THE ALLITERATIVE ANCESTRY OF DUNBAR'S 'THE TRETIS OF THE TUA MARIIT WEMEN AND THE WEDO'

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Recent criticism of the early Scottish makars is concerned to show the great variety of influences which contributed to the creation of their art. The term "Scottish Chaucerians," though still used to refer to a particular group of individual poets - James I,[1] Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas, to name the chief - is felt to be an inadequate description of their respective qualities. Whereas it was once the critic's task to establish the relationship of these poets to "venerabill Chauser, principal poet but peir,"[2] the great master and light-giver, "rose of rethoris all,"[3] to establish their identity, that is, with a tradition stemming from him, we are now no longer satisfied with what is so obvious an over-simplification. It is recognized now that, with the possible exception of James I, who was a more wholehearted imitator of Chaucer than any of the others, these poets fused a great many seemingly incompatible elements in their compositions, weaving together the strands of several traditions. Chaucer's influence must by no means be denied; but it must not be exaggerated. Chaucer himself inevitably drew on the common stock of medieval thought and expression and used current poetic devices and conventions; and too much of what is quite simply medieval in the Scottish makars, with the anonymity of wide currency, has been claimed to bear his stamp. Medieval Latin poetry (especially the hymns and goliardic poems), Gaelic art and poetry,[4] French poetry,[5] the alliterative tradition (in no way directly related to the Chaucerian), the pageantry of stately ceremonial occasions, and the airs and dances of the Scottish peasant folk, with the creation of their own special rhythms and patterns - all these, besides Chaucer, have exerted considerable, if varying, degrees of influence upon the poetry of the makars, whose powers of absorption, synthesis and transformation are not their least remarkable trait. All levels of spoken language from the most potent and abusive slang to the ordinary polite colloquial speech of the educated, together with several styles of literary language, of which the most elevated was the ornate and erudite "aureate" vein,[6] were eagerly employed and experimented with. This is

not to suggest that the masterly productions of the makars have the awkwardness of first attempts; on the contrary, their virtuosity gives the impression of a long-practised, long-established art. Used to submitting their ideas to the discipline of rigorous forms of poetic expression, the makars seemed capable of tackling any new form, of harnessing it to new effect and also, as far as technicalities go, of perfecting it.

Nevertheless, criticism has not wholly disabused itself of all the fallacious notions that cling to the term "Scottish Chaucerians." Partly because the term is a handy one, despite the false degree of emphasis it places on Chaucerian influence it continues to be used, thus re-creating the errors that some of the very persons using it would seek to dispel.[7] With regard to James I the term is highly appropriate, as indicated already, and it may with a measure of justice, though necessarily with caution, be applied to aspects of Henryson's work. With Dunbar the ground becomes very shaky; we must tread very carefully in the interests of accuracy, for here the assumption of predominantly Chaucerian influence is no longer tenable.

It is my purpose to trace a different parentage for parts of The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo,[8] one of Dunbar's poems most often claimed to be in the Chaucerian line of descent. In so doing I hope to produce evidence which has hitherto been neglected.

Although the poem is written in alliterative lines, its debt to the alliterative tradition and the extent to which it truly belongs to it are frequently ignored or too cursorily dismissed.

Let us first examine the statements of a typical representative of the "old school" of Dunbar critics. Æ.J.G. Mackay gives his verdict towards the close of the nineteenth century:

> Although the alliterative romantic poets preceded him [Dunbar] in time, they were not, any more than the metrical chroniclers, his poetic ancestors. He belonged to the line which began with Chaucer, was continued by Gower and Lydgate, and had already in the 'Kingis Quair' of James I., and the poems of Henryson, the Dunfermline schoolmaster, representatives in Scotland.[9]

This is a classic expression of the tidy traditional view on the Middle Scots makars, a view still maintained and reinforced, with slight qualifications, by some of their latest editors and critics.[10]

It is my intention, by way of necessary corrective, to attempt to suggest the extent to which alliterative antecedents are important in discussing Dunbar's Tretis.

How does Mackay follow up this very general statement about Dunbar? He admits that, of the three, Dunbar, James I and Henryson, Dunbar is the least imitative of Chaucer, and claims that what Dunbar chiefly owes to Chaucer is his language. As regards Dunbar's actual subject-matter, he observes that "only the tale of 'The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo,' and the verses on his Empty Purse, show traces of imitation." [11] Despite its qualifications, this view of Dunbar's achievement as having sprung directly from Chaucer has remained so persistent in the face of numerous studies showing equal, if not greater, debts to a variety of other sources that the necessity of resisting it is still with us.

Although Mackay would find it difficult to justify his remark about a language debt, I shall not here dispute it except to remark in passing that nowhere in Chaucer is found Dunbar's fund of colloquial (often abusive) Scots, his aureate vocabulary, or, despite Chaucer's "good ear," [12] his command of the alliterative long line and of some of the traditional vocabulary that went with it. That there is, on occasion, a slight debt of vocabulary and style no one would deny, but anyone who has caught the flavour of Dunbar's work and the cast of his mind will agree that resemblances on this level are hard to find. It is ridiculous to assert that, but for Chaucer, there could have been no Dunbar, [13] as if the former were somehow the progenitor of the latter, or as if the court of King James IV would have been devoid of poets. Dunbar would still have flourished, and not, I imagine, so very differently. His choice of subjects would certainly have been little affected, drawn as they are chiefly from first-hand experiences and impressions of court life, from the sights and sounds of the Edinburgh streets and from his own distressing circumstances and reflections. We may be sure, too, that the stock medieval poetic conventions, such as the dream-allegory, would have reached him anyway even without the currency they received from Chaucer. In this connection it is important to remember the strong political ties then existing between France and Scotland, and the fact that many Scottish students completed their education abroad at the University of Paris, so that, in theory at least, literary ideas and genres could easily have passed directly from France to Scotland. Dunbar's mode of expression - or, rather one of his characteristic modes of expression, since he has several - would no doubt have undergone some alteration, not necessarily for the worse, and perhaps he would not have inherited so generous a stock of stanzaic and metrical forms. But his versatility and his genius for absorbing elements from numerous widely-differing traditions encourage us to believe that he would have existed

poetically in some shape or form, Chaucer or no Chaucer, to the delight of his contemporaries and posterity.

Omitting further discussion of a general kind, then, let us look for imitation where Mackay claims to have found it, in the poem which begins "Sanct Salvatour! send silver sorrow"[14] and in the Tretis. The first is a mere trifle in comparison to the bulk of Dunbar's total achievement, the second very much more considerable, being his longest surviving poem and by some esteemed the best.

Dunbar's complaint on the state of his purse is obviously reminiscent of Chaucer's begging poem on the same theme.[15] Both poems complain of their authors' indigence, both are addressed to a king, Chaucer's in the envoy and Dunbar's implicitly throughout, explicitly at the end; both make use of a refrain ("Beth hevy ageyn, or elles mot I dye! " and "My panefull purs so priclis me"), though Dunbar varies his slightly in the last two stanzas. But here the resemblances end. While we may readily concede inspiration from Chaucer in this case - remembering, however, that there are French examples of this type of begging poem (for example, those by Machaut and Deschamps) earlier in date than Chaucer's,[16] so that the possibility of direct French influence on Dunbar is not excluded - imitation hardly describes the relationship of the two poems. Dunbar does not address his purse, as if it were his lady, in the fanciful semi-humorous, semi-rueful manner of Chaucer. His is very much a personal poem, written in low spirits as an expression of his own distressed circumstances; the expression is individual and the detail he gives particular. Lack of money, he says, is a constant grievance and puts him out of humour all day, making him incapable of any merriment. Not only does lassitude prove an obstacle to poetic composition, but also, he finds, even when he sets himself to sing or dance or engage in some other pleasant pastime, the thoughts of penury which fill his mind swamp all pleasurable feelings. When men who have purses that jingle tunefully go by to drink at the tavern or to have breakfast, then he has to maintain a grave deportment and say that he intends to fast until noon. His purse is made of such a skin that no "cors" (body/coin)[17] will remain inside it; indeed coins shun it like the devil. Whatever his luck in gambling, he is painfully conscious of its emptiness. If he knew a magician anywhere in the world who could work a spell on it to keep it permanently supplied with silver, the devil would no longer have power to tempt him. Having inquired in many places for help and comfort in this desperate situation, he finds by report that the one best able to remedy this malicious evil, which is goading him and making him miserable, is the King,

his lord.[18]

Both in tone and language this poem differs from Chaucer's. Chaucer seems to have far less at stake, can afford to adopt a lighter tone; Dunbar's piece indicates a more real depression, a more real hardship.

Like many other Middle Scots poems it contains lavish ornamental alliteration, as may be seen in the following three stanzas:

> Quhen I wald blythlie ballattis breif,
> Langour thairto givis me no leif;
> War nocht gud howp my hart uphie,
> My verry corpis for cair wald cleif;
> My panefull purs so prikillis me.
>
> Quhen I sett me to sing or dance,
> Or go to plesand pastance,
> Than pansing of penuritie
> Revis that fra my remembrance;
> My panefull purs so prikillis me.
>
> Quhen men that hes pursis in tone,
> Pasis to drynk or to disjone,
> Than mon I keip ane gravetie,
> And say that I will fast quhill none;
> My panefull purs so priclis me. (6-20)

It will be noted that the alliteration in these stanzas falls chiefly on stressed syllables - exclusively so in the first of the stanzas quoted, where it is sustained, and in the refrain, where it is used with hammering insistence. I take coincidence of stress and alliteration as an indication, however faint, that Dunbar's ornamental use of alliteration in this poem originated in the structural kind belonging to the alliterative tradition proper - as an indication, therefore, that it derived from alliterative poetry rather than from other sources.[19] One of the most noteworthy features of the poetry of Henryson, Dunbar, Douglas and other Middle Scots poets is their retention of alliteration to a marked extent even when they are not writing in the alliterative long line, as they sometimes did. The Scots makars were loath to discard a device so fruitful in onomatopoeic effects, so useful for emphasis or comic exaggeration and, above all, so effective in a reel of abuse.

Of "Sanct Salvatour! send silver sorrow" it should be said,

in summary, that Chaucerian influence is limited, at most, to deciding for Dunbar the type of poem and its broad subject. The poem owes its tone to the poet's personal mood and its details to his personal circumstances. As far as its mode of expression and sound effects are concerned, the alliterative tradition, either directly or indirectly, has played a small part, though it cannot be said to have had any influence on the subject-matter.

No exact date of composition can be assigned to the Tretis, a satirical poem of 530 lines, but an outside limit is set by the date of publication from the printing-press of Chepman and Myllar, around 1508-10.[20] If the poem is a mature work, as its length and mastery tend to suggest, there is no reason to assume that it was written much before the date of printing, so that a tentative date of c. 1500 would not be an unreasonable surmise and might, if anything, be placing the poem somewhat early in Dunbar's poetic career.

The poem's success as a literary tour de force arises out of the juxtaposition of artificial courtly sentiment and ideals, which are suggested quite simply by traditional scene-painting and description at the beginning and end of the poem, against the earthiness of supposed "actual" human nature, revealed through the lascivious confidences of three outspoken women. The poet, in the fashion of the chanson d'aventure, goes for a solitary nocturnal walk on Midsummer's Eve, a night of carousal and merrymaking. Hearing voices on the other side of a thick hawthorn hedge, he ensconces himself in it to peep and eavesdrop in the traditionally accepted manner.

Through the hedge he sees[21] three enchantingly beautiful ladies, a widow and her two married companions, seated at a table in a green arbour and imbibing rich wines. The ladies are plainly to be associated with their surroundings, being garlanded with flowers and clad in mantles of green, a colour symbolic, no doubt, of their "naturalness" as well as of their vitality. Without being differentiated at this stage, they are skilfully described in the most delicate conventional romance terms after the fashion, and according to the traditional techniques, of the fourteenth-century alliterative romances. The poet switches abruptly to a different technique, however, as the poem progresses, that of flyting, or Scottish invective verse, when, their tongues loosened by the "wicht wyne," the two wives, at the Wedo's instigation, take turns to divulge their marriage experiences and their opinion of the "blist band" of matrimony. After they have spoken, the Wedo, who, though outwardly "sempill without fraud," is an altogether

more experienced and calculating individual than her companions, treats them to her own confidences and ultra-worldly-wise advice on the same subject.

The first married woman exclaims against marriage in no uncertain terms. She is of the opinion that birds have a far better law than men:

> That ilk yeir, with new joy, joyis ane maik,
> And fangis thame ane fresche feyr, unfulyeit, and constant,
> And lattis thair fulyeit feiris flie quhair thai pleis. (61-63)

Had she free choice, she would mingle with the crowds at fairs and at markets, in church and on pilgrimages, in the king's court or at plays, and pick herself a vigorous young man for a year. While she enjoyed his company she would, however, be busy singling out his successor for the following year.

Her views become more comprehensible, if no more excusable, as she goes on to revile her husband with true flyting venom, pouring on his head the most scathingly bitter epithets. He, a jealous old man, is unable to satisfy her. Nevertheless he always has to pay for her favours, like it or not, with a promise, in advance, of a kerchief of the finest-textured fabric, or a dye-fast furred gown, or some item of costly jewellery. At the conclusion of her speech her companions applaud with peals of laughter, and the wine-cup is passed round as they continue to regale themselves.

The second wife claims that her marriage lot is even worse than that of the first wife, for, she argues:

> Scho that has ane auld man nought all is begylit;
> He is at Venus werkis na war na he semys:
> I wend I josit a gem, and I haif geit gottin;
> He had the glemyng of gold, and wes bot glase fundin.
> (199-202)

Her seemingly vigorous and lusty young husband was, before his marriage, "a hur maister, the hugeast in erd." But he has now spent himself, and the profligate is "for ladyis in luf" nothing but "a right lusty schadow," although he continues to court the attention of the opposite sex by putting on a gallant swaggering appearance with his bonnet cocked askew. While speaking him fair to his face, his wife takes a secret revenge on him by grimacing at him when he is not looking, changing her expression to a "luf blenk" whenever he chances to turn.

There is further laughter and tippling. Then, after a mock prayer for eloquence to make her "preching" the more persuasive, the Wedo reveals her technique in subjugating her husbands and gaining her ends: she cultivates an appearance of saintly innocence, although, she says, she has always been in reality shrewish, haughty, contemptuous and cunning.

The sour moods of the first of her two husbands, a hoary-haired old man, who was constantly hawking and spitting, she rendered palatable by recourse to a discreet lover who was more to her taste. But she made such a fuss of the old man that he assigned his best property by deed to her son, of whom he was not the father.

Her second marriage was to a merchant whose humble origin, as compared with her nobility, was a continual cause of her disdain and gave her the whiphand. She no longer affected an air of innocence, because her previous marriage gave her every right to seem experienced. By constantly reminding her foolishly forgetful second husband of her great kindness and condescension in stooping to an alliance with his low blood she reduced the poor wretch to a state of ignominious subjection and servitude. The more submissive he became, however, the more she hated him. But she took good care never to express her pent-up hatred until all his property had been legally conveyed to her child. Then she released her venom, set him all the woman's work to do about the house and made him the laughing-stock among the gossips. She extracted from him many costly silk clothes and precious jewels, which she wore not in his presence but in the company of gallants and lovers. Hardly surprisingly, he also died from unspecified causes.

Now, as a widow, she piously affects great sorrow as she sits in her pew at church. Drawing her black mourning cloak partially in front of her face to avoid detection, she takes quick sidelong glances at the men around to see which is the most muscular or the broadest in the shoulders. For the benefit of her late husband's friends she has a sopping wet sponge "for wa" concealed in the folds of her copious cloak, which she squeezes at intervals on her cheeks. She has a lover who, at a given signal, will visit her discreetly without damage to her reputation, and many other casual friends who come and go. Indeed, she says:

> Thar is no liffand leid so law of degre
> That sall me luf unluffit, I am so loik hertit;
> And gif his lust so be lent into my lyre quhit,
> That he be lost or with me lig, his lif sall nocht danger.
> (497-500)

Her "pity" is extended to all.

The wives applaud the Wedo's disquisition, and the bibulous trio continue to cool their mouths with comforting drinks until morning. Then, amid joyous birdsong and the trill of the brook, the sweet scent of the grass and the glitter of rain-drops, they go home to rest, while the poet passes into "a plesand arber" to record their conversation.

The poet's own attitude throughout the poem seems to be entirely neutral. Although some critics[22] would like to justify their uneasy enjoyment of the poem by seeing in it moral condemnation of the ladies' behaviour and way of life, it is really neither moral nor immoral, but amoral: the facts are presented, a comic contrast is produced, and the reader may judge of it as he pleases. The poet's own delight in his composition lies in tricking his reader (or audience) into the expectation of one set of values - those appertaining to amour courtois - and then unexpectedly introducing a contrasting set of values, or attitudes, which could hardly be more materialistic, unscrupulous and self-seeking and which are presented as bare, uninhibited "human nature." At the end of the poem, after mockingly reintroducing amour courtois trappings and conventions, he laughingly poses his question, a demande d'amour:

> Of thir thre wantoun wiffis, that I haif writtin heir,
> Quhilk wald ye waill to your wif, gif ye suld wed one?
> (529-530)

and sits back to observe the shocked reaction.

If we discount the early Scottish alliterative prophecies,[23] most of which are in any case short and show hesitant traces of rhyme, this poem represents the only example of the sustained use in Scots of the alliterative long line without rhyme. Of Dunbar's other alliterative poems, The Flyting - strictly speaking not structurally alliterative at all but copiously alliterated - is composed in rhymed octaves of iambic pentameter; and "Kynd Kittok," uncertainly attributed to him, is written in the rhymed stanza with bob-and-wheel popular among the writers of the old Northern alliterative romances and very similar, but not identical, to that used in The Pistill of Susan.

Dunbar's handling of the alliterative long line in the Tretis shows the rhythmical mastery and alliterative opulence which we would expect of him. Some of his lines have five, rather than the normal four, stressed syllables, three or more of which may alliterate, as in:

Besyd ane gūdlie grēin gārth, full of gāy flōuris,
Hēgeit, of ane hūge hīcht, with hāwthorne trēis. (3-4)

But this use of a five-stress line is not uncommon in fourteenth-century alliterative poems. It can be observed in The Pistill of Susan,[24] and even Sir Gawain and the Green Knight has lines which may be felt to contain five stressed syllables, as:

A spétos spárþe to expóun in spélle, quoso mý3t. (209)

Often syllables which are unstressed, or which have only a secondary stress, also alliterate:

So glítterit as the gōld wer thair glōrius gilt trēssis. (19)

This, again, is common practice in the earlier alliterative romances. Very frequently Dunbar imitates a device particularly characteristic of the alliterative Morte Arthure, the carrying over of the same alliterating sound from line to line, often for as many as four lines together:

Quhen that the chuf wald me chid, with girnand chaftis,
I wald him chuk, cheik and chyn, and cheris him so mekill,
That his cheif chymys he had chevist to my sone,
Suppos the churll wes gane chaist, or the child wes gottin. (290-293)

Indeed, throughout the last section of the poem (511-530) Dunbar adopts a system of alliterating on the same sound in pairs of consecutive lines. Double alliteration within the line (usually in the form aa bb) can also be seen. Occasionally the terminal words of consecutive lines alliterate independently of the main alliteration, at times producing an effect close to pararhyme:

And of thir fair wlonkes, tua weddit war with lordis,
Ane wes ane wedow, I wis, wantoun of laitis. (36-37)

Other pairs of terminal words similarly alliterated are meikill/maik (60-61), chekis/chaftis (107-108), wambe/will (131-132), fader/fair (279-280), lufe/lang (457-458), mony/mekle (473-474), finger/fasson (490-491). Sometimes the initial sound of the terminal word in one line becomes the dominant alliterating sound in the next, as in lines 170-171 and lines 173-174. This achieves metrically a type of "run-on" effect and establishes a smooth uninterrupted flow of the verse.

To speak of the poem's technical devices scarcely does justice, however, to Dunbar's command of a rich variety of alliterative effects. His resourcefulness in suiting the sound to the sense is equal to that of the best alliterative poets that precede him. What could better convey the impression of speech thickened by alcohol than the line:

> Thay wauchtit at the wicht wyne and waris out wourdis (39)

with its throaty stressed syllables waucht- and wicht? Elsewhere Dunbar can use alliteration and rhythmical pattern to create a soothingly sweet languid atmosphere:

> The soft sowch of the swyr and soune of the stremys,
> The sueit savour of the sward and singing of foulis,
> Myght confort ony creatur of the kyn of Adam . . . (519-521)

In sharp contrast to this is his use of alliteration with brutal incisiveness in the wives' indictments of their various husbands, where, combined with the more colloquial language, it serves to emphasize the contempt of the speaker:

> Quhen schaiffyne is that ald schalk with a scharp rasour,
> He schowis one me his schevill mouth and schedis my lippis;
> And with his hard hurcheone skyn sa heklis he my chekis,
> That as a glemand gleyd glowis my chaftis. (105-108)

> And so I did him despise, I spittit quhen I saw
> That super spendit evill spreit, spulyeit of all vertu. (396-397)

In the latter example, from the Wedo's diatribe, the contemptuous emphasis is further enhanced by the fact that the alliteration is on sp, the succession of words beginning with these consonants producing the effect of spitting.

Effective use of alliteration thus heightens the contempt expressed by the three women in the central part of the poem. At the beginning and end of the poem Dunbar achieves his literary purpose less by means of alliteration as a technical device than by the suggestive aid of the whole alliterative long line, which is deployed in so traditional a manner that allusion to earlier Northern alliterative poems (especially the serious romances or those with a heroic colouring) is felt to be implicit. The contrast between the contempt of the central portion of the poem and the courtly

romance associations and values conjured up by the delicate descriptions of the ladies and their surroundings at the beginning and end is one fully intended by Dunbar and fully calculated. In the descriptions which precede and follow the women's scathing portrayals of their husbands his use of the alliterative long line is strongly allusive simply because, as the parallels quoted further on (pp. 45 - 46) tend to suggest, he is using it in a way that harks back to an earlier period, specifically that of the alliterative revival of the second half of the fourteenth century and the early fifteenth century. No other Scottish poet of his day used it in this way,[25] and such use may even have been regarded by his contemporaries as consciously archaic. His use of the alliterative long line in the central portion of the poem is, on the other hand, thoroughly contemporary, and recalls the use of alliteration, whether in the form of the alliterative long line or not, for flytings. The parts of the poem which are therefore most strongly reminiscent of, and linked to, the older tradition are the opening and concluding sections.

Before looking further at the aspects of the poem which reflect the tradition of alliterative poetry, it is necessary to take a look at the Chaucerian view of the poem - not, I would maintain, because the two approaches to the poem by way of literary influence, the "alliterative" and the Chaucerian, are incompatible, but because the Chaucerian view, alone and unmodified, is too limited and may lead to a one-sided appraisal of the poem as a whole. This view, to put it in its baldest form, is the one that the poem owes its genesis to the Wife of Bath.[26] There are subsidiary arguments for Chaucerian influence,[27] but this is the most imposing. An approach to The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo via Chaucer would therefore involve a comparison of that poem with The Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale, together with, perhaps, some additional reference to the Tale itself.[28]

There is admittedly a definite correspondence between Dunbar's ladies and Chaucer's Wife, particularly in respect of their garrulous confidences and the subject of these confidences - their marriage relationships. Dr Baxter rightly notes that the two widows share a love of pilgrimages and dense throngs of people[29] - for, it should be added, precisely the same reason: "for to se, and eek for to be seye / Of lusty folk" (Prologue, 552-553). It may also be mentioned that the first wife's method of extracting "gifts" from her husband is exactly that employed by the Wife of Bath.[30] All the ladies enjoy gossiping, drinking and wearing fine clothes. They all, too, share a desire to keep a provident second string to their bows; and the Wedo's water sponge for woe is a delightful

extension of the Wife of Bath's counterfeited grief on the death of her fourth husband. Yet these obvious and not inconsiderable resemblances should not blind us to the many differences.

Dunbar's trio, particularly the Wedo, possess a much higher degree of cynical sophistication than the Wife of Bath, and this is evidenced in their attitudes towards themselves. They know what they are about: they know what they pass for and what they actually are, how great the difference is and exactly what, in material terms, it is worth to them. The outward appearance is a matter of calculated policy and nothing more. Indeed they may well be compared with La Vieille in Jean de Meun's satirical continuation of Le Roman de la Rose.[31] Her advice to Bel Acueil is that a woman should have several lovers, preserving her liberty as far as possible, and should plunder them until they have nothing left to give. These precepts are surely diligently upheld and followed by Dunbar's Wedo, who in cynicism and depth of depravity is a kindred spirit to La Vieille. Except in her consciousness of social status, in which respect she resembles the Wife of Bath, Dunbar's Wedo is much closer in conception to Jean de Meun's La Vieille.

With the Wife of Bath, by contrast, we cannot be sure that she understands herself half so well. She is naturally conscious of her tricks and wiles, her matrimonial deceits, her strategy of using attack as the best method of defence when dealing with a jealous husband; but her devious rationalisations of the married state, and of marrying five times over, within the accepted tenets of Christian morality, do not testify to a high degree of self-knowledge. She is conscious here only of an ill-defined unease. So it may be said that while we are given the clues to her personality, she does not always realize her own pretensions and motives. She is not as grasping and materialistic as Dunbar's ladies, because to some extent, as I think we are meant to feel, she finds the battle for supremacy in marriage exhilarating. She enjoys such tussles and the sense of power they give her as much for their own sake as for what she can gain from them. Moreover, she is not against marriage as an institution; on the contrary, though widowed five times, she cries welcome to the sixth husband "whan that evere he shal" (45). Surprising, in view of the impression given by her of a history of almost uninterrupted marital strife, is her conviction that peace, harmony, fidelity and love are attainable in a marriage relationship, if the wife has a real affection for the husband and the husband is wise enough to give the wife her way. It is this belief which sets her apart from the other women, who regard their marriages as, at best, a miserable constraint. This conviction is illustrated in her Tale, which serves as an exemplum of the thesis propounded in her Prologue that the woman should be granted the sovereignty in marriage, and which shows the Loathly Lady

becoming both fair and faithful when she is assured by the Knight that the conjugal sovereignty is safely in her hands. It is also realized, if the triumphant claim made by the Wife at the end of her "preamble" can be regarded as truthful, in her relationship with her fifth husband, Jankyn, to whom, after she gains the "maistrie," she is, she says, always kind and faithful, as he to her. (One wonders, however, why, being half her age, twenty to her forty, when they were first wed, he should have succumbed to mortality first, and whether his view of the relationship would have supported hers.) The Wife is an extreme feminist in her assertion of women's rights, and particularly of women's sexual rights; but, though by her own admission unable to resist a "good felawe" (618), she is not as wantonly promiscuous as the Wedo, whose account of her licentious "parties," at which she keeps all her lovers and admirers happy more or less simultaneously, might have staggered even the Wife. There is in this depiction of erotic fulfilment nothing like the one-for-one relationship which, as her Tale reveals, is the romantic ideal to which the Wife of Bath aspires. Indeed, in general Chaucer's Wife of Bath impresses us as being a little gentler - more digressive, verbose and "bookish" (even if only superficially so, through the influence of the scholarly Jankyn) - than Dunbar's wives and Wedo. The latter are witch-like [32] and so full of the venom which vents itself in the barbarously savage portrayals of their respective spouses that there seems no room left in them for more kindly feelings; and it is to be doubted whether, corroded as they are by frustration, malice and ill-will, any of them is capable of experiencing a love raised above the level of purely sensual gratification. Whatever their outward aspect, they are "kene, inconstant, and cruell of mynd" (260).

The Wife of Bath's Tale reflects her comparative gentleness. On a first impression, a story out of Arthurian romance with elements of fairy mythology might be thought totally inappropriate for such a personage, whose ebullient and occasionally lewd outspokenness leads one to expect the coarse realism of a fabliau such as The Miller's Tale. [33] But a considered reading of the Tale reveals the complete aptness not merely of the theme but also of the treatment which it receives, and of the attitudes which permeate the subject-matter. From the satire on friars and their lechery at the beginning - in keeping as it is with her interest in sexual matters - to the plea at the end for "Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde" (1259) we never for one moment lose sight of the fact that the Wife of Bath is the teller. We are hardly given the feeling of being transported into the realm of Arthurian romance, so strongly do middle-class feelings and attitudes dominate. The hag is, for most of her speech, the Wife herself, especially in her indignant voicing of contempt for upper-class pretensions to gentility which are founded on nothing but "old

richesse" (1110). While the Knight nominally lives in "kyng Arthures hous" (1089), the hag's reference to his house in line 1225 immediately conjures up a picture of bourgeois domesticity. And the Wife's attitude of practical-minded middle-class scepticism towards fairies virtually puts to rout the fairy elements in the story. It is also noticeable that, despite the love content of the story, courtly love concepts are entirely absent; from this we may, I think, legitimately infer both that the Wife of Bath has no truck with such highfalutin aristocratic nonsense and that she is of slightly lower social rank than the Wedo, who looks down upon the "bastard blude" (312) of her merchant husband, and whose facetious reference to the terms of courtly love shows her familiarity with the code.[34] It is evident that Chaucer has been at especial pains throughout to make the tale conform to his image of the teller. Consequently, we would not be rash in attributing the romanticism of the Tale, the vulnerable sentimental belief in the possibility of marrying and living "happily ever after" (see lines 1257-58), to the Wife herself. It is this hopeful, positive and endearing facet of her character that most clearly distinguishes her from Dunbar's embittered cynics, who are all, to say the least, disenchanted where marriage is concerned. Dame Alys, in the main a more orthodox and conventional individual than they, cares a great deal for her public image and social status as things valuable in themselves, whereas they regard them chiefly as necessary means to an end. Perhaps the subtlety of Chaucer's narration of her self-revelations in the Prologue lies in the way in which he lets us know her areas of self-ignorance, while simultaneously holding the candle to them through her own words. Browning's technique is closer to Chaucer's than is Dunbar's.[35]

Another approach to the Tretis is that made by way of direct, or indirect, French influence, with particular reference to literary genre. Janet Smith in The French Background of Middle Scots Literature sees the poem as basically in the tradition of the Old French lyric form of the chanson de mal mariée, which Dunbar uses in a new way.[36] One of the latest views on Dunbar, that held by Denton Fox in his chapter "The Scottish Chaucerians," is an extension of this. Professor Fox believes that Dunbar's poetry "stands in a special and almost parasitic relationship to the traditional genres," his poems often being "parodies or near-parodies." He sees the Tretis in particular as parodying "among other things" a chanson d'aventure, a chanson de mal mariée and a demande d'amour. He goes on to say that "Dunbar expects his readers to be acquainted with the traditional genres and themes, and to appreciate his novel rehandling of them."[37] There is much truth in this, but I would like to extend the application of the

statement. "Among other things" Dunbar also parodies the typical outlook, technique and phraseology of the alliterative romance and epic-romance which by the late fifteenth century were all but extinct; and again he assumes a knowledge of these older forms on the part of his audience. Indeed, this is really the most fundamental parody in his poem.

My contention, then, is that the poem belongs within the alliterative tradition in more ways than by virtue of its metrical form. It is my purpose to establish a significant line of influence between it and Pearl by pointing out a hitherto unnoticed link. First, however, I shall briefly summarize the views of a writer who came close to stumbling upon the connection.

Agnes Mure Mackenzie, writing in 1933, felt most forcibly certain similarities between the poetry of the Scots makars and Pearl, and voiced the daring and original view that:

> whoever wrote The Pearl, was, far more than Chaucer, the forerunner of the fifteenth-century Scots poets commonly but for the most part absurdly known as the Scots Chaucerians.[38]

She goes on to say that, although Dunbar and the writer of Pearl are greatly dissimilar in temperament:

> their literary methods, and tastes, are closely alike, and do not at all resemble those of Chaucer except in one or two points that they and Chaucer share with their age at large.[39]

For her the poetic diction and extraordinary metrical intricacy of Pearl anticipate the bejewelled aureate diction and comparable metrical intricacy of many of Dunbar's poems, while the combination, in Pearl, of "frank homely realism with delight in splendour, in gorgeousness of decoration" strikes her as especially characteristic of the Middle Scots poets also.[40]

Unfortunately, Miss Mackenzie does not support her argument by detailed illustration and analysis: she simply expresses it in the form of generalized personal observations and impressions which, by themselves, are unlikely to convince the sceptical. Some unsubstantiated statements weaken the remainder of her criticism in the same chapter, so that it is perhaps not surprising that her views have never been taken up by later writers for fuller exploration.

What is extraordinary, however, is that, although Agnes Mackenzie mentally connects Pearl and the Tretis,[41] she fails to see the vital link between these two poems provided by the anonymous Scots lyric "Quhen Tayis bank wes blumyt brycht."[42] To be sure, she names "Tayis Bank" in another chapter as being one of several Scottish lyrics in which "the harmonised pattern of verse, the descant of alliteration or internal rhyme laid over the main form of the stanza, in a manner that goes back to the Pearl," may be seen.[43] Yet she does not notice the full extent of the connection between "Tayis Bank" and Pearl and she fails to observe correspondences between "Tayis Bank" and parts of Dunbar's Tretis. This neglected evidence, though slight, may suggest the way in which fourteenth-century alliterative poetry influenced the Scottish poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. What I hope to show is, first, that "Tayis Bank" was partly inspired by Pearl; secondly, that the Tretis was influenced by "Tayis Bank"; and, thirdly, that some elements of Dunbar's poetry may, in fact, be traceable back to Pearl.

It is generally accepted that Pearl was written c. 1360-95.[44] Some difficulty lies in proving that "Tayis Bank" is earlier in date than the Tretis. I have conjectured a date of c. 1500 for the latter poem.[45] "Tayis Bank" is assignable to the early years of the reign of James IV, provided that the usual interpretation of the poem remains undisputed. A likely date would then be a few years prior to the death of Margaret Drummond, the King's favourite mistress and subject of the poem, in 1502,[46] and prior also to the commencement of negotiations in 1501 for the marriage between James and Margaret Tudor, solemnized in 1503.[47] About 1496 might be a reasonable assumption, since it would appear that the King saw a good deal of Margaret Drummond at Stirling Castle that year, and the following year she bore him a child.[48] But the poem may be even earlier, as internal evidence suggests that Margaret Drummond was living at Stobhall, one of the seats of her father, Sir John Drummond, at the time of composition. If such tentative dating seems to afford but flimsy evidence for the correct chronological sequence of the two poems, there is at least one sound additional reason for supposing "Tayis Bank" anterior to the Tretis.[49]

"Tayis Bank" conforms exactly to Janet Smith's definition of the French reverdie: "a simple spring song without any story, telling only of spring and of the poet's lady."[50] Perhaps if we view it in this light we shall regard it less as an "ingenious and somewhat laboured exercise,"[51] "frigid in its grace,"[52] and more as a joyful paean to spring, with substantial powers of evocation. The lyric conveys a harmony of mood and setting, and the best parts of the poem are in no way spoilt by the artificiality of the form.[53]

The poem is written in the first person, seemingly from the King's point of view. The poet rides out on a glorious May morning alongside the river Tay. The bank is bright with opened flowers; the merle (blackbird) is in full throat; and the poet is himself moved to sing by the sights and sounds around him. He hides himself in a holly-tree (the Scottish counterpart of the French hawthorn, and surely no less uncomfortable) beneath the bank. He describes how the sun shines above the bright shaws, making a patch of sunlight beside him, and how in his bed of flowers on the bank he falls asleep. Then follows, perhaps surprisingly, a further description of his natural surroundings as seen in his dream - the fresh colourful flowers with their bright dew-drop pendants ("schakeris") which form a shining curtain to his bower, the red sun rising behind parallel ridges of cloud, the songs of lark, nightingale and the cheerful shrill-voiced mavis (thrush), the flowers in the coppice, the fish in the river, the deer running through the brushwood. Even the woodbine twining itself around the branches of the trees, symbolic of the passing of winter "with his wallowand [withering] wynd," is noted by the poet with a characteristically Scottish feeling for winter's woes. His gaze lowers, and alone under a tree he sees so beautiful a lady that it would be a sheer miracle to find her match on earth. Several stanzas follow extolling the lady's beauty in conventional medieval fashion. These stanzas are the most stilted in the piece because the sentiment and treatment are stereotyped and the verse is more than elsewhere filled out with tags (for example, "on lyve," "on a land," "be sic fyve," "I dar warrand" - all from the seventh stanza). There are, however, one or two effective touches: the flowers which before seemed shining and bright now dwindle to a pale insignificance beside her, and appear bleached and "blue."[54] In the eleventh stanza the poet compares his lady with the pearl and the diamond - conventional comparisons certainly, which seem to owe their origin to the medieval lapidaries, but despite the conventionality of the metaphor the lines -

> This myld, meik, mansuet Mergrit,
> This perle polist most quhyt (81-82) -

would seem to suggest that the lady's name is Margaret.

The poet then attempts to approach her, but she retires within a resplendent castle. But the poet's attention is so engrossed by the paradise of natural sights and sounds around him that he is not particularly disappointed, and he remains on his bank to listen to the birds. A final stanza of riotous description concludes the poem, the poet achieving a rapport with his surroundings ("Joy wes within and joy without, / Vnder that wlonkest waw"), while the last line gives us the clue to the lady's identity and the location -

Stobschaw - presumably the name given to the woods surrounding Stobhall, seat of Sir John Drummond, the father of Margaret Drummond. [55] The line (69) -

Scho mycht haif confort king or knycht -

is also taken to confirm the interpretation that the poem is about the King's mistress.

We are never told at the end of the poem whether the poet awakes from his sleep. I shall comment on the significance of this inconsistency in a moment.

In spite of the dissimilarity in type of poem and, for that matter, quality of poetry - Pearl being an elegy for a lost daughter incorporating a large body of theological argument which ultimately brings a certain amount of relief to the anguished Dreamer, and "Tayis Bank" a joyous lyric of a mere 120 lines - the points of comparison between the two poems are numerous. The most striking correspondence is the Pearl=Margaret equation in both. The Dreamer's little daughter is also a Pearl, or Margaret, and attempts have been made to identify her with an actual child. [56] Metrically, as Agnes Mure Mackenzie has observed, the poems are similar in their combination of metre, alliteration and rhyme. [57] There is a similar use of bright concrete descriptive detail, seen with an eye for colour. Perhaps more noteworthy are the river setting and the use of the dream-framework in both poems.

What seems to have happened is that the poet of "Tayis Bank," who must have been someone fairly conversant with the earlier alliterative verse of the North-West Midlands, commissioned to write a poem in praise of Margaret Drummond, made the usual medieval connection Margaret=marguarite=pearl, which naturally brought to mind the poem Pearl about an earlier Margaret or Margery. Once the poem was suggested to his mind he allowed it to influence his own composition. Thus it comes about that, although the device of the dream-vision is entirely superfluous to his needs, he makes his watcher on the bank fall asleep (16). The lady is seen in a dream and not in reality, and yet the dream and the reality merge into one because the watcher never wakes up. The device of the dream-vision is made further redundant by the watcher's care, presumably to avoid detection, to hide in a holly-tree before falling asleep (11-12), in a manner which suggests that what is to follow will be an eye-witness account of what he sees rather than a dream. The natural description given before and after he falls asleep follows on uninterruptedly, so we are forced to conclude that the matter of falling asleep is so much a part of the model in the poet's mind that he has failed to see its irrelevance

for his own subject. Unwittingly he has allowed himself to be influenced by the dream-framework of Pearl.

This influence is suggested by a number of details common to both poems. The Dreamer in Pearl falls asleep on the flowery grave-mound ("floury flaȝt" - literally, flowery stretch of turf) of his little daughter. In "Tayis Bank" the watcher falls asleep on a "bed of blumes," and we have to pause and think a little before we realize that this is nothing more nor less than the flowery bank which he has just described.[58] Both poems follow a similar sequence: in Pearl a description of the child's grave-mound with its bright flowers and rich spices is followed, after the Dreamer falls asleep, by a description of the Dreamland with its forest, fruit and birds; the Dreamer comes to a river; paradise, it seems to him, is on the other side (137-138) and he ardently longs to cross; he walks along by the river and, finally, at the foot of a cliff opposite he sees his own little Pearl; he describes her radiant appearance. In "Tayis Bank" a brief description of the brightly-flowered river bank is followed, after the watcher falls asleep, first by a more detailed description of his immediate surroundings and then by a description of the birdsong and the woods by the river. Then and only then does he notice his lady "vnder the lusty lynd." A description of her follows. Possibly significant, though trite, are the lines:

> So angelik vnder the air
> Neuir wicht I saw with E (63-64),

which bring to mind the "angel-hauyng" (754) of Pearl. Of greater significance are the several comparisons towards the end of the poem of the lady's castle and Stobschaw with paradise or heaven (see ll. 91-92; 97; 103). These recall the vision of the New Jerusalem at the end of Pearl. The unapproachability of the loved one in each poem provides another correspondence. Finally, line 69 of "Tayis Bank," quoted above, may be thought to recall the opening line of Pearl.

On the whole, any attempt to trace verbal resemblances between the two poems is a futile and pointless task. They are written a century apart in two quite distinct dialects of English, the North-West Midland and Middle Scots, and the two poets understandably show different dialectal preferences in their choice of words, even for such common natural features as river, forest. The Pearl poet uses the words water, strem, broke to denote "river." The Scottish poet uses riuer, which to the Pearl poet can denote something different though related - the meadows along the bank of a stream.[59] The Pearl poet uses wod, fryth, foreste,

holtewode3 to denote "forest, woodlands"; the Scottish poet, while also using firth, forrest and woddis, prefers schawis. One does not therefore expect to prove a connection between the poems by means of verbal analysis. The strength of the argument for influence must rest on similarities of subject and treatment, and on the curious anomaly of the dream-device in "Tayis Bank."

The connection between "Tayis Bank" and The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo is easier to establish because Dunbar actually borrows lines from the former poem. It appears that he knew it by heart.[60] The introductory and end portions of the Tretis (specifically lines 1-40 and 511-522) plainly draw on "Tayis Bank." It is evident that the latter poem is an earlier composition than the former. For "Tayis Bank" is a straightforward paean and eulogy, the Tretis a satire; and, while it is unlikely that someone wishing to eulogize a lady in a sincere fashion would borrow from a poem like the Tretis, it is perfectly credible that Dunbar might wish to satirize the conventional courtly view of woman by adopting as a framework some of the descriptive detail of a poem like "Tayis Bank." We may feel reasonably sure then that, although a precise dating of the poems has so far proved impossible, they are correctly placed in relation to one another.

The introductory and end portions of the Tretis are largely composed of description of natural scenery, sounds and scents - flowers, birdsong, dew, the noise of a river, and so on - similar to that in "Tayis Bank," and in both poems such description provides the framework for description of a lady or ladies (and, in Dunbar's poem, their conversation). With Dunbar the intent is satirical, but he carefully veils his satirical purpose at the beginning and end to make its effect the more devastating. His eavesdropper listens for a while beneath a holly-tree, before taking up more permanent occupation of a thick hawthorn hedge. This holly-tree is described in exactly the same words as the one which screens the watcher in "Tayis Bank":

"Tayis Bank":	Ane holene, hevinly hewit grene	(11)
Tretis:	ane holyn hevinlie grein hewit	(11)

Only the word order differs, the alliterative long line adopting the more natural syntax. The adjective "heynd" (pleasant, sheltering), applied to the leaves which shelter Dunbar's eavesdropper (14), also echoes the adverb "heyndly" used in a similar connection to express the same idea in "Tayis Bank" (12). Lines 30-33 of the Tretis correspond very closely in idea and expression to lines 23-24 and 19-20 of "Tayis Bank":

"Tayis Bank": Arrayit with a rich vardour
Of natouris werkis new. (23-24)

Ourfret with mony fair fresch flour,
Helsum of hevinly hew . . . (19-20)

Tretis: Arrayit ryallie about with mony rich vardour,
That nature full nobillie annamalit with flouris
Off alkin hewis under hevin, that ony heynd knew,
Fragrant, all full of fresche odour fynest of smell. (30-33)

A slighter resemblance may be detected between lines 512-513 of the Tretis and lines 29-31 of "Tayis Bank," though here Dunbar has assimilated and reorganized his source-material more fully. Again, line 515 of the Tretis is reminiscent of line 21 of "Tayis Bank" ("Silver schouris doune schuke as the schene cristall"; "With schakeris of the schene dew schour"). The same phenomenon of birds shouting is expressed in both poems and here the verbal resemblances are much too close for coincidence:

"Tayis Bank": (i) The mirthfull maveiss merriest
Schill schowttit throw the schawis. (31-32)

(ii) The schene birdis full schill cowth schowt
Into that semly schaw . . . (115-116)

Tretis: And berdis schoutit in schaw with thair schill notis . . .[61] (516)

The sentiment of lines 519-522 of the Tretis may also be compared with that of lines 97-104 and 7-8 of "Tayis Bank." After carefully checking Dunbar's other poems I have been able to note what may possibly be further traces of the influence of "Tayis Bank" in "The Thrissil and the Rois," "The Goldyn Targe," and in "Gladethe thoue Queyne of Scottis Regioun" (probably by Dunbar).[62] Some of the similarities are, however, almost certainly due to common conventions and the stock imagery of the period.

The evidence leaves little doubt of the direct influence of "Tayis Bank" on the Tretis, and hence of the indirect influence of Pearl on Dunbar's poem. May we not legitimately conclude,

then, that something of Dunbar's method of describing natural settings, not only in this poem but in others too - natural settings which, interestingly, are never very naturalistically portrayed - goes back to Pearl? The "natural" scenery in Pearl is supernatural in its brightness, beauty, freshness and intensity. Dunbar's descriptions, although different in kind, possess a comparable "unnatural" intensity, at times a hard bejewelled brilliance, as in these extracts from "The Goldyn Targe":

> The rosis yong, new spreding of thair knopis,
> War powderit brycht with hevinly beriall droppis,
> Throu bemes rede birnyng as ruby sperkis;
> The skyes rang for schoutyng of the larkis,
> The purpur hevyn, our scailit in silvir sloppis,
> Ourgilt the treis, branchis, lef, and barkis. (22-27)

> The cristall air, the sapher firmament,
> The ruby skyes of the orient,
> Kest beriall bemes on emerant bewis grene;
> The rosy garth depaynt and redolent,
> With purpur, azure, gold, and goulis gent. . . (37-41)

> The roch agayn the rivir resplendent
> As low enlumynit all the leves schene. (44-45)

It would be difficult to find a parallel for this kind of jewelled brilliance, superlative in its own way, in Chaucer. It is possible, moreover, that the dream-vision framework, used by Dunbar in his allegories "The Goldyn Targe" and "The Thrissil and the Rois," came to him through "Tayis Bank" from Pearl; the necessity for a debt to Chaucer is not as obvious as some critics think.

Should it be thought that the likenesses between "Tayis Bank" and the Tretis attest to common authorship rather than influence, it will be seen that the argument for the influence of Pearl on these poems is in no way weakened. If Dunbar himself wrote "Tayis Bank," as is remotely possible, it is almost certain that he had a direct acquaintance with Pearl. It is probable indeed that he had a wide acquaintance with alliterative poetry, and he may even have read (or heard) Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. His handling of the description of his three ladies, with its careful attention to details of dress and coiffure, is a faithful reproduction of the alliterative technique:

> So glitterit as the gold wer thair glorius gilt tressis,
> Quhill all the gressis did gleme of the glaid hewis;
> Kemmit was thair cleir hair, and curiouslie sched
> Attour thair schulderis doun schyre, schyning full bricht;

> With curches, cassin thair abone, of kirsp cleir and thin:
> Thair mantillis grein war as the gress that grew in May sessoun,
> Fetrit with thair quhyt fingaris about thair fair sydis . . . (19-25)

There is a suspicion of laughter in his use of the colour green for the ladies' dress. Was he thinking, possibly, of the description of the Green Knight and his horse, also as "grene as þe gres" (235)?[63] And does not the description of the table loaded with wine-cups poke a little fun at the solemn banquet scenes so common in alliterative poetry:[64]

> Ane cumlie tabil coverit wes befoir tha cleir ladeis,
> With ryalle cowpis apon rawis full of ryche wynis. (34-35)

Earlier alliterative poetry provides other parallels to parts of Dunbar's poem. For example, the introduction and conclusion of the Tretis are not unreminiscent of the beginning of the alliterative dream-debate poem Death and Liffe,[65] a late fourteenth-century or early fifteenth-century work, where the dreamer takes a similar pleasure in the natural scenery around him:

> Methought itt lenghtened my liffe to looke on the bankes.
> Then among the fayre [f]lowers I [f]ettled me to sitt,
> Vnder a huge hawthorne þat hore was of blossomee;
> I bent my backe to the bole, & blenched to the streames.
> Thus prest I [ope]ce [on] the [prayere] greene,
> For breme of the birds & breath of the fflowers:
> & what for waching & wakinge & wandering about,
> In my seate where I sate I sayed a-sleepe . . . (29-36)

The points of resemblance are few but obvious, common elements being flowers and their scent, birdsong, streams (plural in each case; compare Tretis, l. 519), and the "huge hawthorne" (compare Tretis, l. 4). Line 29 may be compared with the Tretis, ll. 519-522, as being similar in thought, while ll. 33-36 are comparable both in sense and construction to the Tretis, ll. 7-9.

Moreover, part of the final description of the joyous singing of the birds and the sound of the streams in the Tretis (517-522) closely recalls a similar, though differently worded, passage in the alliterative Morte Arthure[66] which is itself not unlike the description of the Dreamland in Pearl:

> Alle the feulez thare fleschez, that flyez with wengez,
> ffore thare galede the gowke one greuez fulle lowde,
> Wyth alkyne gladchipe thay gladdene theme seluene:

> Of the nyghtgale notez the noisez was swette,
> They threpide wyth the throstilles, thre hundreth at ones!
> That whate swowynge of watyre, and syngynge of byrdez,
> It myghte salue hyme of sore, that sounde was neuere!
> (926-932)

The last two lines of this quotation especially resemble lines 519-522 of the Tretis:

> The soft sowch of the swyr and soune of the stremys,
> The sueit savour of the sward and singing of foulis,
> Myght confort ony creatur of the kyn of Adam,
> And kindill agane his curage, thocht it wer cald sloknyt.

These parallels are not quoted as evidence of Dunbar's direct indebtedness to either Death and Liffe or Morte Arthure; what they do suggest most forcibly, however, is the extent to which he is working within the alliterative tradition in the opening and closing sections of his poem. In view of the observations that follow it is not unlikely, moreover, that Morte Arthure, with its warlike episodes and almost epic quality, was one of the poems Dunbar particularly had in mind when parodying the heroic virtues of alliterative romance.

Professor Kinsley, in one of the best studies of the Tretis to date, notes the use of archaisms such as schalk, sege, leid, wlonk, bird.[67] Several of these would appear to derive from alliterative poetry, and, like the earlier alliterative poets, Dunbar has a wide range of synonyms for frequently required words like "man," "bright, beautiful." Ignoring the more opprobrious substitutes often used by the wives, one finds the following words for "man, person": persoun, heynd, man, leid, churll, berne, grome, fure, carle, schalk, freke, swane, chuf, page (used of a grown man to suggest his servility and low birth), syre, sege, wicht, creatur. The list is certainly not unimpressive and many an earlier poet might have envied such a stock of synonyms. Leid, berne, schalk, freke and sege do not seem to be part of the native Scots vocabulary and are almost certainly borrowed from the alliterative romances, perhaps with satirical purpose, because they formerly signified "man, warrior, knight," with associations of courage and hardihood in battle, and they are here used in an entirely different context:

> I had a lufsummar leid my lust for to slokyn . . . (283)
>
> And I wer in a beid broght with berne that me likit . . .
> (237)

Quhen schaiffyne is that ald schalk with a scharp rasour (105)

To hald a freke, quhill he faynt, may foly be calit. (210)

Full mony semelyar sege wer service dois mak. . .[68] (469)

It is plain from the almost exclusive use of these words in such contexts as the above that they are being made to connote other manly qualities (or the lack of them) - notably "curage" in the sense in which the word is used by the wives (see, for instance, ll. 67 and 215), as practised "in chalmir" rather than on the battle-field. This accords well with the view that the poem is parodying the older alliterative epic-romance, as well as mocking at courtly sentiment. In one place the usually meaningless tags of courtly alliterated poetry are used with deliberate sardonic sexual suggestion. The Wedo is discussing her public pose and secret solace, in the shape of a discreet lover:

Thought I haif cair, under cloke, the cleir day quhill nyght,
Yit haif I solace, under serk, quhill the sone ryse.[69] (470-471)

Similar is the second wife's description of her impotent husband as "that syphyr [cipher] in bour" (184), bringing to mind such dead conventional courtly phrases as "burde in boure,"[70] and humorous in effect here because the tag "in bour" is given a different turn in a phrase applied to a man. The Wedo's description of her merchant husband as "gracelese one to goif [to gaze upon]" (393) recalls in the same way conventional phrases such as "semly on syht"[71] applied to a lover's lady. There can be little doubt of the deliberate intention behind the use of these phrases; Dunbar is always a meticulous artist. The effect achieved is, broadly, one of parody - not of the chanson de mal mariée and the demande d'amour so much as of the alliterative romance and epic-romance. At the same time, Dunbar satirically contrasts courtly poetical sentiment (in general) with the coarsest reality by means of simple juxtaposition, enjoying a huge joke at the expense of his court audience, so that his poem can boast the merit of a double cutting edge.

There is, therefore, some justification for viewing Dunbar's poem in the light of the alliterative tradition. Dunbar has turned the resources of alliterative poetry to advantage in every conceivable way. On the stylistic level he uses alliteration for minor onomatopoeic effects and for biting emphasis in the wives' and Wedo's speeches. Such emphasis is similar to that in the

contemporary alliterated flytings. While reflecting contemporary alliterative usage, his poem is also linked with the older examples of the alliterative tradition by means of expert parody, which he manages in part simply by choice of theme and pungent contrast, through deploying the alliterative long line in an entirely traditional manner at the beginning and end of the poem, and in part by satirical use of conventional courtly phrases and of archaic terms taken from alliterative romances. As Professor Kinsley observes:

> the alliterative line is the formal base on which Dunbar's tonal contrast is developed between the conventional portraiture and 'enamellit termis' of the prologue, and the coarse sentiment and coarser expression of the monologues which follow.[72]

Thus the poem's debt to Chaucer, though important and considerable, is often exaggerated beyond helpfulness. Chaucer, like his Parson, is a Southerner and cannot "geeste 'rum, ram ruf' by lettre,"[73] and the particular subtleties of Dunbar's poem are well outside his scope. It should not be forgotten, finally, that in some respects the poem is exclusively Scottish. Only in latitudes as far north as Edinburgh is there no real darkness between midnight and dawn on Midsummer's night. Above all, the diablerie and exuberant, irreverent humour of the whole conception are characteristically Scottish and characteristically Dunbar's.

NOTES

1 Assuming him to be the author of The Kingis Quair; his authorship is sometimes questioned.

2 Gavin Douglas, The Aeneid, Prologue to Bk I, l. 339. Selections from Gavin Douglas, ed. David F. C. Coldwell (Oxford, 1964), p. 10.

3 William Dunbar, The Goldyn Targe, l. 253. The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (London, 1932), p. 119.

4 Dr Kurt Wittig in his excellent work The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh and London, 1958) is at especial pains to draw attention to the strong similarities between the Gaelic and Scots traditions. See, in particular, pp. 70-75 and 185-198. He puts the case for Gaelic influence convincingly.

5 The most exhaustive study of French influence on the Middle Scots poets is that by Janet M. Smith: The French Background of Middle Scots Literature (Edinburgh and London, 1934).

6 This may be defined as a formal poetic style, suited to the treatment of religious and courtly subjects, typically employing much newly coined Latinate diction - words such as "matutyne" (adj., morning), "revest" (clothed), "redolent" (diffusing odour), "lucern" (lantern, light), "hodiern" (of today), "regyne" (queen), "matern" (as mother), "superne" (high), "sempitern" (lasting) and "mellifluate" (mellifluous). Dunbar's poem "Ane Ballat of Our Lady" (Poems, ed. Mackenzie, pp. 160-162) is full of such Latinisms. These not only served to widen the range of the Scots tongue but were also thought to beautify and ennoble the sentiment. "Aureation" is often associated in descriptions with ornamental bejewelled imagery, artificial rather than naturalistic in character.

7 See Denton Fox, "The Scottish Chaucerians," Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature, ed. D.S. Brewer (London and Edinburgh, 1966), pp. 164 ff. for some interesting discussion of the term.

8 Of the two textual sources of the poem the later is the Maitland Folio MS (c. 1570-86) in the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, press-mark no. 2553, pages 81-96 of which contain a complete text of the poem. The poem was earlier published from the printing-press of Chepman and Myllar, probably in 1508, but unfortunately the sole surviving copy of this tract, now preserved in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, is incomplete and lacks the first 103 lines of the poem. This text has been admirably reproduced by the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society in their photo-facsimile The Chepman and Myllar Prints (Edinburgh, 1950), pp. 177-189. A number of published texts of the poem are available, one of the best and most accessible being that of Mackenzie (Poems, pp. 85-97). Throughout this article quotations from the Tretis (and other poems by Dunbar) are taken from Mackenzie.

9 Æ. J. G. Mackay, Introduction, The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. John Small, STS, 3 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1893), I, cxlvi.

10 See, for example, Charles Elliott's editorial introduction to Poems by Robert Henryson (Oxford, 1963), and H. Harvey Wood, Two Scots Chaucerians (Henryson and Dunbar), Writers and their Work no. 201 (London, 1967).

11 Mackay, op. cit., I, cxlvi.

12 See Dorothy Everett, "Chaucer's 'Good Ear,'" Essays on Middle English Literature (Oxford, 1955), pp. 139-148.

13 H. Harvey Wood, ed., The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson (Edinburgh and London, 1933), Introduction, p. xxxi: "If Chaucer had not been, they [Henryson and Dunbar] had not been."

14 Poems, ed. Mackenzie, pp. 1-2.

15 "To yow, my purse, and to noon other wight." The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (London, 1957), pp. 539-540. All Chaucer quotations in this article are from this edition.

16 Robinson, op. cit., Explanatory Notes, p. 865.

17 The primary sense here is "coin," called "cors" from the cross imprinted on one side of it. See Mackenzie, Poems, p. 197.

18 The underlying imagery of the poem seems to be that of physical disease, possibly with king's evil, or scrofula, in mind, this being supposedly cured by the touch of a king.

19 There are other possibilities. Janet Smith, p. 150, implies that the French Rhétoriqueurs may have influenced the Scottish poets in this respect, since alliteration was a device in which the former "delighted." Kurt Wittig, pp. 108-110, sees a parallel to such combinations of alliteration and rhyme in Gaelic poetry. No doubt all three influences - French, Gaelic and alliterative - helped to form the taste for alliteration in the Middle Scots poets, but the native alliterative tradition would seem to be the most obvious and insistent influence.

20 The date usually given to the Chepman and Myllar print is 1508, but see J. W. Baxter, William Dunbar, A Biographical Study (Edinburgh and London, 1952), p. 55 and pp. 177-180.

21 Sir William Craigie, "The Scottish Alliterative Poems," PBA, XXVIII (1942), 223, notes that in the latitude of Edinburgh it never becomes really dark on Midsummer night, so that, despite the lateness of the hour, Dunbar is not necessarily stretching credibility in representing clear observation as possible.

22 E.g. Mackay, Poems of William Dunbar, I, lxxxvii. Mackay's Victorian sensibilities are deeply shocked.

23 Two of these are edited by J. Rawson Lumby in Bernardus de cura rei famuliaris with some Early Scottish Prophecies, & c., EETS, OS 42 (London, 1870). See also Collection of Ancient Scottish Prophecies, in Alliterative Verse: reprinted from Waldegrave's edition, M. DC. III, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1833).

24 Ed. F. J. Amours, Scottish Alliterative Poems, STS (Edinburgh and London, 1897), pp. 172-245. See e.g. lines 58, 72, 212, 313, 330 and 353 (Vernon text).

25 The composition of alliterative romances seems to have become unfashionable in Scotland about twenty-five years before the composition of Dunbar's poem. Moreover Rauf Coil3ear (dated c. 1475), the last long Scottish alliterative romance extant, clearly evidences a change in feeling towards traditional romance themes.

26 It is expressed, for example, by George Eyre-Todd, ed., in Mediaeval Scottish Poetry (Glasgow, 1892), p. 151; George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature (London, 1898), p. 187 ("The matter of the poem is an ultra-Chaucerian satire on women."); Mackenzie, Poems, p. xxxi; and Baxter, William Dunbar, p. 54.

27 See, for example, Priscilla Bawcutt, "Dunbar's 'Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo' 185-187 and Chaucer's 'Parson's Tale'," Notes and Queries, CCIX (September 1964), 332-333.

28 Ed. Robinson, pp. 76-88.

29 Baxter, p. 55.

30 Cf. Tretis, ll. 133-141 with the Prologue, ll. 409-412.

31 The sentiment of La Vieille's words, taken in their context -

> Ains nous faict beau filz point n'en doubtes
> Toutes pour tous et tous pour toutes.
> Chascune pour chascun commune
> Et chascun commun pour chascune . . . (14250-53)

(Le Roman de la Rose, ed. Silvio F. Baridon, 2 vols., II (Varese and Milan, 1957), p. 279)

- is very strongly echoed by the first wife (see Tretis, ll. 60-65).

32 K. M. Abenheimer and J. L. Halliday, who psychoanalyze the three central characters in the Tretis and, through them, their makar in their article "The Treatise of the Two Married Women and the Widow," The Psycho-analytic Review, XXXI (1944), 233-252, see the three women of the poem as witch figures "who have escaped from their ordinary surroundings to a secret conventicle" (p. 234).

33 It appears that Chaucer at one time intended to assign the Wife such a fabliau, for, as Robinson (p. 732) notes, there are indications that the Shipman's Tale was originally written for her. See also James Winny, ed., The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale (Cambridge, 1965), p. 23.

34 For evidence of this see, in particular, Tretis, ll. 497-502.

35 I have in mind such dramatic monologues of Browning's as "My Last Duchess" and "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church."

36 J. M. Smith, op. cit., pp. 38-41 and 66.

37 Denton Fox, op. cit., p. 187.

38 Agnes Mure Mackenzie, An Historical Survey of Scottish Literature to 1714 (London, 1933), p. 30. It is worth while contrasting this statement with that of Mackay quoted above (see p. 23).

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 A. M. Mackenzie, p. 26.

42 Bannatyne MS. I have used the text supplied in Select Remains of the Ancient Popular and Romance Poetry of Scotland, collected and ed. David Laing, re-ed. John Small (Edinburgh and London, 1885), pp. 220-226. It is also edited by W. Tod Ritchie for the STS: The Bannatyne Manuscript writtin in Tyme of Pest 1568, 4 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1928-34), III, 296-300.

43 A. M. Mackenzie, p. 140.

44 E. V. Gordon, ed., Pearl (Oxford, 1953), pp. xliii-xliv.

45 See above, p. 27.

46 Baxter, p. 97.

47 J. D. Mackie, A History of Scotland (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 120.

48 Baxter, p. 97.

49 See above, p. 42.

50 J. M. Smith, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

51 John Hepburn Millar, A Literary History of Scotland (London, 1903), p. 44.

52 A. M. Mackenzie, p. 140.

53 An old ballad metre: octaves rhyming abababab made up of lines of alternate iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter; with concentrated alliteration.

54 The Scots "blew" appears from the context to have a sense very similar to the modern one in the phrase "to feel blue." Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary, s. v. BLEW: "To look blew, to seem disconcerted. It conveys both the idea of astonishment and of gloominess . . . Blew, S. [Scottish] is often synon. with blae, livid."

55 Select Remains, p. 221.

56 See J. P. Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English, 2 vols. (Manchester, 1930 and 1935), I, 259.

57 Oakden, I, 140.

58 Cf. "Tayis Bank," 15-16 with Pearl, 57-60.

59 E. V. Gordon, Pearl, Notes, p. 50.

60 This may give reason for supposing either that it was a popular song or that it was his own composition.

61 The italics are my own.

62 1. "The Thrissil and the Rois" (Poems, ed. Mackenzie, pp. 107-112). Cf. l. 9 with "T.B.," 74 ("cristall ene"); ll. 12-14 with "T.B.," 27-30 (about birds); l. 18 with "T.B.," 23-24; l. 19 with "T.B.," 18 and 20 (the use of the adj. broun in connection with flowers is a very striking correspondence); l. 50 with "T.B.," 26 (descriptive of the sun). As in most conventional medieval allegory containing references to women, the young Queen, like the Margaret of "T.B." (80), is described as a rose; the phrase "of most plesance" is used in connection with both ladies too ("Thrissil,"39; "T.B.," 75), and the Queen is also described as a pearl (180). Exactly the same four birds - the mavis, the merle, the lark and the nightingale - figure in "Thrissil" (164, 169, 171 and 173) as in "T.B." (see 5, 27, 29, 31). The birds sing with "a schout" (183); cf. "T.B.," 32 and 115. The spring settings in both poems are similar.

2. "The Goldyn Targe" (Poems, pp. 112-119).
The central portion of this poem with its array of allegorical personages bears no resemblance to "T.B.," but in the May setting and dream framework of the opening and concluding sections there are again a few slight correspondences - of imagery and idea rather than of verbal expression. For the idea of leaves and vegetation forming "curtains" cf. l. 11 with "T.B.," 22. Cf. also ll. 11-12 with "T.B.," 17-18; l. 14 with "T.B.," 21. Again the phenomenon of birds shouting may be noted. cf. l. 25 with "T.B.," 32 and 115. The stream described in l. 28 may be compared with that described in "T.B.," 109-110 and 113. Finally cf. ll. 46-47 with "T.B.," 7; ll. 233-234 with "T.B.," 105-110.

3. "Gladethe thoue Queyne of Scottis Regioun" (Poems, pp. 179-180). This poem in praise of the young Queen Margaret is fairly similar in tone and treatment to the part of "T.B." describing Margaret Drummond. Both descriptions are, however, so full of clichés that it is difficult to claim any definite correspondence other than a common predilection for hackneyed images and expressions. The conventional flower and rose imagery is used in both descriptions (cf. ll. 6 and 25 with "T.B.," 80); Margaret Tudor is a "perle," 4 (cf. "T.B.," 82); the adjective "angellik" is applied in both cases (cf. l. 12 with "T.B.," 63); and either lady is a "diamaunt of delit" (cf. l. 35 with "T.B.," 84). In connection with the last phrase it may be added that the word "deir" is also associated by alliteration on "d" in each case.

63 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, 2nd ed., revised Norman Davis (Oxford, 1968), p. 7.

64 E.g. that held in King Arthur's hall in the first section of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; the marriage feast and Belshazzar's feast in Purity; King Arthur's supper at Randolph Hall in The Awntyrs off Arthure; and Arthur's banquet at Carlisle in Morte Arthure.

65 Ed. Sir Israel Gollancz with a Preface by Mabel Day (London, 1930).

66 Ed. Edmund Brock, EETS, OS 8, 2nd ed. (London, 1871).

67 James Kinsley, "The tretis of the tua mariit wemen and the wedo," MÆ, XXIII (1954), 31-35; in particular, 32-33.

68 The italics are my own.

69 The italics are my own.

70 As in "Blow, Northern Wind," l. 5; Early Middle English Texts, ed. Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson (London, 1951), p. 119.

71 "Blow, Northern Wind," l. 6.

72 Kinsley, op. cit., 35.

73 The Parson's Prologue, ll. 42-43; Robinson, p. 228.