ANKARA SOSYAL BİLİMLER ÜNİVERSİTESİ
YABANCI DİLLER FAKÜLTESİ

WORLD LANGUAGE STUDIES

Cilt/Volume: 1, Sayı/Issue 2, Aralık/December 2021 / E-ISSN: 2791-7770

ROBERT HENRYSON AS A MORAL POET AND A POETIC JUDGE: POETIC JUSTICE IN "THE FOX AND THE WOLF" AND "THE PADDOCK AND THE MOUSE"

AHLAKLI BİR ŞAİR VE ŞAİRANE BİR YARGIÇ OLARAK ROBERT HENRYSON: "THE FOX AND THE WOLF" VE "THE PADDOCK AND THE MOUSE"'DA ŞİİRSEL ADALET

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Geliş Tarihi/Submitted:
10.09.2021
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted:
15.11.2021

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Robert Henryson, Fabllar, Şiirsel Adalet, Ortaçağ İskoç Edebiyatı
Keywords:
Robert Henryson, Fables, Poetic Justice, Scottish Medieval Literature

Kaynak gösterme/Citation:
Özgün, Ulaş (2021). "Robert Henryson As a Moral Poet and a Poetic Judge: Poetic Justice in "The Fox and The Wolf" and "The Paddock and The Mouse" .*World Language Studies* (*WLS*), 1 (2): 77-90

Özet

Şiirsel adalet, bir anlatının sonunda iyinin ödüllendirilmesi ve kötünün cezalandırılmasını ifade eden çok tartışmalı bir edebi araçtır. 1677'de Thomas Rymer tarafından nispeten geç türetilmiş olmasına rağmen, kullanımı klasik döneme kadar uzanmaktadır. Terimi savunanlar edebi eserlere etik, öğretici bir bakış açısı benimsese de çok sayıda eleştirmen edebiyatta böyle bir kullanımın değersizleştirici yönüne işaret etmektedir. Bu makalede, on beşinci yüzyıl İskoç şairi Robert Henryson'ın "The Fox and the Wolf" ile "The Padock and The Mouse" fabllarında bu edebi aracın uygulanışının incelenmesi amaçlanmaktadır. *Morall Fabillis*, adaletsizlik, günah ve yolsuzlaşmanın hüküm sürdüğü bir dünyayı betimleyen on üç masaldan oluşan bir koleksiyondur. Ancak bahsi geçen masallar, durumun her an kötülerin aleyhine dönebileceğini ima eder. Dolayısıyla bu makalede Henryson'ın şiirsel adaleti seyrek kullanmasının, sürpriz unsuru ve işlenen suçla orantılı ceza tayini yoluyla amaçlanan dersin etkisini artırdığı ileri sürülmektedir.

Abstract

Poetic justice is a very contentious literary device that refers to rewarding of the good and the punishment of the bad at the end of a narrative. Its use dates as far back as to the classical period despite its relatively late coinage by Thomas Rymer in 1677. The proponents of the term adopt an ethical, instructive perspective to the literary works, although numerous critics point out the devaluing aspect of such a use in literature. In this article, it is aimed to analyse the fifteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Henryson's implementation of the literary device in the fables of "The Fox and the Wolf" and "The Paddock and the Mouse". *Morall Fabillis* is a collection of thirteen fables that depicts a world reigned by injustice, sin, and corruption. However, the aforementioned fables imply that the tables can anytime be turned against the wicked. Therefore, in this article, it is argued that Henryson's sparse usage of poetic justice heightens the effect of the intended moral through the element of surprise and designation of punishment in proportion to the committed crime.

Introduction

Literature as a mode of intellectual gratification and entertainment has remained relevant for humanity from the very beginning of known history. In fact, Albert William Levi goes so far as to associate literature with humanity in his article entitled "Literature as Humanity" (Levi, 1976, p. 50). Literature as a whole has been an integral part of people's lives and it is enjoyed for a diverse set of reasons some of which are as follows: It exercises the imagination and provides an opportunity to understand the complex relations with people's (non)approximate and imaginary surroundings, be it human or non-human, material or cultural. It gives a sense of detachment from people's mundane lives by supplying a plethora of diverse places, and timelines into which they are transported. It delights the individual by offering a complexity of characters and contentious subjects that challenge various norms and worldviews which inevitably hone people's ability to empathise with others in most curious situations. Sometimes it just enables people to forget the injustices they experience in real life by catering stories in which the good overcome against all odds and the bad are punished. Consolatory effect of stories, especially the formulaic and popular ones, is underlined by David Baldacci, who is one of the bestselling thriller writers of the world: "When times are stressful and it looks like the bad is winning out over the good, along comes the genre of crime novels to put the balance back in life" (qtd. in Hannah, 2018, para. 4). The incongruity between what life is and what people want it to be may sometimes draw them into stories. In this specific moment, poetic justice comes into play as a literary device that demarcates the borders between fiction and reality by the authors' deliberate exertion of their own views of justice upon their characters. Thereby, it provides a safe outlet for people's frustration in life and instils hope in them so that the injustices they experience may indeed be reversed or compensated at some point in their lives.

It may seem anachronistic to refer to Robert Henryson's (*c*. 1430- *c*.1500) execution of poetic justice since the term was actually coined by the seventeenth-century drama critic Thomas Rymer in his book, *The Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd* (1677). However, despite Rymer's conceptualisation in the seventeenth century, the idea was certainly older and it can be traced as far back as to *Republic* in which Plato bemoans via the narrative persona of Socrates that the poets,

> tell us about the most important matters concerning human beings is bad. They say that many unjust people are happy and many just ones are wretched, that injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, and that justice is another's good but one's own loss. I think we'll

> prohibit these stories and order the poets to compose the opposite kind of poetry and tell the opposite kind of tales. (Plato, trans. 1997, 392b)

In the ideal society that Plato envisions, stories about the triumph of the wicked are harmful for the education of the young people so that only a selection of stories that inspire good behaviour can be allowed. Assuming a similarly strict didactic approach, Rymer propounds that dramatic works should inspire good behaviour through the triumph of the good against the bad by implementing punishments or rewards in proportion to the vices or virtues of the characters, hence "nothing left to God Almighty, and another World" at the end (1677, p. 26). The premise that emanates from Rymer's perception is that literary texts do not necessarily imitate the non-causality of the real world, but should be subject to *decorum* and morality of their particular society to bring about the justice that is otherwise unlikely or in some cases downright impossible in the real world. Accordingly, the term was first used for drama, but it quickly spread to other genres by the end of the century. As Zirker propounds, one possible reason for its popularity was its convenient function "to bring about closure … with a satisfactory conclusion" (2016, p. 139) for the receiving party of these literary texts. Be that as it may, it was soon revered as an essential rule and propagated by writers such as Samuel Croxall whose novel of six volumes in 1726 begins with an invocation to the principle: "The chief Design of a Romance, and which the Writer ought in the first place to have in View, is the Instruction of his reader, before whom he is to represent the Reward of Virtue, and the Chastisement of Vice" (qtd. in Zach, 1986, p. 9).

The watered-down offshoot of this strong argument about literature in fact finds itself a broad reception as the principle of delight and instruction propounded by Horace. In *Ars Poetica*, he perceives the poet's responsibility as either to delight or instruct, but it is best to "[c]ombine the *utile* with the *dulce*, for only thus will you produce a book that will sell, and enjoy a wide and lasting fame (Horace, trans. 1942, p. 447). This formulation does not necessarily require the poet to offer judgments in proportion to the character's virtues or vices. Still, the elements of delight and instruction share with the poetic justice a desire for the betterment of the individual and by extension the society as the focal point of art. Since then, delight and instruction have remained relevant as an approach to art and literature. In fact, interest in these principles spiked especially during the Middle Ages and the Neo-classical period. In today's world, philosophers of the "ethical turn" such as Martha Nussbaum underline literary texts and our reading of them as an essential component of our discursive practices since for her, "literary imagination … asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people

whose lives are distant from our own" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. xvi). Therefore, art, in general, plays a crucial role in motivating decision-makers to implement just laws and policies for the benefit of the public. Ecocriticism also invests itself in the multi-disciplinary reading of these texts. In this regard, Greta Gaard believes in the transformative power of stories and calls for a diversification of climate change narratives since "climate change will affect the entire global environment, [but] its impacts will be felt hardest by those least able to make adaptations for survival" (2014, p. 281). Therefore, racially, sexually, socially, and economically disadvantaged people are subject to environmental (in)justice, and narratives can play a vital role to raise more awareness for the heterogenous distribution of inequalities in the world.

Accordingly, it is clear that there is an intricate relationship between justice oozing out of fiction and fiction moulded by the poet's justice. Nevertheless, the latter end of the spectrum has frequently, albeit mostly rightly, been subject to various forms of criticism. For instance, strict adherence to poetic justice would "destroy the possibility of tragic suffering, which exceeds what the protagonist has deserved because of his or her *tragic flaw*" (Abrams, 1999, p. 230). Oedipus' tragic flaw far extends the punishment he receives in the end, but assuaging the punishment would eliminate the cathartic effect for the audience/reader. In addition, the subjectivity of the implemented justice renders the prescribed verdict contingent on the spatio-temporal parameters that may undermine the value of the text in the long run. For example, on top of all the humiliation, deprivation of his property and family, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is claimed to be "redeemed through enforced conversion to Christianity, but even this happy poetic (in)justice is not sufficient to make his reappearance tolerable" at the end of the play. (Kertzer, 2010, p. 13). Before leaving the stage, evident anti-Semitism actually renders Shlock's monologue poignant and the ordained justice cruel. Apart from the changing dynamics of values, the poet may consciously misplace his moral stance. In *The Dunciad,* Alexander Pope (1728/2009) refers to the hack writers' exploitation of value judgements by basing them not on right or wrong, but by what is profitable: "Poetic Justice, with her lifted scale, / Where, in nice balance, truth with gold she weighs, / And solid pudding against empty praise" (p. 105). Hence, the concept is definitely a problematic one that casts grave shadows over the aesthetic value of art. Thereby, critics such as Wolfgang Zach and Susanne Kaul associate the popularity of the concept with the poet's understanding of justice based particularly on the divine order of God so that the eventual diminishing of the concept relates to the extensive secularisation process in the West (Zach, 1986, p. 436; Kaul, 2008, p 12).

Accordingly, despite the lack of any concrete evidence of his actual life, fifteenth-century Scottish "makar" Robert Henryson's understanding of poetic justice was too moulded by the divine ordinance of God. His prudish sense of Christianity is detectable from his major works. He writes a "moral" ending to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in which Cresseid is punished by the Gods to live like a leper away from society. He supplies an allegorical *moralitas* to *Orpheus and Eurydice* story where he interprets Orpheus' search for Eurydice in the underworld as humanity's indulgence in sin. His moral stance is also detectable in *Morall Fabillis* as he leaves these fables "vnto the freiris, / To mak a sample or similitude" (Henryson, 1987, p. 110)[1]. Besides, he is most probably familiar with canon law. According to Denton Fox, circumstantial evidence associates him to the University of Glasgow in 1462 as *Magister Robertus Henrisone*, and concerning his possible education in law, he is named a witness to three different cases in Dunfermline which signals his likely position as a public notary (1987, Introduction, p. xiii). In addition, he uses law terminology to a point that simulates a real-life version of a court scene in fables such as "The Trial of the Fox" or "The Sheep and the Dog". He is a moral poet upholding Christian virtues and does not refrain from imposing his sense of justice on his poetry.

On the other hand, in *Morall Fabillis*, he adopts a different approach from that of his other major works; he presents a very dark picture of the world steeped in sin, injustice, and corruption. He is critical of the systems be it judicial, clerical, or governmental due to the human factor. In this regard, the fable genre offers him a convenient set of tools to express this worldview. Accordingly, he loosely benefits from the idea of physiognomy which foregrounds that "the physical features of a person's face and body indicated character instincts and behaviour, and all these were expressive of the soul" (Hartley, 2005, p. 16). Reflection of this belief is stated in the fable of "The Paddock and the Mouse":

> 'For clerkis sayis the inclinatioun
> Off mannis thoct proceidis commounly
> Efter the corporall complexioun
> To gude or euill, as nature will apply:
> Ane thrawart will, ane thrawin phisnomy. (Henryson, 1987, p. 105)

[1] All quotations from *Morall Fabillis* are taken from Henryson, R. (1987). *Robert Henryson: The Poems* (D. Fox, Ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Henryson's clever employment of the fable genre's traditional anthropomorphic characters becomes an implied judgement of the sinfulness of his characters. Humanity's failure to conform to the Christian doctrines establishes an affinity with that of animals who are believed to be below humans in the gradational scheme of the Great Chain of Beings. Henryson refers to this idea in the Prologue:

> Bot takis all the lust and appetyte,
> Quhilk throw custum and the daylie ryte
> Syne in the mynd sa fast is radicate
> That he in brutal beist is transformate. (Henryson, 1987, p. 5)

Henryson's anthropomorphic characters become relevant in terms of demonstrating people who are indistinguishable from animals because of their subjection to their carnal appetites. In Henryson's version of these fables, the traditional moral part that is mostly one or two sentences "swell to fill several stanzas, sometimes threatening to rival the fable narratives in length" (Mann, 2009, p. 267). Thereby, *Morall Fabillis* becomes essentially a text aimed at deriving Christian morals out of these animal narratives through religious exegesis. Henryson's method of balancing the narrative and the moral part also conforms to the literary principle of delight and instruction that was very popular in the Middle Ages. He underlines the value of this principle by claiming that a bow that is always bent loses its power "Sa dois the mynd that is ay diligent / In ernistfull thoctis and in studying" (Henryson, 1987, p. 4). Hence, Henryson aims not just to vex the reader by overloading "With sad materis" (p. 4) but blends his serious material with a comical narrative written in a witty style so as to balance the two.

In this pessimistic portrayal of the world of anthropomorphic characters, however, Robert Henryson seems not to employ any type of poetic justice. As it is made clear, poetic justice prioritises rewarding the good and punishing the bad in direct proportion to their actions, and in the overwhelming number of the fables, the wicked overpower the less wicked through trickery, bribery, or dishonesty. Consequently, society is in disarray, and God seems to have forsaken his subjects. In one of the poignant scenes in "The Sheep and the Dog", the wronged sheep bewails to God by casting "vp his ee vnto heuinnis hicht, / and said, 'O lord, quhy sleipis thow sa lang" (Henryson, 1987, p. 53). In this world of corruption and sin, God seems to have forsaken these characters and his lack of intervention is actually the poetic justice bestowed upon these characters. Moreover, the depiction of an "alternative world" very close to Scotland in which lawlessness and brutality reign becomes a rewarding moral for the reader by reminding them of what may or does happen when humanity indulges solely in their carnal appetites.

Still, Henryson employs poetic justice, albeit scarcely, in the traditional sense within the collection. Implementation of this literary device sparingly is actually a very clever strategy since the unpredictability adds the element of surprise. Similarly, Joseph Shipley (1954)dwells on this element in his definition of poetic justice. He states that poetic justice works best when it results from a phenomenon "that occurs rarely in life, but it is gratifyingly concrete, and it somehow ironically 'fits the crime'" (p. 310). Shipley's invocation of the element of surprise and the ironical punishment that conforms to the nature of the crime are important aspects of Henryson's implementation of the device as well. Consequently, in a collection of thirteen fables, Henryson employs this literary device only in two fables, "The Fox and the Wolf" and "The Paddock and the Mouse". The choice underlines the unpredictable nature of the divine order of things so that it becomes an effective warning for the mischievous reader/listener. In these two fables, Henryson undertakes his scheme by making crucial alterations to the source materials. Accordingly, in the next sections, Henryson's use of poetic justice within these fables will be analysed.

"The Fox and the Wolf"

This fable is actually an intermediary piece of three interconnected fables within the collection and continues from where the preceding fable – "The Cock and the Fox" – has left off. The wily fox named Tod Lowrence fails to hunt down the cock, Chantecleir and is now very hungry. The traditional Scottish names that are derived from beast narratives underscore the comic play on the transgressive boundaries between humans and animals. These characters with hybrid natures stress the comical incongruity between their human responsibilities and their overt animal natures. The contradictions generated by this gap become a very funny, but harsh criticism to people that indulge in their carnal desires. As a result, the prospect compels Lowrence somewhat playfully to be subject to the Christian doctrines. Briefly, the fable focuses on the cunning fox who foresees his death in the constellations unless he mends his sinful lifestyle. He chances upon Friar Wolf Waitskaith who is in fact not very much different from him in nature. Lowrence half-heartedly confesses his sins to the Friar, and the wolf advises him to refrain from eating meat except for fish until Easter as a penance. However, Lowrence cannot contain himself when he sees a stray lamb. He dunks the lamb in the sea to baptise it as a fish and eats it. Afterwards, while the fox is resting, the shepherd kills Lowrence with an arrow to his belly and skins him clean.

At the very beginning of this burlesque tale, there is a huge foreshadowing of the fox's conditional death written in the stars. However, the fact that Tod Lowrence is a stereotypical

character derived from the French Reynardian beast epic tradition diminishes the possibility of his death for the medieval audience because in these tales Reynard the Fox outwits all of his opponents and overcomes every obstacle he faces. The informed reader/listener in the Middle Ages must have been very surprised by the turn of events at the end. The element of surprise in the tale is further amplified by the fact that the final section with "the fatal shot appear[s] nowhere in the story's sources and analogues" (Gopen, 1987, 24). Henryson catches Lowrence and the reader off guard with such an addition to the tale and administers the element of surprise in his exercise of poetic justice which is one of the crucial components of Shipley's definition.

Moreover, Henryson delicately paves the way for Lowrence's eventual punishment. Concerning the confession and baptism scenes, there are "precedents for each of the two parts of this story … [but] the combination of the two motifs appears to be Henryson's invention" (Mann, 2009, p. 282). Henryson unites these two separate scenes in order to demonstrate Lowrence's carnal nature clearly. If the punishment of the fox came after the confession, it would not be known whether Lowrence would keep his promise or not, thus, it wouldn't be a poetic justice in the perfect sense. In this way, the prospect of a small chance of reformation is presented to the fox, but he loses this chance of his own accord. Accordingly, Lowrence confesses even if he is not sorry for the misdeeds he has done: "Me think hennis ar sa honie sweit, / And lambes flesche that new ar letting bluid, / For to repent my mynd can not concluid," (Henryson, 1987, p. 30). The Friar's quick remission of Lowrence's sins in the confession scene indicates his wicked tendencies as well. Indeed, the comedy arises out of the knowledge that "[e]ach of them is a villain, each of them knows himself to be a villain, and each of them knows the other to be a villain." (Gray, 1979, p. 115). The wolf is also a rascal trying to live in these harsh conditions without drawing any attention on himself. Correspondingly, the fable does not pay much attention to him, and he slips by after the confession. Still, with this particular scene, Henryson devises a convenient way of depicting the villainous members of two classes, that is, the laity and the clergy, to underline the extent that corruption penetrates within the society.

Now that Lowrence believes himself to be purified from his sins, he goes to the seashore to catch fish, but his spirit is broken by the rough waves. He quickly changes his mind upon seeing a flock of sheep and steals a kid from the group. He dunks the kid in the sea, saying: "'Ga doun, schir Kid, cum vp, schir Salmond, agane', / Quhill he wes deid, syne to the ladn him drewch" (p. 32). Thus, the follow-up of the mock confession is carried out with a mock baptism scene. Similar to Lowrence's conviction that "it is the form of the confession which is effective, and not the spiritual quality of the confessional process," (Lyall, 2005, p. 91)

citational value of the baptism without any contextual conformity is enough for Lowrence to baptise the kid as a fish. Through his subversion of the baptism, it becomes clear that he cannot keep his promise. Henryson contrives this scene as a fatal mistake on Lowrence's part as it will likewise be exerted from him. Lowrence is now confident that no harm will ever come to him and lies under a tree, caresses his belly, and jokingly says, "Vpon this wame [belly] set wer ane bolt [arrow] full meit" (p. 32). Ironically, a citational performance determines the fate of a character. The verbal play of the confession and baptism now turns against Lowrence and a wish uttered by him comes true via the angry shepherd who kills him with an arrow to his belly.

Henryson's introduction of the shepherd after Lowrence's another behavioural transgression proves his roguish character and seals his fate. Symbolically, the shepherd can be read as Jesus since he frequently referred to himself as the "good shepherd" (King James Bible, 1769/2008, St. John 10:11), and Lowrence is punished because of mutilating His flock. Furthermore, the introduction of the shepherd as the instigator of reversal of fortune, and the manner of the fox's death that is ironically in keeping with the way Lowrence commits his crimes conform to the principles of poetic justice. Lastly, Henryson's implementation of poetic justice helps him reorient the tale by centralising the sense of divine retribution to those mocking Christian rituals. In this way, the fable is imbued with a moral gravity that confers the seriousness of Henryson's intentions in the collection. This is evident from the fact that it is the first time up until the fourth fable that any character is brutally flayed let alone be killed. The moral section of the fable reflects this sobriety as Henryson addresses the folk to take this as an "[e]xempill … to mend, / For dreid of sic ane lyke conclusioun" (p. 33).

The Paddock and the Mouse

"The Paddock and the Mouse" is traditionally placed as the last fable of the collection. Contrary to "The Fox and the Wolf", it has a definitive source which is Gualterus Anglicus's version of the elegiac *Romulus*. (Schrader, 1980, p. 183). It is a famous fable about the difficulty of changing one's bad habits and the resultant injury pertaining to them. However, in the hands of Robert Henryson, it takes a whole new set of religious meanings. In the original version, the fable talks about a mouse whose journey is blocked by a lake. A frog comes and persuades him to ride on him so that the mouse will reach the other side. In the middle of the lake, however, the frog tries to drown the mouse. While the two struggle, a kite swoops in and hunts them down. The moral plainly states that "suffering returns to its author" (qtd. in Schrader, 1980, p. 183). Robert Henryson takes this raw material which consists only of sixteen lines and transforms it into a long and elaborate fable of 198 lines.

The ensuing justice at the end of Gualterus Anglicus' version is not a perfect one because the moral may explain the death of the frog, but it does not account for the death of the innocent mouse. The only possible way of justifying the death of the mouse is putting her in the wrong as well, and Robert Henryson reserves ample space in the narrative part to establish exactly that aspect of the Mouse. First of all, the Mouse's aim in reaching the other side, which is referred to as "heuin" (Henryson, 1987, p. 106), is pleasing to her only because this would appease her appetite: "'Seis thow, … 'off corne ȝone iolie flat, / Off ryip aitis, off barlie, peis, and quheit? / I am hungrie, and fane wald be thair at (p. 103). This establishes that the Mouse desires things that should not actually be desired but worked diligently to achieve. Secondly, she is repelled by the physiognomy of the Frog and anticipates that something is wrong with him, however, "her appetite … overwhelm[s] her good sense" (Gopen, 1987, p. 22), and induces her to be persuaded quite easily. As a result, the Mouse agrees to be bound to the Frog to cross the stream only if the Frog "… sweir to [her] murthour aith: / But fraud or gyle to bring [her] ouer this flude" (p. 106). Her suggestion indicates that she clearly does not trust but wants to trust him because of her carnal cravings. The Frog readily accepts the suggestion and swears an oath. Once again, binding fealty and violation of it play an important role in discerning honesty from dishonesty and establish the legitimacy of the punishment at the end. In this regard, Robert Henryson lays the groundwork to prepare the narrative for an appropriate moment so that the exercise of poetic justice feels earned and justified. Now, there is the element of oath when the Frog decides to drown the Mouse in the middle of the stream: "[t]he mous vpwart, the paddock doun can pres;" (p. 107). In addition to the oath, Henryson introduces the kite because of the big ruckus they make in the water: "… the gled sat on ane twist, / And to this wretchit battell tuke gude heid" (p. 107). Upon noticing them, the kite "with ane wisk, or owthir off thame wist, / He claucht his cluke betuix thame gude speid, /… and baith but pietie slew" (p. 107-8). Again, the detail of attracting the kite's attention because of the turmoil in the water indicates the cause of their end fittingly as their own doing. By laying minute hints of the Mouse's subtle carnality and wrong choices, Henryson justifies the eventual punishment she receives along with the Frog.

The punishment of the Mouse reinforces Henryson's intended *moralitas* in the moral section of the poem. Accordingly, he bestows an allegorical significance to these animals, uniting them as the body and soul of a single entity: "This lytill mous, heir knit thus be the schyn, / The saull of man betaking may in dedi – / Bundin, and fra the bodie may not twyn" (p. 109). The stream becomes "the warld" (p. 109), the other side becomes the "heuinnis blis" (l.

2961) and the kite becomes "deith" (p. 110). With these new significations, the Mouse and the Frog's struggle on the stream takes on a new meaning; the two are responsible for their heedlessness because it represents the struggle of body and soul in life. The Frog's intention of drowning the Mouse, an action "which in nature has nothing to gain from" acquires a new meaning because it now suggests "the continual lusting of the flesh against the spirit" (Greentree, 1993, p. 486). The poem's delicate craftsmanship stems from its elevated moral significance and the resultant poetic justice conferred upon the involved parties. Throughout the fable, Henryson leaves clues about the wicked nature of the Mouse that can only be pieced together after the allegorical moralising at the end. Innovatively, the element of surprise is employed after the fitting punishment is implemented on the Mouse so that it becomes a refined application of the literary device. Similar to "The Fox and the Wolf", "The Paddock and the Mouse" addresses the reader/listener to take these morals as valuable lessons: "Be vigilant thairfoir and ay reddie, / For mannis lyfe is brukill and ay mortall" (p. 110). Therefore, as the final tale of the collection, the fable with a strong moral point cemented with an astute poetic justice becomes the last and probably the most enduring image for the reader/listener.

Conclusion

Unconventional to Henryson's corpus, *Morall Fabillis* presents a bitter world steeped in violence, injustice, corruption, and cruelty. In the majority of the fables, the wicked overcome all odds and get the upper hand in virtually every situation. Given the anthropomorphic nature of these characters, the lack of ordained punishment is understandable which also becomes a robust commentary of the contemporaneous circumstances in Scotland. Still, as a poet with strong religious convictions, he implements his vision of poetic justice, albeit sparsely, by altering and allegorizing these traditional tales from fables and Reynardian beast epics. In "The Fox and the Wolf" and "The Paddock and the Mouse" he places Christian values, practices, and rites such as confession and baptism in the centre, and any offence against these results in a severe punishment that is reflective of the general bitter tone throughout the work. In his sense of poetic justice, he especially benefits from the element of surprise and a sense of punishment that is proportionate to the committed crime which is congruous with Shipley's definition of the term and which may actually point to his judicial past.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Literature as a mode of intellectual gratification has been relevant for humanity for a number of reasons one of which is its ability to provide people an alternative reality in which the good overcome the bad. In this way, it acts as a safe outlet for people's experience of injustice and resultant frustration in the real life. The idea of associating literature with a task to inspire good behavior can be traced as far back as to Plato, however, the literary term that is referred to as poetic justice is first coined by Thomas Rymer in 1677. Basically, the premise foregrounds that literary text should reward the virtuous and punish the bad in direct proportion to their actions in the end. The literary term is certainly a contentious one. Thereby, it is subject to too many criticisms such as its contingency to spatio-temporal and subjective values. The term is regarded to be popular during periods when the divine ordinance of God is prominent. Coincidentally, fifteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Henryson is a highly religious poet. In his major works, the sense of justice is notable. However, in *Morall Fabillis*, he presents a world of injustice, corruption, and sin. His employment of the fable genre's anthropomorphic characters becomes an implicit judgment of the sinfulness of his characters. At the same time, it establishes an affinity between people who do not conform to the Christine doctrines so that they are considered equal to animals who are below humans in the gradational scheme of the Great Chain of Beings. Still, Henryson implements poetic justice, albeit scarcely, in the two fables,

namely “The Fox and the Wolf” and “The Paddock and the Mouse” in the collection. His employment reminds Joseph Shipley’s (1954) definition of poetic justice which “occurs rarely in life, but it is gratifyingly concrete, and it somehow ironically ‘fits the crime’” (p. 310). Accordingly, it is argued that by altering his source materials, making new additions, and adding nuances to these two tales Henryson exercises poetic justice that is similar to Shipley’s definition that prioritises the element of surprise and the ironical punishment that conforms to the nature of the crime.