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The human presence in Robert Henryson's Fables and William Caxton's The History of Reynard the Fox

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Abstract

This study is a comparison of the human presence in the text of Robert Henryson's Fables, and that of William Caxton's 1481 edition of The History of Reynard the Fox (Blake:1970). The individual examples of Henryson's Fables looked at are those that may be called the 'Reynardian' fables (Mann:2009); these are The Cock and the Fox and the Wolf; The Trial of the Fox; The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger, and The Fox, the Wolf, and the Husbandman. These fables were selected to provide parallel focus, through the main protagonists and sources, with the text of The History of Reynard the Fox. The reason for the choice of these two texts, in a study originally envisaged as an examination of the human presence of Henryson's Fables, is that Caxton's text, although a translation, is precisely contemporary with the Fables, providing a specifically contemporary comparison to Henryson, as well as being a text that is worthwhile of such research in its own right. What may be gained from such a study is that the comparison of the contemporary texts, from Scotland and England, with parallel or similar main protagonists, may serve to sharpen the focus on each. The aspect of the human presence to be examined may be seen in the research question.

1. What are the functions of the different strands of human presence in the two texts?

The principal method used is the gathering of specific instances of human presence in the two texts, and the categorising or coding of such instances, with the aid of a qualitative-data computer program QSR N6. The human presence was thus categorised under the separate aspects of i) The tangible human presence (actual human characters who are actors within the narrative). ii) The human as social context, present in the social situations and behaviour of the animal protagonists. iii) The human presence as narrator, both within and outside of the narrative. iv) The human presence in the transmission and reception of the two texts. The resulting categories of human presence were used to generate a theory concerning the functions of the human presence within the texts.

The findings for the research question are as follows:

The human presence in the text serves a far more explicit moral function in the Fables than in Reynard, where it serves a primarily entertaining and satirical function. The less explicit moral function of the human presence in Reynard is found beyond the text, in the reader reception.

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Fox, Denton, « Henryson and Caxton », *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 67, 1968, p. 586-593. Fox, Denton, « A Scoto-Danish stanza: Wyatt, Henryson and the two mice », *Notes and Queries*, 18 (no 216), 1971, p. 203-207. Friedman, John Block, « Henryson, the friar and the Confessio Reynardi », *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 66, 1967, p. 550-561. Gabbard, Gregory Norman, *The Animal-Human Double Context in Beast Fables and Beast Tales of Chaucer and Henryson*, Ph. D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 2012, [xiv] + 535 p. [www]. Gray, Douglas, Robert Henryson, Leiden, Brill, 1979, 283 p. William John Thoms. Стр. 184 - grete deceyte" which Reynard here relates, forms one of the most popular fables of the Middle Ages. It is alluded to by Chaucer in his Miller's Tale. — "The gretest clerks ben not the wisest men, As whilom to the wolf, this spake the mare." It forms the 91st story of the " Cento Novelle Antiche," and its literary history generally, may be read in Schmidt's Beitrage zur Gesch. der Romantischen Poesie, s. 181, et seq. P. 84. / can wel Frenshe, Latyn, English. — Caxton has adapted the whole of... Caxton's Reynard is an important book for many reasons. It represents the first time that the full history of Reynard, which originally appeared in the mid-twelfth century in the Latin poem The Ysengrimus, before making its way into the French (Le Roman de Renart), German (Reinhart Fuchs) and Dutch (Reynaert de Vos) traditions, appeared in English. Other words were borrowed by Caxton from his Dutch original, the prose Die Historie van Reynaert de Vos. Although not a text I used directly for my dissertation on children's retellings of Reynard, this was (of course) my starting point, in terms of my more general research into Reynard in English. I'm not sure to whom I would recommend it. Reynard lovers, obviously. Robert henryson, fables: footnotes. 1 Serious matters please more sweetly when mixed with entertainment. Henryson's handling of his sources for the Fables thus reveals a deep familiarity with the Aesopic tradition as embodied in the Romulus of the medieval curriculum, as well as a keen awareness of recent developments in the incorporation of extra-canonical material into the printed "Aesop" (Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop*, pp. 150–56, 162; Lyall, "Henryson's Moral Fabillis," 89–90).