POETIC TECHNIQUES IN THE POETRY OF
WILLIAM DUNBAR

by
Charles August Meyer

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SIGNED: Charles August Meyer

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Kenneth C. Conroy
KENNETH CONROY
Assistant Professor of English

May 10, 1965
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ABSTRACT

William Dunbar is a poet of humor, of satire, of sadness, of fear, in short, of man and his existence. He writes poetry involving the entire gamut of human experience as he saw it through his own eyes. Writing at the beginning of the sixteenth century, he is the last strong voice of a sparkling, dynamic age.

His poetry is marked by its applicability today. Dunbar is not solely a poet of the past. His verse is representative of life as he experiences it. Because the basic emotions of man have not changed, Dunbar, in many respects, is a current poet. There is no doubt that he is a medieval man. He is, however, a good example of the fact that the medieval period in literature is not solely one of convention and of tradition. It is made up of living men whose experiences and actions are recognizable today as being universal to man.

Dunbar's best work is not found in his conventional verse. Dream allegory and courtly love are not still part of literature as driving, dynamic forces. As an example, the poet's ability is clearly seen in "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo." It is not, however, in the poem's opening and closing lines that this is apparent. When he leaves the traditional framework for description
of the women and their opinions, the poem attains a starkness and vitality that removes it from a now-unexperienced convention to an area of real emotion.

Dunbar, because of this, and because of his ability at handling language artistically, is a good poet.
INTRODUCTION.

Between the death of Chaucer and the advent of Skelton, there is precious little of literary note in England. Thomas Hoccleve's canon is slight and is narrow in its range. Lydgate is voluminous, but because he is so completely overshadowed by Chaucer, his mentor, his work is known to students of the period primarily by name rather than by reputation. Baugh, in his discussion of Lydgate, concludes that he lived thirty years too long for the good of his literary reputation. The remainder of the names in this period are mentioned primarily out of curiosity: George Ashby, John Shirley, Richard Sellyng, and John Halsham. They are amateurs and have scant influence upon the literature of the century in which they lived. Their poetry is a slight dabbling in literary exercise and has no lasting merit or impact.

But to conclude that nothing of literary value is being written in English at this time is erroneous. While literature in England is surviving mainly through the influence of Chaucer's works, an entire vernacular literature is evolving north of the Tyne. Apart from the work of Burns in the eighteenth century, the fifteenth and early part of the sixteenth century is the golden age of Scottish literary productivity. Several names are called to mind:
King James I of Scotland, Balfour, Henryson, and Douglas. But the dominant name among them is William Dunbar (1460?-1520?). Conveniently labelled as a Scottish Chaucerian, a Scottish Lydgateian, a Scottish Skelton, or a Scottish Villon, he has been relegated to the minor ranks, a position that certainly is not worthy of his virtuosity and talent. Nor are the above labels a fair measure of his ability. Lydgate is also a disciple of Chaucer; his work, however, lacks the driving force and humanity that is characteristic of Dunbar's poetry.

Several points concerning Dunbar and his poetry are immediately apparent to the reader. His poetry can never be called "narrow." It has the diversity of his personality and as such can never be completely pigeonholed as "conventional" or "traditional." As Shakespeare could rise to profound heights and sink into a morass of human misery, so can Dunbar. He tackles the mysteries of humanity and of its individual with a gusto unparalleled in Scotland before Burns. All is not misery and sadness; all is not joy and elation. It can never be said of Dunbar that he took the wheat of human experience and left the chaff to lie, ignored. He loves life and living; he likes Man. T. F. Henderson has said: "It is when he touches on human life—its follies and delights, its mischances,
griefs, uncertainties and vanity—that he kindles into true poetic warmth.”

There are two types of diction within his poetry. He writes in "aureate" diction in the formal pieces such as "The Thrissil and the Rois" and "The Goldyn Targe." Aureate diction is formalistic and is full of Latinisms, conventional expressions, and traditional themes. John Speirs has called poems such as these "show piece" poems; they are artificial poetic exercises for the most part, and they do not express Dunbar's true poetic talent. It is in his poems written in colloquial Scots that he excels.

Middle Scots is a descriptive, realistic language. It is much akin to English, but it has all the color of a separate tongue in its vocabulary and sounds. Dunbar's subjects could never have been treated in English with the same tone. His "Lalland" dialect is a good medium for his colloquial poetry. The richness and strength of Middle Scots is apparent in his realistic poems. Because the language and structure are natural rather than constructed and artificial, the poetry takes on a realistic flair reminiscent of Burns three centuries later. Humor,

sadness, and sarcasm never "go" in any mode other than the natural language of a people.

A reader is impressed immediately by the brevity of Dunbar's poetry. His canon is not large and his individual poems are not long. Some eighty-four poems comprise the bulk of his production. The longest, "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," is but 530 lines long. To mistake this brevity for an inability at discussing in depth, however, is wrong. Shortness adds to the liveliness of his stanzas; the lack of superfluity lets him get to the crux of the matter without any redundancy. He makes his point without being long-winded and boring. Certainly this is a mark of an accomplished professional as opposed to the amateur.

That Dunbar is to some extent dependent upon Chaucer is evident, as will later be more fully demonstrated. He has also profited from the work done by Francois Villon, Skelton, and Lydgate. But to consider him as a disciple of any previous poet is not a fair representation. Dunbar is simply too original in too much of his poetry to be subservient to any other artist. What Dunbar has done is to use the various examples of these men as inspiratory rather than dictatory models. He is never limited by the use of his contemporaries alone, however. He knows the earlier Middle English and later Old English poetry well enough to effectively write in unrhymed
alliterative meter; he sufficiently appreciates the tonal value and effectiveness of alliteration to make it integral throughout his canon.

Dunbar is not remarkable in his traditional, conventional, medieval verse. It is within his unconventional that his poetic ability and professional demeanor are especially evident. His subject material includes a headache that he has suffered, the physical conditions of the Edinburgh streets, the jobs of tailors and shoemakers, and the way in which someone else has scurrilously rendered his verse. His emotion is open; his honesty of presentation is plain; his laugh is loud; and his anger is strong. Dunbar has complete confidence in his ability as a poet. His effects are rarely strained. According to J. H. Millar, "His range is from devotion to buffoonery, from courtly panegyric to scurrilous invective." This range, as shall presently be shown, helps make Dunbar readable today. And within all this, he has understanding, both of himself and of men around him. The last two points offer an insight into Dunbar's poetic strength. Because he understands people, and because he writes about people, he does not become archaic or stagnant with age. He is a universal poet because he can speak to today's reader just as he could speak to those in the Scotland of his time.

There is no withering of his strength; on the contrary, today's reader can see and feel Dunbar's subjects and his thoughts upon them. He is not held down by his contemporary civilization.

In some ways, Dunbar's art is second to that of Chaucer. He has not included the human comedy in his poetry that Chaucer so skillfully employs. His characterizations are relatively shallow and wooden. Descriptions of individuals such as Chaucer's redoubtable Wife of Bath are not Dunbar's forte. He is not a "yarn spinner" either. Very little of his poetry is narrative. The only complete narrative accorded to him is "The Freiris of Berwick," and his authorship of this is doubted by some critics. Dunbar does not let his reader "look over his shoulder" as is sometimes the case with Chaucer. We are not admitted into the subtleties of his imagination and on rare occasions do we see any twinkle in his eye. The expression he uses is direct and straightforward. His irony lacks the native humor so skillfully introduced by Chaucer.

A study of Dunbar's poetry must, of necessity, include representative poems from each of William Mackay Mackenzie's classifications. It is possible, then, that a thorough, overall view of Dunbar's art may be achieved. These groups of poems, with the headings "Personal,"

"Allegories and Addresses," "Moralisings," and "Religious"
should be examined in terms of their respective subjects,
diction, and tone. Thus the reader is provided with a
varying discussion that presents Dunbar simultaneously in
several lights. It is in his variety of milieux that
Dunbar is favorably seen. He is not a narrow poet; on the
contrary, his art is an expansive, expanding one and is
varied to the point of interest and diversity of mood, but
not to the point of chaos. It is also through considera-
tion of subject, diction, and tone that the poet's
strengths and weaknesses may be discerned.

By looking at various poems within any one group,
the reader can see the divergent ideas that Dunbar sets
forth. However, a close reading of any one group of poems
makes it evident, as in his poems about women, that
specific themes in that group direct the poet's thinking
and writing.
PERSONAL POETRY

It would be assumed that any poems classified as "personal" would be somewhat revealing of the poet's personality and would offer distinct insights into his thinking and opinions. This is, to some extent, true of William Dunbar's poetry, but not to the extent that critics and readers alike would welcome. Dunbar does not place himself conspicuously within the action of many of his poems. His personal poetry encompasses many subjects. The items that Dunbar reveals to us about himself are not the kind that interest the biographer. We learn that he has suffered a headache, that he has had a dream, that he is greatly concerned about mortality, particularly his own.

Several unifying features in Dunbar's personal poetry are evident upon a close reading of the individual poems. Even though the poems are of a personal nature, are introspective, and are loosely autobiographical to some extent, the reader has the feeling that he does not really know the poet. This judgment stands up upon a reading of his other poetry.

Of course, there are many facets of the man that are apparent, as have been mentioned before. A complete concept of his personality, however, is elusive. It is not possible to put one's finger down, item by item, and
discuss the whole man as he appears through his verse because there are too many blank spots. His ability to remove the emphasis from himself, particularly in his personal poems, and to place it upon man in general is partly the cause. Also, because he is a professional, his ability to somewhat disassociate himself from his poetry helps to bring about the effect.

In many poems however, his personal feelings and ideas are universal. He thus removes the distinct personal aura and supplants it with the idea that he is a child of the world, a man among many men. In effect, he is speaking for all men when in "Lament for the Makaris" he uses the refrain, "Timor mortis conturbat me." In "Ane His Awin Ennemy," the refrain, "He wirkis sorrow to him sell" has the same effect. The fact that he is a universal poet has ample application in his religious poetry, as shall be seen below.

Dunbar does not pursue any recognizable sequence in these poems. He skips about from one small item to another, defying any unifying progression to the various poems. It appears that they were written, not together, but at various times during his career. It is because of this that the reader is hampered by a lack of unification in the subjects of these poems.

In "How Sall I Governe Me?," Dunbar does something that is not usual for him. He thinks out loud so that we
can hear him. The poem has a personal tone in that it is written in the first person, but the subject again is a universal one. His problem is knotty: he is unable to like all men and is unable to have all of them like him. The poem is a realization of these facts and a resolution on the poet's part as to how he can reconcile the problem with what he would like the situation to be. Each stanza repeats the refrain, "Lord, God, how should I govern me?" As the refrain suggests, the resolution is a religious one. He concludes:

Sen all is jugit, bayth gud and ill,  
And no mannis toung I may had still,  
To do the best my mynd salbe;  
Lat everie man say quhat he will.  
The gratious God mot governe me. 

(11. 46-50)

The religious expression is not, however, pompous and preaching. The entire tone is quiet and introspective. There is no moral as such. The application is universal as well as personal, as is the problem. The last statement is the first positive element in the poem. It is a dénouement that serves the purpose of answering his question. It is not an unexpected answer.

Dunbar's ability at discussing a universal theme in personal terms reaches a culmination in "On His Heid-ake." The subject of the poem is as common as the common cold;

5. All quotations from William Dunbar's poetry are taken from The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1932).
his suffering is real, or at least he makes it appear so.
The poem is an expression of reality:

My heid did yak yester nicht,
This day to mak that I na micht,
So sair the magryme dois me menyie,
Perseing my brow as ony ganylie,
That scant I luik may on the licht.  
(11. 1-5)

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,
Dullit in dulnes and distres.  (11. 6-10)

The poem is written to invoke sympathy from the reader, and so it does. For who has not experienced a head-ache that will not let him look at the light or concentrate on what he is doing? Because he is able to invoke the sympathy of mutual experience, he has included all men within his own minute problem.

Dunbar's problem in "Lament for the Makaris" is as difficult to overcome as the secret of life itself. He is concerned with death, not as philosophical theorization but as stark, grim, frigid reality. It is only fitting that the poet should think about this subject on his sick bed and that he should discuss his anguish with reference to his fellow poets who have endured the mysteries of death before him. The list of poets he gives is an impressive one; it includes Chaucer, Gower, Barbour, Walter Kennedy, Blind Hary, Robert Henryson, and many others. Dunbar is afraid of death and of dying. He again has expressed his
personal thoughts in a universal theme. To conclude that
this theme classifies him as a medieval man is true, but on
a grander scale he has included everyone everywhere in his
subject.

The poem is pessimistic throughout. The repeated
refrain, "Timor mortis, conturbat me," sounds a funeral
knell at the end of each stanza. The poem is written in
iambic tetrameter; each stanza is but four lines long, so
that the refrain acts as a retarder for the possibly swift
motion of the lines. It is a halting point, an expected
re-occurrence, just as the tolling of a deep-throated
cathedral bell would sound throughout a service for the
dead. Faith, however, wins out over pessimism. The last
stanza,

Sen for the deid remeid is none,
Best is that we for dede dispone,
Eftir our deid that lif may we;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

(11. 97-100)
is the only positive note in the poem. Coming at the end,
it changes the entire tone of the poem. Fear is somewhat
alleviated; perhaps death has no lasting dominion, except
in the minds of men. And the last mention of the refrain
is positive. It changes from the funereal gloom of dark­
ness to a resonant "Amen," a final acceptance of ultimate
reward.

Dunbar's listing of poets in "Lament for the
Makaris" is remarkable in that some poets are conspicuous
by their absence. Among the notables are Lydgate and Villon. It is not known when Villon died; it is, however, assumed that Dunbar knew of him and of his poetry, at least to some extent. Villon disappeared from public record on January 5, 1462, when it was ordered, because of his infamous character and past deeds, that he be banished, _jusques a dix ans, de la ville, prevoste & viconte de Paris._ Lydgate’s death date is uncertain, but it can be assumed that he died in 1449 or soon after. That Villon is excluded because Dunbar is unacquainted with him is possible but is probably not true.

It is fairly probable that Dunbar knew of Villon’s poetry. The first printed edition, _Le Grant Testament et le petit. Son Codicille. Le iargon & les balades_, was issued, in gothic quarto, by Pierre Levet in Paris, 1489.

If assumptions are reasonably correct, Dunbar would have been 29 years old at this point. If Dunbar was telling the truth in "How Dunbar Was Desyred to be Ane Freir," he was in France at or around this time as a preaching Mendicant Novice. As a literary man and as a university


alumnus, he would certainly be attracted by literary production. He would be even more attracted by printed volumes, as the first Scottish printing press was not established by Chepman and Millan until 1508.

There is another equally good reason why Dunbar would be interested in Villon's poetry. Villon is a medieval man; he loves life and fears death as Dunbar does. Villon can be warm and comforting or hard and sarcastic. His sense of humor is as open and loud as is Dunbar's. Villon is not an itinerant scribbler. He is an educated man, and because of this, Dunbar would be attracted by Villon's intelligent and thoroughly coherent verse.

However, that Dunbar knows nothing of Lydgate is impossible. "Ludgate laureate" appears in the Goldyn Targe. Dunbar speaks of him in complementary terms:

O morall Gower, and Ludgate laureate,
Your sugurit lippis and tongis aureate,
Bene to our cause of grete delyte;
Your angel mouth is most mellifiuate
Cure rude langage has clere illumynate,
And faireourgilt oure specche, that imperfyte
Stude, or your goldyn pennis schupe to wryte;
This Ile before was bare and desolate
Off rethorike or lusty fresch endyte.
(11. 262-270)

Gower is included in the Lament. So are many other poets whose names certainly do not stimulate great interest today. The question here is not a dating of the poem or even of Lydgate's death. It is probably just plain forgetfulness. That he could not have heard about Lydgate's
death, however, is difficult to conceive. One possible conjecture is that Dunbar did not take sufficient notice of Lydgate's passing to record it in his poem.

William Dunbar was both a man and a poet of emotion. He is capable of the entire expanse of human feeling, from sadness to anger to happiness. In "Compliant to the King Aganis Mure" Dunbar vehemently opposes the efforts made at altering his poetry by Mure. The language is strong and the poet makes no effort at couching his argument in diplomacy. Whether Mure is Dunbar's scrivener is never made clear. The language streams out hotly:

Schir, I complane off injuris:  
A refing sonne off rakyng Muris  
Hes magellit my making, throw his malis,  
And present it in to your palis:  
Bot, sen he plesis with me to pleid,  
I sall him knawin mak hyne to Calis,  
Bot giff your Henes it remeid.  

(11. 1-7)

Apparently, Mure,

... dismemberit hes my meter,  
And poysonid it with strang salpeter,  
With ryght defamows speiche off lordis,  
Quhilk with my collouris all discordis:  

(11. 8-11)

Dunbar is not angry only because Mure has changed his rhyme but is also incensed because Mure is passing it off as his own. Mure's changes supposedly contain treasonable material and Dunbar wants no part of the responsibility. Dunbar obviously considers himself an artist and as such is deeply wounded by the plagiarism he finds. His
professional rancor is evident. His complete scorn is also felt in the scathing last stanza:

Punes him for his deid culpabile,
Or gar deliver him ane babile,
That Cuddy Rig, the Drumfres fuill,
May him resave agane this Yuill,
    All roundit in to yallow and reid;
That ladis may bait him lyk a buill,
    For that to me war sum remeird.

(11. 22-28)

As this treatment is the preferred one for a traitor and a scoundrel, so Dunbar's suggesting it completely befits the loyal subject. There is no doubt that Dunbar is making every effort to ingratiate himself with King James IV (1488-1513) for reasons discussed later.

The poem contains the first glimpse we have of Dunbar's ability at manipulating the earthy richness of Middle Scots. "Refing," "rakyng," "magellit," and "babile" are only four examples of the vast wealth that exists in this dialect and of the professional way in which the poet uses it. This wealth will be further manifested when we look at "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wede."

In "How Dumbar wes Desyrd to be Ane Freir," the reader sees that he is capable of fear. The poem opens as a dream vision, but we soon recognize that it is not the type of dream vision so common to the medieval period in English literature. The poem is loosely autobiographical in that the poet was at least a secular priest and that he did celebrate the Mass upon at least one occasion at Court.
Dunbar thinks that "Sanct Francis" appears before him just before dawn and that the image attempts to lure him into becoming a friar once again. Dunbar's reaction, "I lap thairfra, and nevir wald cum nar it" (l. 10) to the dream figure's exhortation, "Reffus the warld, for thow mon be a freir" (l. 5) is a first glimpse at what the true theme of the poem will be.

The poem is a clever attack upon the contemporary religious conditions and upon the attitudes of the clergy toward their responsibilities. Dunbar admits that he has already walked that road of corruption and that,

Gif evir my fortoun wes to be a freir,
The dait thairof is past full mony a yeir;

(11. 31-32)

He is through with the conniving life, the false speech, the holy airs. He admits that

In me, God wait, wes mony wrink and wyle;
In me wes falset with every wicht to flatter,
Qwhilk mycht be flemit with ma haly watter;
I wes ay reddy all men to begyle.

(11. 42-45)

The beckoning figure appearing before the poet in the misty grey dawn would not appear at any other time. His mission cannot survive the light of day because he was "Ane feind . . . in liknes of ane freir" (l. 47). Dunbar cannot be enticed again by the rot he has left behind; thus the enemy of the church "vaneist away with styink and fyrie smowk" (l. 48). Apart from the autobiographical tenor of the poem, one other thing is certain. Because the devil can
appear to the poet and attempt to corrupt him, there are still those friars afoot in the world who are doing exactly what Dunbar has relinquished. It is at these that the poem is directed. They are "in freiris weid" but in spirit they are the devil's advocates.

Dunbar is a man of the city and of the comfortable life. His reaction to the winter weather is negative; these "dirk and drublie dayis" (1. 1) are a bane to his existence. He finds himself denied of "all curage" (1. 4) by Nature, that his "dule spreit dois lurk for schoir" (1. 8), and that his "hairt for languor dois forloir" (1. 9). Summer is his time of year; the flowers bloom and the sun is once again warm.

Like Henryson in the Testament of Cresseid, Dunbar has linked "ane doolie sesson to ane cairfull dyte." Dunbar's "sabill ... hevin" (1. 2) and "mystie vapouris, cloddis, and skyis" (1. 3) are a convenient jumping-off place for a poem that does not concern itself with wet feet, runny noses, and piled snow but rather with the condition of a man's soul and the thoughts that course through his mind. Loosely allegorized characters find their ways into his mind; Dispair, Patience, and Prudence vie for control of the poet's morale. Their battleground is his mind. But Deid has the last word. As Scrooge could not

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abide the words of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, so Dunbar cannot bear the words

... "Thir oppin sail the abyd;
Albeid that thou wer never sa stout,
Undir this lyntall sail thow lowt:
Thair is nane uther way besyde.

(ll. 37-40)

Dunbar's final reaction, however, is the important one. He takes comfort in the fact that summer is soon to come and that he may once again "leif in sum disport" (l. 50).

Meditatioun in Wyntir has an easily recognizable mutability theme within it. The words of Deid are obvious in their meaning: all shall pass away and nothing can stem the irrepressible tide slowly sweeping men closer to the shades. Dunbar's mental triumph is the optimistic note for which the poem is written and serves as the dominant force in the poem. As the thought of death paralyzes only as much as the mind permits its action, so the victory over gloom in mind is ultimate only when the thinker permits it so to be. To call the poem pessimistic is erroneous. The first nine stanzas create a seemingly unconquerable obstacle; the last stanza sweeps the barrier away with the overwhelming force of the human spirit.

Versification in Dunbar's personal poems does not encompass greatly differing forms. All the poems are written in stanzaic form; "Lament for the Makaris" is in four line stanzas and has a rhyme scheme of AABB. It is a form of the French "kyrielle." "Ane his Awin Ennemy," "How
Dunbar wes Desyrd to be Ane Freir," and "On His Heid-ake" are all written in five line stanzas, the first two having rhyme schemes of AABAB and the second two, AABBA. There is nothing remarkable in the rhyming; there is no internal rhyme and there is apparently, with the exception of "Lament for the Makaris," no special effect caused by the meter or the rhyme scheme. That the opposite is the case will be seen in many of the poems later discussed.

That Dunbar is a careful artist is evident. His eye for detail is remarkable. But the details are not about himself. To call this a defect in the man or in the poet is, of course, beating up the wrong road. Shakespeare tells us relatively nothing about himself through more than thirty plays. The "Tale of Sir Thopas," told by Chauser as he interjects himself in the Canterbury Tales, says nothing about the poet or about his motivations and opinions. Dunbar's personal poetry is somewhat enigmatic. Its autobiographical sketchiness tells the reader relatively nothing except of isolated incidents.

Death is very much upon Dunbar's mind through these poems. He has almost a preoccupation with it and is afraid of it. The positive ideas that he includes leave the reader feeling optimistic at the end of many of these poems. But the theme is recurring. It is not possible for Dunbar to leave himself in the hands of God as in "How Sall I Governe Me." His mind runs back to the same problems, to
the same anxieties. In this, he is very much the medieval man. The gargoyles, relics, and promises of things better to come after death stay with him. He is unable to remove the mental stigma of the "feind" from his bedside, from his relations with men, or from his regressions into the past.

An overall unifying theme is difficult to determine. The subject material is diversified enough so that Dunbar, at least in this group of poems, may be called "occasional." Subject material is not linked together by any strong discernible bonds. It would appear that any linkage to be discovered, both here and in his canon as a whole, will have to be thematic rather than subjective.
PETITIONS

Petitionary poetry occupies much of Dunbar's labors. These poems deal with money, the poet's lack of it, and his attempts to get it. For many years Dunbar attempted to get a benefice from King James IV. As a cleric, he was markedly unprepared for any professional endeavor other than writing poetry or overseeing a parish. James' court was an active one. The King was a young man; he interested himself with his people and his country. His attitude toward the Highlands and the Lowlands both was that progress should be the dominant motif of his reign. He was an educated man, and he had an interest in medicine and surgery as well as in finances and economics. The kingdom he ruled was politically dominating and influential. Scotland was not connected or subservient to England; the fact that James married Princess Margaret and that the marriage was surrounded by all the ritualistic and political machinations that befitted the times is evidence of both Scotland's and James' independence and power. That King Henry VIII would permit his daughter to marry James is evidence of Henry's respect of the Scottish King's stature, both domestically and abroad.

It is with this environment of active and progressive thought and action that Dunbar finds himself. He is
one among many, but, like all, feels himself worthy of the King's financial attention. As he considers himself an artist, he feels that his artistry should be rewarded. But Dunbar's desire for a benefice goes unfulfilled, as far as scholars have been able to determine. From the tone of his petitions, it is evident that his poetry is not appreciated by the King to the extent that Dunbar would want it to be. The fact that Dunbar finally receives a pension but not the benefice he was striving for makes this all the more apparent.

George Buchanan, a contemporary figure, comments that King James IV was "ab literis inculto." Hector Boece speaks along the same lines:

The gret displesouris that fallis to us, for laik of letters and virtew in our princis . . . Nane rasit in dignite, office, honour, nor benefice, but maist unhappy and avaritious pepill, void of all virtew and gud maneris; and sa gret ennimes to men of letteris, that they may not suffer thame to rise in proffit, dignite, or honnouris.

Dunbar agrees. In "Remonstrance to the King," the poet lists many characters who are at Court and who are "nacht sa profitable": fenyouris, fleichouris, flatteraris, cryaris, craikaris, clatteraris, soukaris, groukaris, gledaris, gunnaris, monsouris of France, scoffaris,


scamleris, thrilmaris, thristaris, schulderaris, and schowaris. Dunbar's bluntness is probably with factual basis; it should be realized, however, that his account may be somewhat biased and distorted. These people, at least to some extent, have what the poet is striving to receive. His attitude would certainly be one of animosity to these people: because he considers himself to be an accomplished artist, he feels that they are usurping what should naturally go to him for his labors.

Throughout the petitionary poems, one thing is evident: Dunbar is an independent, somewhat self-centered man. The poems (there are fifteen of them) all have one thought; the poet wants a reward for his work and he wants it in the form of a benefice. The format of individual poems may differ and the approaches to the subject may vary, but the intent is always clear. The poems have two basic approaches. In the one, the poet makes his point in a subtle way. In the other, there is a straightforward request for financial help, one man to another.

Three poems, "Of Discretioun in Asking," "Of Discretious in Geving," and "Of Discretioun in Taking" form a trilogy. By their subjects the poems form a logical progression, one to the next. In tone, however, they differ in several ways. All three are written in iambic tetrameter with a rhyme scheme AABAB. All three make use of the repeated refrain. It is fair to conclude that each
has a moral and that the moral is expressed by the refrains in each.

The first, "Of Discretioun in Asking," is an object lesson for the reader. Dunbar passes on the lessons he has learned to his readers. He is of the opinion that a man can get what he desires if he uses tact and diligence. The basic attitude is one of holding the tongue in the proper situation so that a person may have ultimate benefit. As a petitionary poem, it is somewhat vague. Dunbar is asking for nothing at this point but rather is providing himself, as well as the reader, with an exemplum that can be of benefit later on. He is talking to himself as well as to his audience.

In "Of Discretioun in Geving" the tone changes. If the King were to look carefully, he could see himself portrayed in a rather subtle way:

Sum wardly honour to uphie
Gevis to thame that no thing neidis:

(11. 3-4)

Again,

Sum is for gift sa lang requyrd,
Quhill that the crevar be so tyrd
That, or the gift deliverit be,
The thank is frustrat and expyrd:

(11. 16-19)

Dunbar then becomes a bit rougher in his complaint:

Sum givis to strangeris with face new,
That yisterday fra Flanderis flew,
And to avld serwendis list not se,
War thay nevir of sa grit vertew:

(11. 36-39)
The poem thus loses its shell of hinting and becomes a direct confrontation of the King with Dunbar's complaint. The "somebody" is obvious; the "stranger" may very well be John Damian who had become so popular with the King. Dunbar further ridicules him in "The Fenyeit Freir of Tungland." It is apparent that Dunbar's patience, which is so often tested in these poems, is growing a bit thin. The reader also notices that he does not really take the advice he suggests in the previous poem.

"Of Discretioun in Taking" discusses the idea that a man receives retribution after death for his earthly sins.

Grit men for taking and oppressioun
Ar sett ful famous at the Sessioun,
And peur takaris ar hangit hie,
Schamit for evir and thair successioun:
In taking sowld discretioun be. (11. 46-50)

Hanging for Dunbar does not hold the same horrors that it holds for the banished rogue, Villon. "L'Epitaphe" is gruesome, as are hanging bodies blowing in the wind.

La pluye nous a buez et lavez,
Et le soleil dessechiez et noircis;
Pies, corbeaulx, nous ont les yeulx cavez,
Et arrachie la barbe et les sourcis. 12
(11. 21-24)

Death for Villon is a physical misery and a complete spiritual degeneration. For Dunbar, the subject holds the

same awe, but it is spoken of in much milder terms. It is apparent, therefore, that the two poets, while having a fear in common, are quite different in the ways they express it. Dunbar did not live the rapscallion, one step ahead of the low life that Villon led. Death and its horrors are paramount in the minds of both these medieval men. Dunbar cannot see Villon's hanging bodies as a portender for himself; therefore death is not his prime theme here, either. The poem is petitionary, with the moral question placed at the end, perhaps as an afterthought.

In "Quhone Mony Benefices Vakit" Dunbar uses an analogy to help make his point. Is it better, he asks, to give drink to a man who is sorely in need of it or to a man who is already satiated? He has made his argument more cogent by the use of an example that stresses the urgency of the problem. In these terms, his situation becomes a sympathetic one. In "To the King" he renews his attack upon the clergy in scathing terms. Many benefices are being distributed to those around him, but he remains an orphan in the midst of plenty. He remains standing "fastand in a nuke" (l. 7), shunted to the side by those who are scrambling for the prizes being thrown out. He has no use for these clergymen:
Swa thai the kirk have in thair cure,
Thay fors bot litill how it fure,
Nor of the buikis, or bellis quha rang thame:
Thai pans nocht of the prochin pure,
Hed thai the pelf to pair amang thame.  
(ll. 21-25)

His attitude in this case is not prompted by any great concern for the church or for the parishioners who suffer at the hands of the irresponsible clergy. He simply thinks that because these poor specimens can get fortune heaped upon themselves he should receive some too.

The most clever poem in this group is undoubtedly "The Petition of the Gray Horse, Auld Dumbar." It is the most intricate in that it has two speakers: Dunbar and the King. It also is of a more complicated nature structurally; i.e., the stanzas are of six lines each with a rhyme scheme AAABBB. The poem has a two line repeated refrain:

Schir, lat it nevir in toun be tald,  
That I suld be ane Youllis yald!  
(ll. 5-6)

By using this refrain, he repeatedly calls attention to the dominant image in the poem. He compares himself to an old horse which, he feels, should not be turned away, unnoticed and ignored, but which rather should be treated with kindness. This imagery reaches a height in the lines,

Lat nevir the scutteris have my skin,  
With uglie gumes to be gnawin.  
(ll. 57-58)

In other words, "Do not use my hide for leather in the tannery." This ingenuity that he shows makes the poem
probably the most sympathetic among his petitions. It does not have the grim attitude found in "Remonstrance to the King" but is rather a smiling kind of sadness.

The King's participation in the poem should not be reflective of a dramatic poem. The speeches are not in the form of dialogue. The King speaks solely in the final stanza and answers the poet's request:

Efter our wrettingis, thesaurer,
Tak in this gray hors, Auld Dumbar,
Quhilk in my aucht with service trew
In lyart changeit is in hew.
Gar hows him now aganis this Yuill,
And busk him lyk ane bishopis muill,
For with my hand I have indost
To pay quhatevir his trappouris cost.  
(ll. 67-74)

That the King spoke these lines is improbable. It is again an example of the poet's ingenuity in attempting to budge his reluctant sovereign into lending much needed aid. The reader might also think that Dunbar has overstepped the bounds of propriety in crassly putting words into the King's mouth. This is equally improbable. Dunbar has said many stronger things in other poems to the King but has suffered no lasting ill effects. That he could get away with any of them at any time should be clear evidence that he, at least to some extent enjoyed the King's sympathy, if not his favor.

"Of the Warldis Instabilite" does not appear to be a petition at first. It appears to be a moral poem; his
complaints are numerous and varied: he is concerned about hypocrisy:

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

He does not like the degeneration of moral standards:

The pepill so wickit ar of feiris,
The frutles erde all witnes beiris,
The ayr infectit and prophane;
Quhilk to considder is ane pane.  
(ll. 33-36)

Neither does he like the transiency of earthly pleasures and comforts:

The slydand joy, the glaidnes schort,
The feynyeid luif, the fals confort,
The sweit abayd, the slichtfull trane,
For to considder is ane pane.  
(ll. 5-8)

The clergy does not escape his pessimism:

Kirkmen so halie ar and gude,
That on thair conscience, rowme and rude,
May turne aucht oxin and ane wane;
Quhilk to considder is ane pane.  
(ll. 41-44)

His own personal unhappiness and suffering is evident in that he changes his view from encompassing Scottish society in general to a discussion of his own plight. He complains that benefices are not evenly divided, that some men have seven, "and I nocht ane" (l. 47).

Unwoorthy I, amang the laif,
Ane kirk dois craif and nane can have;  
(ll. 53-54)
His failure to obtain a benefice is thus part of a greater universal problem. His pain is only one among many, although he speaks about it for the remainder of the poem.

The poem is marked by the poet’s ability to express many ideas in an extremely compressed style. In the first three lines of the poem, he speaks about "This waverand warldis wretchidness" (1. 1), "Frutless bissines" (1. 2), "mispent tyme" (1. 3), and "service vane" (1. 3). The same tone is carried on throughout the first half of the poem. The examples he offers are, however, marked by extreme generality and shallowness. It is as though he is consciously providing the reader with a catalogue of the world’s troubles so that he may inject his own into the proper environment. He takes the same attitude in the discussion of general problems that he takes in his discussion of his own: that instability is the core of life and that he can never hope to triumph over it. The poem is also remarkable in that it is pessimistic throughout.

The repeated refrain serves much the same purpose as in "Lament for the Makaris." It serves to reinforce the emotional dispair that pervades the tone of the poem. It too is a stopping place, a reiteration of his unhappiness and disillusionment. There is a glimmer of hope in the last stanza:
"Ane pane" becomes "My pane"; the problems that beset all men he takes upon his own shoulders. The lessening of pain that he hopes to achieve is somewhat allusive. There is no profound lifting up of his head into the sun of better days. It is only a hint of what may be and what he would like to experience.

I do not agree with G. Gregory Smith, that Dunbar wrote "with his tongue in his cheek." His contention, while not the general conclusion of most critics, is not well founded. It is true that Dunbar is a sarcastic poet at times. He is capable of writing with his tongue in his cheek, but certainly not here. It is hardly possible to accept "Lat nevir the souterris have my skin," or "And hartzis are maid of hard flynt stone" as being written with a sly, sardonic smile. Dunbar feels wounded, both in his pocketbook and in his pride. He has not received the recognition he feels he deserves. There would be little point in writing verses of petition if they were not to serve some definite function. If he were not in need of financial assistance, his petitions might very well incur

disfavor at Court and place him in an awkward position with the King.

Stylistically, the petitionary poems are rather drab. With the exception of "The Petition of the Gray Hors, Auld Dumbar," they do not show the creative ability found in "Lament for the Makaris" or in "On the Resurrection of Christ." They are basically functionary rather than stylistic, and they have the same emotional theme. The situation for poets at the Court was not a good one. The only books that the Treasurer's Accounts record that James bought are the Bucolics and Eclogues of Virgil. In the face of this obstacle, it is surprising that Dunbar persevered as he did.
Dunbar's "court" poems share many differences in tone, emotion, subject material, and structure. This group is perhaps the most diversified of all his work. There are poems of four, five, six, seven, and eight line stanzas as well as one that is not written in stanzas at all. The poet alternates between use of iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter; the subjects are as diversified as "Of ane Blak-Moir," "The Wowing of the King Quhen He Was in Dunfermling," "Epitaphe for Donald Owre," and "Of James Dog, Kepar of the Quenis Wardrop." In all of them the poet demonstrates a rather profound love of life and a sense of humor that is unparalleled elsewhere in his work.

"Of Sir Thomas Norny," written in six line stanzas with a rhyme scheme AABCCB, is probably based upon an actual historic character; Norny was James' court fool or jester. The humor of the poem is that this jester is characterized as being a great warrior, a chaser of Highland ghosts and rievers. Dunbar has described him as comparing favorably with Robin Hood, "Roger off Clekniskleuch," "Gy off Gysburne," "Allan Bell," "Simonis sonnes off Quhynfell," and "Sir Bevis."

The stanzaic form is much akin to that of "Sir Thopas" in the Canterbury Tales.
Now lythis off ane gentill knycht,
Schir Thomas Norny, wys and wycht,
And full off chevelry;
Quhais father was ane giand keyne,
His mother was ane Farie Queyne,
Gottin be sossery. (ll. 1-6)

Chaucer writes about his hero:

Yborth he was in fer countree,
In Flaundres, al byonde the see,
At Poperyng, in the place.
His fader was a man ful free,
And lord he was of that contree,
As it was Goddes grace. (ll. 718-723)

Both poems have the same meter and the same number of lines per stanza. Both are pictured as being valiant knights, but the description is a jolly one. Sir Thopas and Sir Thomas are both actually rather ineffectual characters. Thopas hunts the hart and the hare; Norny "cummerid mony Helland gaist" (l. 14). They are both good wrestlers and both have handsome physiques. Thopas is "a knyght auntrous" (l. 909); Norny is "This anterous knyght" (l. 31).

Chaucer's poem is much longer than Dunbar's, the former being 206 lines, the latter being but 54 lines. Chaucer's poem has a plot line, even though it is interrupted by the host for its "lewednesse" (l. 921). "Of Sir Thomas Norny" has no plot; it is simply a description of the subject, a rather brief one at that. "Sir Thopas" has much more depth than "Of Sir Thomas Norny"; the main

character is described in depth and the subtleties of expression completely outdo Dunbar's poem. It is quite probable that Dunbar knew of Chaucer's poem; that he used it for a model in any way except as inspiration is doubtful because of the many differences between the two. Dunbar's poem lacks the human comedy that possesses Chaucer's. The line "I cry him Lord of evere full" (l. 50), shows the rather blunt type of humor that Dunbar writes.

Dunbar's earthy humor comes out clearly in "The Wowing of the King Quhen He Wes in Dunfermling." Written in iambic tetrameter with a rhyme scheme AABBCBC, the poem is a rather clever adaptation of a beast fable. The characters are a wolf, a lamb, and a fox. The animals, of course, represent real people; the fox is the King, as the reader might well expect. He chases the poor lamb about, hides when the wolf enters, and finally succeeds in capturing the lamb. The entire poem is a narrative. Dunbar only interjects a comment at the end of each stanza: "And that me thocht ane ferly cace." The reader would expect that the poet is remaining neutral, but in effect he is not. The King is described in a good light. There is no hint of morality in the poem and the action is described in the most marvelously humorous terms. The description of the fox is at once humorous and slyly complimentary:
The tod wes nowder lene nor skowry,
He wes ane lusty reid haird lowry,
Ane lang taild beist and grit with all;
(11. 15-17)

The description of the lamb, the king's object of delight
is equally complimentary of the king's good taste: "Scho
wes ane morsall of delyte" (1. 23). The fox's hiding as
the wolf enters is a scene that the King would certainly
look back on with humor, although it certainly was not
funny at the time:

Throw hiddewis yowling 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;
The yowis besyd thay maid na din:
And that me thocht ane ferly cace.
(11. 57-63)

Here, one of the obvious advantages of Dunbar's
sense of humor manifests itself. He is at once able to
create a scene of suspense, but suspense with a nervous
chuckle, so that the King may look back upon the event
with no mixed emotions; he will be thoroughly pleased with
his aptitudes and with the manner in which the poet has
described the potentially embarrassing situation. It is
fair to assume that the poem is based upon fact. The King
would certainly stand for no such description if it were
not true. It might even be assumed that the poem was
written for his eyes alone and that it came to light only
after his death in 1513.
Two poems, "Of James Dog, Kepar of the Quenis Wardrop" and "Of the Same James, Quhen He had Plesett Him," form a logical, consistent whole. They both speak about the Master of the Wardrobe, James Dog, who was an actual person in James IV's court. Dunbar writes the first because the Master is not at all conducive to giving the poet the clothing that the queen has promised him. The tone is rather straightforward; Dunbar plays upon the man's name throughout the poem:

He turnis to me again and barkis,
As he war wirriand ane hog: (ll. 6-7)

* * *

He girmis that I am red for bytin;
(1. 10)

* * *

He barkis lyk ane miding tyk,
War chassand cattell throu a bog:
(11. 14-15)

* * *

He is ane mastive, mekle of mycht,
(1. 17)

The last line of each stanza acts as a refrain: "Madam, ye heff a dangerous Dog!" That he capitalizes the "Dog" is clear evidence of his rather obvious play on words. The poem, because of the tone concluded by the last point, could be described as a poor attempt. It is the underlying motive, however, that helps make the poem a stylistic gem. Dunbar is not railing. On the contrary and despite his obviousness, he is not really too angry at all. He is nonplussed by the Master's attitude, but the attack is not
at all vicious. One can see Dunbar raising his eyebrows slightly in accompaniment to a little, knowing smile as he pens the lines.

The second poem is an even better example of subtle poetic strength. Dunbar says,

Thocht I in ballet did with him bourde,
In malice spack I nevir ane woord,
Bot all, my Dame, to do your gam:
He is na Dog; he is a Lam. (ll. 5-8)

To be completely disarmed by this statement is a mistake. The poem is not as simple as all that; Dunbar is definitely not printing a retraction of the last poem. The poet has taken the edge off his language, but the intent is basically the same. At closer inspection, the second poem is actually stronger in tone than the first.

Because Dog is the best man to look after the Queen's wardrobe, and because she "can nocht gett ane meter" (l. 9), the poor man should not be submitted to the degradation that he has experienced:

The wyff that he had in his innis,
That with the taingis wald braek his schinnis,
I wald schou drownet war in a dam:
He is na Dog; he is ane Lam. (ll. 13-16)

The wyff that wald him kuckald mak,
I wald schou war, bayth syd and back,
Weill batteret with ane barrou tram:
He is na Dog; he is a Lam. (ll. 17-20)

Dunbar's superficial righteousness holds something of stronger tone. The reader is attracted by the seemingly inappropriate insertion of irrelevant material. But are
these lines above really irrelevant? Dog is a cuckold; he is also henpecked. Dunbar is pointing out a basic weakness in his target. He actually looks upon Dog as being rather foolish, and he certainly considers the poor man to be quite inept, particularly with women. Dog is suited only "To rewle [the] robbis and dres the sam" (l. 11). Dunbar is still making fun of him, and the last line of each stanza is irony characteristic of the poet's satire. Dog is meek and hapless and can only assert himself when someone wants something and it is within his power to refuse. He needs to feel some importance, and this is the point that Dunbar satirizes.

"Of Ane Blak-Moir" is an occasional poem. It describes "My ladye with the mekle lippis" (l. 5) who is present at court. The poem is almost purely description; Dunbar apparently writes from the standpoint that the subject is somewhat unusual to his readers and that it needs full enough treatment so that it will be thoroughly understandable. He describes her, in part:

Quhou schou is tute mowitt lyk ane aep,
And lyk gangarall onto gaep,
And quhou hir schort catt nois up skippis;
And quhou schou schynes lyk ony saep;  (ll. 6-9)

* * *

Quhen schou is claid in reche apparrall,
Schou blinkis als brycht as ane tar barrell;  (ll. 11-12)
The tone is that a Negress is something different and somewhat strange, but that she is not of necessarily lower social standing:

Quhai for hir saek, with speir and scheld,  
Preiffis maest mychttyelye in the feld,  
Sall kis and withe hir go in grippis;  
And fra thyne furth hir luff sail weld:  

(ll. 16-19)

Thus she is equal to playing a role in the knight-lady relationship. On the whole, Dunbar's outlook is a positive one.

Structurally, "Epitaphe for Donald Owre" is remarkable. The stanzas each have six lines and have a rhyme scheme AABBBBA. Lines one and two are iambic tetrameter; lines three, four, and five are iambic trimeter; line six is iambic dimeter. The construction, as we shall see, fits the theme of the poem quite well.

As an "Epitaphe," the poem is misnamed to some extent. It is in no way positive in tone and contrarily is one of the more negative that Dunbar has written. Donald Owre was responsible for a Highland rebellion against the crown which started in 1503 and took two years to repress. Dunbar is very much the royalist in that he calls Owre "The fell strong tratour" (l. 19). Dunbar accuses him of "vice most vicius" (l. 1) and "tressone" (l. 2); he says that Owre is "odious" (l. 7), a "dissimulatour" (l. 31), and a "murtherer" (l. 43). This is strong language. It is interesting that the various epithets
ascribed to the traitor are in English rather than in Middle Scots dialect. Dunbar is emphasizing the national seriousness of the subject; he has no desire to treat it as he treats the women in "Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo." The poem is rather formal in language even though it is candid and expressive.

Each stanza contributes to the total effect of "On gallow treis" (l. 23):

Quha is a tratomr or ane theif,
Upoun him selfff turnis the mischief;
His frawdfull wylis
Him self begylis,
As in the ilis
Is now a preiff.  (ll. 13-18)

Note the swinging effect of the last four lines, just as though it were in imitation of a suspended body on the gallows. Dunbar is not primarily concerned with the odiousness of death; the poem is rather about Owre's treasonable acts than about the fate he should suffer and the horrors that go with it. To conclude, however, that Dunbar is not completely serious is erroneous. The tone of the language illustrated above precludes any possibility of this.

Another example of Dunbar's strong emotion is found in the bitterness he expresses toward the hangers on at court in "Aganis the Solistaris at Court." The poem is a departure from Dunbar's usual style in that it is not written in stanzas. It is twenty-six lines long and is
loosely in iambic tetrameter although many lines do not
scan properly.

We have already heard the sarcasm that the poet
writes concerning the opportunists at court. He continues
it in this poem:

Sum standis in a nuk and rownes,
For covetyce ane uthair neir swownes;
Sum beris as he wald ga wud
For hait desyr off warldis gud;
Sum at the mes leves all devocion,
And besy labouris for premocione;
Sum hes thair advocattis in chalmir,
And takis thame selff thairoff no glawmir.

(1.l. 13-20)

The poem might well be considered a petition, although the
poet does not openly ask for a benefice or for any type of
consideration. The contrast between the open sarcasm and
acrimoniousness of this poem and the galloping humor of "The
Wowing of the King Quhen He Wes in Dunfermling" has the
effect of showing the poet's wide range of emotional con­
cern and involvement within his poetry.

"The Bregy of Busbar" is a further illustration of
the poet's versatility. It is a paraphrase of the Office
of the Dead in the Roman Catholic liturgy. The poem is
not divided into stanzas but is rather in divisions that are
the basis of its model. It is written in both Middle Scots
and in Latin, but it is an imperfect form of macaronic
verse in that the two languages are not interspersed. The

15. Mackenzie, ed., The Poems of William Dunbar,
p. 209.
Latin is only at the end, in the form of a prayer. Satiric in bent, the poet makes the "dead" the people who live in Stirling; they are deprived of comfort, peace, and physical pleasure. Those who "pray" for the dead are the residents of Edinburgh—and Dunbar is the "priest" who intones the mock liturgy.

Because the poem is based upon the Office of the Dead, Stirling may be equated with Hell and Edinburgh with Heaven, even though the comparison is strained. The responses bear close examination in that Dunbar strives for a definite effect in them. For example:

Tak consolatioun In your pane,
In tribulatioun Tak consolatioun,
Out of vexatioun Cum hame agane,
Tak consolatioun In your pane.

(ll. 39-42)

These lines are akin to the French rondeau form in which the lines would look like this:

Tak consolatioun
In your pane;
In tribulatioun
Tak consolatioun;
Out of vexatioun
Cum hame agane;
Tak consolatioun
In your pane.

Note the effect achieved. The swinging lilt of the meter and the lines causes a church bell effect which adds to the religious tone of the entire poem.

The Latin prayer at the end is a clever paraphrase of the liturgy. "Et ne nos inducas in temptationem de
Strivilling: "Sed libera nos a malo illius" is from the Paternoster: "Lead us not into the temptation of Stirling, but deliver us from its evil." "Requiem Edinburgi dona eiis, Domine, Et lux ipsius luceat eiis," "Give them the rest of Edinburgh and let its light shine upon them" comes from "Requiem eternam dona eiis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eiis." 16

The last division of the poem,

Deus qui iustos et corde humiles
Ex omni eorum tribulatione liberare dignatus es,
Libera famulos tuos apud villam de Stirling versantes
A penis et tristitiis eiusdem,
Et ad Edinburgi gaudia eos perducas,
Ut requiescat Strivilling. Amen. (11. 106-111)

is a culmination and final plea of the Office of the Dead:

O God, who deignest to free the just and humble of heart from all their tribulation, liberate thy children who live in the town of Stirling from its pains and sorrows, and bring them to the joys of Edinburgh, that Stirling may be at rest. 17

In all probability, Stirling is nowhere as bad as Dunbar makes it seem. The reader must remember that the poet is a man of the city and of the Court. Edinburgh at his time was the intellectual, financial, and political center of Scotland. It would be only natural that a university educated man such as Dunbar would feel an affinity for it. We have already seen how he feels

16. Ibid., p. 209.
concerning the winter season. His equally strong dislike for the Highlands is clearly made evident in "The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sinnis," a poem to be discussed below.

Dunbar's versatility in Middle Scots dialect is clearly seen in "In Secret Place This Hyndir Nycht." The poem is silly by Dunbar's standards. In the poem, a young man courts a girl and the poet records their conversation; the speech is, according to Mackenzie, a kind of lovers' "baby language."\(^{18}\) This approach makes the poem quite light and superficial. The list of endearing names is lengthy: "Huny," "hart," "hoip," "heill," "curldodie," "possodie," "kyd," "baib," "tyrlie myrlie," "crowdie mowdie," "clype," "slawsy gawsy," "sweet cowhuby," and "swete hurle bawsy" should be sufficient to indicate the foolishness of it all.

As the language is foolish, so is the man who courts. Dunbar describes him:

\begin{quote}
His bony beird was kemmit and croppit,
Bot all with cale it was bedroppit,
And he wes towmysche, perit, and gukit;
He clappit fast, he kist, and chukkit,
As with the glaikis he wer ouirgane;
Yit be his feirris he wald have fukkit;
Ye brek my hart, my bony ane! (ll. 8-14)
\end{quote}

The humor in the poem is precisely what the young lady feels it to be: ""Tehe!" quod seho, and gaif ane gawfe . . ." (l. 21). Dunbar demonstrates that he is capable

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 208.
of coarse humor when he feels that it has a place. Throughout the poem he is making a point, despite the silliness that is rampant. He is opposed, quite violently as we can see, to the tradition concerning love that calls for this verbal pitter patter. The poet, as we see time and again in his poetry, is a straightforward person. His criticism of the functionless palaver of love helps make this all the more clear.

Three poems, "The Devillis Inquest," "Tydingis fra the Sessioun," and "To the Merchantis of Edinburgh" are the only ones in which Dunbar speaks about current conditions within the city. All three can be said to be studies in people, for they serve to point out the failings and inadequacies of the common people in the capital city. All three are cynical in tone and have nothing good to say concerning their subjects. In the first, the poet speaks of a dream he had:

Me thocht the Devill wes tempand fast
The peple with aithis of crewaltie,
Sayand as throw the mercat he past,
"Renunce thy God and cum to me."

(ll. 2-5)

The entire range of people can be and are tempted by the Devil: from "preist" (l. 7) to "tailyour" (l. 31) to "maltman" (l. 56) to "courtyour" (l. 11). Dunbar in his dream, thought that he heard "The commowne people bane and sueir" (l. 22). With the Devil whispering in their ears, they blaspheme God.
At the "Sesioun" there is much corruptness. It appears as a pit of snakes:

Sum sweiris and forsaiakis God;
Sum in ane lambskin is ane tod;
Sum in his toung his kyndnes tursis;
Sum cuttis throttis, and sum pykis pursis;
Sum gois to gallowes with processioun;
Sum sanis the Sait, and sum thame cursis:
Sic tydingis hard I at the Sesioun.  
(11. 36-42)

The tone in the above lines, as well as throughout the poem, is cynical. The things he says are most depressing, and are even more so when it becomes obvious that the poet is not attempting to balance all this sludge with anything good. Dunbar has nothing good to say about the "Merchantis of Edinburgh" either. The city is dirty and full of corruption; it is the fault of the merchants. They are the driving force of the town and it is they who should have enough communal spirit to clean up the mess. Dunbar wants to feel pride in his city and in his country. Because Edinburgh is the capital city, it is representative of the country as a whole. It is the image of Edinburgh that becomes the image of Scotland to the visitor. The poem is replete with descriptions of vile conditions:

May mane pas throw your principall gaittis  
For stink of haddockis and of scattis,  
For cryis of carlingis and debaittis,  
For fensum flyttingis of defame:  
(11. 8-11)

Your stinkand Scull, that standis dirk,  
Haldis the lycht fra your parroche kirk;  
(11. 15-16)
Your burgh of beggeris is ane next,
To schout thai swentyouris will not rest;

(11. 43-44)

* * *

Through streittis name may mak progres
For cry of cruikit, blind, and lame:

(11. 52-53)

* * *

Your proffeit daylie dois incres,
Your goodlie workis les and les;

(11. 50-51)

The merchants are not eager to "eschew schame" (1. 61); indeed, they certainly must not feel any to let such conditions prevail. Dunbar's mentioning the beggars and the physically deformed brings to mind the condition of the beggars who are afflicted with leprosy in the Testament of Cresseid by Robert Henryson. Whereas the latter uses such a scene to depict the degradation and fall of one woman, Dunbar uses the same basic example to further establish his opinions of a general situation. The crooked, blind, and lame are only one aspect of overall, deplorable conditions.

Dunbar tries to appeal to the merchants' good sense and to their moral responsibilities. His lines contain nothing but criticism; there is nothing good that he can say about the men to whom he speaks or about his city. This completely cynical, pessimistic tone pervading the three poems is an example of the ultimate in the poet's sardonic poetic expression.
Throughout all the poems in this chapter, it is possible for the reader to sense a slightly abusive and sometimes openly sarcastic tone. Dunbar jokes and yells. His laughs are like those of the young lover's desire; they are guffaws rather than chuckles. When Dunbar laughs, it is from the pit of his stomach rather than from the tip of his tongue. The subtle humor expressed such as in "Of the Same James, Quhen He Had Plesett Him" is no exception. Dunbar likes the off-color expression, the double meaning. Indeed, he makes good use of these and of innuendo. Dunbar never waggles his finger in chastisement. Instead, he waves his arms and raises his voice in a welter of emotion and spontaneity. The reader feels that in "Tydingis Fra the Sessioun" the bitterness and the dirt simply pour forth in a great torrent. The poem is organized as though a completely disillusioned man is spilling all the complaints that he has on his mind at once. We shall see this spontaneity again when we look at his religious poetry.
RELIigious POETRY

Dunbar's religious poetry, while small in the number of poems, is strong in its impact. The poet is a Roman Catholic; his earlier experience in the church has already been discussed in relation to "How Dunbar was Desyrd to be Ane Freir." It is also assumed that he had contact with the church in later life as a secular priest. There is a record in the Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland dated March 17, 1503-4, which states: "Item the xvii day of merch to the kingis offerand at maister William Dunbarris first mes vii Franch crounis summa iii lib. xviii s." The poet would have to be a priest to celebrate the mass and thus to receive this gift. That there may have been another William Dunbar who was a priest is also possible. If this is so, and there is no evidence to support it, it does not mitigate the fact that Dunbar was at least a traditional Catholic. He would have to be in order to have received the Master of Arts degree from St. Andrews University as he did, in 1479.19

As stated in the last chapter, Dunbar's religious verse has spontaneity. Three poems in particular are

demonstrative of this. "Of the Nativitie of Christ," "Of the Passioun of Christ," and "On the Resurrectioun of Christ," all written in eight line stanzas with a rhyme scheme ABABBCBC, form a coherent trilogy. None of them seems in the least strained; the poet appears confident in his writing.

There is a tonal progression as the reader reads from the first to the second to the third. In "Of the Nativitie of Christ," there is a song-like quality. The poem starts off powerfully with a quotation from Isaiah 45:8: "Rorate celi desuper!" (l. 1), "For unto us a child is born!" The complete joy of the poem is then expounded in a spring-like description:

Hevins distill your balmy schouris,
For now is rissin the bright day ster,
Fro the ros Mary, flour of flouris:
The cleir Sone, quhome no clud devouris,
Surminting Phebus in the est,
Is cumin of his hevinly touris;
\textbf{Et nobis Puer natus est.} \hfill (ll. 2-8)

The second stanza continues as an intoned exhortation for all to join in the promised joy that has come and that is yet to come:

Archangellis, angellis, and dompnationis,
Tronis, potestatis, and marteiris seir,
And all ye hevinly operationis,
Ster, planeit, firmament, and speir,
Fyre, erd, air, and watter cleir,
To him gife loving, most and lest,
That come in to so meik maneir;
\textbf{Et nobis Puer natus est.} \hfill (ll. 9-16)
Dunbar has included both Christian and pagan qualities in these first two stanzas. In doing this, he has made the poem universal in tone and in appeal. The reader should be wary of taking his use of "Phebus," "ster," and "planeit" seriously. The planets are not ever described; they are solely mentioned. Dunbar has not used them as Henryson uses them in his condemnation of Cresseid. Dunbar is not consciously putting the pagan aspects of the poem on the same level with the Christian ones. As is noted, these pagan qualities are subservient to the real motive of the poem; they are to give praise to the Messiah and to rejoice in his coming.

The spring-like quality already mentioned above is continued throughout the poem. Mary is again called a "rose"; "Celestiall fowlis" (l. 33) are to sing out loudly and clearly; they should be full of mirth "In firthis and in forrestis fair" (l. 35). The poem is a complete reawakening:

Now spring up flouris fra the rute,
Revert yow upwart naturaly,
In honour of the blissit frute
That rais up fro the rose Mary;
Lay out your levis lustely,
Fro deid tak lyfe now at the lest
In wirschip of that Prince wirthy,
Qui nobis Puer natus est. (ll. 41-48)

Just as the world once again comes alive at the birth of a new year, so it comes alive vigorously at the birth of a Savior who "is crownit abone the sky" (l. 55). Dunbar
exalts Christ above all things. And as Chaucer's "smale fowlles maken melodye" (l. 9), Dunbar's "foull of flicht... mak melody" (ll. 51-2).

But as the reader is impressed with the inherent joy in the poem, so is he also impressed with its superficiality. Dunbar takes much for granted on the part of his readers. The poem would certainly never do as a piece with which to convert a non-Christian. He takes for granted that the reader knows the whole story and that he is a Christian to start with. The poem is thus solely an extension of already accepted material.

The depth of the poem, rather, is found in its tone. The poet lets out all the stops on his baroque organ; because all the cares of darkness and of winter are put away, there is complete, ultimate joy which runs fairly rampant through the lines. The happiness expressed is in complete opposition to the laughing in "Of James Dog..." or to the guffaw in "In Secret Place this Hyndir Nicht."

"Of the Passioun of Christ" is the longest poem in the trilogy. Just as the previous poem's tone is determined in the first stanza, so is it in this one also. There is strong difference between the two, however. As the first opens into a sunny world of Spring, the second opens into a cloister, down long, silent, echoing corridors.

that appear of interminable length. There is no other sound than the hushed tone of the poet’s voice. The birds and the newly sprouting leaves are gone; there is desolation within the poet’s soul. A footfall in this world of penitent meditation would be an intrusion; the poet includes none. Dunbar frames the poem within a dream, but the dream is solely an exterior convention; there are no May mornings here.

In his dream, the entire story of the Passion is recreated before his very eyes. To feel that the poem is only narration is to miss the point entirely. Dunbar has placed himself, as representative of Man within the action, as a person experiencing first hand so that the reader feels an obligatory involvement. The refrain "Et nobis Puer natus est" is replaced by "Oh mankynd, for the luif of the." In stanzas two through twelve the repetition of these lines as concluding stanzaic remarks serves as a reinforcing agent to the various ignominious sufferings of Christ. Each stanza says something new; each stanza recreates a different scene with the intensity of a Lenten litany.

The language here is that which implements the ruggedness of the story:

Quhen he was bentit so on breid,
Quhill all his vanis brist and brak,
To gar his cruel pane exceid
Thay let him fall doun with ane swak,
Quhill cors and corps all did crak;
The finality of the last sounds in lines two, five, and six, suggests both pain and the finality of the subject itself. The vision throws the poet into a turmoil; he says, in the last stanza,

For grit terrou of Chrystis deid,
The erde did trymmil quhair I lay;
Quhairthrow I waiknit in that steid
With spreit half ingis in effray;
Than wrayt I all without delay,
Richt heir as I have schawin to yow,
Quhat me befell on Gud Fryday
Befoir the Crose of sweit Jesu.

Dunbar's use of allegorical characters is peripheral. These characters, i.e., Compassion, Contrition, Ruth, Rememberance, Pain, Pity, Grace, Confession, Conscience, Repentance, and Penance, speak within the poem, though not to the poet. They are not at all described, and the few lines given to their voice serve only the function of demonstrating to the reader the basis of their characters. They are all presented and they are all done away with within five stanzas. Their names, however, evoke the basic emotions of the poem. The order in which they are presented does not conform to any rigid sequence. It appears that Dunbar presents them just as the emotions they represent would well up within a person who has experienced the profundity of the subject.
The poem does not end on any positive note. There is nothing optimistic in it, just as there was nothing optimistic for those believers who stood on Calvary. And as the jubilation of Easter comes three days later, so does Dunbar's resolution of the trilogy and his joy come in the last poem.

"On the Resurrection of Christ" is a poem of praise and of glorification. Unlike the song-like quality in "On the Nativity of Christ," it is a speech and, according to C. S. Lewis, it is "thundering." "It . . . has the ring of a steel gauntlet flung down." The words of the first stanza burst upon the reader as the newly risen sun bursts upon the mountain top and removes all traces of darkness with one strong blast of light:

Done is a battell on the dragon blak,
Our campioun Chryst confoundet hes his force;
The yettis of hell ar brokin with a crak,
The signe triumphall rasit is of the croee,
The devillis trymoonil is with hiddous voce,
The saulis ar borrowit and to the blis can go,
Chryst with his blud our ransonis dois indoce:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. (ll. 1-8)

As the images in the first stanza are powerful, so are they throughout the poem. The Devil is "The crewall serpent with the mortall stang" (l. 10); Christ is "lyk a lyone rissin up agaÅne" (l. 19); the entire story is discussed in

terms of a physical battle where one side has been overwhelmingly victorious;

The foe 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 yemit:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. (ll. 33-40)

The Christian faith and its ultimate glory is discussed through these lines in a language that is powerful through its basic earthiness. There is nothing of the pampered phrase or the polished diction that the poet uses in his examples of aureate diction. It is a completely human faith expressed; anyone can understand the words and can experience the emotional tone that is carried through the stanzas.

Because Christ is revived, "Sprungin is Aurora radius and bricht" (l. 21); Appollo has once again taken to the sky with the joyous news. The subject is widened to include all Nature, not just men. As Nature shared in the Nativity, so should it share in the final happiness.

Another of Dunbar's religious poems is weak in comparison. "Ane Ballat of Our Lady" is an example of extremely intricate verse. Written in twelve line stanzas, it has a rhyme scheme ABABABABXABAB. In all the stanzas, the odd line is "Ave Maria, gracia plena!" The poem is a long, somewhat tedious discourse on the beauty and
spiritual purity of the Virgin Mother. It is full of conventional phrases such as: "sterne superne" (l. 1), "Angelicall regyne" (l. 6), "fresche floure femynyne" (l. 10), "hevinlie hie emprys" (l. 38), "humile oratrice" (l. 48), and "qwise of hevyn" (l. 52), plus many others. Throughout the poem, the poet is saluting her; in eighty-four lines, the word "Hail," in various spellings, appears twenty-five times.

The poem is basically an exercise in poetic intricacy. One stanza should serve as sufficient example:

Hale, sterne superne! Hale, in eterne, In Godis sicht to schyne! Lucerne in derne for to discerne Be glory and grace deyne; Moderne modern, sempitern, Angelicall regyne! Our tern inferne for to disperne Helpe, riallest rosyne. 
Ave Maria, gracia plena! Haille, fresche floure femynyne! Yerne us, guerne, virgin matern, Of reuth baith rute and ryne.  

(11. 1-12)

The meaning of the stanza is lost in the forest of internal and end-rhymes. One gets the feeling that many of the rhymes are simply constructed to fit the poet's desire for polished intricacy.

Dunbar has excluded the warmth and quiet mystery found in other praises of the Virgin. Gounod's Ave Maria and Pietro Yon's O Sanctissima immediately come to mind. The poem, to some extent has the same spring-like quality found in "On the Nativitie of Christ." What it lacks,
however, is a full, undivided emotional expression. Dunbar has sacrificed feeling for versification, and the poem has consequently suffered. The poem is elevated linguistically. As Baxter has said, "(It) glitters in its preciosity." 22

"The Maner of Passing to Confessioun" is representative of the quiet man within William Dunbar. He has toned down his language and his emotional pitch to one of tranquil introspection. The last two lines stress the measure of the poetry:

Small merit is of synnes for to irke
Quhen thow art ald and ma na wrangis wyrke.
(11. 69-70)

Dunbar is speaking from the vantage point of twenty-twenty hindsight. He is looking back upon the youth he once had and the ways in which he misused it. His further advice serves to thoroughly enforce this point:

I reid the, man, qhhill thow art stark and young,
With pith and strenth into thi yeris grene,
Qhill thow art abill baith in mynde and toung,
Repent the, man, and kepe thi conscience clene;
(11. 64-67)

The seriousness of the poem is ever present. But the poet is not wagging his finger in the conventional "Thou shalt not . . ." His experience permits him to depart from the fiery exhorting so common in younger zealots. He says, "I reid [the] man, of thi transgressioun" (1. 8); he does not

condemn; he does not wave a stick fraught with eternal damnation. He merely advises. It is because of this that the poem does not become a moralistic one-way street. The young person is left with a positive approach: the burden is placed both upon the confessor and the confessing. He says that both, in effect, "... power hes of thy synnes compleit" (l. 31). The burden of responsibility is thus placed with the human rather than with any predestinal force.

Dunbar proves himself to be a medieval man and a follower of the Church's edicts in "The Tabill of Confession." He has committed the "Sevin Deidly Synnys" (l. 18):

Off pryd, off yre, invy, and covetyce,
Off lichery, gluttony, with sleuth ay to ourdryve,

(11. 19-20)

He has not performed the "Sevin Deidis of Marcy Spirituall" (l. 33):

To ignorantis nocht gaif I my teiching,
Synnaris correctioun, nor destitut counsall,
Na unto wofull wretchis comforting,
Nor to my nychtbouris support of my praying,
Nor was to ask forgifnes penitent,
Nor to forgif my nychtbouris offending;

(11. 34-39)

Neither has he shown respect to the "Sevin Deidis of Mercy Corporall" (l. 26):

To hungre meit, nor drynk to thristy gaif,
Nor veseit the seik, nor did redeeme the thrall,
Harbreit the wolsome, nor naikit cled att all,
Nor yit the deid to bury tuke I tent:

(11. 27-30)
These confessions appear to be the conventional form of speaking within the confessional. The reader notes that the poet speaks only in generalized terms. There is no mention of specific acts that he has either committed or omitted. Everything conforms to form and process.

Worthy of note is Dunbar's versification of the Ten Commandments:

The Ten Commandis,—ane God for till honour,
Nocht tane in vane his name, no sleyar to be,
Fader and moder to wirschep at all hour,
To be no theif, the haly day to uphie,
Nychtbouris to lufe, fals witnes for to fle,
To leif adulter, to covet no manis rent;

(ll. 49-54)

To contend that this version is more powerful than the original is to be guilty of poor reading. It is apparent that Dunbar has been forced to remold the Commandments to fit his poetic structure. The use of them is within the tone of the poem as a whole; their paraphrase is weaker than the Biblical version and causes a somewhat inferior class of workmanship to enter his art.

In his religious poems, Dunbar has shown himself as a man capable of emotion and of sustained imagery. He has also shown himself, in many respects, as a rather traditional religious poet. It is fair to say that he is in some ways an innovator. The content of his trilogy first discussed is ample evidence that Dunbar does not adhere strictly to the conventions that he was subjected to. The poems have a sparkle that is all their own.
There is nothing quite like them anywhere else in his canon and certainly not in the Scottish literature that preceded him. His ability to sustain an image is seen in "On the Passioun of Christ." As stated above, the poem is long; the poet never departs from the basic theme, the description in rather rugged language of the crucifixion. He also adheres to his original tone in that the poem ends as it began—solemnly.

That he is a traditional poet is also seen in "Ane Ballat of Our Lady." There is nothing new said. His attitude is that of the medieval man; the poem is a repetition of many things that have already been said:

Dame du ciel, regente terrienne,
Emperiere des infernaux palus,
Recevez moy, vostre humble chrestienne,
Que comprinse soye entre vos esleus,
Ce non obstant qu'oncques rien ne valus.
Les biens de vous, Ma Dame et Ma Maistresse,
Sont trop plus grans que ne suis pecheresse,
Sans lesquelz biens ame ne peut merir
N'avoir les cieux, je n'en suis jangleresse:
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir. (ll. 1-10) 23

Also:

Edi be thu, Hevene Quene,
Folkes froure and engles blis,
Moder unwemmed and maiden clene,
Swich in world non other nis.
On thee it is well eth sene
Of alle wimmen thu havest that pris.

My swete Levedy, her my bene,
And rew of me yif thy wille is.  

(11. 1-8)

* * *

Spronge blostme of one rote,
The Holy Ghost thee reste upon;  

(11. 17-18)

* * *

Thu ert to gode sede;
On thee lighte the Hevene dews;
Of thee sprong the edi blede--
The Holy Ghost hire on thee sews.  

(11. 25-28)

Also:

Of on that is so fair and bright,
Velud maris stella,
Brighter than the dayes light;
Parens et puella:  

(11. 1-4)

* * *

Levedy, flower of alle thing,
Rose sine spina,  

(11. 10-11)

* * *

Of alle thu berst the pris,
Levedy, Quene of Parais
Electa;  

(11. 14-16)

* * *

Of care, conseil thou ert best,
Felix fecundata; 

(11. 37-38)

The above examples should serve as sufficient example that
Dunbar's lines in "Ane Ballat of Our Lady" are demostrative of the times and of the medieval expression that grew up around the Virgin and the general subject of Mariolotry.


T. F. Henderson's comment that Dunbar is not passionate in religion and that his poems are sonorous and grand but nothing more is somewhat wide of the mark. To conclude, firstly, that Dunbar is always sonorous and grand is not correct. Aureate diction as he displays it in one religious poem is certainly not sonorous as the language in "On the Resurrection." To conclude that "On the Passion of Christ" is not somewhat passionate and emotional is equally unfair. The language is simply too sympathetic and humanly responsive for it to be only sonorous.

C. S. Lewis's comment, that the religious poems are not truly personal alone but are "public and Liturgical" is a better estimate than is Henderson's. As has been seen throughout Dunbar's poetry thus far, the subject material and the implications of it are directed at an audience and are many times universal in meaning. When Dunbar speaks to the young man he is speaking to all young men. When he exults over the resurrection, he is expressing universal joy. When he confesses in the confessional and at the altar, he is mirroring the phrases that men have used since the birth of Christianity. Dunbar simply does not write only to himself. The poems are not solely introspective,


although there is some of that too. He writes for whoever will hear him.
POEMS OF WOMEN

Dunbar's poems about women do not always involve love. It is an interesting feature of these poems that women and their attitudes are not pigeon-holed and do not fit any one preconceived mode of thinking on the subject. The poet is capable of being both placid and vicious toward his subject and both close and distant. It would be unfair to say that Dunbar is either completely sympathetic or completely cynical toward women. In different poems, he can be, and is, either. This dichotomy can also be seen in one poem, "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," which shall be examined at length further on in the chapter.

"In Prais of Wemen" is written in iambic pentameter rhyming couplets, a versification that the poet rarely uses. The poem is short (34 lines), but the poet is able to show incisiveness even in this brevity. The poem opens with a completely optimistic and praiseworthy comment:

Now of wemen this I say for me,
Off erthy thingis nane may bettir be;
Thay suld haif wirscep and grit honoring
Off men, aboif all uthir erthy thing;
Ryght grit dishonour upoun him self he takkis
In word or deid quha evir wemen lakkis;
Sen that of wemen cumin all ar we,
Wemen ar wemen and sa will end and de.

(11. 1-8)
The same positive note continues throughout the poem and at the end the poet says,

All women of us suld haif honoring,
Service and luve, aboif all uthir thing.
(11. 33-34)

It is because of this all-pervasive optimistic attitude that the poem seems unbalanced. The poet can find no bad things to say, whereas there are certainly both good and poor things to be said about both sexes. The poem also has the effect of subtly placing woman over man in terms of importance. Nothing is said concerning the honor man should show to himself; nothing is said of the mutual respect that a man and a woman must share for them both to be completely fulfilling in a relationship. The poem, through its basic generality and one-sided attitude, is poorer in expressive power than others that Dunbar has written about women, such as "The Tua Cummeris."

The generality of the poem has the effect of placing the idea of Woman before the reader's eyes, rather than specific women. The reader's attention is called to the fact that a woman gave birth to Christ; women are shown as helping men through life, from birth to maturity. The only specific woman discussed is Mary; she is not even named. The use of such an example has the effect of placing a somewhat misplaced religious emphasis in a basically secular poem. It also implies a certain cause
and effect relationship, something that is not necessarily true in terms of logic.

"To a Lad ye" is a study in contrasts. An extremely short poem, it has but fifteen lines in three stanzas. The poem has the effect of placing one image in the reader's mind and then sustaining it throughout the poem. The lady is compared to a rose:

Sweit Rois of vertew and of gentilnes,  
Delytsum lylie of everie lustynes, 
Richest in bontie and in bewtie cleir,  
And everie vertew that is held most deir,  
Except onlisy that ye ar mercyles.  

(ll. 1-5)

The reader thinks from the first four lines that the poem is simply another of conventional praise. The last line above has a snapping effect in that the reader immediately has an image of duplicity.

Comparison with Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is in order. Keats' "wretched wight" sees basically what Dunbar's character sees:

"I met a lady in the meads,  
Full beautiful—a faery's child;  
Her hair was long, her foot was light,  
And her eyes were wild."  

(ll. 13-16)  

Both poems may be interpreted as a pursuit of ideal beauty that is not fulfilled; both may be interpreted as disillusionment on a personal level. In both, the rose

blossoms and the rose fades; in both the searcher is disillusioned by the obverse of what he believes to be true.

Dunbar, unlike Keats, ends on an optimistic note:

I dout 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 confortand his levis unto me bene.  

(11. 11-15)

Keats leaves the subject in a wasteland of disappointment:

"And this is why I sojourn here  
Alone and palely loitering,  
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,  
And no birds sing.  

(11. 45-48)"  

There is a revitalization in Dunbar that is non-existent in Keats. The reader can see, therefore, that Dunbar is ultimately optimistic about life. If the poem is solely a description of personal disillusionment, then the poet is willing to seek for the person he has lost; if the poem represents a search for ideal beauty, then the poet recognizes that it can be found and that he should pursue it because it is good.

Another example of Dunbar's ability to communicate on two levels is found in "Of the Ladyis Solistaris at Court." He suggests an image of ladies at court who are fair, honest, and perfectly capable. On the other hand, it appears that Dunbar is also speaking of those ladies at

29. Ibid.
court who are present primarily for the pleasure and gain that they can derive. The lines,

With littill noy Thay can convoy
Ane mater fynaly,
Richt myld and moy, And keip it coy,
On evyns quetly.
Thay do no mis, Bot gif thay kis,
And keipis collatioun,
Quhat rek of this? Thair mater is
Brocht to conclusioun. (ll. 9-16)

The intimation is fairly obvious. Dunbar's ability at handling the subject is in vast opposition to the tone of "The Tretis." He is subtle here; his meaning can be carefully deduced, but at the same time does not glare out in an open frontal assault.

The versification in this poem is interesting; the poet has written in ballad stanza but has joined two stanzas together to form one. In each stanza of the poem, line four ends in a period. Lines are alternatingly iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter. Also, the capitalization of the beginning word in each second half line of the iambic tetrameter examples suggests a construction such as this:

Thir ladyis fair,
That makis repair
And in the court ar kend,
Thre dayis thair
Thay will do mair
Ane mater for till end, (ll. 1-4)

The flow of the words and the ease of the rhyme makes the poem move rapidly. This fits well with the relatively
light subject material. Also, the internal rhymes do not interfere with the reader's understanding of the meaning as is the case in "Ane Ballat of Oure Lady."

In two poems about women, Dunbar becomes extremely cynical and sarcastic. In "The Twa Cummeris" we have a picture of two fat gossips drinking early in the morning of Ash Wednesday. The discussion is frightfully realistic; the women are painted as being irreligious and sexually oriented. The repeated refrain, "This lang Lentern makis me lene," serves as a constant reminder of Dunbar's sarcasm. His descriptions of the two "ladies" is pungent in tone:

God wait gif scho wes grit and fatt,  
(1. 7)

* * *

"Ye tak that nigertnes of your muddy;"  
(1. 12)

Their conversation is equally spiced:

"Your counsale, cummer, is gud," quod scho,  
"All is to tene him that I do,  
In bed he is nocht wirth a bene;  
Fill fow the glass and drynk me to;  
This lang Lentern makis me lene."  
(11. 21-25)

That a woman could speak thusly about her husband is further demonstrated in "The Tretis of the Tua Marriit Wemen and the Wedo," the other poem about women that also continues in the same attitude.
The poet's attitude as expressed in "To the Merchandis of Edinburgh" reaffirms itself here. Dunbar does not like the common people. He expresses great disdain for those who are not of the nobility; the tone of these two poems, the only ones directed at the average citizens of Edinburgh, is degrading; it serves to bring out the worst qualities in them without ever compensating them with anything positive.

To consider the poem as an unfavorable comment upon the religious attitudes of the time is to miss the point. The religious material expressed in the poem is merely used as a medium to convey Dunbar's attitudes toward the people he writes about. It should in no way be taken as Dunbar's religious opinions.

The most familiar poem that Dunbar writes about women is "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo." Because it is a long poem, and because it is rather complex, it requires much closer examination than do many of the poet's other works. Perhaps the first thing remarkable about it is that it is written in unrhymed alliterative measure. The poem is not divided into congruous sections, but rather is divided as would be the chapters in a pamphlet. A new section starts when a new speaker is introduced, and thus a new point of view. The poem is the only one Dunbar has written in unrhymed alliterative meter. Thus he demonstrates that he has
knowledge of not only Chaucer and his contemporaries but also the earlier Middle English verse forms. The versification and meter suit the subject well. The poem is in the form of a trialogue; it reads like prose, and the subject material is such that it really does not fit the medium of poetry.

Dunbar has placed his poem in a distinct framework. It opens:

Apon the Midsummer evin, mirriest of nichtis,
I muvit furth allane, neir as midnicht wes past,
Besyd ane gudlie grein garth, full of gay flouris,
Hegeit, of ane huge hicht, with hawthorne treis;
Quhairon ane bird, on ane bran sche, so birst out hir notis
That never ane blythfullar bird was on the beuche harde;
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:
The dew donkit the daill and dynnit the feulis.
(11. 1-10)

The end of the poem is much the same:

The morow myld wes and meik, the mavis did sing,
And all remuffit the myst, and the meid smellit;
Silver schouris doune schuke as the schene cristall,
And berdis schoutit in schaw with thair schill notis;
The goldin glitterand gleme so gladit ther hertis,
Thai maid a glorius gle amang the grene bewis.
(11. 513-518)

The opening is traditional in the courtly love allegory. Chaucer uses much the same opening in his courtly love poems and Dunbar does also, as is discussed in the chapter on his allegories. Dunbar’s poem does not have a dreamer as such; however, the listener looks through a space in the hedge. He is as apart from the action of the poem as is the eavesdropper in The Parlement of Foules.
To complement this pure setting, Dunbar has added "thre gay ladeis . . . in ane grene arbeir" (l. 17). They are surrounded by fresh flowers and wear fresh crisp kerchiefs. Their cloaks are like the green that one finds outdoors in May; the whole area around them is filled with "fresche odour fynest of smell" (l. 33). They are described as noble ladies of noble bearing who sit to partake of dainty conversation around a small table in a garden straight from the Romance of the Rose.

The reader is shocked out of his courtly expectations as soon as the first "lady" opens her mouth. The luxury of courtly love becomes a jungle of flying epithets and unguarded phrases with a rapidity that throws the reader momentarily off balance. The things they say are subject for the bawdy house and not for the garden in which they sit. All three women make a mockery of marriage; their attitudes on love are displayed with a candor that puts the Wife of Bath to shame. The language becomes earthy and at times becomes derogatory:

I have ane wallidrag, ane worme, ane auld wobat carle,  
A waistit wolroun, ma worth bot wourdis to clatter;  
Ane bumbart, ane dron bee, ane bag full of flewme,  
Ane skabbit skarth, ane scorpion, ane scutarde behind;  
To see him scart his awin skyn grit scunner I think.  
(11. 89-95)

Dunbar has put the Middle Scots dialect to its most effective use here. Although many words are not at first recognizable, the tone they project by their sounds alone
is sufficient to show the great contrast that exists between them and a May morning. To call a husband a sloven man, a caterpillar man, a mongrel, and a cormorant is certainly to speak in an extremely derogatory fashion.

The sexual content of the poem is also part of the great change in tone from the opening lines. The first married woman continues, concerning her husband:

But quhen that glowrand gaist grippis me about,  
Than think I hiddowus Mahowne hes me in armes;  
Thair ma na sanyne me save fra that auld Sathane;  
For, thocht I croce me all cleine, fra the crowne doun,  
He wil my corse all beclip, and clap me to his breist.  
(ll. 100-104)

The rancor grows to a fevered pitch, the vulgarity growing with it by geometric progression:

Ay quhen that caribald carll wald clyme one my wambe,  
Than am I dangerus and daine and dour of my will;  
Yit leit I never that larbar my leggis ga betueene,  
To fyle my flesche, na fumyll me, without a fee gre;  
And thought his pene purly me payis in bed,  
His purse pays richely in recompense efter:  
(ll. 131-136)

She has, in effect, become the harlot to her own husband; he disgusts her, but the material things that he gives her more than compensate for her conjugal unhappiness.

To dote unnecessarily long upon these elements, however, is not good. The crux of the poem is not contained in these lines or in the others like them. Dunbar is writing about the degradation of the human spirit and about the loss of pride. The married woman has not only
degraded her husband; she has placed herself before the reader as a cackling, haggling woman. So has the Widow:

I wald half ridden him to Rome with raip in his heid, 
Wer not ruffill of my renoune and rumour of pepill. 

(11. 331-332)

She continues:

I gert the renyeis rak and rif into sondir; 
I maid that wif carll to werk all womenis werkis, 
And laid all manly materis and mensk in this eird. 
Than said I to my cumaris in counsell about, 
"Se how I cabeld yone cout with a kene brydill!"

(11. 350-354)

She probably succeeded in emotionally destroying her husband; she is, after all, a widow. But she has more thoroughly destroyed herself in her further comments; she speaks about her conduct in church:

And, as the new mone all pale, oppressit with change, 
Kythis quhilis her clair face through cluddis of sable, 
So keik I through my clokis, and castis kynd lukis 
To knychtis, and to clerkis, and cortly personis. 
Quhen frendis of my husbandis behaldis me on fer, 
I halfe a watter spunge for wa, within my wyde clokis, 
Than wring I it full wyleyly and wetis my chekis, 
With that watteris myn ene and welteris doune teris. 

(11. 432-439)

Vain hypocrisy is the theme here. Dunbar has let the women cut their own throats.

Dunbar includes very little actual description apart from the beginning and end of the poem. In one of the interludes between speakers, he has, however, given us a picture of the true tone of the poem:
When the semely had said her sentence to end,  
Then all thai leuch apon loft with latis full mery,  
And raucht the cop round about full of riche wynis,  
And ralyeit lang, or thai wald rest, with ryatus speche.  
(ll. 146-149)

The entire poem is a rude guffaw: heads tilted back, belly 
laughs emitted, and wine swilled as fast as it can be 
poured. Dunbar dislikes these women with great passion. 
Because he makes them so vehement in their disgust, he 
succeeds in making them disgusting to the reader. He is 
attacking the low state to which love has sunk; he attacks 
via the medium of the people who have caused its demise.

The narrator in the poem is completely neutral, but 
Dunbar certainly is not. The narrator is never described; 
he is not involved in the action of the poem as is the 
narrator in "On the Passioun of Christ." He hides behind 
the hedge, listens, makes no comment other than the fact 
that he writes down what he hears after they are gone. The 
attention paid to him at the beginning of the poem reverts 
to the stage of the real action and never returns to where 
he is standing. His function is merely introductory. He 
has to be present to help fill out the setting that so 
completely contrasts with the main body of the poem.

The framework mentioned above is not merely tonal; 
it is also structural. The poem fits conveniently into the 
beginning and end lines as a picture slides into a frame. 
The most powerful aspect of the poem is its contrast, how­
ever. If the allegorical setting is removed, then the
vulgarity within loses its potency. The reader must have something to compare it to and to use as an example of the good.

Dunbar's satire reaches its high point at the very end of the poem. He poses an interesting and unanswerable question: "Quhilk wald ye waill to your wif, gif ye suld wed one?" (l. 530) He openly shows the hopelessness of the situation and the extreme disrespect he holds for the people he has described.

Critics generally agree that this poem is a good one. It has been compared with "The Wife of Bath," a comparison that is not altogether favorable. "The Tretis" is a clever poem; it does not, however, have the human feeling expressed by Chaucer about his five-times-married travelling companion. The reader is shown both the wife's good and bad points. She becomes a more realistic character than any seen in Dunbar's garden at midnight. Dunbar's women are somewhat stiff and lack characterization. They show the reader how horrible they are but the poet interjects nothing of their good points. Certainly they must have some. Any comparison of "The Tretis" with the "Wife of Bath" is perhaps to award the latter less praise than it has earned. There are many humorous things in the Tretis. But as C. S. Lewis has said, "the fun is of a ferocious kind." The comedy overlaps the "demonic" and the
Dunbar laughs; it is a sinister snicker or it is a rude guffaw. He laughs at his characters; he never laughs with them. In other words, the humor in the poem is negative rather than neutral or positive. The poet laughs in order to degrade and destroy; there is nothing positive in his humor.

All this does not, however, remove the artistic merit within the poem. Dunbar shows himself capable of carrying on an extended emotional tone. He does not flag in his ardor throughout the poem. The reader does not yawn at any point—though it is possible to do so, even in a poem of this nature. The tone does not become boring; Dunbar holds the reader's interest until the very last line.

To classify Dunbar's attitude toward women is an almost impossible chore. In fact, "chore" is the proper expression. To lump together all the various expressions of the poet on this subject, and to say that he is such-and-such a way, is unfair and poorly critical. In one poem, "In Prais of Wemem," Dunbar writes favorably about women. And as we have just seen, he appears strongly opposed to women in "The Tretis." Such a complete reversal is not possible in a perceptive poet, particularly when he explicitly is first pro and then con.

30. C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, p. 94.
The point here is that Dunbar basically likes women. It is not fair to say that because he is derogatory in "The Tretis" he dislikes and reviles. Dunbar would want women to be the way he draws them in "In Prais of Wemen." In the poems where he describes women in an unfavorable light, he is saying that some women, in fact many women, have deviated from his ideal. Apart from the fact that "In Prais of Wemen" is rather generalized, it becomes increasingly apparent to the reader as he pursues these poems further that this poem represents the poet's ideal. That poems such as "The Twa Cummeris" are more vehement only serves to reinforce the idea that many women have deviated from his concept of beauty and femininity.

Dunbar writes about a basic breakdown in mores. These poems, more than any of his others, are social in content. The beauty of ideal love and those who promulgate it is waning. He is distressed by the lack of standards that is being felt and uses his pen to condemn it. Dunbar is not normally a social poet; as stated above, he writes primarily occasional verse. But the women are becoming coarser and the men are becoming less virulent. He feels the necessity of making this known and of making his displeasure known.
ALLEGORIES

William Dunbar's allegories are probably the best known of his poetry. Mackenzie, in his edition of Dunbar's poetry, lists only six poems in this group, which he has lumped together with "Addresses." Because these two genres have so many differences, one from the other, it is better to examine them as separate groups rather than as together.

In his allegories, Dunbar is the conventional medieval poet. In only one is he remarkable; "The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sinnis" is somewhat different from the "Goldyn Targe" and the "Thrissil and the Rois." It has a vitality that places the latter two in a somewhat second light. These three are the poems that are most published in anthologies and in many respects have come to serve as demonstrative of Dunbar's art. He is thus categorized as another medieval poet. These allegories do not have the same sparkle that Chaucer has written into his poems representative of the genre, such as, The Book of the Duchess and The Parliament of Fowles. It is unfair to judge the poet on these examples alone.

To assume, however, that Dunbar's allegories have no value is equally wrong. They demonstrate another example of his many-sided talent. The reader may too quickly assume that the poet who writes "Petition of the
Gray Hors, Auld Dumbar" or "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" is not part of the literary period in which he writes. This is not at all true. Dunbar, through his allegories, shows that he is very much part of the medieval tradition and is completely willing to express this involvement in his poetry.

Three allegories that Dunbar has written, namely "Bewty and the Presoneir," "The Dream," and "The Merle and the Nychtingaill" are not well known. They are usually skipped over in anthologies and are not generally discussed in criticisms of the poet's work. They deserve some examination, however, because they are part of the total picture of Dunbar's art. They are overshadowed by the longer poems already mentioned above.

"Bewty and the Presoneir" is not laden with the aureate diction found in many of Dunbar's other allegories. It is quite short (112 lines) and does not have many of the allegorical features found in Dunbar's other allegories. There is no garden, no animals or birds, no dreamer, and no May morning. The imprisonment described is described in physical terms, although there are actually no walls.

The poem contains a parade of allegorical figures: "Lust," "Strangenes," "Comparesone," "Langour," "Gud Houp," "Lawlines," "Bissines," "Gud Fame," and "Matremony." They are not described at any length; a line or two usually suffices. Lust tries to free the prisoner; Strangenes
inhabits the gate of the "castell of pennance" (l. 12) where he is bound. "Comparesone" captains the dungeon while "Langour" watches over the castle walls. "Scorne" is the hall jester. The prisoner is aided in his plea to the lady for mercy by "Gud Houp" and "Lawlines." "Bissines" and "Lust" cause the drowning of "Gud Fame" when they mount siege engines and attempt to free the prisoner from his bondage. "Matrimony" succeeds in completing "The band of freindschhip . . . Betuix Bewty and the presoneir" (ll. 103-104).

As the reader can see, the battle reverts to the mind. The walls are imaginary but the capture by the heart is real. The drowning of Gud Fame is explicit in that the prisoner should certainly lose it if he were to abandon the call of ideal love for Lust. The battleground as the poet describes it is rather nondescript. There is apparent an absence of freedom in the action of the poem. It has the ring of an abbreviated fairy tale and as such loses strength and poignancy.

"The Dream" is a more effective poem. Because it creates a distinct relevancy for the allegory, it becomes a poem with a function and is not just an idyllic catalogue. All the allegorical characters have the function of directing a basically petitionary poem. The poem is a dream vision:
This hinder nycht, halff sleiping as I lay,
Me thocht my chalmer in ane new array
  Was all depent with many divers hew,
Of all the nobill storyis ald and new,
Sen oure first father formed was of clay.

(11. 1-5)

The dreamer experiences "the lift all bricht with lampis lycht"; he then sees a parade of the dream figures who then dominate the poem until its conclusion.

The allegorical characters are not sharply drawn. They are shallow of description; the reader does not get a deep insight into their attitudes and their "personalities" as he does in the Romance of the Rose:

Last painted was the form of Poverty,
Who could not buy a rope to hang herself,
For she had not a penny in her purse;
Nor could she sell her clothes, for she was bare
As any worm, clad only in a sack
That fitted tight and was most poorly patched.
It served her for a mantel and a cloak,
But nothing else she had for covering.
I think that, if the weather had been bad,
She would have died of cold; for she did quake,
Clinging and cowering in a little coign,
Far from the others like a mangy bitch.31


"Temperance," and "Ressoun." The function of many of them in a petition is obvious; the petition itself, however, is not directed at any particular listener. As the creatures in evidence are in the poet's dream, so is the thought of financial help within his own mind. The poem is not outward in its appeal.

In "The Merle and the Nychtingaill" the poet reverts to the customary subject of medieval allegory: love. The poem has no human other than the listener present; the dialogue which makes up the greater portion of the poem is between the two birds. They are disputing the two types of love that each represents. The merle, "With notis glaid and glorious armony" (l. 17), proclaims "A lusty lyfe in luvis service bene" (l. 24). Her counterpart, the nightingale, "with suggurit notis new" (l. 13), believes that "All luve is lost bot upone God allone" (l. 16). The argument is, then, whether earthly or heavenly love should dominate the mind of men.

Dunbar sides with the merle, even though the outcome of the poem belies this. Her arguments are more effective, both in content and in the language they are written in. She argues:

```plaintext
   . . . . "Lufe is caus of honour ay,
   Luve makis cowardis manheid to purchas,
   Luve makis knychtis hardy at assey,
   Luve makis wrechis full of lergenes,
   Luve makis sueir folkis full of bissines,
   Luve makis sluggirdis fresche and weill besene,
```
The nightingale's answer to this is:

. . . . . "Trew is the contrary;
Sic frustir luve, it blindis men so far,
In to thair myndis it makis thame to vary;
In fals vane glory thai so drunkin ar,
Thair wit is went, of wo thai ar nocht war,
Qhill that all wirschip away be fro thame gone,
Fame, guddis, and strenth; quhairfoir weill say I dar,
All luve is lost bot upone God allone." (ll. 89-96)

The merle's argument has the appeal of a proclamation. The nightingale's retort is weak by comparison. The merle has taken a positive outlook on the subject of life whereas the nightingale is representative of austerity in thought. The merle upholds the virtues that are best in men; the nightingale sees these virtues as waylayers for man's ideal destiny. The poet who wrote:

Throw hiddowis yowling 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;

is not of an austere mood; he loves life and, although he is not a libertine, is in favor of the joyous approach to life's adventures rather than the dim one.

For some reason, however, Dunbar lets the nightingale win the argument. Her argument is certainly no more convincing than that of the merle, but the merle comments:
"Myn errore I confes;  
This frustir luve all is bot vanite;  
Blind ignorance me gaif sic hardines,  
To argone so agane the varitie;  
(11. 97-100)

It seems that she has had a complete change of heart and is turning from her own views, so ably and convincingly expressed, to those of the nightingale. It is here that the reason starts manifesting itself. The narrator, who has remained completely in the background, reasserts himself. It is the poet himself, rather than an imaginary creation. He concludes:

Me to recomfort most it dois availl  
Agane for lufe, quhen lufe I can find none,  
To think how song this merle and nyichtingaill,  
All lufe is lost bot upone God allone.  
(11. 117-120)

The poet is disillusioned—about what we can only surmise. He is not happy, even though his philosophy is that of the merle. The nightingale's attitude thus becomes a retreat, perhaps a "second-best."

"The Goldyn Targe," for all that has been written about it, is not a spectacular poem. It ranks below Dunbar's best. From the opening lines, it is a conventional courtly love allegory:

Ryght as the stern of day begouth to schyne,  
Quhen gone to bed war Vesper and Lucyne,  
I raise and by a rosere did me rest;  
Up sprang the goldyn candill matutyne,  
With clere depurit bemes cristallyne,  
Glading the mery foulis in thair nest;  
Or Phebus was in purpur cape revest
Up raise the lark, the hevyns menstrale fyne
In May, in till a morow myrthfullest.  
(ll. 1-9)

There is the dream, the May morning, the singing birds, the streaming rays of the newly risen sun. Everything is conventional.

It is here that the reader may pause to examine Dunbar's aureate diction. It is, as Patrick Crutwell has said, a "quasi-religious" language. Full of Latinate expressions and high diction, it has the effect of adding linguistic support to the highly elevated subject and tone of the poem. Examples such as

The cristall air, the sapher firmament,
The ruby skyes of the orient,
  Kest beriall bemes on emerant bewis grene;  
(ll. 37-39)

* * *

And as I did awake of my sueving,
The joyfull birdis merily did syng
  For myrth of Phebus tendir bemes schene;
Suete war the vapouris, soft the morowing,
Halesum the vale, depaynt wyth flouris ying;  
(ll. 244-248)

serve to illustrate the unrealistic, idyllic tone that this sort of expression lends to the entire poem.

Dunbar unmistakably ties himself to a former tradition in this poem. He feels himself as the culmination of a long line of great poets, all of whom used the same linguistic method that he now uses:

Noucht thou, Omer, als fair as thou coud wryte,
For all thine ornate stilis so perfyte;
No 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.

(11. 67-72)

What Dunbar says is obvious; what he implies is also quite clear. These scions of literary heritage would not be as capable as he at describing the scene that lies before the dreamer. Their language is too "light."

John Speirs has remarked that the poem lacks spontaneity. He is entirely correct. The language used completely precludes anything of a human tone. There is nothing in it that compares to Chaucer's *Parlement* in these lines:

The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also
So cryede, "Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!" hye,
That thoughr myne eres the noyse wente thos.
The goos seyde, "Al this nys not worth a flye!
But I can shape herof a remedie,
And I wol seye my verdit fayre and swythe
For water-foul, whoso be wroth or blythe!"

(11. 498-504)

The duck, the goose and the cuckoo shout out spontaneously. They are angry and they want the affair done with so that they can leave. Dunbar's birds, instead, sing only "With curiouse note, as Venus chapell clerkis." It is impossible that they should get angry; it is equally impossible that


they should do anything but be the conventional birds in the conventional poem. They have no real function other than to add one more necessary trapping.

The nine line stanzas are reminiscent of Blind Hary and of Chaucer, particularly in *Anelida and Arcite*. It is in "The Goldyn Targe" that Dunbar clearly acknowledges his debt to the English poet:

> O reverend Chaucere, rose of rethoris all,
> As inoure tong ane flour imperiall,
> Thatraise in Britane evir, quho redis rycht,
> Thou beris of makaris the tryumph riall;
> Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall
> This mater coud illumynit have full brycht:
> Was thou noucht of oure Inglisch all the lycht,
> Surmounting eviry tong terestriall,
> Alls fer as Mayis morow dois mydnycht?

(ll. 253-261)

The poem itself, however, is not worthy of these lines, for it falls far short of Chaucer's art and ability as a poet. Dunbar thus has linked himself with a literary tradition. He is no longer alone in his conventions. The above stanza has an even more important function. Even though he is appreciative of the poets in "Lament for the Makaris," it is not an appreciation of them as poets but rather as men. He is interested in them as people within the confines of the poem. It is rather to the English poets, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate particularly that he looks for his inspiration. Dunbar is not the rustic Scotsman. The baronial courts of Inverness hold no awe for him. He does not like the Highlands, as the reader clearly sees in "The
Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sinnis." His language is not from the hearty Gaelic people north of the Forth but is rather "Inglisch," a definite connection to the masters of the south. This point holds true for his allegories and for the majority of his other poems. It is interesting, however, that the best he writes is really in Middle Scots.

The parade of dream characters that appears before the narrator is impressive in its content. Present are Venus, Aurora, Flora, Juno, Proserpyne, Dyane, Pallas, along with many other goddesses. The Gods are also there: "Mercurius, wise and eloquent" (1. 116), "god of gardingis Priapus" (1. 118), "god of wildernes, Phanus" (1. 119), "god of fludis, Neptunus" (1. 121), "god of wyndis, Eolus" (1. 122), "Bacus the gladder of the table" (1. 124), "Pluto, the elrich incubus" (1. 125), "Cupide the king" (1. 110), and "Mars . . . Awfull and sterne, strong and corpulent" (1. 113). Allegorical figures are not absent either: Beautie, Fair Having, Fyne Portrature, Plesance, Chere, Ressoun, Youth, Drede, and many others. The list is long and basically is not important. As the poet says,

And eviry one of thir, in grene arayit,
On harp or lute full merily thai playit,
(11. 127-128)

There is no distinguishing among them; again, their names provide the best measure of their personalities and their individual habits. They act together; they leave the poem
together; in short, they are a body with many names that act in unison.

The poem seems to be divided into five distinct sections: the opening description, a list of the months and the goddesses, both of which are feminine, a list of the gods, the capture of the dreamer, with his subsequent torture, and the reawakening and end. The tone is bright until the dreamer is captured, at which time it becomes dark and foreboding; after his release, it again becomes bright. None of the participants speak other than the dreamer who performs the function of narrator. The poem is completely a narrative; it is again placed within a framework. In one stanza the allegorical characters are all present; in the next the dreamer is reawakening, the dream completely spent.

An interesting sidelight is the disappearance of the dream figures. They depart on a ship:

In twinkling of ane eye to schip thai went,
And swyth up saile unto the top thai stent,
And with swift course atour the flude thay frak;
Thay fyrit gunnis wyth powder violent,
Till that the reke raise to the firmament,
The rochis all resownyt wyth the rak,
For rede it semyt that the raynbow brak;
Wyth spirit affrayde apnon my fete I sprent
Amang the clewis, so carefull was the crak.  
(1l. 235-243)

These lines bring to mind another dream allegory of a later time. Skelton's "Bowge of Court" takes place on a ship, but it is rather the dreamer who escapes the scene,
as the seven deadly sins bear down upon him with his death on their minds:

And as he rounded thus in mine ear
Of false collusion confett'red by assent,
Methought I see lewd fellows here and there
Came for to slee me of mortal entent;
And, as they came, the shipboard fast I hent
And thought to leap, and even with that woke,
Caught pen and ink, and wrote this little book.

Dunbar's use of the ship does not come from Chaucer. It is the only mention the Scottish poet makes of the sea or its trappings. In relation to the rest of his allegorical canon, it is a somewhat strange intrusion.

"The Thrissil and The Rois" is a more interesting poem than the "Goldyn Targe." Lewis calls it "a minuet of conventions." But whereas "The Goldyn Targe" uses allegory as a "peg on which to hang its poetry," the "Thrissil" shows an art with rules and thus gives a good understanding between the poet and his audience. The latter is a careful amalgamation of allegory and courtly love with the occasional poem. Although the subject is couched in conventional terms, the reader sees a historical outline emerging beneath the ornamentation.

The poem opens with the narrator dreaming. Aurora enters through his window; May stands before his bed and says,

"Slugird, . . . 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 deleyte,  
Yit nocht incresis thy curage to indyt,  
Quhois hairt sum tyme hes glaid and blisfull bene,  
Sangis to mak undir the levis grene."  
(11. 22-28)

He follows her into a beautiful garden and finds himself  
within Dame Nature's court. The characters present include  
Dame Nature, Thrissil, Ros, animals and flowers. The  
latter two are personified.

In spite of the title, there is another focal  
point within the poem. The lion is to be crowned the King  
of Beasts. It is here that the reader feels the all-  
pervading calm of the poem. The lion is not like most of  
his species; he is quiet, humble. He rests his snout on  
Dame Nature's knee while all the other animals proclaim,  
"Vive le Roy!" (1. 115) There is nothing of conflict in  
this Dame Nature's court as there is in the Parlement of  
Foules. It is here that the formalistic style of the poem  
becomes evident. Because everything is perfect, the poem  
lacks realism. It is quiet and tame. There is nothing  
introduced to upset the balance put into it by the poet.  
The members of Nature's court all have their place in their  
"society." They never step beyond it, as do some of  
Chaucer's birds in their squabbling.

The real motive of the poem, of course, is found in  
the title. Dunbar uses the allegory as a framework for
praising the King and Queen of Scotland. There is no effort at being subtle; the thrissil is the state flower of Scotland. The rose is, of course, representative of the Tudor line in England, a combination of the two roses, red and white. The thrissil is described as hardy, strong, and fearsome-looking. Dunbar calls the flower "a king" (l. 134). The rose is described in glowing terms:

So full of vertew, plesans, and delyt,
So full of blisfull angeilik bewty,
Imperiall birth, honour and dignite.

(11. 145-147)

She is crowned "with clarefeid stonis brycht" and is proclaimed "quene." As the crowds in Edinburgh and in Aberdeen rejoiced at Margaret's coming as their queen, so do all the members of Nature's court also rejoice at the crowning of their queen:

... me thocht all flouris did rejos,
Crying attonis, "Haill be, thow richest Ros!
Haill, hairbis empryce, haill, freschest quene of flouris,
To the be glory and honour at all houris."

(11. 158-161)

* * *

The commoun voce uprais of birdis small,
Apone this wys, "O blissit be the hour
That thow wes chosin to be our principall;
Welcome to be our princes of honour,
Our perle, our plesans, and our paramour,
Our peax, our play, our plane felicite,
Chryst the conserf frome all adversite."

(11. 176-182)

She is loved among the poorer birds whose exclamations are as strong as the great song birds. The people of Aberdeen gave Margaret just such a welcome.
Dunbar does not miss the opportunity to speak a bit about responsibility. It is not really morality; it has no quality about it that makes the listener chaff under the scourge. His words to the King are evidence of this:

And, sen thow art a king, thow be discreit;
Herb without vertew thow hald nocht of sic pryce
As herb of vertew and of odor sueit;
And lat no nettil vyle, and full of vyce,
Hir fallow to the gudly flour delyce;
Nor latt no wyld weid, full of churlichenes,
Compair hir till the lilleis nobilnes.
(11. 134-140)

In the last two lines, it seems that Dunbar is making reference to previous events such as those in "The Wowing of the King Quhen He Wes in Dumferling." The King was a young man and had a hardy and adventurous spirit. The poet wants him to take marriage and its responsibilities seriously. But he does not wave a finger; he merely advises, in rather positive language which is designed to offend no one.

The entire poem can offend no one. Despite its function, it has a dearth of artistic expression the reader knows Dunbar capable of writing. It is nice; it is not dominating. It lacks the poet's loud, colorful voice and attempts to glorify without exciting. It leaves no lasting impression with the reader.

"The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sinnis" is a startling poem. It is a dream vision; the dream, however, takes place in February rather than in April. Thus the
time is well suited to the frigidity of the tone. The versification is interesting in that Dunbar has written the poem in twelve-line stanzas. It has a rhyme scheme AAB CCB DDB EEB. The couplets are in iambic tertrameter; the B lines are in iambic trimeter. This rhyme scheme and meter help give the poem the lightness of foot implied by the title.

The subject of the poem is not really the "Dance," however. It is rather those who dance and the horror that surrounds them. It is in this allegory alone that Dunbar has clearly depicted his allegorical figures. He devotes one stanza to each, and they, rather than their actions, are the compelling aspects of the poem. Dunbar has mixed horror with amusement in his descriptions:

Nixt in the dance followit Invy,
Fild full of feid and fellony,
Hid malyce and dispyte;
For pryvie hatrent that tratour trymlit.  
Him followit mony freik dissymlit,
With fenyeit wirdis quhyte;
And flattereris in to menis facis;
And bakbyttaris in secrete places,
To ley that had delyte;
And rownaris of fals lesingis;
Allace! that courtis of noble kingis
Of thame can nevir be quyte.  (ll. 43-54)

There are actually nine major characters in the poem in addition to the dreamer: Mahoun, Pryd, Invy, Cuvatyce, Sweirnes, Lichery, Gluttony, and Makfadyne.

It is in Mahoun's calling for the Highland "padyane" (l. 109) that Dunbar launches his most bitter
attack on the Highlands and its people. The lines describing the scene of the Scotsman’s entrance serve this purpose quite fully:

Than cryd Mahoun for a Heleand padyane;
Syne ran a feynd to feche Makfadyane,
Far northwart in a nuke;
Be he the correnoch had done schout,
Erschemen so gadderit him abowt,
In Hell grit rowme thay tuke.
Thae tarmgantis, with tag and tatter,
Full lowd in Ersche begowth to clatter,
And rowp lyk revin and ruke:
The Devill sa devit wes with thair yell,
That in the depest pot of hell
He smorit thame with smuke. (11. 109-120)

Makfadyane brings the entire clan with him; they are so distressing to Satan that even he and his followers can no longer stand them. He is forced to have these barbarians smothered to shut them up. Dunbar does not miss his opportunity for deriding the northern language. As a man of the Lowlands, the Gaelic language falls harshly on his ears. It is the unlearned tongue, incapable of producing the artistic effect that his "Inglische" can produce.

The entire, unbroken tone of the poem is one of hideousness. Dunbar's vocabulary points out this fact; he uses words such as "fowl" (1. 14), "skaldand" (1. 23), "fyre" (1. 23), "hiddous" (1. 24), "fellony" (1. 44), "malyce" (1. 45), "evill" (1. 56), "vyce" (1. 56), "lathly" (1. 79), "cors" (1. 79), "ugly" (1. 82), "gredy" (1. 92), "tarmegantis" (1. 115), "rowp" (1. 117), and others. The opening lines start the increasing crescendo. The poet
does not dream but rather lies "in till a trance" (1. 3). He sees both "hevin and hell" (1. 4), but the former is never mentioned again in the poem. It is completely incongruous with his subject. The leers and sneers of the characters belong nowhere except where the poet has placed them.

Dunbar's poem is a kaleidoscope that possesses a starkness of reality. It is a torturous poem at which the reader laughs, as did the poet. But Dunbar's laugh is one mixed with trepidation. He laughs and trembles at the same time because it is precisely this description of Hell that he accepts. The poem is a good example of something so grave and horrible that it cannot be taken with complete levity. It becomes a mixture of farce and terror. In this Dunbar is more human and more exemplary of the poet as a man rather than as a poet as a versifier, a situation that exists to a large extent in his other allegories. The poem has a ruggedness about it not found in "The Goldyn Targe" or in "The Thrissil and the Rois." It is down to earth and has none of the aureate formality in the latter two. Of all of them, "The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sinnis" is the most believable.
ADDRESSES

William Dunbar addresses poems to both cities and to people. There is relatively nothing tangible within them to join them together in an organic whole. These addresses are rather occasional poems, suited to isolated incidents and environments, each having a special meaning for the people and places involved. The tones among them differ greatly. From loud sarcasm and satire to benificent glorification, to eulogy, these poems are independent entities and should be discussed as such rather than as members of a tradition or a convention.

Of all his poems, Dunbar's Addresses are the most historical, simply because they are occasional poems. There is little inward looking expressed here. Dunbar does not dwell on his own inner feelings. He becomes the reporter of incidents, the chronicler. This is not to say however, that the poet removes himself completely from his poems. He does comment upon them as an individual, although the main emphasis is placed elsewhere.

In "To Aberdeen," the poet discusses Queen Margaret's visit to that city. The poet's attitude is one of jubilation. The reader already knows that he and the Queen are on good terms; he demonstrates this in "Of James Dog, Kepar of the Queen's Wardrop." He likes Margaret
because he feels that she is a fine addition to his nation and because he also likes the King. He is also favorable in his comments toward the city:

Blyth Aberdeane, thow bereall of all tounis,
The lamp of bewtie, bountie, and blythnes;
Unto the heaven [ascendit] thy renoun is
Off vertew, wisdome, and of worthines;
He nottit is thy name of nobilnes,
Into the cuming of oure lustie Quein,
The wall of welth, guid cheir, and mirrines:
Be blyth and blisfull, burgh of Aberdein.

(11. 1-8)

The town is second in his heart only to Edinburgh, as we have seen in "The Dergy of Dunbar."

While it is a poem of praise, it also has a slight moral flavor. There is a very pleasantly worded exhortation to Margaret in which the poet states her responsibility to the city:

O potent princes, pleasant 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 thay socht all way and mein;
Thairfoir, sa lang as Quein thow beiris croun,
Be thankfull to this burcht of Aberdein.

(11. 65-72)

The above stanza is also complimentary to the queen. The poet intimates that she is certainly worthy of the praise the city has given her. Perhaps what Dunbar is slightly afraid of is that Margaret, not being a native Scot and not being old in years, would tend to forget these townspeople after she returns to Edinburgh. Because he does not wish to see a fine city slighted, he interjects this small note
of reminder. It is interesting to note that Dunbar writes nothing at all for the Queen's entrance into Edinburgh for her marriage.

"Dunbar at Oxinfurde" is completely different from the above poem. It is the only other poem in which the poet mentions himself by name in the title. The poem is actually a morality, although it was probably written with Oxford in mind. There is no known record of Dunbar's ever having visited the university town although we know that he was in London to help arrange the King's marriage to Margaret. The substance of the poem would seem to back up the notion that the poet never did get to the University and that he is writing a moral using the school solely as an example and as a catalyst for the reader's thinking.

The poet lists several subjects that the scholar might study at the University: Logic, rhetoric, philosophical natural science, astronomy, theology, and poetry. Whether or not the poet ever studied these himself he never says. The list is by no means a complete one. These points are actually background material for the poet's true intent. He feels that the scholar and the churchmen, both of whom are recipients of this learning, should be examples to the rest of men in their behavior. He says:

Quhairfoir, ye clarkis and grittest of constance,
Fullest of science and of knawlegeing,
To us be myrroriis in your governance,
And in our darknes be lampis in schyning,
Or than in frustar is your lang leirning;
Giff to your sawis your deidis contrair be,
  Your maist accusar salbe your awin cunning:
A paralus seiknes is vane prosperitie.
(11. 17-24)

The last line is a refrain for each of three stanzas in the poem. It fits the tone of the poem in that Dunbar feels education to be worthless unless it is applied to everyday living. These men should be models for us, not in their evil as in Mirrour for Magistrates, but in their virtuous living and acting.

Thus the poem is not addressed to a city or a university, but rather to men. It is a poem of responsibility and is written in complete seriousness, quite different from other addresses that are to be explored.

"The Sowtar and Tailyouris War" and "The Amendis to the Telyouris and Sowtaris for the Turnament Maid on Thame" should be read together. They are both satires on the tradesmen mentioned in the titles. The first, written in the same meter and stanza form as "The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sinnis," pictures a tournament between the two main combatants "In presens of Mahoun" (1. 3). Dunbar has thus relegated the poem to Hell from the first stanza. The descriptions Dunbar gives of these men are thoroughly vile.

The tailor comes onto the field

With mony lymmar loun,
  Off seme byttaris and beist knapparis,
  Off stomok steillaris and clayth takkaris,
A graceles garisoun.
(11. 9-12)
The Devil is completely overwhelmed by the man's appearance:

In harte he tuke yit sic ane scunner,
Ane rak of fartis, lyk ony thunner,
Went fra him, blast for blast.  
(11. 34-36)

The appearance of the shoemaker is no better. He enters the field surrounded by "full mony lowsy harlott" (l. 41) who run about him in a frenzy.

The two of them confront one another, trembling from the knees upward. They are dressed as knights but have the hearts and stomachs of cowards. The cobbler is in the worse shape of the two:

Quhen on the telyour he did luke,  
His hairt a littill dwamyng tuke,  
He mycht nocht rycht upsitt;  
In to his stommok wes sic ane steir,  
Off all his demnar, quhilk he coft deir,  
His breist held deill a bitt.  
To comfort him, or he raid forder,  
The Devill of knychtheid gaif him order,  
For sair syne he did spitt,  
And he about the Devillis nek  
Did spew agane ane quart of blek,  
Thus knychtyly he him quitt.  
(11. 49-60)

Because they are so cowardly and because they are such disgusting creatures, the Devil has them driven into a dungeon.

The entire poem rests upon a supposed description of knights and tournaments. The two merchants have a following but it is the type upon which any knight would gag. The poem is a study in irony. The tailor and cobbler are made to look so much more scurrilous because of the
mold into which the poet has thrown them. They are not fit to even sit upon the sidelines, yet here they are in the middle of the fray. A tournament takes place amidst pageantry and fine surroundings. This one takes place in Hell. To Dunbar, this is where tailors and cobblers belong. The reader will remember the invectives thrown at them among others in "To the Merchandis of Edinburgh." The poet is simply reinforcing his real hatred of these tradesmen.

It is discovered only at the end of the poem that the action has taken place completely within a dream experienced by the narrator. Who he is is obvious. The way in which he ends the poem is quite clever. It has the effect of making the dream appear as wishful thinking upon Dunbar's part. The tournament has never taken place. But it is in this light that he sees the two men and it is into this very experience he would like to see them cast.

A complete change of heart in the poet is at first in evidence in the title of the second poem. Instead of using the rhyme scheme and versification of the first poem of the two, Dunbar writes in four line stanzas, using a rhyme scheme AABB, and iambic tetrameter meter. The shortness of the stanzas would lend a brighter tone to the poem, as the title suggests. The repeated refrain, "Telyouris and Sowtaris, blist be ye" would make it appear that Dunbar has completely recanted his earlier invectives. But this
is not at all the case. As in his apology to James Dog, Dunbar uses this poem also as a means for further directing his ill feelings at the two tradesmen.

Dunbar's scurrility is brought about through gross exaggeration. He writes:

In Hevin hie ordand is your place,
Aboif all sanctis in grit solace,
Nixt God grittest in dignitie:
Tailyouris and Sowtaris, blist be ye.
(ll. 5-8)

With a wave of the poetic hand, he places these common merchants about angels, archangels, saints, and martyrs. To the Christian, and especially to the Roman Catholic, the hierarchy in Heaven is quite important. The elevation of these men, therefore, is impossible and is a complete misrepresentation. Dunbar even places them above God in their power:

Thocht God mak ane misfassonit man,
Ye can him all schaip new agane,
And fassoun him bettir be sic thre:
Telyouris and Sowtaris, blist be ye.
(ll. 25-28)

The supposed "amendis" are thus relegated to harsh sarcasm. It is in this mode that Dunbar achieves much of his humor. There is little subtlety in the poem. Dunbar has not changed his attitude toward his two victims. On the contrary, the wishful thinking of the last poem is manifested in this real life, non-dream world invective.

From complete sarcasm, Dunbar reverts to complete praise. In two poems, "The Ballade of Lord Bernard
Stewart, Lord of Aubigny" and "Elegy on the Death of Bernard Stewart, Lord of Aubigny," the poet speaks in glowing terms. The versification also changes. These two poems are written in eight line stanzas. The rhyme scheme of each is ABABBCBC, and the meter is iambic pentameter. Thus, the mechanics of the poems are made to suit the subjects. There are no rollicking phrases as in "The Sowtar and Tailyouris War." Instead, the lines are written in the same meter that Dunbar uses in his allegories. The subject is of far more importance than invective; he is praising a real man who has done much service for his country, and he is lamenting the death of an important national figure.

Both poems are artificial in their constructions. Dunbar compares Stewart with Achilles, Hector, Arthur, Agamemnon, Hannibal, Julius, Mars, Saturn, Venus, and Mercury. Thus Stewart is raised to the highest ranks, both on earth and in the pagan heavens. In the "Elegy" Dunbar continues the praise:

To the Turk sey all land did his name dreid, Quhois force all France in fame did magnifie; Of so hie price saill mane his place posseid, For he is gon, the flour of chevelrie.  
(11. 13-16)

One line, in particular calls attention to itself; Dunbar writes: "O duifull death! O dragon dolorous!" The reader sees that it lacks the strength of "Done is a battell on
the dragon blak." There is simply not the same spirit of movement and of poetic strength inherent in the former as there is in the latter. It is on this basis that it is fair to assume that the "Elegy" is a rather conventional poem and does not have the same personal emphasis that "On the Resurrection of Christ" has. Dunbar is not within the former; he rather has stepped outside of the lines to admire his handiwork. He is not involved.

The last stanza of "The Ballade" is interesting in that it hearkens back to the envoy used by Villon in his Testament:

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;
Quhoise knyghtli name, so schynyng in clemence;
  For wourthines in gold suld writtin be;
With glorie and honour, lawde and reverence.

(11. 89-96)

Villon writes:

Vous portastes, digne Vierge, princesse,
  Iesus regnant qu' n'a ne fin ne cesse.
Le Tout Puissant, prenant nostre foiblesse,
  Laissa les cieulx et nous vint secourir,
Offrit a mort sa tres chiere jeunesse;
Nostre Seigneur tel est, tel le confesse:
  En ceste foy je vueil et mourir.38


Both poets use the first letter of lines or of parts of lines in Dunbar's case, to spell out a name. Villon is perhaps more conceited in his stanza; he praises Christ and spells Villon; Dunbar spells "Stewart," the man whom he is praising. Dunbar is thus once again linked to the French master whom he never met, but who most certainly played a role in carving his verse.

One point is again reinforced in these poems from Dunbar's canon. The poet is most effective when he is not hampered by conventions in his verse. The two poems concerning Bernard Stewart lack the strength and *tour de force* of those about the tailor and the cobbler. Just as the allegories and dream visions in the previous chapter do not have the same poignancy as the religious verse, neither do the conventional poems in Dunbar's addresses. The addresses form a minor part of Dunbar's poetry as a whole. They are not as demonstrative of the poet's talents to the same degree that his court poetry is. The humor here is not chuckling; it is snickering. It does not leave the reader with a good flavor of Dunbar's extremely good sense of humor. It lacks the subtlety of "The Wowing of the King" and the personal touch of "Petition of the Gray Hors, Auld Dumbar." On the whole, then, it cannot compare with the rest of his canon in ability and sense of professional standard. The test of a poem's value is largely in how
long its impression remains with the reader. Dunbar's Addresses scarcely remain at all.
POEMS OF MORALITY

Each of Dunbar's morality poems is not readily identifiable by itself. As the title of the group suggests, the poems are linked, not by medieval conventions necessarily, but by a strong medieval tradition. If Dunbar were not considered a medieval man in his allegories, he certainly would be in his moralities.

Because of this, it is necessary to look at these poems, more as a group than separately. That they have different motifs is true; that they all have one basic guiding thought is equally true. In order to understand each poem, as a unit, and in relation to the others in the group, it is necessary to specify this. The titles run the gamut in tone from "Best to be Blythe" to "All Erdly Joy Returnis in Pane." Thus, some are light while others are dark in effect. The underlining principle in each, however, is that man is a transitory animal. This expression is brought about in many ways.

All these poems are serious minded. There is a definite absence of frivolity. In "Of the Changes of Lyfe" Dunbar expresses the mutability of all earthly things:

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. (ll. 1-5)
The poem is pessimistic; after the flowers bloom, the rain washes the blossoms away; the new season of the year that came into man's existence with a sweetness yesterday now "stangis lyk ane edder." Winter comes after summer; in the same fashion,

Nixt dirk mednycht the mirthefull morrow;
Nixt eftir joy aye cumis sorrow:
So is this warld and ay hes bein. (ll. 18-20)

There is a universality of ultimate misery here. The poet dominates his lines with the bleak side of a picture that need not be bleak at all. He is like the alcoholic who regards the bottle as already being half empty. There is nothing to which he can look forward.

The same predominating tone is found in "All Erdly Joy Returnis in Pane." The bird sings, as in "Thrissil," but she sings in lent, and her song is a dirge. Her repeated refrain, "All erdly joy returnis in pane" is the re-echoing sound of a funeral bell over the joys of living. All the good passes away; it is not the material good of sparkling blossoms and brilliant sunshine, however. It is the good of the human mind and soul.

"Heir helth returnis in seiknes,
And mirth returnis in havines,
Toun in desert, forrest in plane:
All erdly joy returnis in pane." (ll. 25-28)

***

"Vertew returnis in to vyce,
And honour in to avaryce;
With cuvatyce is consciens slane:
All erdly joy returnis in pane." (ll. 33-36)
The bird, and consequently the poet, concludes that all joy is vain because it is transitory and cannot be considered dependable. Dunbar has mirrored the tone of the prophet in Ecclesiastes.

"Of Manis Mortalitie" has the impression of mutability throughout. As in the previous two poems, the joys of man's existence are transitory, so here man himself is transitory. The first line is a warning: "Memento, homo, quod cinis est!" (l. 1) The refrain is equally poignant: "Quod tu in cinerum reverteris" (l. 8). Man's passing is not a quiet one; it may very well be full of horrors that a person can only understand once he has experienced them:

Thocht now thow be maist glaid of eheir,  
Fairest and plesandest of port,  
Yit may thow be, within ane yeir,  
Ane' ugsum, uglye tramort; (ll. 17-20)

Several good images appear in this poem to further the visual effect of death and disruption:

Syne sail the swallow with his mouth  
The dragone Death that all devouris.  

(11. 27-28)

Thow sail in deathis port arryve,  
Quhair nocht for tempest may indure,  

(11. 42-43)

The realization of Death is brought about by personification and allusion to common principles that all readers will understand. A chronicle of great men is also provided. All have passed, like Shelley's *Ozymandias*: Hector, Sampson, Alexander, David, Absalom. Because the famous and
the infamous pass away, certainly the commonalty will also suffer the same fate. The poem thus extends the poet's personal reflection in "Lament for the Makaris" to the macrocosm and includes every one.

"Of the Warldis Vanitie" has an even stronger Old Testament cry. The refrain for each of the three stanzas, "Vanitas Vanitatum, et omnia Vanitas" tells of the futility of everything material in the world. The poem is dark in its color:

O wreche, be war! this warld will wend the fro,
    Quhilk hes begylit mony greit estait;
Turne to thy freynd, beleif nocht in thy fo,
    Sen thow mon go, be grathing to thy gait;

(11. 1-4)

Nothing in the world is stable; Day becomes night, and fortunes with friends change as surely as does light into darkness. What was once gold is now turned into cinders; the world is transitory.

In light of this mournful tune, the reader should continue on to the poems that have something saving in their quality. Dunbar is not a prophet of doom, a ne-herdsman of Tekoa spreading ultimate poison for the human race with no hope of reprieve. Dunbar strongly favors truthful dealings with one's fellow men. In "Gude Counsale," a man should not be a wretch, a liar, a jangler. He should not act shamefully or amiss; he should not be too talkative; he should be wisely advised if he is a lover; he should not be conceited but should instead place himself
on an even basis with those around him. Thus the poet has dealt with man's relationship to man, and most important, to himself. Dunbar is not a self-debaser. He loves life and those who live it; he sees the best of life come forth from honest understanding of meaningful relationship and from honesty to oneself. The tone is extended by "Of Content." Man should not be too pretentious. He should not ascribe beyond the point of being contented. The moral is clear:

For quho in warld moist covatus is
In world is purast man, I wis,
And moist neidy of his intent;
For of all gudis no thing is his
That of no thing can be content.

(11. 31-35)

The most powerful and compressed line in the poem, "Gif we not clym we tak no fall" (l. 29), sums up the poet's attitude well. There is no destroying of human initiative here; it is rather a warning expressed in the language of common sense. Truly it is a maxim.

The better meaning of life can also be found in "Best to be Blyth." The poem seems to be a reversal of course at first. The poet suggests that life will only be miserable if a person looks upon it that way. The poem has no dark side to it unless the reader does not heed Dunbar's admonition. What he says, however, is really an outgrowth of his earlier darker poetry. He contends:
This warld evir dois flicht and vary;  
Fortoun sa fast hir quheill dois cary,  
Na tyme bot turne can it tak rest;  
For quhois fals change suld none be sary;  
For to be blyth me thynk it best.  

(11. 6-10)

Thus Dunbar counsels the rational approach to life rather than the emotional, dooms-day leap off the deep end. Life is worth living; it is wrong to sit down and bewail the end of all when so much more of ultimate value can be accomplished in the meanwhile.

The crux of all this is found in Dunbar's shortest poem, "Of Lyfe." It is only seven lines long, and it is worth seeing in its entirety:

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 Paradise or Hell;  
A pray to deid, quhome vane is to repell;  
A schoirt torment for infineit glaidnes,  
Als schort ane joy for lestand hevynes.

Man is given a free choice; he is allowed this life in which to direct his eternity. The ultimate venture belongs to no one else but him. It is his to do with as he sees fit. All Dunbar's morality thus is tied up in these lines.

On this note, it is advantageous to leave William Dunbar's poetry. His morality poems are the best measure that we have of him as a man. Although the reader has experienced his more rollicking verse and has waded through his allegories and religious lines, the moralities serve as the real insight into his psyche. Dunbar is a medieval
man. He has all the fears of death that Villon had; he has
the vanity of this world close to his heart because this is
what he really believes. His attitudes are not ultimately
startling. Instead, they reveal in great depth, but with­
out close personal contact, his inner drives and anxieties.
This, and not the external everyday events in a man's life,
is the truly effectual means of knowing him.

Dunbar is a good poet; about this there is little
doubt. That he is great is another matter. He certainly
does not rank among the giants of English literature—
Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Coleridge, Wordsworth,
Keats. Again, he does far outrank any poet in his century.
The lack of interest surrounding him is not his fault. His
obscurity does not lie in his inadequacies. Of course, he
has written mediocre poems. No poet can be at the pinnacle
of creative effort in everything he writes. The Shakespeare
we really know is the Shakespeare in Hamlet, not in Love's
Labour's Lost.

Dunbar's universality in many of his poems helps
him reach the ears of today's listeners. His contempora­
neity helps the student of medieval literature gain a
fuller perspective of the period and of its directions. It
is here that Dunbar has his greatest value. He does not
attempt to step out of his surroundings and thus does not
give a false impression. The reader sees him as he really
is; he writes within a tradition and echoes its failings and accomplishments.
REFERENCES


