

**Roosters, Wolves and the Limits of Allegory****Lianna Farber**

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Robert Henryson, probably trained in canon law, possibly schoolmaster in Dunfermline, wrote *The Morall Fabillis* sometime in the second half of the fifteenth century. Although *The Morall Fabillis* is one of the most prominent works of one of the most prominent late medieval authors, the dating, like all of our information about Henryson, is necessarily vague. We know that he was "a man of some age" in 1462, possibly the Robert Henryson who was admitted as a member of the University of Glasgow; that "he was active" in 1477-78, probably the "magistro Roberto henryson publico notario" who witnessed three deeds in Dunfermline in these years; and that he was dead by 1505.<sup>1</sup>

Along with William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas, Henryson is usually considered one of the principal "Scottish Chaucerians," a designation that categorizes his language (Middle Scots, a development of Northern English spoken of by the poets who used it as "Inglis" and not "Scottis") and his time (after Chaucer) but says little about the writing itself.<sup>2</sup> *The Morall Fabillis* are part of long tradition of retellings of Aesopic fables, although Henryson's is only the second extant version of the fables written in English.<sup>3</sup> The fables found many audiences in medieval England. Elementary students learned Latin by translating the pithy Latin stories and morals into English; more advanced students practiced composition by embroidering and amplifying the Latin fables; preachers used the stories and morals as salutary and memorable exempla, easily and profitably allegorized.<sup>4</sup> One scholar has even suggested that in the Middle Ages only the Bible was more widely read and translated.<sup>5</sup>

In his *Fables* Henryson combines moral fables with Old French Reynardian literature. Scholars have recently looked at the entire work with increasing interest in its overall structure, its use of classical rhetorical forms, its place within the scholastic and literary fable tradition, and the way that Henryson portrays himself as an author.<sup>6</sup> The context that interests me here, however, is the one Henryson himself provides in the "Prologue" to the fables where he explains their value as pleasurable instruction. In this essay I look only at two of the fables, "The Cock and the Jasp" and "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman," and their relationship to the value of fables that he sets forth as he sets for that value in the "Prologue." I turn to the sources of the fables to show the way that Henryson deliberately changes them. The changes he makes, I argue, have the effect of divorcing the story that he tells from the *moralitas* he provides. This conscious effort to separate the fable from its moral, I contend, not only forces us to question the way we understand the stories he tells but also casts doubt upon the epistemology of allegory itself.

In the "Prologue" to his *Fables*, Henryson justifies his choice of subject matter in wholly traditional ways: just as we are rewarded for plowing a rough field with great diligence by shoots of grain, "Sa dois spring thair ane morall sweit sentence / Oute of the subtell dyte of poetry, / To gude purposis, quha culd it weill apply" (So does spring there a moral sweet meaning / Out of the subtle verse of poetry, / To good purpose, for whoever could apply it well).<sup>7</sup> And again, like the hard nut's shell that holds the sweet kernel, "Sa lysis thair ane doctrine wyse aneuch / And full of frute, under ane fenyceit fabill" (Thus lies there a doctrine wise enough / And full of fruit, beneath a fictional fable, 17-18). This justification is in fact so traditional that Henryson takes it from Walter of England's popular Latin compendium of Aesop's fables.<sup>8</sup> Henryson explains that in the interest of this pleasant edification, he has decided to make a translation of Aesop's fables. Henryson thus justifies the telling of the fables by reference to their sentence, the meaning that we will get from them. The stories themselves, in this commonplace explanation, are the "work"--the plowing or the shell--while the "moral" is the sweetness and the reward that we gain from interpreting the story. The explanation unequivocally asserts a direct relationship between story and moral--we must move through the story in order to understand the moral. This assertion that the moral depends upon the story is one that is typical of not only of fables but also of allegory.

And so, with this insistent if somewhat standard explanation of the relationship between story and moral in mind, we can turn to the first of Henryson's *Fables*, which tells the story of a jaunty but poor cock who sets out early one morning to look for food. As he pecks around in the ash he comes upon a fine jasper. After Henryson explains how a jewel came to be lying on a dung-heap--it was tossed out by a careless servant-girl, so eager to finish her sweeping that she little noticed what she threw away--and laments such carelessness, the rooster

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addresses the jewel. "O gentill Iasp, O riche and nobill thing," he exclaims, "Thocht I the find, thow ganis not for me" (O gentle Jasp, O rich and noble thing, / Although I find you, you profit not for me).<sup>9</sup> In the next five stanzas, the cock observes that the jasper is fit for kings and lords, has glorious colors and should make its home in a crown rather than in the mud. He, on the other hand, spends his days scraping in the dirt for food "to fill my tume intrail" (to fill my empty belly, 91). The cock reiterates again and again that his life is a search for basic sustenance and that fine though the jewel may be, it serves no use for him, "For houngrie men may not weill leue on lukis" (For hungry men may not well live on looks, 104). The story ends as the rooster leaves the jasper on the ground and goes on his way to continue his search for food. The narrator has no idea what became of the jasper, but he will tell us the "inward sentence and intent" (deeper meaning and intent) of the story, in accordance with the stated aim of the "Prologue" (117).

At this point, however, we might well pause to applaud this sensible cock, who does not allow bright baubles or unsuitable riches to divert his hard work and search for basic sustenance. As the cock reflects, the jasper may be a handsome stone, appropriate for those who wish to possess or display riches, but it ill fits his own way of life. We might also think of Christ's teachings that the poor will inherit the earth, and his warnings about the danger of clinging too fondly to earthly goods: it will be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for those who possess jaspers to enter the kingdom of heaven. In his own version of this fable, written around the time of Henryson's birth, John Lydgate provides just such encomiums for the cock. Characteristically, Lydgate does not wait for the final moralizing "Envoy" to express his approval of the rooster but presents him as an unabashed hero from the first. His red crest signifies courage and hardiness; every morning he praises the Trinity with a triple crow; he is the "prophete of all ioy and all gladnes"; his early morning digging for food provides a salutary example of diligence and honest labor as a means of procuring a livelihood; and he does not allow himself to be sidetracked from his straight path by the glitter of useless baubles that are not fit for his station in life.<sup>10</sup> In the "Envoy" to the fable, Lydgate reinforces the lessons of the story--or as Derek Pearsall has put it, "Lydgate labours the point already made."<sup>11</sup> The cock correctly understands that "to hym hit was more dew / Small simple grayne, þen stones of hyghy renoun" (213-14) and that "The vertuous man to auoyde all ydelnesse / With suffisaunce hold hymself content" (220-21). All of the cock's honor and dignity that remains implicit in Henryson's version of the story is repeatedly pointed out in Lydgate's version, which (also characteristically) runs to 234 lines, as compared to the ninety-eight Henryson uses and the ten of their common source.

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Lydgate's telling of this fable thus explicitly states the moral towards which Henryson's version points. Full of these sorts of congratulatory thoughts for the hard-headed but reflective rooster whom Henryson so vividly portrays, we can turn to the *moralitas* of his fable. But rather than praising the cock for the manifold virtues that Lydgate has so laboriously catalogued, Henryson's narrator does an about-face, scorning the cock whose ignorance and crass concern for food lead him to bypass that which "is sa nobill, so precious, and sa ding, / That it may with na eirdlie thing be bocht" (is so noble, so precious, and so rare, / That it may be bought with no earthly thing, 150-51). He enumerates many fine properties of the jasper (although not quite the full seven he promises), equating the jewel with honor, wisdom, and knowledge--"science" is the word he uses, the Thomistic "scientia," with its suggestion of religious knowledge and grace.<sup>12</sup> Because the cock cares only for lowly material needs, Henryson explains, he walks away from the true knowledge that the jasper represents.

The cock's mistake, in Henryson's version, is that he gets confused between what Kenneth Burke has called different realms of language.<sup>13</sup> When the cock saw the jasper, he assumed it was an actual jasper: a hard, bright stone valued by those who have the luxury of valuing such objects. Instead, it turned out to be a symbol for (probably religious) Knowledge. Henryson's fable thus plays upon the slipperiness inherent in metaphoric language, language that Burke would say "borrows" between realms--the image of a jewel is borrowed from the natural realm and used to stand for

valuable non-material qualities. Such borrowing is the property of all metaphoric language, and we usually depend upon context to make the meaning clear--"Give thanks to the Lord!" means one thing if shouted by a bailiff after a peasant has been let off for trespassing on the manor; quite another if urged by a priest in church. By placing us within the world of a fable, Henryson points out just how precarious metaphoric language may be. You think a jewel is a jewel, and sensibly decide not to covet riches. Instead it turns out you've given up wisdom. Henryson's version of the fable shows a diligent, prudent rooster, and implies a different lesson than the one that the *moralitas* provides, understandable though the *moralitas* becomes once we have learned it. Henryson uses the discrepancy between the two playfully to expose the instability of metaphoric borrowing.

In thus using his *moralitas* to teach what seems to be a different lesson than the telling of the story implies, Henryson exploits one of the possible interpretations of value inherent in his source, a collection of Latin fables by Walter of England.<sup>14</sup> In eight lines of Walter's fable, the cock looks for food, finds the jasper, tells the jasper that it is not suitable for him to keep because he cannot use it and he values only lowly things, and then leaves the jewel. The cock does not dwell on his hunger (which Henryson's rooster mentions in three separate places) and specifically reports that the more value an object has

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the less he values it. In the two line *moralitas* Walter reproves the cock ("*Tu Gallo stolidum*"--"You stupid rooster"--he stenorously intones) for shunning the beautiful gift of wisdom, and ascribes the cock's behavior to native obtuseness. While witty, Walter's ending does not come as much of a shock and does not seem unjust. These differences from the effect of Henryson's ending arise in part from Henryson's superior portrait of the rooster, but even more from the system of valuation that Walter has established.

Our view of the *moralitas* rests primarily upon our interpretation of the claim with which the cock ends the story: the more precious a thing the less he loves it (*plus amo cara minus*). Walter seems to encourage us to see this as an assertion of absolute value: if a thing, whether a jewel or Knowledge, has value, then the cock does not care for it. In explaining his position, the cock acts like a vice character in a morality play or one of the seven deadly sins in *Piers Plowman*, boldly proclaiming what he is, however "psychologically" or "characterologically" implausible such a stance might be. Objects, in this system of absolute values, cannot stand as valuable to me but not to you, or good for me but bad for you--they are simply valuable or not, good or bad. On this scale, jewels and wisdom might very well stand for each other as species of the valuable, just as apples and oranges, whatever their differences, can stand as types of fruit. Walter encourages this absolute scale in his *moralitas*: what sort of stupid creature, he asks, would not value the valuable?

This interpretation of the cock's statement follows Walter's own sources, which emphatically demand an absolute system of valuation. The fable seems to originate in Phaedrus's first-century A.D. collection of Latin verse fables. In his own time, Phaedrus was either often mocked for writing such lowly, sub-literary things as fables, or extremely sensitive about what he perceived as the unfavorable reception of his work. Whatever the actual case, he frequently complained of critics who asserted that his fables were not poetry. The story of the Cock and the Jewel originate as an attack upon these critics.<sup>15</sup> The cock finds the jewel, cannot use it, and therefore walks away, leaving it in the dirt. Phaedrus offers no more explanation than a one line *moralitas* that curtly states "This tale is for those who do not appreciate me."<sup>16</sup> The tale thus begins its life as a straightforward attack upon those who deprecate Phaedrus's fables; it asserts that fables are valuable, not just for me or for you, but absolutely. If you do not see their value, that is your limitation, rather than a difference of opinion or position.

Phaedrus's collection of fables was known to the Middle Ages through Romulus's sixth-century prose version of them, a version so faithful to Phaedrus that one scholar has remarked that the medieval tradition of Aesopic fables consisted primarily of "Phaedrus with trimmings."<sup>17</sup> Romulus does, however, broaden the moral of the fable of the Cock and the Jewel, explaining that it

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tells of those who despise wisdom.<sup>18</sup> Caxton, working from a French translation of Heinrich Steinhöwel's printed version of Romulus, combines the two implied morals, stating that the cock stands for those who reject wisdom, while the stone (the wisdom that the cock rejects) stands for the book of fables.<sup>19</sup> While the precise significance of the jewel

shifts throughout these many versions, the system of valuation they impose never leaves room for variation. The cock rejects that which is absolutely valuable, in and of itself, on an invariable scale of value.

In the statement of Walter's rooster that the more precious a thing the less he loves it, however, we could also see a claim about the relativity of value: an object that possesses great worth for a prince possesses little worth for a cock because princes find different objects valuable, or measure value differently, than cocks do. "More precious" would therefore refer to the love a prince, or even the world in general, bears the object, and the cock's lesser love would refer to his own system of valuation. While Walter's sources do not admit the possibility of this interpretation, Walter gives it just enough play to make his *moralitas* witty. But this implication of relative value (for in Walter it could hardly be called more than an implication) is the one that Henryson picks up and uses to make his cock's argument plausible and sympathetic: the cock does not value the jewel because he must concentrate on his hunger; the jasper would look fine in a prince's crown but ridiculous on a rooster. In Walter's version, the cock does not value the jewel because he (seemingly perversely) holds everything worthless that is valuable. Even had he known that the jewel represented wisdom, in other words, he would not have valued it. Henryson's rooster instead declares emphatically that he has no use for the jewel in particular, rather than rejecting the entire category of "the valuable."

This reading, in which Henryson knowingly manipulates the possible implications of the speech made by Walter's rooster--creating a relative system of value in the story, contradicting it with an absolute system of value at the end, and pointing out the precariousness of borrowing between realms of language--depends upon the idea that Henryson is, in fact, setting us up to admire the cock. Twice in print, however, Denton Fox, Henryson's best editor and most thorough student, has charged that any admiration we might feel for the rooster is anachronistic, that such a reading has been invented by that perennial scourge "modern critics," and that Henryson and his readers would have found such a response perverse at best, and more likely, completely inexplicable.<sup>20</sup>

Anachronism stands as a constant risk when we read poems that were written well over four-hundred years ago, and the charge is a serious one. Lydgate's version of the fable is therefore salutary in showing us that admiration of the cock's diligence and satisfaction with his own status was, by the

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later Middle Ages, a perfectly plausible interpretation of the fable--so plausible, in fact, that Lydgate "fixed" the moral so that the story would make more sense. Lydgate and Henryson's versions of this fable make clear that by the time they were writing, they assumed their readers would read the fables thinking in terms of a system of relative valuation, that it would "make sense" to them that a cock should look for food and leave jewels to princes.

In the fable of the "Cock and the Jasp," Henryson uses the assumption of relative value to comment upon the nature of the borrowing that takes place between realms of language. This borrowing is essential to allegory, which depends upon our ability to use the language of one realm to signify that of another. "The Cock and Jasp," the first of the fables, however, merely signals the difficulty of deriving sentence from story that we encounter throughout the *Fables*. In the *Fables* Henryson continually changes the morals of his stories so that the morals do not quite fit, continually introduces elaborate frameworks only to ignore them. One of the most pronounced cases of these failures is the fable of "The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman."

The farmer sets out one morning at the beginning of the plowing season with oxen who are "vnwsit, young, and licht" [unbroken, young, and frisky] and whom he cannot get to plow straight (2240). Frustrated, the farmer throws his trol and cries "The volff mot haue you all at anis!" (The wolf may have you all at once! 2244). Overhearing the farmer, the wolf swears to his friend the fox that the farmer shall keep his word. The oxen become more adept as the day progresses, and as the satisfied farmer leads them home, the wolf appears: "Quhether dryuis thou this pray?" he inquires, "I chalenge it, for nane of thame ar thyne!" (Where do you drive this pray? I challenge it, for none of them are yours! 2259-60). The farmer, taken aback,

. . . soberlie to the volff answerit syne:  
 "Schir, be my saull, thir oxin ar all myne:  
 Thairfoir I studdie quhy ye suld stop me,  
 Sen that I faltit neuer to you, trewlie." (2262-65)

(. . . soberly to the wolf answered then:  
 "Sir, by my soul, these oxen are all mine:  
 Therefore I wonder why you should stop me,  
 Since I never committed a fault to you, truly.")

The farmer, in other words, has two answers to the wolf's challenge. He first replies that the oxen belong to him. Although this assertion of ownership might seem enough to justify the farmer's bewilderment about why the wolf should stop him, the farmer provides a

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second reason the wolf should leave him alone: he has never harmed the wolf. The answer makes it clear that the farmer believes there are two cases in which ownership might commonly be challenged. One is if the person in question does not own the property, and the other has nothing at all to do with ownership, but instead with retribution for a past grievance. The wolf reminds the farmer of his earlier oath, claims the oxen as a gift from him, and reprimands him for being so stingy with a gift. The wolf assumes that once promised, the goods have been given--a generous gift, he admits, for which the farmer should receive credit. The transfer of property, the wolf asserts, will hold whether the farmer intended it to or not, so he might as well give his gift willingly as unwillingly.

The farmer counters this argument that once given a pledge must be kept regardless of intention with a claim for the greater determinative power of intention:

"Schir," quod the husband, "ane man may say in greif,  
 And syne ganesay fra he auise and se.  
 I hecht to steill; am I thairfoir ane theif?  
 God forbid, schir, all hechtis suld haldin be.  
 Gaif I my hand or oblissing," quod he,  
 "Or haue ye witnes or writ for to schau?  
 Schir, reif me not, bot go and seik the lau."(2273-79)  
 ("Sir," said the farmer, "a man may say in anger,  
 And then gainsay when he takes counsel and reflects.  
 I say that I'll steal; am I therefore a thief?  
 God forbid, sir, that all promises should be enforced.  
 Did I give my hand or binding contract," he said,  
 "Or do you have a witness or writ to show?  
 Sir, rob me not, but go and seek the law.")

The farmer essentially argues against casual speech-acts. Words, he asserts are different from both intentions and actions. Words said in anger bind neither morally (if I say I will steal something, I am not morally culpable if I do not steal it) nor legally (I cannot be prosecuted for asserting in anger that I will steal). Another way of stating the farmer's argument is that words, the farmer claims, never mean everything they might mean, or could mean, given other circumstances. The farmer thus asks the wolf rhetorically whether his words were accompanied by any actions that would have indicated an intention to cede property or would have made his words binding: he gave neither his hand nor binding contract; the wolf has neither writ nor witness. Some indication,

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in other words, is needed to for us to believe that words necessarily mean what they say.

Here, however, we know that the farmer has underestimated the wolf. After more pedantic or sophistical arguing back and forth about the binding power of a word, the wolf calls upon the fox as his witness. The fox declares that he is a judge and will make everything right. He takes each party aside, tells each he hasn't a case but that if they agree to his judgement he will solve the problem satisfactorily, and makes the farmer promise him two hens (one for him and one for his wife) in exchange for calling off the wolf. The farmer agrees to the bribe. The fox then tells the wolf that if he will renounce his claim to the oxen the farmer will give him the largest cheese in the land, a deal he advises the wolf to take. The wolf agrees. Lawrence leads the wolf around until night, when he takes him to a well, where the wolf

sees the reflections of the moon, and Lawrence tells him that the farmer hides the cheese there. The wolf sends Lawrence to get it. Lawrence hops into one bucket, which goes into the well. He calls up that it is too large for him to bring up, the wolf should help. The wolf jumps into the other bucket, and since he is heavier than the fox Lawrence rises up to the top and jumps out.

The source of the fable is probably Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis*, which also combines the three motifs of the farmer's rash promise; the wolf who mistakes the reflection of the moon for a cheese; and the wolf who descends into a well in a bucket, thus trapping himself and rescuing a fox in the other bucket. While Henryson seems to take this particular constellation of folk themes from the *Disciplina clericalis*, whether directly or indirectly, the discussion of the legality of promises and the binding power of language is entirely his own. The story is the twenty-third exemplum of the *Disciplina clericalis* and it tells the story with Petrus Alfonsi's characteristic economy. After the farmer unhitched his oxen,

[U]enit ad eum lupus ita dicens: Da michi boues quos michi promisisti! Ad hec arator: Si uerbum dixi, non tamen sacramento firmaui. Et lupus contra: Habere debeo, quia concessisti. Firmauerunt tandem pactum quod inde irent ad iudicem. Quod dum facerent uulpi obuiauerunt.

(The wolf came to him and said, "Give me the oxen you promised me."

The plowman said, "Although I said it, I did not swear to it." The wolf argued, "I should have them, because you promised." Finally they agreed to go to court, and on the way they met a fox.)[21](#)"

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The idea that the words should hold their literal meaning is joke that sets up the story. The difference between literal and figurative language is not so much questioned as assumed and "court" is invoked as a place that will settle a dispute rather than an institution that can make pronouncements about the nature of language itself. Henryson adds the entire debate about the nature and strength of language and the enforceability of the claims that it makes to this barebones structure.

The end of the exemplum in the *Disciplina clericalis* explains that the wolf lost both the oxen and the cheese because he "relinquished what was present for what was to come" (pro futuro quod presens erat dimisit).[22](#) Although it applies explicitly only to the wolf, its warning against dissatisfaction with what you already have ties back nicely to the initial picture of the impatient farmer. The exemplum thus uses the farmer and his impatience wittily to set up the story of dissatisfied wolf and to caution against the wolf's brand of speculation.

After going to the lengths we have seen to establish an elaborate framework of legal argument over the binding power of words and the nature of promises in a story that previously had none, it comes as no surprise that Henryson chooses to give up the lesson of the exemplum for one that includes the farmer more fully. Rather than concentrating on the wolf, the moral he creates posits an elaborate allegory that puts men into categories by character. The wolf is like evil men who oppress wherever they can; the fox is like the Devil, inciting men to wicked acts; the farmer is the Godly man with whom the Devil finds fault; the woods in which the fox leads the wolf are the world; and the cheese is covetise. The allegory, salutary as its message may be, does not hold true in any traditional sense: it is the wolf, not the fox, who argues with the man, for example, and even godly men must make it through the woods of the world. Even more problematic are the ways in which it might hold true. Is Henryson really suggesting, for example, that to save his oxen, even the Godly man must agree to bribe the judge and that such bribes make him no less Godly? Most problematic, given Henryson's elaborate additions, is that the moral takes no account of the legalistic arguments about the bindingness of words and the appeals to the law that Henryson so prominently adds to the story. Henryson introduces an intricate legal framework, in other words, only to show that it has no impact whatsoever in resolving the issues with which it is supposed to deal. This disjunction not only calls into question the efficacy of the law but also suggests the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of connecting story to moral and the shakiness of the traditional metaphors Henryson uses to set up in the "Prologue" of the *Fables*.

Having seen the way Henryson uses some of the traditionally pedagogical allegorical fables to question the kinds of conventional relation-

ships between story and lesson that he so blithely asserts in the "Prologue," the question arises of what sort of critique this is. Allegorical stories, the disjunction between story and moral in these fables seems to suggest, cannot teach us to recognize the difference between real and symbolic jewels when we see them. Language invented to solve disputes is at best irrelevant in their solution in the world, and far from helping us encounter the world, language serves primarily as a distraction. In calling doubt upon the efficacy of language in teaching action or teaching us how to act, in questioning its ability to help us know or understand the relationships between different realms of language, Henryson casts doubt upon the idea of allegory and its ability to teach.

Recognizing these doubts, however, is a different matter from deciding how serious they are and how seriously we should take them. In raising these questions it seems that Henryson neither subverts nor means to subvert the basis of allegory; nor do his fables seem to call for a different way of learning; nor do they herald a fundamental despair about language and its possibilities. Not only does the lively, witty and careful language of the *Fables* themselves seem to argue against such dire conclusions, but his later *Testament of Cresseid* shows a tremendous faith in language, its possibilities and its ability to influence actions and ideas. We can see this faith on many levels, from the seriousness with which he takes Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, to the deliberation with which he executes what he seems to feel is his own duty to punish Cresseid, to the conscious literariness with which he crafts his descriptions of the gods, to the delicacy and care of his language throughout the poem.<sup>23</sup> Yet to read the careful non-alignment of story and moral in the *Fables* as a thoughtless joke would be equally unfair to the fables and their careful art. It may therefore be best to understand the games Henryson plays with realms of language and discourse and meaning in the *Fables* as a warning--at times playful, at times exasperated, but usually too lively to seem akin to despair. We think back to the "Prologue" and see the fundamental differences between the easy analogies Henryson takes from Walter and the fables Henryson tells. When we sow we know what we will reap; and we open walnut shells expecting to find walnut meat, not sunflower seeds or jewels. By rewriting the fables and their morals, Henryson reminds us that language, with its shifting realms and invented modes of discourse, offers no such certainties.

Notes

I am grateful to Elizabeth Fowler, Allen Frantzen, Michael Lower, and Derek Pearsall for extremely helpful comments they made on an earlier version of this essay.

1. *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford, 1981), pp. xiii and xxi. Denton Fox carefully reviews all evidence of Henryson's life in *Poems*, pp. xiii-xxv.



2. See Denton Fox, "The Scottish Chaucerians," in *Chaucer and Chaucerians*, ed. D.S. Brewer (London, 1966), pp. 164-200. Fox makes these points in trying to explain such a baggy classification.
3. The first extant version of Aesopic fables in English are from the first half of the fifteenth century by John Lydgate.
4. For the use of the fables in medieval England see Stephen Manning, "The Nun's Priest's Morality and the Medieval Attitude Toward Fables," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 59 (1960), 403-16; Evelyn Newlyn, "Robert Henryson and the Popular Fable Tradition in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Popular Culture* 14 (1984), 108-18; and Edward Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and His Followers* (Gainesville, 2000), pp. 52-96. For the use of fables as exempla in sermons see J. A. Mosher, *The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England* (New York, 1911), and J. T. Welter, *L'Exemplum dans la littérature religieuse didactique du moyen âge* (Paris, 1927); for the popularity of animal-tale literature in the fifteenth century see I. W. A. Jamieson, "The Beast Tale in Middle Scots," *Paragon* 2 (1976), 26-36.
5. Arno Schirokauer, cited by Fox in *Poems*, p. xlii.
6. See for example George Gopen, "The Essential Seriousness of Robert Henryson's Moral Fables: A Study in Structure," *Studies in Philology* 82 (1985), 42-59; Robert Kindrick, *Henryson and the Medieval Arts of Rhetoric* (New York, 1993); Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop*; and Rosemary Greentree, *Reader, Teller, and Teacher: The Narrator of Robert Henryson's Moral Fables* (Frankfurt, 1993).
7. "Prologue," *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford, 1981), p. 3, ll. 12-14. The lines are numbered continuously from the beginning of the Prologue throughout the *Fables*. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given by line number in the text. I have silently amended yough and thorn to y and th. All translations are my own. Fox reviews the evidence we have about Henryson's life in *Poems*, pp. xiii-xxv.
8. *Recueil général des Isopets ii*, ed. Julia Bastin (Paris, 1930), p. 7. This edition contains the complete text of Walter's fables. For a discussion of the extent to which these justifications were commonplace see Manning, "The Nun's Priest's Morality" and Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop*, pp. 151-55.
9. "The Cock and the Jasp," p. 6, ll. 79-80. Although the order of the *Fables* has been the subject of much argument, the Prologue ends by pointing the reader to the tale of the Cock and the Jasp: "And to begin, first of ane cok he wrate, / Seikand his meit  

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quhilk fand ane jolie stone, / Of quhome the fabill ye sall heir anone" (And to begin, first he wrote of a cock, / Seeing his food, who found a pretty jewel, / The story of whom you shall hear at once). Fox carefully refutes the idea that the Prologue was meant to stand in the middle of the *Fables* (see *Poems*, pp. lxxv-lxxx). On this probable order, see also Douglas Gray, *Robert Henryson* (Leiden, 1979), pp. 32-33.
10. John Lydgate, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ii, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken (London, 1934). Subsequent references to this edition are given by line number in the text. Subsequent references to this edition are given by line number in the text.
11. Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London, 1970), p.196. Lois Ebin reaches a more tactful version of the same conclusion. See Lois Ebin, *John Lydgate* (Boston, 1985), pp. 106-8.
12. This connection is also noted by Fox, p. 195. It is made more plausible by Henryson's probable training in canon law. Marianne Powell notes that in the Vulgate "scientia" corresponds to what we would translate as "understanding" or "wisdom." See Marianne Powell, *Fabula Docet: Studies in the Background and Interpretation of Henryson's Morall Fabillis* (Odense, 1983), p. 106.
13. Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley, 1970), pp. 14-15.
14. Walter's collection of fables may or may not have been the only version of this story that Henryson knew. Fables were extremely widely used as pedagogic tools, particularly in teaching schoolboys Latin and Walter's version was popular, but as Fox points out, it would be difficult to prove that Henryson had not read a different version. It is almost certain, however, that Henryson based his fable on Walter's. (Henryson, *Poems*, p. xlix. For a complete discussion of sources, see *Poems*, pp. xliv-1).
15. In Phaedrus's telling, and in all subsequent tellings until Walter's, the jewel in question is a pearl rather than a jasper. Walter's reasons for the change are uncertain; Fox, after studying medieval lapidaries, concludes that there is no discernible substantive reason for the change and that it must therefore have had to do with meter. See Fox, pp. 194-95.
16. *Babrius and Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. Ben Edwin Perry (Cambridge, MA, 1965), p. 279.
17. Joseph Jacobs, quoted in Perry, *Babrius*, p. lxxxiii.
18. This is true of all four medieval versions of Romulus's Fables transcribed in Léopold Hervieux, *Les Fabulistes Latins*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1894), 2. 564.
19. *Caxton's Aesop*, ed. R. T. Lenaghan (Cambridge, MA, 1967), p. 74.
20. See Henryson, *Poems*, pp. 195-96; and Denton Fox, "Henryson's Fables" *English Literary History* 29 (1962), 341-48. For a very different, and notably Phaedrean reading of this fable, see C. David Benson, "O Moral Henryson,"

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- in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, CT, 1984), pp. 215-17.
21. Petrus Alfonsi, *Die Disciplina Clericalis*, ed. Alfons Hilka and Werner Söderhjelm (Heidelberg, 1911), p. 34. English from Pedro Alfonso, *The Scholar's Guide*, trans. Joseph Ramon Jones and John Esten Keller (Toronto, 1969), p. 88.
  22. *The Scholar's Guide*, p. 90; *Die Disciplina Clericalis*, p. 35.
  23. These claims have all been widely observed in readings of *The Testament of Cresseid*. See, for example, A. C. Spearing, *Criticism and Medieval Poetry* (London, 1964), pp. 118-44; Lee W. Patterson, "Christian and Pagan in *The Testament of Cresseid*," *Philological Quarterly* 52 (1973), 696-714; Julia Boffey, "Lydgate, Henryson, and the Literary Testament," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (1992), 41-56; Felicity Riddy, "'Abject Odious': Feminine and Masculine in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*," in Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone, eds., *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray* (Oxford, 1997); and Denton Fox's introduction and commentary in Henryson, *Poems*, pp. lxxxii-civ, 338-83.