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Robert Henryson and his *Orpheus and Eurydice*

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[1] It has been noticed that Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* might create a sense of disappointment in its readers (Kindrick 1997: 187; Gray 1979: 209, 240). This sense of dissatisfaction could be partly due to the author's confused and sometimes contradictory presentation of the characters and to the narrator's ambiguous attitude towards the story; moreover, establishing the kind of readership to which the poem is targeted is problematic, since certain information about Henryson's life is notoriously limited if not totally absent.

[2] The fifteenth-century audience was likely to be familiar with a large number of sources concerning the myth of Orpheus; the adventures of the Thracian poet were popular both in Europe and in the British Isles (cf. Friedman 1970; Giaccherini 2002). Classical works containing the legend, like Virgil's *Georgics*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, were still read in Latin but also translated into vernacular languages. In addition, medieval scholars such as William De Conches and Nicholas Trivet provided detailed commentaries in which the moral value of the legend was underlined (Friedman 1970: 90-145; Nauta 1997: 41-42). Finally, Christian theologians saw in Orpheus a *figura Christi*, as his descent to Hades to rescue Eurydice was read as an anticipation of Christ's advent to save mankind (Friedman 1970: 38-85, 125-27).

[3] In Britain, knowledge of this myth dates back to the Roman conquest, and representations of Orpheus can be seen on the mosaic pavements of some Roman villas. (Examples of these mosaics can be seen in Brading Villa (Isle of Wight), in Barton Farm (Cirencester), in the mosaic of Dyer Street (Cirencester), in Horkstow Hall (Lincolnshire) and in Woodchester Roman Villa (Gloucestershire) (Vieillefon 2003 : 69).) The literary evidence demonstrates a continuous tradition. Apart from some translations and adaptations of the Latin texts, notably King Alfred's translation of Boethius and Chaucer's *Boece*, and the Middle English lay *Sir Orfeo*, there are several references to Orpheus – for example, in the *Liber Monstrorum* and in Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* – which suggests that medieval readers were quite familiar with the legend. Moreover, from this variety of texts belonging to different traditions one can infer that, by Henryson's time, the figure of Orpheus was associated not only with philosophical reflection but also with courtly literature and romance.

[4] In his poem, Henryson follows the Boethian version of the story, and Trivet's commentary to it, or at least this is what it is claimed in the final *moralitas*. However, it is very likely that Henryson knew also other sources concerning the Orphic myth and that these might somehow have influenced his work. In this paper, I will try to analyse some possible sources of the poem through the problems and contradictions in the presentation of the characters, in order to try to understand what kind of audience the poet was actually addressing and how Henryson managed to handle all the different extant traditions regarding the Thracian poet.

Orpheus: the disappointing perfect hero

[5] As far as the hero of the poem is concerned, Henryson provides his readers with a good deal of

information about Orpheus, and initially presents him as a perfect hero; however, in the end, the expectations the poet creates will be disappointed.

[6] Henryson includes a description of the union of the hero's ancestors – who are only vaguely mentioned in *Sir Orfeo*, where it is said that the hero was a descendant of 'King Pluto' and 'King Juno,' once believed to be gods because of their great deeds – and a long presentation of the Muses, something which in the other versions of the legend is generally absent (Bliss (ed.) 1966: ll. 43-6). Henryson seems here concerned to show clearly from the beginning his complete knowledge of what 'out of Grew in Latyne translait is' (Fox (ed.) 1981; l. 42 – all subsequent quotations from *Sir Orfeo* and from Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* use these two editions, and give line numbers only), even inviting his readers to 'correct him' if his rendition is wrong (l. 28). The aim of this long introduction – 64 lines – is to underline Orpheus' 'gentilnes' of blood, which should somehow ensure a corresponding nobility of action. However, the sense of expectancy thus created will be frustrated in the end, as this noble hero fails in his quest.

[7] Orpheus is said to be the son of the god Apollo and the muse Calliope. In the *moralitas*, they are identified with wisdom and eloquence respectively (ll. 425-6). The Thracian poet is the result of the union of these two virtues and therefore Henryson observes that "No wounder is thocht he was fair and wyse, gentill and full of liberalite" (ll. 65-6). So far, then, the poem seems to respect the canons of medieval romance, where the hero is usually endowed with all the noblest qualities. However, the narrator seems to focus more on the fact that Orpheus received these virtues from his ancestors rather than on the hero's actual merits. Orpheus is up to this point depicted as a passive character; he will not be attributed any real action until he asks the maid what happened to Eurydice (l. 117). Until then, he is simply the object of the other characters' actions.

[8] Beauty, gentleness and generosity were at the time implicitly attributed to Orpheus, who, in Old French and Middle English literature, had become a hero of courtly love. In *Sir Orfeo*, which is with all probability one of the other sources for the Scottish poem, the protagonist is described as 'A stalworth man and hardi bo; Large and curteys', welcoming generously any minstrel who visits his court (ll. 41-2, 27-8). These elements are recalled in Henryson's description of Orpheus as 'of statur large, and farly fair of face' (l. 72), just as the scene of Eurydice's death, on a warm spring morning, is very similar to the setting of Dame Herodis' abduction in *Sir Orfeo*. From the beginning of the poem, Henryson presents his Orpheus as dependant both on the classical sources concerning the myth, and on the medieval tradition of romance, which had appropriated the figure of the Thracian poet.

[9] The hero's physical characteristics and his 'noble fame' are the principal reasons Eurydice chooses Orpheus for a husband. His conduct, however, does not seem particularly wise, since he apparently accepts Eurydice only because he has been seduced by her kisses and loving glances (ll. 81-4). Furthermore, when the maid announces to Orpheus that his wife is dead, his reaction is far from the composed grief of a wise man, and very similar to madness. Henryson describes him as 'inflammit all in ire, | And rampand as ane lyoun ravenus, | With awfull luke and ene glowand as fyre' (ll. 120-22). Even the comparison with the lion here assumes a negative connotation. In medieval bestiaries, this animal was ambiguously renowned for its nobility and generosity, but also feared for its ferocity and aggressiveness (Ciccarese 2007: 13; Hast 1999: 3). King Orpheus is correctly compared to the king of animals, but Henryson unexpectedly mentions the most realistic and dangerous aspects of the lion and makes no reference to its symbolic virtues. Besides, it is remarkable that Orpheus, the tamer of wild beasts, should

be compared to a ravenous animal which is unable to control itself, and that he should display an attitude quite inappropriate for someone initially described as ‘wise’ and ‘gentill’. Henryson seems to recall traditional notions, only to reject them the next moment or to combine them in a surprising manner.

[10] Moreover, where the protagonist of *Sir Orfeo* leaves his steward in charge of his reign (ll. 204-8) before starting a composed and almost religious retirement in the forest, Henryson’s Orpheus runs to the wood wringing his hands, without worrying about the future of the kingdom he had received through marrying Eurydice. Not only is Orpheus dependant on his wife for his power and riches in Thrace, but in his grief he forgets all his wisdom and nearly surrenders to insanity:

Quhen scho had said, the king sichit full sore:
His hert ner birst for werray dule and wo
Half out of mynd, he maid na tary more,
Bot tuke his harpe and to the wod can go
Wryngand his handis, walkand to and fro (ll. 127-31)

The hero’s search for Eurydice here assumes the traits of a medieval quest; Henryson even expands the traditional journey to the otherworld, having his Orpheus visit the heavens before descending to Hades. The poet’s journey, however, seems to lack the sense of heroism one would expect. Orpheus, for instance, is said to start from ‘Wadlyng Strete’ (l. 188), which was another name for the Milky Way, but also a real road from London to Wroxeter (cf. ‘Watling Street’, OED). Whatever Henryson had in mind, the reference to the Milky Way as if it was a mere street diminishes the magnificence of the hero’s journey to the otherworld. Furthermore, Orpheus’ experience with celestial harmony proves to be rather odd: the marvellous secrets he is said to have learnt among the spheres are actually a catalogue of Pythagorean proportions and a series of corresponding intervals. It has been suggested that this passage might conceal a complicated symbolic structure deriving from different compositions of the figures implied by the musical proportions (MacQueen 2006: 255-60). Nevertheless, Orpheus’ discovery was probably something far from obscure or innovative to the readers of his time as music was an essential subject in the *quadrivium* (English 1994: 12), and intervals and proportions were widely studied by music theorists (Auda 1930: 47).

Thare lerit he tonys proportionate,
As duplar, triplar, and emetricus;
Emoleus and eke the quadruplate;
Epogdyus, ryght hard and curius;
And of thir sex, suete and dilicius,
Ryght consonant, fyve hevynly symphonyis
Componyt ar, as clerkis can deuse.
First dyatesseron, full suete i wis;
And dyapason, symple and duplate;
And dyapente, componyt with a dys;
This makis fyve, of thre multiplicat.
This mery musik and mellifluat,
Complete and full wyth nowmeris od and evyn,
Is causit be the moving of the hevyn. (ll. 226-39)

It is possible that here Henryson, who dismisses the matter immediately after saying that he was never able to sing a note in his whole life (ll. 240-2), wanted to play with his readers by presenting a confusing list of simple concepts as an otherworldly revelation. Alternatively, he might have meant to deflate the figure of Orpheus by attributing to him a discovery which was simply part of everyday life. Moreover, this latter interpretation could imply that Henryson was writing more for an educated audience than for readers who were just at the beginning of their studies, as the traditional image of the poet as the schoolmaster of Dunfermline might suggest.

[11] Orpheus' only episode of 'heroism' seems to occur when he passes among the souls condemned to the tortures of hell and relieves their pain with the power of his music (ll. 275-302); nevertheless, the scene focuses more on the illustration of the torments of the damned souls, on a Dantesque inclusion of historical and mythological figures in hell, and on anti-clerical polemics, than on the hero's courage or abilities. Henryson seems to use the hero's descent to Hell more to insert an erudite digression on the destiny after death of great mythological figures, after the tradition of Chaucer's *Monk's Tale* and of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, than to magnify the protagonist's actions. Therefore, the poet is probably addressing an audience which was already so well acquainted with this specific aspect of the myth, and with the musical skills of the hero, that it was useless to spend extra lines exalting them. Similarly, in the wood scene, the traditional taming of animals and plants is nearly absent, but for a brief reference to trees dancing a merry melody to comfort the harper (ll. 144-47).

[12] While in other versions of the legend the apex of the story is the wood scene or the descent to Hades, here these aspects are apparently unimportant or merely implied. Even the medieval vision of Orpheus as the personification of eloquence seems absent (Friedman 1970: 112): during his encounter with the Queen and King of Hell, he does not pronounce brave or persuasive speeches, as occurs, for instance, in Poliziano's *Fabula d'Orfeo* (Gray 1979: 226). Apart from his address to Eurydice, he actually hardly speaks in Hell. Besides, in the moral explanation, Henryson indicates the harp, not Orpheus, as the symbol of eloquence, leaving the readers in doubt whether he meant to use a metonymy to indicate the player, or to suggest that the Thracian poet would not have succeeded in his quest without his instrument.

[13] Moreover, while the poet of *Sir Orfeo* spends about thirteen lines (ll. 25-38) celebrating the musical skills of the protagonist and his dedication to the study of the harp, Henryson only mentions that his mother 'gart him sowke of hir twa palpis quhyte the sweit licour of all musike parfyte' (ll. 67-70). As Denton Fox observes, this could be a rendering of Boethius, who writes that Orpheus exploited "all that he drank with thirsty draught from his high mother's chiefest spring" (Fox 1962: 395; Stewart (ed.) 1953: 294). However, Orpheus's ability is something he has inherited from his ancestors, just like his noble blood and 'gentilness'. His skill magically allows him to overcome any obstacle in his way but will prove useless when the resolution of the quest is centred on his own moral strength; not even the privilege of such an extraordinary musical gift will help Orpheus to fulfil the only condition imposed upon the return of his wife. Unlike most analogues, Henryson gives an explanation for Orpheus' looking back; the Thracian poet is blinded by love and forgets the condition imposed by the infernal gods. The idea of blindness preventing Orpheus from rescuing his wife may recall the Boethian wish to behold the spring of eternal good, something which Orpheus and Eurydice, who celebrate their apparent victory by talking about earthly things such as 'play and sport' (l. 385), are evidently incapable of doing.

[14] Finally, after failing in his quest, Orpheus is described as going back a sad widower, a definition which is rather unflattering for a hero who is traditionally considered the inventor of music, the best

harpist in the ancient world, the king of Thrace, the personification of eloquence and, because of his *katabasis*, a *figura Christi*. It is possible that Henryson wanted the conclusion of his story to focus on the grief of his hero, but he actually seems to have created a parable of progressive disillusionment from the initial celebration of the hero through his noble ancestors to the final definition of the Thracian poet as a common widower, in which the initial expectations about the hero are disappointed.

Eurydice, the earthly Thracian Queen

[15] Even though not as complex as Orpheus, Eurydice is not much easier to define; above all, it is difficult to understand whether she is a positive figure – since she is the object and the reason for Orpheus' quest – and something the readers presumably hope he will attain, or something negative and earthly which should be left behind in order to reach perfection, as is suggested in Boethius's *Consolation* (Stewart (ed.) 1953: 296, ll.52-58).

[16] All we know about her is that she is beautiful and rich, but nothing is said explicitly about her associations, unlike in *Sir Orfeo*, where Dame Herodis is described as beautiful, but also as virtuous. We can infer that when Henryson states that Eurydice thought it no shame to propose to Orpheus (l. 80), he might be implicitly condemning this conduct. On the other hand, in chivalric literature a lady proposing to the hero is not so unusual as one might expect, even though in these cases she is often described as a fairy, as can be seen in the Anglo-Norman lay *Sir Lanval* (Walter (ed.) 2000: 172). This may be an allusion to Eurydice's portrait as a nymph in the classical sources, and could explain why Proserpine, here presented as a fairy queen, decides to summon the Thracian queen to her court as soon as death strikes her.

[17] Furthermore, the poet describes Eurydice as directing 'blenkis amorous' to Orpheus (l. 81); as Denton Fox notes, the same expression can be found also in the description of Venus in the *Testament* (1962: 396), where the goddess is said to be full of provoking and loving glances and to become angry and hateful the next moment (ll. 226-28). The fact that Henryson attributed to Eurydice the same words he had used for his inconstant Venus suggests that an equally vain nature is to be attributed to Eurydice, or at least that the two characters have a common, earthly nature. This impression is reinforced some lines later where the union between Orpheus and Eurydice is compared to a worldly joy, destined to vanish in a short time, like a flower. Orpheus' fruitless quest for Eurydice in heaven is also rather indicative of Henryson's moral judgement about the Thracian Queen. Fox argues that Orpheus' adventure in the spheres could be a development of Trivet's commentary, where Orpheus tries to convince the celestial gods to give him his wife back before going to look for her in Hades (1962: 399). Nevertheless, Henryson's insistence on the fact that she cannot be found in heaven seems rather to qualify her in a negative way, especially when we consider that she is destined for what resembles a Christian Hell more than a pagan Hades.

[18] In the *moralitas*, she is simply defined as the sensual part of the soul, and thus as something earthly which should be abandoned in order to reach more elevated goods, as in the traditional interpretation of the story. This is somehow in line with her general presentation in the poem, where all the information given regards her bodily and sensual nature. For example, during the scene of her death, Henryson focuses on her being 'barfute with schankis quhytar than the snawe' (l. 100), and on her shattered heart (l. 108). The detail of Eurydice walking barefoot is quite interesting, as it is not present in Ovid or Virgil or Boethius, the most popular Latin sources. Although this is useful to the plot in facilitating Eurydice's being bitten by the snake, it is not essential: there are many illuminations showing Eurydice wearing a

pair of boots and being bitten on her ankle (see, for instance, a manuscript of the *Ovide Moralisé* now at the Bibliothèque de la Ville, Lyon (Ms. 742. fol. 166r)). Indeed, according to medieval bestiaries, snakes were believed to avoid naked men and women (Ciccarese 1999: 271). Henryson might be recalling here the *Ovide Moralisé*, where Eurydice is said to be walking barefoot on green fields (De Boer (ed.) 1915-38: 1). In this work, her walking barefoot in the green meadows is later compared to running without defence among earthly pleasures and vices (De Boer (ed.) 1915-38: 17, ll.212-21); it is not to be excluded that Henryson had a similar allegory in mind and that he considered the Thracian queen partly responsible for her own end because of her earthly and sinful nature.

Even Orpheus, when addressing his queen, seems concerned mostly with her altered external appearance.

Quhare is thy rude as rose wyth chekis quhite,
Thy cristall eyne with blenkis amoureuse,
Thi lippis rede to kis dilicouse? (ll. 354-56)

The celebration of the woman through the description of her body is of course not uncommon in love poetry, but here, as in the rest of the poem, Orpheus seems to focus only on the physical beauty of his wife, without even considering the moral aspects of her character.

[19] The reader is thus disoriented. Orpheus is a hero who, according to the opening lines, should set an example. Yet while his love object does incarnate the ideal beauty of chivalric literature, she is far from embodying the inspiring virtue of courtly love heroines, who somehow guide the hero through a process of perfection. On the contrary, as Jill Mann suggests, she is the principal cause of Orpheus' descent from Heaven to Hell (1990: 96). Henryson's Eurydice exemplifies the contrast between the courtly tradition of *Sir Orfeo*, where the hero's retirement in the wood and his subsequent quest for his wife represent a way to attain exceptional musical skills and to re-establish the initial positive situation, and the allegorical interpretation of the myth given by the commentaries, which present Eurydice as the negative, earthly part of the human soul (Friedman 1970: 107, 113).

Aristeus: a virtuous rapist

[20] The most stunning contradiction between the narrative and the *moralitas* is probably the definition of Aristeus as the personification of human virtue; it has even been argued that the *moralitas* might not have been written by Henryson (MacQueen 1967: 27). Once again, this moral explanation squares with what can be read in Trivet's commentary, which reports Fulgentius' etymological interpretation of the characters (Fox 1962: 385). Aristeus there is interpreted as deriving from *aristos*, the superlative of the adjective meaning "good" (Helm 1970: 77). And yet here Aristeus can hardly be defined as virtuous. His only function in the story seems to be that of causing Eurydice's escape in the meadow: the poet therefore does not even assign him a specific profession, simply calling him a 'hird' who keeps 'beists'. He is present also in other versions of the story, such as Poliziano's *Fabula d'Orfeo*; but while the Italian Aristeo behaves like a courtly lover, Henryson's *hird* simply acts as a rapist who is unable to control his lust when he sees a 'lady ying' or a 'lady solitar' (Petrina 2002: 388-9). It is indeed quite surprising that Henryson's example of perfect virtue should be a shepherd who hides among the bushes in order to attack lonely women, just like the fairies described in the tale of the Wife of Bath. Moreover, the parallel with Chaucer's tale might be extended also to the Wife's statement that in present days, the lecherous fairies are replaced by friars:

The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,

Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.
This was the olde opinion, as I rede;
I speke of manye hundred yeres ago.
But now kan no man se none elves mo,
For now the grete charitee and prayeres
of lymytour and othere hooly freres,
That serchen every lond and every strem
[...]
Wommen may go sauflly up and down.
In every bussh or under every tree
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour. (Benson 2008, 116-17; ll. 860-81)

Aristeus' chase for Eurydice is traditionally interpreted as virtue trying to get hold of the sensual part of the soul and tame it. This is not far from the idea of a priest, the representative of the Church often symbolised as a 'shepherd,' who tries to bring the human soul to salvation. This description of Aristeus, together with the poem's dissonant moral explanation, might be an indirect attack on contemporary clergy just like the Chaucerian tale. Some lines later, when Orpheus visits the underworld, Henryson explicitly condemns to hell many popes and bishops; the anti-clerical protest is therefore already present in his work.

[21] The equivalence between Aristeus and human virtue could be applied to Poliziano's character, who laments his impossible love for Eurydice in philosophical and abstract terms, according to the principle of Arcadian literature, where those who enjoyed a simple and rustic life, such as shepherds, could nevertheless be capable of refined and poetic feelings. This cannot be found in Henryson, who in *Robene and Makyne* rejects the possibility that courtly love might be accessible to simple people, such as the shepherd Robene (ll. 9-11; Fox 1962: 176).

[22] Though present only for a few lines, Aristeus represents another example of an incongruity between how a character is initially presented and how he is then revealed to be. If we assume that Henryson wrote both the narrative and the *moralitas*, this could be the poet's way of playing with his readers and affirming his awareness as an author, the only one who has the power to decide the real nature and meaning of his own creations, even against the reader's expectations.

Pluto and Proserpine: the infernal elven gods

[23] In this poem, the lords of Hades bear the names which can be found in the classical tradition. It is interesting to notice that, for the king of the underworld, Henryson uses the name 'Rodomantus' in line 308, and then the more traditional 'Pluto' from line 344. As Fox notes, this is probably a reference to Trivet's commentary, where the lord of Hades is mistakenly identified with Radamantus, who can be found in Virgil's *Aeneid* as the judge of souls (1962: 406). Henryson's switch without explanation from Radamantus to Pluto suggests that he expected his readers to be acquainted with Trivet's commentary.

[24] The sovereigns of Hades are also presented as queen and king of the Fairies; Proserpina is indicated as the 'quene of fary' (l. 125) after Eurydice's death, while Pluto explicitly defines himself as an elf (ll. 359-361) immediately before Orpheus' performance in Hell. This could be the result of the convergence of the many traditions regarding the sovereigns of classical Hades, some of which were probably still

popular in the Middle Ages, and the fairies, which became their equivalent in medieval folklore, as can be seen in Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale*, and could help us understand further the complex pattern of sources behind the poem.

[25] As far as the classical sources are concerned, the figure of Pluto is present in Boethius, even if he is not named. He and his wife are simply defined as the lords of the shadows ('umbrarum dominos' – l. 28; 'arbiter umbrarum' – ll. 40-41; De Boer 1953: 296). Ovid, on the other hand, uses the name *Persephone* (l. 15), the Greek variant of *Proserpine*, to designate the queen of Hell and a generic 'the lord who there rules' ('regna tenentem' l. 15) to indicate Pluto (Page (ed.) 1958: 64). Something similar occurs in Virgil, where Proserpine seems to be the one who imposes the condition of not looking back and Pluto is called 'regem tremendum,' 'the fearful king' (Goold (ed.) 1999: 252, l.469)). However, both names appear in the *Ovide Moralisé*, where a brief account of the rape of Proserpine is also given:

Amours fist faire la rapine
De vous deus et l'assemblément.
Se la renommee ne ment,
Pluto Proserpine ravit
Par amours, si tost qu'il la vit. (De Boer (ed.) 1915-38: 13, ll.78-82)

The legend of the abduction of Proserpine by the King of the otherworld probably reinforced the medieval identification of Pluto with the King of the Fairies, which can be found, as already mentioned, in *The Merchant's Tale*, where Proserpine is also present as Pluto's wife:

And so byfel, that brighte morwe-tyde
That in that gardyn, in the ferther syde,
Pluto, that is Kyng of the Fayerye,
And many a lady in his compaignye,
Folwyng his wyf, the queene Proserpyna,
Which that he ravysed out of [Ethna] (Benson (ed.) 2008: 166, ll. 2225-30)

[26] In the presentation of the sovereigns of Hades, Henryson seems to be recalling above all *Sir Orfeo*. In the Middle English lay, Eurydice is abducted by the King of the Fairies – although we are not told his name – and disappears, as happens in Henryson's poem. Furthermore, in both cases she is appointed a special member of the Fairy court: in the lay, she goes out hunting richly attired with the other elven ladies (ll. 303-322) and, in both poems, she dwells in what seems a privileged condition in the fairy world, since she does not undergo any kind of torment. Henryson apparently places her among the members of the court of Pluto and Proserpine, as Orpheus spots her 'quare Pluto was' (ll. 345-48). Finally, as in *Sir Orfeo* (ll. 447-452), in Henryson the sovereigns of Hades treat Orpheus as if he were a professional minstrel. After his performance they ask him how he shall be rewarded, and appear more moved by the sound of his harp than by his sad story (ll. 371-374).

[27] However, unlike the fairy lords in *Sir Orfeo*, Pluto and Proserpine here keep their word without contesting the hero's request: Pluto's court might be a doleful and dark place, but justice is respected there. They are no real enemies to Orpheus, who has only himself to blame for his failure, for it is he who breaks the promise made to Proserpine to respect her condition.

[28] The condition of not looking back is set by the queen of Hell, who justifies her request by saying that it is necessary because it was she who brought Eurydice there. After being bitten by the snake, Eurydice is said to fall into a deadly swoon and to disappear, since Proserpine had summoned her to the fairy court. It is not clear why Eurydice's case requires Proserpine's intervention. As has already been suggested, it may be because of Eurydice's classical connection with the nymph world, or because of the medieval belief that fairies would kidnap people in their sleep, and keep them in a deathlike state, and Eurydice's deadly swoon could be seen as a kind of sleep (Johnson & Williams (ed.) 1984: 14). However, Proserpine seems to include Eurydice in her court on rightful terms, unlike in *Sir Orfeo*, where the king of the fairies simply abducts the queen when the possibility arises.

[29] In creating his Pluto and Proserpine, Henryson seems to assemble different traditions; he was certainly acquainted with the classical myth, or at least with the Boethian version, but he nevertheless decided to add the fairy element to his poem, either because of the popularity of this association, or to reinforce the parallel with some of his sources for the Orphic legend, or even to create a setting which would recall the typical adventures of romance literature.

[30] In conclusion, Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* prompts many doubts regarding the delineation of the characters and the identification of their possible antecedents and sources. The hero presents evident contradictions; his wife is described in an extremely ambiguous manner; and Aristeus' behaviour creates a comic contrast with the allegorical interpretation. What seems to begin as an epic quest ends with an embarrassing failure; similarly, the *moralitas*, which should provide the readership with the keys that will enable it to understand the allegorical messages contained in the poem, is not fully convincing.

[31] The most evident outcome of these contradictions is an impression of irony and literary satire, which may be more present in this poem than one might expect. Henryson uses a great deal of irony elsewhere: for example, at the beginning of the *Testament of Cresseid*, where he describes himself as an old man incapable of celebrating the rites dedicated to Venus because of his age (ll. 22-42). An ironic approach is also present in the *Moral Fabillis*, in, for example 'The Tail of the Cock, and the Jasp' or 'The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger,' where narration and *moralitas* have a most unexpected correlation.

[32] A comic intent can also be seen in the dialogue between Orpheus and Eurydice in Hell. When he finally finds his bride, Orpheus addresses her with loving but hackneyed questions, asking what happened to her beauty, which she seems to have lost with death. She answers in a concise and dismissive way that he shall learn the reason another day. And Pluto's quickly adding that there is nothing wrong with Eurydice, that she is simply turning into an elf and that she will be well just as soon as she goes back to her land of Thrace – something both readers and author know to be impossible – definitely ridicules Orpheus' rhetorical speech (ll. 352-365). Moreover, the scene focuses on Orpheus' not knowing what has happened to his wife – something actually self-evident – and it is odd that this should happen to a hero who is considered one of the founders of western knowledge.

[33] As for the literary influences behind the work, the genealogy of the poem is certainly controversial and impossible to identify with any certainty. However, it is clear that what Henryson wanted to achieve is a balanced fusion of different traditions. The classic legends about Orpheus find their place here together with their translations and courtly adaptations. Some of these adaptations belonged to literary traditions which had already been over-exploited by his time, as in the case of medieval romance, and could therefore be looked at with irony, or could even appear incompatible with other sources. The figure

of Eurydice is a case in point, since she cannot incarnate both the chivalric object of the hero's love and the Boethian sensual part of the soul without creating a sense of ambiguity. Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* assembles much of what had been produced about the Orphic myth, the otherworld, music and planets; however, Henryson does not passively accept the literary authorities he depends on, but underlines their limits with an ironic approach and by showing their contradictions to a readership which was sufficiently acquainted with these traditions to appreciate his refined pattern of references and his irony.

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Mabel Maxine Riedinger, educator : an interpretation /. Robert W. Baum. Thesis (Ed. D.)--University of Akron, 1983. "Cosmology and Sexuality in Robert Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice". Jennifer Brown. Download with Google. Download with Facebook. or download with email. "Cosmology and Sexuality in Robert Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice". Download. "Cosmology and Sexuality in Robert Henryson's Orpheus and Eurydice". Jennifer Brown. Loading Preview. Orpheus and Eurydice. Chepman & Myllar ed. of 1508, certain emendations drawn from the Asloan transcription and Bannatyne edition have been made by the depositor, Harry D. Watson. Be warned, then, that this version essentially constitutes a new edition, one whose veracity has not yet been investigated.Â Heir begynnys the traitie of orpheus kyng and how he yeid to hewyn and to hel to seik his quene and ane othir ballad in the lattir end. 1: The nobilnes and grete magnificence. 2: Off prince or lord quha list to magnify 3: His grete ancester and linyall descense 4: Suld first extoll and his genology 5: So that his hert he mycht enclyne thare by 6: The more to vertu and to worthynes 7: Herand rehearse his eldirs gentilnes 8: It is contrair the lawis of nature 9: A gentill man to be degenerate 10