

‘Gild brother and fre burgess ...’

Life in medieval Dunfermline as
evidenced in the poetry of Robert
Henryson

And als the caus quhy [fabils] first began
Wes to reпреif the of thi misleuing,
O man, be figure of ane vther thing.

(5-7)

symbolically/allegorically

In lyke maner as throw a bustious eird,
Swa it be laubourit with grit diligence,
Springis the flouris and the corne abreird,
Hailsum and gude to mannis sustenance;
Sa springis thair ane morall sweit sentence
Oute of the subtell dyte of poetry,
To gude purposis, quha culd it weill apply.

a rough piece of ground

in first shoots

meaning

The nuttis schell, thocht it be hard and teuch,
Haldis the kirkell, sueit and delectabill;
Sa lysis thair any doctrine wyse aneuch
And full of frute, vnder ane fenyteit fabill ...

an invented tale

(8-18)

‘The Prologue’ to the *Morall Fabillis*

The hie prudence and wirking meruelous actions, workd
The profound wit of God omnipotent,
Is sa perfyte and sa ingenious,
Excellent far all mannis iugement; excelling
(1622-25)

Nane suld presume be ressoun naturall
To seirche the secreitis off the Trinitie,
Bot trow fermelie and lat all ressoun be. believe firmly
Yit neuerthelss we may haif knowlegeing
Off God almychtie be his creatouris,
That he is gude, fair, wyis, and bening. benign
(1647-1652)

The firmament payntit with sternis cleir shining stars
From eist to west rolland in cirkill round,
And euerilk planet in his proper sphere,
In mouing makand harmonie and sound;
The fyre, the air, the watter, and the ground –
Till vnderstand it is aneuch, I wis,
That God in all his werkis wittie is.
(1657-1663)

‘The Preaching of the Swallow’

Quhair he micht se the twinkling sternis cleir
And all the planetis off the firmament,
Thair cours, and eik thair mouing in thair spheir, path of planet, also
Sum retrograde and sum stationeir,
And off the zodiac in quhat degre
They wer ilk ane ...

(629-634)

But astolab, quadrant, or almanac,
Teichit off nature be instructioun,
The mouing off the hewin this tod can tak, understand
Quhat influence and constellatioun
Wes lyke to fall vpon the earth adoun.
'The Fox and the Wolf' (642-646)

In his passage among the planetis all,
He herd a hevynly melody and sound,
Passing all instrumentis musicall,
Causeid be rolling of the speris round;
Quhilk armony, throu all this mappamound, which harmony is unified
Quhill moving cesse, vnyt perpetuall – perpetually through all the globe
Quhilk of this world, Plato the saul can call.
Orpheus and Eurydice (219-225)

... our saull with sensualitie
So fetterit is in presoun corporall,
We may not cleirly understand nor se
God as he is, nor thingis celestially;
Our mirk and deidlie corps materiale
Blindis the spirituall operatioun,
Lyke as ane man wer bundin in presoun.
(1629-1635)

bound in the fleshly prison

dark and deadly physical body

That mannis saull is lyke ane bakkis ee ... a bat's eye
Hir ene ar waik, the sone scho may not se:
Sa is our saull with fantasie opprest,
To knaw the thingis in nature manifest.
'The Preaching of the Swallow' (1637, 1640-1642)

Sum makand dyke, and sum the pleuch can wynd, drive the plough
Sum sawand seidis fast frome place to place,
The harrowis hoppand in the saweris trace;

(1722-1724)

Thus passit furth quhill Iune, that iolie tyde, until June
And seidis that wer sawin off beforne
Wer growin hie, that hairis mycht thame hyde,
And als the quailze craikand in the corne. corncrake

(1776-1779)

The lynt ryipit, the carll pullit the lyne, ripened, pulled up (not cut)
Rippillit the bollis, and in beitis set, removed the seed-pods, sheaves
It steipit in the burne, and dryit syne, soaked it in water, then dried
And with ane bittill knokkit it and bet, pounded with a mallet
Syne swingillit it weill, and hekillit in the flet; scraped, drawn through flax-comb
His wife it span, and twynit it in to thread,
Off quhilk the fowlar nettis maid in deid.

‘The Preaching of the Swallow’ (1825-1831)

Thair wes ane husband quhilk had ane plewch to steir ... plough
Airlie in the morning to follou furth his feir go with his companion
Vnto the pleuch, bot his gadman and he.
His stottis he straucht with 'Benedicite!' young oxen, put to work

The caller cryit 'How! Haik! vpon hicht. Ho! Trudge on! loudly
'Hald draucht, my dowis,' syne broddit thame full sair: pull on, doves
The oxen wes vnwsit, young, and licht, untrained, frisky
And for fersnes thay couth the fur forfair. and wildness ruined the furrow
The husband than woxe angrie as ane hair,
Syne cryit, and caist his patill and grit stanis ... paddle-shaped tool

'The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman' (2232, 2235-2243)

The pure pepill, this lamb may signifie,
As maill men, merchandis, and all lauboureris, tenant farmers
Of quhome the lyfe is half ane purgatorie,
To win with lautie leuing, as efferis. To make honest living, as is fitting
The wolf betakinnis fals extortioneris
And oppressouris of pure men, as we se,
Be violence, or craft in suteltie.

(2707-2713)

The first ar fals peruerteris of the lawis
Quhilk ... for ane bud the pure man ouerthrawis, bribe
Smoirand the richt, garrand the wrang proceid smothering, allowing
(2715, 2718-19)

His hors, his meir, he man len to the laird,
To drug and draw in cairt and carriage; carrying
His servant or his self may not be spaird
To swing and sweit withoutin meit or wage: labour, without food
Thus how he standis in labour and bondage Thus is how he is situated
That scantlie may he purches by his maill rent
To leue vpon dry breid and watter caill. cabbage broth
'The Wolf and the Lamb' (2749-2755)

Syne winter wan, quhen austerne Eolus,
God off the wynd, with blastis boreal
The grene garment off somer glorious
Hes all to-rent and rein in pecis small ...
(1692-5)

And bewis bene ar bethit bair off blis
Be wickit windis off the winter wair.
'The Preaching of the Swallow' (1701-2)

northern blasts

torn and shredded in small pieces

pleasant boughs dried up, withered

Of quham the eldest duelt in ane borous toun town with charter
(164)

Was gild brother, and made ane fre burges,
Toll-fre als, and fredome had to ga quhair euer scho list
Amang the cheis and meill, in ark and kist. bin and chest
'The Two Mice' (172-175)

Ane cok sum tyme with feddram freshe and gay... feathers
Fleu furth vpon ane dunghill sone be day;
He fand ane iolie iasp, richt precious, jasper
Wes castin furth in sweping of the hous. thrown out

As damsellis wantoun and insolent
That fane wald play and on the streit be sene,
To swoping of the hous thay tak na tent sweeping, no care
Quhat be theirin, swa that the flure be clene;
lowellis ar tint, as oftymis hes bene sene, jewels are lost
Vpon the flure, and swopit furth anone. swept out
'The Cock and the Jasp' (64, 66, 69-76)

Baith cheis and butter vpon skelfis hie,
Flesche and fische aneuch, baith fresche and salt,
And sekkis full off grotis, meill, and malt...

(264-266)

Mutton and beif, stikin in tailyes greit.
Ane lordis fair thus couth thay counterfeit

(270-1)

Ane plait off grottis and ane disch full off meill;
Thraff caikkis als I trow scho spairit nocht
Aboundantlie about hir for to deill,
And mane full fine scho brocht in steid off geill,
And ane quhyte candill owt off ane coffer stall
In steid off spyce, to gust thair mouth withal.

(282-287)

Fra fute to fute he kest hir to and fra,
Quhyles vp, quhyles doun, als tait as ony kid.
Quhyles wald he lat hir rin vnder the stra ...

'The Two Mice'

(330-332)

high shelves

groats

In thick slices

unleavened cakes

best white bread, meat jelly

he tossed her from foot to foot
cheerful

Heir may thow se that riches of array rich clothing
Will cause pure men presumptuous for to be ...
Quhill sum man tit thair heillis ouer thair heid ... until
Bot yit nane wait how lang that reull will ring;
Bot he was wyse that bad his sone consider:
Bewar in welth, for hall benkis ar rycht slider slippery
'The Wolf and the Wether' (2595-6, 2601, 2606-2608)

Medieval dress

