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# **UMI**

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WILLIAM DUNBAR'S POETICS: A RECONSIDERATION  
OF THE CHAUCERIAN IN A SCOTTISH MAKER

by

Andrew S. Tomko

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in  
English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Abstract

WILLIAM DUNBAR'S POETICS: A RECONSIDERATION  
OF THE CHAUCERIAN IN A SCOTTISH MAKER

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Andrew S. Tomko

Adviser: Professor William Coleman

The term "Scottish Chaucerian" currently has a negative connotation. Recent critical studies of Dunbar focus on the poet's "Scottishness" in an attempt to distance him from Chaucer. This dissertation examines Dunbar's poetry from the perspective of English literary history and across the boundaries of such categories as religious, moral, and court poetry that all editors and most critics of the poet have used. Writing in the early sixteenth century, Dunbar reveals a debt to medieval theories of poetry, but his works also incorporate certain features that later become hallmarks of Renaissance poetry.

After an examination of criticism on the poet, the study moves to a discussion of Dunbar's familiarity with concepts developed in such works as Dante's De vulgari eloquentia and Boccaccio's Genealogia deorum gentilium. In particular, Dunbar's "aureate" style arises from the technique of veiling the subject of a poem and making the language more dense and challenging. In Dunbar's comments on clothing ideas and the relationship between speech and

matter, one finds the poet revealing his awareness of the rhetorical tradition in poetry in which he clearly saw himself.

Dunbar's poems almost always impart to the audience a sense of the poet's role in the creative process. The poet presents himself as both "compiler" and "auctor." As either the accurate recorder of events he witnesses or the maker of the poems, the speaker takes responsibility for what is on the page. He also evinces a consideration of audience; throughout his poetry, for example, Dunbar attempts to shape his audience's perception of the speaker.

The study concludes with an examination of Dunbar's use of the ten-syllable line. While most of his poetry is written in octosyllabic lines, Dunbar was quite comfortable in this longer line form and he used it in poems covering a variety of subjects. The model for this stanza was Chaucer, as is evident from the syntactical parallels. William Dunbar should still be thought of as the most "Chaucerian" of early sixteenth century poets, as much for the ways he experiments as for the ways he echoes the master.

For Robert O. Payne

"A man of gret auctoritee . . . ."

### Acknowledgments

This dissertation was begun under the supervision of Robert O. Payne. He gave me the original idea for the study when I was looking for a topic in late medieval literature. My approach to medieval poetics has been shaped by Robert O.'s teaching and writing. I cannot possibly express how much I owe to him; he took me on as his student after his retirement from CUNY and made sure I kept to the schedule we agreed on before my orals. His death in February 1994 came as I was about to make a final push to complete the dissertation; without his guidance and badgering, it has taken me more than a year to finally finish.

I have been extremely fortunate, however, in having William Coleman as advisor during this final year. He graciously agreed to serve as advisor and was equally firm in setting deadlines that seemed impossible, but were instrumental in my being able to complete this work. Prof. Coleman also took a great deal of time going over my prose and organization during a summer when he should have been thinking only of spending the next year on sabbatical in Italy. I would also like to thank my readers Gordon Whatley and Catherine McKenna for taking time from their summers to read the study and make very helpful comments.

Finally, I would not have been able to complete any of this work without the love and support of my wife Diane

and my daughter Emma. While our one-year-old daughter probably will not remember how difficult this past summer was, I will never forget how much Diane did to allow me to finish this work with some semblance of my sanity intact. Thank you Diane for doing more than I deserved.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### "Not Burns -- Dunbar!"

In the early 1920s, in an effort to steer young Scottish poets away from what he called the "quaintness" of eighteenth and nineteenth century Scottish literary production, the Scottish poet and literary critic Hugh MacDiarmid urged his compatriots to read "Not Burns -- Dunbar!"<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately for students of Dunbar, MacDiarmid later rescinded the statement: some fifty years later in 1973, he wrote "I can now wish that in the early twenties I had chosen Henryson rather than Dunbar" (Kindrick, Robert Henryson 184). The switch to Henryson marks a way of thinking that has shaped the reception of Dunbar in the twentieth century. Dunbar, while a poet of extraordinary range, is a troublesome poet to use as a model because he is so difficult to grasp with any kind of coherent critical overview.

Critics select Henryson as a better representative of a Scottish literary heritage because he reveals his debt to classical mythology and thus he seems more akin to the spirit of the Renaissance. This is an attractive attribute for a poet writing in a time regarded as transitional.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Kindrick in Robert Henryson, 184.

Yet Henryson's best known work remains a sequel to Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. Thus, instead of establishing a uniquely Scottish heritage in poetry, MacDiarmid grounds the roots of Scottish literary history in a poet most familiar as a Chaucerian. The irony of this situation seems to have gone unnoticed by MacDiarmid.

MacDiarmid's attempt to claim a Scottish heritage in poetry apart from the history of English poetry is an example of the kind of critical approach that has kept Dunbar from being thoroughly examined and appreciated. Until quite recently, in fact, his poetry has been for the most part overlooked. Book-length studies of the poet are few, and the number of articles devoted to Dunbar remains small. The lack of critical attention may be attributable to Dunbar's location in place and time: he wrote in Scotland, in Middle Scots, a dialect of Middle English even more challenging than the northern dialect of Sir Gawain, and he wrote in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, an era in English literary history that remains little studied. These two reasons have ensured that Dunbar remain relatively obscure. To address the former situation, one must necessarily rely on glossaries that are at times not as thorough as they might be.<sup>2</sup> Middle

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<sup>2</sup> Priscilla Bawcutt best sums up the situation: "there are still far too many lines in Dunbar where editors have provided not glosses but comically divergent guesses . . ." (in Chaucer and Middle English Studies 190).

Scots, however, is not as formidable as it appears at first glance; one soon becomes accustomed to the differences that set the language apart from Middle English. As to the latter situation, it seems curious that so little critical attention has been paid to this transitional period between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The cause could well be that fifteenth century English poets, and Lydgate in particular, are less than worthy heirs of Chaucer. It seems a critical maxim that the immediate successors of Chaucer in England had great difficulty modelling themselves on the master. Lydgate has received much deserved criticism for not understanding a good deal of Chaucer's subtleties, and thus producing poetry that is facile at best, and long-winded and tedious at worst. Hoccleve, Skelton, and Hawes likewise do not display the range of poetic ability that Chaucer had demonstrated. Thus, after Chaucer, the logical leap is made to the early Renaissance when new ideas about poetry come into fruition.

For anthologists of English literature, the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries remain something of a literary wasteland.<sup>3</sup> Medieval literature after 1400, for many, consists of second-rate imitators of

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<sup>3</sup> Fox has called the fifteenth century "the great terra incognita of English literature" (cited by Green in Poets and Princepleasers 4).

Chaucer filling in the time until Wyatt and Surrey.<sup>4</sup> One needs to be mindful of the fact that a good amount of time is being overlooked; some seventy-five years separate Dunbar from Lydgate, for example. It would be foolish to assume that little if any poetic development was occurring over this time. The uses Spenser made of medieval poetry remind us that a continuum exists, and in fact, some of the Renaissance sentiments typically attributed to continental borrowings can be found in late medieval English and Scottish poetry. Paradoxically, some of the characteristics of fifteenth century English poetry that are disdained by critics are qualities of poetry lauded when found in Renaissance poetry. In particular, the aureate style, of which Dunbar is usually deemed the leading practitioner, is often viewed as particularly egregious in the late Middle Ages, but becomes "high style" a century after Dunbar. Yet the most common term for the state of poetry in the late fifteenth century is "decadent."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the reason that this "drab age," to use C. S.

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<sup>4</sup> The Norton Anthology of English Literature, for example, includes Malory and Skelton, the latter of whom is described as "the major poet of the first quarter of the [sixteenth] century" (457). In spite of this, the editors note that his lines "to the modern ear resemble doggerel" and "can keep on rhyming until the resources of the language give out" (457).

<sup>5</sup> Chambers remarks "courtly poetry fell into decadence with the fifteenth-century inheritors of the Chaucerian tradition . . ." (66), and Moore finds that Dunbar's poems "indicate the effect of a decadent literary heritage on a talented poet . . ." (195).

Lewis's phrase,<sup>6</sup> is neglected is that the best English poetry was written not in England but in Scotland. Despite the differences in language and the fact that the two countries were at war for part of this period, late medieval Scottish poets felt connected to English literary history. In this study, therefore, Dunbar, as well as several of his Scottish contemporaries, will be treated as writers of poetry in *English*. Dunbar on several occasions connects himself to English poets before him and makes it clear that he thinks of himself as writing in "oure Inglish."<sup>7</sup> However, as we shall see later, much criticism of Dunbar seeks to locate him in a Scottish setting as far removed from England as possible.

The neglect of late medieval English poetry in general and the isolation of Scottish poetry in particular have affected the critical approaches to the "Scottish Chaucerians."<sup>8</sup> When the poetry is accorded some critical attention, many times the purpose is to demonstrate the flawed nature of what poets such as Dunbar were trying to achieve:

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<sup>6</sup> "Drab" is the title of Book II of Lewis's English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama.

<sup>7</sup> Dunbar "ignores the political boundaries between England and Scotland, and embraces their shared language and poetic traditions" (Bawcutt in Jack 75). Henryson and Douglas express similar sentiments in their poetry.

<sup>8</sup> Henryson is most commonly associated with this label, although Douglas and Dunbar are considered part of the same school of poetry.

We find in Scotland at the end of the fifteenth century a brilliant, optimistic, zealous, unhappy, and premature attempt to produce what England successfully developed later in the next century -- an instrument of expression that would fuse what was most valued and accessible in popular speech with an immense body of reference -- extending terms built up mainly from Latin and Greek. (Shuffleton 143)

Rather than being regarded as a direct precursor to Renaissance poetry, or a continuation of medieval poetic principles, Scots poetry is deemed a failed "premature" stab. Yet in the poetry of William Dunbar especially we find the culmination of medieval rhetorical principles, an expression of what was possible based on earlier theorists and poets such as Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Dante, and Boccaccio, as well as an acknowledgement of what earlier English poets had produced by using this theory. Dunbar is an inheritor of much that was practiced in the Middle Ages. Poetically, he should be recognized as someone who shared many of the same concerns as Chaucer, not someone who sought only to emulate what he felt made Chaucer a successful poet. Dunbar in many ways is a more worthy representative of a line of poetry that includes Chaucer and stretches forward to Wyatt and Surrey. We can observe him grappling with many of the same issues as Chaucer had wrestled with, although at times the resulting poetry is strikingly different.

While criticism from early in this century through the 1960s pegged Dunbar as a disciple of Chaucer, the

focus of such critics as Gregory Smith, John Speirs, and Denton Fox was on how he modelled his poetry on the master and came up short by being overly concerned with language at the expense of content, a charge often levelled at fifteenth century poets. Later, perhaps as a corrective, critics such as Tom Scott and Hugh MacDiarmid focused on Dunbar's "Scottishness," deeming him a product of his times and surroundings. Both views are necessarily limiting. A more encompassing view of the poet has yet to be established, one that locates him in a line that includes Chaucer as well as other, very different poets, such as the Gawain poet and John Gower, in addition to taking into consideration his place as a Scottish writer. Certainly, Dunbar is indebted to Chaucer; as Edmund Reiss (14) and Priscilla Bawcutt (Dunbar 25) have pointed out, much of Dunbar's so-called French influences can be traced through Chaucer. But Dunbar was also able to integrate characteristics of the alliterative revival into his poetry. Some of Dunbar's most un-Chaucerian verse occurs in "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie," which incorporates such lines as

Thy rigbane rattillis, and thy ribbis on raw,  
 Thy hanchis hirklis with hukebanis harth and haw  
(180-81).

*rigbane*: backbone; *rattallis*: rattles; *on raw*: in order;  
*hirklis*: drawn close; *hukebanis*: hucklebones; *harth*:

rough; haw: blue<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, "The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" is written in unrhymed alliterative meter. While these are the most obvious examples, other instances of the influence of northern English medieval literature are apparent in Dunbar's poetry in more subtle forms. When one recalls Chaucer's "rum, ram, ruf" dismissal of alliterative poetry, one is reminded of the separateness of these two major strains of medieval poetry. Surprisingly, then, while this significant characteristic has been mentioned by critics of Dunbar, it has not received the kind of attention it merits. Here, after all, is a poet bringing together the two disparate stylistic inheritances of medieval literature.

Viewing Dunbar alongside his most direct English contemporary, John Skelton, provides an interesting perspective on both poets. Skelton was more clearly interested in the aureate style for its own sake than was Dunbar. Carpenter posits that this may be a result of Skelton's being considered for the laureate, which at the time was an honorary degree in rhetoric (37). Thus, Skelton is interested in showing off his rhetorical virtuosity for a reason. In a stylistic comparison with Dunbar, Skelton does not display the range of poetic forms

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<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted, glosses are taken from Kinsley's edition (379-504).

that Dunbar attempted and excelled in, yet Skelton was after all an English poet. This fact alone explains why he has been more read and studied than Dunbar. Sixteenth and seventeenth century English poets clearly were more familiar with Skelton than with Dunbar; in fact, Dunbar is little mentioned in England until the eighteenth century (Scheps xii).

Dunbar's direct influence on the poets of the sixteenth century is clearly a problematic issue. It is well known that Wyatt, Surrey, and others made use of French sources directly. Many critics of early English Renaissance poetry deny any influence of late medieval authors, except in the case of Spenser. However, a certain poetic sensibility can be traced from the late Middle Ages to the early Renaissance. While the direct influence of Dunbar and other Scots poets is difficult to establish, poetic trends did not simply dry up, to be discovered again in later times. Dunbar's prosody, then, is perhaps not as much a culmination as it is a bridge.

This study, then, considers Dunbar in a somewhat different light from that in which he has been seen before. Recent works have made the case more than adequately that Dunbar is very much a poet worth studying.<sup>10</sup> But much criticism isolates the poet and does not acknowledge

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<sup>10</sup> Priscilla Bawcutt's Dunbar the Makar (1992) is the most recent and best study of the poet to date.

all that went into shaping his poetic skill. In particular, it has become increasingly fashionable to view the poet with as much distance as possible from Chaucer. Perhaps because the best known Scottish poet of the time, Robert Henryson, is known primarily for his sequel to Chaucer's Troilus, the term "Scottish Chaucerian" has developed a rather undignified connotation, which, it must be acknowledged, has served a useful purpose in allowing the late Medieval Scots to have a literary place of their own. Much early criticism of Dunbar and, especially, of Henryson, was stifled by a burdensome comparison that almost unavoidably had the Scots coming up short.

While no analysis is served by a slavish comparison to Chaucer, it is almost impossible to look at poets such as Dunbar and Douglas without noting the greatest influence on them. The extent to which Dunbar and his contemporaries were indebted to Chaucer, though, has been debated among critics for quite some time. Some have been trying to undo the "Scottish Chaucerians" label to the point of branding Dunbar a "Scottish Lydgatian."<sup>11</sup> Tom Scott, whose study of Dunbar still remains one of the few book-length works on the poet, goes to great lengths to diminish the influence Chaucer had on Dunbar.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> P. H. Nichols, "William Dunbar as a Scottish Lydgatian," PMLA 46(1931): 214-24.

<sup>12</sup> Bawcutt argues convincingly that this approach stems from Scottish nationalism (Dunbar 24).

One of the goals of this study is to rehabilitate the term "Scottish Chaucerian." The negative associations of the phrase have been exaggerated by those critics seeking to establish Dunbar's originality and his place in the lineage of Scottish literature. A reconsideration of the uses Dunbar made of Chaucer's work points out that Dunbar was a perceptive reader of Chaucer and understood many of the poetic concepts that shaped the earlier poet's work. It is also crucial to view Dunbar in the context of the history of poetry in English, something most of his critics seem reluctant to do.

Disassociating Dunbar from Chaucer removes the Scots from the continuum of poetry in English in which they reside and is perhaps one reason why the Scots are not generally included in the lineage of poetry in English. Scottish poetry is of course indebted to the poetry that came before it, and in some instances, quite a bit is owed to Chaucer. Nevertheless, A. C. Spearing has been one of the few critics to include the fifteenth century Scots in a line that stretches from Chaucer to Wyatt, Surrey and Spenser.<sup>13</sup>

Dunbar is certainly indebted to Chaucer in some fundamental ways, as are all medieval poets following Chaucer. One must agree with Bawcutt's observation that when read-

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<sup>13</sup> See particularly Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry.

ing Dunbar "the poet of whom one is most conscious is Chaucer" (Dunbar 24). Still one must be careful to define what is meant by "Chaucerian"; in Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry Spearing sums up the characteristics of late medieval poetry that represent the "Chaucerian style" of the fifteenth century, primarily evidenced by Lydgate:

the predominance of Latinate diction; the use of complex syntactical structures, often accompanied by an artificial word order, on the model of Latin poetry; and the substitution of figurative for literal and straightforward modes of expression. (72)

More appropriately, this description represents the "Chaucerian tradition" that was invented by fifteenth century writers; one finds little latinate diction in Chaucer, for example. One could very easily apply this description to much of William Dunbar's poetry, however. Yet an identification with the "Chaucerian tradition" does not facilitate an appreciation of the ways in which Dunbar truly echoes Chaucer the poet. To get a better sense of this it is necessary to look closely at Dunbar's "poetics," including his metrical art, a task made difficult because Dunbar has left us no treatise, or even a work that comments explicitly on writing as do Chaucer's Prologue to The Legend of Good Women and House of Fame. Dunbar's use of Chaucer is more interesting and subtle than most early critics would acknowledge. Even recent commentators (Kinsley, Bawcutt) have noted similar verse forms or phrases in the two poets and have confined this informa-

tion to explanatory notes, perhaps in order to deemphasize the connection to Chaucer. Before we banish the term "Scottish Chaucerian,"<sup>14</sup> some of the more subtle implications of that phrase should be explicated.

A review of the criticism of the late medieval period in Scotland reveals a good amount of room for work to be done. Dunbar in particular seems to be a poet mentioned by many, but closely investigated by few. Walter Scheps has cataloged the criticism of Middle Scots poets and points out that "[d]espite his reputation, Dunbar's canon is still in a state of flux" (1986 xiii). Book length studies of the poet are few. Rachel Taylor's Dunbar: The Poet and his Period (1931) remains a standard reference. Works by MacDiarmid and Scott in the 1960s are perhaps the most comprehensive studies, with the most recent book-length works being those of Reiss in 1979, Ross in 1981, and Bawcutt in 1992. A standard modern edition of the poems has yet to be agreed on; Mackenzie's 1932 edition, until very recently, was cited with as much frequency as Kinsley's 1979 edition.<sup>15</sup> The standard edition for scholarship has been John Small's edition for the Scottish

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<sup>14</sup> Bawcutt remarks that the term is currently out of fashion: "Few would now apply to Dunbar the outmoded phrase 'Scottish Chaucerian'" (Dunbar 24).

<sup>15</sup> This situation will most likely be remedied with the publication of Priscilla Bawcutt's edition of the poems late in 1995 or early 1996. Bawcutt notes the weaknesses of Kinsley's edition in "The Text and Interpretation of Dunbar," Medium Aevum 50(1981): 88-100.

Text Society (1883-93). (For this study, I will generally be relying on Kinsley's edition, but will take some readings from Small.<sup>16</sup>) The lack of a reliable modern edition of the poems reveals the generally low level of interest in the poet.

Two main problems plague editions of Dunbar's poems. The actual number of poems attributable to Dunbar remains questionable, and ranges from Small's ninety, with eleven "poems attributed to Dunbar," Mackenzie's eighty-four, with nine "attributions," to Kinsley's total of eighty-three (Bawcutt's edition promises to contain fewer still). The other issue is that of a reliable glossary. Small's edition still contains the most extensive glossary, while Kinsley's is perhaps more reasonable. Dunbar's reliance on colloquial terms continues to frustrate his editors, and glosses of Dunbar have a tendency to be euphemistic with some of the harsher language.<sup>17</sup> The Scottish National Dictionary and the Dictionary of the Older Scots Tongue as well as the ongoing Middle English Dictionary must be consulted when making assertions about Dunbar's language.

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<sup>16</sup> Priscilla Bawcutt, in Dunbar the Makar, relies almost exclusively on Kinsley's text, as most recent critics of the poet have begun to do. This dissertation will follow Bawcutt's method of referring to Kinsley's numbers, e.g., K 6.

<sup>17</sup> In one particular example, the word "leiche" is glossed by Kinsley as "physician," without even a remark about the obvious connotation of calling a doctor a leech. Dunbar elsewhere refers to "leichis" as bloodsucking animals ("The Flyting" line 45).

Dunbar's tone in each poem must also be evaluated to determine what connotations may be implied by his word choice.

A bibliographical search invariably results in discovering few articles, full length published works, theses, or dissertations devoted to Dunbar. One can divide the criticism roughly in half. Book length works and chapters on Dunbar in longer studies tend to place the poet in a historical perspective focusing on the history of Scotland, rather than the history of English poetry. Thus, Dunbar's place in the court of James IV is delineated, leading to much discussion of how court life shaped many of the poems. Tom Scott's Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems and Ian Simpson Ross's William Dunbar are best representative of this school. Several works, such as J. W. Baxter's William Dunbar: A Biographical Study, attempt to provide evidence from Dunbar's personal background for some of his poetic achievements, a very speculative endeavor at best. Shorter articles, on the other hand, focusing on specific poems, typically discuss the occasion that inspired them (as, for example, Shuffleton does for "The Goldyn Targe") or focus on one characteristic of Dunbar's imagery (see, for example, Ebin, Fox, Hyde, Lyall).

For ease of criticism, Mackenzie's groupings from his 1932 edition tend to be employed to divide the poems into

various categories, i.e., love poems, moralizing poems, satirical poems, and court poems. For example, Mackenzie's "Moralisings," Kinsley's "Moralities," Reiss's "The Christian Moralist," and Bawcutt's "Moralitee and Hoolynesse" cover essentially the same poems. Almost without exception critics have organized their discussions of the poet into these thematic sections. Priscilla Bawcutt follows this in her recent Dunbar the Makar, which finds a focus in the petitionary poems. While dividing up Dunbar's corpus of poems allows critical discussion to fall neatly into chapters, it does little to shed light on any kind of unity in Dunbar's work, instead making the reader dizzy with the extremes of the poet's subject matter. Instead of regarding Dunbar's variety as evidence of his virtuosity, many view it as problematic. In the words of one critic, "he disturbs us by a startling indifference to theme in poetry . . ." (Morgan 156). Thus, the critical view of the poet is often frustrated by a perceived lack of coherence in his work. This criticism no doubt flows out of the attempts to segregate Dunbar's work into fixed categories. At the very least, critics invariably divide Dunbar's poetry into the "aureate" and the "eldritch," that is, the highly ornate, latinate style and the colloquial, or grotesque style, epitomized by the

"flyting."<sup>18</sup> This dichotomy frequently results in a focus on extremes, with each end seen pejoratively. Missing from all this is a comprehensive attempt to see what exactly Dunbar was trying to achieve and what he in fact did accomplish.

Perhaps the most insightful piece of criticism on Dunbar's poetry comes from Isabel Hyde ("Primary Sources and Associations of Dunbar's Aureate Imagery" Modern Language Review 51[1956]). In a brief eleven pages, Hyde discusses the aureate style and the disdain that critics have had for it, leading to their overemphasis on the vernacular poetry. Hyde's conclusion is "that the vernacular poems represent the peak of Dunbar's achievement and show his genius at work . . ." (482). Hyde begins to probe Dunbar's use of aureate, as well as biblical and typological imagery in his vernacular poetry. This is one of the few attempts to take in the entire corpus of Dunbar's poetry and make connections and associations toward an overall understanding of his creative style. Yet Hyde's study is only a beginning, and one that has not yet been followed up.

Another profitable approach is taken by Lois Ebin in "The Theme of Poetry in Dunbar's 'Goldyn Targe,'" (Chaucer Review 7[1972]). Ebin finds the subject of Dunbar's most

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, John Leyerle's "The Two Voices of William Dunbar."

famous poem to be poetry itself. She claims that Dunbar stakes out some of his plans for his own poetry in this poem and others. In positing this, she focuses on the manner in which the allegory is presented in the poem; Ebin finds Dunbar describing both a natural and a poetic landscape, the first illuminated by the sun, the second by the poet (157). Her thesis is that Dunbar's poetic method is more lamp than mirror, and she posits that Dunbar reveals the effect that he believes his words have on the matter they describe. Yet a study of the rest of Dunbar's poetry is still needed to test Ebin's hypothesis. One problem of her study is that her argument eventually becomes mired in a focus on Dunbar's "enamelling," his concern with a verbal surface at the expense of theme or carefully chosen subject matter. With its focus on "surface adornment" (Fox 333), this metaphor has done a great disservice to Dunbar. Bawcutt cites Denton Fox's labeling of what Dunbar felt made good poetry; the term most frequently used by critics is "enamelled." Fox also sees brightness as important (Dunbar 23). Bawcutt herself backs away somewhat from the metaphor, perhaps because it tends to make Dunbar seem like an illustrator.

More recent articles take on specific problems and images in Dunbar's poetry, for example, MacDonald's "William Dunbar, Medieval Cosmography, and the Alleged First Reference to the New World" (1987) describes an instance

in one poem that may or may not be a reference to the discovery of the Americas. Tang's "Dunbar's 'Thistle and the Rois': A Note on the Influence of Lydgate's 'Reson and Sensuallyte'" (1987) examines a possible source for one of Dunbar's best known poems, although it is perhaps more likely that both Dunbar and Lydgate were influenced by older poetic traditions. Swenson's "Mary as Wall in Dunbar's 'Ane Ballat of Our Lady'" (1987) examines one image of the Virgin in one of Dunbar's poems, and Ridley's "The Treatment of Animals in Henryson and Dunbar" (1990) focuses on representations of animals and their use and abuse in these two poets. These studies are certainly worthwhile, but larger issues in Dunbar's poetry remain unstudied.

Priscilla Bawcutt's Dunbar the Makar (1992) is surely the most comprehensive treatment of the poet yet offered. One of the most useful bits of information in it comes in the introduction where Bawcutt succinctly sums up the uncertain status of authorship of a good deal of Dunbar's poetry (12).<sup>19</sup> Three categories are identified, the first being the most reliably attributed to Dunbar. This

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<sup>19</sup> This situation seems odd for Dunbar, whose poems are found in only three manuscripts and one printed edition from the sixteenth century. Most of the poems are found in the Bannatyne MS. (c. 1568, containing sixty poems credited to Dunbar) and Maitland Folio (c. 1570-86, containing sixty-one poems) (Reiss 173). The confusion arises from the inconsistent, contradictory, or lacking attributions.

group consists of nine poems.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately for critics of the poet, this category includes the best known of Dunbar's poems, and covers a variety of poetic styles. Bawcutt's second category consists of poems somewhat less reliably attributed to Dunbar, but nonetheless claimed with some degree of certainty. This group is made up largely of the petitionary poems and forms the body of work at the core of Bawcutt's analysis. The third category includes questionable attributions, based on a single manuscript, stylistic inference, or in some cases, a judgment call in the face of conflicting manuscript information. Seventeen poems fall into this grouping.

Anyone wishing to study Dunbar is obligated to acknowledge this problem of uncertain attribution. Nine poems confidently attributed to the poet out of Kinsley's eighty-three in the best known edition should give the reader pause. It is true, however, that much Dunbar scholarship rests on analysis of these nine poems. Yet to do justice to the poet, or to attempt to strengthen the case for Dunbar's place in history, we find ourselves perhaps relying too heavily on uncertain attributions by concentrating on the middle group of poems; Bawcutt,

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<sup>20</sup> The poems following Bawcutt (Dunbar 12) are "Ane Ballat of Our Lady," "The Tabill of Confessioun," "The Goldyn Targe," "The Flyting," "The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," "I that in heill wes," "The Ballade of Bernard Stewart," "Schir lat it never in toun be tald," and "The Dregy of Dunbar." Their respective numbers in Kinsley's edition are 2, 6, 10, 14, 22, 23, 35, 43, and 62.

however, makes no apologies for focusing on the petitionary poems. Nevertheless, we might abstain from too heavy a reliance on the most uncertain group of poems. This study attempts to do this, although several of the poems discussed do come from this group. In two cases, there are manuscript attributions to Dunbar.<sup>21</sup> But the fact of Dunbar's poetic breadth is still intact; as Bawcutt points out, the most reliably attributed of Dunbar's poems cover a variety of styles and subject matter.

For Bawcutt, the petitionary poems become the center of Dunbar's poetry. She goes as far as to state of them "Here, if anywhere, is the core of Dunbar's poetry and the 'unifying consciousness' that some critics would deny him" (115). In contrast, Scott (1966) finds the "satiric" poems to be the center of Dunbar's work (333). Bawcutt's statement reveals that she is still influenced by the school of thought that is troubled by the variety in Dunbar's poetry. Bawcutt makes a valid point about this grouping of poems, but confines much of her analysis to this one area of the poet's work. Her discussion of the petitionary poems stresses Dunbar's movement from an individual situation to a larger observation of society. In addition, she finds them revealing for what they tell

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<sup>21</sup> K 38 is attributed to Dunbar in the Bannatyne MS and K 57 in the Maitland Folio (Bawcutt, Dunbar 13).

us about Dunbar's poetic method. Thus, what unifies them is not only that they share a particular subject matter, but that they shed light on the poetic process. The qualities that Bawcutt finds in the petitionary poems are present in other of Dunbar's poems.<sup>22</sup> Again this reveals a problem with separating Dunbar's works into thematic groups. In this case Bawcutt has made a valid point, but the analysis must still be applied to the whole of Dunbar's poetry.

Much work remains to be done with Dunbar's poetry. This survey of the criticism reveals that critics are not asking particularly insightful questions of Dunbar's work.<sup>23</sup> Criticism of Dunbar at times resembles criticism of the lyric in medieval poetry, which is often perceived as falling into two distinct categories, religious and secular. This split has been convenient for study, but it creates an artificial segregation that certainly was not intended by many of the poets or acknowledged by the audiences. A similar situation exists with Dunbar. We come upon a seemingly schizophrenic poet, able to write the most elevated, aureate poetry alongside the most base flytings. In reality, many of Dunbar's poems defy easy

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Lois Ebin's "The Theme of Poetry in Dunbar's 'Golden Targe.'"

<sup>23</sup> In Reiss's 1979 annotated bibliography, for example, many sources are described with the term "general appreciation" (174-76).

categorization. (This does not seem to be a problem for critics of Renaissance poetry; in particular, discussions of Donne's sonnets do not seem to be burdened by such attitudes.) The difficulty in compartmentalizing Dunbar's work should be seen as one of its strongest attributes; it is a measure of his poetic skill that he incorporates various genres and styles with ease. Because almost all of his poems are short, most about twenty to thirty lines long, several critics have viewed Dunbar as essentially a lyric poet. If one considers Dunbar to be a poet writing in the lyric tradition, as, for example, Arthur Moore does, then his use of the conventions of this form might be considered, as well as his experimentation with those conventions. While Moore finds only five or six of Dunbar's poems to be noteworthy example of lyric poetry, he does make a succinct case for the place of the poet: "Dunbar anticipates the Renaissance, then, not as a seer, but as a poet, the wholly self-conscious artist risen after three centuries of experimentation with lyric form and style" (215). Consideration of the lyric form will be a part of this analysis, but other influences on Dunbar's artistry will be examined more fully. Viewing Dunbar's prosody in all the poems and seeking similarities and connections that will unify his style of writing into a more coherent whole than it has been seen as before are a primary goals of this study.

Few critics have examined Dunbar's poetry across the thematic boundaries established by the poet's editors. Priscilla Bawcutt is one of the few critics to attempt this, noting both the "extreme colloquialism" and elaborate garden imagery in the "Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" (Dunbar 190). Edmund Reiss also notes that "To look at Dunbar's corpus of poems in terms of dichotomies -- for instance, moralizings opposed to petitions, bawdy tales opposed to religious poems -- is . . . inadequate" (18). However, while both of these critics comment that Dunbar defies categorization and cite poems that embody several different styles or themes early in their respective works, they then proceed to organize their discussions into chapters based on thematic groupings.

It is the aim of this study, then, to flesh out a sense of Dunbar's poetics from an examination of his poetry. Doing this will entail examining the poems across the boundaries of genre that Dunbar's critics have followed almost slavishly. A comprehensive analysis of Dunbar's entire corpus of poems, as Scott, Reiss, and Bawcutt provide, will not be attempted; rather, individual poems that shed light on Dunbar's technique will be examined regardless of their association with a particular theme. Likewise, this undertaking will not spend a great deal of time on the better known of Dunbar's poems. Three in particular -- "The Goldyn Targe," "The Thrissill and

the Rois," and "The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" -- have received more critical commentary than any other of Dunbar's works. Some of the critical responses to these three poems include the best work written on the poet's oeuvre. In the case of these poems, this study will offer no major new readings, except perhaps some minor additional analysis.

This dissertation addresses issues such as poetics, style, and the subjects that poets consider appropriate for poetry. Some of these concepts are subjective, but in making a case for Dunbar's artistry (another subjective term), these critical considerations inevitably arise. In fact, this study will demonstrate that these concepts were important to Dunbar and that he was influenced by treatises on these poetics and stylistics. In much of the analysis, reference will be made to some of the works of medieval rhetoric that almost certainly were read by Dunbar and other poets of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Since Dunbar leaves us no treatise on poetics and no firm evidence about his intellectual background, we must infer his reading from his poetry. In some cases this is made easy by passages that echo earlier works. At times, however, the influence is more oblique, and to support certain assertions, one must appeal to circumstantial evidence. It will become clear that Dunbar reveals in his poetry the awareness of certain methods of composi-

tion that were known and probably discussed at the time he wrote. Earlier critics have done this kind of work on Chaucer, demonstrating that poet's rhetorical underpinnings through careful examination of passages that reveal his thorough familiarity with medieval rhetorical doctrine. Dunbar, too, reveals an awareness of rhetorical doctrine, but incorporates elements of medieval poetry that Chaucer did not.

The extent to which late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Scottish poets made use of medieval rhetorical principles in their poetry is often overlooked. Scottish universities in the fifteenth century stressed the trivium and quadrivium more than did English universities of the same period, and so we may consider Dunbar's education at St. Andrews to have been more firmly rooted in the subjects that earlier English poets would have learned.<sup>24</sup> Dunbar's poetry contains numerous references to the art of poetry itself, a trait that may be described as "Chaucerian." Dunbar, however, does not draw attention to this quality of the poetry in the same way that Chaucer had done; we can, however, see the two poets wrestling with many of the same issues in their respective poetry.

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<sup>24</sup> Hastings has remarked that the curriculum at St. Andrews was "medieval in character" through the Reformation (310), and in Scottish universities "the old medieval trivium and quadrivium . . . have continued, almost down to the present moment [1895] to supply the university curriculum" (321).

But the two were also quite different poets, separated not only by time but by social situation. Certainly, the verse Dunbar chose to write, primarily short poems in four-stress lines, differs from the bulk of Chaucer's work.

Perhaps the most significant difference between these two poets is that Dunbar has seen much of medieval poetic theory put into practice by Chaucer and others. Additionally, Dunbar seems to have incorporated other influences more clearly into his poetry. In addition to the strong elements of the alliterative revival noted above, Lydgate and Gower were also influential. Dunbar is steeped in the theory of the Middle Ages and influenced by the poets that put that theory into practice. He has been labeled a "self-conscious" poet, and some of the implications of this term need to be considered more fully. The fact that he was intimately involved in the court in the role of poet caused his poetry to have a different rhetorical aim from Chaucer's. Dunbar is the inheritor of medieval approaches to poetry, but he is also an innovator, and this brings an important dimension to his craft.

The power of words and the effect on the audience were very much in Dunbar's mind. In one address to King James IV, for example, Dunbar threatens that "With my pen I man me wreik," and that if not given recompense he will "Lat the venim ische all out" (K 44). This sense of the

power behind the words is striking in Dunbar's poetry, but absent, for the most part, in Chaucer's. Admittedly, Dunbar's audience, consisting mainly of a small court circle, was more limited than Chaucer's. Chaucer seems to have been more aware of his place in history than Dunbar, who reveals an understanding of the power his words will have at court in the present quite clearly. In fact, Dunbar seems to have placed more importance on his role as speaker in the speaker - message - audience schema than Chaucer did. Chaucer reveals more of an awareness of the audience's power to shape the meaning of the poetry than Dunbar does.

Gregory Kratzman comments on the Scottish sense of the speaker in Anglo - Scottish Literary Relations 1430-1550, writing about the fifteenth century Scots in a Chaucerian tradition: "Poetry is felt to be a spoken as well as a written art, and for this reason the presence of the speaker is evoked with great immediacy" (238). Kratzman finds the Scots more discriminating in their assessment of Chaucer than Lydgate, and the resulting poetry certainly supports his argument. He continues: "The work of Lydgate's followers shows a widening of the gulf between literary and spoken language . . ." (246). Indeed, he concludes, "the strength of the sense of 'voice' in Scots poetry would be the mark of a continuity which is just as remarkable as the pervasive anonymity of contempo-

rary English poetry" (249).

This notion of a separation between the spoken and the "literary" language is at the heart of an understanding of Dunbar. It is also wise to consider the lasting effects of what had occurred in the century before he wrote. The late fourteenth century had produced a great many changes. In Chaucer we find expressions of a new uneasiness with language, a split between sign and signifier, in the modern parlance, which Chaucer uses to dramatic and comic effect throughout his work. Langland as well recognizes this perspective, as does Gower to a somewhat lesser extent.

When we look at poetry written in the century following Chaucer, however, we are tempted to argue that the fourteenth century transformation was lost on the successors of Chaucer and Langland. Lydgate and Skelton spring immediately to mind as being less "theoretical" in their approaches to making poetry. We must turn north to Scotland to find poetry being written guided by a poetics similar to Chaucer's. In Dunbar one sees a poet at times confident in the power his words will have, while at other times aware that there are limitations to his craft.

Spearing captures this characteristic of Dunbar well:

[W]e gain little sense of an individual personality [in Dunbar's poems], but this does not mean, as is often alleged, that Dunbar's poetry is superficial or unfeeling. The feeling is there, but it is detached from the personality; neither medieval nor Renaissance poets generally

aimed at self-expression, and Hoccleve is a remarkable exception to this rule. The feeling is attached rather to ideals, and it often seems to be provoked by a sense of the gap between permanent ideals and shifting realities. One of the ideals which act as a focus of feeling in Dunbar's poetry is that of poetry itself; and this belongs to the most Renaissance side of his work. (Medieval to Renaissance 200-01)

An important point must be made regarding how Dunbar saw himself as a poet. Priscilla Bawcutt titled her recent study Dunbar the Makar with good reason. In the Middle Ages, a distinction was held between the terms "maker" and "poet." Dunbar clearly saw himself as the former, as had Chaucer.

Chaucer is observing a distinction here [in the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women] between "makynge" and "poesy," a distinction that was generally observed among writers of the late Middle Ages . . . . "makynge" was perceived primarily as craftsmanship intended for entertainment and refreshment, and "poesy" as inspired morality and learning . . . . in self-designations throughout his works [Chaucer] refers to himself as a "makere," never a "poete" . . . .  
(Jordan 109)

Bawcutt comments that the term "maker" was probably brought into Scottish currency by Dunbar, as few other examples of its usage can be found (Dunbar 18). She continues: "Dunbar could not fail to be aware of this exalted conception of the poet but there is little sign that he had such large-scale ambitions for himself" (Dunbar 19). Although the term "maker" seems to suggest that Dunbar saw himself as a craftsman rather than an artist, Chaucer used the very same term. The term poet

seems to have been held in reserve for classical authors, so "maker" may not be as pedestrian a term as Bawcutt implies. Certainly if Chaucer had seen himself as a maker, Dunbar could not possibly claim a higher rank for himself.

Perhaps because of the label "maker," Dunbar has been seen as not interested in theoretical issues in the writing of poetry. Throughout his work, however, the poet reveals that he has knowledge of much rhetorical doctrine. For example, a recurring metaphor that captures Dunbar's attitude toward making is that of clothing or veiling. It is one of the most prevalent images in Dunbar's poetry. The clothing metaphor has a rich background in rhetorical theory, and this is important for a poet who has not really been viewed as making much use of rhetorical tradition.

Chapter Two of this dissertation will present some of the rhetorical background to Dunbar's poetry. His familiarity with the ideas developed in certain rhetorical treatises well known throughout the Middle Ages will become evident. By establishing this connection, the study will illuminate a characteristic of Dunbar's work that is essential for an appreciation of his poetry. The ideas in certain works, particularly Dante's De vulgari eloquentia and Boccaccio's Genealogia deorum gentilium, provide clues to how Dunbar approached the craft of "mak-

ing."

An analysis of a poet's rhetorical style, however, must do more than simply catalog the figures which the poet employs. This strategy, while perhaps useful on a limited stylistic level, must always become reductive. Listing Dunbar's use of particular rhetorical figures would only create the impression that the poet was working from a catalog and made poems in some mechanical fashion. Greater benefit comes from placing a poet in the rhetorical tradition. Furthermore, as one critic has recently remarked, "The challenge is less to show that a relation exists between a given poet's works and the rhetorical tradition than to show how an awareness of such a relation changes our understanding of those works."<sup>25</sup>

It seems likely that Dunbar had familiarity with some basic medieval rhetorical texts. If he did not encounter the texts themselves, then he certainly was aware of the ideas contained in them. The concepts in these works shape Dunbar's approach to creating poetry. One must be wary of applying a reductive view of rhetoric to poets who express familiarity with rhetorical principles, however. The limitations of such an analysis should be apparent, as

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Camargo, *Speculum* 70 (1995): 163. Camargo makes this statement in a review of Kindrick's Henryson and the Medieval Arts of Rhetoric. The review points out weaknesses of studies that draw upon the *ars dictaminis*, *ars poetriae*, and *ars praedicandi* strictly when discussing literary applications of medieval rhetoric.

Camargo has remarked. This analysis will be concerned with what Robert Jordan labels "macro-rhetoric," that is, "the broad compositional sense of rhetoric, . . . the ways in which the poet chooses, shapes, and fits together his larger elements of narrative material," as opposed to a "micro-rhetoric" consisting of "ornaments and colors of style" (Chaucer's Poetics 55). Dunbar is a sophisticated poet whose essence, if a coherent one can ever be found, lies in a somewhat abstract consideration of poetics.

The rhetorical background serves as a basis for approaching Dunbar's concept of "enameled" poetry. Springing from the idea that a poet "veils" his subject in a garment of words, Dunbar's practice of "appareling" his work has been viewed as evidence of the poet's concern with style over substance. However, throughout his poetry, Dunbar evinces a concern that the outer appearance match the inner substance of the work. At the heart of Dunbar's poetics is a connection between the subject being discussed and the manner in which it is presented.

Chapter Three centers on a discussion of the speaker in Dunbar's poems. Dunbar's narrator on numerous occasions comments on the process of creation. In several of his poems one encounters what Dunbar thought of as fitting subject matter for poetry, but more important, one gets a glimpse of his creative process. This chapter will examine some of the rhetorical strategies used by Dunbar,

providing evidence that the poet was well versed in medieval rhetorical theory on invention. The central argument of the chapter is that Dunbar's speakers provide us with clues to what the poet felt was fitting material for poetry. In addition, Dunbar's sense of the place of the speaker in the poetic process may be seen in the personas he creates.

Dunbar's sense of reception is another quality of his poetry that is little investigated by critics, but one that sheds light on how he saw himself as a poet. Dunbar is quite concerned with what will happen to his poetry in the hands of an audience. (Exactly who Dunbar thought of as his audience will be examined in detail in Chapter Four as well.) Here Dunbar comments on the power of language and the effect he is able to have as a maker. In this feature of the poetic process, some important differences between Dunbar and Chaucer become apparent. In the area of faith in an audience's ability to make sense of the poetry, for example, the two poets are very far apart. Chaucer seems almost convinced that his audience will misread him, while Dunbar is at least hopeful that his intent will come through. Lydgate, on the other hand, is not troubled and has faith in the power of the rhetoric.

Dunbar's faith in his audience's ability to understand him allows the poet to use both elevated and colloquial diction in his poetry. While his range of vocabu-

lary gives modern readers some difficulty, it seems obvious that the poet's contemporary audience was not troubled by his use of a variety of modes of expression, at times in the same poem. The poet's virtuosity reminds us that he trusted his audience to appreciate his experimentation with poetic language. The chapter will also examine Dunbar's direct addresses to King James IV and the tone he adopts in poems that are ostensibly petitions, but that reveal much about how the poet saw himself as court poet.

Chapter Five, the last section of the study, discusses poems based on their sharing a particular verse form. The chapter deals with Dunbar's use of the decasyllabic line as used in both rhyme royal and the eight-line "Monk's Tale" stanzas. Critics have generally neglected Dunbar's use of ten syllable lines, no doubt because the bulk of his verse is in short lines. However, Dunbar skillfully handles the decasyllabic line and shapes these two stanzaic forms in various ways, producing a wide range of effects. The two stanzas are used in poems of varying subject matter, proving that he did not consider one particular form suitable for only one subject or theme. In these poems, Dunbar flexes his poetic skill and produces some of his most interesting verse. Here one finds the clearest evidence of a Chaucerian influence as these stanzas were almost certainly inherited from that poet.

As much as possible throughout this study, poems will

not be grouped according to subject matter. This tendency has been detrimental to an overall appreciation of the poet's achievement. It is the aim of this work to portray Dunbar as a poet concerned with poetic theory, an approach that has not been used by his critics, who still find him uninterested in theoretical issues in poetry. Throughout his work, however, we will find numerous occasions where Dunbar reveals his concerns over the creation, reception, and arrangement of his poetry. He also shares attitudes toward his work that both look back to the Middle Ages and forward to the Renaissance. Dunbar writes at an interesting transitional time in the history of English literature. In him one finds a poet who in many ways bridges the gap that only seems to exist between medieval and Renaissance English poetry.

## Chapter Two

## Enamel and Apparel:

## Dunbar and the Craft of Poetry

"This ile before was bare and desolate  
 Off rethorike, or lusty fresch endyte"  
 ("The Goldyn Targe" 269-70)

Dunbar clearly was influenced by the rhetorical treatises he encountered in his university training. Some of the concepts in these works make their way into his poetry in obvious and subtle ways. Specifically, Dunbar's sense of the "enamel" that his words place over the subject being described derives from medieval and classical conceptions of language as a veil. Dunbar, however, goes to great lengths to remind his audience that the verbal clothing he uses is appropriate to the inner meaning of the poems. The sense that language must be appropriate to the material being described shapes Dunbar's approach to composing poetry.

Throughout his work, Dunbar gives evidence that he is a poet thinking rhetorically. This observation should be self-evident; however, few critics of the poet give the rhetorical aspect of Dunbar's poetry the attention it merits. Scott, Reiss, and Bawcutt, for example, make little or no mention of Dunbar's use of rhetorical strategies in his poetry. Scott does acknowledge a possible influence of the French *grands rhetoriciens*, but finds

that this influence moved Dunbar's poetry "in the direction of artificiality . . . unhealthy 'smoothness' and sweetness, and so it weakened language and expression" (47).

Several critics make passing reference to rhetoric in Dunbar's work. Bawcutt, for example, comments perceptively on the ending of "The Goldyn Targe," from which the two lines above were taken: "Dunbar distinguishes a poem's mater, or subject, from its decorative expression, and implies a near-equation between poetry and rhetoric" (Dunbar 22). However, she limits her comments to "The Goldyn Targe" only and goes on to state "there seems a risk of exaggerating the extent to which he put [poetic ideas] into practice" (24). Two concepts are revealed in Bawcutt's sentence, the first of which, a distinction between the poet's *verba* and his *res*, will be discussed later. The second, the "near-equation between poetry and rhetoric" in Dunbar's poem, is an essential aspect of Dunbar's oeuvre. Throughout his work, the poet reminds us that he is cognizant of the rhetorical nature of poetry and displays an awareness and firm command of medieval rhetorical theory.

In this sense Dunbar best represents what is "Chaucerian" in poetry in English, and his poems share some of the same rhetorical aims as many of Chaucer's works. Robert O. Payne sums up the qualities of Troilus and

Criseyde that make it "rhetorical":

consciousness of a situation in which a speaker confronts audience, awareness of an element of pretense as necessary to communication in the situation, agreement to tolerate specified artifices to keep the pretense working, identification of similarities and differences in speaker's and audience's reactions to a subject, the search for a larger ground of agreement between them (i.e. persuasion) . . . . (Key 231)

As we shall see, particularly in the petitions to King James, these qualities describe Dunbar's style perfectly. Dunbar, more so than his contemporaries in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, exemplifies a poetics based firmly on medieval rhetorical theory.<sup>1</sup> Dunbar has been labeled a "transitional" poet writing between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; one cannot deny the difference in poetic sensibility between him and such later poets as Wyatt and Surrey. While Dunbar's poetics are perhaps closer to those of such earlier poets as Chaucer and Gower, one must acknowledge the important differences in style and tone that Dunbar exhibits. This aspect of Dunbar's work has been touched upon by his critics, but it is the central goal of this analysis to support it by an examination of the places in his work where his attitude toward the poetry is revealed. Dunbar clearly stretches

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<sup>1</sup> Dunbar's closest Scottish contemporaries, Henryson and Douglas, incorporate more classical allusions into their poetry than Dunbar does, while his closest English contemporaries, Hawes and Skelton, reveal much more certainty in the power of their verse to ensure lasting fame. For these reasons their verse is more akin to what we would label "Renaissance" poetics.

the boundaries of what we would consider "medieval," and in some ways adumbrates poetic thought of the Renaissance.

To get a sense of Dunbar's poetics, it is useful to begin with Chaucer's, as that poet was clearly the most significant single influence on Dunbar. Robert M. Jordan, in Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader, brings together a number of critical thoughts on medieval poetics in an analysis of Chaucerian poetics. Jordan builds on what Payne first suggested was a fundamental part of Chaucer's composing process, an understanding of medieval rhetoric, and usefully points out that for Chaucer rhetoric was held in the domain of written composition. This essential point seems to have been lost on many modern critics of Chaucer and later medieval poets, who dwell on the *ars praedicandi* as an influence,<sup>2</sup> when it seems clear that by the fourteenth century, poets were taking what they could out of rhetorical theory aimed specifically at the written word.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is only natural that Chaucer and Dunbar would look to earlier poets and writers who discussed rhetorical treatises that had a tangible relation to what they were trying to do, that is, to compose works which would have had rhetorical purposes quite

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<sup>2</sup> Owt and Robertson have been very influential in this regard.

<sup>3</sup> See Payne, The Key of Remembrance pp. 31 ff., and Martin Camargo's review in Speculum 70 (1995), p 163, for discussions of weaknesses of over-reliance on the *ars praedicandi*.

distinct from those of sermons. While Dunbar was a priest, and some of his poems on religious topics are certainly indebted to preaching manuals, there is no evidence that he relied on his clerical training when composing poetry of a secular nature. On the contrary, some of his religious poems seem more indebted to earlier poetry than to the tradition of Scriptural exegesis.

Jordan's comments on Chaucer are valuable because to comprehend Dunbar one needs to understand what Dunbar took from Chaucer and to acknowledge the ways in which he departed from that poet who would have been his greatest inspiration. Jordan points out that Chaucer never strove for realism, but focused on language and was aware of "its tangible, material nature and its uncertain relation to truth" (7). This thought is found in Dunbar, particularly when the poet makes a statement such as "I will no les- ingis [lies] put in verse" (K 37: 43), an attempt, perhaps, to convince himself as well as the reader of the veracity of his undertaking. Chaucer evinces a concern throughout his poetry with how he will be understood and with the difficulty of counting on the language he is using to fulfill the demands that may be placed on it. In much the same way, Dunbar, while using colloquial terms from spoken language, creates a poetic "aureate" language to express ideas in a different manner than spoken language is capable of doing.

Jordan illuminates Chaucer's preoccupation with the contingent nature of language. He points out that "Chaucer's works display an uneasiness with univalent authority . . . . His unspoken poetics provides a framework for coming to terms with uncertainty" (10). Thus Chaucer is a product of an age that found the separation between reality and the word, between sign and signifier, to be increasingly apparent. Jordan also makes a connection between much postmodern theory and fourteenth century poetics. For Chaucer, language is as slippery as the ice mountain in the Hous of Fame, yet he knew that some attempt had to be made to construct meaning with his words.

In part, Chaucer's attitude is a product of the influence of nominalism on all late medieval poets.

Spearing sums up the major ideas:

From Ockham onwards, the unity of reason and revelation was denied, and it was asserted that God in his potentia absoluta could have established a quite different order of things. Thus the world, the book which God has chosen to write, becomes radically contingent, and faith must take the place of a rational metaphysic. Equally contingent are the means by which God governs the world and the meanings he assigns to creatures and events - including the crucial meanings which God assigns to men, of 'saved' or 'damned.' (Medieval to Renaissance 194)

One could make the claim that Chaucer derives a certain amusement from this contingency, and that much of his irony springs from it. He also makes us aware that he understands the limitations of language, and at times is

deeply troubled by the uncertainty that comes with its use.

As Robert Sturges points out, "late in the Middle Ages the competition between determinate and indeterminate had not been resolved" (222). Certainly, one can find clear echoes of a Chaucerian uneasiness with language and certainty in Dunbar's poetry. Dunbar, however, presents one with a slightly different attitude toward language. In some sense Dunbar is able to write poems to the king that reveal a determination to challenge authority because he seems unwilling to cede much to that one power.<sup>4</sup> But there is another aspect of Dunbar's poetry, which flows out of this attitude. Dunbar, like Chaucer, had a love for language, an absolute fascination with the possibilities of constructing a poetic language. He was not as pessimistic about the outcome of shaping language, though; at times he seems to have been having too much fun to worry about the long term outcome.

This sense of the possibility of language marks a departure from many of the sentiments Chaucer had expressed and leads straight to the Renaissance. It manifests itself in the aureate style, in Dunbar's use of alliteration, and in his macaronic verses. In this sense, in Dunbar's belief in what he could accomplish with lan-

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<sup>4</sup> This aspect of the petitionary poems will be developed in Chapter Four.

guage, in his belief that he was creating, going beyond the old books, Dunbar stands as distinct from Chaucer, not merely by the fact of his Scottishness, the usual basis for separation from Chaucer. Dunbar's optimistic view of language colors his approach to the rhetorical theory that also influenced Chaucer.

Since Dunbar does not make specific references to works of medieval rhetorical theory, evidence that he was familiar with them is not directly apparent. One may draw certain conclusions about the kind of education he would have received in late fifteenth century Scotland, however. Although the biographical evidence is scant, a "William Dunbar" -- presumably the poet -- graduated from the University of St. Andrews in 1479 (Bawcutt, Dunbar 6). Because of the kind of education Dunbar was likely to receive at St. Andrews, with its focus on the trivium and quadrivium, we may assume that he was well versed in medieval rhetorical theory.<sup>5</sup> It is probable that at university Dunbar was exposed to such works as John of Garland's Parisiana Poetria (Bawcutt Dunbar 221), in which the distinction is made between the *ars dictandi*, *metricandi*, and *rithmicandi* (more commonly referred to as *ars dictaminis*, *ars poetica*, and *ars rythmica*) -- letter writing, quantitative verse, and rhymed syllabic verse. However, pointing out the influence of textbooks such as this

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<sup>5</sup> See Hastings, pp 310-11.

invariably results in a reductive analysis, often a catalog of figures which is of limited usefulness. Kindrick makes the point that Scottish university curricula in the late fifteenth century included such works as Hugh of St. Victor's Didascalicon, Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, and Boccaccio's Genealogia deorum in the curriculum (Robert Henryson 16). Almost certainly he would have encountered Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Poetria Nova as well, if not directly, then through Chaucer's incorporation of it. The treatises on literary theory of Geoffrey and Boccaccio, along with those of Dante, are useful places to look to find the basis of a "theoretical" perspective on Dunbar.

Ultimately, the evidence that Dunbar was familiar with the poetic theory that also influenced Chaucer must be gleaned from comments in the poetry itself. Some may object to the claim that Dunbar had familiarity with Dante and Boccaccio, as the Italian influence on the poet has been dismissed for the most part.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the main reason the Italian influence has been neglected is because it comes not through vernacular poetry, but through prose works in Latin written by Italians such as Dante and Boccaccio. The justification cited for the absence of an

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<sup>6</sup> The one study devoted to this subject, R.D.S. Jack's The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature, begins, with a few exceptions, with the late sixteenth century in Scotland.

Italian influence is twofold: Dunbar uses no Italian in his poems and there is no biographical evidence that the poet ever visited Italy. One expects to find such an influence in Dunbar's work, because he was inspired by Chaucer, who clearly adapted Italian works and displayed a familiarity with Dante and Boccaccio's Latin prose works in defense of poetry. But Chaucer's incorporation of Italian sources is also something that many critics find lacking in his successors, including the so-called "Scottish Chaucerians." More specifically, the growth of humanism in Italy in the fourteenth century, which to some extent influenced Chaucer, has not been noted in Dunbar, while it has been detected to some extent in Henryson, for example.<sup>7</sup>

O. B. Hardison labels this "Humanistic Period" of the fourteenth century as "the last period of medieval criticism" (in Preminger 296). In particular, Hardison sees Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio as purveyors of the philosophy that poetry is divinely inspired, and, beginning with Dante, that the vernacular is appropriate for "great poetry." Defenses of poetry are necessary because of conservative attacks based on scholastic theories of logic. In France, such poets as Deschamps (and others of the *seconde rhetorique*) represent for Hardison "a continuation of twelfth-century humanism," reflected in vernacu-

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<sup>7</sup> See Spearing, Medieval to Renaissance, p. 198.

lar poetry (Preminger 296), marked by the observation that poetry is not yet held up to the same level as theology, as it is in Italy.

The distinction between France and Italy is important. It was noted earlier that critics have recognized the French influence in Dunbar (Kinsley cites the French influence almost exclusively in his edition of the poems, at times to the exclusion of the more obvious Chaucerian source), but rarely discuss the Italian. In part, this is a result of the disparity between the French and Italian views of humanism that arose in the fourteenth century. The Italian view of a more divine poetry produced defenses that claimed the high status of poetry and poets. Dunbar, however, does not evince this regard of poetry in his work. R.D.S. Jack, for example, states that Dunbar "had little time for the humanist influences" (The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature 21). His purpose in writing is often pragmatic or traditional (petitioning the king for a benefice, praising a queen, writing religious lyrics). The Italian influence for many critics seems of necessity to be tied to an expression of the "divine" nature of poetry, as Dante had expressed in De vulgari eloquentia, and in this regard, admittedly, Dunbar's poetry seems to fall short.

One must be cautious when distinguishing between France and Italy during the late Middle Ages, however.

Italian works were being translated into French throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the distinction between the two countries, in terms of literary attitudes, may have become blurred. Boccaccio's Genealogia, while certainly read by Dunbar in the original Latin, was translated into French in 1498 (Wilkins 6). So, by claiming Dunbar was more heavily influenced by French sources than Italian sources, one must be careful not to confuse where Dunbar was obtaining his material with the material he was reading. Additionally, Dunbar's position at court ensured that he was exposed to traveling dignitaries from Italy, as Jack points out (4).<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, Dunbar must be viewed as a court poet; the historical records available indicate that he spent his career as a poet in service to King James IV. As such, we must allow for a distinction between what Dunbar was trying to achieve and what other poets, particularly the Italian humanists, were attempting. Glending Olson states: "Whatever indebtedness court writers have to the humanists and commentators, and it is certainly substantial in places, it is equally true that the two groups tended to remain at least somewhat separate" ("Making and Poetry" 273). Olson sees a distinction between the rhetorical aims of makers and poets that is reflected in the

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<sup>9</sup> Jack also notes that William Scheves, the Archbishop of St. Andrews in the mid-fifteenth century, traveled to Italy and was familiar with Italian humanism (4).

material produced: "The division implies a separation between an activity which usually carries moral and allegorical force and an activity which may well not be 'poetic'" (278). While allowing for this difference, one must not overstress its importance. While Dunbar labeled himself a maker, clearly much of his work is "poetic" (one can begin to see the semantic difficulties that arise when trying to separate what we now call "poets" into categories that we can no longer adequately define). Olson makes another qualification that on the surface appears to apply to Dunbar: "The early humanists talk about what they want to write, makers often about what they are expected to write" (288). Dunbar, however, does not so much write about what he is "expected to write" as he does about what he thinks is necessary to get what he wants (at least in the petitions).

The genuine connection between Dunbar and Boccaccio and Dante comes in a shared concern with language. More specifically, these writers reveal their efforts to properly express the truth, in the absolute sense, or to describe the material at hand, in any case. They also share the medieval awareness of the necessity to veil that matter, as pointed out as early as Augustine with regard to the sacred. In De doctrina Christiana, for example, Augustine comments that "those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to become worthless" (2. vi. 7,

trans. Robertson 37).<sup>9</sup> Hardison notes the connection to poetic expression:

poetic fables can be regarded as veils covering esoteric truths or as symbolic statements necessitated by the impossibility of directly expressing transcendent experiences in language. Obscurity may be inevitable in great poetry as in scripture. (in Preminger 297)

For the Italian humanists, the concern over the effectiveness of the language to do justice to the subject matter becomes apparent. This goal of poetry is not lost on Chaucer, in whose work the connection is clear and manifests itself in the use of *occupatio* or the "blameth nat me" topos throughout his poetry. What, then, does this have to do with a poet writing almost one hundred years later? Dunbar clearly did not attempt poetry, or more precisely, "making," of the same magnitude as Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, for example. However, as a writer who deliberately connects himself to a poetic tradition that includes Chaucer, he could not help but be influenced by ideas about poetry that were in the air when he was writing. In particular, the notion of veiling or ornamenting becomes for Dunbar, if not a means to conceal poetic truth, at least a method of composition that is second nature to "making."

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<sup>9</sup> This section of De doctrina includes Augustine's meditation on the metaphor of the Church as teeth "cutting off men from their errors." Augustine concludes that he does not completely understand why he appreciates the image more when it is expressed in an obscure fashion rather than in plain language.

While Dunbar may not be a "bookish poet," to use Bawcutt's phrase, it seems improbable that he would come up with a compositional method completely divorced from those developed by earlier poets and put into practice by his immediate predecessors. In fact, much rhetorical commentary was designed for practical purposes, and is not as lofty as some critics would have it: Hardison comments on Geoffrey of Vinsauf: "Geoffrey's artist is no Longinian genius excited to ecstasy and moved to utterance by a supernatural enthusiasm" (Preminger 386). Throughout the Poetria Nova, Geoffrey reminds his audience that the expression must fit the subject: "Domes ita vocem / Ut non discordet a re, nec limite tendat / Vox alio, quam res intendat" [Thus guide the voice so that it is not discordant with the matter; do not allow the voice to take any other direction than the matter requires.] (IX: 2041-43, trans. Gallo 125). Although Dante and Boccaccio appeal to a higher poetic principle, for example, Dante's search for an "illustrious" Italian language in De vulgari, which "demands men of like quality to its own" (II:i, trans. Preminger 430), Boccaccio also suggests that poetry is a "facultatem" (XIV:vii), "a practical art," in Osgood's translation (41).

One of the few critics to note an Italian influence on Dunbar is R.D.S. Jack, who points out: "In a sense, then, Italian influence on Scottish literature was almost

as strong as French, but it was Italian ideas rather than Italian poetry, written in Latin rather than the vernacular" (4). This distinction suggests that Dunbar could well have been aware of Dante's De vulgari eloquentia and Boccaccio's Genealogia deorum gentilium, both of which were written in Latin. Although Jack minimizes the influence of the Italian on Dunbar, he notes that Dunbar probably picked up the terza rima from Italian minstrels at court (20); if this is so, it would answer the objection of those who point out that Dunbar never actually visited Italy. Jack finds clear evidence of Lindsay's use of the Genealogia, but adds that Dante, or at least the Commedia, did not become very popular in Scotland until the end of the sixteenth century (32). Henryson, however, certainly makes use of the Genealogia in The Testament of Cressid and "Orpheus" (Jack 14).<sup>10</sup> In fact, the Genealogia is the only work by Boccaccio recorded in Scottish libraries before 1500 (Jack 4), although the records of early libraries can in no way be thought of as comprehensive, and we have no way of knowing the status of private manuscript collections in Scotland.<sup>11</sup> Manuscripts and incu-

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<sup>10</sup> That Henryson made use of classical references in his work leads several critics to assume that he is closer to the Renaissance than Dunbar. See, for example, Spearing, Medieval to Renaissance, 172 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Osgood points out that "[t]he large number of manuscripts and editions, especially in the sixteenth century, is only one sign of its [the Genealogia] popularity" (xliv). He cites others who have catalogued ten

nabula editions of the Genealogia were widespread in the late Middle Ages<sup>12</sup>, as the work was a ready compendium of classical mythology.

The Italian influence is apparent in one aspect of Dunbar's work that has received a good amount of critical attention -- his ornate, or "aureate" style. In the most simplified definition, it is "pointedly eloquent and ornamental" (Reiss 19) often with Latinisms incorporated. The most cited example is perhaps the opening line of "Ane Ballat of Our Lady (K 2): "Hale, sterne superne; hale, in eterne," but perhaps the style is best exemplified by the opening lines of "The Goldyn Targe": "Ryght as the stern of day begouth to schyne / Quhen gone to bed war Vesper and Lucyne."<sup>13</sup> For many, aureation illustrates a concern with artifice at the expense of substance.<sup>14</sup> Tom Scott has commented on Dunbar's allegorical poems, for example:

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printed editions between 1472 and 1532, and notes that a French edition was completed in 1498 (ibid).

<sup>12</sup> Hortis notes twenty-seven extant manuscripts of the Genealogia copied in the late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries (in Osgood xliv). Wilkins finds evidence of between thirty and forty MSS from that period (5). The first printed edition dates from 1472, with seven other printings from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Wilkins 5).

<sup>13</sup> These examples are cited by Bawcutt (Dunbar 354), among others (Cf. Reiss, Ross, Scott).

<sup>14</sup> See Ebin's "The Theme of Poetry in Dunbar's "Goldyn Targe'" 148-49 for a summary of critical commentary on the aureate style.

"He is in these poems, in a strict sense, 'superficial'" (333). Much criticism of Dunbar has been guided by the conception that if the subject matter for poetry is not as important as the way in which it is presented, then the style should be given precedence over the content.

This approach to Dunbar obviously has its limitations. Critics can chastise the poet for using dense figuration and alliteration ("Sanct salvatour, send silver sorrow!" is commonly alluded to).<sup>15</sup> Critical perceptions of passages such as this are colored by subjective opinions of what is "tasteful" and what is not. Dunbar is better labeled experimental than excessive; his aureate lines may be compared to Euphuistic prose of the later sixteenth century. One must also be aware that many poets can be made to look foolish if excerpts are presented out of context.

In very little criticism on the poet is the possible source of this style clearly examined.<sup>16</sup> Richard Firth

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<sup>15</sup> The Rhetorica ad Herennium presents three categories of style: "Elegantia" consisting of "latinitas" or correctness of Latin, and "explanatio" or clarity; "Compositio," making the style uniformly polished and avoiding excessively figured language; and "Dignitas," the use of a variety of tastefully used figures (Lanham 115). Perhaps criticism of the aureate style springs from these definitions, as Dunbar may be accused of violating the guidelines. Indeed, many of his critical detractors say as much without acknowledging the rhetorical definition behind their charges.

<sup>16</sup> Reiss, among others, has noted a possible source in the French *grands rhetoriciens*, but little more is made of the connection (Reiss 48). Likewise, Kinsley notes

Green makes the case that a "pompous and grandiloquent style" arose out of the courtly displays being the occasion for poetry, and distinguishes between Lydgate and Chaucer's influence:

By the end of the fifteenth century the social demand for a highly rhetorical idiom suitable for describing and accompanying public displays of princely magnificence had led to a concept of literary eloquence which, in the vernacular at least, looked back to Lydgate; Chaucer, by comparison, had come to be seen as the poet of plain speaking, the master of concise, accurate, and unpretentious language.

(Poets and Princepleasers 178)

It is not always clear, however, that such a distinction between Lydgate and Chaucer is being made. Dunbar and other poets seem to revere the two for the same reasons. One must turn to the work of Dante and Boccaccio, in order to clearly see the roots of Dunbar's aureate style.<sup>17</sup>

In De vulgari eloquentia, Dante reasons that all actual languages are flawed in some sense. By studying vernacular Italian dialects, Dante felt he could come up with some sense of a basic grammar to guide all language. De vulgari is novel in being a treatise on poetry that opens with a discussion of language. The poet, then,

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that the use of "aureate diction" was common in addresses to the Virgin (225).

<sup>17</sup> While a number of poems have been grouped under the aureate heading, it must be noted that this "high style" is used by Dunbar throughout his work, even in "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie," traditionally classed as the opposite extreme stylistically from "The Goldyn Targe."

becomes a student of language, in addition to being a manipulator, in the classical rhetorical sense. For contemporaries of Dante, as well as all those following him, a poet writing in the vernacular must go beyond the limits of his native language. He must develop a poetic language in order to be a great poet. This language is necessarily artificial in some sense because the poet is going by rules outside those of the vernacular language in which he is writing. It is in Payne's words "a language of disciplined artifice" (Key 54).

It would thus seem quite logical for Dunbar to incorporate Latinisms to elevate his poetry. As Bawcutt points out: "The notion that the great poet *illuminates* both his subject and his native language has a long history, and may be found in Lydgate, Chaucer, and Dante" (Dunbar 23). The "artificialness" that many critics find in Dunbar's poetry can be traced to the influence of these writers and perhaps Dante in particular. Good poetry for Dante depends on the poet's ability to create a language and make it work in the poem.

In De vulgari eloquentia, Dante describes searching for an "illustrious Italian language." He finds that the most beautiful is not any one dialect but a blend of all: the language "whose fragrance is in every town, but whose

lair is none" (I:xvi; trans. in Preminger 427).<sup>18</sup>

Quare autem hoc quod repertum est illustre, cardinale, aulicum et curiale adicientes vocemus, nunc disponendum est; per quod clarius ipsum quod ipsum est faciamus patere. Primum igitur quid intendimus cum illustre adicimus, et quare illustre dicimus, denudemus. Per hoc quidem quod illustre dicimus, intelligimus quid illuminans et illuminatum prefulgens.

(I:xvii:1-2)

We must set forth why it is that we call this language we have found by the epithets illustrious, cardinal, courtly, and curial; and by doing this we disclose the nature of the language itself more clearly. First, then, let us lay bare what we mean by the epithet illustrious, and why we call the language illustrious. Now we understand by this term "illustrious" something which shines forth illuminating and illuminated.

(trans. in Preminger 428-9)

As mentioned above, Lois Ebin's discussion of "The Goldyn Targe" makes an important point: "As his critics have not recognized, Dunbar's preoccupation with craft serves the important purpose of accentuating the theme of poetry and the poet in the 'Targe'" (149). She further points out how Dunbar comments on what makes good poetry in the poem. The term used by Dunbar is revealing:

Good poetry is "illuminit . . . full brycht" with "fresch anamalit termes celicall" (257-58). It is "ourgilt" (267) with fair speech and decorated with all of the flowers of rhetoric. Bad writing is "bare and desolate / Off rethorike" (269-70). (155)

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<sup>18</sup> I have cited the Howell and Wicksteed translation of De vulgari and Osgood's translation of Boccaccio's Genealogia, as they are most often cited in criticism and thus the wording will be familiar.

Ebin does not note the possible source in Dante. Dunbar's concept of "illuminit" poetry could spring directly from Dante's "illuminans et illuminatum." The two senses, illuminated and illuminating, are in fact touched upon in the "Targe." In the opening stanzas, the landscape is described as clothed and decorated by Nature:

Apparalit quhite and rede wyth blomes suete;  
 Anamalit was the felde wyth all colouris<sup>19</sup>  
 (K 10: 12-13)

The purpur hevyn, ourscalit in silver sloppis,  
 Ourgilt the treis, branchis, lef and barkis  
 (26-7)

The rosy garth depaynt and redolent  
 With purpur, azure, gold and goulis gent  
 Arayed was by dame Flora the quene  
 (40-2)

With the words "apparalit," "anamalit," "ourscalit," "ourgilt," and "depaynt," the poet repeatedly emphasizes the effect that words have on matter; the reference to "colouris" in line thirteen surely is meant to imply rhetorical colors as well. Ebin's article, which remains the best work on this poem,<sup>20</sup> lays out the framework as it moves from the world of nature to the world of the

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<sup>19</sup> Likewise, in "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," the garden setting is "Arrayit ryallie about with mony riche vardour, / That nature full nobillie annamalit with flouris" (30-31).

<sup>20</sup> It must be stressed that Ebin makes too much of the distinction between "surface" and "matter," however, with such statements as "the poetic principle is . . . the creation of a surface of tightly interlocked words and sounds . . ." (157), and in "The Tretise of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," Dunbar exploits the enameled surface for ironic effects" (157).

poetic, the two coming together in the final stanzas as "Dunbar makes the implicit analogy between the sun and the poet, the natural landscape and the rhetorical landscape explicit" (153); in particular, Dunbar makes the connection with the comment on the "lusty rosis redolent" of "rethorike" (l. 275). The natural setting in the beginning is illuminated by Nature (Dame Flora) as the dreamer comes upon it. However, at the end of the poem, the responsibility to illuminate is clearly placed on the poet. The speaker claims that Chaucer could have done the scene justice: "Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall / This mater coud illumynit have full brycht" (258-9); in contrast, Dunbar's poem stands "aferit of the licht" (279). The light here is the rhetorical ability of Chaucer, Lydgate, and Gower (the three mentioned in the poem), which is, to use Dante's words, "illuminans et illuminatum prefulgens."

This illuminating with which Dunbar is concerned is always tied to the material being illuminated. Louise Fradenburg begins to identify this aspect of Dunbar's compositional method in "The Thrissil and the Rois":

Dunbar, the newly created and creative poet, will create and enter a Scottish paradise of words . . . through his power to "discryve." Dunbar's spectacular aureation tries to give to language a glorious, incorruptible body: it is a sensuous ideality rather than an idealized sensuality. (137)

Yet Fradenburg, caught up in Lacanian theory, reduces

both "The Thrissil and the Rois" and Dunbar as poet to "servants" of "the desire of the other" (135). The poet becomes "subjected to a discipline whereby his own voice becomes an instrument for the discourse of sovereignty" (135). Fradenburg here ignores the distinction between "poet" and "maker," with somewhat confusing results. By using a Romantic definition of poet, unknown to Dunbar, Fradenburg sets up an artificial construct in order to tear it down easily. A medieval maker is always subject to his themes; he must be because he is not in a real sense creating anything new. Dunbar is not trying to give his language a "body"; he is attempting to make his language fit the material about which he is writing. But Dunbar is doing more than merely manipulating language; he certainly was aware of the dangers of sophistry.

Dunbar, albeit not as often or directly as Chaucer, at times does focus on his craft itself, deliberately drawing attention to what he is doing. If one finds a poet stepping outside the constraints of the material about which he is writing, if for example one finds the poet commenting on his own craft, or on the words themselves, one may place him in one of two categories. He may be a "mere" rhetorician, and in the extreme a sophist, someone concerned with words and the effects they will have on an audience with minimal regard to the veracity or appropriateness of the content. On the other hand, one

may consider him a critic of himself or of the tradition in which he is writing. Despite the lack of overt commentary which might inform us about what he is doing, too many critics have classified Dunbar a sophist, using the term "craftsman" in a pejorative sense (Reiss 19, Bawcutt 3, et al.). It seems curious that Dunbar seems to draw attention to the "technical" aspects of his work without labeling what he is doing himself. Chaucer draws attention to the artifice of what he is doing much more frequently, yet does not come under the same kind of attack.

Criticism of Dunbar's aureation is not new; in his own time the style came under assault. In the "Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie" (K 23),<sup>21</sup> Kennedy is willing to mock Dunbar's "terms" in language all poets will understand:

I peramblit of Pernaso the montayn,  
 Enspirit wyth Mercury fra his goldyn spere,  
 And dulcely drank of eloquence the fontayne  
 Quhen it was purifit wyth frost and flowit clere;  
 And thou come, fule, in Marche or Februer  
 Thare till a pule, and drank the padok rod  
 That gerris the ryme in to thy termes glod  
 And blaberis that noyis mennis eris to here.

(337-344)

Quhen: when (quh = wh in Middle Scots); padok rod: toad spawn; glod: unknown [Kinsley], probably something like ME "cloudy"

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<sup>21</sup> The "Flyting" consists of stanzas written by Dunbar alternating with ones by Walter Kennedy. The mock exchange of abuse in verse was quite popular in sixteenth century Scotland and other later examples survive (Bawcutt, *Dunbar* 222). Dunbar speaks warmly of Kennedy in the "Lament for the Makeris" (K 62) and there is no reason to believe that the two poets ever had a legitimate quarrel.

These comments surely reflect a growing negative view of rhetoric, one that criticizes a reliance on terms that results in catalogs rather than poems, or other types of writing for that matter. Also, the split between rhetoric and poetic is becoming more defined, something that Boccaccio is aware of in the Genealogia. Here one detects the emergence of a disparaging view of rhetoric, as Boccaccio distinguishes between it and poetry:

Dicent forsan, ut huic a se incognite detrahant, quo utuntur rethorice opus esse, quod ego pro parte non inficiar. Habet enim suas invenciones rethorica, verum apud tegumenta fictionum nulle sunt rethorice partes; mera poesis est, quicquid sub velamento componitur et exquiritur exquisite. (XIV:vii)

Haply, to disparage this art of poetry now unrecognized by them [Boccaccio's opponents], these men will say it is rhetoric which the poets employ. Indeed, I will not deny it in part, for rhetoric has also its own inventions. Yet, in truth, among the disguises of fiction rhetoric has no part, for whatever is composed as under a veil, and thus exquisitely wrought, is poetry and poetry alone. (trans. Osgood 42)

Interestingly, Boccaccio removes the now negatively-tainted term "rhetoric" from the poetic process, yet he cleverly appropriates "inventio" for the poet, downplaying its significance for rhetoric. It seems an attempt to maintain some sense of the properties of rhetoric as applied to poetry, while distancing the art from what is becoming seen as sophistry.

Boccaccio makes a strong case for a dense, figurative language. Here, he contrasts the poet with the philosopher

in terms of the style each employs:

Phylosophus stilo prosaico ut sepius, et eius fere paruipendens ornatum, scribere consuevit; poeta metrico, summa cum cura exquisito decore conspicuo. (XIV: xvii)

The philosopher as a rule employs an unadorned prose style, with something of a scorn for literary embellishment. The poet writes in metre, with an artist's most scrupulous care, and in a style distinguished by exquisite charm.

(trans. Osgood 79)

Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth books of the Genealogia, Boccaccio depicts poetic style as ornate, embellished and adorned. These qualities are prevalent features of Dunbar's poetry, more so than of Chaucer's. Boccaccio even addresses those who find difficulty with this literary style:

Si forsā velint duriciem textus, figuras dictionum, aut orationum colores, et peregrinorum vocabulorum incognitam a se pulchritudinem damnasse, et hinc poetas obscuros dixisse, quid aliud dicam non habeo nisi ut gramaticales iterum scholas repetant, pedagogi ferulam subeant, studeant discantque, quid veterum auctoritate circa talia poetis licentie datum, scrupulosiusque scrutentur preter vulgaria atque domestica que sint etiam peregrina.

(XIV:xii)<sup>22</sup>

If by chance in condemning the difficulty of the text, they really mean its figures of diction and oratorical colors and the beauty which they fail to recognize in alien words, if on this account they pronounce poetry obscure -- my only advice is for them to go back to the grammar schools, bow to the ferule, study and learn what license ancient authority granted the poets in

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<sup>22</sup> Latin quotations from the Genealogia are taken from the edition edited by Vincenzo Romano, Bari: Laterza, 1951.

such matters, and give particular attention to such alien terms as are permissible beyond common and homely use. (trans. Osgood 61)

Boccaccio's comments address the heart of the matter in Dunbar's aureate style. The "alien terms" that Dunbar employs constitute a fundamental part of poetic language. Good poetry for Dante and Boccaccio depends on the poet's ability to create a language with unfamiliar terms and to challenge the audience to struggle to grasp the ultimate meaning.

While Boccaccio allows for the use of a dense style, perhaps a more basic feature of poetry is the idea that language must be "ornamented" in some way. Geoffrey of Vinsauf comments on the need for such ornamentation in poetry in the Poetria Nova:

Sit brevis aut longus, se semper sermo coloret  
 Intus et exterius, sed discernendo colorem  
 Ordine discreto. Verbi prius inspice mentem  
 Et denum faciem, cujus ne crede color:  
 Se nisi conformet color intimus exteriori,  
 Sordet ibi ratio: faciem depingere verbi  
 Est pictura luti, res est falsaria, ficta  
 Forma, dealbatus paries et hypocrita verbum  
 Se simulans aliquid, cum sit nihil. Haec sua  
 forma  
 Dissimulat deforme suum: se jactitat extra,  
 Sed nihil intus habet. (742-752)<sup>23</sup>

Whether short or long, let the discourse always be decorated within and without; but choose among ornaments with discretion. First examine the soul of the word and then its face, whose outward show alone you should not trust. Unless

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<sup>23</sup> Latin quotations from the Poetria Nova are taken from Ernest Gallo's The Poetria Nova and its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine, Paris: Mouton, 1971.

the inner ornament conforms to the outer requirement, the relationship between the two is worthless. Painting only the face of an expression results in a vile picture, a falsified thing, a faked form, a whitewashed wall, a verbal hypocrite which pretends to be something when it is nothing. Its form covers up its deformity; it vaunts itself outwardly but has no inner substance. (trans. Gallo 53)

Throughout his poetry, Dunbar reveals an awareness of the nature of poetry as spelled out by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Dante, and Boccaccio. The idea of embellishing, or ornamenting the material is clearly on his mind. But Dunbar's comments quite clearly illustrate that the poet was concerned about the relationship between the embellishment and the material being embellished. Outer appearance is often suspect for Dunbar, especially if there is any indication that the outer form may not correspond to the inner being. In a poem about love, for example (K 15), the troubling quality is linked to surface appearance. Love appears

With sueit dissavyng countenance  
In quhais fair dissimulance  
May none assure. (2-4)

*dissavyng*: deceiving; *dissimulance*: deceit

More confirmation that such issues were weighing Dunbar down is found in "The Merle and the Nychtingale" (K 16):

The pyat withe the pairtie cote  
Feyn3eis to sing the nychtingale note,  
Bot scho can not the corchet cleiff  
For hasknes of hir carleche throte:  
Exces of thocht dois me mischeiff.

Ay fairast feddiris hes farrest foulis;  
Suppois thai have na sang bot 3owlis

In sylver caiges thai sit at cheif;  
 Kynd native nestis dois clek bot owlis;  
 Exces of thocht dois me mischeiff. (16-25)

pyat: magpie; pairtie: multi-colored; corchet cleiff:  
 crochet split; carleche: churlish; Jowlis: yowls; at  
 cheif: at principal place; clek: hatch

In the first stanza the magpie is described as trying to imitate the nightingale, but she is unable to do so because of her husky throat. In spite of her lovely external coat, the magpie cannot truly imitate the loveliness of the nightingale because that bird's beauty comes from her ability to sing. In the next stanza Dunbar ponders those who have the fairest external visages, but whose songs are, literally, yowls. They can occupy the places of honor only in silver cages, where they may be looked at from a distance. The next line introduces a metaphor of the owl as usurper. The "native nestis," where one might expect to find the appropriate birds, in reality contain owls. The external evidence is not to be trusted and what appears lovely on the outside may only be imitating what is truly beautiful. The surface must extend all the way to the interior; enameled speech is worthless without an equally valuable core to match it.

Another poem that uses the clothing metaphor is "This nycht befoir the dawing cleir" (K 55). In this dream vision, the narrator sees St. Francis appear to him asking him to renounce the world and become a friar. The narrator refuses to put on the habit held by St. Francis; he

answers that he had done service as a friar earlier in life, and when in that habit, "I wes ay reddy all men to begyle" (45). The narrator also points out that "Off full few freiris that hes bene sanctis I reid" (28). His reluctance proves wise as the figure turns out to be "Ane fiend . . . in liknes of ane freir" (47).

Kinsley points out the similarity to The Prologue to The Legend of Good Women in the "call to amendment of life and doctrine" (346). There is also a similarity to the narrator of Troilus and Criseyde, as St. Francis discloses that the narrator of Dunbar's poem "hes lang done Venus lawis teiche" (13) and he also claims "Gif evir my fortoun wes to be a freir / The dait thairof is past full mony a 3eir" (31-2); both speakers contend they are past their prime, already somewhat detached from the everyday world.

Reiss claims to detect untrustworthy impressions throughout the poem (137), beginning with the first two lines: "This nycht befoir the dawing cleir / Me thocht St. Francis did to me appeir," but "Me thocht" is Dunbar's standard phrase to introduce a dream vision. Kinsley's most insightful comment is "the key symbol is the friar's habit, the sheep's clothing disguising the wolf" (347). Bawcutt has noted the clothing imagery as well, and points out that the narrator contradicts himself, at one point stating "Bot thame to weir it [the habit] nevir come in my

mynd" (24), and later claiming "I haif in to thy habeit maid gud cheir" (35).

The simplest explanation for this would be carelessness on the part of the poet, but we might also consider Dunbar presenting us with an unreliable dreamer. Certainly he had ample models for unreliable narrators in Chaucer's poetry. Bawcutt finds both the vision and dreamer to be similar in their shadiness (272). The dreamer quite possibly is aware of the true identity of the vision all along and so refuses to be taken in by the devil, while admitting that he had used the garment of the friar for his own worldly gain. In this case we have two garments really. One is offered by the fiend, "Quhy skarris [scared] thow with this holy weid? [dress] / Cleith the thairin, for weir it thow most neid" (11-12), and certainly leads to eternal damnation, and the other is used by friars on earth, allowing the wearer to deceive and beguile. The dreamer, while guilty of using a false outward appearance, nonetheless draws the line when it comes to a garment that would do himself personal harm. This dreamer is aware of what a false garment is capable of doing; he has used one himself, and he knows one when it is laid down in front of him. Significantly, the outer clothing seems to be the source of deception, because it does not match the figure wearing it.

Dunbar expresses a similar concern in "Quhome to sall

I complene my wo" (K 63):

Flattry weris ane furrit gown  
 And falsett with the lordis dois roun  
 And trewth standis barrit at the dure  
 And exul is honour of the toun (36-39)

exul: exiled

Here the false garment has fooled the lords in town and truth can not even get in the door. The deceptive outer garment image is also used by Dunbar against Kennedy in "The Flyting":

Thow held the burch lang with ane borrowit gown  
 And ane caprowsy barkit all with sweit,  
 And quhen the laidis saw the sa lyk a loun  
 Thay bickerit the with mony bae and bleit

(201-04)

*caprowsy*: undergarmnet; *barkit*: hardened; *sweit*: sweat; *loun*: rascal; *bickerit*: attacked; *bae and bleit*: sounds of sheep

Here the inner clothing is a bit more soiled than the borrowed gown. The curious sheep noises produced by the ladies are intended no doubt to recall another metaphor that Dunbar uses in several poems: the fox in sheep's clothing. In the above passage the women react as a flock of sheep discovering an intruder in their midst. In "The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" (K 14) the disguise is also invoked: "Quhen that I go to the kirk cled in cair weid [mourning attire] / As foxe in a lambis fleise fen3e I my cheir [demeanor]" (422-23). The image occurs elsewhere as well; "Sum in ane lamskin is ane tod [fox]" (K 74: 37).

In "As 3ung Awrora with cristall haile" (or "The Flying Abbot of Tunglund" K 54), one finds another example of the outer garment causing trouble. The poem is based on an actual incident involving one John Damian, an alchemist made abbot by James IV, who attempted to fly through the air with a pair of wings fashioned from feathers in 1507 (Kinsley 343). In this poem, a charlatan's career of deception is described, from physician to priest to alchemist, as he moves from country to country taking advantage of the unwitting. Bawcutt remarks "the unnamed 'he' slips through roles, or rather disguises, as easily as he passes through different countries" (Dunbar 274). But of course it all must catch up with him and his fatal mistake is to attempt to fly: "A fedrem on he tuke / And schupe [prepared] in Turky for to fle" (60-1). It is not gravity that causes the abbot's fall, but rather actual birds who attack him and rip his costume to pieces.

And guhen that he did mont on he  
 All fowill ferleit quhat he sowld be  
 That evir did on him luk.  
 Sum held he had bene Dedalus,  
 Sum the menatair marvelous,  
 Sum Martis blak smyth Vulcanus  
 And sum Saturnus kuke. (62-8)

*ferleit*: marvelled

It is worth noting that the birds make the mythological connection, not the human onlookers. The abbot abruptly ends his flight by slipping out of his costume and falling into a mud pit:

He schewre his feddreme that was schene  
And slippit owt of it full clene

And in a myre up to the ene  
Among the glar did glyd (105-8)

line 105: He revealed his feathers that were shiny (lovely); glar: mud

The abbot remains in the mud for three days, pecked at by ducks and ravens, and the noise awakens the narrrtaor. This is a nice play on the ending of The Parliament of Fowls, as Kinsley points out (346). The punishment is carried out by the agents of nature who are slandered by the abbot's misappropriation of their appearance. Human observers have no place in the poem, emphasizing the "unnaturalness" of the act.<sup>24</sup>

Dunbar's attack on the tailors and cobblers (K 52 C)<sup>25</sup> also includes the clothing metaphor. Bawcutt and others see the poem as part of a traditional attack on craftsmen. Reiss, however, takes the interpretation to another level, and begins to make a connection that should be more fully elucidated: "as clothes were seen to reflect, or conceal, man's real self, so their makers were

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<sup>24</sup> See Bawcutt, 270-1, for a discussion of the poem's use of the *impossibilia* topos.

<sup>25</sup> The textual evidence for the arrangement of this poem is confusing. It is made up of three distinct sections: a dance of the Seven Deadly Sins, a tournament between a tailor and a cobbler, and an "Amendis" in which the tailor and cobbler's skills are praised. The three sections may have been three separate poems (Bawcutt, Dunbar 288).

viewed as imitating, or perverting, the Creator" (84). It seems particularly ironic that Reiss uses the word "maker" in his analysis, but does not make the connection to poets and veiling the truth.

It is fair to consider this poem a comment on poets and ornamentation, an approach which makes the poem all the more ironic and self deprecating. In the "Amendis," the narrator dreams that an angel comes to tell him how honored tailors and cobblers will be in heaven. The mock praise of craftsmen such as tailors is not all that uncommon, as Kinsley points out (340). Yet the notion of mocking a craftsman whose task it is to "clothe" seems to be a metaphor that one can not easily overlook. The blasphemy is clear:

In hevin hie ordand is 3our place  
 Aboif all sanctis, in grit solace,  
 Nixt God grittest in dignitie;  
 Tail3ours and sowtaris, blist be 3e.

The caus to 3ow is nocht unkend;  
 That God mismakkis, 3e do amend  
 Be craft and grit agilitie;  
 Tail3ouris and sowtaris, blist be 3e. (5-12)

Since it is the job of the poet to clothe the truth of God with ornamentation, and Dunbar was certainly aware of this metaphor,<sup>26</sup> the parody might well extend to those of Dunbar's own craft. Boccaccio, among others, had used the clothing metaphor:

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<sup>26</sup> The metaphor is used by Hawes, for example, in "The Pastime of Pleasure" (esp. lines 701-819).

[Poesis] ornare compositium inusitato quodam  
 verborum atque sententiarum contextu, velamento  
 fabuloso atque decenti veritatem contegere  
 (XIV:vii)

[Poetry] adorns the whole composition with un-  
 usual interweavings of words and thoughts; and  
 thus it veils truth in a fair and fitting gar-  
 ment of fiction. (trans. Osgood 39)

In fact, considering that Boccaccio goes on to say that  
 poetry can among other things "reges armare, in bella  
 deducere, e navalibus classes emictere . . . irritare  
 torpentes, desides animare" (XIV: vii) [arm kings, marshal  
 them for war, launch whole fleets . . . awake the idle,  
 stimulate the dull], it seems that Dunbar is only taking  
 this premise to its absurd conclusion: heavenly reward of  
 the highest order. The poem continues:

And 3e tail3ouris with weilmaid clais  
 Can mend the werst maid man that gais  
 And mak him semely for to se;  
 Tel3ouris and sowtaris, blist be 3e.

Thocht God mak ane misfassonit man  
 3e can him all schaip new agane  
 And fassoun him bettir be sic thre;  
 Tel3ouris and sowtaris, blist be 3e.

Thocht a man haif a brokin bak,  
 Haif he a gude tail3our, quhattrak,  
 That can it cuver with craftis slie;  
 Tel3ouris and sowtaris, blist be 3e. (21-32)

Tailors have the ability to improve upon and in some cases  
 correct what God has created. Assuming that Dunbar was  
 familiar with Boccaccio, which is likely, or that he was  
 at least aware of the clothing metaphor, which is even  
 more likely, the poem can be taken as a parody of the  
 power of poetry. The irony is particularly biting in the

case of Dunbar who so often elsewhere reveals a delight in the power his words will have. Yet the humor of the poem remains whether one takes it literally as a mockery of tailors, or metaphorically as a mockery of poets. Dunbar seems to be aware of his own limits, if only subconsciously. The references to tailors improving upon God's work relate quite nicely to earlier concepts of poetic theory and *inventio* in particular.

In "The Tournament," the poem or section of poem that immediately precedes the "Amendis," Dunbar makes a more graphic comment on writing. A tailor and a cobbler dress for battle, made to appear as knights by the devil Mahoun. The joust that they prepare for never occurs, as the tailor can only fart and the cobbler vomit when they look upon each other in the face of actual combat. Again the point can be made that each is appalled in dress that is completely inappropriate, and thus they cannot act in the manner of those as whom they appear. At the end of the poem, the narrator intrudes in the face of this scatological display:

I had mair of thair werkis writtin  
 Had nocht the sowtar bene beschitten  
     With Belliallis ers unblis  
 Bot that sa gud ane bourd me thocht,  
 Sic solace to my hairt it rocht  
     For lawchtir neir I brist.     (216-222)

*bourd*: joke

The absolute hilarity of the scene wakes the narrator with laughter, so that he is forced to break off writing

about what happened (the use of "ers unblast" after describing the tailors as "blast" by God is particularly effective). Significantly, the narrator uses the term "writtin," making concrete the connection to the written word. This, it would seem, is a direct reference to the power of the poetry. It is powerful enough to rouse the poet himself out of sleep; one can only imagine what effect it will have on the reader!

Using traditional imagery, "Amang thir freiris, within ane cloister" (or "The Passioun of Crist," K 3) draws attention to clothes being removed and put back on Christ. After Christ is condemned by "ane juge," "For scorne thai cled him into quhyt" (26). As Christ is paraded through the streets, the crowd spits on him and "Of all his claythis thay tirvit him bair" (23), making the humiliation more intense. As he is led toward the cross, Christ is wrapped once more: "Nixt in purpyr thay him cled" (41). But as Christ is raised on the cross, the clothes are removed once more: "him all nakit on the tre / Thay raissit on loft be houris sax" (71). Dunbar here follows manuscript illumination and late medieval painting in his depiction of the Passion. The Scriptural images of the Passion chosen, however, exemplify Dunbar's use of the clothing metaphor. Christ is clothed in inappropriate garments while being tormented, but finally ends his life stripped, since no clothing can adequately cover his body.

In "Musing allone this hinder nicht" (K 81), Dunbar reveals his concern that when the outer garment is appropriate, observers may judge the person false anyway.

Be I ane courtman or ane knyght  
Honestly cled, that cumis me richt,  
Ane prydfull man than call thay me. (21-23)

This pessimistic tone is prevalent throughout the poem. Here also the poet uses a related image, that of speech not matching the thought uttered. Dunbar writes specifically about the kind of language he employs and the reaction it sometimes engenders:

And be I ornat in my speiche  
Than Towsy sayis I am sa streiche,  
I speik not lyk thair hous men<sup>3</sup>ie.  
Suppois hir mowth misteris a leiche  
3it can I not undemit be.

Bot wist thir folkis that uthir demis,  
How that thair sawis to uthir semis,  
Thair vicious wordis and vanitie  
Thair tratling tungis that all furth temis,  
Sum wald lat thair demyng be. (32-40)

*Towsy*: unkempt woman (Cf. Mrs. Tow-wouse in Joseph Andrews); *streiche*: proper; *hous men<sup>3</sup>ie*: household company; *misteris a leiche*: has need of a physician; *undemit*: unjudged; *sawis*: utterances

Kinsley (371) and Reiss (77) note similarities between this poem and Lydgate's "A wicked Tunge wille sey Amys." Bawcutt, however, downplays the connection, while citing Kratzman and Owst to show that the poem follows standard preaching techniques of pro and contra argument (139).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> A problematic issue is the ascription of the poem to Stewart in one version in the Maitland Folio; another version in the same folio is left anonymous, while

In the first stanza the narrator draws a distinction between his speech and the "hous men3ie," or people of the household. Yet he is mocked as being "sa streiche," so proper, by a low class woman, if he uses "ornat" speech. The speaker, however, will not judge "hir mowth," because he himself cannot go unjudged. The second stanza, nevertheless, is more critical of those who let their speech get the better of them, cleverly noting that "uthir," another or others, will judge how their words seem, or appear. Interestingly, when the narrator imputes the judgment to others, the criticism can flow much more freely; "vicious wordis" and "tratling tungis" lead to "deming," judgment or damning. Thus the narrator at first is hesitant to judge others, while allowing that his speech is different from theirs, but finds a way to judge through the voice of some "other." Again, the concern with appropriate words is noteworthy; what at least one woman notices about the narrator is the quality of his words. Unwisely chosen words are likely to lead to damnation.

In "This Waverand Warldis Wretchidnes" (K 39), Dunbar also laments some things that trouble him about language. The poem is essentially a petition for a benefice preceded

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Bannatyne names Dunbar as the author (Kinsley 370). Although Bawcutt lists it in her "uncertain" category, she does find some reason to view it as being composed by Dunbar (140-41).

by an expression of anxiety about the state of the world.

This waverand warldis wretchidnes,  
 The fail3eand and frutles bissines,  
 The mispent tyme, the service vane,  
 For to consider is ane pane. (1-4)

Several passages, however, stand out for their reference to language.

The sugurit mouthis with myndis thairfra  
 The figurit speiche with faceis tua,  
 The plesand tounGIS with hartis unplane,  
 For to consider is ane pane. (9-12)

*thairfra*: elsewhere

In this poem, Dunbar is quite aware of the danger of empty rhetoric. He continues to display a concern with the content beneath the enameled surface. While the tongue can be pleasing, it is troubling when the heart is "unplane," or unclear. Dunbar sees beneath the words to the intent. This is exactly the issue that Geoffrey of Vinsauf and Boccaccio had been writing about. There are those who master rhetoric but have no soul.

Dunbar's distress over "hartis unplane" reflects his composing process as well; he is not interested in the mere ornamentation of language, but seeks vocabulary that is appropriate to the material. This is central to an understanding of this poet who so often reveals his concern with language. Additionally, this passage reveals that Dunbar is aware of the "two-faced" nature of language -- that the process is indeed flawed. In fact, Dunbar admits that he too may be guilty; he is after all produc-

ing "figurit" speech. As Bawcutt relates: "the phrase well describes the rhetorically 'figured' and two-faced speech that he sometimes employs" (211).

This raises a question with which critics continue to struggle: is Dunbar being ironic when he criticizes something that he elsewhere does? Bawcutt provides a sensible reminder: "Irony, like parody, is liable to divide an audience into two groups: those who see only the ostensible 'surface' meaning, and the initiates, who perceive the further or 'deeper' meaning" (211). It is perhaps enough to say that Dunbar is aware of the limitations of language at times in his poetry, even though at other times he cannot help being constrained by them.

The poet expresses a similar concern with fitting language in "Quhome to sall I complene my wo" (K 63):

Fra everilk mowth fair wordis proceidis;  
 In every hairt disceptioun breidis;  
 Fra everylk e gois lukis demure  
 Bot fra the handis gois few gud deidis:  
 Into this world may none assure.

Toungis now ar maid of quhyte quhaill bone  
 And hairtis ar maid of hard flynt stone  
 And ene ar maid of blew asure  
 And handis of adamant laith to dispone:  
 Into this world may none assure. (41-50)

*laith to dispone*: unwilling to hand anything over

Here, as elsewhere, the speaker notes the distinction between the heart and the tongue; because of the disparity between the two, true meaning is not expressed to the outside world.

Dunbar's speakers are not above using "plesand toungis" on occasion, however. The narrator of "The Tabill of Confessioun" (K 6) confesses his use of inappropriate language. He seeks forgiveness for the use "Off flattering wordis for finyng of substance" (132). "Finyng" is glossed by Kinsley as "settlement, contract, composition," while substance is "wealth, possessions." At any rate the sin is in using words for personal gain, which would seem to contradict Dunbar's use of them to obtain recompense from the king in the petitions.

The false tounge is a recurring image in Dunbar's works. In "Schir, 3e have mony servitours" (K 44), the speaker notes the presence of "Fantastik fulis [fools] bayth fals and gredy, / Off tounge untrew and hand evill diedlie" (57-8). In K 78 one finds "hairt abasit, but tounge rekles" (34), and in K 77, "And fra all fals tungis fulfild with flattry, / Als [also] fra all schrewis, or ellis thow art eschamit" (26-7). In fact this problem leads Dunbar's speaker to urge people to keep their mouths shut: "Behold and heir and lat thy tung tak rest - / In mekle [much] speiche is pairt of vanitie" (K 77: 3-4).

Dunbar makes his concern about empty rhetoric clear in "To speike off science, craft or sapience" (K 76, also known as "Dunbar at Oxinfurde").

The curius probacion logicall,  
 The eloquence off ornat rethorye,  
 The naturall science filosoficall,  
 The dark apirance off astronomy,

The theologicis sermon, the fablis off poetrye-  
 Withowt guid lyff, all in the self dois de  
 As Mayis flouris dois in September drye.

(9-15)

The speaker lists sermons and poetic fables in the same line, perhaps indicating an equation between them in the poet's mind. Certainly the purpose of both would have been to impart some lesson to the audience. Other sciences as well will not aid in our understanding of ourselves if we do not lead good lives. One does not have to read this in a strictly Robertsonian light to appreciate Dunbar's concern.

The cloth or veil that Dunbar places on his language, an extension of thinking in terms of enamelling, along with the concern that speech appropriately reflect the matter being described, lead to a consideration of the extent to which Dunbar was thinking in terms of allegory. Spearing argues quite forcefully that Chaucer's poetry is devoid of allegorical thinking.<sup>28</sup> He contends that the allegory occurring in Piers Plowman is not an attempt on Langland's part to "veil the truth," but rather develops "because the truth itself was to him [Langland] obscure and uncertain" (2491). For Spearing, the use of allegory to obscure rather than clarify comes in the Renaissance

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<sup>28</sup> Chaucer "was a writer of strongly literal and rational temperament, who showed little interest in allegory or allegorization . . . even in those poetic dreams which were generally among the commonest vehicles for allegory" (Medieval to Renaissance 249).

when poets seek protection when they write potentially inflammatory political commentary.

Thus, Spearing distinguishes between medieval allegory, designed to make the uncertain more certain, and Renaissance allegory, designed to cloak potentially damaging material. Spearing does allow for some allegorical treatment of the medieval kind in "The Goldyn Targe." However, Dunbar's political situation, in service to a king, would seem to fall into Spearing's definition of the environment in which allegory designed to obscure is used. Unfortunately, the historical documents of James IV's court are not fulsome enough to allow one to determine whether Dunbar had particular incidents or even persons in mind when making what are apparently satiric remarks.

"The Testamnet of Maister Andro Kennedy" (K 38) exemplifies this dilemma. The poem is a mock testament of someone who may or may not have been an actual figure at court. The exact tone toward this Kennedy is difficult to discern:

*Omnia mea solacia*  
 Thai wer bot lesingis all and ane,  
*Cum omnia fraude et fallacia*  
 I leif the maister of Sanct Antane-  
*Willelmo Gray sine gratia*  
 Myne awne deir cusing as I wene  
*Qui nunquam fabricat mendacia*  
 Bot quhen the holyne growis grene. (57-64)

Bawcutt notes that whether Andrew Kennedy was alive or dead when Dunbar wrote the poem affects our perception of the tone: it is "callous, if he is indeed dead or dying,

more jocular, if he is alive and flourishing" (Dunbar 51). While several critics assume that the figure was a physician, this has not been proven conclusively. Thus, Ross's comment that "we may see in him also the anti-type of Christ, the false healer" (121), depends on a speculative identification.<sup>29</sup>

One may take issue with Spearing's definition of medieval allegory, as his position seems a bit extreme in light of the number and variety of allegorical poems written in English during the Middle Ages. Dunbar, like several other late medieval poets such as Lydgate and Skelton, does not make use of the multilayered form of allegory as delineated in Dante's "Letter to Can Grande." For Dante, however, "allegoria" means any kind of figurative language. The thirteenth century classification into different levels of allegory seems not to have been of too great concern to Dante, at least as far as poets were concerned. "The Letter to Can Grande" is of questionable attribution to Dante and one may question whether it reflects the way Dante interpreted secular literature. Exegetes, on the other hand, have different constraints due to the nature of interpreting Scripture.

Nevertheless, one detects in Dunbar's poetry some evidence of allegorical thought. Confirmation that this

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<sup>29</sup> Bawcutt suggests that the figure could simply be a university graduate, and thus the poem becomes "a self-drawn satiric portrait" (Dunbar 53).

way of thinking was tied to poetic expression does exist.

As Osgood points out in his introduction to Boccaccio's

Genealogia:

This allegorical theory of poetry, deriving from the Ancients, and sustained from early mediaeval times by a naturally strong inclination to symbolism and allegory, supports the allegorical quality of literature and art from Prudentius to Spenser. Nor is it confined only to formal allegory such as the Divine Comedy, but suspects and seeks ulterior meaning in all art and poetry worthy of the name. (xxxviii-ix)

The last sentence is particularly important because it reveals that part of the profession of poet entailed a use of symbolic or figurative language. Even in poets such as Dunbar not always thought of as "allegorical,"<sup>30</sup> one will inevitably find traces of allegorical thinking.

Glending Olson also comments on allegory in terms of the distinction between maker and poet:

It would be as great a mistake to assume that Chaucer, say, owes little to allegorical poetics as it would be to assume that his every reference to a classical figure is packed with mythological scholarship and faithful to its viewpoint. ("Making and Poetry" 287)

Thus we can find elements of allegorical thinking in Dunbar, if not a completely developed system operating on several levels.

Spearing does allow for the beginnings of a sophisticated, multi-layered allegorical thought in Lydgate's use

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<sup>30</sup> Scott's comment is typical: "Dunbar is not interested in intellectual depth -- the true quality of allegory -- but in spectacle, show, [and] pageantry . . ." (332).

of typology in his religious poems. He finds it as well in Hawes, although Hawes seems to use allegory only to connect his poetry to that of the ancients and to generalize particular characters (Medieval to Renaissance 250-254). Spearing gives extended treatment to two of Skelton's poems, "The Bowge of Courte" and "Speke Parott," and he finds subtle and sophisticated use of allegory in each (261-77).

Dunbar uses the clothing and enameling metaphors, as well as alliteration and macaronic verse, as Renaissance poets use allegory in Spearing's classification. That is, there is at times an attempt to veil the language and make it more dense and challenging. Such devices also allude to earlier forms and writers. With Dunbar, however, the references are never direct, and we might argue that he writes not so much with direct references at hand as with ideas in his mind. Certain ideas came along with the profession of poet, were absorbed by Dunbar in his learning and reading, and later made their way into his poetry in subtle and indirect ways. Dunbar's poetry provides grounds for such an argument; in fact it could be argued that one must make these kinds of assumptions when considering the place in which Dunbar saw himself. In Dunbar's clothing metaphors and in his comments on the relationship between speech and matter, one finds the poet revealing his awareness of the rhetorical tradition in poetry, a

tradition in which he clearly saw himself.

### Chapter Three

#### Invention, Narration, and the Poetic Persona of the Speaker

##### "To dyt thocht I"

In various ways Dunbar informs us about how he approaches the composing process. The speakers that the poet uses in his work are perhaps most helpful in determining Dunbar's sense of the poet's place in the communicative process. In the persona of a speaker, Dunbar at times comments on what he is doing or trying to achieve in his poems. Additionally, the poet discusses the sources of the poetry and his ability to record events accurately in an attempt to assure the audience that he is trustworthy. Several metaphors for the poetic process are evident throughout Dunbar's poetry, and these also shed light on the poet's creative techniques.

In Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry, A. C. Spearing notes that Chaucer was the first English author to offer his audience a list of his own works (60). This statement of authorial territoriality, however, is offset by the many times the poet cites sources, makes use of *occupatio*, or presents a retraction. Thus a new sense of pride in personal accomplishment is tempered by an Augustinian understanding that the poet is not inventing anything new, but rather giving new expression to material

that has already been discovered. Spearing suggests that these two inclinations inspired confusion in Chaucer's successors, who no doubt also wrestled with the question of what it meant to be a poet. For Spearing and others this is one way to explain why the century following Chaucer produced no poetry that matched that poet's greatness. Chaucer was able to overcome, or more appropriately, use, this anxiety between a desire to claim originality and an acknowledgement of the necessity to cite sources to produce brilliant poetry; poets who attempted to model themselves on the master were caught in this snare of authorship.

This authorial quandary identified by Spearing would not have been a concern of most poets throughout literary history. For most medieval poets, for example, the idea of creating something new was not part of the composing process. Instead, the challenge was often to find ways of expression that suited the material at hand, whether that material came from Scripture or "old books." Composing poetry, then, may be thought of as the application of fitting language to the material with which one chooses to work.

Reflecting this temperament, A.J. Minnis in Medieval Theory of Authorship sees one category of medieval authors as essentially compilers, since they were aware that they were not actually creating new material. These authors

deny personal authority and accept responsibility only for the arrangement of the details (Minnis 192). Chaucer is most representative of this type of medieval compiler, Minnis points out, although he makes his case primarily with references to the Canterbury Tales.<sup>1</sup> John Gower, while essentially a compiler in the Confessio Amantis, admits that he has an intent to affect his audience in a certain way, and thus identifies himself as an auctor, particularly at the end of the eighth book of the Confessio, where the distinction between Amans and the poet becomes blurred. Gower is more representative of the kind of poet to whom Spearing refers and exemplifies Minnis's definition of auctor: "someone not merely to be read but also to be respected and believed" (10). Gower does however deny responsibility for what his audience will make of the work. Chaucer as well evinces a feeling that he cannot control what his audience, and particularly his future audience, will make of his texts. Lydgate, however, is at the other extreme, having a great deal of faith in the ability of the rhetoric to affect his audience. Perhaps because Lydgate did not question the effectiveness of the language he was using, some critics have labeled his poetry superficial and long-winded. Spearing, for example, notes that Lydgate uses sentence clauses as

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<sup>1</sup> Minnis acknowledges that the ending of Troilus and Criseyde stands apart from Chaucer's other work in this regard (195).

"applied decorative devices lacking any logical or semantic function, and in any case is often quite unable to control and complete [his sentences]" (Medieval to Renaissance 74).

William Dunbar exhibits characteristics of both *auctor* and *compiler*. In some ways he mirrors what Spearing notes of Chaucer, but with a greater sense of *auctoritas* than Chaucer exhibits. Dunbar's voice is strongly apparent in much of his verse. He emphasizes the role he played in conveying the material in his poetry to the audience. In many poems his role is obviously more than that of a compiler; for example, in the petitions to King James, Dunbar locates himself as the subject of the poetry. Yet in other poems, Dunbar is careful to point out that the source of the material is outside -- a dream, for example, or some unnamed person. In any case Dunbar's poetry exhibits a characteristic that Gregory Kratzman finds in medieval Scots poetry, that is, a "willingness to discuss the background to the writing of poetry" (256). Dunbar is thus perhaps closer to *auctor* than *compiler*. Even when admitting that he has taken material from an outside source, Dunbar still manages to remind the reader that he has had a vital role in transmitting the subject matter. He seems intent to claim *auctoritas* even when it is clear he is not the originator of the substance.

Dunbar's concept of *inventio* has its roots in medi-

eval rhetorical theory. The two works that form a framework for Minnis's categories are Cicero's De inventione and Geoffrey of Visauf's Poetria Nova. Invention is the first and perhaps most important step in the rhetorical process for Cicero, who emphasizes the connection between eloquence and proper subject matter. While Cicero devoted an entire work to the subject of where ideas and subject matter are to be found, Geoffrey glosses over the topic, devoting only twenty-seven lines of the total 2121 to invention. He focuses instead on arrangement as the real subject of a manual for poets. Geoffrey is writing from a Christian perspective; in this sense the search for topics is unnecessary because all topics are already revealed to a Christian writer. This perspective has its roots in Augustine, for whom memory is crucial. He remarks that to speak wisely "it is above all necessary to remember the words of Scripture" (De doctrina christiana IV:v, trans. Robertson 122) and "teachers cannot teach true things, but can only remind their pupils of what they already know" (De magistro X:xiv, cited by Kimmelman 45). Augustine's view thus implies that the whole question of whether anything is "invented" is presumably moot for Christian authors -- or at least for those authors who applied Augustine's theology to their writing. However, with the rise of vernacular poetry in Italy particularly, one notes an increasing emphasis on the power of the poet to invent.

Dante and Boccaccio, for example, fall somewhere in between Cicero and Geoffrey of Vinsauf. Dante draws a distinction between exegetes and poets that allows poets the license to create, since they are not interpreting Scripture. Boccaccio claims that poetry can be invented by the mind ("quod inveneris" [Genealogia XIV: vii]), although it ultimately springs from God ("ex sinu dei procedens" [ibid]). Dunbar reflects these sentiments, but emphasizes himself as an intermediary or even an originator of material.

The theme of poetic creation occurs in many places in Dunbar's poetry. While certainly not all of his poems are "about" poetry, as Denton Fox suggests is true of "The Goldyn Targe,"<sup>2</sup> a surprising number of references to the poetic process can be found in Dunbar's works. As discussed earlier, Dunbar is still not generally thought of as a poet concerned with poetic theory. He does, however, reflect many of the same concerns as Chaucer, since much of his work reveals an interest in the materials that are necessary to produce efficacious poetry. One gets the sense that the poet felt the need to try to create something with words although he knew that the process of capturing anything with language was flawed. He is obligated to his craft, which in some way allows him a

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<sup>2</sup> "Dunbar's 'The Goldyn Targe.'" Journal of English Literary History 26[1959]: 331-33.

measure of confidence. Like Chaucer, Dunbar can draw attention to what he is doing and remind the audience that he is aware that he may not be successful although Dunbar is much more confident that the audience will perceive the subject matter in the way he intends it to be perceived.

As mentioned above, Lois Ebin has written one of the most perceptive modern analyses of Dunbar's "Goldyn Targe." Ebin expands on Fox's comment that this poem is in fact "about" poetry. For Ebin, the poem "examines the relationship between the poet and his matter . . . " (147). "The entire narrative," she writes, "is characterized by an intense preoccupation with craft" (148). This perspective is curiously absent in most criticism of Dunbar; that the poet would reveal himself in his poetry seems not to have concerned his critics. Ebin's article is a useful starting point for an examination of Dunbar's commentary on the creative process. As she points out, "The relationship between the poet and his matter is translated into practice in a significant way in every important area of his writing" (159).

The poem that most directly deals with the composing process is "My Heid Did 3ak 3ester Nicht" (K 21). In this remarkable little poem Dunbar begins with a headache that prevents him from writing on one occasion and expands the discussion to comment on a general depression or malaise that often troubles him. It is one of the better expres-

sions of the frustrations of writer's block.

My heid did 3ak 3ester nicht,  
 This day to mak that I na micht;  
 So sair the magryme dois me men3ie,  
 Perseing my brow as ony gan3ie,  
 5 That scant I luik may on the licht.

And now, Schir, laitlie eftir mes,  
 To dyt thocht I begowthe to dres,  
 The sentence lay full evill till find --  
 Unsleipit in my heid behind,  
 10 Dullit in dulnes and distres.

Full oft at morrow I upryse  
 Quhen that my curage sleipeing lyis:  
 For mirth, for menstrallie and play,  
 For din nor danceing nor deray,  
 15 It will not walkin me no wise.

3ak: ache; sair: sore; men3ie: wound; gan3ie: arrow;  
 evill: ill; deray: revelry; walkin: awaken

The poem begins with one specific instance of frustration with writing, and concludes with a general statement about Dunbar's inability to participate in daily activities. In the central stanza Dunbar reveals something of his composing process. The "sentence" he is seeking is within him, in his "heid behind," a technical term for that part of the brain that is devoted to memory (Kinsley 280).<sup>3</sup> Yet it is there "unsleipit," unrested, and thus "dullit in dulnes." For Dunbar the mind needs exercise and rest to actively produce. Reiss is somewhat troubled by "unsleipit" because the most obvious gloss in his opinion,

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<sup>3</sup> The standard medieval division of the brain was in three parts: the front, site of Fantasy; the middle, site of Reason; and the rear, site of Memory (Reiss 26).

"asleep," does not fit in with the sense of the line. Kinsley reads it more logically as "not having slept." Reiss, however, makes an interesting suggestion: "Perhaps the word should be something like 'unshaped' . . ." (27). This definition fits the sense of the poem quite well, although textually it lacks a firm grounding. Reiss, however, has detected a clue to Dunbar's composing process.

The tools the poet needs are to be found, but at times they may have become "evill," or ill, and the creative process is stifled. The poet here does not seek material beyond what he has at hand, but gaining access to the "sentence" sometimes can be arduous. Here one detects the Augustinian perspective; Dunbar is not attempting to "invent" anything. In the last stanza Dunbar connects his difficulty with writing to a lack of interest in the activities at court, and this reveals that for the poet "making" is as much a part of his general happiness as are dancing and singing.

The word "dyt" has a rich meaning not fully examined by Dunbar's critics. The Dictionary of the Older Scots Tongue (DOST) primarily defines it as "to put in writing" but additional meanings in DOST include "to direct or instruct," and "to dictate something to be written, learned, or dealt with." The Middle English Dictionary provides several pages of definition, some of which un-

doubtedly had made it north by Dunbar's time. These include "to make, build, create, form, kindle, bring about or cause," and "to prepare, tune, polish, repair, ornament, dress, cultivate." The word means more than just "to write"; it reflects a desire to get something out, and to get it down in a formed or adorned way. In this sense it is similar to Greek "poiem" or Anglo-Saxon "scyppan," to shape or create, with its connection to "scop," poet. It is not enough to get the sentence out; the creative process must act to shape the thoughts to get them right. This poem reveals much about Dunbar's concern with the process of poetic creation, as he here admits the difficulty of the endeavor. Here, if anywhere, Dunbar articulates his definition of *inventio*.

For Arthur Moore, this poem embodies

the assertion of personal emotion as fitting matter for poetry, the choice of a subject altogether trivial, and the expansion of theme by objective, non-narrative methods. (207)

Moore's comment seems contradictory; "personal emotion" later in English poetry becomes the only "fitting matter for poetry." However, the subject of a headache *qua* headache certainly would be trivial. It seems quite apparent that the headache is only the prompting for Dunbar to comment on one aspect of making poetry. Moore in fact finally dismisses the poem as "of little intrinsic merit" (207), a not uncommon opinion about a good many of Dunbar's poems.

Memory is tied to the process of invention for many medieval poets; Dunbar expresses this as well, although at times memory seems to distress more than inspire him. In "The Passioun of Crist" (K 3), the narrator comments "Than rudlie come Remembrance / Ay rugging me withouten rest" (105-06). This occurs as part of a list of feelings coming over the narrator, after Compassioun, Contritioun, and Pity. In this case memory is painful, as it should be in remembrance of the Passion; thus, the sentiment is appropriate.

While memory itself may be painful, elsewhere, the poet reminds us that lack of memory is a greater danger:

Quhair seldin compt is tane and hes a hevy charge,  
 And syne is rekles in his governance  
 And on his conscience he takis all to large  
 And on the end hes no remembrance:  
 That man is abill to fall ane great mischance.  
 The synfull man that all the 3eir oursettis  
 Fra pasche to pasche rycht mony a thing  
 for3ettis. (K 5: 57-63)

*compt*: account; *syne*: thereupon; *oursettis*: puts off

The sinful man here is too concerned with the cares of everyday life to pause and remember what Christ has done for him. In addition, he does not take the time to recall and examine his own sins. As a result, he is in danger of falling into "mischance." The idea of "governance," how a person should lead his or her life, concerns Dunbar in several other poems as well. Elsewhere also, remembrance of Christ is essential in order to lead a good life.

Nocht thankand the of gratitud and grace  
 That thou me wrocht and bocht with thi ded,  
 Off this schort tyme remembring nocht the space  
 The hevinnis blis, the hellis hiddous feid . . . . .  
 (K6: 97-100)

In his poems devoted specifically to religious topics, Dunbar uses the spiritual sense of memory as an aid to compunction. He urges his audience to recall Christ, as he recalls Scripture as the source of material for the poem. This sense of memory is distinct from and more specific than rhetorical *memoria*.

In addition to the serious subjects in Scripture, however, Dunbar leaves room in his memory for some of the humorous scenes he observes in dream visions. At the end of the "Tournament" between the tailor and cobbler discussed in Chapter Two, the narrator states "To put this in rememberance / Mycht no man me resist" (K 52B: 224-5). The vulgarity of this particular scene (which causes the dreamer to waken himself with laughter) reminds us that Dunbar leaves room for purely entertaining subjects in his poetry as well as his memory.

While memory may be a source of inspiration for poetry, Dunbar is more likely to cite an outside reference as the origin of his material. This may be a person, but in some cases it is an unnamed, disembodied source. K 37 begins: "This hinder nycht in Dumfermeling / To me wes tawld ane windir thing" (1-2). The subject of the poem, a beast fable about a fox ("tod") seducing a lamb, perhaps

had some contemporary significance for Dunbar's readers which would have prompted him to distance himself from the material. Bawcutt suggests that the mention of the town "Dumfermling" twice in the poem might point to this possibility (Dunbar 304). Small's and Kinsley's editions follow the Bannatyne MS in assigning to this poem the title "The Wowing of the King quhen he wes in Dumfermling," and if that is indeed the subject of the poem, Dunbar's reticence in claiming authorship is understandable. The title has been discredited by Bawcutt, who notes that it is only in the Bannatyne MS, and not in Maitland Folio or Reidpeth MS (Dunbar 306).

After the seduction, the poem continues with a wolf coming onto the scene, while the fox is otherwise distracted, reminiscent of Chaunticleer in Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale." To escape the clutches of the wolf, the fox somehow puts on the skin of the lamb to avoid being eaten:

Throw hiddowis 3owling of the wowf  
 This wylie tod plat doun on growf,  
 And in the silly lambis skin  
 He crap als far as he micht win  
 And hid him thair ane weill lang space . . . . .  
 (57-61)

plat: fell flat; growk: ground; crap: crept; win: gain;  
 weill: full

No satisfactory explanation for this scene has been offered; Scott glosses over it (213-4), Kinsley states the fox is "covered in retreat by the lamb" (313), and Bawcutt

assumes the lamb has been devoured (Dunbar 306), but the events remain problematic. Elsewhere Dunbar uses the fox in sheep's clothing image: "Sum in ane lambskin is ane tod" (K 74: 37), but the use in this poem remains difficult to explicate.

At several points in the poem the narrator intrudes; in the seventh stanza he proclaims

I will no lesingis put in verse  
 Lyk as thir jangleris dois rehers  
 Bot be quhat maner thay war mard  
 Quhen licht wes owt and durris wes bard . . . .  
(43-6).

*lesingis*: lies; *mard*: confounded; *durris*: doors;  
*bard*: barred

"Bot" in line 45 is problematic. If it means "but," or "except," as DOST indicates, then it contradicts the previous lines. A better reading would be "about," which would fit in with the *occupatio* of the stanza. This intrusion does not quite reinforce the opening statement that this was "tawld" to the narrator and that it was "ane windir thing," which, while not leading to the conclusion that the story was fictitious, does at least imply some sense of questioning on the part of the hearer. Additionally, in line seven, the narrator comments "And that me thocht ane ferly cace." "Ferly cace," or marvelous, strange affair, has the implication of "tall story" according to Bawcutt (Dunbar 304). The final two lines of the poem are "And this report I with my pen, / How at Dumfermling fell the cace" (69-70). Again the material is

distanced from the poet, who ultimately becomes the reporter.

In this poem one gets the sense that Dunbar's narrator could not quite leave himself out of the material. The distancing at the beginning and end is undercut by his entrance into the poem in the middle, and the words he chooses for that entrance might even inspire some confusion in the reader. Dunbar's narrator here is emphasizing his accuracy as a reporter, since in this case, because he is recording "ane windir thing," the audience might distrust his perception of the events. Thus, he removes the culpability for any fantastic elements in the tale from himself.

Dunbar's inclusion of his "pen" is significant and ties his poetic method in this poem to compiling, which emphasizes putting the ideas of others in writing. It also reveals his awareness of a difference in the nature of spoken and written language. As Janet Coleman has pointed out:

Writing appears to establish a different kind of relationship between the word and its referent which is a more general and abstract one, less closely connected with a particular person, place, or time, than obtains in oral communication. (158)

While the great growth in literacy in the British isles had occurred in the fourteenth century, it seems clear that Dunbar is using an awareness of some basic differences in the two forms of communication. At the very least,

the shift from the spoken to the written gives Dunbar some flexibility, or license, to shape the material, although he seems to deny that anything is lost in the movement from one form of communication to the other.

Gregory Kratzman makes several points about the nature of the spoken and the written word in Scottish poetry. He begins with Chaucer and other English writers of the fourteenth century for whom "[p]oetry is felt to be a spoken as well as a written art, and for this reason the presence of the speaker is evoked with great immediacy" (238). But with Lydgate comes a change in sentiment, and the concern for poetry becomes completely grounded in writing:

The work of Lydgate's followers shows a widening of the gulf between literary and spoken language, and one suspects that to Hawes at least the use of any kind of colloquial effect of diction or rhythm in a non-satirical context would have been as deplorable as the use of "vyle termes." (246)

As Spearing has done, Kratzman seeks to explain why Chaucer's successors did not measure up to him, and here the culprit is the growing focus on the written word. Kratzman goes as far as saying that the loss of emphasis on the spoken "removed the obligation upon poets to control their rhythm" (246). This statement would seem to take matters to an extreme, but the question remains why the fifteenth and sixteenth century Scots did not seem to be affected in the same way as their English contemporar-

ies were. Kratzman states that "the strength of the sense of 'voice' in Scots poetry would be the mark of a continuity which is just as remarkable as the pervasive anonymity of contemporary English poetry" (249).

The dangers of the spoken word are mentioned by Dunbar in "The Tabill of Confessioun" (K 6). The text uses the ten commandments, the seven deadly sins, the four virtues, and the seven works of mercy for structure.<sup>4</sup> Dunbar's innovation is in also cataloguing sins of speaking, thought and intention in the poem (Kinsley 240).

I knaw me vicius, Lord, and rycht culpabill  
 In aithis, swering, lessingis and blasflemyng,  
 Off frustrat speiking in court, in kirk, in  
     tabill,  
 In word, in will, in wantones expremyng . . . .

(105-08)

*aithis*: oaths; *lessingis*: lies; *expremyng*: expression

His "frustrat speiking" can clearly be read in the petitionary poems. In this poem, the poet uses himself as an example with whom the audience can identify, a technique not likely to have been used by clerics at the time. Again, this illustrates the distinction between Dunbar's poetic and clerical personas.

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<sup>4</sup> Bawcutt discusses this as well as other points of the structure of the poem and its sources (Dunbar 171-4). Kinsley reports that the Arundel MS is the only complete version of the poem, since during the Reformation several stanzas were excised from the Maitland Folio and Bannatyne MS (238). We may never be sure of the number of overtly religious poems that Dunbar wrote because the Reformation in Scotland did away with, or at the very least caused the heavy editing of, much religious verse.

While the spoken word may be the source of woe for the speaker, overhearing it becomes the source for several of Dunbar's poems. In "Ane Murlandis Man of Uplandis Mak" (K 74), a highlander asks a neighbor for news of "peax or weir" (3). His neighbor, who has just returned from Edinburgh, responds by cataloging the corrupt behavior he has observed in that city: "Sum in his toung his kyndnes tursis [carries]; / Sum cuttis throttis, and sum pykis pursis" (38-39). Clerics are also criticized: "Religious men of divers placis / Cumis thair to wow and se fair facis" (43-44), while monks frequent the city because there "All mercyfull wemen thair eirandis grantis" (55). Putting these words in the mouth of a Highland Scotsman demeans the city even more as Highlanders, or "Wild Scots," were thought of by Lowlanders to "exemplify lawless violence, barbarism, an incapacity for civil society" (Fradenburg 169). The speaker seems unsure of what to do with the information he has gathered as he tells his neighbor to "Keep this all secreit, gentill brother" (10). One wonders why the Highlander is not eager to have this news spread; perhaps it is Dunbar's ironic way of making the inhabitants of Edinburgh appear even less civilized than the standard exemplars of lawlessness.

An eagerness to overhear is a characteristic of Dunbar's speaker in other poems. Hearing the spoken word is what draws the narrator to the garden in "The Tretis of

the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" (K 14). This poem is ostensibly the record of the speech of three women whom the narrator overhears. Their pleasant voices are immediately attractive to him.

Quhairon ane bird on ane bransche so birst out hir notis  
 That never ane blythfullar bird was on the beuche hard.  
 Quhat throw the sugarat sound of hir sang glaid  
 And throw the savour sanative of the sueit flouris,  
 I drew in derne to the dyk to dirkin efter mirthis.

(5-9)

*beuche*: bough; *sanative*: curative; *derne*: secrecy; *dyk*: wall; *dirkin*: lie hidden

The words of the women finally cause the narrator to thrust himself into a hedge to get a better view:

I hard under ane holyn hevinlie grein hewit  
 Ane hie speiche at my hand with hautand wourdis:  
 With that in haist to the hege so hard I inthrang

(11-13)

line 11: I heard, under a splendid green-hued holly tree

His efforts, however, are rewarded by having to listen to disputations on the various ways women can cuckold and deceive their husbands.

The poem has been discussed at length by several critics -- twice, in fact, by Spearing.<sup>5</sup> It has perhaps eclipsed "The Goldyn Targe" as the most written about of Dunbar's works. The poem comes out of anti-feminist tradition, but certainly stretches the boundaries of that

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<sup>5</sup> in Medieval to Renaissance in English Literature and most recently in The Poet as Voyeur.

tradition by including well-developed and quite likeable females.<sup>6</sup> For purposes of this study, the comments on how the narrator finds his material are important. As Bawcutt notes:

The substance of "The Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" is talk: the poet overhears women talking about themselves and their husbands, and when they retire homewards, he too withdraws to an "arber": "And with my pene did report ther pastance [pasttime] most mery" (526).

(Dunbar 325)

Scott notes that the Widow, the most charismatic speaker, invokes God before she speaks (189). For him, the Widow is apparently about to present a reasonable picture of marriage after the two women had gone on about various methods of deceiving and cuckolding their husbands. The Widow's advice, ironically, turns out to center on how one may avoid being caught when deceiving one's husband. Scott is particularly harsh in his treatment of the Widow: "Thus Dunbar adds at one stroke blasphemy, cunning, and hypocrisy to the sins of the two wives" (189). However, the irony of the Widow is apparent in her opening remarks:

Than said the weido, I wis ther is no way othir:  
 Now tydis me for to talk, my taill it is nixt;  
 God my spreit now inspir and my speche quyckin  
 And send me sentence to say substantious and noble,  
 Sa that my preching may pers 3our pervest hertis  
 And mak yow mekar to men in maneris and conditiounis.

(245-50)

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<sup>6</sup> See Bawcutt, Dunbar pp. 324-46 for a thorough discussion of the background of the poem and Dunbar's adaptation of several other traditional genres.

Dunbar, after all, is the priest, and the use of the word "preching" by the Widow, while irreverent, seems a jab at his own profession. In fact, Bawcutt catalogues many Scriptural references in the Widow's speech (Dunbar 335-36). And at the end of her talk, the narrator comments:

Quhen endit had hir ornat speche this eloquent wedow,  
 Lowd thai lewch all the laif and loffit hir mekle,  
 And said thai sald examplill tak of her soverane teching  
 And wirk eftir hir wordis, that woman wes so prudent.  
 Than culit thai ther mouthis with comfortable drinkis  
 And carpit full cummerlik with cop going round.

(505-10)

*lewch*: laugh; *loffit*: loved; *mekle*: much; *carpit*: conversed; *cummerlik*: like gossips

The ladies "culit," or cooled, their mouths with wine, with its obvious religious significance. There is a firm sense of closure here as the ladies have vented their frustrations with men and now require some curative drink. The wine, which will now balm their mouths, ironically was the lubricant that allowed them to voice their sentiments so freely. Surely the description of the Widow's "ornat speche" and the label of "eloquent" are to be taken ironically in light of the fact that her discourse was alcohol induced. In effect, the drinking of the wine functions as a narrative device to open and close the section of the poem in which the ladies speak.

At the end of the poem, day returns and the narrator goes off to record what he has witnessed

And I all prevely past to a plesand arber  
 And with my pene did report ther pastance most mery.  
 3e auditoris most honorable that eris hes gevin  
 Oneto this uncouth aventur quhilk airly me happinnit:  
 Of thir thre wantoun wiffis that I haif writtin heir,  
 Quhilk wald 3e waill to 3our wif gif 3e suld wed one?  
 (525-30)

prevely: privately; pastance: pastime; waill: choose

The ending is reminiscent of K 37, where the narrator also "reports with pen" the events of the poem. The sexual significance of his pen should not be overlooked either. The importance of the speaker is stressed by Spearing (Medieval to Renaissance 219-222) and downplayed by Bawcutt, who finds that "his importance should not be exaggerated. If we do, we turn the poem's structure inside out, putting what is marginal and peripheral at its very centre" (Dunbar 331). Bawcutt takes this point too far. The narrator is hardly "marginal"; he is the source of the entire narrative as the eavesdropper. Thus our appreciation of what the women say must be colored by his intermediacy. The narrator, though, is presented in an ironic and self-deprecating fashion; we must remember that during the course of the narrative the narrator is stuck in a hedge on the periphery of the garden struggling to make out the words of the women. Dunbar's placement of the narrator in this position says much; he is made to look as foolish as the husbands in the wive's tales. But he cannot escape his need to hear the words, to take in what is being spoken, and this reflects Dunbar's own attraction

to spoken language.

Dunbar's fascination with words, with the spoken language, is apparent in the "Tretis" and elsewhere. In fact, he seems to pride himself on being able to render the spoken into the written, and makes note of the fact that he is recording speech accurately. In "I seik about this warld unstabille" (K 58), for example, the speaker remarks:

I seik about this warld unstabille  
To find ane sentence convenabille,  
Bot I can nocht in all my wit  
Sa trew ane sentence fynd off it  
As say, it is dessaveabille. (1-5)

*convenabille*: appropriate; *dessaveabille*: deceitful

The state of the world, its unsettled nature, gives Dunbar great pain, and would seem to interfere with his composing process. This is also made evident in K 69:

In to thir dirk and drublie dayis  
Quhone sabill all the hevin arrayis,  
With mystie vapouris, cluddis and skyis,  
Nature all curage me denyis  
Off sangis, ballatis and of playis. (1-5)

The sentiment is similar to the opening of Henryson's "Testament od Cresseid," but for Dunbar the effect of the climate seems more dramatic and stifling.

In two poems about James Dog, the keeper of Queen Margaret's wardrobe, Dunbar incorporates an obvious pun on the name, but he also defends his own speech, distinguishing it from writing. The first poem (K 29) apparently concerns Dunbar's efforts to get Dog to give him a doublet

("To giff a doublett he is als doure" [2]). Much of the humor comes from Dog's reaction when Dunbar presents him with the Queen's orders: "Quhen that I schawe to him 3our markis / He turnis to me again and barkis" (5-6); "Quhen that I schawe to him 3our wrytin / He grinis that I am red for bytin" (9-10) ("grinis," or grins, here implying showing the teeth). Each stanza ends in the refrain "Madame, 3e heff a dangerous dog!" The poem concludes with Dunbar's suggestion that the Queen "get a less ane" - a tamer dog.

In the second poem, labelled in the Maitland Folio "Of the said James, quhen he had plesett him," Dunbar takes a more conciliatory tone, since he apparently has received his garment. He concludes each stanza with "He is na dog; he is a lam." But Dunbar's apology is specific: "Thocht I in ballet did with him bourde [jest] / In malice spack I nevir ane woord" (5-6). One gets the sense here that the ballad provides a safe place for commentary that should be exempt from harsh judgment. Dunbar evinces this kind of immunity in his verse, as will be discussed later regarding some of the petitionary poems; this seems to have been a new concept for a court poet. Firth makes the point that in the main court addresses to Kings were deferential (Poets and Princepleasers, esp. 204-10). But Dunbar seems to have felt safe behind his poems, indicating he may have recognized some distance between himself

and what he produced. It is also possible that the court poet held a position similar to court fool, and thus his criticisms were tolerated.

Dunbar does display typical attitudes of the court poet in several of his petitions, however. At times he mentions the cost of his writing implements when he petitions for money:

For rekkyning of my rentis and roumes  
 3e neid not tyre 3our thowmes,  
 Ne for to gar 3our countaris clink,  
 Na paper for to spend nor ink  
 In the ressaveing of my soumes. (K 46: 6-10)

*thowmes*: thumbs; *gar*: cause

But his success at writing is directly connected to his payment in the next poem in Kinsley's edition, called "Welcome to the Lord Treasurer" in Small's edition:

Thane had my dyt beine all in duill,  
 Had I my wage wantit quhill 3uill,  
 Quhair now I sing with heart onsair:  
 Welcum, my awin lord thesaurair! (K 47: 21-24)

*duill*: sorrow; *quhill 3uill*: at Yule; *onsair*: pain free

The half-comic salute to the "lord" treasurer is reminiscent of Chaucer's "Complaint to his Purse" and is typical of many court poets' petitions for benefice. The comic tone no doubt was more pleasing to the king than straightforward lamentation over lack of funds.

While worldly concerns form the subject matter of a number of Dunbar's poems, dreams provide a rich source of material in several of his best known works. Ebin com-

ments on Dunbar's use of the dream vision, and specifically on his modification of the form. Dreams are a source of material in a number of Dunbar's poems. But Dunbar's dream visions are lean, as Ebin points out:

Although he works within the same tradition, Dunbar engages in more extreme experimentation with the dream vision than his predecessors. . . . he deliberately strips the vision of most of the features exploited by previous poets. The allegorical action . . . is reduced to bare essentials. . . . he establishes a new relationship among the three main sections of the vision -- the narrator's preamble, the dream, and the reawakening . . . . (150-1)

Dunbar does not always shape his dream visions into neat three part structures, however; there are authorial intrusions at times. In her analysis of "The Goldyn Targe," Ebin sees the relationship between the sections as Dunbar's method of commenting on the poetic process, uniting the allegory in the dream to the composing of the poem. As discussed above, one of the limitations of Dunbar criticism that Ebin herself falls into is the focus on Dunbar as stylist, a poet overly concerned with figurative language, and her analysis of the "Targe" unduly stresses Dunbar's craftsmanship; that is, she sees his creative method to be essentially one of ornamenting the material, instead of focusing on the reasons why he may have chosen certain images.

While inside the dream, the narrator does intrude in "The Goldyn Targe" to make a comment on his powers of

reporting:

Discrive I wald, bot quho coud wele endyte  
 How all the feldis wyth thai lilies quhite  
 Depaynt war brycht, quhilk ti the hevyn did  
 glete?

Noucht thou Omer, als fair as thou coud wryte,  
 For all thine ornate stilis so perfyte;  
 Nor yit thou, Tullius, quhois lippis suete  
 Off rethorike did in to termes flete:  
 Your aureate tongis both bene all to lyte  
 For to compile that paradise complete.

(K 10: 64-72)

The choice of words to depict what the poet is attempting is significant. The narrator is endeavoring to "discrive," and in the end it is the ability to "compile" that is needed in this situation. Homer and Cicero would not have the ability to "endyte" the scenes the speaker has witnessed. "Endyte," along with "dyt," seems to imply more of a creative process on the part of the writer. In this case, that ability is not called for, perhaps because the speaker is emphasizing the beauty of a scene that requires no embellishment. Dunbar creates the artifice that a less creative poet does more justice to the scene, because he is the more objective reporter.

Two poems that offer extended commentary on the nature of poetry are "The Thrissal and the Rois" and "The Goldyn Targe." "The Thrissil and the Rois" is perhaps Dunbar's most accomplished dream vision. The historical occasion, James IV's marriage to Margaret, has been dis-

cussed at length, most recently by Bawcutt<sup>7</sup>. The imagery is clearly intended to represent James and Margaret, but it is the opening and closing of the poem that are most interesting for a glimpse of Dunbar's creative process. Fradenburg discusses this aspect at length (134-148), but her analysis rests too heavily on theoretical conceptions of authorship that are questionably applied to Dunbar.

The comparison to Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls is inevitable, as the two poems share imagery and stanzaic form. Almost every critic who has dealt with the poem has referred to Chaucer's work. Surprisingly, few have mentioned the quite obvious reference to the opening of the Canterbury Tales in the opening stanza.

Quhen Merche wes with variand windis past  
And Appryll had with hir silver schouris  
Tane leif at Nature with ane orient blast.

(K 50, 1-3)

Another Chaucerian work that must be mentioned is the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women. The god "fresche May" in Dunbar's poem appears attired in "brycht atteir of flouris forgit new" (18), as Chaucer's Alceste appears in the visage of a daisy, "enbrouded ful of grene greves,/ In-with a fret of rede rose-leves" (F 227-28). Echoes to the Prologue are found in several of Dunbar's works. Again, textually, one could argue that Dunbar is merely

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<sup>7</sup> Dunbar the Makar pp. 92 -103, see also Spearing, Medieval Dream Poetry 16-18, and Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry 206-07.

making use of the same traditional motifs as Chaucer had used, both poets borrowing from Machaut or Deschamps, for example. But Chaucer would have been a more obvious reference, a poet writing in the same language as Dunbar, and the one who certainly seems to have exerted the most influence on him.

Perhaps the most interesting stanza for examining Dunbar's ideas of invention is the fourth, after the narrator has fallen asleep and sees the vision of May.

Slugird, scho said, Awalk annone for schame,  
 And in my honour sum thing thow go wryt;  
 The lork hes done the mirry day proclame  
 To rais up luvaris with confort and delyt;  
 3it nocht inress thy curage to indyt,  
 Quhois hairt sum tyme hes glaid and blisful l  
       bene,  
 Sangis to mak undir the levis grene.     (22-28)

Fradenburg has pointed out that May reminds Dunbar that he is to "discryve the Ros of most plesance" (39), and that it is the word "discryve" which "brings together the ideas of writing down, delineating, and picturing with (from the verb descry) ideas of proclaiming, making known, announcing as a herald" (135-36). Fradenburg posits that Dunbar has difficulty in starting to write because he is "subjected, as Lacan might say, to the desire of the other" (135). Thus, for Fradenburg, the rhetorical occasion of the poem constrains the poet to write about the marriage and he becomes "an instrument in the discourse of sovereignty" (135).

This interpretation, however, does not adequately

explain the success of the poem. The beginning of the poem is interesting, as Fradenburg also points out, because of the trepidation with which Dunbar approaches the subject matter. After being asked to write "sangis," the narrator demurs, saying that in the real Scottish landscape "Thy air it is nocht holsum nor benyng" (32), adding:

Lord Eolus dois in thy sessone ring;  
So busterous ar the blastis of his horne,  
Amang thy bewis to walk I haif forborne. (33-35)

May responds by reminding the speaker of his promise to "discryve," and suggests he

Go se the birdis how thay sing and dance,  
Illumynit our with orient skyis brycht  
Annamyllit richely with new asur lycht. (40-43)

After this she enters a "lusty gairding gent" (elegant garden) (44), and the speaker follows, viewing a verdant garden, shining with light, full of birds singing the praises of Nature and Venus. Again, the comparison to The Parliament of Fowls is often made, but the same scene unfolds to Chaucer in the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women, where he sees in the garden the "floures swote enbrouded al" (119), and where "Forgeten hadde the erthe his pore estat/ Of wynter, that hym naked made and mat" (125-26).

Similarly, Dunbar's speaker must leave the actual landscape in order to prompt his creativity. The process is clear: the poet is asked to write a poem in praise of

the rose, but looking at the landscape around him, finds little in the way of inspiration. May, smiling, leads him into a garden where he can observe a truly spring-like setting, thus allowing the creative process to begin in earnest. But there is a difference between this task and the "sangis" that May reminds the poet he "sum tyme hes glaid and blisfull bene" to write. In the fourth stanza, the poems had been labeled "sangis to mak," while for this particular occasion, the task is to "discryve." The difference in verbs is important. "Discryve" does not have the emphasis on creating that "mak" does. In the last stanza, the speaker remarks:

Than up I lenyt, halflingis in affrey,  
 And thus I wret, as 3e haif hard to forrow,  
 Off lusty May upone the nynte morrow . . . .  
(187-89)

*halflingis*: half; *affrey*: fear; *to forrow*: previously

"Wret" is perhaps the blandest term Dunbar uses to label what he does; it comes as something of an anticlimax to the beautiful imagery of the poem. While he is not completely subservient to the occasion, Dunbar nonetheless makes it clear that he does not have complete creative control over the material in this poem. Again, he constructs a narrator who functions as a reporter.

Elsewhere, Dunbar's dreams are more pleasant and they reveal more about the poet. "This hinder nycht halff sleiping as I lay" (K 51) begins:

This hinder nycht halff sleiping as I lay  
 Me thocht my chalmer in ane new aray  
 Was all depent with many divers hew  
 Of all the nobill storyis, ald and new,  
 Sen oure first father formed was of clay. (1-5)

This poem, in Priscilla Bawcutt's words, "has not pleased many critics" (122). Supporting this, she points out metrical weakness in the work. Kinsley argues: "The poem is not an artistic success, for the narrow personal concern suits ill with the broad, general, and august associations of allegory" (334). Kinsley is not alone in missing the humor, which is central to an appreciation of the poem. Bawcutt rightly points out humorous antecedents in allegory, but is still forced to conclude that the poem is "an interesting failure, but through weaknesses in its execution rather than an inherent unsuitability of form to content" (122). While the metrical flaws are apparent (several lines violate the decasyllabic pattern such as "Sum sang, sum danceit, on instrumentis sum playit" [9]) there is much to like about this poem.

The tone seems humorous almost from the beginning; in the third stanza the poet thinks:

This seimes to me ane guidlie companie,  
 And gif it be ane feindlie fantasie  
 Defend me Jhesu and his moder Marie! (13-15)

This does not sound like a man overly concerned with the potential dangers of allegorical ruminations; his plea to Jesus and Mary seems to be chosen more to fit the rhyme scheme than to ward off evil. It also seems ironic that

the allegorical figures do not speak directly to Dunbar in an effort to cheer him up but rather talk about him, so that the poet becomes an observer recording the dialogue.

The poem is organized into four sections: an introduction that sets up the dream vision, the parade of comforting figures, the parade of complaining figures, and finally, a sort of counseling session from Patience. The figures approach the speaker differently; the first three -- Distres, Hivines, and Langour -- set the tone by representing the poet's mental state. The next -- Nobilnes, Confort, Pleasance, and Persaveing -- attempt to brighten the speaker's mood. The next group of figures, led by Resoun and Discretioun, introduces the section of the poem that speaks directly of the poet's woes of underappreciation. This is the portion of the poem which most critics find problematic. But taken in context, the section comes as a humorous anticlimax when seen in the allegorical tradition.

What does Dunbar really want from these beings? Clearly he seeks sympathy rather than inspiration or even consolation for that matter. Because we expect a more lofty discussion, we chuckle when we hear these figures discussing Dunbar's lack of appreciation at court. It is appropriate that Dunbar the poet does not play an active role in this poem; even he is above this kind of talk, for the moment, at least. This is perhaps even more ironic

given the content of virtually all of Dunbar's other petitionary poems.

Bawcutt finds the penultimate stanza "startling" as Patience directly addresses the poet for the first and only time.

Patience to me -- my friend -- said, Mak guid cheir  
And on the prince depend with humelie feir;  
For I full weill dois knaw his nobill intent:  
He wald not for ane bischopperikis rent  
That 3ow war unrewardit half ane 3eir. (106-110)

The last two lines are somewhat confusing; Kinsley suggests that Patience is implying the the "king would not, for his own profit, delay the nomination of a beneficed priest to a vacant bishopric, if this meant holding up Dunbar's preferment" (335). In other words, the king would nominate bishops to fill vacancies if he needed the income to pay Dunbar, rather than let the poet go "half ane 3eir" without reward.

The poem is similar to "In to thir dirk and drublie dayis" (K 69). The latter poem also features a parade of allegorical figures, but the tone is completely different. In K 69, the poet's melancholic nature is predominate, and the figures reach out directly to the poet.

Than Patience sayis, Be not agast;  
Hald Hoip and Treuthe within the fast  
And lat Fortoun wirk furthe hir rage'  
Quhome that no rasoun may assuage  
Quhill that hir glas be run and past.

And Prudence in my eir sayis ay,  
Quhy wald thow hald that will away?  
Or craif that thow may have mo space,  
Thow tending to ane uther place

A journey going everie day?

And than sayis Age, My friend, cum neir  
 And be not strange, I the requeir;  
 Cum brodir, by the hand me tak;  
 Remember thow hes compt to mak  
 Off all thi tyme thow spendit heir. (21-35)

Clearly this is a more successful poem, at least in terms of prosody, than K 51. Patience here speaks with the lofty words appropriate to her station. But the fact (or at least probability) that Dunbar wrote both of these poems must cast "This hinder niycht" into the realm of parody. Dunbar obviously understood the implications of having a figure such as Patience cite details of the king's financial situation.

Another point which has been overlooked is that "This hinder nycht" is clearly a dream vision, while in "In to thir dirk and drublie dayis" the poet makes no mention of sleep. Perhaps the poet's more active imagination comes out in dreams, and the more conventional visions occur during consciousness. Bawcutt points out the abrupt ending of "This hinder nycht" in which the poet awakens with a start after hearing Patience make her comment about the king's monetary dispensation. This sudden ending is perhaps the poet's way of acknowledging that he has gone a bit too far, finally straining his credibility.

One also gets a sense of Dunbar's conception of invention in poems that incorporate metaphors for creation. The most common image for creation in Dunbar's

poetry is the flower. It occurs in several poems across several categories. In "Et nobis Puer natus est" (K 1), the first stanza includes the traditional depiction of Mary: "the ros Mary, flour of flouris" (4). The scriptural origins of the poem, from Isaiah 45:8 and the office of the Mass for Christmas Day have been noted by Bawcutt (Dunbar 175) and Reiss (93), among others. Bawcutt focuses on the celebratory tone of the poem, noting how Dunbar's work stands out from the other Nativity poems that appear with it in the Bannatyne MS (176).

But later in this poem of the Nativity, the poet comments on nature's response to the birth of Christ:

Now spring up flouris fra the rute,  
 Revert 3ow upwart naturally  
 In honour of the blissit frute  
 That rais up fro the rose Mary;  
 Lay out 3our levis lustely,  
 Fro deid tak lyfe now at the lest  
 In wirschip of that prince wirthy . . . . .

(41-48)

Christ brings about the renewal of the flowers in spring. The flower Mary bears the fruit (Christ) who inspires the leaves to spread out. The poem exhorts the flowers to "revert," or spring up, "naturally," as they do every year. (One wonders what distinction is to be made in honor of the birth of Christ.) Possibly, the poet is emphasizing the recurring nature of the event to remind the audience to honor Christ each and every year. There is also the notion of renewal sparked by Christ's coming to earth. Again the image of the flower springing from a root pro-



ful bud; she must also propagate the line. Dunbar uses very similar imagery to describe Mary in K 1 (see below Chapter Five), and the religious imagery of line 31 above is unmistakable.

Perhaps Dunbar's most beautiful use of the plant metaphor occurs in "Sweit Rois of Vertew" (K 8).

Sweit rois of vertew and of gentilnes,  
 Delytsum lyllie of everie lustynes,  
 Richest in bontie and in bewtie cleir  
 And everie vertew that is held most deir,  
 Except onlie that 3e ar mercyles:

In to 3our garthe this day I did persew;  
 Thair saw I floweris that fresche wer of hew-  
 Baithe quhyte and rid moist lusty wer to seyne,  
 And halsum herbis upone satlkis grene:  
 3it leif nor flour fynd could I nane of rew.

I doubt that Merche with his caild blastis keyne  
 Hes slane this gentill herbe that I of mene  
 Quhois petewous deithe dois to my hart sic pane  
 That I wald mak to plant his rute agane,  
 So comfortand his levis unto me bene.

*halsum*: health-giving

The action of the poem is simple enough: The poet describes the flower, rose or lily, in the first stanza, noting its attributes. He ends the stanza by describing the one exception in her qualities: she is merciless. In the second stanza, the poet enters the flower's garden, taking in the beautiful flowers and herbs there present. Again the last line announces an exception; no plant of "rew" can be found. Bawcutt has pointed out that "rew" is a medicinal shrub, a perennial, in addition to being a pun on rue, or pity (Dunbar 298). Finally, the poet specu-

lates on why he finds no such plant, fearing the cold winds of March as the cause. He vows to replant the root as the leaves give him so much comfort.

The ostensible interpretation of this poem has the flower representing a lady and the poet searching for love that has disappeared. His pain can be relieved only by a replanting in an effort to grow a new love where the old one has died.<sup>8</sup> Another level of interpretation is possible, however. There are several echoes of Chaucer's Prologue to The Legend of Good Women. In particular, Dunbar's poem recalls the section in which Chaucer states his preference for certain types of flowers:

Now have I thanne eek this condicioun,  
That, of alle floures in the mede,  
Thanne love I most thise floures white and rede,  
  
Swiche as men calle dayeyes in oure toun.  
(F 40-43)<sup>9</sup>

The F text further amplifies the speaker's sentiment:

So glad am I, whan that I have presence  
Of it, to doon it alle reverence  
As she that is of alle floures flour,  
Fulfilled of al vertu and honour,  
And evere ilyke faire, and fressh of hewe;  
And I love it, and ever ylike newe,  
And evere shal, til that myn herte dye.  
(F 51-57)

The verbal echoes are clear: Chaucer's "floures white and

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bawcutt, Kinsley, Scott, Reiss.

<sup>9</sup> I cite the F version as it was the most prevalent in manuscripts in the fifteenth century. A copy of it exists in the same MS, Seld. Arch. B 24 in the Bodleian Library, as "The Kingis Quair" (McDiarmid, The Kingis Quair (2-4)).

rede" become Dunbar's "Baithe quhyte and rid," and the lilly's "vertu and honour" become "vertew and gentilnes" in Dunbar, while the "fressh of hewe" comes across intact in Dunbar's line seven. The change from honor to gentleness perhaps was necessary to allow Dunbar to call the flower "mercyles," which does not seem a particularly honorable thing to do.

If these are indeed echoes of Chaucer's Prologue, as they seem to be, then the section of Chaucer's poem from which they come is of interest. The lines occur in the beginning of the poem after Chaucer discusses old books as the keys of remembrance. Additionally, following the lines about the daisy, Chaucer describes himself going through the fields after the "corn" has been harvested, lucky to find an "ear" or two on the ground (F 73-77). Dunbar's poem gains meaning if we view it alongside Chaucer's as a comment on the poet and his material. Dunbar finds neither leaf nor flower (again an echo of Chaucer [F 72]) of the plant that he seeks directly. What does the poet do when he cannot even find a scrap ear of corn in the field? Dunbar answers that he must plant anew.

Of course Dunbar is not rooting around in a barren field; he has many beautiful flowers around the garden from which to choose. But here he is in search of some particular object that will comfort him, one that will take pity on him. Perhaps Dunbar is reminding us of the

limitations of relying only on old books; at times the field must be replanted. But in reviving this plant the poet must have the root; nothing springs from nothing. This is a statement of the power of the poet to create, instead of just to recreate. Dunbar, however, is still a man of his times who acknowledges that the poet must have the root of the material before he begins the creative process.

The notion of poetry springing from a seed is discussed by Robert O. Payne in the context of Chaucer's organic ideas of poetry:

Chaucer's revivification of the speaker/language/audience model for the poetic process, in the context of his unquestionably Christian notions of time and reality, produces a very organic notion of the poem. That is, the Chaucerian speech/poem, like all those the eagle showed him in the Hous of Fame, is an initially invented construct which, once committed to time, carries into the stream of time some seeds of its speaker and its topics which germinate, grow, bear fruit, and reseed themselves in successive generations of hearer/readers.

(in Murphy Medieval Eloquence 285)

Dunbar's poem reveals that he seeks a place for himself in this organic model of literary history. While Chaucer's speaker in the Legend of Good Women relied on what others had planted, Dunbar's speaker places himself at the beginning of the process, "making" to plant the root so that he along with all who follow may have the enjoyment of the full plant.

In Dunbar's poetry one gets a sense of a speaker, of

an "I" who is at times quite clearly defined. In this sense, Dunbar breaks away from medieval poetics and moves in the direction of the Renaissance. The personal details that Dunbar gives his audience in his poems do not represent a radically new device in poetry, nor are they the most "personal details" one finds in late medieval poetry. In "La Male Regle," for example, Hoccleve writes about his "mild alcoholism, his laziness, his pursuit of prostitutes and his cowardice, all with the fascination of a man observing someone other than himself" (Spearing Medieval to Renaissance 114). This is a very personal "I," very different from Chaucer, who consistently used fictional narrators. "Skelton on the contrary goes even further than Chaucer in the direction of total dramatization of the speakers of his poems" (Spearing Medieval to Renaissance 239). Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Chaucer's narrators is the fact that the poet deliberately creates them so that the audience can see through them. They are almost always simple or ignorant of the implications of many of the statements they utter. This artifice is deliberate and much of Chaucer's irony stems from the narrator.

While Dunbar clearly includes himself in a number of poems, particularly the petitions, the relationship between the narrator of Dunbar's poems and Dunbar himself is certainly ambiguous on occasion. Nevertheless, in only a

few poems does Dunbar the poet create a narrator whom he expects the audience to view as simplistic, as in, for example, "The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo." Dunbar's use of narrators who are more assertive than Chaucer's reflects his attitude toward authorship. When Dunbar's narrators attempt to distance themselves from the material, it seems to be an effort to express objectivity. Additionally, Dunbar rarely cites other authors as the source of his material.

Ultimately, Dunbar's presentation of himself as both compiler and auctor are linked. In both cases the speaker takes responsibility for what is on the page, either as the maker of it or as the accurate recorder of events he witnesses. While objective recording may seem like an attempt at disclaiming responsibility for content, Dunbar's speakers draw attention to the fact that they are the ones producing the material. In this way they are tied to the communicative process. Invention for Dunbar almost always imparts to the audience a sense of the poet's role in the creative process.

## Chapter Four

## The Constraints and Demands of Audience

## "Into This World May None Assure"

Most of Dunbar's critics have focused on the poet's immediate court audience as an important factor in his choice of subject matter. While it is certainly true that he wrote primarily for the court, Dunbar exhibits a wider conception of audience in many of his poems. Like Chaucer, Dunbar is concerned with what will happen to his text once it enters the public domain. But Dunbar's attitude toward his audience is complex; his addresses to King James IV, for example, may surprise the reader with a tone one might not expect a poet to take with his ruler. As a result, one may suspect that the King was not the only audience the poet had in mind. A consideration of whom Dunbar saw as his audience affects one's understanding of what the poet's goals were and whether or not he may have achieved them.

One has the distinct sense in a number of Dunbar's poems that he is acutely concerned about what his audience will make of the texts in front of them. To a greater extent than Chaucer, Dunbar creates a poetic persona who wishes to exert control over the state of the text and frets over the uncertain reception his work may engender. Two strains become apparent in Dunbar's statements on the

reception of poetry. On one hand, there is uncertainty and fear of what may be misunderstood or missed by the audience. This more conventional characteristic may be traced back to poets with whom he was undoubtedly familiar, in particular Chaucer. In Dunbar, this uncertainty manifests itself in expressions of a possessive desire ("Schir, I complane of injuris"), and in poems that reveal Dunbar's concern over how he is perceived by those around him. He also expresses this concern in poems that lament the mutability of the world. Seemingly irreconcilable with this strain is the poet's sense of the power of his words. Flyting is of course an obvious example, but in other places Dunbar evinces a confidence in his words having the ability to make things happen. This is particularly apparent in the petitions, perhaps due to the striking tone the poet uses with the king, but it is evident in other types of poems as well. Indeed, this is a pervasive sentiment in Dunbar's work, particularly the petitions and the dream visions.

Dunbar thus provides an opportunity to observe a poet being pulled in two directions. While these sentiments are hardly unique to Dunbar, the poet's work does demonstrate a concern for how poetry will be received, and an awareness of both the power and the limits of his language. One finds in Dunbar's poetry a sense of confidence in the language, a tone that implies that the poet be-

lieved his points were getting across to his audience intact. This sentiment, absent for the most part in Chaucer's work, is evident in the poems of Lydgate and Skelton to a much greater degree than it is in Dunbar's. Unlike those poets, though, Dunbar also exhibits a concern about how his words may be perceived, evident in statements designed to remind the audience of what his role is in the communicative process. This attitude aligns him more closely with Chaucer.

Reader-response criticism can help one understand some characteristics of Dunbar's poetry. Medieval literature, interestingly, has been for the most part overlooked by reader-response theorists. Only narrative poetry, in particular, the Romance, has been investigated with any thoroughness by reader-response critics looking at the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Dunbar would seem to be a good case study for this type of criticism, which, in its most sweeping definition means "a poem cannot be understood apart from its results" (Tompkins ix). More specifically, reader-response focuses on the audience's role in the interpretation of literature, and thus sheds light on how audience reception affects authorial intent.

In "The Reader in History," the introductory essay to her volume Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, Jane Tompkins attempts a sweeping

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular Sturges, Ganim, and Rosenblatt.

overview of the place of the reader in the author's eye in literature from ancient Greece through the twentieth century. For Tompkins, authors in the classical period think of literature as "a unit of force whose power is exerted upon the world in a particular direction" (204). Not until the Renaissance do poets actively think of an audience when composing:

The poet's dependence on his patrons, the social relations that subsist between him and his audience, give Renaissance poetry the power to carry out a host of new functions that might be summed up in the phrase "public relations." (208)

Dunbar is certainly capable of carrying out these "new functions" that according to Tompkins do not appear until later in the Renaissance. A conspicuous gap in Tompkins's essay is the lack of any discussion of the medieval period. One possible explanation for this lacuna is the lack of a sharp distinction between classical and Renaissance attitudes toward readership. In fact, medieval authors such as Chaucer and Dunbar embody characteristics of both cultural periods.

It would be easy to place late medieval authors such as Dunbar in a transitional period between classical and Renaissance attitudes, but the reality is more complex and interesting for discussions of literary history. Tompkins's statement regarding the "new functions" of poetry certainly may be applied to Dunbar, for he was acutely aware of the nature of his audience, and "public rela-

tions" (in a number of senses of that term) were certainly part of the job description of a court poet, as will be seen in much of Dunbar's work. Indeed, as Denton Fox points out, Dunbar is representative of an attitude toward audience that was prevalent for a large portion of literary history:

A poet, at least a pre-Romantic poet, is not likely to write poems unless he has an audience in mind which will in some way reward him.  
("Middle Scots Poets" 110)

Dunbar's conceptions of poetry did not spring full blown into existence in the late Middle Ages; much of what he articulates was present in the writings of classical authors such as Cicero. As pointed out above, Dunbar's education undoubtedly stressed classical concepts of rhetoric, and the roots of some of what Tompkins labels "Renaissance ideas" can be traced back to classical treatises on rhetoric. By skirting over the medieval period, Tompkins and others neglect the continuum that exists in literary history; they also miss many fine examples of authors attempting to come to terms with their own and their audience's roles in the production and consumption of literature. Dunbar clearly struggled with the confidence in the power of his words and the knowledge that, once they left his pen, they were no longer under his control but were subject to the interpretation of an audience.

Criticism that investigates the nature of the intend-

ed reader in a given body of work is useful for studying Dunbar. Gerald Prince distinguishes three categories of readers: the virtual reader, "whom [the writer] bestows with certain qualities, faculties, and inclinations according to his opinion of men in general"; the real reader, that is, the actual readership that the work commands; and the ideal reader, "one who would understand perfectly and would approve entirely of the least of his words" (in Tompkins 9). These are distinguished from a narratee, a figure explicitly addressed in the work, as in Dunbar's case, "Schir," when addressing James IV, or "Man," when addressing a general audience. In much reader-response criticism it is argued that meaning resides only in the reader, that a text is meaningless until read.<sup>2</sup> Prince, however, locates the reader's response as originating in the text. This approach is most useful for studying Dunbar as it allows one to identify places in the poetry where the poet has a particular audience in mind. One also may find examples of the poet trying to shape his audience, or at least to shape the audience's response in a way he deems appropriate.

Seth Lerer makes a similar point about Chaucer in Chaucer and His Readers:

Defining himself as author necessarily involves

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<sup>2</sup> See, particularly, the work of Stanley Fish, for example, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" (in Tompkins 70).

finding a strategy to "direct and delimit the interpretative activity" of that community, in other words, to develop a stance or a persona that controls the possibilities of audience response while at the same time posing to invite the range of audience participation. (10)

The definition could well be applied to Dunbar. Lerer contends that the fifteenth century idea of authorship was completely indebted to Chaucer. Although he excludes the Scots from his discussion, noting their innovation (5), Lerer takes Foucault's approach to authorship and states that "all fifteenth century poetry remained 'in the field of discourse' Chaucer had initiated" (11).<sup>3</sup> For Lerer, poets following Chaucer, whether conscious of it or not, could imitate only the forms of poetry Chaucer had used.

Lerer also notes that the fifteenth century poets are concerned "with the social and political institutions and individuals that order, read, and transmit works of literature" (24). Thus, the emphasis on writing for a court audience with a more distinct purpose in mind produces "makers" as distinct from poets. He defines making as

a socially constructed ritual, a public affirmation of behavior patterns and ideals. It was a form of writing on demand, located in the specifics of commission and attuned to the responses of an audience. (31)

One can see a connection to Dunbar, but this definition is too limiting; Lerer assumes that "makers" had no higher

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<sup>3</sup> It is unclear whether Lerer includes the Scots in this statement. However, excluding them would seem difficult to justify in light of his argument.

aspirations than those with which their immediate situations provided them. A problem with the label "maker" is that the writer may be stigmatized as someone whose ambitions are prescribed by his contemporary context.<sup>4</sup> Chaucer repeatedly labels himself a maker, as does Dunbar, but both have aspirations more grand than a response from an immediate audience. Both poets clearly wanted their works to live on in posterity. This is undoubtedly more difficult to detect in Dunbar than it is in Chaucer because Dunbar's immediate court audience is almost always at the forefront in the poems. However, in many poems, Dunbar's concern with the future of his work may be detected.

This concern for a future audience reflects a conventional attitude of the poet toward the work. The concluding stanza of "The Goldyn Targe," as many have noted, is a fairly common address by a medieval author to the work just completed.

Thou lytill quair, be evir obedient,  
 Humble, subject, and symple of entent  
 Before the face of eviry connyng wicht:  
 I knaw quhat thou of rethorike hes spent;  
 Off all hir lusty rosis redolent  
 Is none in to thy gerland sett on hicht;  
 Eschame thar of, and draw the out of sicht.  
 Rude is thy wede, disteynit, bare and rent;  
 Wele aucht thou be aferit of the licht.

(271-79)

wede: dress

A modesty that Dunbar does not display in many of his

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<sup>4</sup> Bawcutt's comments are typical: Dunbar's "failure to use the term [poet] does suggest a disclaimer of its more lofty connotations" (Dunbar 19).

other poems is evident here. Yet the language is almost stock and the passage is conventional. A stanza such as this sheds little light on Dunbar's concern with an audience. The fact that it is in his best known work perhaps explains why Dunbar's attitude toward his making has not been thoroughly investigated. Louise Rosenblatt offers an explanation for this, arguing that most readers give their "selective attention" when they encounter a text. She remarks that often our response to a poem is shaped by a "response to cues" in that poem (54).

Our association of Dunbar's address with a rhetorical commonplace encourages us to view the author behind the writing as conventional. The best known example of this kind of address for Dunbar probably was the ending of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. But the fact that it is almost a stock address is revealing in another sense. One does not detect the strong presence of the poet in this passage; this seems to indicate that he did not write this particular poem to elicit a response in an immediate audience. Other poems, however, clearly demonstrate that the poet was quite aware of that immediate audience and at times he speaks directly to them.

Several critics have discussed the nature of the poet's style and how this might reflect the poet's consideration of an audience. John Ganim remarks: "When we are asked to savor or contemplate some minor description or

scene, our admiration is meant to be directed as much toward the medium as to its object" (150). This accords with what Lois Ebin has written about "The Goldyn Targe." Dunbar's description of the poetic landscape, which differs so greatly from the actual Scottish landscape outside his window, attracts our attention to how the poet describes his vision. Similarly, Louise Rosenblatt notes that descriptions in poems that one terms "poetic" "call attention to themselves" and cause the reader to adopt what she labels the "aesthetic stance" (34). In this manner the reader expects a certain level of poetic diction and style. Thus, the conventional features of "The Goldyn Targe" reinforce our notion of Dunbar as a conventional poet.

The notion of who Dunbar saw as his audience requires a bit of clarification. Unlike Chaucer, who at times clearly reveals he is writing for posterity, Dunbar almost always has an immediate court audience in mind for his poems. Thus, there is a certain distance that we feel when reading the bulk of his work; this is the case for other court poets such as Skelton as well. C. S. Lewis makes this point: "[Dunbar's] poems are not 'human documents.' We remain his audience, not his confidantes, cut off from him by the footlights."<sup>5</sup> Although not his "con-

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<sup>5</sup> English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama 98. Lewis's reading of Dunbar remains among the most sympathetic to the poet, which is perhaps unexpected

fidantes," I would argue that we can approach Dunbar more closely than Lewis would allow, particularly in poems other than the petitions to King James IV.

Denton Fox attributes much of Dunbar's choice of subject matter to the audience for whom he was writing. He states: "it seems that he wrote to command: one imagines the King calling now for an obscene ditty, and now for pious exhortation" ("Middle Scots Poets" 124). Fox here grants the audience too much significance in the compositional process. While it is entirely possible that James did indeed take pleasure in the variety of Dunbar's compositions, it hardly seems likely that he would issue a "command" for an "obscene ditty." Fox, struggling with Dunbar's breadth, merely identifies an outside cause to explain why Dunbar exhibits little consistency in his verse. A more likely scenario is that the King requested both entertaining and didactic verse and left the details to the poet. Fox's explanation does little to account for Dunbar's petitions; that James would request these types of poems seems extraordinarily unlikely.

One feels a distance in Dunbar's work perhaps because most of the poems were written expressly for a court audience. Many of these poems are addressed directly to King James, and so a more general audience is at times not readily apparent. One must remember that the literate

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considering his disparagement of the century as a whole.

population in Scotland at this time was small; few people outside of court could be expected to have access to or take an interest in this poetry. According to Denton Fox, a "reading public" did not arise in Scotland until the second half of the fifteenth century and was still quite small when Dunbar wrote ("Middle Scots Poets" 116-17). He also suggests that that no distinction be made between Dunbar's court audience and any wider audience for whom he may have been writing: "There seem to have been no perceptible differences between the tastes of the court and the tastes of the reading public" ("Middle Scots Poets" 125). This implies that the poet was not consciously excluding a segment of the populace when he was writing; he composed for an audience he knew would hear or read the poetry.

The only clue to what a readership in early sixteenth century Scotland would have appreciated comes from the manuscripts and early printed collections that survive. The Asloan MS, dating from 1513-30, contains both prose and verse on a variety of subjects. Chepman and Myllar were authorized to set up the first printing operation in Scotland and the collections they produced from 1507 on are also marked by a diverse body of poems and prose (Fox, "Middle Scots Poets" 120). As Fox remarks, in these early print collections, "the poems are in all metres, genres, and stylistic levels" ("Middle Scots Poets" 121). Since some sort of demand would have dictated the choice of

works that were printed, one may consider these artifacts representative of what a literate Scots audience was encountering in the early sixteenth century.

Dunbar's works are included in both the Asloan MS and Chepman and Myllar's printings, and the Maitland Folio and Bannatyne MS, which were copied in the first half of the sixteenth century. Dunbar's variety of subjects and verse forms seems to be consistent with the general format of the collections in which his verse appears. If one can draw a conclusion from this, it may be that Dunbar knew what his readership wanted and simply was talented enough to produce poetry in a wide range of genres and on a broad spectrum of subjects satisfying his readers' tastes.

When Dunbar does address a more general readership, it is likely to be in a poem on a religious subject. In this type of poem, Dunbar's tone is apt to be that of a preacher addressing his audience, either lambasting his listeners for not following the true path or urging them to follow his example in praying for forgiveness or direction. But in many poems, which editors have labeled petitions or "moralities," Dunbar does have a larger audience in mind. At times he clearly envisions a life for his poetry beyond the immediate circumstances surrounding its production. In many poems Dunbar reveals his concern with language, with what others outside of court will make of his poems and with what they will do to his

poems.

In several of the poems Dunbar frets over what becomes of the text after it leaves his, or his scribe's, hands. Once the work has been produced, the poet must be wary of others trying to claim it as their own. In "Schir, I complane of injuris" (K 26), Dunbar informs King James that there is someone who "Hes magellit my making throw his malice." "A refing sonne of raking Muris" is named in the second line, but the exact identity of "Mure" remains conjectural. Several critics have taken Mure's offense very personally; Scott complains "That idiot Mure has chopped his metre to bits . . ." (120). It is entirely possible that Mure is a fiction, created to allow Dunbar to vent his anxiety over the state of his texts. Indeed, Reiss suggests that "Muris" could be akin to "Moors," or some other general term (32).<sup>6</sup> Reiss sees a similarity to Chaucer's "blameth nat me" device, and suggests that Dunbar is distancing himself from any "possibly offensive material" in the poetry (32). In any event, he seeks punishment for one

That fulle dismemberit hes my meter  
 And poysonid it with strang salpeter,  
 With rycht defamows speiche off lordis  
 Quhilk with my collouris all discordis,  
 Quhois crewall sclander servis ded;

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<sup>6</sup> Reiss's discussion of Mure remains the most sensible on the poem. He uses this as an example of critics who seek biographical information in the poems, at times having to dance around the lack of factual basis for their claims (31-32).

And in my name all leis recordis:  
 3our grace besik I of remeid. (8-14)

Dunbar is angered over the misappropriation of his colors, his rhetorical tools of ornamentation. Concerned with being given proper credit for the actual work he has done, Dunbar complains:

He has indorsit myn indyting  
 With versis off his awin hand wryting. (15-16)

Dunbar reveals a sentiment much like Chaucer's in "Adam Sriveyn," but here it is carried further; someone seeks not only to reproduce incorrectly what the poet has written, but to claim it as his own. One wonders what the greater crime is for Dunbar, stealing the verses or mangling them in the presentation. Dunbar humorously treats this attempt to retain control over the exact shape of the work, but, as Bawcutt has remarked, "This protest implies that Dunbar was far from indifferent to what happened to his poems once they passed from their author's control" (Dunbar 34).

Dunbar's concern with the status of his texts makes an interesting contrast to the attitudes of Skelton and Hawes. Lerer points out the following about Skelton.

His many additions to his poems, the evidence that some of them were composed over many years, and his thematic concern with reading as a form of rewriting, all contribute to the sense of Skelton both enacting and inviting audience rescription of his text. (194)

Hawes, on the other hand, perhaps because he was working

with printed editions, sees the text as stable; "Hawes defines the reception of his book as a made object: one that may be explained, apologized for, or excused, but never altered after printing" (Lerer 194). Dunbar's position is somewhere in between. While he may not want "audience rescription," he nevertheless is aware that it may occur. However, if we take the tone of "Schir, I complane of injuris" to be humorous, as Reiss does, then Dunbar may indeed be inviting various readings, if they will prevent audience members from taking offense.

Bawcutt makes a good case for the value of the petitionary poems as a whole. But their importance also lies in their contribution to our understanding of Dunbar's conception of the impact his verse will have. He is extraordinarily confident in some of them, as evidenced by his tone toward King James. Expressions of the power of language occur in several of Dunbar's poems. The poet seizes upon the more vituperative nature of his craft in "Schir, 3e have many servitouris" (K 44).

My mind so fer is set to flyt  
 That of nocht ellis I can endyt,  
 For owther man my hart to breik  
 Or with my pen I man me wreik;  
 And sen the tane most nedis be -  
 In to malancolie to de  
 Or lat vennim ische all out -  
 Be war anone, for it will spout  
 Gif that the tryackill cum nocht tyt  
 To swage the swalme of my dispyt. (79-88)

tane: taken; tryackill: remedy; tyt: quickly;  
 swalme: swelling; dispyt: hate

This, one must remember, is an address to the King, one that began by addressing him as "3our hie regale majestie" (22). The change in tone in this poem from beginning to end is quite remarkable. It reveals a poet confident in his position.<sup>7</sup> Even more importantly, this poem reflects one who is aware of the effect his words can have. Spear-  
ing comments:

Dunbar has passed beyond the abject humility of Hoccleve, Lydgate and Chaucer, whose jokes, like those of household fools, had to be at their own expense . . . . The reason for this is not primarily that he was a more arrogant man than these earlier poets . . . it is rather that he valued his art more highly -- the art of poetry, which is now seen, in classical and Renaissance terms, as able to grant permanence to its subject matter. (Medieval to Renaissance 201)

He connects his comment to an analysis of the middle section of the poem, lines 25-34, which he argues is Dunbar's claim for the permanence of poetry (202).

Als lang in mynd my work sall hald,  
Als haill in everie circumstance,  
In forme, in mater and substance,  
But wering or consumptioun,  
Roust, canker or corruptioun. (28-32)

"Schir, 3e have mony servitouris" is given a good deal of attention by Bawcutt. She discusses the structure

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<sup>7</sup> Dunbar's arrogant tone toward the King bears a similarity to bardic practices common throughout the Middle Ages. Celtic and Gaelic examples of damaging satire of rulers can be found up to the sixteenth century. However, considering Dunbar's disparagement of bards (particularly apparent in "The Flyting"), a connection to this tradition seems difficult to support. Further investigation into the common origins of the bards and makers is clearly necessary.

of the poem in some detail (34-36), yet the tone of the final few lines still deserves more comment. Bawcutt suggests that the threatening tone of this last passage stems from Dunbar's displeasure at the throng of unsavory people at court. She notes:

he is deferential to the king, appealing to logic and 'reassoun.' But when he turns to the disorderly 'thrang' of court parasites, his tone becomes correspondingly impassioned, and at the end is distinctly menacing. (Dunbar 118)

The question of exactly whom Dunbar was menacing seems unclear. While Dunbar may be addressing others in court in the poem, the last few lines can hardly be called "deferential"; King James, after all, is the only one who can provide "tryackill" to "swage" the poet's "dispyt." What seems to have occurred is that the poet's anger toward the "thrang" has overwhelmed him.

In this poem, Dunbar is working under the classical parameters of the conclusion. Cicero claims: "The peroration is the end and conclusion of the whole speech; it has three parts, the summing up, the *indignatio* or exciting of indignation or ill-will against the opponent, and the *conquestio* or the arousing of pity and sympathy" (De Inv. I.98). What Dunbar has done is to describe his own indignation. It would seem that the poet is not confident in the effectiveness of arousing only pity; fear may be more productive. Perhaps James is to be left with the idea that Dunbar's pen could also be used against him. The

humor of the passage must not be overlooked either.

"Schir, 3e have mony servitouris" contradicts the view of critics such as Fradenburg, for whom Dunbar represents the court poet expressing the will of the monarch, his poetry, in her words, an "instrument for the discourse of sovereignty" (135). In a particular post-modernist turn, this view removes the powerful presence of the poet from his poetry. Dunbar, however, resists attempts to displace his authorial presence from his poetry. Through the language he chooses, Dunbar claims an active role in many of his poems.

In other petitions, Dunbar's attitude toward James IV is problematic. Dunbar's tone seems too antagonistic to have been tolerated. Even if he is not being contemptuous, he seems to slight the king at times. In "Schir, for 3our grace bayth nicht and day" (K 25), the refrain is "God gif 3e war Johne Thomsounis man." Kinsley glosses this phrase as "a fellow who yields to the wishes of his wife" (299) (Johne: Joan). Reiss observes that "Dunbar's "wish" in this poem is so outrageous that there could be no question of its being meant, or taken, seriously" (36). Dunbar argues in the poem that the Queen takes greater pity on him, and so would convince her husband to be more forthcoming with a benefice. His tone is humorous throughout:

The mersy of that sweit meik rose

Suld soft 3ow, thrissill,<sup>8</sup> I suppois . . . .  
(21-2)

My advocat bayth fair and sweit,  
The hale rejosing of my spreit,  
Wald speid to my erand than,  
And 3e war anis Johne Thomsounis man. (25-8)

Bawcutt notes the poem is "wittier and more audacious" than others of his petitions (Dunbar 109). Dunbar must have had a secure relationship with James to have been able to commit such thoughts to writing. We may also assume that James had a sense of humor.

The idea that Dunbar was somehow able to adopt such a tone because he presented himself as a court fool has some support from the depictions he presents of himself in the poems. "Sir Jhon Sinclair begowthe to dance" (K 28) is the most cited example of self portraiture:

Than cam in Dunbar the mackar;  
On all the flure thair was nane frackar,  
And thair he dancet the dirrye dantoun;  
He hoppet lyk a pillie wantoun  
For luff of Musgraeffe, men tellis me;  
He trippet quhill he tint his panton:  
A mirrear dance mycht na man see. (22-28)

*flure*: floor; *frackar*: readier; *dirrye dantoun*: a lively dance; *pillie*: colt, penis [DOST]; *Musgraeffe*: an unidentified member of the court; *tint*: lost; *panton*: slipper

The comic portrayal is obviously not to be taken seriously, but it is perhaps how Dunbar wished to be perceived at court. This would, after all, allow him some latitude that might be attributable to his simpleness. In another

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<sup>8</sup> The thistle was the traditional symbol of the Scottish king; see also "The Thrissil and the Rois."

address to the King, "Schir, lat it never in toune be tald" (K 43), Dunbar seems somewhat less sprightly:

I am ane auld hors, as 3e knaw,  
 That ever in duill dois drug and draw;  
 Gryt court hors puttis me fra the straw  
 To fang the fog be firthe and fald:  
 Schir, lat it never in toune be tald  
 That I suld be ane 3owllis 3ald. (9-14)

*duill*: sorrow; *fang*: take; *fog*: grass left in winter;  
*firthe*: wood; *fald*: small field; *3owllis 3ald*: someone  
 without new clothes for Yule

Of course, the chronology of Dunbar's poems is impossible to establish, but there is no reason to suppose that the poet waited until his old age to compose such a lament. The rest of the poem details the horse's appraisal of himself with white mane, and fear that cobblers will come after his hide. Clearly Dunbar wishes to be seen as pathetic here, but perhaps counts on an appreciation of the artifice used to make the point.

In the petitions especially, Dunbar's poems are speech acts; that is, they are examples of communication designed to effect some behavior in the audience by the nature of the utterance itself. They are what Austin labels "illocutionary" acts; they order or warn, for example (109). Interestingly, the evidence indicates that Dunbar's petitions for a benefice did not have the effect the poet intended. While Dunbar received a comfortable annual stipend from James, Fox reports that James "never gave him the benefice which he begged for so often" ("Mid-

dle Scots Poets" 118). Of course, whether Dunbar is sincere in these petitions is open to question. Reiss notes: "How much in these poems is 'for real,' how much literary tradition, and how much standard moralizing is not clear" (36).

Since twenty of Dunbar's surviving poems directly or indirectly ask for some form of compensation,<sup>9</sup> this topic must have occupied his thoughts to a considerable degree. While the tone varies across the poems, the overall sense one gets is of their lightheartedness. Examples of this tone are found in the poems about James Dog, or in poems asking for a benefice when the poet states "Bot Lord! how petewouslie I luke" (K 40: 9), or compares his lack of a benefice to the lack of water experienced by a man dying of thirst (K 41). Either Dunbar felt that humor would be an effective way to elicit pity or he did not take the task of begging in verse terribly seriously. His persona in his poetry may have led his contemporary audience to form opinions about him just as it has led modern critics to categorize him.

Dunbar records the mutability of others who would judge him and assumes the worst of them in "How sould I governe me" (K 82), a companion to "Musing allone this hinder nicht" discussed above. The basic argument of this

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<sup>9</sup> In Kinsley's edition, numbers 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49.

poem is that, no matter what one does, some will find fault in the behavior. Reiss makes too strong an argument when he remarks that the poem signifies that "the voice of the world cannot be trusted and should not be valued" (78). Dunbar is clearly concerned with what others make of his words, but here at least the narrator puts things in the proper cosmic perspective, concluding "The gracious God mot governe me" after asking how he should govern himself. A comment on appearance judged by dress follows:

And gif I be not wele besene  
 Than twa and twa sayis thame betwene,  
 Evill gydit is 3on man, par de -  
 Be his clething it may be sene. (26-29)

The mocking tone here is obvious; those who judge by surface appearance are not to be taken seriously. The overall tone of this poem is either light hearted or satiric, as evidenced by the opening: "How sould I rewill me or in quhat wys / I wald sum wyse man wald devys." Bawcutt is right in finding this a more successful poem than "Musing allone this hinder nicht" (139), and the tone is precisely the reason. "How sould I" is more like Dunbar's other works, with a serious topic treated with a bit of wry humor, not an off-handed tone, but an acknowledgment that we should not take matters too seriously. Dunbar suggests here that no one has control over audience perception, neither poet nor any human being for that matter; if one obsesses about the reactions to one's behavior, the result is likely to be madness. Ultimately,

God is the source of how to live a good life.

The mutability of the world forms a subject in a good many of Dunbar's poems, and this often leads the poet to ruminate on the fate he and his works will face. Again, most often there is a humorous edge to his complaint. In "Off benefice, Sir, at everie feist" (K 40), Dunbar laments his lack of reward, complaining that the rich in court are much better off than he is: "Riche befoir pure spraidis ay thair nett, / To fische all watiris dois belang thame" (17-18). At one point the poet mentions his work and his consciousness of his audience:

Off sic hie feistis of sanctis in glorie  
 Baithe of commoun and propir storie  
 Quhair lairdis war patronis, oft I sang thame  
*Charitas pro Dei amore;*  
 And 3it I gat na thing amang thame. (11-15)

*lairdis*: lords

The speaker appeals to the love of God for help, but to no avail. Similarly, in "Schir, 3it remember as befoir" (K 42), Dunbar states that he is not as accomplished at flattery as some others at court are.

In sum pairt of my selffe I plein3e  
 Quhone utheris dois flattir and feyn3e;  
 Allace I can bot ballattis breif . . . . (46-8)

There is some truth to this. An examination of Dunbar's petitions reveals that he seldom resorts to flattery of King James. He is more likely to make his case through a depiction of himself as a suffering, unrewarded petitioner and often compares himself to others whom he feels are

getting a more thorough reward.

Dunbar does have some help in his defense at times though. In "This hinder nycht halff sleiping as I lay" (K 51), discussed in Chapter Two, the seven virtues appear to him in a dream and defend him in the face of his treatment at court.

Dunbar also reminds his audience that there is really no one to complain to when lamenting the state of the world. "Quhome to sall I complene my wo / And kyth my kairis on or mo?" begins K 63, a poem with the refrain "Into this world may none assure." Dunbar points out "Nane heir bot riche men hes renoun," perhaps lamenting his state as a poet who is not known very well outside of court. The answer to the question of how to deal with the transitory and mutable nature of the world is "For to be blyth me think it best," the refrain of K 64, and in the refrain of K 65, "Without glaidnes availis no tresure."

In one case Dunbar addresses a particular group of people, the merchants of Edinburgh in K 74, "Quhy will 3e mercantis of renoun." Bawcutt points out that Dunbar is concerned about Edinburgh's reputation. He objects that the merchants are ruining the city by being concerned only with their own profit, and not the "commone proffeitt" (Dunbar 151). The poem is a call to civic responsibility.

He speaks of the unreliability of the judgment of others in "Musing allone this hinder nicht" (K 81).

Be I bot littill of stature  
 Thay call me catyve createure,  
 And be I grit of quantitie  
 Thay call me monstrowis of nature. (26-29)

In "How sould I rewill me or in quhat wys" (K 82), he makes a similar point:

Gif I be sene in court our lang  
 Than will thai quhispir thame amang,  
 My freinds ar not worthe ane fle  
 That I sa lang gwerdon gang:  
 Lord God, how sould I governe me? (31-35)

*gwerdon*: reward

The impression one gets from these poems is twofold. On one hand, Dunbar is assuming the role of a preacher, instructing his audience to have little or no faith in worldly reward or even consistency. But on the other hand, one detects Dunbar's unhappiness with his status as poet. It seems that he would prefer a bit more worldly recognition in court for his services. Dunbar seems always to be aware of a larger audience looking over his shoulder; that is why some of the ending addresses to the reader in these poems seem tagged on.

One poem that has received attention regarding its audience is "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" (K 14). Several critics have raised the question of just who the audience for the poem is. Many find it to be male, either predominantly or exclusively (Scott 202, Spearing, Medieval to Renaissance 222). The rationale for this perspective is in the last four lines as well as in the nature of what the women discuss:

And I all prevely past to a plesand arber  
 And with my pene did report ther pastance most mery.  
 3e auditoris most honorable that eris hes gevin  
 Oneto this uncouth aventur quhilk airly me happinnit:  
 Of thir thre wantoun wiffis that I haif writtin heir,  
 Quhilk wald 3e waill to 3our wif gif 3e suld wed one?  
 (525-30)

The poem seems to be a male vision of wives plotting to make their lives miserable. Bawcutt makes several salient points about the audience of the poem:

Dunbar . . . asks, not 'what do you think of these women?', but 'which of them would you marry?' The question is highly equivocal, and Dunbar himself is playing an authorial 'game': concluding, yet in a most inconclusive way; implying that his audience is solely male, when it would probably be mixed; and playfully blurring any barrier between fictional 'wiffis' and actual 'auditours.' (Dunbar 328)

Scott, however, takes the point to an extreme:

The audience has been looking on, enjoying the spectacle of the satire on the three women -- on "others": now suddenly the satire is turned back on them and they are implicated in it. One can imagine that if there were husbands and wives in the audience, they might well be made uncomfortable by the sudden switching of the satire from fiction to reality, from the women to themselves. (203)

The question of audience becomes significant because it certainly influences critical response to the poem. One may also contemplate Robert Sturges's comment on medieval authors and texts: "For medieval as for post-modern writers, the author, text, and reader can easily seem less distinct from one another than we have been trained to conceive of them . . ." (3). Because Dunbar was a court poet it is likely that the poem was read for a courtly

audience. But the ending seems more artifice than reality: either an attempt to draw the listener in to the poem or merely a stock ending tagged on. Even if the audience were a gathering at court, it probably would have consisted of more men than women. The women are lively and comic and the men pathetic in an anonymous, distant sense; they are not described with any detail. The poem also depicts a male desire -- overhearing women discuss how they feel about their men. Dunbar is having fun with the anti-feminist tradition, softening it somewhat. Bawcutt remarks "Dunbar's humorous poems about women are no less indebted to literary tradition and female stereotypes than those that celebrate them - but they are distinctly more witty and subtle" (Dunbar 324).

Dunbar's use of narrative may be compared to the most famous Middle Scots narrative, Henryson's "Testament of Cressid." Henryson also reveals a consciousness of the reader, but in a somewhat different way. John Ganim points out that in the "Testament" Henryson attempts to limit the reader's range of possible responses to what is occurring in the text (125). According to Ganim, he does this in part by including interruptions by the narrator. In many cases, these interruptions are marked by the speaker's use of *occupatio*. Ganim argues that these intrusions interfere with the reader's absorption of the material, instead of functioning as humorous interjections

as they do in Chaucer's poetry, for example. Dunbar's narrators are certainly less intrusive than Henryson's. Dunbar seems to prefer to let the events in the narrative run their course; as pointed out in Chapter Three, the point of Dunbar's narratorial intrusions is most often to remind the audience that he is recording events as accurately as possible. The question at the end of the "Tretis" seems intended to draw the audience in to the poem or at least make the audience think more thoroughly about what has just taken place.

The other natural place to look for a sense of Dunbar's reception is "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie" (K 23). Kinsley suggests that the poem "may have been developed in a series of attacks and counter-attacks circulated in manuscript form at court; it may, at least in its final form, have been recited before the king as a stylized duel in verse" (284).<sup>10</sup> Obviously, one does not get a true picture of what Dunbar's contemporaries made of him, but doubtless some statements reflect a shared understanding of what makes good poetry.

Dunbar, for example, chides Kennedy for his misuse of rhetoric:

Thow callis the rethory with thy goldin lippis;  
Na, glowrand, gaipand fule, thow art begyld.

(97-8)

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<sup>10</sup> Kinsley traces the history of the form and notes that Dunbar probably inherited it from Gaelic examples (282-84).

*glowrand*: staring; *gaipand*: gaping

He is more graphic in the following stanza:

Thow hes full littill feill of fair endyte:  
I tak on me ane pair of Lowthiane hippis  
Sall fairar Inglis mak, and mair parfyte,  
Than thow can blabbar with thy Carrik lippis.

(109-12)

*feill*: feeling for, understanding; *Carrik*: "the southern district of Ayrshire, largely Gaelic speaking until the Reformation" (Kinsley 289).

Dunbar here implies that the Gaelic influence is detrimental to proper expression in English. Dunbar rather graphically points out that he can speak better English "through his hips (ass)" than Kennedy can with his mouth. Dunbar also mocks Kennedy's ability to hear "And quhen thow heiris ane guse cry in the glenis / Thow thinkis it swetar than sacrand bell of sound" (159-60). Kennedy in turn calls upon Dunbar to "Renounce thy rymis, bath ban and birn thy bill" (332). As mentioned above, Kennedy claims Dunbar stumbled upon the fountain on Mt. Parnassus after it was only a pool, which resulted in jarring rhyme (lines 337-44). He swears to Dunbar "And thou sal lik thy lippis and suere thou leis" (396), which, considering Dunbar's concern that he not be perceived as writing lies, hits the mark. Kennedy attacks again:

Greit in the glaykis gude maister Gilliam gukkis,  
Our imperfyte in poetry or in prose,  
All clocis undir cloud of nycht thou cukkis;  
Rymis thou of me, of rethory the rose?  
Lunatike, lymare, luschald, louse thy hose . . . .

(497-501)

*glaykis*: trickery; *gukkis*: talks foolishly; *clocis*: court-yards; *cukkis*: beshitten; *lymare*: scoundrel; *luscald*: "abusive term of doubtful meaning" DOST

A reference to "The Goldyn Targe" comes in the "rethory the rose" line, which was used to describe Chaucer.

Kennedy also comments on Dunbar's begging: "Small fynance amang thy frendis thou beggit. / To staunch the storm wyth haly muldis [burial mounds] thou loste" (377-8).

In some of his poems, Dunbar addresses the audience much as a preacher would his parishioners. "O synfull man, thir ar the fourty dayis / That every man sulde wilfull pennence dre" (K 5: 1-2), for example. In the religious poems, the poet also addresses God directly "To The, O marcifull salvoir myn, Jesus" (K 6: 1); "Salviour, suppois my sensualitie / Subject to syn hes maid my saule of sys" (K 7: 1). In these poems Dunbar adopts a typical tone of the penitent, or of a preacher, or holds himself as an example for others to model themselves upon. It does seem to be the case that Dunbar's direct addresses to a general audience come in these religious works. Because of the subject matter, very little of Dunbar the poet is apparent in these poems. They are perhaps useful in determining Dunbar's training in the *ars praedicandi*, but to gauge Dunbar's sense of how he was being received, they are of limited value. "Off Lentren in the first mornyng" (K 59), "O wreche, be war: this world will wend the fro" (K 60), and "Memento homo quod cinis es" (K 61) are also

representative of this tone. The phrasing appears stock, in Kinsley's words, "[a] rhetorical mosaic of moral commonplaces" (351). A typical example is "Thy lustye bewte and thy 3outh / Sall feid as dois the somer flouris" (K 61: 25-6). The message of these poems is typically to renounce the worldly and to worship God.

In one example of this type of poem, however, Dunbar adopts a more personal attitude. In "I that in heill wes and gladness" (K 62), also known by its refrain, "*Timor mortis conturbat me*," and by the title "Lament for the Makaris," Dunbar singles out the fates of poets as the source of his concern. Kinsley notes Dunbar's innovation on the theme from the Office of the Dead by creating a *danse macabre*, by adding poets to the list of respectable and Biblical figures facing death and by including himself as the last of these poets (352-53). Bawcutt also notes that the repetition in the poem emphasizes the banality of death (Dunbar 156).

Kinsley remarks: "It is interesting, however, that he places himself with poets, and not with priests; it is as a priest that he would be buried" (353). This is an example of Dunbar seeing himself as more than just a "maker" who limits himself to his immediate audience and purpose. The first eleven stanzas are devoted to cataloguing typical figures such as knights, princes, lords and ladies, in addition to rhetors, logicians, and physicians.

Dunbar seems to have taken care in choosing the order of the figures. The figures descend from princes through lords to clerks in stanza nine. In stanzas ten and eleven the figures appear to be more closely associated with those in court:

Art magicianis and astrologgis,  
 Rethoris, logicianis and theologgis --  
 Thame helpis no conclusionis sle:  
*Timor mortis conturbat me.*

In medicine the most practicianis,  
 Lechis, surriganis and phisicianis . . . . .  
 (37-42)

Dunbar catalogues the same figures in "Schir, 3e have mony servitouris" K 44) as representative of those who receive more reward than he does. The effect is to bring the fear of death closer to the audience, to make it more immediate and threatening. But Dunbar switches the focus in the next stanza:

I se that makaris among the laif  
 Playis heir ther pageant, syne gois to graif;  
 Sparit is nought ther faculte:  
*Timor mortis conturbat me.* (45-48)

*laif*: remainder; *syne*: after

Makers are "among the laif," but the poem now takes a turn toward the historical, as Dunbar catalogues makers of the past with whom he associates himself. The most famous stanza follows:

He has done petuously devour  
 The noble Chaucer of makaris flour,  
 The monk of Bery, and Gower, all thre:  
*Timor mortis conturbat me.* (49-52)

Structurally, the stanza gives weight to the poets in order of their importance to Dunbar: Chaucer receives a full line, Lydgate, a half line, and Gower a single word. But they are connected by "all thre," which serves in this poem to isolate them as poets from the past; the rest of the poem mentions Scots poets of Dunbar's present and recent past.<sup>11</sup> The poem builds to a climax with Kennedy on his death bed, "In poynt of dede lyis veraly" (90), leaving Dunbar the last surviving maker. As such, he becomes the last in this line of poets, and the weight on him comes across. He carries on the tradition begun by Chaucer, but the end is near for Dunbar as well.

Sen he has all my brether tane  
 He will naught lat me lif alane;  
 On forse I man his nyxt pray be:  
*Timor mortis conturbat me.* (93-96)

*On forse*: inevitably

Here Dunbar expresses a feeling of isolation, or perhaps he is displaying arrogance by writing that he is "alane." He is the inheritor of a tradition as well as its last surviving exemplar.

Dunbar concludes in a larger expression, offering a suggestion to the audience:

Sen for the ded remeid is none  
 Best is that we for dede dispone

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<sup>11</sup> Kinsley (354-56) provides background for the list of Scottish poets, some of whom, e.g., Henryson and Kennedy, are known to us, others, such as Mungo Lokert, remain known only as names in this poem.

Eftir our deid that lif may we:  
*Timor mortis conturbat me.* (97-100)

*dispone*: make ready, set in order (DOST)

The conclusion, while fitting for the traditional form of the poem, comes as something of an anticlimax after the pointed references to other poets. Bawcutt sees the ending as "calm and practical . . . . The 'I' of the previous stanza is absorbed into the collective 'we,' and the voice is no longer that of a single individual" (Dunbar 157).

The ending seems designed to reinforce the Christian thinking in the poem, perhaps answering Kinsley's comment that Dunbar has located himself with poets not priests. But it seems also designed to appeal to a larger audience, to remind listeners that poets are not the only ones who face this fate. It also indicates a shift from an ideal to a real audience in Dunbar's mind. A larger audience is brought in at the end, not only poets, a limited readership, but all who face death.

At times Dunbar expresses his concern in a general sense:

Nane heir bot riche men hes renoun  
 And bot pure men ar pluckit down  
 And nane bot just men tholis injure;  
 Sa wit is blindit and ressoun:  
 Into this world may none assure.

(K 63: 16-20)

*tholis*: have to suffer; *assure*: have confidence

These lines express the uncertainty in the world that "

Dunbar feels. But one gets the sense that he is lamenting the state of the poet, who certainly is not "riche" and thus lacks renown.

Clearly Dunbar considered his audience when composing his poetry. He did so because he may have been requested to write something or because he expected a certain result from his verse. Dunbar's petitions caution us not to associate a poet with the persona in the poem too closely, however. Dunbar's speaker often seems to have been created out of convention or a desire to have a comedic effect on the audience. In this sense, whether he achieved his goal remains open to question. In some poems one may not be certain of what his goal is: is he actually trying to secure a benefice or maintain a certain persona that the court expected him to embody? Throughout his various poems, though, Dunbar consciously shapes his audience's perception of the speaker in each poem. In this way, he evinces an understanding of the importance of the audience to the poet.

## Chapter Five

Still a Scottish Chaucerian:

A Longer Look at Dunbar's Longer Lines

"Fulle dismemberit hes my meter"

One of the hallmarks of Dunbar's poetry is its brevity. The poet's preferred line consists of four stresses or eight syllables. Priscilla Bawcutt notes his "evident preference for shorter and more lyrical stanzas, consisting of four or five lines," (Dunbar 135). All of his poems are short; while the longest, "The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and The Wedo," contains 530 lines, most are thirty to fifty lines long. Dunbar was comfortable in a wide variety of forms including longer lines and more complicated stanzas. His range of poetic forms, however, has made efforts to analyze his metrical strategies often superficial, limited to comments on the French sources of his verse forms, or the prevalence of short, eight syllable lines.<sup>1</sup>

Although he writes the bulk of his verse in eight syllable lines, Dunbar uses ten syllable lines in two stanza types modelled on Chaucerian forms: rhyme royal and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Scott's examination of meter (306-30), Reiss's survey of Dunbar's verse forms (145-50), and Bawcutt's discussion of Dunbar's language (Dunbar 347-82), all confined to the last chapters of their respective studies.

the eight line "Monk's Tale stanza." Rhyme royal is used in only four poems, but the eight line decasyllabic stanza was a rich form for Dunbar, who experimented with it metrically and syntactically in at least eleven poems.<sup>2</sup> These two verse forms reveal that Dunbar at times modelled his poetry on Chaucer's, but also that he was metrically innovative, incorporating a variety of methods to hold his stanzas together including alliterative techniques scorned by Chaucer.

Dunbar's use of these longer lines and stanzas remains little studied by his critics. Bawcutt most recently passes over Dunbar's use of the eight line stanza: "Late - medieval poets in England and Scotland favoured, for didactic purposes, the stanza used by Chaucer in 'The Monk's Tale'" (Dunbar 135).<sup>3</sup> She is however vague about what exactly these didactic purposes might be, nor does she point out that Chaucer used the stanza in five short poems as well. As is the case with too many comments on

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<sup>2</sup> Two poems in this stanzaic form are of questionable authorship. "O lusty flour of 3owth, benyng and bricht" (K 49) has been convincingly rejected by Priscilla Bawcutt (Dunbar 87), who also finds "Be 3e ane luvar, think 3e nocht 3e suld" (K 11) at best questionably attributed to Dunbar (Dunbar 321).

<sup>3</sup> Curiously, Bawcutt lists only four of Dunbar's poems as being written in this stanza (thirteen fall into the category in Kinsley's edition, on which Bawcutt relies). The four (K 60, 65, 76, and 77) fall into what is generally called the "Morality" group of Dunbar's work, thus supporting Bawcutt's assertion about the "didactic" purpose of the stanza.

Dunbar, the statement is left unsupported and the reader is expected to accept its validity. Dunbar's use of the stanza defies the limited application Bawcutt's comment implies. Examining the ten syllable, seven and eight line stanzas, one sees Dunbar using one form for poems of different subject matter; this runs counter to Bawcutt's view that a certain verse form is appropriate for certain subject matter.

Dunbar's critics still wish to find some way of unifying his corpus of poetry. Bawcutt most recently focuses on the petitions as the center of the poet's work. But Dunbar defies such attempts at unification. Perhaps it is best to admit that he was a poet who enjoyed a wide range of material and form and spent his career shaping his poems in different ways. In this light, the contention that Dunbar used the long line stanzas for a particular purpose is difficult to support. While a case can be made that Dunbar used the eight line form mainly for religious verse, there are several exceptions. Additionally, within a thematic grouping of poems, Dunbar works the lines in various ways; this indicates that he enjoyed experimentation and did not feel constrained to use the verse in one particular manner.

In the poems incorporating the eight line stanza, which Chaucer adapted from Boccaccio's ottava rima, the form of the stanza often seems to shape the content of the

lines. The rhyme scheme, ababbcbc, tends to create a focus around the central couplet, which often establishes a conclusion for the first three lines or acts as a turning point for many stanzas. But Dunbar employs other techniques in these stanzas and divides them in several different ways, producing quite different effects. Dunbar also exploits alliteration, subtly and dramatically, to move the lines along.

In his use of these two verse forms, Dunbar's relationship to Chaucer is most clearly observed. One can see Dunbar writing lines with a Chaucerian feel, while at the same time incorporating alliteration. In the eight line stanza particularly, Dunbar brings together the two great strains of medieval poetry. In these stanzas Dunbar best represents a culmination of medieval poetics.

A word must be said regarding the study of metrics in medieval English poetry. Numerous studies credit Chaucer with introducing the iambic pentameter line into English. Wright, in Shakespeare's Metrical Art (1988), laments the state that the iambic pentameter line fell into in the fifteenth century in England under such practitioners as Lydgate and Skelton (18). Thus, Wyatt and Surrey are credited with reinvigorating a form that had become corrupt. This is an all too common view of the history of poetry in English, one that looks back from Shakespeare instead of forward from Old English.

In the study of metrics, this perspective runs the risk of imposing on earlier poetry conventions adopted after the fifteenth century. An important example of this is the application of Greek terms of meter on poets who had little if any exposure to Greek poetry in the first place. Verse might scan as iambic, trochaic, or dactylic meter, but if the poet who wrote the lines was not aware of this system of versification, it is unwise to hold the poetry to those standards. The risk of finding many lines that do not fit the Greek system and may be labelled "defective" is a danger of this approach. Chaucer has been a victim of this methodology in the past. Certainly a large number of lines in the Canterbury Tales scan quite well as iambic pentameter, yet we would be wise to recall C. S. Lewis's comment that "there are hundreds of lines in Chaucer that demand pure decasyllabic reading" (qtd. in Mustanoja, in Rowland 74). Thomas Cable reasonably states that poetry based on an iambic foot "begins tentatively with Surrey, assuredly with Sir Philip Sydney, and it flourishes as the main meter of English poetry for the next three centuries" (118).

Cable does not go into detail about Chaucer's immediate successors, but he does put Chaucer's meter in context:

Chaucer's decasyllabic verse is a different meter from the iambic pentameter of Sidney [and] Shakespeare . . . . [I]t is not foot meter; and I identify mid-sixteenth century poets as writ-

ing in the same meter as Chaucer. (Fifteenth century prosody, including that of Lydgate, remains a mystery.) (118)

Although Cable does not elaborate on the "mystery" of fifteenth century verse, it seems evident that he is unsure of exactly when foot meter was introduced into English poetry. Dunbar falls into Cable's "mystery" period of English literary history. While avoiding the iambic pentameter label, Cable nonetheless finds Lydgate and other fifteenth century poets to be problematic. Dunbar and other Scots poets, not discussed by Cable, prove to be better readers of Chaucer than Lydgate, and so it seems logical that their poetics would have been closer to Chaucer's.

Cable separates the poetry of the Alliterative Revival and Chaucer by meter: strong stress and foot meter for the former, and alternating meter and syllabism in the latter (128). For Cable, the two merge in English with Sidney. Dunbar, however gives clear evidence that he is uniting the two strains much earlier, particularly in the seven and eight line stanzas. One must keep in mind, however, that Dunbar might well not have made a sharp distinction between these two strains of poetry. Cable provides a useful reminder for those making generalizations about prosody: "The main metrical categories that we impose on medieval poetry (alliterative vs. rhyming, accentual vs. syllabic, even prose vs. poetry) are modern

polar terms that are often more misleading than helpful" (67).

If one takes Wright's position that Chaucer introduced iambic pentameter into English, then it follows that Chaucer's successors would have endeavored to imitate this form. One of the reasons for the neglect of such poets as Dunbar is this view of metrics. Dunbar's poetry has a higher percentage of lines that do not scan iambically than does Chaucer's. It follows that critics view him as an unsuccessful imitator of Chaucer. However, when one applies the French or Gaelic system of counting syllables to Chaucer and Dunbar, a greater appreciation for the meters of both poets results. In this light, the decasyllabic line has greater flexibility; lines that do not scan iambically and are thought of as defective add variation to the poetry, while still fitting in with the meter. While many of Dunbar's lines seem to follow a five stress pattern, some do not, and must be scanned syllabically, indicating that he may have been aware of both the quantitative and the qualitative systems of versification.

One characteristic of Dunbar's poetry that reveals his departure from Chaucer is the use of alliteration. Tom Scott makes much of this characteristic and recognizes a close connection between Dunbar and Anglo Saxon alliterative verse. Dunbar's use of alliteration is not as anachronistic as it might appear; Bawcutt reminds us that

while the use of alliteration had peaked in English poetry in the fourteenth century and waned by the late fifteenth, many poems written in late fifteenth century Scotland are alliterative, so Dunbar had numerous contemporary models (Dunbar 370).

Dunbar's use of an alliterative pattern makes his lines metrically more varied and shows that he was willing to experiment and not slavishly imitate Chaucer. At times the lines become heavily alliterative, but the meter is still apparent: "Falling on face full law befor thy feit" ("Tabil of Confessioun," 7). In this line, while the f sound is the dominant alliterative marker, in the second half of the line the stress shifts to the vowel sounds in "law" and "befor." Reading this line in iambic foot meter would result in an awkward stress on the first word "Falling," but the five stresses in the line are evident. Scott points out that one finds in Dunbar's poetry "a combination of the metric and alliterative techniques, the Romance and the Teutonic [Old English]" (312).

For Scott, most of the lines that we might read as iambic pentameter are in fact four stress lines, often with a caesura in the middle (314). Scott gives a few examples, although for the most part he refers to the "Treatise of the Twa Marit Wemen" to make his point. One does in fact find quite a few lines in this particular poem that have a pause in the middle. But the "Tretis,"

as Bawcutt remarks, is a throwback to an archaic type of poetry based solely on alliteration, not on any stanzaic pattern (Dunbar 374). Thus, it is not surprising to detect elements of purely alliterative poetics in this particular poem.

Elsewhere, it is evident that while there are often strong caesuras, most of these long lines have five stresses, not four, as Scott suggests. Counting ten syllables instead of five stresses allows the line to be divided neatly in half. Dividing the line with a caesura in the middle seems to have been Scott's method of scansion. A number of Dunbar's ten syllable lines in these eight line stanzas reveal this clear pause in the middle of the lines. In "Gude Counsale" (K 11) for example, we find:

Be ye ane luvar, think ye nocht ye shuld  
Be weill advysit in your governing? (1-2)

Syntactically, these lines break after the fifth syllable, indicating that Dunbar may have been using syllable count as the basis for the verse here.

Numerous other examples reveal this metrical pattern, for example, in "The Ballad of Barnard Stewart": "Bot dreyd of danger, de in thi defence . . . To quham be honour, lawde and reverence" (39, 41). Likewise, the repeating last lines of the stanzas of "To Aberdein": "Be blyth and blisfull, burcht of Aberdein." In this example, the alliteration joining the two half lines is clear-

ly apparent, including the second "b" of the second half line buried in "Aberdein."

Scott concedes that not all of Dunbar's poetry falls into the half line formula, but does point to numerous examples of this influence in the poems. One must also remember that a good deal of Old English and Alliterative Revival poetry falls into a 3 - 2 stress pattern, in which the half lines are never quite equal. Scott seems a bit too close to suggesting that Dunbar had access to Old English poetry, when that is extremely unlikely. More probable, as Cable states of Surrey (94), would be that Dunbar picked up remnants of Old English from poetry of the Alliterative Revival and contemporary Scottish alliterative poems.

While Dunbar had access to the French sources, and possibly the Italian, it seems more likely that he inherited the eight line ababbcbc and seven line ababbcc ten syllable stanzaic forms from Chaucer. These verse forms were common in English poetry by Dunbar's time and it is questionable whether they were thought of as anything else but English forms by fifteenth and sixteenth century poets. The poems in the eight line stanza range over varying subject matter, from sections of the "Flyting" to "Surrexit Dominus de Sepulchro."

The long line stanzas are often seen as Dunbar's adoption of a French verse form. Tom Scott views the

decasyllabic octave with refrain as being "based on a French form . . . a common Middle English stanza, and popular with Dunbar" (235). However, as Denton Fox points out, "no one has ever established any specific French source for any of Dunbar's poems" ("Middle Scots Poets" 122). Dunbar clearly saw himself as a poet writing in English, and as such it is difficult to overlook the English influences that came before him. James Dean has provided a useful analysis of Gower's indebtedness to Chaucer (Studies in Philology Summer 1991) that delimits the influence of the French forms and connects Gower much more closely to Chaucer. Attacking Fisher and Macaulay, who have labeled Gower's rhyme royal French in origin, Dean states:

decasyllabic and endecasyllabic lines were not as common in French ballades as Macaulay implies. Froissart, Othes de Grandson, and Charles d'Orleans sometimes wrote in ten-syllable verses, and Deschamps often, but octosyllabics were the verses of choice in fourteenth century French balladry. (256)

Indeed, the French influence is often applied to Dunbar with so much regularity that it easily outweighs the attention given to Chaucer as an influence. In fact, it is probably a way of getting around the "Scottish Chaucerian" label that many find so offensive. Again it is a case of overlooking the obvious. If a connection to French poets is to be found in Dunbar, then the shorter line poems would be the places to look, in light of Dean's

observation. Certainly Dunbar worked a great deal in octosyllabic lines, but it is his expertise in the longer line that owes the most to Chaucer and, in certain respects, Gower.

The extent of Chaucer's influence is also questioned when discussing the decasyllabic line, however. Many have noted the quality of the ten syllable verse produced in Scotland, especially in comparison with fifteenth and sixteenth century English verse. The Scots seem to have better assimilated this line from Chaucer. Denton Fox, however, suggests that the expertise in the decasyllabic line is evidence of a distance between the Middle Scots poets such as Henryson and Dunbar and Chaucer. Fox states that because of dialectical differences, among other reasons, Scottish poets did not try to slavishly imitate Chaucer. They simply added two syllables to "traditional octosyllabics" ("Middle Scots Poets" 113). Fox's argument is perhaps the strangest attempt to distance Middle Scots poets from a Chaucerian influence.

The fourteen poems using the eight line ten syllable stanza reveal Dunbar's proficiency in a form that Scott finds more suitable for "narrative-dramatic" poetry, not Dunbar's mostly lyric output (315). Dunbar appears to have been comfortable in the longer ten syllable line and he experimented with the rhythm of the line, producing a number of variations based on syntax and meter.

One of Dunbar's techniques is to insert caesuras at various points in the lines for variety:

Be mery, man, for any aventure . . . .

("Without Glaidnes" 6)

O merle, quod scho, O fule, stynt of thy taile.

(The Merle and the Nychtingall" 29)

The apparent differences in the spoken length of these two lines, both of ten syllables, testify to the variety that Dunbar achieved. Of course, the modern reader must be wary of punctuation inserted by modern editors, but in many cases the syntax of the line reveals distinct pauses. Dunbar could have no better model for this type of line construction than Chaucer. Indeed, such lines as "This wes hir song, and of a sentens trew" from "The Merle and the Nychtingall" have a syntax that sounds very much like Chaucer's, for example, "Liggyng in oost, as I have seyde er thi" (Troilus IV: 29), or "Do what you lyst, I wyl your thral be founde" ("Rosemounde" 23).

A common trait of these poems is the separation of the line by the caesura into two separate comments or expressions of mood. Fradenburg labels the shift between two moods or sentiments "variance" and argues that it is an essential feature of Dunbar's poetry. Ultimately this dichotomy observable in the lines of poetry represents the split between earthly and divine power, but Fradenburg also notes Dunbar's "attempts to negotiate the strengths

and weaknesses of worldly power" (149). The unsettled nature of the world, a theme for many other poets, kept Dunbar from writing long narratives, and forced him to write in "poetic genres capable of isolating single moods" (149). She states:

Variance, finally, appears in Dunbar's poetry in such a variety of forms -- alternation, opposition, antagonism -- that it becomes the measure of the strength of Dunbar's engagement with alternatives, as much as his desire to keep them apart. (149)

This notion of "variance" is found in single lines of Dunbar as well: "This fals warld ay flittis to and fro; / Now day up bricht, now nycht als blak as sabill" (K 60: 18-19), "Agane for lufe, quhen lufe I can find none" (K 16: 118), "The weir is gon, confermit is the peis" (K 4: 35), "Turne to thy freynd, belief nocht in thy fo" (K 60: 3). Dunbar surely acquired this technique from his training in rhetoric. As noted above, lines may break in the middle if one is counting syllables, or one half line may receive more emphasis if one is counting stresses. One notes in these lines that the second half line gets one more stress than the first (either 2, 3 if counting stresses, or 4, 6 if syllables), often providing more emphasis on the second point.

While lines of poetry may be neatly divided in half on the basis of syllables, syntactically the lines may break up elsewhere, as in "The Merle and the Niychtingall" (K 16):

Nevir suetar noyis wes hard with levand man,  
 Na maid this mirry gentill nychtingaill,  
 Hir sound went with the rever as it ran,  
 Outthrow the fresche and flureist lusty vaill.  
 O merle, quod scho, O fule, stynt of thy taill,  
 For in thy song gud sentens is thair none,  
 For boith is tynt the tyme and the travaill  
 Off every luvè bot upone God allone. (25-32)

With the exception of the first line, the stanza scans iambically. However, that reading sounds forced, as forced as emphasizing every syllable. The first line also contains eleven syllables. It is plausible that "Nevir" would have been pronounced monosyllabically, although elsewhere in Dunbar it is written "neir" ("Lucina schynning in silence of the nicht" K 53, line 21). It should be noted that the occasional endecasyllabic line is not uncommon in Dunbar's long lines.

Dunbar often uses alliteration to link several lines of poetry together in a stanza, in addition to linking half lines themselves. In "To Dwell in Court, my Friend" (K 77), the second stanza reads:

Bewar quhome to thy counsale thow discure,  
 For trewth dwellis nocht ay for that trewth appeiris;  
 Put not thyne honour into aventure--  
 Ane freind may be thy fo as fourtoun steiris:  
 In cumpany cheis honorable feiris  
 And fra [vyle] folkis draw the far on syd;  
 The psalme sayis, Cum sancto sanctis eiris:  
 He rewlis weill that weill him self can gyd. (9-16)

*discure*: reveal; *feiris*: comrades; line 14: "vyle" taken from Small (XX), Kinsley reads "vyld"

In the above stanza the lines scan iambically, although a more natural reading is not strictly iambic. This example

argues for Dunbar using stress instead of syllable count. The stanza is also noteworthy because of its two part structure which differs from the three part construction that Dunbar more often employs in this stanzaic form.

This stanza is held together in several different ways. Here the alliteration serves to link the fourth and sixth lines, with a weaker connection in between to the fifth line. Syntactically, the break comes after the fourth line, creating a division in the stanza of 4, 2, 2 or 4, 2, 1, 1. Yet the alliteration serves to link the lines for a division of 3, 3, 2 or 3, 3, 1, 1. In addition, the rhyme scheme divides the stanza 3, 2, 3. It seems unlikely that Dunbar was not in some sense aware of these patterns when composing. While Scott sees Dunbar's use of alliteration as "playful," it is unlikely that a poet so concerned with words would construct these alliterative lines without a greater purpose in mind. Here it seems as though Dunbar deliberately employed several distinct characteristics of English prosody.

One of the poetic techniques that Dunbar inherits from Chaucer is his use of enjambment. Dunbar makes more use of enjambment than Chaucer did in his eight line and rhyme royal stanzas. It predominates in the opening two stanzas of "The Merle and the Nychtingall"

In May as that Aurora did upspring  
 With cristall ene chasing the cluddis sable  
 I hard a merle with mirry notis sing  
 A sang of lufe with voce rycht comfortable

Agane the orient bemis amiable  
 Upone a blisful brenche of lawry grene;  
 This wes hir sentens sueit and delectable:  
 A lusty lyfe in luves service bene.

Undir this brench ran doun a revir bricht  
 Of balmy liquour cristallyne of hew  
 Agane the hevinly aisur skyis licht,  
 Quhair did upone the tother syd persew  
 A nyctingall with suggurit notis new  
 Quhois angell fedderis as the pacok schone;

This wes hir song, and of a sentens trew:  
 All luve is lost bot upone God allone. (1-14)

The effect here is to move the verses along swiftly, and one notes the absence of strong caesuras.

Dunbar's greater use of enjambment is indicative of the fact that he was comfortable working in these longer lines. He is also able to draw upon alliteration as a means to connect the verse internally over several lines, a technique that Chaucer did not use. The extensive use of alliteration in some of Dunbar's poems has been noted, but little light has been shed on the reason for it. In some cases one notices a connection between the second half line of one line and the first of the next line. In other words, instead of connecting two half lines on a single line, Dunbar at times will divide them over two.

And every morrow seik the at thi graife,  
 That seis my hert; as thou hir forgaife,  
 Thairfor forgif me as synner penitent.

(K 6: 148-50)

Playand on timberallis and singand rycht sweitlie;  
 That *semelie* sort in ordour weill besein . . . .

(K 48: 45-6)

In these examples the alliteration follows the syntactical



on each of them, forcing emphasis on each one. Indeed, the whole rhythm slows down in these two lines, as Dunbar calls attention to the sins themselves. Later in the poem Dunbar modifies this somewhat listing the Seven Sacraments:

Lord, I have done full litill reverence  
 Unto the sacramentis sevin of gret renoun:  
 To that hie eucarist moist of excellence,  
 Baptasing, pennence, and confirmacioun,  
 Matremony, ordour, and extreme uncioun.  
 Heirot sa fer as I wes necligent,  
 With hert contrit and teris falling doun  
 I cry the marcy and laser to repent. (41-48)

Dunbar draws attention to receiving the "eucarist" by giving it a line of its own as befitting the nature of this particular sacrament. Also conspicuous is its placement out of historical sequence, as Baptism comes first in one's life.

Undoubtedly one of Dunbar's finest religious poems and one of the finest in the Middle Ages describing Christ's Resurrection is "Done is a battell on the dragon blak" (K 4, also known by its refrain, "*Surrexit Dominus de Sepulchro*"). Bawcutt has the most thorough commentary on the poem, noting the heroic imagery used and the syntactical variation in the stanzas (Dunbar 170-84). Christ is heroic, "campioun" (2), and "grit victour" (25), who battles Satan and secures "our ransonis" [ransom] (7), the "tresur" (39) of souls. Bawcutt notes that this image was an older one that did not have much currency in Dunbar's time (Dunbar 179). The image recalls Beowulf, who also

battles a dragon to rescue a treasure, and the heroic Christ echoes such poems as the Old English "Dream of the Rood"; indeed, in Dunbar's poem the cross becomes a "signe triumphall rasit" (4), not the instrument of torture.<sup>5</sup> The heroic images influence the poet to qualify the traditional peaceful images of Christ; He is "lyk a lamb in sacrifice" (18), and "lyk a lyone rissin up agayne" (19), but "as a gyane" [giant] (20) when he rises up to defeat Satan.

While the eight line stanza may have been chosen here because of the religious subject, heroic imagery and more worldly images of war are found in the poem. The first stanza reads:

Done is a battell on the dragon blak;  
 Our campioun Chryst confoundit hes his force:  
 The 3ettis of hell ar brokin with a crak,  
 The signe triumphall rasit is of the croce,  
 The divillis trymmillis with hiddous voce,  
 The saulis ar borrowit and to the bliss can go,  
 Chryst with his blud our ransonis dois indoce:  
*Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.* (1-8)

3ettis: gates; indoce: endorse

Again, the stanza allows Dunbar to develop a concentric structure that shapes the imagery. The first three lines describe Christ's defeat of Satan and opening of the gates of Hell; the fight is over, but movement is suggested through the image of the gates of Hell bursting open "with

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<sup>5</sup> Bawcutt notes that the image of Christ with the cross as a battle standard occurs in painting form the late Middle Ages (Dunbar 178).

a crak." In the central couplet, the image of Christ triumphant standing over the cowering Satan is presented as a frozen image, while the last three lines point forward; the souls "to the blis can go," as if the poem takes place in that time period just before the souls leave Hell. A peculiar legal image is suggested in the last three lines with the "borrowit" souls, and the "ransonis" endorsed by Christ. As Bawcutt notes, "'endorse' stresses the transaction's legal validity, but the legal figure is not further developed" (Dunbar 179). Dunbar is stressing the "correctness" of Christ's action, the clerical image balancing out the military image of the first part of the stanza. It is as if Christ has conducted a treaty after the war, thus leaving no loose ends for Satan to seize after relinquishing the souls, as an enemy might refuse to release a hostage.

Dunbar perhaps intends that the audience recall King James I and the time he spent imprisoned by the British in 1425. This event would still have been fresh in the court's memory. The prisoner imagery is echoed in the final stanza:

The fo is chasit, the battell is done ceis,  
 The presone brokin, the jevellouris fleit and flemit  
 The weir is gon, confermit is the peis,  
 The fetteris lowsit and the dungeoun temit,  
 The ransoun maid, the presoneris redemit;  
 The feild is win, ourcumin is the fo,  
 Dispulit of the tresur that he 3emit:  
*Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.* (33-40)

*ceis*: ceased; *jevellouris*: jailors; *fleit*: fled; *flemit*:

banished; temit: emptied; 3emit: guarded

Again the legal images of war concluding in a treaty "confermit" occur in line 35. The stanza builds in the first three lines going from "fo" to "jevellouris" to "weir" in line three. Even in the end, the phrase "the feild is win," would have more currency to Dunbar's immediate audience than the next line's image of a "tresur" taken from Satan, which echoes older heroic poetry.

Dunbar here unites a religious, epic/heroic, and contemporary account of warfare genre in one poem. One notes Dunbar's flexibility in treating a religious subject of the utmost gravity. The poem is divided into three parts recalling the Trinity, and the forty lines echo the forty days that Christ appeared to the Apostles.<sup>6</sup>

Dunbar also uses the eight line stanza in poems described as "Moralities" by Kinsley, or "Moralisings" by Mackenzie. Although it is not overtly religious, "O wreche, be war: this warld will wend the fro" (K 60, also known by the refrain, *Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*"), also offers a reminder of the state of this world.

Heir nocht abydis, heir standis nothing stabill;  
This fals warld ay flittis to and fro;  
Now day up bricht, now nycht als blak as sabill,

---

<sup>6</sup> Bawcutt cites Hill, who makes this argument (Dunbar 183). She also notes that three other poems on the subject grouped with Dunbar's in the Arundel 285 MS also consist of forty lines.

Now eb, now flude, now freynd, now cruell fo,  
 Now glaid, now said, now weill, now [in-to] wo,  
 Now cled in gold, dissolvit now in as;  
 So dois this world transitorie go:  
 Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas. (17-24)

line 21: from Small, Kinsley reads "now to wo" ; as: ash

This stanza has a wonderfully concentric structure. The central four lines are joined syntactically, and have an internal pattern as well. Bawcutt notes in these lines the "Now this, now that" structure used by many medieval writers (Dunbar 147). The second line requires a pause to be counted with the syllables to produce a decasyllabic scansion; this works well as the line breaks neatly in half, with the two sides having very different rhythms: "This fals world" appropriately has a solemn tone to it as each word receives stress, but in the second half "ay flittis to and fro," the transitory nature is stressed and the line moves more swiftly.

Yet this line does not really fit any meter one tries to impose on it. While it might be considered defective, its effect seems too calculated not to have been intentional. In the center of the stanza, lines four and five have breaks after every stress. The alliteration in this poem is subtle, occurring in several lines to move the rhythm along, but not prevalent enough to draw attention to itself as it does in other poems. Like K 77, this poem bears a similarity to Chaucer's "Fortune," which uses the same stanza:

This wrecched worldes transmutacioun,  
 As wele or wo, now povre and now honour,  
 Withouten ordre or wys discrecioun . . . . (1-3)

The solution often is to deemphasize the worldly and to trust God, as in "Be mery, man, and tak nocht fer in mynd" (K 65), which urges "To God be hummle and to thi frend be kyind" (3), and "Mak gude cheir of it that God the sendis" (9). Here the alliteration is more strongly developed: "The remanent of al thow brukis with balis; / Seik to solace quhen saidnes the assalis" (12-13). The opening stanza reads:

Be mery, man, and tak nocht fer in mynd  
 The wavering of this wrechit vale of sorow;  
 To God be hummle and to thi frend be kyind,  
 And with thi nichtbour glaidlie len and borow --  
 His chance this nycht, it may be thine to morow.  
 Be mery, man, for any aventure;  
 For be wismen it has bene said afforow,  
 Without glaidnes avalis no tresure. (1-8)

The central two lines describe the relationship one should have with one's neighbor; these lines provide a focus for the stanza with a proverbial sound and rhythm.

"To dwell in court, my freind, gif that thow list" (K 77, discussed above on page 176) also makes use of proverbial material, as Kinsley notes (369). The refrain, "He rewlis weill that weill him self can gyd," also recalls lines of Chaucer's "Fortune," such as the following:

No man is wrecched, but himself it wene,  
 And he that hath himself hath suffisiaunce.  
 Why saystow thanne I am of thee so keen,  
 That hast thyself out of my governaunce?  
 (25-28)

Dunbar also uses the eight line stanza in what one might term occasional verse, such as "Gladethe thoue, queyne of Scottis regioun" (K 31), which was discussed above in terms of its flower imagery. These poems reinforce the point that Dunbar did not reserve this form expressly for poems of high seriousness.

O hye triumphing paradis of joy,  
 Lod steir and lamp of eivry lustines;  
 Of port surmounting Pollexen of Troy,  
 Dochtir to Pallas in angellik brichtnes;  
 Mastres of nurtur and of nobilnes,  
 Of fresch depictour princes and patroun,  
 O hevin in erthe of ferlifull suetnes:  
 Gladethe thoue, queyne of Scottis regione.

(9-16)

*ferlifull*: wonderful

The stanza is divided into mythical and the contemporary royal comparisons surrounded by more religious phrasing. Lines two and seven, with the phrases "lod steir and lamp" and "hevin in erthe," recall addresses to the Virgin. Lines three and four feature mythical references and lines five and six seem to characterize qualities of noble rulers. Additionally, lines three and six begin with the same preposition; this seems to reinforce the concentric structure. The shift occurs in the central couplet as the description moves from "Dochtir to Pallas" to "Mastres of nurtur."

"To speik off science, craft or sapience" (K 76, or "Dunbar at Oxinfurde"), also employs the stanza, here with Dunbar's more common technique of forming the stanza

around the central couplet.

To speik off science, craft or sapience,  
 Off vertew, morall cuning or doctryne,  
 Off jure, off wisdome or intelligence,  
 Of everie studie, lair or disciplyne:  
 All is bot tynt, or reddy for to tyne.  
 Nocht using it as it suld usit be -  
 The craft excersing, considering nocht the fyne.  
 Ane peralous seikness is vane prosperitie.

(1-8)

tynt: lost; tyne: lose

Again, the rejection of worldly sciences is traditional. The stanza works with the material by providing a conclusion for the first half in lines four and five, which divide neatly in half, before proceeding to a more general comment at the end of the stanza.

Dunbar's two poems in praise of Bernard Stewart (K 35 and 36) also use the form; this suggests that it was thought of as appropriate for occasional epidiectic verse. Stewart was a great Scottish general and Lord of Aubigny who fought for the French; the poem may have been written on the occasion of his return to Scotland in May 1508 (Reiss 47). Reiss also notes the poem's "high style appropriate for stately occasions" and sees the poem as a product of Dunbar's role as "court panegyrist" (47). In addition to sharing the same verse form as Chaucer's "An ABC," Dunbar's last stanza also uses an alphabetical arrangement to praise Bernard Stewart's name:

B in thi name betaknis batalrus,  
 A able in feild, R right renoune most hie;  
 N nobilnes and A for aunterus,  
 R ryall blude; for dughtines is D;  
 V valyeantnes, S for strenewite. (89-93)

When the two poems are compared, it becomes evident that the elegy has much more alliteration than the ballad:

Throw Scotland, Inland, France and Lumbardy  
 Fleys on weyng thi fame and thi renoune,  
 And our all cuntries undirnethe the sky  
 And our all strandis fro the sterris doune;  
 In every province, land and regioun  
 Proclomit is thi name of excellence  
 In every cete, village and in toun,  
 Withe glorie and honour, lawd and reverence.  
 (K 35: 49-56)

While the above stanza from the ballad features some alliteration (lines 50 and 52), it is not as prevalent as it is in the elegy:

Complaine sould everie noble valiant knyght  
 The death of him that douchtie was in deid,  
 That many ane fo in feild hes put to flight  
 In weris wicht, be wisdome and manheid.  
 To the Turkas sey all land did his name dreid  
 Quhois force all France in fame did magnifie;  
 Of so hie price sall nane his place posseid  
 For he is gone, the flour of chevilrie.  
 (K 36: 9-16)

Several critics have suggested that the elegy is perhaps not as heartfelt as it might be: Bawcutt comments that it is "strikingly repetitious" (Dunbar 83). She also notes the large number of French *complaintes* or *epitathes* which have achieved a reputation of being cliché-ridden (Dunbar 84-5). Dunbar's elegy is short -- four stanzas -- and does follow French and English models. The alliterative lines do contain what seem to be clichés or proverbial thoughts strung together. However, Dunbar may well have chosen this form to echo an older poetic line. In this sense it would lend gravity to the poem.

"Blyth Aberdeane, thow beriall of all tounis" (K 48) was written to celebrate what was probably Queen Margaret's first visit to the city in May 1511 (Bawcutt, Dunbar 89). The poem praises the city directly "Be blyth and blisful, burgh of Aberdein" is the refrain, and in the last stanza shifts the address to Margaret herself.

O potent princes, plesant and preclair,  
 Great caus thow hes to thank this nobill toun  
 That for to do the honnour did not spair  
 Thair geir, riches, substance and persoun,  
 The to ressave on maist fair fasoun;  
 The for to pleis thai socht all way and mein:  
 Thairfoir sa lang as quein thow beiris croun,  
 Be thankfull to this burcht of Aberdein.

(65-72)

*preclair*: illustrious

Bawcutt notes the shift in this stanza from an address to the townspeople to an address to Margaret herself, which urges her to be thankful for her reception (Dunbar 91). Here the stanza effectively divides in the central couplet to allow Dunbar to make this transition. This is accomplished quite effectively in the couplet by moving from "Thair" (their) to "The" (thee).

Perhaps the most interesting use of this stanza occurs in "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie" (K 23). The poem is certainly not of great moral weight, although, as Reiss points out, "Dunbar may be intentionally perverting the usual application of this form" [the "Monk's Tale" stanza] (148). In the "Flyting," Chaucer's form is used by Dunbar, but not Kennedy, who uses an eight line stanza

with the rhyme scheme ababbccb. The reversal of the last two lines means that the verse of each poet will have a slightly different effect. The poets may have agreed to this strategy since they were friends. In this case, the vituperative nature of their comments to each other is purely a convention of the form. Kennedy's stanzas tend to build to a climax in the couplet, then end with a final thought, or a comment on what was just mentioned.

Dathane deivillis sone and dragone dispitous,  
 Abironis birth and bred with Beliall,  
 Wod werwoif, worme and scorpion vennemous,  
 Lucifers laid, fowll feyindis face infernall,  
 Sodomyt, syphareit fra sanctis celestiall:  
 Put I nocht sylence to the, schiphird knaif,  
 And thow of new begynis to ryme and raif,  
 Thow salbe maid blait, bleir eit, bestiall.

(249-56)

*Dathane*: a devil; *Abironis*: rebelled against Moses (Num. xvi); *syphareit*: separated; *blait*: spiritless

The alliteration is pronounced in the "Flyting" and one can see the effect in this stanza. The lines move swiftly, as if the poets are out of breath from cursing each other.

Dunbar's stanzas, on the other hand, tend to focus on the central couplet, although in this poem the stanzas seem less structured, certainly to reinforce the notion that the duel was extemporaneous.

Mater annuche I haif, I bid nocht fen3ie,  
 Thocht thow, fowll trumpour, thus upoun me leid;  
 Corruptit carioun, he sall I cry thy sen3ie.  
 Thinkis thow nocht how thow come in grit neid  
 Greitand in Galloway lyk to ane gallow breid,  
 Ramand and rolpand, beggand koy and ox?

I saw the thair in to thy wathemanis weid  
 Quhilk wes nocht worth ane pair of auld gray sox.  
 (137-44)

*annuche*: enough; *fen3ie*: feign; *trumpour*: imposter;  
*sen3ie*: war cry; *ramand*: shouting; *rolpand*: roaring; *koy*:  
 young cow; *wathemanis weid*: outlaw's dress

Dunbar uses rhyme royal in four poems, the best known of which is "The Thrissil and the Rois" (K 50). While the case may be made that this dream vision makes an appropriate topic for the stanza, Dunbar also uses rhyme royal in "O synfull man, thir ar the fourty dayis" (K 5), "My hartis tresure and swete assured fo" (K 12), and "Quhat is this lyfe bot ane straucht way to deid" (K 57). Dunbar's use of the stanza in a religious, love, and moralizing poem indicates that he felt it appropriate for a variety of subjects.

Rhyme royal was of course the stanza James I used in "The Kingis Quair." While there is no evidence that Dunbar was familiar with the "Kingis Quair," the use of rhyme royal in that poem indicates that the form was known in Scotland by the time Dunbar began his poetic career. James Dean points out that Chaucer was the one who first adapted rhyme royal to narrative, as the French had used the stanza only for ballads (252). But Chaucer also wrote several short poems in this form, most notably "Adam Scriveyn" and the "Complaint to His Purse." Dean notes that Gower used rhyme royal for occasional verse and "philosophical love poetry" (252). Dean suggests that

Gower modelled his verse on Chaucer's, and cites in particular strong caesuras in the lines (254) as evidence of a Chaucerian basis.

Mustanoja has noted the history of critical commentary on Chaucer's prosody (in Rowland 65-94). Ten Brink had argued that Chaucer's stanza most often could be separated ab ab bcc, but Mustanoja among others rejects this and points to numerous stanzas that violate the pattern (82). Dunbar both uses this pattern and deviates from it. In "O synfull man," Dunbar opens with a stanza strongly divided between the fourth and fifth lines, but also following Ten Brink's scheme for Chaucer's rhyme royal:

O synfull man, thir ar the fourty dayis  
 That every man sulde wilfull pennence dre:  
 Oure Lorde Jesu as haly writ sayis  
 Fastit him self, oure exampill to be.  
 Sen sic ane mychty king and lorde as he  
 To fast and pray was so obedient,  
 We synfull folk sulde be more diligent. (1-7)

Elsewhere in this poem and in the other three, the division of the stanza is less certain, however; most often Dunbar seems to indicate a break after the third or fourth line. The following two stanzas from "My hartis tresur and swete assured fo" illustrate the variety which Dunbar achieves:

Have mercie, luif; have mercie, ladie bricht:  
 Quhat have I wrocht aganis 3our womanheid  
 That 3e suld murdir me, a saikles wicht  
 Trespassing never to 3ow in word or deid?  
 That 3e consent thairto, O God forbid!  
 Leif creuelte, and saif 3our man for schame,

Or throucht the warld quyte losit is 3our name.  
(8-14)

Behald my wod intollerabill pane  
For evermoir quhilk salbe my dampnage;  
Quhy undir traist 3our man thus have 3e slane?  
Lo, deithe is in my breist with furious rage,  
Quhilk may no balme nor tryacle asswage  
Bot 3our mercie, for laik of quhilk I de:  
Allace, quhair is 3our womanlie petie? (22-28)

Dunbar, the priest, here comfortably adopts the persona of a lover, although perhaps with a note of sarcasm. The "O God forbid!" of line twelve seems to be more a secular exclamation than a sincere appeal to the deity. Noteworthy in line fourteen is the threat to spoil the woman's good name. One discerns this note of revenge available to the speaker almost as a last resort elsewhere in Dunbar's poems. Also apparent are the stong caesuras in lines eight, ten, twelve, thirteen, at different points in each line.

The first line of the poem bears a striking resemblance to Chaucer's "Complaint to His Lady": note Dunbar's line "My hartis tresure and swete assured fo" and compare Chaucer's "My dere herte and best beloved fo" (58). Reiss points out that Dunbar "uses the built-in stateliness of ryme royal for comic effects" in this poem (148). It does seem that the poet is exaggerating the seriousness of the matter here, and thus the stanzaic form is appropriate.

Similarly, in "The Thrissill and the Rois," Dunbar varies the syntactical pattern in a number of ways. Ten Brink's suggested scheme for Chaucer's verse is apparent:

Slugird, scho said, Awalk annone for schame,  
 And in my honour sum thing thow go wryt;  
 The lork hed done the mirry day proclame  
 To rais up luvaris with confort and delyt;  
 3it nocht incress thy curage to indyt,  
 Quhois hairt sum tyme hes glaid and blisful bene,  
 Sangis to mak undir the levis grene. (22-28)

But in the same poem, two stanzas above, the stanza seems arranged to build to a final couplet:

In bed at morrow sleiping as I lay  
 Me thocht Aurora with hir cristall ene  
 In at the window lukit by the day  
 And halsit me, with visage pail and grene;  
 On quhois hand a lark sang fro the splene:  
 Awalk, luvaris, out of 3our slomering;  
 Se how the lusty morrow dois up spring. (8-14)

*halsit*: hailed

Despite the punctuation -- added by editors -- this stanza divides 5 2, with the description of the first five lines used as a backdrop for the address of Aurora. Dunbar is flexible in his division of the stanzas and he experiments with the syntactical arrangement of the lines.

Rhyme royal seems to have been reserved by Dunbar for poems of high seriousness, or parodies of them, although with only four poems in this form, generalizations are risky. Dunbar's shortest poem, which may be an excerpt (Bawcutt, Dunbar 144), is "Quhat is this lyfe" (K 57); it consists of one rhyme royal stanza:

Quhat is this lyfe bot ane straucht way to deid,  
 Quhilk hes a tyme to pas and nane to duell;  
 A slyding quheill us lent to seik remeid,  
 A fre chois gevin to paradice or hell,  
 A pray to deid, quhome vane is to repell;  
 A schoirt torment for infineit glaidnes -  
 Als schort ane joy fo lestand hevynes.

The thought is traditional, ranging from Seneca to Chaucer, as Kinsley has pointed out (350). The fourth line, which has eleven syllables, scans with five stresses, and appropriately "paradice" receives two stresses in the second half of the line. It is possible that either "gevin" or "paradice" could have been pronounced as one and two syllables respectively, but the content and position of the line may indicate that Dunbar wanted to draw attention to it. Elsewhere Dunbar incorporates endecasyllabic lines into these stanzas: "To The, O marcifull salviour myn, Jesus" is the first line of "The Tabill of Consessioun" (K 6). "Herbreit [harbor] the wilsum [wandering], nor nakit cled at all" (29) from the same poem, is emphasized in a list of good deeds. In "The Merle and the Nychtingall," one finds the line "The nychtingall sang, Man, lufe the Lord most deir" (107). These endecasyllabic lines scan with five stresses, yet stand out just enough to call attention to themselves. Each seems to contain a thought appropriate for emphasis, a reference to Christ, or a particular act the audience might perform more regularly.

Dunbar's poems in decasyllabic meter reveal that he worked comfortably and skillfully in this form. The critical focus on Dunbar's use of octosyllabic lines in short poems overlooks some of the poet's finest verse. Admittedly, the poet did not produce the bulk of his work

in ten syllable lines, but the number he did compose reveals that he did not think of one verse form as appropriate for one type of subject only. Additionally, one detects a debt to Chaucer in these lines, perhaps more strongly here than elsewhere in Dunbar's poetry. One suspects that a close look at Dunbar's use of rhyme royal and the eight-line stanza may reveal a connection to Chaucer that is too conspicuous for many critics to acknowledge.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

Dunbar, one must admit, belongs more to the Middle Ages than to the Renaissance. As Reiss observes, "for all its newness Dunbar's verse is grounded in medieval poetic and doctrinal traditions" (150). Perhaps this explains some of the critical neglect of the poet. His educational grounding in the medieval literary and rhetorical traditions promotes the critical response that he is closer in spirit to the Middle Ages than the Renaissance. Yet Dunbar lived until perhaps 1520, slightly less than forty years before Tottel's Miscellany signals the beginnings of the Renaissance in English poetry. The temptation to see a connection to that later period in cultural history is great; one would then be able to laud the poet as ahead of his time.

Dunbar is perhaps best thought of as being very much of his time. That time for poets in Scotland was one of change and experimentation. Dunbar's grounding in medieval poetic theory should make one more appreciative of the richness of his work. In the poetry of William Dunbar, we find both a culmination and a beginning; he reveals his debt to medieval rhetorical doctrine and also attempts a poetic diction of the kind that will be highly prized in the Renaissance.

William Dunbar has also been stigmatized because of his apparent focus on the small and immediate court audience around him. As we have seen, however, Dunbar at times looked beyond his immediate audience and located himself in the larger context of the history of poetry in English. These obvious references to posterity are not the only ways Dunbar connects himself to the larger context of poetry in English. By acknowledging a debt to earlier poetry, overtly and subtly, Dunbar adds his work to the continuum in English literary history, rather than to an isolated "drab age."

Perhaps the most common critical view of the poet is that he was a craftsman concerned largely with the "surface" of his poetry. While Dunbar reveals this interest in several of his poems, clearly he was equally concerned with making the outer appearance match the inner subject matter of the poems. Dunbar's numerous references to clothing in his work reveal not only an awareness of medieval rhetorical doctrine on this matter, but also a sense that the diction and imagery of the poem must be appropriate to the material. Dunbar's labelling of himself as "maker" perhaps inevitably has led to a critical view of the poet as someone interested in the immediate goals of the poetry, the petitions to the king, for example, at the expense of a more elevated sense of the place of poetry in history. We have seen, however, that these

loftier concerns make their way into Dunbar's work and that the poet had several conceptions of who his audience was.

If the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are thought of as a transitional period between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, then Dunbar is a poet of his time. He brings into his poetry personal concerns, representative of a new sense of an expanded notion of what is fitting matter for poetic expression. The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries have been the subject of increasing critical attention in the past several years. The stigma of centuries of criticism is finally beginning to be lifted; poetry once degraded as being "transitional" is now being studied and valued for that very reason.

Dunbar, however, still suffers from a critical perspective that imposes order and seeks unifying themes in his poems. Priscilla Bawcutt, Dunbar's most sympathetic and astute commentator, claims to have located a "core" of Dunbar's work in the petitions to King James IV (Dunbar 115). One wonders whether this latest attempt to give coherence to his work will facilitate greater appreciation of the poet or detrimentally narrow the perspective new readers will embrace.

The fact that Dunbar was a cleric has also tended to narrow the critical response. Reiss ultimately concludes that "the efforts of Dunbar the poet [are] wholly in

accord with those of Dunbar the cleric" (151). This is a dangerous oversimplification. Dunbar is able to create speakers with a wide range of voices, not all of them guided by clerical or moral concerns. There is no reason to assume that he was consciously or unconsciously attempting to create poetry that accorded with his clerical background. It is wise to recall other poets who were also clerics -- Boccaccio and Lydgate, for example -- and the variety of poetry they produced. While religious subjects certainly form the basis of many of his poems, Dunbar adopts personas in some of them that seem at odds with his clerical background. When one approaches his poetry, it is wise to treat Dunbar as a poet first and a cleric second.

Dunbar's aureate diction seems particularly to have been singled out by critics as evidence of the poet's fascination with style at the expense of a thorough consideration of content. The attention that has been paid to Dunbar's subject matter seems always to be an attempt to explain the immediate circumstances of the poems. Of course he petitioned the king and wrote morally instructive verse or celebratory poems for state occasions. However, this study has argued that in his poems Dunbar the poet reveals himself in interesting and subtle ways. Whether writing about a headache or a forsaken love, Dunbar reveals his debt to the richness of English liter-

ary history.

The influences on the poet that we can identify with any certainty come out of the English literary tradition; Dunbar's achievements must be placed in that context. The geographical and political distance between Scotland and England has been cited as one reason the Middle Scots poets were able to excel when their English contemporaries were faltering in their attempt to model their poetry on Chaucer's. Dunbar, however, reveals a thorough understanding of Chaucer. The distance between the two countries is not the reason he was able to produce fine poetry; his skill as a reader of Chaucer and other poets and his own compositional talent are more likely explanations.

One of the goals of this dissertation has been to reclaim the title "Scottish Chaucerian." The negative connotations of this phrase seem exaggerated and driven by a desire to claim a uniquely Scottish heritage in poetry. Perhaps it is stigmatized as well because of the fifteenth century poets in England who relied on a facile grasp of Chaucer's poetics and an over-reliance on rhetorical devices that Chaucer used with subtlety. Dunbar, however, particularly in the decasyllabic lines, reveals that he was able to take a form used by Chaucer and use it with delicacy and originality. Many critics who fear too close a connection with Chaucer fail to emphasize Dunbar's absorption of the alliterative tradition. Dunbar's use of

alliteration along with end rhyme is perhaps the most significant characteristic of his poetry. He reveals a debt to Chaucer, but he is by no means a slavish imitator; this is the point that critics of the poet should underscore.

What should William Dunbar's place in literary history be then? Dunbar reminds us that medieval poetic theory did not disappear after Chaucer. Despite what Chaucer's English followers made of his poetry, Dunbar at least was able to see the brilliance of it and make fine poetry of his own. The fact that Dunbar does not mention other sources or make use of classical references suggests that much of what we may label his poetics undoubtedly came through Chaucer. But perhaps too much emphasis need not be placed on that earlier poet's influence. We may instead argue that Dunbar and Chaucer are writing out of the same tradition, that they shared an appreciation of medieval rhetorical theory. Clearly they had similar notions of the place of the speaker and audience in the poetic process. Part of the concern of a poet always includes some apprehension about what the future will bring to the poetry being let go into literary history.

But perhaps what is most important about Dunbar is that he represents a development from Chaucer. This study noted how Dunbar reveals more confidence in his language. He is able to use a very colloquial style and an elevated

poetic or aureate style, at times in the same poem; he made colloquial, speech-based language a fitting vehicle for poetic expression, while also seeking a rich Latin-based vocabulary to do justice to the richness of his subject matter. Confidence in his powers as a poet and in his audience's ability to decipher his terminology made this possible. Ironically, Dunbar's use of both colloquial and aureate terms has contributed greatly to his critical neglect; modern readers find both extremes to impede an understanding of the poet. We may never fully understand some of Dunbar's colloquial vocabulary, but perhaps what is important is the fact that he put the spoken language he was hearing into verse.

How then do we reconcile his colloquialism with his attempt to shape a poetic language using latinate vocabulary and metaphoric imagery? The answer, as always for Dunbar, is not to attempt to reconcile the poet's many voices. Dunbar used all the available tools before him and seems to have enjoyed incorporating as many different styles and techniques as he could. What unifies Dunbar's corpus of poems are the references that may be found to the poetic process. In various ways Dunbar places himself in his poems. He draws attention to the speaker, inviting the reader to question the reliability of that speaker. He also comments on the source of the material for the poem, reminding the audience that the poet may have sever-

al different functions in the communicative process.

Dunbar represents the variety of poetry that can come from the tradition of medieval rhetorical poetics. He is the most suitable heir to Chaucer because he modelled many aspects of his poetry on Chaucer's, but also because he was experimental. Dunbar stretched the boundaries of poetic vocabulary in two directions: toward the colloquial and the highly ornate. Perhaps Dunbar was a good reader of Chaucer because he did not attempt to fit Chaucer into any one category. Dunbar's work gives evidence that the poet drew upon Chaucer's narrative poetry as well as his short, lyric-like poems.

One may be left to wonder just what aspirations Dunbar had of his own. Bawcutt has suggested that Dunbar does not evince the "large-scale aspirations" that one might expect of a poet as opposed to a maker (19). This may be so, but it is important to remember that Dunbar's position as a court poet influenced the kinds of subjects about which he wrote. Perhaps it is more useful to perceive Dunbar as a poet revealing himself subtly, through comments that may or may not have been intentional. While he may not have aspired to the kind of poetic fame that Chaucer achieved (although this is certainly difficult to support), Dunbar nonetheless could not help but be influenced by the great poets before him.

Dunbar was certainly not narrow in his focus or his

range. If one is looking for some way of unifying his work, perhaps one finds it in the fundamental ways almost all of his poems reveal the poet's debt to rhetorical theory. But perhaps the best way to appreciate Dunbar is to revel in his richness. He represents the best of medieval poetry, the culmination of the line of medieval poets that begins with Chaucer and the Gawain-poet. Dunbar is no dead end, however; he speaks with the high style that will become praiseworthy later in the Renaissance. He also exhibits an attitude toward the power of language that marks a new found confidence in the ability of words to convey ideas and images clearly.

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