fox, Father-war, is the usurpation of his dead father's lands together with the impious disposal of his body. When this is immediately followed by the summoning and fencing of the high court of parliament, the fox becomes afraid because he assumes that legal retribution is coming his way. His second act of *hybris* is his attempt to deceive the court by disguising himself. *koros* is represented by his behaviour during and immediately after the embassy to the grey stud mare. The killing of the lamb is *ate*, which brings him swiftly to the gallows.

The 6 stanzas of branch 2 (49–54: 733–74), telling how the first fox met his death, are balanced, after three intervening stanzas of *Moralitas*, by the first 6 of branch 3 (58–63: 796–837), dealing with his imperfect obsequies and the disposal of his estate. The earlier group begins with the stanza marking the first or bodily climacteric (49), when the fox's rational soul becomes the victim of his bodily appetites "in the *Deuillis* name". The stanza concluding the second group (63) marks the median climacteric, which pertains to intellect as well as body, and which is immediately preceded by the disposal of the body in a waterlogged peat-hole, again in the Devil's name: "And to the *Deuill* he gaif his banis to keip" (stanza 62: 830). Stanza 63, spoken by the commentator, is a valedictory for the elder fox considered as a human being who has foolishly disregarded the consequences of his earlier actions:

O fulische man! Plungit in wardlynes  
 To conqueis wrangwis guidis, gold and rent,  
 To put thy saull in pane or heuines  
 To riche thy air, quhilk efter thow art went,  
 Haue he thy gude, he takis bot small tent  
 To sing or say for thy saluatioun.  
 Fra thow be dede, done is deuotioun. (63: 831–37)

Stanza 60, which completes the sixth decad and tells how Father-war used his nose to discover his father's flayed and reeking body, cleverly exploits the rhetorical device of ironic anticlimax. There is

mock-heroic pathos in the description of the corpse “nakit, new slane” (60: 812). Father-war seems at first to react like a dutiful son: “till him is he went, / Tuke vp his heid, and on his kne fell down.” (60: 812–13). But he is not vowing vengeance or offering prayers for his father’s soul. He thanks God selfishly for what he thinks is a providential intervention on his own behalf:

Thankand grit God off that conclusioun,  
And said, “Now sall I bruke, sen I am air,  
The boundis quhair thow wes wont for to repair”. (60: 814–16)

This shameless behaviour leads not only to an intervention by the narrator suggesting what the course of providence is likely to be (61: 817–23), but also to actual *hybris*, disguised as “naturall pietie” (62: 824), when, despite the reference to God, the body is consigned to the Devil by way of the hole in the peat-bog. The deliberate reversal of expectations is paralleled, for instance, in the Scottish ballad, *The Twa Corbies* (Child ed. 1965: 1: 253):

In behint yon auld fail dyke,  
I wot there lies a new slain knight;  
And naebody kens that he lies there,  
But his hawk, his hound, and lady fair.

His hound is to the hunting gane,  
His hawk to fetch the wild-fowl hame,  
His lady’s ta’en another mate,  
So we may mak our dinner sweet. (5–12)

There is a deliberate contrast with the English ballad, *The Three Ravens*, where hounds, hawks and lady behave more properly. Henryson contrasts the behaviour of the fox with the expectations of classical epic and romance.

The commentator, it may be noted, has subtly changed his attitude. He is still a medieval Christian. Branch 3 however is more secular in emphasis than anything which has gone before. The commentator’s remarks are aimed more at secular affairs, nearer to worldly wisdom; they show that the effort to gain lands and capital goods is damaging to the soul in the long as well as the short term. The heir for whom the fortune has been made will seek only to enjoy it – he will waste no time on his father’s eternal welfare. An element has been added to the pagan pessimism of Horace in *Eheu fugaces* (*Odes*, II, 14):

Farewell to lands, home, dear and affectionate  
 Wife then. Of all those trees that you planted well  
 Not one, a true friend, save the hated  
 Cypress shall follow its short-lived master.

An heir shall drain those cellars of Caecuban  
 You treble-locked (indeed he deserves it more)  
 And drench the stone-flagged floor with prouder  
 Wine than is drunk at the pontiff's banquet. (Michie tr. 1964: [21–28] 123)<sup>12</sup>

The heir in Horace will carelessly spill his father's exquisite vintages. In Henryson he will not provide masses to shorten the stay in Purgatory of his father's soul.

The commentator's subsequent interventions follow the same pattern. Some resemble those in the earlier branches. In stanza 70, which completes the seventh decad, he sees the assembling of the parliament of four-footed beasts through the eyes of Father-war:

And quhat thay wer, to me as Lowrence leird,  
 I sall reheirs ane part of euerilk kynd,  
 Als fer as now occurris to my mynd. (70: 884–86)

Lawrence told him, some time since, what animals were present, and he is now, to the best of his ability, repeating the list. When the fox attempts to disguise his presence at the parliament, the narrator comments in two stanzas omitted by the Bannatyne MS, stanzas which I once regarded with suspicion. I now accept Denton Fox's arguments for their authenticity (Fox ed. 1981: 234):

O fylit spreit, and cankerit conscience!  
 Befoir ane roy renyeit with richteousnes,

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12. *linquenda tellus et domus et placens  
 uxor, neque harum quas colis arborum  
 te praeter invisas cupressos  
 ulla brevem dominum sequetur:*

*absumet heres Caecuba dignior  
 servata centum clavibus et mero  
 tinget pavementum superbo  
 pontificum potiore cenis.*

Blakinnit cheikis and schamefull countenance!  
 Fairweill thy fame; now gone is all thy grace!  
 The phisnomie, the faouour of thy face,  
 For thy defence is foull and disfigureate,  
 Brocht to the licht basit, blunt, and blait.

Be thow atteichit with thift, or with tressoun,  
 For thy misdeid wrangous, and wickit fay,  
 Thy cheir changis, Lowrence, thow man luke down;  
 Thy worschip of this warld is went away.  
 Luke to this tod, how he wes in effray,  
 And fle the filth of falset, I the reid,  
 Quhairthrow thair fallowis syn and schamefull deid. (83–84: 971–84)

The emphasis on physiognomy and the “worschip of this warld” are characteristically Henrysonian (above, 91). The fox’s panic and subsequent disguise are to be explained by the fact that he expects to be successfully arraigned before the king and parliament for his usurpation of his father’s territory, and also, perhaps, for his impious method of disposal for the corpse. The court is worldly but respectable, and simply for this reason likely to condemn the excess which the fox has displayed. The commentator again speaks in a context of worldly concerns.

The parliament is primarily a place of judgement. When the herald who proclaims it, Unicorn Pursuivant, disturbs the fox’s self-satisfied repose, there are suggestions even of Judgement Day following the Last Trump:

This tod to rest him carit to ane craig,  
 And thair he hard ane buisteous bugill blaw  
 Quhilk, as him thocht, maid all the warld to waig.  
 Than start he vp quhen he this hard, and saw  
 Ane vnicorne come lansand ouer ane law,  
 With horne in hand: ane buste in breist he bure;  
 Ane pursephant semelie, I yow assure. (64: 838–44)

The effect comes chiefly from the phrase describing the effect of the bugle blast, “maid all the warld to waig”, but partly also from the position of the stanza as 7th in the branch. At the Last Trump the 6 Ages of the World, corresponding to the 6 days of Creation, will be succeeded by the 7th Age of Judgement, leading to the Sabbath of eternity. 64, it should perhaps be noted, the number of the stanza in the poem as a whole, is 2 raised to the 6th power ( $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ ). The

eternal status of every individual will be established by the Judgement which the Last Trump proclaims.

The assembly, described in stanzas 64–79, is more a court of justice than a parliament in the modern sense. In some limited respects it resembles the idealised Scottish gatherings described by Fordun and Bower, which took place in the open air on “the moothill on which stood the royal seat at Scone where the kings sitting on the throne in royal attire are accustomed to proclaim judgements, laws and statutes to their subjects” (MacQueen, J. & W. eds 1989: 414–17). The lion is king. In heraldic terms he is clearly the king of Scots, whose proclamation of the parliament is made by one of his heralds, Unicorn Pursuivant, and who is supported by the king of England, represented by three leopards (as first pointed out by Dickins 1924).

Thre leopardis come, a croun of massie gold  
 Beirand thay brocht vnto that hillis hicht,  
 With iaspis ionit, and royall rubeis rold,  
 And mony diueris dyamontis dicht.  
 With pollis proud ane palyeoun doun thay picht,  
 And in that throne thair sat ane wild lyoun,  
 In rob royall, with sceptour, swerd and croun. (69: 873–79)

Denton Fox correctly indicates that the throne on which the lion sits is in fact the larger crown brought in by the leopards (Fox ed. 1981: 237). This heraldic image survived long enough to appear on a modern coin, the “Scottish” shilling of George VI (1936–52), while the three leopards of England, promoted to three lions, appear on the pre-decimal (1953–66) shillings of Elizabeth. The words of the lion in stanza 77 paraphrase two Scottish royal mottoes, *Parcere prostratis scit nobilis ira leonis* and *Nemo me impune lacessit*, the latter of which still figures on the edge of the current “Scottish” one-pound coin:

I lat you wit, my nicht is merciabill  
 And steiris nane that ar to me prostrait;  
 Angrie, austerne, and als vnamyabill  
 To all that standfray ar to myne estait. (77: 929–32)

The parliament is distinctively Scottish, or even British with a Scots predominance. It is not idealized. The people flock to it at least partly because they are frightened by the king and his immediate attendants; at the pursuivant’s cry they are “govand agast” (65: 851); when the

king makes a move to open proceedings, they fall “flatlinguis to his feit” (76: 924), and, although he makes some pretence at calming them, he makes it plain that he has the arbitrary power to raise up, or lay low, any one of them.

As might be expected, the order in which the animals arrive corresponds to their assumed social status. The catalogue in 5 stanzas (71–75: 887–921) begins with mainly mythical and heraldic beasts representing the nobility. Their progress to the assembly is dignified, covered at the end of the stanza by a single colourless verb, “furth can carrie” (893). The first four mentioned are monsters – dangerous creatures, that is to say, in whom the characteristic features of two or more species are conjoined. The minotaur is a hybrid of bull and man who lived on human flesh in the Cretan labyrinth. By “Bellerophon” Henryson probably intended the Chimaera, a triple creature, “lion-fronted and snake behind, a goat in the middle, / and snorting out the breath of the terrible flame of bright fire” (Homer, *Iliad*; Lattimore tr. 1951: [VI, 181–82] 158). It was killed by the hero Bellerophon. Its triple nature makes it, as Henryson describes, a “beist of bastardrie” (888). Both werwolf and Pegasus have been “transformit” (presumably from human being and horse respectively) “be assent of sorcerie” (890), one to wolf, the other to horse with eagle wings. The Pegasus is described as “perillous” (889). The remaining aristocrats (891–93) belong more to the realm of genuine natural history, but all have some monstrous quality. The tiger is “full of tiranie”. The elephant is marked by his incongruous bulk, the dromedary and camel by their grotesque humps and long necks. It should perhaps be added that Oliphant and Campbell (sometimes written and pronounced “Cammel”) are names of distinguished Scottish families. Some topical reference may be intended.

The progress of the remaining creatures is less stately. The verbs in stanza 72, “couth speid” and “ran”, are appropriate to the more hurried movements of the lesser nobility and gentry. The progress of the lower orders, characterized in the next two stanzas by “furth can flock”, “furth can slyde”, “furth can glide”, and the simple “went”, is even less ceremonious. Stanza 75, the last of the catalogue, which completes the eighth intermediate pentad, makes plain that the general motive is fear, while at the same time picturesquely introducing the laggards, the last to compare:

The marmisset the mowdewart couth leid,  
Because that nature denyit had hir sicht.



Thus dressit thay all furth for dreid of deid;  
 The musk, the lytill mous with all hir micht  
 In haist haikit vnto that hillis hicht. (75: 915–19)

The oxymoron applied to the mouse, the smallest animal among those mentioned, *in haist haikit*, “trudged in haste”, is striking even in the context of the general motive of the animals to assemble, “dreid of deid”. The lion is more than an arbitrary monarch; he is a tyrant.

This is consistent with the general presentation of the monarch and upper classes in the *Fabillis*. The catalogue also makes sense if it is read in terms of the interpretation given for the lion in the *Moralitas*. He typifies something more than the king of Scots, or indeed any earthly ruler:

The lyoun is the warld be liklynace,  
 To quhome loutis baith empriour and king,  
 And thinkis of this warld to get mare grace,  
 And gapis daylie to get mair leuing;  
 Sum for to reull, and sum to raxe and ring,  
 Sum gadderis geir, sum gold, sum vther gude;  
 To wyn this warld, sum wirkis as thay wer wod. (102: 1104–10)

Greed as well as fear brings the “brutall beistis and irrationall” (66: 857) to the parliament of the lion. It is no accident that a variant of the phrase used in the opening line reappears in stanza 66, where it forms part of the lion’s proclamation, and indicates the nature of the assembly which he is summoning. I have already indicated that the parliament is, among other things, a mock-heroic version of the Day of Judgement; stanza 66 is perhaps intended to remind the reader of 666, the Number of the Beast in *Revelation* 13: 18: “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six”. The Beast, it will be remembered, “causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save that he had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (13: 16–17). At one level the lion corresponds to the Beast, and the parliament to those who bear his mark.

The proclamation of the king’s peace in stanza 79, with its double reference, retrospective to the death of the elder fox and prophetic of Father-war’s future behaviour –

Se neir be twentie mylis quhair I am  
The kid ga saiflie be the gaittis syde,  
The tod Lowrie luke not to the lam – (79: 943–45)

together with the fencing of the court in stanza 80, which is at once the 23rd stanza of the branch, with the suggestion of vengeance on sinners, and the completion of the eighth decad, brings the fox to an impasse in stanza 81 (9×9), the intellectual climacteric of the poem. He can see no way of escape:

I wait this suddand semblie that I se,  
Haifand the pointis off ane parliament,  
Is maid to mar sic misdoars as me.  
Thairfoir geue I me schaw, I will be schent;  
I will be socht and I be red absent;  
To byde or fle, it makis no remeid;  
All is alyke, thair followis not bot deid. (81: 957–63)

No matter how he acts, the fox will be arraigned for the usurpation of his father's territory and the impious disposal of his corpse. The inheritance and disposal of lands was the major item on the agenda of Scottish courts at this period. The fox is terrified in much the same way as his father had been when he observed the ominous night sky. The father's response – to consult a priest – had been sensible. The son's is riskier and more foolish – he attempts (stanza 82) to disguise himself, to alter his physiognomy which reflects the nature of his soul (above, 91, 229). As the commentator notes (83: 974–77), the very act changes his character for the worse and loses him such possibility of defence as an open countenance might have provided. One is reminded of the alteration in the appearance of Cresseid caused by the leprosy inflicted on her as a punishment. The fox's disguise as a one-eyed cripple is a kind of comic equivalent. The ultimate fate of the two characters however is very different. For Cresseid there remains some hope of salvation, for the fox little or none.

At the baptismal ceremony the godparents, on behalf of the child, promise to renounce “the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same”, a phrase which might serve to describe the lion and his parliament, one purpose of which is to satisfy the covetous desires of its members. Only one animal stands aloof, the grey stud mare, first mentioned in stanza 85, the ninth intermediate pentad, but also, in terms of branch 3, stanza 28, the second perfect number. Even without the *Moralitas* it is clear that the mare

emblematises the opposition, those who have kept their baptismal vow of renunciation. The *Moralitas* itself is more specific; the *mare* signifies the religious orders, the monks and canons regular who served in such places as Henryson's own Dunfermline Abbey:

The meir is men of contemplioun,  
 Off pennance walkand in this wildernes,  
 As monkis and othir men of religioun  
 That presis God to pleis in euerilk place,  
 Abstractit from this warldis wretchitnes,  
 In wilful pouertee, fra pomp and pryde,  
 And fra this warld in mynd ar mortyfyde. (103: 1111–17)

The mention of “pennance” takes the reader back to branch 2. It is not expressly stated, but probably implied, that Henryson excludes from this category friars like Freir Volff Waitskaith and, if he is not the same person, the clerical wolf-ambassador in branch 3.

Within the bounds of the story, the *mare* is obviously a figure of some consequence, addressed by the fox as “madame” (87: 1003), and later, less formally, as “maistres” (88: 1006). Unlike the nobility in general however she is neither monstrous nor predatory. Unexpectedly for the representative of the celibate orders, she is a breeding mare, a stud, with the ability to give birth to her own successors, new generations of contemplatives who will walk their abstracted way in this wilderness, and who will therefore by their self-mortification continue to offer a threat to the worldly dominance of the lion. From this point of view the embassy of fox and wolf is a matter of substance and some danger. Appropriately, the fox, who had expected to be arraigned, is frightened rather than relieved when the lion effortlessly penetrates his disguise and proposes to give him the post of ambassador – more evidence, incidentally, of the arbitrary way in which business is conducted at the court. The dialogue is brilliantly oblique; nothing is explicitly stated, but the eventual outcome becomes plain as soon as the assembled animals make their sycophantic response:

“Ga, make ane message sone vnto that stude”.  
 The court than cryit, “My lord, quha sall it be?”  
 “Cum furth, Lowrie, lurkand vnder thy hude”.  
 “Aa, schir, mercie! Lo, I haue bot ane ee,  
 Hurt in the hoche, and cruikit as ye may se.  
 The volff is better in ambassatry  
 And mair cunning in clergie fer than I”.

Rampannd he said, “Ga furth, ye brybouris baith”. (86–87: 992–99)

The fox attempts to have the wolf appointed on grounds of wider diplomatic experience and greater learning, enabling him as part of his mission to deliver humanist orations in classical style like that given in 1484 by one of the Scottish ambassadors, Archibald Whitelaw, to Richard III at the English court (*Bannatyne Misc.* 1836: 41–48). It is thus notable that when they come to the mare, the fox himself does most of the speaking, and indeed that the mare accuses him of indulgence in “cowrtlie knax” (87: 1005), in reference to his addressing her in courtly style as “madame”, and to his use of a Latin legal term, *contumax*, with the sense “in contempt of court”. The fox immediately adopts the less formal style of address already mentioned. It is an essential part of his equipment as ambassador that he is able to move at will from one stylistic level to another.

It is thus surprising that he claims under oath – “sa God me speid” (88: 1010) – to be illiterate, when the mare offers to show him the respite under her heel, still more so later, when he returns to Latin in addressing the wolf as *Lupus* (90: 1025), and when he replies to the mare’s second offer to show him her privilege:

“Na, be Sanct Bryde!” quod he. “Me think it better  
To sleip in haill nor in ane hurt skyn.  
Ane skrow I fand, and this wes writtin in –  
For fyue schillingis I wald not anis forfaut him –  
*Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum*”. (91: 1029–33)

When it suits him, the fox is well able to quote a Latin proverb, with which his reading (“ane skrow”) has made him familiar. He is also aware that St Bryde is the patron of healers, to be invoked whenever injury seems a possibility (*Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, s.v. “Brigid (Brigit, Bridget, Bride) of Ireland”). The fox is more than clever enough to dissimulate when he realizes the danger of coming near the mare’s hoof. He is treading on dangerous ground however when he sets his claim to God’s favour against the assertion that he cannot read – “I can not spell”, quod he, “sa God me speid” (88: 1010).

Despite the references to his legal and intellectual accomplishments, the wolf speaks only twice, on both occasions in short, haughty phrases: “Quhair is thy respite?” and “Hald vp thy heill” (89: 1017, 19). His lack of caution leads in the pivotal 90th stanza to disaster. Despite his claim to have only one eye, in this case

at least the fox is well able to see possible dangers. It is the wolf, with both eyes, who is blind. He is the victim of his own pride which forces him to examine something as base as the mare's hoof:

Thocht he wes blindit with pryde, yit he presumis  
 To luke doun law, quhair that hir letter lay.  
 With that the meir gird him vpon the gumis  
 And straik the hattrell off his heid away;  
 Halff out off lyif thair lenand doun he lay. (90: 1020–24)

The force of this is doubled by the interpretation given in the third and final *Moralitas*, which in general is “darker” and less predictable than its predecessors, but nevertheless maintains with them some continuity of argument. The first, beginning in stanza 28 (the second perfect number) introduces several terms the full relevance of which only becomes clear with stanza 101, the beginning of the third:

Now, worthie folk, suppose this be ane fabill,  
 And ouerheillit wyth typis figurall,  
 Yit may ye find ane sentence richt agreabill  
 Vnder thir fenyeit termis textuall. (28: 586–89)

This harkens back to biblical interpretation and Boccaccio's theory of myth and narrative poetry already briefly discussed in the Introduction. The literal sense is the product of the poet's invention, into which he introduces *typis figurall* and *fenyeit termis textuall*, which initially hide, but may be used to reveal, the *sentence*. *Type* is the term usually applied to events in the Old Testament which prefigure others in the New. Old Testament events are thus “figures” (whence *figurall*) of incidents and persons in the New. The *sentence* is the moral or philosophic meaning derived from a recognition of the types. *Fenyeit* indicates that the narrative material is the product of the poet's invention. (One should also recollect the connection between *figure*, *figurall*, and numerical composition (above, 33–35)).

The discussion resumes in stanza 101. The poet is compared to the gold-miner who refines gold (*sentence*) from the lead (*fabill figurall*, equivalent to *fenyeit termis textuall*) with which it is mingled in the lode. The final three lines of the stanza are particularly important, and for these the Bannatyne MS provides a text more difficult, *lectio difficilior*, but also more meaningful than the one printed in Fox's edition:

Richt as the mynour in his minorall  
 Fair gold with fyre may fra the leid weill wyn,  
 Richt so vnder ane fabill figurall  
 Sad sentence men may seik, and efter fyne,  
 As daylie dois thir doctouris of dyvyn,  
 Apertly be our leving can applye  
 And preve thare preching be a poesye. (101: 1097–1103)

The last couplet forms an adjectival clause qualifying “doctouris of dyvyn” – “[who] by poetic interpretation can make their preaching plainly apply to, and be tested in terms of, our way of life”.

Doctors of Divinity have not hitherto made a very creditable appearance in the poem. Henryson is now perhaps offering some amends. In the medieval university theology and the art of preaching were mainly taught by friars who had obtained this doctorate. Their teaching methods were also used in the junior Faculty of Arts, where rhetoric and philosophy required the study of works the authors of which were not Christian, and which therefore had to be translated into Christian terms to make the study worthwhile. The phrase “*thir doctouris*” (italics mine) suggests that Henryson had specific individuals in mind, one of whom may have been the Dominican friar Nicholas Trivet (?1258–1328), who taught at Oxford and Paris, and whose commentary on Boethius he used in the *Moralitas to The Tale of Orpheus*. The terms used there are similar to those just discussed. Henryson, it will be noted, goes out of his way to credit Trivet with the doctorate as well as the MA:

Lo, worthy folk, Boece, that senature,  
 To wryte this feynit fable tuke in cure,  
 In his gay buke of consolacion,  
 For oure doctryne and gude instruction:  
 Quhilk in the self, suppose it fenyeit be,  
 And hid vnder the cloke of poesie,  
 Yit maister Trewit, doctour Nicholas,  
 Quhilk in his tyme a noble theolog was,  
 Applyis it to gude moralitee. (415–23)

As will be seen, Trivet’s interpretation is complex and detailed, almost metaphysical in relation to the text which he explicates (below, 253). Henryson proposes to follow the pattern set by him, and perhaps by some of the other, slightly later, “classicising” friars whose work Beryl Smalley has discussed in *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early XIVth Century*. One might single out John Ridevall, a

Franciscan active in the 1330s, author of *Fulgentius Metaforalis*, a treatise on mythology adapted to the use of preachers (Smalley 1960: 110–18; Liebeschütz ed. 1926). Ridevall’s aim is moral, but much of his material has its origin in poetry. As the title indicates, the general source is the *Mythologiae* of the late classical Latin author Fulgentius (c.467–532), but Ridevall drew largely on the later expanded version by “Alberic of London”, a twelfth-century writer now generally known as the Third Vatican Mythographer (above, 16). For him Fulgentius was mainly a textbook for the study of the liberal arts. It is for this reason that in the Middle Ages and Renaissance “Alberic’s” work was generally known as *Poetarius* or *Scintillarium poetarum*. Ridevall builds on his example, and it is in terms of this tradition that Henryson’s doctors “preve thare preching be a poesye”.

A passage from Seznec’s *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*<sup>13</sup> will serve to illustrate (Seznec 1953: 94). Ridevall equates the goddess Juno with Memory, who

has the following attributes: she is veiled, crowned with a rainbow, and perfumed; she holds a sceptre, is bound by a golden chain, surrounded by peacocks etc. All these details are explained by the very fact that the goddess represents memory. Memory does, of course, keep alive the recollection of sin: hence the veil behind which Juno may hide her shame. The recollection of sin leads to repentance, and thus to reconciliation with God: this explains the rainbow, sign of divine forgiveness. Reconciliation gives birth to spiritual consolation, which fills the soul with rapture: hence the perfumes. And having, by virtue of memory, attained repentance and reconciliation, the soul in its new state of blessedness regains that mastery of itself which sin has caused it to lose; hence the sceptre etc.

Although the attributes of Juno are interpreted in terms of the individual Christian human soul, they are taken from classical Latin poetry. However unclassical Ridevall’s moralisation may be, the basis is still the poetry of that period. An entire moral process is thus allegorically derived from a single mythological figure.

In Henryson much the same is true, particularly in terms of the “dark” Moralities. Allegorically, lion, fox, wolf, and mare should be regarded as aspects, external and internal, of the human soul in relationship to the fallen creation. In stanza 104 the wolf is identified with sensuality, but the sensuality does not exist in isolation; it is an

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13. Alberic’s version of Fulgentius was known in 15th-century Scotland; see Bower, *Scotichronicon* (MacQueen, J and MacQueen, W. eds. 1993: [1: 80–83] 162).

aspect of the mare's makeup, the concupiscence necessarily present in the human soul, by which worldly persons may come to set desire for the creature, the World, above love for the Creator. There are various methods however by which a rational being, though fallen, may restrain his sensual impulses, produce in himself a sense of contrition powerful enough to keep them in check. These are listed in many manuals of penance, including Chaucer's,<sup>14</sup> who puts third among them the thought of death and the subsequent fate of the sinner: "The thridde cause that oghte moeve a man to Contricioun is drede of the day of doom and of the horrible peynes of helle" (*Parson's Tale*, 158). Allegorically, this is the weapon used by the mare to overcome the wolf:

Hir hufe I likkin to the thoct of deid:  
 Will thow remember, man, that thow man de,  
 Thow may brek sensualiteis heid;  
 And fleschlie lust away fra the sall fle.  
 Fra thow begin thy mynd to mortifie,  
 Salamonis saying thow may persauf heirin,  
 "Think on thy end; thow sall not glaidlie sin". (105: 1125–31)

Compare in *The Thre Deid Pollis*, a poem doubtfully attributed to Henryson, the lines:

Heirfoir haif mynd of deth, that thow mon dy:  
 This sair exampill to se quotidiane  
 Sowld caus all men fra wicket vycis fle. (14–16)

The phrase "brutall beistis", used in line 1 of *The Talking of the Tod* and again in the proclamation of the parliament (66: 857; cf. above, 81), makes its final appearance in the explication of the significance of the wolf. In the two earlier instances it was linked with the negative adjective "irrational"; here however it is directly contrasted with the positive "ressoun", the distinctively human property by the exercise of which sensuality may be kept in check. Incidentally, the use of the technical term *remord*, "feel remorse", as an essential stage in the process of escape from the domination of the world, links the action of the third to that of the second branch:

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14. The source for the part of *The Parson's Tale* quoted is the thirteenth-century *Summa de poenitentia* of St Raymund of Pennafort (Bryan and Dempster [1958]: 733–34).



This volf I likkin to sensualitie,  
 As quhen lyke brutall beistis we accord  
 Our mynd to all this warldis vanitie,  
 Lyking to tak and loif him as our lord:  
 Fle fast thairfra, gif thow will richt remord.  
 Than sall ressoun ryse, rax, and ring,  
 And for thy saull thair is na better thing. (104: 1118–24)

This leads directly to the explication of the kick given by the mare. The entire poem is in fact a plea for rationality, not perhaps quite as the term is used today, but still in a way appropriate for a troubled and dangerous world.

The fox is likened to “temptatioun”, with which the world attempts to rouse concupiscence in the individual, and more specifically in the contemplative. Denton Fox’s text, in which the word is plural, “temptationis”, I find impossible to accept, chiefly because the rhyme-scheme entails two lines later the appearance of the meaningless phrase “men of religiounis”, when clearly what is required is “men of religioun” (i.e., “religious” in the sense “men bound by religious vows”; cf. above, stanza 103: 1113, “monkis and othir men of religioun”). The singular form is found in the Hart print and in the Bannatyne MS. The mare has already been explicated in such terms; the reference in this stanza is to the command given to her by the fox to come to the lion’s court:

This tod I likkin to temptatioun,  
 Beirand to mynd mony thoctis vane,  
 That daylie sagis men of religioun,  
 Cryand to thame, “Cum to the warld agane!”  
 Yit gif thay se sensualitie neir slane,  
 And suddand deith with ythand panis sore,  
 Thay go abak, and temptis thame no moir. (106: 1132–38)

In this version, the pronoun “thay” (1136, 1138) refers to “mony thoctis vane” (1133). The phrase “neir slane” (1136), applied to sensuality, is notably precise; in fallen humanity, whatever the vocation, an element of sensuality will always remain. The wolf correspondingly lies “Halff out off lyif” (90: 1024). Stanza 90 in which the phrase occurs is also 33rd of the branch, and carries the usual signification, Dante’s “Man, as by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of his free choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing Justice” (Dante, “Letter to Can Grande” (Toynbee ed., tr. 1920); Sayers tr. 1949: 15).

In allegorical terms, as I have said, mare and wolf are internal aspects of an abstract individual entity, as opposed to which lion and fox typify external forces and influences affecting that entity. The fox is temptation, and also the tempter, directing the unwary towards the world. The mare's identity is collective; she represents not just the individual contemplative, but the plural "monkis and othir men of religioun", members, that is to say, of religious houses and orders. It is to these that the fox particularly addresses his appeal. From the point of view of a fifteenth-century Scottish churchman, an attempt to suborn the monastic orders is an attack on the church itself, and so more diabolic than any crime attempted or committed in the first two branches. It is for this reason that Henryson names the second fox Father-war and equates him with "euill" in the superlative degree.

The temptation offered by the fox is to the sensuality represented by the wolf. This it might seem reasonable to equate with failure on the part of the clergy to maintain celibacy, failure which had become a notorious scandal and had received particular condemnation in the decree *De Concubinariis* of the Council of Basle (1431–49; see Patrick ed. 89–91). The wolf's interest in the mare's hindquarters fits this interpretation. At best however, and in view of the terms, "Cum to the warld agane", in which it is expressed, it is only a partial explanation. Concubinage and a return to the world are hardly the same, although the first may be included in the second. Sensuality means subjection to the five corporeal senses shared with the animal creation rather than to the distinctively human power of reason. It is concupiscence rather than concubinage, and includes any kind of involvement by contemplatives in the affairs of the world.

Henryson may have included a specific reference to his own times. It is as a lingering consequence of what used to be called New Criticism that suggestions of this kind are still unpopular, and everyone would agree that no absolute certainty is ever likely to be attained. The best one can attempt is to establish a balance of probability. John Leslie, the post-Reformation Roman Catholic bishop of Ross (1565–96), regarded an incident in Henryson's own immediate milieu as marking the beginning of a decline in the monastic life of Scotland, a decline marked by the establishment of temporal authority, the world, over the monastic communities. In 1472 James III intruded as abbot of Dunfermline Henry Crichton, abbot of Paisley, in place of Alexander Thomson, whom the monks had duly elected: "From this proceidet the first and foul sklander that efter

infected monasteries and Mounckis through al Scotland” (Cody ed. 1888–95: 2: 90). Leslie’s account is open to criticism, but it is unlikely that his idea is simply invention. The appointment would certainly have made some impression on Henryson if, as John Durkan suggests, he moved from Glasgow University to Dunfermline in or about 1468 at the invitation of Crichton’s predecessor, Richard Bothwell, who provided a house for the town schoolmaster, with Henryson, perhaps, specifically in mind (above, 10).

James certainly made it an object of policy to control monasteries and their revenues. In 1462, for instance, he forcibly removed the Benedictine priory of Coldingham from its position as a dependency of the English priory of Durham. Despite previous well-founded claims on the part of Dunfermline Abbey (Shead ed. 1991: [XI, 22–24] 64–73), the immediate, and indeed the long-term, result was subjection of the priory and its revenues to the Home family, but in 1472 the king attempted total suppression and the transference of revenues to the royal chapel of St Mary at St Andrews. The king’s general aim was twofold, first to extend crown control over ecclesiastical patronage and the vast wealth of the church, and second to use the heads of monastic houses in carrying out the business of royal administration – in effect, to turn them into civil servants. Ranald Nicholson comments:

It was somewhat novel, though hardly scandalous, that Archibald Crawford, Abbot of Holyrood, and David Lichtoun (or Leighton), Abbot of Arbroath, served successively as treasurer [of Scotland], and that the latter, together with the Abbots of Cambuskenneth and Paisley and the Prior of Pittenweem, were commissioned to assess crown lands. (Nicholson 1974: 459)

It should also be noted that it was during this period that the practice of granting abbacies and priories *in commendam*, sometimes, as with the Homes, to laymen, became common in Scotland (Nicholson 1974: 335–40, 458–61). All these developments were opposed to the spirit of monasticism, and Henryson may well have seen them as surrender to the world, betrayal.

The situation was not unique to Scotland, and indeed, as Henryson seems to indicate, applied in much of western Europe. When he says (102: 1105) that “baith empriour and king” bow to the lion, he refers to the Holy Roman Emperor in association with the other monarchs of Christendom. The line may be general in application rather than particular to Henryson’s own contemporary as emperor, Frederick III

(1452–93), or even to the more historical conflict of authority between empire and papacy, the struggle of Ghibellines with Guelphs, a struggle in some measure renewed by the conflict between pope and council, the latter often supported by the emperor, during the sessions of the Council of Basle (1431–49; see esp. Burns 1962). However that may be, the king and parliament of Scotland, both unmistakably indicated, become the type of all temporal authority opposed to spirituality. James III, it will be recollected, claimed imperial status (above, 12).

One should not look in the historical record for parallels to the kick given by the mare to the wolf. The equation of the hoof with the thought of death stands at a different level from anything else in the *Moralitas*, being necessarily particular to the individual, whereas the others, lion, mare, wolf, and fox, represent universals or, in one instance, communities with a physical presence in the outside world. Henryson does not recommend any kind of bodily or political action, but rather mortification of spirit as the best way to resist the power of the lion.

In view of all this, it may seem unexpected that the proximate cause of the fox's downfall is not his approach to the mare, but the slaughter of the lamb whom he encounters in the significantly numbered stanza 93 (31×3; above, 203). The *Moralitas* contains no reference to this episode which follows the fox's hypocritical expression of sympathy for the stricken wolf and offer to bring him water:

To fetche watter this fraudfull foxe furth fure;  
 Sydellingis a bank he socht vnto ane syke.  
 On cace he meittis cummand fra the mure  
 Ane trip of lambis dansand on ane dyke.  
 This tratour tod, this tarrant, and this tyke,  
 The fattest off this flock he fellit hais,  
 And eit his fill; syne to the volff he gais. (93: 1041–47)

The denunciation is precise. The fox is a traitor because his action puts him in breach of the king's peace; his treatment of the lamb makes him a tyrant, and his illegitimate birth makes him a tyke or mongrel. The description of his encounter with the lambs as being *on cace*, "accidental", may be ironic, the offer to fetch water for the wolf no more than a pretence to cover the attack. The lambs were conspicuous as they danced on the dyke, and the fox's stealthy ("sydellingis") approach suggests the poacher rather than the first-aid man.

Henryson's tone in this episode is markedly more denunciatory than in his earlier treatment of the death of the kid. There the event was left to speak for itself. The first fox, driven as he was by hunger and the need to fulfil his penance, had some kind of excuse; the action of the second is wholly gratuitous. The ewe, the mother of the lamb, echoes and intensifies the commentator's hostility: "This harlet huresone and this hound of hell, / He werryit my lamb full doggitly." (97: 1071–72). Here is the same emphasis as before on the fox's bastard birth, but "hound of hell", appropriately coupled with the adverb "doggitly", is appreciably stronger than anything that has gone before. One may suspect a further reference to Doeg the Idumaeon (above, 206).

The lamb has always symbolized the innocence of the sacrificial victim, the redeeming Lamb of God – compare *The Wolf and the Lamb*, already discussed (above, 129). The kid, offspring of the goat, has different associations. In the Old Testament he too is often a sacrificial victim, sometimes the scape-goat, laden with sin and driven into the wilderness, but the primary association is with the New Testament phrase (Matthew 25: 33) describing events on the Day of Judgement: "And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left". The sheep are the redeemed, the goats the condemned. "Hound of hell" associates Father-war with Satan and the vain attempt to overcome the power of Christ and the church. In effect, the episode is a variation, even an intensification, of the attempt on the privilege held by the mare. Initially the attempt is more successful, but the ultimate penalty is more stringent.

The killing of the lamb is separated from the ewe's appearance by the exchange of *knakis* (a repeated word; cf. above, stanza 87: 1005; there "tricks", here "mocking jests") between fox and lion. These turn on the supposed doctorate in divinity (in academic dress denoted by a red cap) conferred on the wolf by the mare's kick. The allegorical significance of the mare makes the degree doubly appropriate:

"Quhair is yone meir, schir Tod, wes contumax?"  
 Than Lowrence said, "My lord, speir not at me,  
 This new-maid doctour of diuinitie,  
 With his reid cap can tell yow weill aneuch".  
 With that the lyoun and all the laif thay leuch. (94: 1050–54)

The usual significance of "leuch" in Henryson has already been noted (above, 140, 208). Six stanzas later the new-made doctor will give

Lowrence a probably worthless shrift immediately before he is hanged.

The abrupt arrival of the ewe brings the merriment to an end:

As thay wer carpand in this cais, with knakis,  
 And all the court in garray and in gam,  
 Swa come the yow, the mother off the lam. (96: 1066–68)

The ewe is no more part of the parliament than had been her lamb, but she recognizes its authority – by appealing to the temporal arm she is in effect rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. The real appeal, “For Goddis lufe, my lord, gif me the law” (97: 1074), is to God, although it is couched in terms of a breach of the king’s peace. The assize which follows finds the fox guilty of “murther, thift and party tressoun” (99: 1089). The murder is the death of the lamb; theft probably refers to the fox’s earlier usurpation of his father’s landed property, and party treason (probably “treason in the interest of a faction”) refers both to the breach of the king’s peace and to the usurpation, probably also to the disguise adopted by the fox at the parliament. This last would be regarded as particularly heinous. The assize follows normal Scottish practice in Henryson’s time.

The ewe introduces to the parliament the voice of practical reason. In his attempted rebuttal of her charge, the fox uses all his powers of plausible speech, the “talking” of the title, but what he produces is a kind of fantasy, convincing only without any examination of the evidence, and effortlessly swept away by the ewe. The last words of the fox to be reported bring to a climax and conclusion the family tradition of prevarication; to maintain an appearance of verisimilitude, he includes one physical feature of the incident, the dyke on which the lambs were dancing:

“My purpos wes with him for to haif plaid,  
 Causles he fled as he had bene effraid;  
 For dreid off deith he duschit ouer ane dyke  
 And brak his nek”. “Thow leis”, quod scho, “fals tyke!”

“His deith be practik may be preuit eith:  
 Thy gorrie gumis and thy bludie snout;  
 The woll, the flesche, yit stikkis on thy teith;  
 And that is euidence aneuch but dout”. (98–99: 1079–86)

The ewe talks like a prosecuting lawyer in her use of the word *practik*, “material evidence”, and *evidence* itself. Her words are enough to have the fox hanged, appropriately in the final line (1096) of stanza 100.

Despite the surface comedy, the picture of the world finally presented in *The Talking of the Tod* is bleak. Almost all the characters are sinners. The ignominious death of both foxes has no parallel in the *Roman de Renart* or elsewhere. A temporary discomfiture is the worst the hero usually suffers. But the effect is not totally dark; it is brightened a little, in the first branch by the cock’s providential escape, in the second by the respect paid to the sacrament of penance, and in the third by the respite of the mare from the authority of the lion’s parliament. In the second branch particularly, but also to a lesser degree in the third, there is a steady stream of references to God. The commentator’s appeal in the final stanza to the Virgin Mary as mediatrix through her son for humanity, and the reappearance in the penultimate line of the word “God”, in rhyming position and as the consummation of the beatific vision, are proof that here, as in *The Preaching of the Swallow* or *The Testament of Cresseid*, Henryson’s outlook was not altogether hopeless:

O Mary myld, mediatour of mercy meik,  
 Sitt down before thy sone celestiall,  
 For ws synnaris his celsitude beseik  
 Vs to defend fra pane and perrellis all,  
 And help vs vp vnto the heuinlie hall,  
 In gloir quhair we may se the face of God!  
 And thus endis the talking of the tod. (107: 1139–45)

As has already been noted, 107, the number of the stanza, is a prime (above, 197). The association of divinity with such numbers is well established. One might compare *The Kingis Quair* of James I where the total number of stanzas, 197, is a prime, while 196, the number of narrative stanzas, is a square (14×14). Elsewhere I have suggested that these numbers reflect the relationship of God as Creator, represented by the prime, to his creation, the orderly universe, represented by the square subsumed in the prime (MacQueen, J. 1988: 59). In isolation, as here in Henryson’s text, a prime might well be associated with the perpetual virginity of Mary. The role is particularly appropriate for this number. 107 (100+7) is a strengthened form of 7, and 7, according to Macrobius, was known as the Virgin (above, 71). It is fortunate that in one text at least the invocation has survived the

Reformation and the attentions of Protestant censors. (The reading is found only in the Bannatyne MS). The poem as a whole is something of a monument to the strengths as well as the weaknesses of Catholicism in late medieval Scotland.



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## **Platonic Myth**

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## Chapter Eleven

### The Descent of the Soul: *The Tale of Orpheus (Orpheus and Eurydice)*

Henryson was a Platonist whose Platonism was largely based on the cosmology set out in the creation-myth of the *Timaeus* (Hamilton and Cairns eds 1961: 1151–1211), a work known in the Middle Ages by way of Calcidius' translation and commentary (Waszink ed. 1962)).<sup>1</sup> The universe is a living creature, made by the Demiurge, who endowed it with an invisible soul – the *Anima Mundi* – created from the harmonic mathematical ratios made up by 7 numbers arranged in what is known as the Lambda formula (below, 281), a soul which animates a visible body, the material universe consisting of the spheres of the stars and planets, with the earth at their centre. At the beginning of time individual human souls were created from a diluted version of the same Lambda formula. Initially each was assigned to a star and so participated in the harmony of creation, but the subsequent necessity of incarnation entailed possible enslavement to the body and a multiplicity of reincarnations before return to the star eventually became possible. At any time, the status of the individual soul depended on its consonance with the general harmony of the creation.

In the *Timaeus* musical numbers and ratios are the predominant feature. Plato provided supplementary details, for instance, in the *Phaedrus* myth of the human soul as charioteer with two steeds, in that of Er the Pamphylian which concludes the *Republic* with an account of the world as experienced after death, and in that of Atlantis which informs the *Critias*. (*Republic*, *Timaeus* and *Critias* in fact form a trilogy.)<sup>2</sup> Later Neoplatonic elaborations contributed to Macrobius' *Commentary*, based, it will be recollected, on Cicero's *Republic*, and well-known to Henryson.

Henryson's Christian version of this Platonism has already made an appearance in the discussion of *The Paddock and the Mouse* (above,

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1. For possible fifteenth-century Italian influence on Henryson, see MacQueen 1976: 84–88.

2. *Phaedrus*, translated by R. Hackforth, *Republic*, translated by Paul Shorey, *Timaeus* translated by Benjamin Jowett, *Critias*, translated by A.E. Taylor, in Hamilton and Cairns eds, 476–525, 576–844 (vision of Er, 838–44), 1153–1211, 1213–24.

chapter three), but comes most clearly to the fore in *The Tale of Orpheus*, ultimately derived from Greek myth but later given a Platonic slant by Boethius in *The Consolations of Philosophy*, bk.3, metrum 12, and given additional moral complexity by the early-fourteenth-century commentary of Nicholas Trivet (1258–1328), which provides material for Henryson’s long and elaborate *Moralitas* (Stewart and Rand eds 1918: 294–97; Fox ed. 1981: 384–91; see too Powell 1978).

Henryson’s version of the Orpheus myth has several unusual features. It begins with an extended *sententia*: a member of a noble family must maintain the standards set by his ancestors. There is already a suggestion that Orpheus failed to do so. The *sententia* modulates into an account of Orpheus’ remarkable genealogy. He was grandson of Jupiter, the supreme god, and the goddess Memoria or Mnemosyne, a personification of memory. Their children were the nine Muses, of whom one, Calliope, mated with Phoebus and so gave birth to Orpheus:

Na wounder is thought he was fair and wyse,  
 Gentill and full of liberalite,  
 His fader god, and his progenitrys  
 A goddes, fyndar of all ermonyne. (10: 64–67)

As a baby, he sucked “The sweit licour of all musike parfyte” (10: 70) from his mother’s breast. When he reached manhood, the queen of Thrace, Eurydice, proposed, indeed demanded, that he should marry her. He accepted, and they lived together in a joy which Henryson terms “worldly”. One May morning the shepherd Aristaeus attempted to rape Eurydice, out walking, accompanied only by her maid. She fled and accidentally trod on a venomous snake which stung her. She swooned. Proserpine, goddess of the dead, summoned her and she vanished. The maid reported her disappearance to Orpheus. He tried unsuccessfully to use the musical power of his harp to discover her whereabouts, then set out in search of her, beginning in heaven, then descending through the spheres of the planets. He did not find her, but improved his musical skills when he overheard the music of the spheres. On earth he continued his search and eventually made his way to the gate of hell. The power of his harp enabled him to pass the monsters who blocked his way and alleviate the sufferings of the exemplary sinners Ixion, Tantalus and Tityus. He reached Hell’s House and the multitudinous sinners there. At the very lowest level he

found a much changed Eurydice in attendance on Pluto and Proserpine. His music persuaded them to let her go, but on strict condition that he should not look back until both had passed the boundaries of hell. At the last moment Orpheus forgot, glanced back, and so lost Eurydice for ever. The narrative ends with his outcry against the deceptiveness of sensual love.

The *Moralitas* contains 110 rhyming couplets against the 57 preceding 7-lined stanzas of the narrative. In it Orpheus is identified as the “part intellectiue” (428) of the human soul, Eurydice as “affection” (431), the appetitive part, and Aristaeus, in an apparent paradox, as “gude vertewe” (436). Numerological structure is limited to the narrative.

Elsewhere I have demonstrated something of the relationship between *Moralitas* and narrative (MacQueen, J. 1967: 27–38). The *Moralitas* itself is tropological – “gude moralitee, / Rycht full of frute and seriositee” (423–24) – but incorporated in the main body of the poem there is ample evidence for a second “dark” level, that of allegory proper, based on Platonic doctrine, metaphor and numerology.

Henryson made selective use of Trivet’s commentary. He introduced one notable difference. In Trivet, as in Boethius, it is primarily by song that Orpheus attempts the rescue of Eurydice. In Henryson Orpheus is an instrumentalist rather than a singer; the emphasis falls on the music of his harp.

The *Moralitas* revolves around a kind of refrain, a series of near-identical couplets which introduce allegorizations of the effects produced by the harp. The interpretation, for instance, of the overthrow of Cerberus, the three-headed hound of hell, introduces one form of the introductory couplet:

Bot quhen our mynd is myngit with sapience,  
 And plais apon the harp of eloquence;  
 That is to say, makis persuasioun  
 To draw oure will and oure affection,  
 In ewiry elde, fra syn and foul delyte,  
 This dog oure saule has no power to byte. (469–74)

(Notice the biblical echo – *Psalm* 22: 20, *Vulgate* 21: 21: “Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog”. Henryson’s interpretation even of Cerberus, has a biblical basis.)

Almost the same introductory couplet is used for two of the three great sinners, Ixion (507–8) and Tantalus (545–46). For Tityus it differs slightly: “Quhen Orpheus vpoun his harp can play, / That is, our vndirstanding, for to say –” (577–78). The effect on the king and queen of Hell, Pluto and Proserpina, gives rise to the final interpretation:

Than Orpheus, our ressoun, is full wo  
 And twichis on his harp and biddis ho  
 Till our desyre and fulich appetyte. (611–13)

In the microcosm of the human soul, the music of the harp corresponds to the rational harmony of the macrocosm, the Soul of the World. Its function is to establish the authority of reason over sensual appetite.

Denton Fox pointed out that the number of strings on the medieval harp was variable (Fox ed. 1981: 397). Henryson however used the word as equivalent to the classical *cithara*, the lyre, the construction of which admirably fitted the numerological scheme developed in the narrative. “The ancient cithara had seven strings”, remarks one authority, the encyclopaedist Isidore of Seville (602–36), “each producing a different note”. He adds that the number is 7, either because 7 strings span the entire range of sound, or because “heaven sounds with seven movements”, the *musica mundana* or music of the 7 planetary spheres (Lindsay ed. 1911: 3: 22: 5).

Isidore also quotes three words (*septem discrimina vocum*) from Virgil’s lines about Orpheus in the Elysian Fields, where he “plays as accompaniment to the rhythm the seven distinctive notes, plucking them now with his fingers, now with his ivory plectrum” (*Aeneid* VI, 646–47; Lindsay ed. 1911: 3: 22: 4–5).

By Henryson’s time the story of Orpheus had established itself as folk-narrative or fairy-tale, exemplified by the romances *Sir Orpheo* (Bliss ed. 1966) and the fragmentary *King Orphius* (Stewart ed. 1973). In this tradition Pluto and Proserpine become king and queen of Faery, the Otherworld generally familiar in Celtic and Lowland British folklore. Henryson admits this level; two features, for instance, of his Hell, the bridge (36: 262), and the thorny moor (40: 289), belong to it. The servant girl describes Eurydice’s death as capture by the fairies: “Erudices, your quene, / Is with the fary tane befor myne ene!” (17: 118–19). She is the only one to use the term, and it seems likely that Henryson intended his primary audience to distinguish her reaction as

possessing an element of truth, but belonging to a level of understanding beneath that which, I hope to show, is implicit in the remainder of the poem (MacQueen, J. 1967: 36; 1976: 70; Mills 1977; Aitken et al. eds: 1977: 52–60).

The subject of *The Tale of Orpheus* is the attempt of the soul, divided in incarnation, to recover its pre-existent integrity and so return to its native place, the Plain of Truth, described in the *Phaedrus* (Hamilton and Cairns eds: [247c–248b] 494–95). The narrative part consists of 52 7-line stanzas, interrupted by the 5 10-line stanzas of the lyric “Complaint of Orpheus” (20–24: 134–83). The three early texts which have survived are corrupt, but not desperately so; the corruptions may be emended with a fair degree of probability.

As has been mentioned, some features of Henryson’s presentation of the Orpheus legend are unique. One of these is Eurydice’s peremptory proposal of marriage. Allegorically this is to permit appetite to usurp the role of reason. The foundations of the marriage are therefore false; the wedded joys of the couple are termed “warldlie” (89) in the significantly numbered 13th stanza. It is to be expected that Orpheus will lose Eurydice and that his music will lack any capability to find her.

A second unique feature<sup>3</sup> is that Orpheus begins his quest in the heavens, from which he makes a descent through the spheres. The Plain of Truth beyond the stars is the proper pasturage for reason, the rational soul, and it is from there that his desire for Eurydice leads him to a descent through the spheres, which will bring no ultimate profit, although there are incidental benefits.

The allegory centres on stanzas 30–32 (narrative 25–27), their importance underlined by the ironic modesty topos which immediately follows:

Off sik musik to wryte I do bot dote,  
 Thar-for at this mater a stra I lay,  
 For in my lyf I coud newir syng a note. (33, narrative 28: 240–42)

This topos marks the transition from the celestial spheres to Earth. Its number in either sequence, 28 or 33, indicates the potential for

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3. Based on a single sentence in Trivet: *Quam volens reducere ab inferis Orpheus modulationibus deos superos placare satagit* (Fox ed. 1981: 385). This does not imply a journey to the heavens or a descent through the spheres.



reintegration of the human soul, a potential involving the recovery of Paradise. 33 refers directly to Christ.

The corrupt text of the previous three stanzas may be reconstructed thus:

In his passage among the planetis all,  
 He herd a hevinly melody and sound,  
 Passing all instrumentis musicall,  
 Causid be roll yng of the speris round;  
 Quhilk ermony of all this mappamound,  
 Quhill moving ces, unite perpetuall,  
 Of this quik world Plato the saull can call.

Thare lerit he tonys proportionate,  
 As dupler, tripler and epitritus,  
 Hemiolius and eik the quadruplat,  
 Epogdous, richt hard and curious;  
 And of thir sex, suete and dilicius,  
 Richt consonant, fyve hevynly symphonyis  
 Componyt ar, as clerkis can deuse.

First dyatessaron full suete, I wis;  
 And dyapason, symple and duplate;  
 And dyapente, componyt with a dys;  
 Thir makis five, of thre multiplycate.  
 This mery musik and mellifluate,  
 Complete and full with nowmeris od and evyn,  
 Is causit be the moving of the hevyn. (30–32, narrative 25–27: 219–39)

The movements of the 7 planetary spheres, corresponding to the 7 strings of the classical cythara, produce this music, the *musica mundana*, which Plato called the Soul of the World.

The Lambda formula, with its 7 constituent numbers,

$$\begin{array}{r} 1 \\ 2 \ 3 \\ 4 \ 9 \\ 8 \ 27 \end{array}$$

is not so much stated as taken for granted. The 7 individual numbers represent the 7 planets whose movements produce the harmony of the spheres. Other features represent the properties of space; the point or simple location represented by the monad, 1; the first dimension, length, in feminine and masculine form by 2 and 3; two dimensions, area, by the feminine and masculine square numbers 4 and 9; three

dimensions, volume, by the cubes 8 and 27. The legs of the  $\Lambda$  contain the masculine and feminine geometric means, the first represented by 2, twice 1 and half 4, and by 4, twice 2 and half 8; the second by 3, thrice 1 and one-third of 9, and 9, thrice 3 and one-third of 27. The presence of masculine and feminine elements makes the whole generative. As has already been noted, the final number of the sequence, 27, is the sum of all the preceding numbers and thus that the sum of all the numbers is twice-27, 54.

If we expand the Lambda to complete the four-fold triangle or tetractys, we also complete the set of arithmetic and harmonic means:

$$\begin{array}{c} 1 \\ 2 \ 3 \\ 4 \ 6 \ 9 \\ 8 \ 12 \ 18 \ 27 \end{array}$$

Two of the arithmetic means – 2, midway between 1 and 3, and 3, midway between 2 and 4 – are present in the original form of the Lambda. The addition of 6 means that 9 takes an additional role as midway between 6 and 12, while 6 is itself midway between 4 and 8. Two harmonic means, 4 (which exceeds 3 by the same proportion as it falls short of 6) and 9 (correspondingly between 6 and 18), are also present; the others are 12 and 18, the first of which exceeds 8 by the same proportion as it falls short of 18, the second exceeds 12 by the same proportion as it falls short of 27. In other words, 8 stands to 12 in the same ratio as 18 to 27. The central position in the completed triangle is occupied by the first perfect number, 6.

Stanza 31 (narrative 26) lists the six arithmetical ratios on which Pythagorean and Platonic musical theory is based (*Timaeus* 35a–c; Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: 1165) *dupler*, 2: 1; *tripler*, 3: 1; *epitritus*, 4: 3; *hemiolius*, 3: 2; *quadruplat*, 4: 1, and *epogdous*, 9: 8, all implicit in the basic Lambda formula. The five corresponding consonant musical intervals, “multiply” from the three basic, diapason, diapente, and diatessaron, and constituting the pentatonic scale, follow in stanza 32 (narrative 27) diatessaron, a fourth, corresponding to epitritus, diapason, an octave, corresponding to dupler, bisdiapason (*dyapason ... duplate*), or double octave, to quadruplat, diapente, a fifth, to hemiolius, and diapente-and-diapason (*dyapente componyt with a dys*), a double fifth, to tripler. The words “suete and dilicius / Richt consonant” should be taken as qualifying

only the five symphonies; epogdous, though important, is not a consonant ratio.

Even a superficial examination shows why Henryson called these ratios “full with nowmeris od and evyn”, and called the series musically complete. For the modern reader however the relationship between this and the Platonic Soul of the World, soul, that is to say, of the created universe, is less obvious. Soul for Plato is non-corporeal and therefore abstract but more “real” than body. As a consequence it is closely related to the abstractions of number which underlie and govern the physical universe. The substance of the soul Plato held to be compounded of three abstracts, Existence, Sameness and Difference; this substance in turn was subdivided in terms of the Lambda formula. The basic numbers include the potential of the main musical ratios, but the formula was not necessarily limited to them. Ratio rather than numerical expression was what mattered; that is why the means are important. Calcidius developed his exposition by way of the parallel series (Waszink ed. 1962: 89–92):

	6	
	12	18
	24	54
	48	162

in which each of the original figures is multiplied by six, and the series begins with the first perfect number. Plato himself introduced a ratio, 256: 243, which may at first sight seem unrelated, but which is necessary if the full significance is to be understood (*Timaeus* 36b: Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: 1166).

The initial sequence will serve for introduction. As already noted, it is linked to the physical universe, first by the fact that it is made up of 7 integers, corresponding primarily to the 7 planets but also to the 7 musical intervals (Orpheus’ *cythara* with 7 strings), 5 tones and 2 semitones, which separate the 8 celestial spheres and are produced as their harmony. Like the universe, 7 is self-generating and self-sustaining (i.e., it is a prime, no multiple of which falls within the decad, the first limit of numbers). Because the series alternates the masculine odd numbers with the feminine even, it is generative. It consists of the monad, 1, representing the dimensionless point; 2 and 3, representing the one-dimensional line; the squares 4 and 9, representing two-dimensional area, and the cubes, 8 and 27, representing three-dimensional volume. It thus provides a basis for the

3 spatial dimensions (Stahl tr. 1952: [I vi, 45–46] 109, [II i–ii] 185–93).

To refine the formula further, Calcidius introduced the series already mentioned, 6, 12, 18, 24, 54, 48, 162, which preserves the ratios, but allows for odd numbers only indirectly, and not at all for squares and cubes. Between 6 and 12 he inserted two mean terms, 8 and 9, one even, the other odd. The even, 8, exceeds 6 by one-third; 12, correspondingly, exceeds 9, the odd, by one-third. 8: 6 and 12: 8 thus stand in the ratios 4: 3, epitritus, and 3: 2 hemiolius. 9 is halfway between 6 and 12, and so exceeds 6 and is smaller than 12 by a figure of 3. 9: 6 thus stands in the ratio 3: 2, hemiolius, and 12: 9 in the ratio 4: 3, epitritus. The ratios thus come to exist in both feminine and masculine form. The ratio of the two mean terms is obviously 9: 8, epogdous, a tone. The integers of that part of the formula which is related to the basic 6 by the factor 2 (12, 24, and 48) have corresponding mean terms 16 and 18, 32 and 36, which follow the same pattern. Those related by the factor 3 (18, 54, and 162) have mean terms 27 and 36, 81 and 108, where the lower mean stands in hemiolius relation to the lower extreme, and the upper mean correspondingly to the upper extreme. Epitritus and consequently epogdous, that is to say, exist only in terms of the means of the integers linked by the factor 2. When Plato said that God filled all intervals of 4: 3, epitritus, with 9: 8, epogdous, he was referring only to the even series (Waszink ed. 1962: 89–92).

The octave corresponds to the interval diapason and the ratio dupler, 2: 1. As containing 5 intervals of a tone and 2 of a semitone (in Tonic Sol-Fa notation, on the one hand, *doh, ray, me, soh, lah*, on the other, *fah* and *te*), diapason stands in a vital relationship to epogdous. Calcidius illustrates in terms of the series 192, 216, 243, 256, 288, 324, 364.5, and 384. The extremes of the series stand in the ratio 2: 1, representing diapason. The means, 256 ( $8 \times 32$ ) and 288 ( $9 \times 32$ ), in relation to the extremes, produce hemiolius and epitritus, diapente and diatessaron, under masculine and feminine aspect. In relation to each other they produce epogdous, a tone. When the other numbers are taken into account, four additional ratios, 216: 192; 243: 216; 324: 288, and 364.5: 324, become possible. All are epogdous. The series thus produces the 5 tones of the octave, as well as diapente and diatessaron. The remaining two ratios, 256: 243, mentioned by Plato, and 384: 364.5, are precisely equivalent (the quotient in both is 1.0534979), each representing a semitone. These complete the octave,

and with it the musical structure of the Soul of the World (Waszink ed. 1962: 98–99).

It should now be obvious that the formula as summarized by Henryson is indeed “complete and full wyth nowmeris od and evyn”, and that the later complications are to a large extent governed by the exigencies of epogdous, which may well be called “rycht hard and curius”. Henryson had the full formula in mind, and gave it expression as complete as was consonant with the structure of his poem.

It is more than a pedantic outgrowth on the narrative. The poem is constructed on Platonic principles to illustrate Platonic doctrines. The formula for the Soul of the World is not confined to three stanzas; it is built into the narrative structure and controls its meaning.

Excluding the Moralitas, the poem consists of 52 7-line stanzas, into which are intruded 5 10-line stanzas of lyric complaint. The description of the music of the spheres occupies narrative stanzas 25–7, ending with the stanza the number of which brings the Lambda formula to a conclusion, the first masculine cube. The sum of the first six integers of the formula equals the seventh ( $1+2+3+4+5+6=27$ ). Correspondingly, if 8, the sixth integer, is subtracted from the seventh, the resulting number, 19, is the sum of the first five integers. It is also, as has been noted (above, 29), an unlucky number. 27 represents both itself and the sum of the six earlier integers, while 19 marks a significant, often an unfortunate or tragic, stage in the summation. The narrative development of the poem is interrupted at stanza 19 by the lyric complaint on the death of Eurydice; when the narrative resumes, 8 stanzas bring us to the completion of the mathematically based account of the Soul of the World.

The first 19 stanzas in turn fall fairly readily into subdivisions of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 9. Stanza 1 forms the proem; the introductory emphasis on genealogy suggests that a traditional praise-poem is to follow, proclaiming that some lord or prince has not fallen away from the virtues of his great ancestors. The emphasis shifts in stanzas 2 and 3 towards degeneracy and the possibility of guarding against so disastrous an outcome. In stanza 4 the Neoplatonic figure of emanation, usually applied to creation, and also involving some measure of degeneracy, introduces the actual genealogy of Orpheus:

Lyke as a strand of water or a spring  
 Haldis the sapour of his fontall well,  
 So did in Grece ilk lord and worthy king,  
 Off forbeiris thay tuke tarage and smell. (4: 22–25)

One might compare the use of the same figure in a famous passage from Macrobius:

God, who both is and is called the First Cause, is alone the beginning and source of all things which are and which seem to be. He, in a bounteous outpouring of his greatness, created from himself Mind. This Mind, called Nous, as long as it fixes its gaze upon the Father, retains a complete likeness of its Creator, but when it looks away at things below, creates from itself Soul. Soul, in turn, as long as it contemplates its father, assumes his part, but by diverting its attention more and more, though itself incorporeal, degenerates into the fabric of bodies ... Soul ... out of that pure and clearest fount of Mind from whose abundance it had drunk deep at birth, endowed those divine or etherial bodies, meaning the celestial spheres and the stars which it was first creating, with mind ... Accordingly, since Mind emanates from the Supreme God and Soul from Mind, and Mind, indeed, forms and suffuses all below with life, and since this is the one splendour lighting up everything and visible in all, like a countenance reflected in many mirrors arranged in a row, and since all follows on in continuous succession, degenerating step by step in their downward course, the close observer will find that from the Supreme God even to the bottommost dregs of the universe, there is one tie, binding at every link and never broken. This is the golden chain of Homer, which, he tells us, God ordered to hang down from the sky to the earth. (Stahl tr.1952: [I xiv, 6–7, 8, 15] 143–45)

The link with medieval and later ideas of the Great Chain of Being is self-evident. Emanation from the One, ultimate Being, produces Nous, the second person of the Neoplatonic Trinity, from whom the third person, the Soul of the World, is a further emanation. Everything else emanates from the Soul of the World. It should be added that the particular emanation which produces the Soul of the World is governed by the stringencies of the Lambda formula, which also applies to lower orders of creation, in particular the human soul. The process of emanation is also a process of degeneracy.

Nous and the Soul of the World figure prominently (as Noys and Anima Mundi or Endelichia) in the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris (above 53, 66, 96).

Orpheus himself may be equated with the Soul of the World if we regard the line formed by his grandfather, Jupiter, his father, Phoebus (both divinities), and himself as a trinity. The female line – Memoria, mother by Jupiter of the 9 Muses, one of whom, Calliope, is Orpheus' mother, by Phoebus – receives special prominence, probably because the 9 Muses were regarded as “the tuneful song of the eight spheres and the one predominant harmony that comes from all of them” (Stahl

tr. 1952: [II iii, 1] 194).<sup>4</sup> In Henryson's catalogue the 9th Muse is Urania, "callit armony celestial" (9: 59). The 8 previously named, it follows, are to be associated with the music of the 7 planetary spheres and the Fixed Stars. Etymologically and otherwise the Muses and music are related. Isidore's coupling of the 7-stringed cithara with the music of the spheres has already been mentioned (above, 254).

The 4th Muse, Calliope mother of Orpheus, corresponds to the 4th celestial sphere, that of the Sun, his father.

Orpheus is the child of divine parents and should be regarded as himself divine, although, in terms of emanation, to a somewhat lesser degree than his parents.

The 3 stanzas, 4–6, begin the genealogy of Orpheus; the figure of Calliope introduces the next 4, which end with his birth. The 9 stanzas, 11–19, deal with the improper initiative shown by Eurydice in proposing marriage to Orpheus, a marriage which makes him king of Thrace, and which is ended, to the violent grief of Orpheus, when Proserpina captures Eurydice. The ineffectiveness of his music in the interpolated lament (stanzas 20–24) shows that its power has been diminished by the marriage. In the 8 stanzas which follow Orpheus descends from the outmost heaven to earth by way of the celestial spheres. In the course of his journey he receives the mathematical music lesson already discussed.

The first 27 narrative stanzas, it is tolerably clear, represent the complete primary series of the Platonic formula, with 27 representing both itself and the sum of the preceding six integers, each in turn forming a stanzaic marker. Henryson intended the intelligent reader to notice that his exposition of the Soul of the World concluded at a numerologically important point, and that the entire previous narrative formed in effect a representation of the material set out in that stanza

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4. The complexity in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century thought of the relationship between the Muses and the celestial spheres deserves some additional comment. Each sphere had appointed to it, besides one of the feminine Muses, one of the masculine Bacchi. Their function corresponded to the double operations of Nous and the Soul of the World. The function of the Bacchi was to know – from a celestial point of view to look upwards towards the *aplans* beyond the spheres. The Muses animated and ruled the physical bodies of the spheres to make them operate as transmitters of the divine will to the world of incarnation – to look downwards (Ficino 1964; Bongo 1591: ["De Numero XII"] 390). The relevance of Orpheus' genealogy to his descent through the spheres, and indeed to the general course of the poem, thus becomes evident.

and the two immediately preceding. It is clear too that he meant the formula to apply to Orpheus as well as the Soul of the World.

Dante was well aware of the significance of the number 27. Compare, for instance, *Purgatorio* 27, in which he reaches the Earthly Paradise at the summit of Mount Purgatory. The 7 P's marking the 7 sins (and incidentally also the 7 integers of the basic Lambda formula) have been removed from his forehead. His soul is restored to its primordial authority. The canto ends with the words of benediction, the last spoken to him by Virgil, hitherto his guide:

No word from me, no further sign expect;  
Free, upright, whole, thy will henceforth lays down  
Guidance that it were error to neglect,

Whence o'er thyself I mitre thee and crown. (139–42)

He is now perfected in soul and ready for his ascent towards the Empyrean. Beatrice rather than Virgil is to be his guide.

By the end of stanza 27 correspondingly, Orpheus is prepared to rescue Eurydice from the bondage of the lower world and begin the upward return journey. The harp which had failed him is now able to control the potentates of the underworld.

Orpheus' attempted rescue of Eurydice represents one aspect of human incarnation. The union beyond the spheres of the intellectual soul (Orpheus) with the appetitive (Eurydice) establishes the possibility of contact with the lower universe by way of sensation and desire. Eurydice's function is that of the "doubill twynit threid" in *The Paddock and the Mouse*, discussed above (above, 97). Incarnation begins when she is captured by the powers of the material lower world. The shattering effects of the process on the rational soul Plato described in terms of his total formula:

The three double intervals and the three triple intervals, together with the mean terms and the connecting links which are expressed by the ratios of 3: 2 and 4: 3 and 9: 8 – these, although they cannot be wholly undone except by him who united them, were twisted by them [i.e. the sensations] in all sorts of ways, and the circles were broken and disordered in every possible manner, so that when they moved they were tumbling to pieces and moved irrationally, at one time in a reverse direction, and then again obliquely, and then upside down. (*Timaeus* 43d–e; Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: 1172)



The sequence of the first 27 stanzas is broken, after stanza 19, by the 5 intruded stanzas, each of twice-5 lines, which constitute the lyric complaint. This lacks the true music, later substantially recovered by Orpheus in his descent through the spheres. It exerts power only on *silva*, brute matter – the control of trees and birds shown in stanza 21 – but at any more spiritual level it is ineffective. The passions which accompany incarnation have distorted the Lambda formula, significantly between the masculine square and the feminine cube, 9 and 8, which is also the vital interval of a tone. The distortion is produced by the impact of loss, grief, and unsatisfied desire which accompanies incarnation. The pentad of twice-5 line stanzas which constitutes the “Complaint”, emblemizes the 5 bodily senses, through which the original balance of the soul is damaged. The total of 50 lines may also contain a reference to the zoogonic triangle and the Nuptial Number, failure to observe which is associated with degeneracy in the individual and in the State (above, 201).

The number 19 is important in another, not unrelated, way. As has already been noted (above, 29), in the fifth century BC the Athenian astronomer Meton had proposed a 19-year cycle to bring the lunar month into correlation with the solar year. The Christian church made use of it to calculate the Golden Number, by which the date of the primary moveable feast, Easter, might be established for any given year. The possible values ranged from 1 to 19. The date of Easter depends on the date of the first full moon after the vernal equinox, a date which varied from year to year through the cycle. 19 thus has strong lunar as well as paschal associations (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. “Golden Number”). The moon was particularly associated with bodies; at the sphere of the moon, last stage in its descent, the soul acquired “the function of molding and increasing bodies” (Stahl tr. 1952: [I xii: 14] 136–37), a function intimately related to the actual business of incarnation.

In terms of the Platonic image of the triple soul as a charioteer with two unruly steeds (*Phaedrus* 246a-249d; Hamilton and Cairns 1961: 493–96), Eurydice is the steeds. The charioteer is the rational soul, properly concerned only with the world of abstract reality. The steeds represent the metaphorically upward and downward urges which beset the soul under its more appetitive aspects. The Moralitas makes Orpheus correspond to the charioteer, Eurydice to the steeds, sometimes directing their course upward, but more usually downward. Orpheus

callit is the part intellectiue  
 Of mannis saule and vnder-standing, free  
 And separate fra sensualitee.  
 Erudices is oure affection,  
 Be fantasy oft movit vp and down;  
 Quhile to reson it castis the delyte,  
 Quhile to the flesch settis the appetite. (428–34)

When Eurydice takes her pleasure in reason, she is the nobler steed of the pair, when she takes it in the flesh, the ignoble. When she proposes marriage to Orpheus, it is as the nobler steed; more surprisingly for the modern reader, when she flees from the shepherd Aristaeus, she becomes its ignoble yokemate. Trivet's handling of this conceit, which Henryson accepts, is not purely Platonic; the emphasis falls, as in the philosophy of Duns Scotus, on the non-rational faculty, the will, represented by the shepherd, the active instrument of virtue, who takes the masculine initiative, not open to intellect, and seeks to bring the lower appetitive into the habit of submission. The attempt is in effect a counterbalance to Eurydice's earlier proposal of marriage to Orpheus, but it is not successful. When it fails, the appetitive inevitably becomes a prey to Hell, a term the meaning of which for Henryson will be discussed later. Intellect has no choice but to follow and in so doing undergo the process of incarnation (Jack, R.D.S. 2001: 72–77).

All this suggests an explanation for one of the more puzzling features of the poem. Marriage to Eurydice makes Orpheus king of Thrace, a region with a definite location on earth, yet his search begins, not in Thrace, but in the empyreal heaven, and continues with a descent through the spheres of the fixed stars and planets. When he reaches Earth, only one feature is mentioned, the "grauis gray" (33, narrative 28: 244) – "groves", in all probability, rather than "graves", but a play on words is palpably present. In philosophic and scientific usage Latin *silva*, "wood", means "brute matter", and it seems likely that this too is part of the connotation. The next place mentioned is the gate of hell, and hell is the location of the remainder of the narrative.

In terms of mythology, Orpheus is a divinity, born to divine parents. In terms of the allegory, the original habitation of the intellectual soul lies outside the created universe, and its descent to incarnation through the spheres has good Neoplatonic authority. Macrobius, for instance, discusses three opinions held by philosophers, the third of which he is himself inclined to favour:

According to this sect, which is more devoted to reason, the blessed souls, free from all bodily contamination, possess the sky; but a soul that from its lofty pinnacle of perpetual radiance disdains to grasp after a body and this thing that we on earth call life, but yet allows a secret yearning for it to creep into its thought, gradually slips down to the lower realms because of the very weight of its earthly thoughts. It does not suddenly assume a defiled body out of a state of complete incorporeality, but, gradually sustaining imperceptible losses and departing further from its simple and absolutely pure state, it swells out with certain increases of a planetary body: in each of the spheres which lie below the firmament it puts on another ethereal envelopment, so that by these steps it is gradually prepared for assuming this earthly dress. Thus by as many deaths as it passes through spheres, it reaches the stage which on earth is called life. (Stahl tr. 1952: [I xi, 11–12] 132–33)

The appetitive, in other words, already forms part of the unfallen soul before incarnation, and also is the instrument by which the soul is forced to descend.

The astrological stages by which full corporeality is reached are defined with some precision:

In the sphere of Saturn it obtains reason and understanding, called *logistikon* and *theoretikon*; in Jupiter's sphere the power to act, called *praktikon*; In Mars' sphere a bold spirit or *thymikon*; in the sun's sphere, sense-perception and imagination, *aisthetikon* and *phantastikon*; in Venus' sphere, the impulse of passion, *epithymetikon*; in Mercury's sphere, the ability to speak and interpret, *hermeneutikon*; and in the lunar sphere the function of molding and increasing bodies, *phytikon*. (Stahl tr. 1952: [I xii, 14] 136–37)

The Orpheus of stanzas 34ff. has gained qualities and powers lacking in the earlier part of the poem, but he has also moved towards incarnation.

The process of incarnation is in one sense a death of the soul, a descent to the infernal regions:

Some ... declared that the immutable part of the universe extended from the outer sphere, which is called *aplanes*, the fixed sphere, down to the beginning of the moon's sphere, and that the changeable part extended from the moon to the earth; that souls were living while they were in the immutable part, but died when they fell into the region subject to change, and that accordingly the area between the moon and the earth was known as the infernal regions of the dead ... The men of old handed down the tradition that the Elysian fields were in this sphere [the *aplanes*], destined for the pure souls. The soul, when it was dispatched to a body, descended from these fields through the three ranks of the elements to the body by a threefold death" (Stahl tr. 1952: [I xi, 5–9] 131–32).

The reference to the Elysian fields derives ultimately from the Plain of Truth in the *Phaedrus*.

In the light of this, the reader may feel justified in taking the term Thrace as a figure for the original home of the unitary soul, Orpheus and Eurydice together, on the outer surface of the *aplanes*, the Plain of Truth, from which begins the descent to corporeality. Bodily life is represented by Hell, the place of sensual experience and unsatisfied desire, from which Orpheus fails to rescue Eurydice. That life is alien to either part of the soul. Incarnation is complete when Orpheus reaches Hell, where he finds Eurydice suffering from a kind of wasting disease:

Quod he, "My lady lele and my delyte,  
Full wa is me to se yow changit thus.  
Quhare is thy rude as rose wyth chekis quhite,  
Thy cristall eyne with blenkis amoureuse,  
Thi lippis rede to kis dilicieuse?" (49, narrative 44: 352–56)

49 represents the bodily climacteric. 44 is the product of 4 with 11, the number of transgression. Correspondingly, in the 49th stanza of the narrative sequence Orpheus finally loses Eurydice when he glances back at her in the course of their ascent to the "vtter port". His action is caused by a metaphorical blindness, the failure of intellect to master bodily affection.

The earlier comment of Pluto: "Were scho at hame in hir contree of Trace, / Scho wald refete full sone in fax and face." (50, narrative 45: 364–65), almost certainly refers to the Plain of Truth: "the pasturage that is proper to their noblest part comes from that meadow, and the plumage by which they are borne aloft is nourished thereby" (*Phaedrus* 248b–c; Hamilton and Cairns 1961: 495). This occurs in a stanza whose number, 50, is that of jubilee or remission; the alternative, 45, is the product of 5, the number of the bodily senses, and 9, that of intellect.

In Hell the first creature encountered by Orpheus is the 3-headed hound Cerberus. In a well-known document of Renaissance Platonism, the *Practica musicae* (1496) of the Milanese organist Franchinus Gafurius (1451–1522), Cerberus is the central figure of a diagram illustrating the music of the spheres (Young tr. ed. 1969: 1). His serpent-like body extends beyond the *aplanes* to form a looped support for the throne of Apollo, and his three heads rest, not in Hell, but on the sphere of Earth, labelled TERRA. He is not, that is to say,

regarded as in any everyday sense of the word an infernal monster; as Edgar Wind observes, in the world of time as opposed to eternity, “the triple-headed monster, *fugientia tempora signans*, retains a shadowy vestige of the triadic dance that the Graces” (whom Gafurius identifies collectively with Thalia, a Muse, present also in the underworld) “start under the direction of Apollo” (Wind 1967: 265).<sup>5</sup> In Henryson’s underworld of corporeal existence, the triadic theme receives further emphasis by the presence there of the 3 Furies grouped round Ixion’s wheel, and of the 3 exemplary sinners, Ixion himself, Tantalus, and Tityus.

Henryson selectively follows Trivet in his analysis of underworld figures and objects as dangers awaiting the incarnate soul. The hound Cerberus is Death; his 3 heads represent the 3 possibilities, death in youth, in maturity, or in old age.<sup>6</sup> The 3 Furies are “wickit thought, evill word, and frawart dede” (478), the all-inclusive “sinned in thought, word, or deed” of the *Confiteor* or General Confession. The 3 great sinners each represent forms of concupiscence. Ixion on his wheel is “warldly delyte” (510), “the grete sollicitude, / Quhile vp, quhile down, to wyn this warldis gude” (515–16); Tantalus is avarice and Tityus the insensate craving to know the future. The image of blindness returns with the interpretation of the dark road to Pluto’s hall as “blinding of the spreit / With myrk cluddis and myst of ignorance” (601–2).

I have already commented on the likelihood that the 5 stanzas, each of twice-5 lines, which form the lyric complaint, emblemize the 5 bodily senses, perhaps with a reference to the Platonic Nuptial Number. The same significance is probably to be discerned in the 25 (5×5) stanzas (33–57) devoted to Orpheus’ journey through Hell. Hell is corporeal existence, the realm of degeneracy and the 5 senses; infernal experience begins as soon as the soul in its descent has passed the sphere of the Moon.

Next to Eurydice’s original marriage proposal and the descent of Orpheus through the spheres, the most unexpected feature of the poem is perhaps the appearance in a classical Hades, not only of biblical figures such as Pharoah and Jezebel, but of others from the much later Christian church. For the latter, Henryson is unusual, not so much in

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5. Gafurius diagram will be found in Young (ed.) 1969: 1.

6. One should also recollect the threefold death which forms part of Macrobius’ process of incarnation.

the anachronism, part of the timelessness proper to medieval allegory, as in the suggestion that *many* high dignitaries, from popes to abbots, had been major sinners in their lives and are now paying the penalty in Hell. Contrast the damned in Dante's *Inferno*, whose numbers include only two popes, Nicholas III (1277–80) and Celestine V (1294). (Although the latter resigned the papacy, he was afterwards canonized by Clement V.) By the assumed year of Dante's vision, 1300, Hell had confident expectations of two new arrivals, Boniface VIII (1280–1303) and Clement V (1305–14), (Sayers tr. 1949: 19, 46–120). It is perhaps significant that those condemned all belong to Dante's own lifetime.

The fate proposed for so many princes of the church suggests that Henryson had at least some sympathies with the doctrines of Wycliffe, who went so far as to declare that the pope and the hierarchy were Antichrist. Denton Fox suggests that the stanza may also contain a covert reference to the unhappy appointment in 1472 of Patrick Graham as first archbishop of St Andrews (1472–78) and his subsequent fate. (Graham, incidentally, was a “committed opponent” of Henryson's patron, Henry Crichton, abbot of Dunfermline (MacDougall 2001: 45).)<sup>7</sup> Henryson's use of the present tense is certainly notable, particularly if one accepts Fox's emendation of “archbischopis” for “bischopis” (Fox ed. 1981: 408):

Thare fand he mony pape and cardinall,  
 In haly kirk quhilk dois abusoun;  
 And archbischopis in thair pontificall  
 Be symony and wrang intrusioun;  
 Abbotis and men of all religion,  
 For euill disponyng of thair placis rent,  
 In flambe of fyre were bitterly turment. (47: 338–44)

Like the other denizens of Hell, these are souls in whom the rational has failed to control the appetitive.

The total length of the narrative, 52 7-line stanzas, fairly obviously corresponds to the 52 7-day weeks of the solar year. The poem as a whole represents the year in a way which Macrobius may help us to understand. In the course of its year the Sun apparently moves round

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7. If *The Tale of Orpheus* was written during Henryson's Glasgow residence (above, 9) a reference to Graham as archbishop is not possible. Fox's proposed emendation is open to doubt.

the firmament through the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The most northerly and southerly points are marked by the summer and winter solstices, which in classical times were situated in Cancer and Capricorn respectively. Macrobius held that the soul began its entry to the material universe at the summer solstice in Cancer, the portal of men, and made its eventual return to immortality by way of the winter solstice in Capricorn, the portal of gods. These points, he erroneously believed, were where the zodiacal belt was crossed by the Milky Way (Stahl tr. 1952: [I xii, 1–2] 133–34), to which Henryson gives the traditional name *Wadlyng strete*, “Watling Street” (25: 188).

Orpheus entered Watling Street at the point in the poem which corresponds structurally to the summer solstice, regarded ideally as 15 June, the midpoint of the mid-month of summer. Each line of the narrative represents one day of the year. In the course of the poem a single calendar reference appears. The death of Eurydice occurs when she is walking “in till a Maii mornynge” (14: 93), i.e., when she is engaged in her May-morning observances. Orpheus reaches Watling Street in line 138 of the narrative, 188 of the complete poem. If we assume that line 93 represents 1 May, line 138 represents 15 June. Orpheus, the intellectual soul, enters the material universe by the portal of men, where in Bernardus Silvestris pre-existent souls also wait for incarnation (above, 97). The corresponding winter solstice, 15 December, midpoint of the mid-month of winter, is represented by line 319 of the narrative, 369 of the complete poem, the middle line of the stanza in which the music of Orpheus gains a conditional remission for Eurydice (I have again emended the corrupt text):

Than Orpheus before Pluto sat down,  
 And in his handis quhite his harp can ta,  
 And playit mony suete proporcion,  
 With base tonyis in Hypodoria,  
 With gemilling in Hyperlydia;  
 Till at the last, for reuth and grete pitee,  
 Thay wepiti sore that coud hym here and see. (51: 366–72)

At this point “terms of art”, the technical vocabulary of medieval musical theory, reappear. Hypodoria and Hyper(mixo)lydia are the lowest and highest of the fifteen Boethian Tonois or Keys (Chadwick 1981: 98), and in terms of the music of the spheres correspond to the Moon, the lowest, and the *aplanes*, the highest. The choice implies that Orpheus utilised the entire range open to him and so, by producing a “porporcion” in correspondence with the music of the

spheres and the Soul of the World, won for Eurydice and himself the opportunity to return to the Plain of Truth by the portal of gods, represented numerologically by the middle line of the stanza. It is perhaps indicative of the sad outcome that this middle line emphasizes Hypodoria, the lowest, rather than Hypermixolydia, the highest, of the tonoi.

It seems likely too that in the closing lines of the 48th narrative stanza the final two words refer to the portal of gods: “And on thai went, talkand of play and sport, / Quhill thay come almaist to the vtter port.” (53, narrative 48: 385–86).

Orpheus and Eurydice fail to reach “the vtter port”. The subject of their final conversation, play and sport, indicates that they are not yet ready for the Plain of Truth. Orpheus has not fully assimilated the music of the spheres; their joy remains “warldlie” (13: 89), their love earthly, directed to bodies, rather than divine. Orpheus looks back. He is unredeemed intellect which can never bring about the return of the appetitive to the heavens. He has degenerated from the standards set by his divine ancestors. The ending – conventional in some ways though it is, but still representing the cry of the blinded intellect seeking a definition of its problems – is as bleak as that of *The Paddock and the Mouse*:

“Quhat art thou lufe? How sall I the dyffyne?  
 Bitter and suete, cruel and merciabile;  
 Plesand to sum, til othir playnt and pyne;  
 To sum constant, till othir variabil;  
 Hard is thy law, thi bandis vnbrekable;  
 Quha seruis the, though he be newir sa trewe,  
 Perchance sum tyme he sall haue cause to rewe.

“Now fynd I wele this prouerbe trew”, quod he,  
 ““Hert on the hurd, and hand is on the sore;  
 Quhair lufe gois, on fors turnis the ee’.  
 I am expert, and wo is me thar-fore;  
 Bot for a luke my lady is forlore”.  
 Thus chydand on with lufe, our burn and bent,  
 A wofull wedow hame-wart is he went. (56–57, narrative 51–2: 401–14)

Like Boethius, Henryson makes no reference to the subsequent fate of Orpheus as later relayed by Milton:

What could the Muse herself that *Orpheus* bore,  
 The Muse herself for her enchanting son,



Whom Universal nature did lament,  
 When, by the rout that made the hideous roar,  
 His gory visage down the stream was sent,  
 Down the swift *Hebrus* to the *Lesbian* shore? (*Lycidas*, 58–63)

Neither does he refer to the Platonic doctrine that the fallen soul must undergo many reincarnations before it attains a final return to the Plain of Truth. The *Moralitas* ends like the narrative with Reason, the rational soul, “a wedow for tobe” (627), but adds a somewhat perfunctory pious prayer:

Now pray we God, sen oure affection  
 Is alway prompt and redy to fall down,  
 That he wald vndirput his haly hand  
 Of manteinans,<sup>8</sup> and geve vs grace to stand  
 In parfyte lufe, as he is gloriu.  
 And thus endis the tale of Orpheus. (628–33)

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8. This is the reading of the Asloan and Bannatyne MSS. Fox prints *manetenance*, based on *mane temance*, the reading in the Chepman and Myllar print. The latter probably results from a misreading of *mane teinance*.

## Conclusion

During the early years of the sixteenth century, the meagre evidence surviving suggests that the most highly regarded of Henryson's longer poems was *The Tale of Orpheus*, just discussed. In or about 1508 the first Scottish printers, Chepman and Myllar, made it the main item of their eighth tract under the title *Heire begynnis the traitie of Orpheus kyng and how he yeid to hewyn & to hel to seik his quene And ane othir ballad in the lattir end* (Beattie 1950: 149). The "othir ballad" mentioned is "The Want of Wise Men", sometimes attributed to Henryson, but rejected by Denton Fox (Fox ed. 1981: cxvi–cxvii). No other of Henryson's longer poems was printed by Chepman and Myllar, or at least no other survives. The title emphasises one unusual feature of the poem, that Orpheus went to heaven as well as hell in his search for Eurydice.

Slightly later is a handwritten note by Gavin Douglas (1474–1522) on the word "Muse" in his *Aeneid* 1, 13 (Caldwell ed. 1957–64: 2: 19), a note probably added to the manuscript immediately after his secretary Matthew Geddes had completed the fair copy of the first book, probably in 1515 (Caldwell ed. 1957–64: 1: 97). The note reads: "Musa in Grew signifeis an inventrice or inuention in our langgage, and of the ix Musis sum thing in my Palice of Honour and be Mastir Robert Hendirson in New Orpheus". This is important as showing that Douglas put *The Tale of Orpheus* on a par, at least in some respects, with his own humanistic *Palice of Honour*, composed about 1501 (Bawcutt ed. 2003: 3–133).<sup>1</sup> Either might be consulted as an authority on classical mythology.

There are a number of reasons for this. *The Tale of Orpheus* probably gained prestige from the fact that it was not Aesopic, but came closer to Boccaccio's third type of fable, epic, with a moral, philosophic, and theological content (above, 17), in this case a great classical myth, narrated at some length by Virgil in the context of the misfortunes of Aristaeus after his attempted rape of Eurydice (*Georgics* 4, 452–505), and by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 10, 1–77). There is no need, incidentally, to assume that because Henryson used Trivet's commentary, the only version of the story with which he was

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1. I have quoted the text of the London edn., c.1553.

familiar was that of Boethius. Virgil and Ovid were curriculum authors. Trivet several times refers to Ovid, although not to Virgil.

It is conceivable that Douglas regarded Nicholas Trivet, whose commentary on Boethius provided the source for Henryson's *Moralitas*, as a notable scholar, a precursor of Boccaccio on whose *Genealogy of the Gods* several of his notes to Book 1 of the *Aeneid* are based. Trivet's commentaries on classical authors were valued by his contemporaries and held their place for some considerable time after his death (Smalley 1960: 58–65). Henryson's adaptation of such a source might in itself appear a contribution to learning.

But there is more to it than this. Douglas had used Henryson's poem to help him compose his own *Palice of Honour*. An examination of his debt shows what features of *The Tale of Orpheus* he admired and so found useful. These often involve numbers and ratios. His passage on musical theory echoes Henryson's. Admittedly, the music he describes is that of the company of Venus rather than the spheres, but, as the phrase "sound celestial" implies, this too necessarily derives from the *musica mundana*:

Concordes swete, diuers entoned reportis,  
 Proportionis fyne with sound celestiall  
 Duplat, triplat, diatesseriall,  
 Sesquealra, and decupla resortis  
 Diapason of mony syndry sortis  
 War songin, and plait be seir cunnynng menstrall,  
 On luf ballattis with mony fair disportis.

In Modulatioun hard I play and syng  
 Faburdoun, priksang, discant, conturyng  
 Cant organe, figuration, and gemmell. (1, 41–42: 492–501)

Later he also echoes Henryson's mock-modest disclaimer of musical skill: "Na mair I vnderstude thir noumeris fine / Be god than dois a gekgo or a swyne." (1, 44: 517–18). Neither cuckoo nor pig is noted for their musicality.

In the same stanza Orpheus and his harp are mentioned in the context of the music of the spheres:

Na mair I wyl thir verbyllis swete diffyne  
 How that thair musik, tones war mair cleir  
 And dulcer than the mouing of the speir.  
 Or Orpheus harpe of trace with sound divyne. (1, 44: 521–24)

On Douglas's part, this is not a mere cross reference but a definite attempt to outdo Henryson's musical excursus, an attempt which, at the same time, is a recognition of his elder's achievement.

The strange journey to reach the Palace of Honour, which in fact is the house of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, bears a general resemblance to the wanderings of Henryson's Orpheus. On the way Douglas's narrator catches something more than a glimpse of hell (3, 4–12: 1315–95). Both journeys end in deliberate anticlimax. The general allegorical implications of the two are similar.

Douglas's poem is exuberantly encyclopedic, embracing all three mirrors, the *Speculum Naturale*, *Doctrinale* and *Historiale*, of the earlier encyclopedist Vincent of Beauvais (c.1190–c.1264). The last of these is summarised in the Mirror of Venus (3, 21–49: 1476–1731). Fox has noted that *The Tale of Orpheus* also is “an encyclopedic and cosmological poem, containing a supernatural journey, and full of rhetorical pyrotechnics” (Fox ed. 1981: cix). He compares it to Chaucer's *The House of Fame* as well as to Douglas's poem. The greatest difference is that neither is Platonic to anything like the degree found in Henryson.

Alice Miskimin has demonstrated a final link (Miskimin 1978). The references to the Muses and musical ratios, together with the overall structure, a prologue followed by 3 books, indicate that Douglas's poem too has a numerological basis. The theme of a spiritual journey or quest, ultimately unsuccessful, the stages of which are pointed by musical numbers and ratios, was attractive to him as a cleric; as a humanist he admired the comprehensive involvement of classical and biblical figures, as well as those of more recent date. Like Henryson, he intended his poem to be a stylised image of the world and the dilemma of the human soul.

Times and tastes change. *The Tale of Orpheus* has lost the pre-eminent position it seems once to have occupied. The qualities analysed are still present, but critics and readers nowadays prefer something of the kind which appears more prominently in *The Testament of Cresseid* and the Aesopic and beast-epic fables, something less mythic and closer to realism or naturalism. In this study I have tried to do justice to both aspects of Henryson's work. The excellencies of *The Tale of Orpheus* are to be found in the other poems and contribute to their overall effectiveness. In the British Isles by Henryson's time Chaucer was almost as much an *auctor* as Virgil and Ovid and Henryson uses him as such. Aesop was a lesser *auctor*,

but still important. In *The Preaching of the Swallow* the action is universalised, using an encyclopedic and numerically based technique to demonstrate cosmic structure and the limitations of humanity as shown by the thoughtlessness of the birds. That thoughtlessness is again emphasised in *The Two Mice* by way of a structure which calls attention to the major Christian festivals, Christmas and Easter. *The Testament of Cresseid* and *The Paddock and the Mouse*, like *The Tale of Orpheus*, show the inability of the human soul to come to terms with the physical world. *The Cock and the Jasp* is a more static, more comic, depiction of the same predicament.

Justice, recompense and retribution are legally-related themes, exemplified by the fate of the dead generally and the particular judgement of Pluto in the case of Orpheus, elsewhere most evidently in the action of *The Wolf and the Lamb* and *The Sheep and the Dog*. Recompense is clearest in *The Lion and the Mouse*, where the equitable behaviour of the lion towards the mouse afterwards brings him release from prison and possible death. Retribution – *poena*, “penalty” – may be seen, for instance, in the action of *The Testament of Cresseid* and *The Wolf and the Wether*. In *The Two Mice*, it is miraculously averted. Divine intervention foils the evil intentions of the first fox in *The Talking of the Tod*, but when he attempts by way of the sacrament of penance to avoid the consequences of his sins in thought, word and deed, brought home to him by the movements of the heavens, he fails to make proper satisfaction and so is killed. The second fox, Father-war, apparently gains success even in adverse circumstances, but when he is at his most triumphant, he is suddenly overthrown and brought to the gallows. His story is Chaucerian tragedy translated into the harsh comedy of the beast-epic:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,  
As olde bookes maken us memorie,  
Of hym that stood in great prosperitee,  
And is yfallen out of heigh degree  
Into myserie, and endith wrecchedly. (*Prologue to the Monk's Tale*, vii, 1973–77)

The afterlife, seen in Christian terms even in *The Tale of Orpheus*, is always a present reality, as *The Preaching of the Swallow* most clearly shows. The protagonists in *The Wolf and the Lamb* and *The Sheep and the Dog*, oppressors and criminals who seem to escape any punishment for their crimes, will still pay the penalty after death.

Numbers – 4, 5, 8 and especially 23, “vengeance for sinners” – point the message.

*The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman* and *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger* stand somewhat apart. In both the prime villain is the fox who in both emerges triumphant. In neither is it suggested that he will pay any penalty, whether in the present or in the future life – this too despite the fact that in the first tale he grossly abuses the legal process of arbitration, and in the second the church season of Lent. The point of these fables however is different; in both the chief sinner is the wolf, who duly suffers retribution. The fox is not so much a sinner as the instigator of sin in others, identified in one tale as the Fiend, in the second as the World associated with the Flesh and the Devil. The sinner is the person or animal who submits himself to this tempter and receives the fitting punishment. Henryson recognises the fact of evil, but leaves it simply as a fact.

In every case, the relationship of tale to Moralitas is subtle and dynamic. The exposition of themes more or less abstract sets the preceding tale in a new, sometimes a surprising aspect. Equally, the events of the tale vivify, give reality to, the abstractions of the Moralitas. The two together form an artistic unity, closely related to life in fifteenth-century Scotland, but also universal. Henryson’s use of *auctores* contributes to this last. In *The Tale of Orpheus*, Trivet acts as a scholastic intermediary between antiquity and modern times. Aesop, particularly as represented in *The Lion and the Mouse*, gives the fables a perspective of centuries, indeed of eternity, but one still directed to the immediate present in terms of the exchanges between lion and mouse and the subsequent fate of the lion. The setting of *The Testament of Cresseid* is pagan antiquity, the Trojan War, as seen through the eyes of “Lollius”, Chaucer, and the author of the “vthir quair”, but the problems, the people, belong equally to Henryson’s own Christian era, and indeed to the present day.

I have already quoted Plato’s Athenian Stranger who in the *Epinomis* argues that Wisdom is only to be found by way of the mathematics of astronomy and that astronomers therefore are the only governors suitable for the ideal state (above, 27). The same Athenian Stranger holds the stage in the *Laws*, where among much else he discusses the role of the poet in society. He is kinder than the Socrates of the *Republic*, who demanded that poets be expelled from the state (*Republic* 398a; Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: 642–43). Socrates regarded poetry as education in the bad; the Athenian makes stringent

demands, but concedes to poetry some place in the absolutist process which he recommends:

Why, I believe the argument is bringing us back for the third or fourth time to our old position, that education is, in fact, the drawing and leading of children to the rule which has been pronounced right by the voice of the law, and approved as truly right by the concordant experience of the best and oldest men. That the child's soul, then, may not learn the habit of feeling pleasure and pain in ways contrary to the law and those who have listened to its bidding, but keep them company, taking pleasure and pain in the very same things as the aged – that, I hold, proves to be the real purpose of what we call our “songs”. They are really spells for souls, directed in all earnest to the production of the concord of which we have spoken, but as the souls of young folk cannot bear earnestness, they are spoken of as “play” and “song”, and practised as such. Just so, in the case of the physically invalid and infirm, the practitioner seeks to administer wholesome nutriment in palatable articles of meat and drink, but unwholesome in unpalatable, to accustom the patient to accept the one and reject the other, as he should. In the same fashion a true lawgiver likewise will persuade, or if persuasion fails will compel, the man of poetic gifts to compose as he ought, to employ his noble and fine-filed phrases to represent by their rhythms the bearing, and by their melodies the strains, of men who are pure, valiant, and, in a word, good. (*Laws* 659c–660a; Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: 1256–57).

Robert Henryson's practice as a poet comes close to that recommended by the Athenian Stranger. The two are separated, of course, by many centuries and several removes of culture, most important the scholastic Christianity of the later Middle Ages. Henryson however combined in himself the offices of lawyer, if not law-maker, schoolmaster and poet, and in much of his poetry adapted legal and educational material to a morality suitable for adults, but entertaining for adults and children alike. Mathematical and astronomical principles help to shape his narratives. He is perhaps less given to direct representation of the pure the valiant and the good, more to the opposite, plausible evil, than the Stranger would have liked, but he does show the unhappy consequences of such evil for the individual, and that these sometimes grow from very small beginnings. A more optimistic observation is that they may occasionally lead to a limited enlightenment. The pure, the valiant and the good are best represented by Troilus in *The Testament of Cresseid* and the “grey stude mare” in *The Talking of the Tod*.

## Appendix A

### The Fibonacci Series and the Lambda Formula

It is easily possible to construct a series or sequence such that, after the first two, each individual number is the sum of the two preceding. The Fibonacci series, named from the Florentine mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci (c.1170–1250), whose *Liber abaci* (1202) introduced Arabic numerals to Europe, follows this pattern. It begins with the first three natural numbers; obviously thereafter the gap between successive numbers increases: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, and so forth. The sequence is interesting in itself but also useful in finding an approximate, but increasingly precise, value for the so-called Golden Section, called by Euclid (*Elements*, 13.8) Division in Extreme and Mean Ratio. Although the fact had been known long before, the Scottish mathematician Robert Simson (1687–1768) was the first to make the explicit statement that in such a sequence the ratios of consecutive terms tend to a limit which is the actual Golden Section. In terms of the Fibonacci series the ratios are represented by the series of fractions  $2/1$ ,  $3/2$ ,  $5/3$ ,  $8/5$ ,  $13/8$ , etc. These ultimately converge on the irrational or transcendental number represented by the continuing decimal fraction 1.61803... , which, like  $\pi$  or the square root of 2, cannot be written in a finite exact form. The ratios are alternately greater than and less than the unattainable figure required, but, as the series continues, successive ratios approximate more and more closely; thus  $2/1=2$ ,  $3/2=1.5$ , but  $8/5$  and  $13/8$  give 1.6 and 1.625 respectively. After 12 terms the match is correct to four decimal places.

Euclid demonstrated that Division in Extreme and Mean Ratio occurs in the geometrical figure called the pentagram at the points where the lines cross. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1.630) the figure is called the “endeles knot”, because it can be drawn without raising pen from paper. It is there given added significance by the fact that it includes 5 points.

An infinite number of series, a few of which are used in this book, follow the same pattern as the Fibonacci. In each the ratio of consecutive terms tends to the same limit, the Golden Section.

The Egyptians, Greeks and Romans used an approximation to Golden Section in their architecture and in the Renaissance it was



consciously employed by artists. Particular beauty resided in a painting on a rectangular canvas in which the internal divisions and the dimensions of the actual canvas corresponded, so far as was possible, with this ratio. The paintings, for instance, of Henryson's contemporary, Botticelli (c.1445–1510), are full of Golden Sections. Fra Luca Pacioli (c.1445–1517) published in 1509 *De divina Proportione*, illustrated with drawings of the Platonic solids by his friend, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519). Leonardo was probably the first to refer to it as *sectio aurea*, the Golden Section. It figures in much of his work.

The Fibonacci series, and as a consequence Golden Section, is endemic to the natural world.

The centre of a daisy is composed of scores of tiny florets arranged in two opposite sets of spirals, 21 spirals in a clockwise direction and 34 in a counterclockwise direction ... This sequence is however by no means confined to daisies, fruit ... It occurs, for example, in the way in which successive leaves grow around the stems of many plants and trees, and it is only one of many such instances in which sequences of numbers, apparently invented by man, are found to have existed in nature since the times before man appeared on the earth. (Flegg 1987: 3–4; cf. also Wells 1987: 65–66)

Some proportions of the human body follow the same pattern. The relative distances at least of the inner planets from the Sun also correspond, at least approximately (Livesy 2004: 12).<sup>1</sup> The astronomer Kepler (1571–1630) “enthused over this Divine proportion, declaring ‘Geometry has two great treasures, one is the Theorem of Pythagoras, the other the division of a line into extreme and mean ratio; the first we may compare to a measure of gold, the second we may name a precious jewel.’” (Wells 1987: 37–38). A feature of the beauty of the world is also a feature of the world of art, with both regarded as reflections of the ultimate beauty of the Creator.

I believe that mathematical reality lies outside us, that our function is to discover or *observe* it, and that the theorems which we prove, and which we describe grandiloquently as our “creations”, are simply our notes of our observations. This

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1. The distances given by Bode's Law, for planets (not Neptune and Pluto) in relation to their distance from the sun, approximate to a Fibonacci-like series. This “may have some significance with respect to the formation of the solar system” (Illingworth 1985: 46).

view has been held, in one form or another, by many philosophers of high reputation from Plato onwards. (Hardy [1940] 1992: 123–24).<sup>2</sup>

Plato put forward the claim that numbers were the animating factor, the soul, of the material universe as well as the human being. His celebrated Lambda formula for the Soul of the World as well as the souls of individual human being, set out in the *Timaeus* (Hamilton and Cairns eds. 1961: [35b–c] 1165), consists of unity, the monad, together with the first even and odd numbers and their squares and cubes, arranged like a Greek capital Lambda ( $\Lambda$ ):

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & & 1 \\ & 2 & 3 \\ & 4 & 9 \\ 8 & & 27 \end{array}$$

There are 7 numbers in the formula, corresponding to the 7 planets of the material creation. The presence of unity (1, the geometric point), basic number (2 and 3), the square (4 and 9), and the cube (8 and 27), ensure that location, the point, together with the three spatial dimensions, length, area and volume, are all included. So too are the arithmetic ratios which govern the musical intervals, epogdous (9:8), a tone; diatessaron (4:3), a fourth; diapente (3:2), a fifth; diapason (2:1), the octave. These constitute both the universal music of the spheres and all earthly music and harmony. When the triangle or Pythagorean tetractys is completed by inserting the appropriate means, “the one exceeding and exceeded by equal parts of its extremes” (harmonic mean), “the other being that kind of mean which exceeds and is exceeded by an equal number” (arithmetic mean), the musical intervals (apart from the tone, 9:8, which in musical terms is discordant) are present in terms of all three spatial dimensions. The first perfect number, 6, appropriately occupies the central position.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & & 1 \\ & 2 & 3 \\ & 4 & 6 & 9 \\ 8 & 12 & 18 & 27 \end{array}$$

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2. A similar position has been maintained, for instance, in Bigelow 1988.

Plato added a third series of intervals which produce tone and semitone (256:243) in both masculine and feminine form. Because it includes both odd and even numbers, the formula is generative, vivifying the material body of the creation.

The final number, 27, the masculine cube, is particularly important. It is the sum of everything preceding it in the Lambda formula ( $1+2+3+4+9+8=27$ ). The sum in total is  $2 \times 27 = 54$ . 27 is thus a summary in itself of all the rest.

## Appendix B

### The Order of the *Morall Fabillis*

In the course of this book I have ignored the order in which the *Morall Fabillis* have long been printed, an order first found in two prints of the later sixteenth-century, the Charteris (1570) and the Bassandyne (1571), and in one MS of similar date, BL Harley 3865 (1571), all three probably derived from a single earlier print, itself to be dated after 1560 (Fox ed. 1981: lix–lx). All contain the *Prologue* and thirteen fables in the order given here. Where appropriate, I have also noted (in brackets) the very different order found in the verse-*Romulus*:

1. *Prologue* and *The Cock and the Jasp* (1)
2. *The Two Mice* (12)
3. *The Cock and the Fox*
4. *The Fox and the Wolf*
5. *The Trial of the Fox*
6. *The Sheep and the Dog* (4)
7. *The Lion and the Mouse* (18)
8. *The Preaching of the Swallow* (19)
9. *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger*
10. *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman*
11. *The Wolf and the Wether*
12. *The Wolf and the Lamb* (2)
13. *The Paddock and the Mouse* (3)

Book 1 of the verse-*Romulus*, made up of the first twenty fables, provides the model for seven of these tales, but there is no relationship with any of the remaining six, which I have classified as Beast-Epic. It rather looks as if Henryson had in his possession only Book 1 and that he began by adapting the *Prologue* and the first four fables of the verse-*Romulus*, later becoming more selective, and eventually moving to an entirely different source or sources. In the verse-*Romulus*, *The Lion and the Mouse* precedes *The Preaching of the Swallow*.

Under the title *The fabillis of Esope with diuers vthir fabillis and poetically workis maid and Compyld be diuers lernit men*, the Bannatyne MS (1568) contains the *Prologue* and eight fables (ten, if we regard *The Talking of the Tod* as three separate fables), in a different order, intermingled with other of Henryson's poems not

usually included among the fables, and with the work of others. The order is:

1. *The Preaching of the Swallow*
2. Holland's *The Buke of the Houlat*
3. *The Tod*, made up of fables (3), (4) and (5) in the previous sequence.
4. *Orpheus and Eurydice*
5. *The Bludy Serk*
6. *The Prologue with The Cock and the Jasp*
7. *The Paddock and the Mouse*
8. *The Two Mice*
9. *The Sheep and the Dog*
10. *The Wolf and the Lamb*
11. *The Lion and the Mouse*
12. Dunbar's *The Thistle and the Rose*
13. Dunbar's *The Golden Targe* (Ritchie ed. 1928–34: 4: 116–261).

The *Prologue* seems only to introduce *The Cock and the Jasp*. *The Preaching of the Swallow* begins the collection and comes well before *The Lion and the Mouse* which, under the order generally accepted and in terms of the verse-*Romulus*, it follows. *The Lion and the Mouse* is the final Henrysonian item in the collection (see too Ramson 1977).

When complete, the earlier Asloan MS (most probably written 1515–25; see Cunningham 1994: 133) contained seven fables, again in an apparently idiosyncratic order:

1. *The Paddock and the Mouse*
2. *The Preaching of the Swallow*
3. *The Lion and the Mouse*
4. *The Cock and the Fox*
5. *The Fox and the Wolf*
6. *The Trial of the Fox*,

then after five intermediate poems not by Henryson,

7. *The Two Mice*. (Craigie ed. 1923–25: 1: xiv–xv)

This last is the only text to have survived (Craigie ed. 1923–25: 2: 141–49), the remainder are known only from the contents-list. The *Prologue with The Cock and the Jasp* does not appear. *The Preaching of the Swallow* precedes *The Lion and the Mouse*.

The Makculloch MS of the late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth century contains only the *Prologue with The Cock and the Jasp* (Stevenson ed. 1918). The word *fabill* in the singular, suggests that the transcriber

was unaware of any additional fables: “My auctowr *in this fabill* tellis quhow / That brutell bestis spak, & wnderstuyd.” (*Prologue*, 7: 43–44; italics mine). It may be significant that here, in the oldest MS, the two stand in isolation, that they do not appear in Asloan, and that they do not occupy the opening position in Bannatyne.

The textual evidence for the *Fabillis* as a collection with a fixed order appears only in the second half of the sixteenth century, seventy or more years after the probable date of Henryson’s death.

H.H. Roerecke has defended the order usually accepted, making use of numerological assumptions (Roerecke 1969). He sees the narrative part of *The Lion and the Mouse*, which he regards as occupying 24 stanzas, forming the deliberately chosen centre-piece. In a total of 424 stanzas, he observes, these 24 are flanked on either side by a group of 200 stanzas:

seven of the thirteen fables are apparently taken from Gualterus: in the traditional order, these are the first two, the last two, and the middle three. This leaves two blocks of three fables (3, 4, 5 and 9, 10, 11). These fables are all about foxes, or wolves, or both. The seven fables from Gualterus can themselves be sorted out by their animals; if we leave out *The Lion and the Mouse* (as the middle fable and one told by Aesop himself), the first half and the last half of the collection each contain one fable about mice, one about birds, and one about sheep.<sup>1</sup>

Basically I sympathise with the approach, which none the less presents some difficulties, not least the fact that earlier collections show no sign of the arrangement. Roerecke follows modern editorial convention in regarding the length of the narrative in *The Lion and the Mouse* as 24 stanzas. He assumes that there is a prologue of 12 and a *Moralitas* of 7 stanzas (neither of which, incidentally, play any part in his scheme), an assumption for which there is little justification in any of the early MSS or prints. In Bassandyne, Charteris, and Harley, a subtitle separates stanzas 12 and 13: “The end of the Prolog, and beginnis the Taill.” This clearly derives from 12: 1404: “‘I grant,’ quod he, and thus begouth ane taill”, and is probably no more than a sixteenth-century editorial comment, not very perceptive, and

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1. As summarized in Fox ed. 1981: lxxvii–lxxviii, corresponding to Roerecke 1969: 124–35. So far as the individual poems are concerned, I find myself in agreement with the conclusion: “The *Fables* ... is a cosmic poem. It is a kind of Christian topography with its scales of distances, its meridian and its boundaries. It is this inclusiveness and containment, I feel sure, which Henryson intended by the geometrical symmetry of his poem.”

substantially unrelated to auctorial intention. To regard whatever precedes simply as prologue is to distort the effect of the poem, where the natural divisions are markedly different. The poem is dream-allegory, with the dream-action beginning in stanza 5 and continuing beyond the Moralitas to the narrator's awakening at the disappearance of Aesop in stanza 43. The actual story of the lion and the mouse occupies 23 stanzas (13–35: 1405–1565), rather than the 24 indicated in modern texts; stanza 36 contains comment by Aesop and further dialogue with the dreamer before the beginning of the Moralitas, spoken by Aesop.

A striking difference between Roerecke's first and second block of three fables is that the first group forms a unified whole, a kind of miniature beast-epic, called by Bannatyne *The Tod*, and by Henryson himself *The Talking of the Tod* (above, 197). The main role is played by two foxes, father and son; the wolf plays a subordinate role and features only in the second and third episodes. There is no corresponding link between the tales in the second group. The first two deal with foxes and wolves, again with the wolf as subordinate; in the third, although the wolf still has a secondary role, the fox plays no part. The balance is anything but precise.

The *Prologue* serves as an introduction to *The Cock and the Jasp* – in the Makculloch MS, as has been noted, introduction to that fable alone. There is no more than a suggestion that it is to be the first of a series – “And to begin first of ane cok he [i.e. Aesop] wrate” (9: 61). The reference intended may be to the verse-*Romulus*. Aesop is mentioned in the first line of *The Two Mice* (1: 163), *The Sheep and the Dog* (1: 1146), *The Wolf and the Wether* (1: 2455), and *The Paddock and the Mouse* (1: 2777). The first line of the Moralitas in *The Preaching of the Swallow* (39: 1888) contains a reference which is clumsy because it seems to identify as Aesop the first-person narrator in the body of the fable. Aesop figures in the dream-allegory of *The Lion and the Mouse*. With the exception of *The Wolf and the Wether*, all these fables are to be found in the verse-*Romulus*; the fact that Henryson used the version of *The Wolf and the Wether* to be found in Caxton's *Aesop* (1484) may explain the additional attribution (above, 175). Of the fables based on the verse-*Romulus*, only *The Wolf and the Lamb* contains no reference to Aesop.

None of the others has a claim to Aesopic origin. All fit the tradition of beast-epic. I have already mentioned that the first three are combined to form a single narrative sequence. Each has a Moralitas,

but as I have already indicated, that is part of the narrative form as Henryson understood it. It is no more necessary to treat them as Aesopic, and so belonging to the collection, than it is with *The Tale of Orpheus*. In the Bannatyne and Asloan collections they appear simply as fables. Against this, as has been illustrated in terms of Caxton's print, many fifteenth-century Aesopic collections include material derived from the beast-epic.

The Moralitas of *The Sheep and the Dog* contains the following lines:

Of this fals tod, of quhilk I spak befor,  
 And of this gled, quhat thay micht signify,  
 Of thair nature, as now I speik no moir. (20: 1279–81)

In the Bassandyne and Charteris prints and in the Harleian MS, *The Sheep and the Dog* immediately follows *The Talking of the Tod*. As has already been pointed out elsewhere (MacQueen, J. 1967: 192; Fox ed. 1981: 261), the reference to the fox in the first line of the quotation may provide some minor justification for this sequence, and so imply that when Henryson wrote *The Sheep and the Dog*, he regarded *The Talking of the Tod* as the fable immediately preceding. The reference to the kite however remains a puzzle. Despite Roerecke and Denton Fox (Fox ed. 1981: 261), it seems to me that if the lines are interpreted as suggested, they must also be taken to imply that Henryson had already discussed the allegorical significance of the kite as well as the fox. *The Paddock and the Mouse*, that is to say, should precede *The Sheep and the Dog*, as indeed it does in the verse-Romulus and in Bannatyne, although not in the sequence favoured by Roerecke and Denton Fox. The easiest assumption however is that the reference is not to any preceding fable or Moralitas, but simply to the passing mention of both animals earlier in *The Sheep and the Dog*: "The foxe wes clerk and noter in the cause; / The gled, the graip vp at the bar couth stand." (5: 1174–75). The Moralitas in *The Sheep and the Dog* is unusual in that it does not make an immediate moral point but rather translates the corrupt officers of the church court into the corresponding members of the secular sheriff court. Under either jurisdiction the function of the clerk to the court and the advocate for the prosecution is the same. Henryson therefore has no need to expand the point; it is self-evident. This, I suggest, is the true significance of the lines.



It is widely agreed that two of the most elaborate fables, *The Lion and the Mouse* and *The Preaching of the Swallow*, stand in close relationship to each other (MacQueen, J. 1967: 192; Fox ed. 1981: 261). In both, the narrator is unusually prominent. In both he walks to a *locus amoenus*, where he has a remarkable experience under a hawthorn-tree. In *The Lion and the Mouse*, the season is summer, June. *The Preaching of the Swallow* involves a sequence of seasonal encounters which take place in spring, summer (June specifically), and by implication at least, autumn and winter. The first two episodes in *The Preaching of the Swallow* end with the narrator walking homeward; in *The Lion and the Mouse* the Moralitas ends with the startling disappearance of Aesop, which causes the dreamer to waken and walk home. An unusual turn of phrase in *The Lion and the Mouse*, “In ane morning betuix mid day and nicht” (1: 1325), is paralleled in the June episode of *The Preaching of the Swallow*, “I mouit furth betuix midday and morne” (23: 1780). Aesop’s words to the dreamer in *The Lion and the Mouse*,

My sone, lat be,  
For quhat is it worth to tell ane fenyeit tair,  
Quhen haly preiching may na thing auair? (10: 1388–90)

contain an obvious reference to the failure of the swallow, the Preacher, to save the other little birds in *The Preaching of the Swallow*, which Henryson must therefore at some point have regarded as anticipating the other. This is the order found in Bannatyne, which appears also to have been present in Asloan.

As fables, *The Tale of Orpheus* and *The Bludy Serk* (if it is by Henryson) do not form part of any collection. Their self-sufficiency is denoted by the fact that in the final line each is given a title, “And thus endis the tale of Orpheus” (1.633); “Think on the bludy serk” (15: 120). Both *The Preaching of the Swallow* and *The Talking of the Tod* end with similar lines – “And thus endis the preiching of the swallow” (47: 1950); “And thus endis the talking of the tod” (107: 1145) – a reasonable indication that neither was originally intended to form part of a collection. The endings of three other fables are similar – “But think vpon the wolf and on the wedder” (*The Wolf and the Wether* 23: 2615), “Quhairfoir I counsell mychtie men to haif mynd/ Of the nekhering interpret in this kynd” (*The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger* 40: 2229–30; suggested title *The Nekhering*); possibly “Go seik the iasp quha will, for thair it lay” (*The Cock and the Jasp* 14: 161;

suggested title *The Iasp*) – evidence, I suggest, that these too may originally have been independent compositions.

Charteris, Bassandyne and the Harley MS appear to have more authority because they include three tales not found in Bannatyne, *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger*, *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman*, and *The Wolf and the Wether*. It is possible however that these tales are later than the others (Crowne 1962; MacQueen, J. 1967: 192–93), and that Bannatyne worked from MS or printed sources which contained only the items written earlier. Asloan's more limited selection, excluding the *Prologue*, *The Cock and the Jasp*, *The Sheep and the Dog*, *The Wolf and the Lamb*, as well as the other three fables, may be explained in a similar way.

After writing the three later tales, Henryson may have rearranged the collection in terms of the system advocated by Roerecke, more or less ignoring his own earlier intentions. Alternatively, and I think more probably, the arrangement originated with a printer in the second half of the sixteenth century, who felt that the collection, as it came to him, lacked form. He particularly appreciated *The Lion and the Mouse*, which he made central, despite its puzzling structure. His order shows some appreciation of Henryson's numerical practices.

Only three sequences may be assigned to Henryson with full certainty:

(1) The *Prologue* introduces *The Cock and the Jasp*. A title, *The Jasp*, was perhaps intended for them as a pair. It is possible that in the late-fifteenth and during much of the sixteenth century, other individual fables circulated, singly or in groups, without any general introductory material.

(2) *The Preaching of the Swallow* precedes, and is linked to, *The Lion and the Mouse*.

(3) *The Cock and the Fox*, *The Fox and the Wolf*, and *The Trial of the Fox* form a linked group which originally may not have formed part of any Aesopic collection.

There is one further point. In general, fable and Moralitas use the same 7-line stanza. In *The Two Mice*, however, an 8-line form, rhyming *ababbcb*, is adopted for the Moralitas. The same form is used in the first three stanzas of the Moralitas in *The Paddock and the Mouse*; the next six revert to the 7-line form. This may indicate some special connection, intended but now lost, between the two fables.

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