

THE STYLISTIC INFLUENCE OF THE ALLITERATIVE TRADITION
ON THE POETRY OF WILLIAM DUNBAR

By

N. LINDSAY MCFADYEN

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N. Lindsay McFadyen

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Chairman: Richard H. Green
Major Department: English

Writing in Scotland around the beginning of the sixteenth century, William Dunbar was one of the last poets to work in the tradition of English alliterative verse. The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate his use of that tradition, paying particular attention to his handling of alliteration itself, and his use of traditional alliterative formulas. The poems are considered in three groups--the aureate, or high, style, the comic style, and the plain style.

In the aureate poems, such as "The Golden Targe," "The Thistle and the Rose," or "Ane Ballat of Our Lady," Dunbar uses alliteration to augment the effect of formal decoration produced by the Latinate diction. In these poems, the alliteration is frequently used as a linking device, and is often patterned to serve as a complement to meaning.

Dunbar demonstrates his debt to the alliterative tradition most clearly, however, in the comic poems. He uses the unrhymed alliterative long-line in "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," and rhymed alliterative verse in "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy." In the dance poems, "Of a Dance in the Quenis Chalmer" and "The Dance of

the Sevin Deidly Synnis," he uses alliterating sounds both to help characterize the dancers, and to create dance-like rhythmic patterns. Dunbar uses alliterative formulas for comic effects by placing traditional formulas into unexpected, and sometimes bizarre, contexts.

Since for Dunbar the alliterative tradition is primarily a source of ornamentation, the tradition is least influential in the least decorated poems, those of the plain style. Even when alliteration is used frequently in one of these poems, as it is in "The Petition of the Gray Horse, Auld Dunbar," it lacks the careful patterning found in the other styles. The most common use of alliteration in these poems is to contrast a brief alliterating passage to the simplicity of the poem in which it appears. This technique is used, for example, in "Meditatioun in Wyntir" and "To the King That He War Johne Thomsounis Man."

The final chapter is a study of Dunbar's prosody, using Morris Halle's and Samuel J. Keyser's theory of iambic verse, and Paul Kiparsky's theory of morphophonemic variation in poetry. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, it attempts to demonstrate that in some passages Dunbar uses iambic verse to produce metrical effects reminiscent of the alliterative long-line. Second, the chapter attempts to demonstrate that an adequate theory of prosody must take into account not only, as Halle and Keyser do, metrical complexity, the degree to which a line deviates from the "normal" iambic pattern of unstressed-stressed, but also the linguistic complexity, the deviations from the spoken norm which are permissible in poetry. Linguistic complexity is explained in terms of what Kiparsky calls the "metrical range," that is, the linguistic

options open to the poet in placing a line of poetry into a metrical form. Dunbar's metrical range includes options permitting him to ignore unstressed vowels in certain environments, and to give some nominal and verbal suffixes syllabic value. In addition, Dunbar has the poetic option of rendering some lexical stresses metrically insignificant, and of placing stress on normally stressless syntactic dependents, such as prepositions and auxiliary verbs.

Chairman

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A little more than sixty years after the death of William Dunbar, King James VI turned his attention to the instruction of Scottish poets. One bit of royal advice makes an excellent starting point for this investigation of Dunbar's poetry: "Let all zour verse be Literall, sa far as may be quhatsumeuer kynde they be of. . . . By Literall I meane, that the masit pairt of zour lyne, sall rynne vpon a letter."¹ To "rynne vpon a letter" is, for King James, to alliterate. King James's advice clearly implies that a tradition of alliteration had permeated every form of Scottish poetry. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine Dunbar's use of alliteration throughout his work, and to relate his use of this device to the tradition of alliterative poetry.

Before considering Dunbar's debt to the alliterative tradition, a brief survey of criticism is in order. Critics have generally found three strands of influence in Dunbar's work--the fourteenth century southern poetry of Chaucer and Lydgate; French poetry, especially Villon; and finally the native alliterative tradition.

The fifteenth century Scottish "Makars" have been traditionally termed "The Scottish Chaucerians." While Dunbar specifically acknowledges his debt to Chaucer in "The Golden Targe" (ll. 253-261),² this traditional label implies a much greater influence than anyone has been able to prove. William Mackay Mackenzie is certainly right in his suggestion that any "Chaucerian" influence on Dunbar is to be found in the general style of all southern poetry:

What appeals to Dunbar, however, is Chaucer's treatment of "oure rude langage," out of which he had contrived something that was really literature. In this achievement he associates Gower, not undeservedly, and Lydgate. It is the style of these writers, as we should say, that primarily appeals to him.³

The nature and extent of this stylistic influence is difficult to define, and John Speirs is disinclined to admit any substantial Chaucerian influence on Dunbar: "To Dunbar Chaucer has become the 'rose of rethoris all'; the phrase is sufficient to awaken doubt as to the substantiality of Dunbar's appreciation of Chaucer. An examination of his poetry reveals that as a poet he is in fact as different from Chaucer as it was possible for another medieval poet to be."⁴ Denton Fox echoes Speir's opinion, but continues to point out that despite his differences, Dunbar owed much to Chaucer:

First, it seems clear that Dunbar and Chaucer are about as unlike as any two poets can be. Chaucer's poems are typically narrative, philosophical, richly suggestive, and lengthy; Dunbar's poems are just the opposite. Secondly, it seems clear that Dunbar is immensely indebted to Chaucer. His debts are of two kinds, neither of which is very susceptible to measurement. On the technical level, Dunbar's sophisticated metrics, rhetorical devices and diction surely descend, in part, from Chaucer. The question here is not so much of Chaucer inventing new techniques as of his naturalising some of the graces of Continental verse and of his emphasizing, and so strengthening, certain features of the native tradition. One could be precise, and point to certain words and stanzaic forms which Dunbar borrowed from Chaucer, or very often from Lydgate, but the more important part of the debt is more intangible: Dunbar's prevailing syllabic metrics, for instance, and his willingness to accept into his poetry rhetorical figures and learned words.⁵

Fox's "yes and no" attitude toward Chaucerian influences on Dunbar is unsatisfying, but very sensible. In his tremendous versatility, Dunbar seems to have plundered virtually every stylistic tradition available to

him, so that it is difficult to sort out threads of influence, and to prove influence in any particular instance. Fox is also quite correct in another point which is frustrating to anyone attempting to show a poetic influence in Dunbar: the most important influences are likely to be intangible. Dunbar's verbal gift could take another poet's techniques and put them to use in poems which seem uniquely "Dunbarian."

If a direct link between Chaucer and Dunbar is difficult to prove, another approach is to find an intermediary. Pierrepont H. Nichols suggests that the most direct influence on Dunbar was not Chaucer, but Lydgate, and that Dunbar might more properly be called "a Scottish Lydgatian."⁶ Nichols points out that both Dunbar and Lydgate wrote a number of moral didactic poems, while Chaucer produced only one, and in examining the moral poems of Lydgate and Dunbar, concludes that Dunbar's poems "were strongly influenced by the vast array of Lydgate's sententious moral verse. This evidence consists of frequent parallels in tone, purpose, content, design, and stanzaic form, and in some cases of striking verbal similarities."⁷ Nichols strengthens his case by finding Dunbar most similar to Lydgate when Lydgate is least similar to Chaucer. In a later article on Lydgate's contribution to the aureate terms favored by the Scottish poets, Nichols concludes that "the typical aureate style employed by the Scottish-Chaucerians is modelled directly upon those works by Lydgate which show a distinct deviation from the true Chaucerian type of diction."⁸ Ronald D. S. Jack, while acknowledging the value of Nichols's work, has offered a useful correction, demonstrating that although Dunbar borrowed from Lydgate, he was more restrained, and a better craftsman: "Dunbar did not carry these techniques to the extremes

of the English poet. Further, his poetic vision was much more precise than Lydgate's, tending naturally towards short lyrics rather than long narrative verse; brief, almost humorised character portraits, rather than tedious descriptions bolstered by the moralizing and Biblical associations, which are necessary parts in Lydgate's thought progression."⁹ In addition, some of the verbal parallels cited by Nichols are simply the result of Lydgate's and Dunbar's working with the same traditional materials, particularly in their religious poems.¹⁰ At first glance Lydgate's influence seems more promising than Chaucer's because it is more specific. Both Nichols and Jack are able to point to poems or lines in Lydgate which probably influenced poems or lines in Dunbar. On the other hand, the very specificity of their arguments limits their appeal. While we can see Lydgate's stamp on a few poems, the general impression of Lydgate's verbosity is very different from the brief, if highly ornamental, poems of Dunbar. While Lydgate's influence may be useful in understanding a few poems, it does not give a very good overall viewpoint for examining Dunbar's style.

An earlier, but again not very fruitful, approach to Dunbar was the French connection. Janet Smith examined the French influence on Dunbar and reached conclusions startlingly similar to those of Denton Fox about Chaucer's influence: "Yet, though Dunbar owed as much or more to French as to English literary fashions and traditions, he is so original a writer, at least according to mediaeval standards, that there is not much of which we can say definitely that it comes from any particular French author. The French influence was vague and general; Dunbar used

these fashions as he would; they did not master him. The inevitable comparison with Villon shows no personal contact, but rather the similarity of the literary traditions which both poets inherited."¹¹ The similarities between Dunbar and the French are broad. The French had an aureate style which may have influenced Dunbar's vocabulary as much as Lydgate, and Dunbar used French verse forms, especially the ballade. It is even possible to see a new use of Old French forms in "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," and "The Flyting," generally considered two of Dunbar's most characteristically Scottish productions. At the same time it is possible to see a clear distinction between Dunbar's practice and that of the French in one of his most Latinate poems:

Dunbar never copied the Rhetoriquers' manner of twisting and playing with ideas, and though he does imitate their vocabulary and their elaborate rhymes, he does not go far with their tortuous verbal conceits. In "Haile, sterne superne!" he uses the Latinised diction and the internal rhymes popular with the French poets, but the sense is perfectly simple, and he preserves the lyrical quality of the Latin hymns--a quality which had practically disappeared from contemporary French.¹²

More recently A. M. Kinghorn has compared Dunbar to Villon, finding that both poets are "linguistic," in that they depend on experimentation and "an exuberant use of words" both learned and colloquial.¹³ This comparison is not particularly helpful, however, since Kinghorn also finds that "Linguistic comparison between works written in different languages is unprofitable,"¹⁴ and concludes that the differences between the two poets are more important than the similarities:

Where Dunbar accepts, Villon lashes out, for, when all is said and done, he has nothing to lose by snarling. Dunbar's emotions are always kept under tight rein and even his 'flyting' is a brutally studied performance, owing far

more to his fiery virtuosity than to any real hatred or desire to pay off old scores. Dunbar's daemon and Villon's have different origins, and only the superficial similarities which common convention brings about. If Villon is 'modern', in Arnold's sense of the word, Dunbar is rooted in 'the Middle Ages'.¹⁵

A broad French influence in Dunbar's work seems certainly possible, but very difficult to specify clearly enough to be useful.

Kurt Wittig has suggested another non-English influence on Dunbar, that of Gaelic literature. Gaelic influences are even more difficult to trace than French, largely because of the lack of evidence that Dunbar actually knew Gaelic. Wittig is forced to postulate very general connections: "But the fact remains that Dunbar evidently has Celtic blood in his veins, and not a little of the Gaelic temperament; and his own genius has a recognisable affinity with the spirit of Celtic poetry. Even if Dunbar knew little or no Gaelic--and as to that the evidence is inconclusive--he must certainly have been accustomed to the sound of Gaelic poetry."¹⁶ Dunbar's "Gaelic temperament" may be what is considered characteristically Scottish by some of his critics, but it is still too vague to be of much critical value. Dunbar may well have heard Gaelic poetry, but it is difficult to specify the influence of the sound of poetry in a language Dunbar may or may not have understood. At any rate, native English sources supply an adequate basis for the sound of Dunbar's poetry.

A more promising source of influences on Dunbar seems to be the tradition of English alliterative poetry, particularly that of the fourteenth century alliterative revival. Indeed, some acknowledgement of Dunbar's debt to this tradition seems to have become a critical

commonplace. A. J.G. Mackay wrote in "Introduction" to the STS edition that he "used the three kinds of poetry which preceded him--the Alliterative of northern England and southern England, the Chaucerian of southern England, and the French of Villon and the poets of the Renaissance--but did not allow his originality and independence to be overpowered" (I, cxlviii). George Staintsbury termed Dunbar, "prosodically speaking, Chaucer plus Langland, plus a very considerable proficient in the lyric forms," adding that Dunbar's use of alliterative verse in "The Tretis" is "by far the best that we have out of Piers Plowman itself, and perhaps Cleanness."¹⁷ C. S. Lewis called Dunbar "the accomplished master of one tradition that goes back to Beowulf and of another that goes back to the Troubadours."¹⁸ Denton Fox has stated the general case for the importance of the alliterative tradition in Middle Scots poetry:

But it remains true that the pre-Chaucerian tradition was more available to Dunbar, for instance, than it was to his English contemporaries. The most obvious sign of this is that alliterative poetry, which in England was essentially dead by the fifteenth century, was still influential in Scotland at the beginning of the sixteenth century. There is, first, the ordinary unrhymed alliterative line, as in Piers Plowman, which occurs in Dunbar's The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo. Then there is the rhymed alliterative stanza, ending in a group of short lines, which is used by Henryson, Douglas and numerous anonymous poets, often for humorous purposes. A more indirect symptom is the habit which Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas have of using alliteration very heavily in verse which is structurally non-alliterative.¹⁹

The only investigation of Dunbar's use of alliteration to my knowledge is Edwin Morgan's study, which asserts that "the older tradition was very pervasive and very congenial to the Scottish spirit, and they pay it that debt of exemplification which is often more revealing than their addresses to Chaucer."²⁰ Morgan, however, seems to see the influence of alliterative

verse primarily in the satiric poems:

Alliteration of the 'popular' side of poetry recommended itself to the Scots because it was an apt medium for racy narrative, because it established an immediate link between verse and the fund of alliteration in common proverbs, tags of speech and phrases from ballads and songs, and because it encouraged the peculiar Scots leaning towards the wild and the outspoken, the vituperative and the incongruous. Alliteration on the 'art' side of poetry is one aspect of a larger movement which affected all the poets of the time: the wakening consciousness of language as a ground open to deliberate enrichment and of literature as a growth springing from that prepared soil.²¹

As his comments on the "art" side of alliteration indicate, he is willing to admit that the alliterative style might have had a general influence on all the poetry of the time, but he generally confines his comments on alliteration to the satiric poems.

If Dunbar's debt to the alliterative tradition is so widely acknowledged, further study of the matter would seem pointless. The justification for such an undertaking is that although the relationship has been acknowledged, it has never been thoroughly studied. Morgan's article points in the right direction, but he underestimates the impact of the alliterative tradition on Dunbar's non-comic poetry. An examination of Dunbar's use of the tradition is, I think, crucial for an understanding of his poetic technique.

I have considered the poems in three groups, placing them in categories described by Denton Fox: "Dunbar's courtly allegories, hymns, and encomiastic poems are written in an artificial, ornamented, and often Latinate style; his moral poems and petitions are in a simple, easy, but still dignified style; and his humorous and vituperative poems are in a Scots so broad as to be almost a jargon."²² The first of these groups I

have termed the aureate style, although not all the poems included in this category have a large number of "aureate terms," the unusual Latinate words with which many fifteenth century poets decorated their poems. The second group I have called the plain style, for the relative absence of ornament in this category, and the third group the comic style. The boundaries between these categories are not always clear. In some cases it is difficult to decide whether a poem belongs in the aureate or the plain style, or the plain style or the comic. Nevertheless, the three divisions offer an adequate stylistic grouping of Dunbar's poetry. Any disputes over the classification of individual poems should not damage my main argument, since I will apply the same method of analysis to the poems in each group.

Notes

¹The Poems of James VI of Scotland, ed. James Craigie, Scottish Text Society, Ser. 3, No. 22 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1955), I, 76. In further references "Scottish Text Society" will be abbreviated "STS."

²All my citations of Dunbar's poetry are from The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. John Small, "Introduction" by A. J.G. Mackay, "Notes" and "Glossary" by Walter Gregor, STS, Ser. 1, Nos. 2, 4, 16, 21, and 29 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1893). Poems will be cited in the text by the title assigned in the STS edition and line number. References to other portions of the edition will be cited in the text as "STS edition."

³W. Mackay Mackenzie, "William Dunbar," in Edinburgh Essays in Scots Literature (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1933), pp. 29-30.

⁴John Speirs, The Scots Literary Tradition, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 54.

⁵Denton Fox, "The Scottish Chaucerians," in Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature, ed. D. S. Brewer (University Ala.: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 186.

⁶Pierrepont H. Nichols, "William Dunbar as a Scottish Lydgatian," PMLA, 46 (1931), 214-224.

⁷Nichols, p. 215.

⁸Pierrepont H. Nichols, "Lydgate's Influence on the Aureate Terms of the Scottish Chaucerians," PMLA, 47 (1932), 522.

⁹Ronald D. S. Jack, "Dunbar and Lydgate," Studies in Scottish Literature, 8 (1971), 217.

¹⁰Jack, p. 219.

¹¹Janet M. Smith, The French Background of Middle Scots Literature (1934, rpt. n.p.: The Folcroft Press, 1969), p. 62.

¹²Smith, p. 76.

¹³A. M. Kinghorn, "Dunbar and Villon: A Comparison and a Contrast," Modern Language Review, 62 (1967), 205.

¹⁴Kinghorn, p. 206.

¹⁵Kinghorn, p. 208.

¹⁶Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), p. 61. Alliteration and internal rhyme, devices Dunbar used, appear in Gaelic poetry. See Charles W. Dunn, "Celtic," in Versification: Major Language Types, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (New York: MLA and New York Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 136-147.

¹⁷George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody, 2nd ed. (1923, rpt. New York: Russel and Russel, 1961), I, 273-4.

¹⁸C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 97.

¹⁹Denton Fox, "The Scottish Chaucerians," pp. 166-167.

²⁰Edwin Morgan, "Dunbar and the Language of Poetry," Essays in Criticism, 2 (1952), p. 139.

²¹Morgan, p. 143.

²²Denton Fox, "The Poetry of William Dunbar," Diss. Yale 1956, p. 9.

CHAPTER II

THE AUREATE STYLE

In the aureate poems, Dunbar demonstrates most clearly his debt to Latin and French, both in his vocabulary and in his reworking of themes such as the allegorical love affair derived from the Roman de la Rose. Since foreign traditions are so obvious in these poems, it is particularly interesting to see Dunbar's extensive use of stylistic devices borrowed from the native alliterative tradition in these poems. Before attempting to examine Dunbar's use of the alliterative tradition, however, it is necessary to discuss the tradition itself. The discussion will concern both the historical evidence that the alliterative tradition was alive in Scotland when Dunbar was writing and specific effects the tradition might have been expected to have on his poetic style.

In Dunbar's time, English poetry already had a long tradition of combining rhyme with alliterative poetry. Rhyme began to make its way into English verse in the late Old English period, when it was occasionally used, like alliteration, to bind half-lines together. The tenth century poem "Judgement Day II," for instance, "substitutes end rhyme for alliteration in a few places and even combines the two poetic techniques in a couple of lines."¹ "Judith," also a tenth century poem, has an unexpected number of end rhymes.² The most extensive combination of rhyme with alliterative poetry in Old English is the "Riming Poem," which Stanley Greenfield terms "a tour de force of eighty-seven lines, in which the first verse, or half-line, not only rhymes with the second but also preserves the customary alliterative pattern of Old English meter."³

This tendency to add rhymes to alliterative verse continues in the Middle English period, when rhyme can be seen exerting its own influence on native verse forms. Dorothy Everett writes, "Early Middle English verse has one peculiarity of its own, which seems to have accompanied, and was perhaps caused by, the use of rhyme or assonance to link the half-lines. In many of the rhyming lines there is a more or less regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, so that they sound like rough couplets. . . . Such lines can have alliteration or not, and the half-lines can have two, three, or four stresses, three being the most usual number."⁴ The source of this variation in early Middle English is difficult to trace. Prof. Everett suggests that either the influence of French poetry or tendencies already present in late Old English may have been responsible.

The combination of rhyme and alliteration became very popular during the fourteenth century:

The combination of alliteration and rime, two elements originally opposed to each other, began to find favor in England towards the middle of the fourteenth century, and travelled northwards to Scotland, where it reached its highest popularity about a hundred years later. These two elements then are found blended in every variety of metre, from the simple couplet to the most intricate stave.⁵

Since the combination of rhymed and alliterative verse would have reached its peak of popularity in Scotland about the middle of the fifteenth century, or roughly the time of Dunbar's birth (c. 1460), it is hardly surprising to find alliterative verse influential in Dunbar's poetry.

Although rhymed alliterative poetry may have reached its peak in Scotland in the middle of the fourteenth century, the alliterative

tradition remained alive in Scotland throughout the sixteenth century. King James VI discusses the uses of alliteration in Ane Schort Treatise. Part of his discussion was cited at the beginning of the first chapter; for convenience the entire passage may be quoted here:

Let all zour verse be Literall, sa far as may be, quhatsumeuer kynde they be of, bot speciallie Tumbling verse for flyting. By Literall I meane, that the maist pairt of zour lyne, sall rynne vpon a letter, as this tumbling lyne rynnys vpon F.

Fetching fude for to feid it fast furth of the Fairie.

Zy man obserue that thir Tumbling verse flowis not on that fassoun, as vtheris dois. For all vtheris keipis the reule quhilk I gaue before, To wit, the first fute short the secound lang, and sa furth. Quhair as thir has two short, and ane lang throuch all the lyne, quhen they keip ordour: albeit the maist pairt of thame be out of ordour, & keipis na kynde nor reule of Flowing, & for that cause are callit Tumbling verse: except the short lynis of aucht in the hinder end of the verse, the quhilk flowis as vther verses dois, as ze will find in the hinder end of this buke, quhair I giue exemple of sindrie kyndis of versis.⁶

The tradition of rhymed alliterative poetry is evident in the King's taste for as much alliteration as possible in any kind of poetry. It is also obvious that the King knows about the old alliterative line, which he terms "Tumbling verse," although he mistakes it for an irregular anapestic.

King James's testimony is important because it shows conclusively that the alliterative tradition survived in Scotland long after Dunbar's death. The King's statement is contradictory, however, in that it seems to imply two opposing trends in the use of the alliterative tradition in Scottish poetry. On the one hand he says that all verse should have as much alliteration as possible, "quhatsumeuer kynde they be of." On the

other hand, he says that alliterative verse itself should be used for flyting, a poetic battle of humorous abuse.

The King's attitude toward alliterative verse may probably be explained by two causes. First, he seems to dislike the lack of a steady meter in the old Germanic line. His censure of "Tumbling verse" is based on its lack of a regular rhythm rather than its alliteration. Oakden offers another reason that alliterative poetry might have seemed comic to a sixteenth century reader. Writing about rhymed alliterative verse, Oakden observes:

The experiment [combining rhyme and alliteration] was not successful, yet looking back we are able to see the danger involved. It was the desire for ornament that led these poets to overcrowd their lines with alliterating sounds, and to employ so many metrical devices. In its last stages the long line is a mere jingle of sounds.⁷

An irregular line, which had become "a mere jingle of sounds," might well sound comical to the courtly audience which King James represents and for which Dunbar wrote. Such an audience would, however, appreciate the carefully controlled ornamentation of Dunbar's aureate poetry.

Edmund Spenser's poetry provides additional evidence the alliterative tradition survived in England until the end of the sixteenth century. Ants Oras finds the alliterative tradition influencing Spenser in ways resembling those I hope to demonstrate in Dunbar:

Spenser's method, with its emphasis on the beginning of the syllable, may quite possibly be connected with the native alliterative tradition, to which, unlike his master Chaucer, he so patently belongs: a great number of his line endings alliterate with words within the line. In The Pearl, for example--a poem which perhaps influenced him--a similar combination of rhyme with even more pronounced alliteration yields closely parallel results.⁸

The results of Spenser's use of the alliterative tradition are apparent in his self-conscious linguistic virtuosity:

Spenser is far from disguising his art. He wants his effects to be duly noted. This is true of him almost throughout. He likes to accumulate devices of the same kind, to show off his skill in playing with them, and to arrange them as clearly and geometrically as possible, which often leads to symmetry.⁹

But, turning back, the historical evidence indicates that the alliterative tradition was alive to influence Dunbar. The extent and nature of its influence is to be found in the statistical and stylistic evidence. The most obvious indicator of any influence of the alliterative tradition in Dunbar would be the frequency with which he uses alliteration within his lines. Before statistical evidence may be profitably discussed, however, it is necessary to understand what is being counted, which means that there must be some definition of alliteration. Merle Fifield defines alliteration for the Middle English lyric as "the repetition of a consonant initial to an accented syllable or initial to a word."¹⁰ This definition appears too restrictive in one sense in that it fails to recognize vocalic alliteration, which Dunbar uses even in the alliterative "Tretis":

That full of eldyng is, et anger, et all euill thewis.(1.119)

On the other hand, her definition is too broad in that it permits any word-initial consonants to alliterate. Applying Fifield's definition strictly, we would have to say that the following line alliterates because of its unstressed determiners:

How all the feldis wyth thai lilies quhite.("Targe," 1.65)

In this dissertation, I have defined alliteration as the repetition of a

consonant, if any, initial to a word bearing full stress or initial to the stem of a stress-bearing word if that stem is preceded by an unstressed prefix. Under this definition, any vowel can alliterate with any other vowel.¹¹ The only constraint on the definition is that the traditional clusters of st, sp, and sk are assumed to alliterate as single consonants. Dunbar's practice with these s clusters is rather ambiguous. In the "Tretis" he can write a line with three sk's and one s:

To see him scart his awin skyn grit scunner I think. (1.93)

It is difficult to decide whether see participates in the alliteration of the line or not. Dunbar's rhymed poetry abounds in lines which have one s and one cluster:

A saill, als quhite as blossom vpon spray. ("Targe," 1.51)

Because such instances are at best doubtful, I have not counted them as alliterating lines.

The statistical evidence strongly supports the proposition that Dunbar was influenced by the alliterative tradition. Of 4,814 lines of rhymed poetry, 2,069 lines, or 43.0%, alliterate. For the sake of comparison, Oakden sees a survival of the alliterative tradition in "many other important works in M.E. with some alliteration on the stressed syllables. These usually have less than 33 percent of the lines with such alliteration."¹² In her survey of fifteenth century lyrics, Merle Fifield found alliteration in 35.2% of the lines of the religious poems, and 26.4% of the secular ones.¹³ Clearly, Dunbar uses more alliteration than most of his contemporaries.

Now let us examine some of the general traits of alliterative poetry, other than alliteration itself, which may have survived the

transition. Oakden lists eleven features of rhymed alliterative verse.¹⁴ While not all the features Oakden lists are especially common, even in rhymed alliterative poetry, they offer a general indication of what we might expect to find in poetry heavily influenced by the alliterative tradition. I will paraphrase Oakden's list, with a comment on the appropriateness of each item to Dunbar:

1. There is some sort of stanzaic arrangement. This is true of all Dunbar's rhymed poetry.

2. Enjambment does not occur, but the caesura is strong. Enjambment is unusual in Dunbar, and many lines can be read with a caesura.

3. Violations of the natural stress for the sake of alliteration are rare. Dunbar generally alliterates only on stressed syllables. Unstressed prefixes of Romance words, which frequently alliterate, are the only common exceptions.

4. Consecutive lines may be grouped by identical alliteration. This device is very common in Dunbar.

5. The ending / x (a feminine ending) is less common than in the rhymeless long line. Dunbar's rhymed poetry offers relatively fewer clear instances of the pattern / x than "The Tretis." The placement of extra syllables at the end of lines is ambiguous, however, for reasons to be discussed in Chapter V.

6. Vocalic alliteration occurs. It also occurs in Dunbar.

7. Alliterative groups, consonant clusters alliterating as a single consonant, are usually observed. Dunbar is reasonably careful about these clusters in "The Tretis." His practice in the rhymed lyrics is more ambiguous.

8. Repetition is used to link stanzas. This device is common in Dunbar's poetry.

9. Alliterative types, the normal patterns of alliterating syllables found in the long line (aa/ax, ax/ax, xa/ax, ba/ab, ab/ab), are still used. Dunbar sometimes follows the old patterns, but generally his placement of alliterating syllables follows no rule. This freedom of placement of alliterating syllables entered the tradition long before Dunbar's time, as soon as poets found substitutes for alliteration in linking half-lines, as Dorothy Everett observes:

But, while in 'classical' verse the alliteration is the sole means of linking the half-lines, in 'popular' verse, rhyme or assonance can be used, either with alliteration or without it. This occasional use of rhyme or assonance is peculiar to the verse of the late Old English and early Middle English periods; it is not a feature of the fourteenth-century long line. When alliteration is used (as it is in the majority of lines), its placing does not conform to the strict rules of 'classical' verse. It is common to find the last stressed syllable of a line bearing the alliteration, as in 'faren mid feondes in eche fur' in the Departing Soul's Address to the Body; and there are a number of other irregularities.¹⁵

10. The number of unstressed syllables in each line is usually consistent throughout the poem. The number of syllables in each line is consistent. The ratio of stressed to unstressed may vary.

11. The rhythm of these poems generally precludes extended half-lines, and the poets usually avoid clashing rhythm. In adapting his poetry to a syllabic meter, it is impossible for Dunbar to write extended half-lines. Clashing rhythm, which is the placement of fully stressed syllables in adjacent metrical positions, is certainly possible for Dunbar. Still, it is safe to say he "usually avoids" it.

There are two other aspects of Dunbar's poetry, its diction and

structure, which may have been influenced at least partially by the alliterative tradition. Dunbar's fondness for alliterative phrases is the aspect of his diction which is most clearly related to the alliterative tradition. Everett, Benson, and Oakden have noted that alliterative poets seemed to have a stock of phrases, or formulas, and Oakden traces some of them into non-alliterative southern poets such as Chaucer, Gower, and Robert Mannyng.¹⁶ Dunbar's use of alliterative phrases seems almost certain to have been influenced by the formulaic tags of the alliterative poets, and some of the phrases of Dunbar's poetry are shared with other poets of the same period. The work of Oakden and of Merle Fifield, both of whom have compiled extensive lists of alliterative phrases used from Old English through the fifteenth century, indicates the extent to which Dunbar borrowed from a common store of phrases.¹⁷

Another less direct influence of the alliterative tradition on Dunbar's diction is his love of ornate words. Dunbar's use of "aureate terms," learned borrowings from Latin, has received a great deal of critical attention in which the medieval rhetoricians are usually cited as the source for this sort of decoration.¹⁸ If the rhetoricians laid a theoretical foundation for an aureate style, the alliterative poets at least provided an example. Larry Benson observes that fourteenth century poets "found in the alliterative line a style that tended almost naturally toward a heavily adorned verse of the sort that the rhetoricians recommended."¹⁹ There is even a precedent in the alliterative tradition for the use of Romance words: "The traditional vocabulary is often enlarged by a wealth of technical terms, usually French, to do with

hunting, architecture, armour, and so forth."²⁰ Admittedly, Dunbar has little use for architectural or hunting terms, but the tradition does support the practice of borrowing from French when no English word comes to mind.

The syntax of alliterative poetry lends itself naturally to parallel constructions, since a poet writing in half-lines finds it very easy to make the second half-line a variant of the first. To avoid the monotony of too many parallels, the alliterative poet relies on contrasts. According to Larry Benson, "The tension between the movement toward parallelisms and that toward contrasts lends the alliterative line much of its strength."²¹ Jerome Mandel finds contrast central to an understanding of Old English poetry:

I find that much Old English poetry is built upon the principle of contrast, that contrastive collocation works constantly in the language of the poem to determine the position and force of particular words in the poetic line, and that the whole can often best be understood in terms of this contrast. Thus, on the one hand, the argument that the Anglo-Saxon poet consciously and all but methodically employed contrast to announce and amplify his theme, shift the focus and direction of his poem, develop an idea or sophisticate an argument, and add a certain excitement to his language, suggests that contrast is an absolutely necessary rhetorical tool of the poet. And on the other hand, the argument that Old English poems can often best be understood in terms of an essential contrast or sequence of contrasts suggests contrast as a basic structural principle.²²

Although both parallels and contrasts are common in Dunbar, contrasts are abundant enough to have become the subject of a dissertation.²³

The technique of contrast may, in alliterative poetry, be expanded to provide the structure for an entire poem. Mandel writes that "by using the technique of contrast in small, large, and larger blocks of lines, the poet creates a structure which, in itself, contains and communicates

the essential concerns of the poem."²⁴ Working within a tradition of contrastive poetry, a poet might tend to make his point by juxtaposition, which Larry Benson finds a stylistic trait of alliterative poetry:

Like the modern writer, the alliterative poet defines his concepts by the juxtaposition of their parts, capitalizing on the clash of perspectives that this action allows. Such a style, in which the parts of an action, object, or concept are juxtaposed with a minimum of explicit explanation, leads at once to a multiplication of specific detail and to a structure that renders the details meaningful.²⁵

Dorothy Everett finds a similar tendency in alliterative verse which she describes as "certain fixed habits of composition, intimately connected with the nature of the alliterative line; notably a cumulative method of description, the piling up of phrases, usually a half-line in length and often similar in construction, each of which makes its contribution to the total impression."²⁶ This aspect of alliterative poetry may help to explain a trait of Dunbar's style which Denton Fox has observed, that "in all of Dunbar's poems the prose sense is negligible and the decoration, the poetic artifices, are everything. . . . Dunbar's poems are static, ending where they begin, but are made tightly unified by technical poetic devices."²⁷ The meaning of Dunbar's poems comes, I think, from the juxtaposition of specific details within a meaningful structure. Any reading I have found of "The Golden Targe," for instance, rests on the wealth of its descriptive detail and the juxtaposition of its images.²⁸ The "prose sense," to use Fox's term, in Dunbar's poems is very weak; his strength lies in his poetic sense, which is deeply rooted in the alliterative tradition.

To summarize briefly, historical evidence indicates that the alliterative tradition was still active in Scotland in Dunbar's time,

although by then alliteration was frequently coupled with rhyme. Dunbar's poetry contains the eleven stylistic traits Oakden finds in rhymed alliterative verse. In addition, Dunbar employs alliteration in an unusually large number of his lines, and he shows less obvious influences of the alliterative tradition in his use of unusual words and poetic structures based on contrast and juxtaposition. The analysis of these traits in Dunbar's poetry will occupy the remainder of this chapter and of the entire study, with the exception of the chapter of Dunbar's prosody.

Dunbar's aureate poems may be divided into three groups--love visions, ceremonial poems, and religious poems. The love visions include "The Golden Targe," "Sen That I Am a Presoneir," and "In May as that Aurora Did Vpspring," also called "The Merle and the Nightingale." "The Thistle and the Rose" could equally well be classified as a love vision or a ceremonial poem, and so makes a convenient bridge between the two groups. The ceremonial poems include one connected with the marriage of James IV and Margaret Tudor, "Blyth Aberdene," as well as two dedicated to Bernard Stewart, "The Ballad of Lord Bernard Stewart," and "The Elegy on the Death of Bernard Stewart." The religious poems include "Ane Ballat of Our Lady," "Rorate Celi Desuper" and "Done is a Battell on the Dragon Blak."

"The Golden Targe," probably the best known of Dunbar's poems, is one of the finest examples of his aureate style. It is also a very careful reworking of material from non-native sources. According to Denton Fox, "Dunbar handles the traditional Roman de la Rose themes in an extremely conservative manner; with a few minor exceptions, every part of the Targe can be paralleled many times over in earlier poems."²⁹ What is

surprising in a poem so heavily indebted to continental traditions for its subject matter is to find so many traces of the alliterative tradition in the style of the poem.

A brief summary of the poem's contents may be useful before turning to an analysis of its style. The dreamer, who narrates the poem, goes to sleep in a garden by a river bank on a May morning. In his dream, a ship with white sails appears, from which a hundred ladies dressed in green disembark. They are joined by two groups of classical deities, the goddesses and Apollo forming one court, and the other gods forming another. When the ladies begin to dance, the dreamer creeps forward for a better look, but he is spotted by Venus, who orders his arrest. The dreamer is defended by Reason, who bears the Golden Targe, until Presence blinds him by throwing a powder in his eyes. After the dreamer's arrest, Dangere turns him over to Heavyness. Eolus blows his bugle; the gods and ladies depart on their ship, firing guns which awaken the dreamer. In the final twenty-seven lines of the poem Dunbar praises Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate for making English a fit language for poetry. He closes by bidding his own poem hide, because of its deficiencies in rhetoric.

The most obvious influence of the alliterative tradition on the poem is the sheer frequency of alliteration. Of the 279 lines in the poem 50.2%, or 140 lines, contain alliteration. Since the verse form in this poem requires only rhyme, Dunbar has great flexibility in the placement of alliteration. He uses the alliteration very skillfully as a means of emphasis and linkage. The alliteration is never gratuitous, but rather lends to the ornate, almost bejeweled quality of the poem's style which is so appropriate to its imagery and theme.

An excellent example of Dunbar's use of alliteration in "The Golden Targe" is the first stanza of the poem:

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;
 Wp sprang the goldyn candill matutyne,
 With clere depurit bemes cristallyne,
 Glading the mery foulis in thair nest;
 Or Phebus was in purpur cape revest
 Wp raise the lark, the hevyns menstrale fyne
 In May, in till a morrow myrthfullest. (11.1-9)

Only three lines (the third, fifth, and ninth) alliterate, but the three alliterating lines emphasize the most important points in the stanza. The first two lines merely establish the time of day through classical allusion. The third line, reinforced by triple alliteration, announces the most important element of the poem, the dreamer and his actions. This line also announces that the poem will take place in a "rosere," or rose garden, a setting which would immediately put Dunbar's audience in mind of the Roman de la Rose and the corpus of allegorical love poetry which followed it. The alliteration in the fifth line is appropriate since it is the first image of a system of light images which play an important role in the description of the garden, and which culminate in the final stanzas in which Dunbar praises other poets for their power to "illuminate" a subject or the language (11.253-270). The final two lines of the stanza are the most complex in their alliteration. First, the two lines are linked by alliteration since menstrale is close enough to the end of the penultimate line to be linked to the triple alliteration of the final line. In this case, the alliteration on menstrale creates a link between the first stanza and the second by emphasizing one quality of the lark, its singing. The first line of the next stanza continues

the image of "hevyns menstrale":

Full angellike thir birdis sang thair houris. (l.10)

Combining alliteration and imagery, this linkage forms an interesting counterpoint to the rhyme and stanzaic patterns of the verse. The triple alliteration of the final line brings the stanza to a close, emphatically pointing out the time of year, May, a time for lovers. The alliterating word morrow makes the stanza symmetrical by returning to the images of morning. Finally, as another critic has observed, the line creates an alliterative "crescendo," in which each alliterating word is one syllable longer than the one preceding it.³⁰

An indication of Dunbar's artistry with alliteration is his sense of where not to use alliteration when a brief undecorated passage will yield a greater effect through contrast, or when a simple style is appropriate to the subject. After describing the garden and arrival of the ship, for instance, Dunbar writes one stanza saying that neither he nor any other poet could do justice to the scene:

Discriue I wald, bot quho coud wele endyte
 How all the feldis wyth thai lilies quhite
 Depaynt war brycht, quhilk to the hevyn did glete:
 Nocht thou, [H]omer, als fair as thou coud wryte,
 For all thine ornate stilis so perfyte;
 Nor yit thou, Tullius, quhois lippis suete
 Off rethorike did in to termes flete:
 Your aureate tongis both bene all to lyte,
 For to compile that paradise complete.(ll.64-72)

Two lines of this stanza, the first and eighth, have a weak sort of alliteration which I have not counted in my tabulations of alliterating lines. The first line has two c's, pronounced /k/,³¹ but the second falls on an unstressed word. The eighth line has the phrase "both bene,"

although it is doubtful that either word in the phrase could bear stress. This type of alliteration is unusual in Dunbar. Normally, he is careful to place alliterating sounds only on stressed syllables, or at least first syllable of major category words. The weak alliteration in these lines does, however, serve a definite purpose. In both lines, Dunbar specifically states the incapacity of poets, himself in the first line, classical poets in the eighth, to recreate in language the scene he has created in his imagination. The poverty of decoration in this stanza, and the obvious inadequacy of the alliteration in the first and eighth lines underscore the limitations of language. Only in the final line, when Dunbar turns his attention away from the craft of poetry to his dream, does his language regain its customary decoration. The final line carries triple alliteration supplemented with identical prefixes on the first and last major words.

Dunbar uses extremely heavy concentrations of alliteration in "The Golden Targe" in moments of particular dramatic intensity. When Reason drives off Venus' first attack, she assembles a new and stronger assault force. The tension in the anticipation and beginning of the second attack is reflected in two stanzas in which fifteen of eighteen lines alliterate:

Quhen Venus had persauit this rebute,
 Dissymilance scho bad go mak persute,
 At all powere to perse the Goldyn Targe;
 And scho that was of doubilnes the rute,
 Askit hir choise of archeris in refute.
 Wenus the best bad hir go wale at large;
 Schö tuke Presence plicht ankers of the barge,
 And Fair Callyng that wele a flayn coud schute,
 And Cherising for to complete hir charge.

Dame Hamelynes scho tuke in company,
 That hardy was, and hende in archery,
 And broucht dame Beautee to the felde agayn;
 With all the choise of Venus cheualry
 Thay come, and bikkerit vnabaisitly:
 The schour of arowis rappit on as rayn;
Perilouse Presence, that mony syre has slayne,
 The bataill broucht on bordour hard vs by,
 The salt was all the sarar suth to sayn. (ll.181-198)

One of the lines without alliteration, the first line of the second stanza quoted, is linked to the second line of its stanza by alliteration on Hamelynes. The alliteration in these stanzas functions artistically to highlight the battle. Such heavy use of alliteration in a battle scene, even an allegorical battle, may be a reminder of action scenes in alliterative romances.

Linking one line to another is a common function of alliteration in Middle English verse. Several examples in which one word in a line is linked by alliteration to a following line have been discussed. Dunbar also uses identical alliteration in succeeding lines to link them into a unit crossing the patterns of linkage created by rhyme. For example, two lines may be joined by imagery and alliteration:

So lustily agayn thai lykand lemys,
 That all the lake as lamp did leme of licht. (ll. 29-30)

Dunbar uses a more subtle technique of linking lines with alliteration in two stanzas of "The Golden Targe." This technique first appears in the description of the court of goddesses:

There saw I May, of myrthfull monethis quene,
 Betuix Aprile, and June, her sister schene,
 Within the gardyng walking vp and down,
 Quham of the foulis gladdith al bedene;
 Scho was full tender in hir yeris grene.
 Thare saw I Nature present hir a gounn

Rich to behald, and nobil of renounn,
 Off ewiry hew under the hevin that bene
 Depaynt, and broud be gude proporcioun. (11.82-90)

The artistic problem in this stanza is to link May, at the beginning of the stanza, to Nature at the end. In the first line, May participates in triple alliteration. The next five lines lack internal alliteration, but four of the lines, the third through sixth, each contain one word alliterating on g. The placement of these words follows a definite pattern, on the fourth position of the third line, the sixth position of the fourth, and the tenth position of the fourth and fifth lines. These alliterating words move in an orderly procession through the stanza from left to right, connecting May in the garden to Nature's presentation of the gown..

Nature is tied to the description of the gown in the following line through the interlocking pattern of n's and r's ornamenting that line. The rich alliteration of this line, "Rich to behald, and nobil of renounn," forms, like the flowered gown of May, a bright contrast to the sparseness which has preceded it. The remaining two stanzas of the line alliterate, complementing the ornate gown of May.

Dunbar uses a similar technique in the third from last stanza of the poem, in which he praises Chaucer:

O reuerend Chaucere, rose of rethoris all,
 As in oure tong ane flour imperiall,
 That raise in Britane ewir, quho redis rycht,
 Thou beris of makaris the tryumph riall;
 Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall
 This mater coud illumynit haue full brycht:
 Was thou noucht of oure Inglisch all the lycht,
 Surmounting ewiry tong terrestriall,
 Alls fer as Mayes morow dois mydneycht? (11.253-261)

The stanza begins with alliteration on r, which is repeated in the third line. The fifth through seventh lines lack internal alliteration, but

are linked to each other through vocalic alliteration on anamalit, illumynit, and Inglisch. The alliterating words fall on the third, fifth, and sixth positions of their respective lines, preserving the same left to right pattern as in the stanza on May. Aside from acting as stepping stones helping to bind the stanza together, the alliteration from line to line in this instance heightens key words. Denton Fox has suggested that the final stanzas of "The Golden Targe" are a comment on poetry, in which Dunbar reveals his aesthetic through his own poetic imagery: "Dunbar suggests several metaphors for good writing, a principle one being that of light. Gower and Lydgate are said to have illuminated and made clear the language, while Chaucer is given almost solar powers. . . . But the most revealing image and the one which connects all the others is 'anamalit.' Enamel is clear and brilliant, colorful, with a rich sweet beauty."³² If this interpretation is correct, Dunbar has expressed his ideal of poetic style, "anamalit, illumynit Inglisch," through the line to line alliteration of these three lines. The imagery is complemented by the rhyming words, celicall, brycht, and lycht. The images are joined by the two traditions in which Dunbar works, alliterative and Romance, into a statement of his poetic.

Alliteration forms a large part of Dunbar's enameling, and Dunbar uses the store of traditional alliterating phrases. Several phrases in "The Golden Targe" have clear antecedents in the alliterative phrases from fifteenth century lyrics listed by Merle Fifield.

Dunbar	Fifield
leme of licht (1.30)	lyght lemys (p. 437)
gold and goulis gent (1.41)	in grene, in gold, in gowlis gen (p. 436)

fresh as flouris (1.59)	fresshe floure (p. 435)
fair feynit fortune (1.79)	fair fortune, and felicitie (p. 434)
suth to sayn (1.189)	soth forete say (p. 443)

Dunbar remolds one formula into a consistent, and very useful, shape for this poem. Phrases such as "bogan bende" (Oakden, II, 203) and "bend up his bow" (Oakden, II, 269) become "with bow in hand ybent" in "The Golden Targe":

Cupide the king, with bow in hand ybent (1. 110)

And first of all, with bow in hand ybent
Come dame Beautee, rycht as scho wald me schent. (11.145-146)

The phrase occupies the same metrical position in both occurrences, and is designed both to provide alliteration within a line and to fit a rhyme scheme. In the first instance, it provides a fairly traditional attribute of Cupid. The second occurrence marks a very aggressive Beauty. There is an excellent poetic logic in applying the same epithet to Cupid, king of the court of gods and Venus' son, and to Beauty, who leads the assault of Venus' archers on the dreamer.

The most frequently repeated formulaic expression in "The Golden Targe" concerns May, usually alliterating with some combination of "morrow," "mirth," or "month." The formula has its antecedents in phrases such as "mai mere," and "mihti merthful mai" (Fifield, p. 183). The formula ends the first stanza, "in May, in til a morrow myrthfullest" (1.9), establishing both the setting and tone of the poem. Dunbar repeats the formula as a motive for the birds' song, "For mirth of May, wyth skippis and wyth hoppis,/The birdis sang vpon the tender croppis" (11. 19-20). When May appears in the court of goddesses, she carries her formulaic tag with her, "There saw I May, of myrthfull monethis quene"

(1.252). In this instance the same words are used as when May appears in the court, although now she is the mirthful queen, rather than queen of mirthful months. In the final discussion of poetry, Dunbar says that Chaucer has raised English above every other language "Alls fer as Mayes morow dois mydnycht" (l. 261). The final appearance of the formula balances the first. The formulaic expression moves from May's morning to May's role as queen of months and back to the morning motif. Dunbar's handling of this formulaic system in the "Golden Targe" is an excellent example of his ability to mold traditional materials to his own purposes. The May morning is used at the opening of the poem to establish the setting in which the dreamer is to fall asleep, and at the close of the poem to illustrate the dreamer's return to the original setting. In the center portion, the formula proclaims May's royalty, placing her among the goddesses from the ship. In its last occurrence, the formula complements the light imagery of the passage on poetry, and helps to join the last section to the rest of the poem.

The final aspect of the alliterative style to be discussed in "The Golden Targe" is the tendency of alliterative poets to organize their material through parallels and contrasts, and to define relationships by juxtaposition rather than explicit statement. For an example of the use of parallel and contrast in the poem, we need not go beyond the first three lines:

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. (ll.1-3)

The rising sun, "the stern of day," of the first line contrasts the setting stars of the second. In contrast to the stars' motion, the dreamer

rises, and so is in a parallel to the sun. The first stanza is arranged in three-line units. The fourth line, which begins the second unit, parallels the meaning of the first line of the poem, "Wp sprang the goldyn candill matutyne" (1.4). There is a syntactic parallel in the second stanza, in which Dunbar describes the bows from which the birds sing.

Apparalit quhite and red, wyth blomes suete;
Anamalit was the felde wyth all colouris. (11.12-13)

The syntactic parallel establishes the connection between the white and red branches and the entire field. The bough is part of the colorful ornamentation of the field, and as such offers a close-up view of a form of beauty repeated many times over in the field. The two lines also provide a contrast between the bough and the field, making the entire field seem much more beautiful than any one part of it. The bough is appareled with two colors, while the field is enameled with all colors.

A more extended example of parallel structure occurs in the description of the court of gods. Unlike most stanzas of "The Golden Targe," neither stanza of this description can stand alone, so that Dunbar must find some means of linking the two stanzas into a unit. His solution to the problem is a series of syntactic parallels:

Ane othir court thare saw I consequent,
Cupide the king, wyth bow in hand ybent,
And-dredefull arowis grundyn scharp and square:
Thare saw I Mars, the god armypotent,
Afull and sterne, strong and corpolent;
Thare saw I crabbit Saturn ald and haire,
His luke was lyke for to perturb the aire;
Thare was Mercurius, wise and eloquent,
Of rethorike that fand the flouris faire;

Thare was the god of gardingis, Priapus;
 Thare was the god of wildernes, Phanus,
 And Ianus, god of entree delytable;
 Thare was the god of fludis, Neptunus;
 Thare was the god of wyndis, Eolus,
 With variand luke, rycht lyke a lord vnstable;
 Thare was Bacus, the gladder of the table;
 Thare was Pluto, the elrich incubus,
 In cloke of grene, his court usit no sable. (ll.109-126)

The parallel begins with the phrase, "Thare saw I Mars," followed by "Thare saw I crabbit Saturn." These sentences establish that Thare is being used in its adverbial sense, meaning "in that place," and consequently takes full stress. The stress on the Thare of "Thare saw I" falls naturally on the Thare of "Thare was Mercurius," and all the "Thare was" phrases of the following stanza. The parallel phrases both link the stanzas and link the lines within the second stanza, a function usually performed by rhyme. In the second stanza, however, most of the lines beginning with "Thare was" end with the unstressed Latin suffix -us, which is the rhyming syllable. This repetition at the beginning of the lines forms a very emphatic structure which seems to call for formal weakening elsewhere in the lines to restore a poetic balance. Dunbar provides this weakening by deliberately leaving the rhymed syllables unstressed.

A more general influence of the alliterative poetic structures of juxtaposition and contrast may be seen in the structure of the poem as a whole. Whatever coherence "The Golden Targe" has must be found in the juxtaposition of its parts. Previous critics have noticed this feature of the poem, although without attributing it to the alliterative tradition. Denton Fox, for instance, comments on Dunbar's handling of Roman de la Rose themes, "But Dunbar's omissions are radical to an unprecedented

degree. Most of the customary amplifications are neglected: though there are two courts, one ruled by Cupid and one by Nature and Venus, there is neither any of the usual differentiation between courtly and natural love nor any establishment of a king and queen of love."³³

Surveying what Dunbar has omitted from his poem, Fox concludes, "Though it does not seem to have been previously noticed, the whole structure of the Targe is, strictly speaking, elliptical."³⁴

Lois A. Ebin has attempted to interpret "The Golden Targe" by dividing the poem into three parts in apposition to each other: "As we shall see, Dunbar develops the 'Targe' as a triptych, the pieces of which illustrate the relationship between the sun and nature and the poet and his matter."³⁵ Even the parts of the triptych present their pictures through juxtaposition, "In section II, the dream, Dunbar establishes an implicit analogy between what the sun does to nature and what the poet does to his matter."

"The Golden Targe" is one of the most interesting examples of Dunbar's use of the alliterative tradition. It is justly considered "aureate" since its vocabulary is heavily influenced by Romance borrowings and Dunbar seems to delight in the sounds of long French and Latin words. In addition, the subject matter for the poem comes almost entirely from Romance sources. On first reading, the style of this poem would seem to be as far as possible from the native alliterative tradition. It is somewhat surprising, then, to find the poem so indebted to it. The most common, and most effective ornament in the poem is alliteration, which is borrowed directly from the native tradition. Dunbar uses traditional alliterative formulas, with some variations of his own. Even

the "elliptical" structure of the poem probably owes more to Old English than to Old French.

A stylistic contrast to "The Golden Targe," "Sen that I Am a Presoneir" lacks the dream apparatus of the "Targe." At the beginning of the poem the speaker has already been captivated by the sight of a beautiful woman. The prisoner is able to send a letter to Petie, who organizes an assault on the prison. The prisoner is freed, and at the end of the poem, Matremony, "The band of freindschip hes indost, / Betuix Bewty and the presoneir" (11.103-104).

The alliterative tradition exerts a much weaker influence on "A Presoneir" than on the "Targe." With only 33.9% of its lines containing alliteration, "A Presoneir" uses far less alliteration than the "Targe," and less than Dunbar's work as a whole. Dunbar is, however, careful to place his alliterating lines to create an appropriate effect. A series of alliterating lines draws the reader's attention to the reason for the speaker's imprisonment:

I govit on that gudliest,
So lang to luke I tuk laseir,
Quhill I wes tane withouttin test . (11.5-7)

The climax of the battle, in which the allegorical forces holding the narrator prisoner are vanquished, is highlighted by a series of alliterating lines:

Thrucht Skornes noss thai put a prik,
This he was banist and gat a blek;
Comparisone was erdit quik,
And Langour lap and brak his nek.
Thai sailgeit fast, all the fek,
Lust chasit my ladeis chalmirleir,
Gud Fame wes drownit in a sek;
Thus ransnit thai the presoneir. (11.81-88)

Dunbar makes little use of traditional alliterative formulas for the diction of this poem. Only one phrase, "fra 3_eir to 3_eir" (1.3) has a clear parallel in Merle Fifield's lists (p. 446). Dunbar creates one formulaic construction which produces an interesting result. The start of the battle places Lust and Bissines at the front of the assault:

Lust bur the benner to the wall,
And Bissines the grit gyn brocht. (11.59-60)

The lines are linked both thematically and by the alliteration on b in each line. There is no alliteration in the following six lines, until Bissines reappears in a virtual repeat of line sixty:

Than Bissines the grit gyn bend,
Straik down the top of the foir tour. (11.67-68)

In both instances Bissines appears in the same position in the line, and alliterates on a monosyllabic verb which also appears in the same position. Since there is no alliteration between these two lines, both lines achieve a certain prominence, while the formulaic repetition only increases the importance of difference between the verbs. We see, in a quick and emphatic sequence, the engine brought into position and readied for action. The syntax of the second pair of lines owes something to the alliterative style since it creates its effect by means of a juxtaposition achieved through parallel structure. The verbs bend and straik both have the same subject, Bissines. An explicit connective between the dual predicates depending on Bissines is unnecessary. The parallel syntax merges the preparation of the engine and the attack on the tower into one quick action, an excellent handling of a battle description. The special emphasis on Bissines and her engine is also appropriate since one stroke of the engine is sufficient to make Comparisone, who is in command of

the tower, offer to hand over the prisoner.

Dunbar's love debate, "In May as that Aurora Did Vspring," or "The Merle and the Nightingale," is an interesting example of his use of both Romance and alliterative traditions, since, even for purposes of discussion, it is almost impossible to separate the two. As a debate, the poem is obviously structured on a series of contrasts, as the two opponents answer each other's arguments. The source for this kind of contrast is more likely to be found, however, in the tradition of Romance love debates than in the habits of alliterative composition. Still, Dunbar handles the contrasting views in the poem so as to create the effect of a symmetrical balance that an alliterative poet could achieve by balancing half-line against half-line. Each speaker in the debate receives an alternating stanza, the merle defending erotic love, and the nightingale arguing for the love of God. The alternation of speakers from stanza to stanza makes a very strong rhythm, combining both the verse form and the sense of the poem.

The refrain is another device in "The Merle and the Nightingale" which seems to be derived from the alliterative and Romance traditions. The refrain is, of course, a Romance device, but the refrains in this poem seem, for two reasons, to be related to the alliterative tradition. First, as Oakden points out, repetition to bind stanzas is a common device in rhymed alliterative poetry. Each of the merle's stanzas ends with the line, "A lusty lyfe in luves scheruice bene." The nightingale ends each of its stanzas with "All luve is lost bot vpone God allone." The phrases help separate the speeches of the two birds, while at the

same time linking the poem as a whole since both refrains alliterate on the same letter. The refrains emphasize the nature of the debate by using variant words to alliterate on love, just as the merle and nightingale are debating different kinds of love. The second way in which the refrains are related to the alliterative tradition is that they are used rather like alliterative formulas. The merle's refrain, alliterating lusty and luves, has clear precedents in alliterative formulas.³⁷ Alliterative formulas, in the hands of a skillful poet, can surprise the reader by giving one phrase where he has been led to expect another.³⁸ Dunbar uses his refrains in this manner when the merle is persuaded by the nightingale to renounce courtly love. At the end of its surrender speech, the merle not only borrows the nightingale's refrain, but places a line alliterating on the same letter before it:

Bot luve the luve that did for his lufe de;
All lufe is lost bot vpone God alllone. (11.103-104)

The nightingale's refrain is used in the remaining two stanzas of the poem, in which the two birds sing of God's love, and the poet recounts the comfort he finds in remembering their song. The unexpected use of the refrain, "All lufe is lost bot vpone God allone" at the end of the merle's speech, and its repetition in the remaining stanzas strongly reinforce the meaning of the poem.

One stanza of the poem is built on a series of parallels which end in a climax of alliteration:

The merle said, "Lufe is causs of honour ay,
Lufe makis cowardis manheid to purchass,
Lufe makis knyghtis hardy at assey,
Lufe makis wrechis full of lergeness,
Lufe makis sueir folkis full of bissiness,

Luve makis sluggirdis fresche and weill besene,
 Luve changis vyce in vertewis nobilness;
 A lusty lyfe in luvis scheruice bene". (11.81-88)

The repetition of "Luve makis" becomes almost formulaic by the end of the stanza. The use of alliteration on the second line and last three gives the stanza a balance, while allowing it to build to a linguistic climax. The extended parallels in this stanza make it stand out from the other stanzas of the poem, so that it is an effective conclusion to the merle's arguments in favor of earthly love.

Alliteration is used liberally as an ornament in the poem, with 45.0% of the lines alliterating. Dunbar displays his usual skill in employing alliteration to support his meaning. For instance, in the first stanza the merle is introduced with a surfeit of alliteration, emphasizing the sensuous nature of its argument:

In May as that Aurora did vpspring,
 With cristall ene chasing the cluddis sable,
 I hard a merle with mirry notis sing
 A sang of lufe, with voce rycht comfortable,
 Agane the orient bemis amiable,
 Vpone a blisful brenche of lawryr grene;
 This wes hir sentens sueit and delectable,
 A lusty lyfe in luves scheruice bene. (11.1-8)

The nightingale, introduced in the second stanza, receives a more restrained welcome, with only four lines of alliteration. The four are interestingly placed, however, as may be seen in the last four lines of the stanza:

A nychtingall, with suggurit notis new,
 Quhois angell fedderis as the pacok schone;
 This was hir song, and of a sentens trew,
 All luve is lost bot vpone God allone. (11.13-16)

The emphasis here is on the nightingale's song. In the second to last

line the alliteration on song and sentens contrasts with the alliteration of sentens and sueit in the penultimate line of the first stanza; the merle's "sentens sueit" is opposed to the nightingale's "song . . . of a sentens trew."

The diction of "The Merle and the Nightingale" owes relatively little to the alliterative formulas. Dunbar pairs flowers with fresh, for instance, "fresche Flora hes flurest every spray" (l. 21), and "the fresche and flureist lusty vail" (l. 28). One occurrence of alliteration, "the rever as it ran" (l. 27), recalls the line "Down throu the ryce a ryuir ran wyth stremys" (l. 28) in "The Golden Targe."

"The Thistle and the Rose" is both a love vision and a ceremonial poem, written for the wedding of James IV and Margaret Tudor. In this poem, the poet is awakened one morning by May, who orders him to write something in her honor. He then follows her into a garden, where he sees Nature call a convocation of birds, beasts, herbs, and flowers. She names the eagle king of birds, the lion king of beasts, the thistle king of herbs, and the rose queen of flowers. Alliteration plays an important stylistic role in the poem, as the 51.4% proportion of alliterating lines indicates.

Alliteration is used in this poem, as in most of Dunbar's poems, to emphasize important segments. It is, however, perhaps more interesting in this poem to examine the care with which Dunbar arranges patterns of alliterating sounds. Alliteration frequently binds lines together in patterns which form a counterpoint to the rhyme scheme, as in these two lines describing May's robe:

Hevinly of color, quhyt, reid, broun and blew,
Balmit in dew, and gilt with Phebus bemys. (11.19-20)

The same device is used to bind two lines in a cause and effect relationship, when Eolus' blowing his horn has made the poet stay inside:

So busteous ar the blastis of his horne,
 Amang thy bewis to walk I haif forborne. (11.34-35)

Vocalic alliteration may also link closely related lines:

Illumynit our with orient skyis brycht,
Annamyllit richely with new asur lycht. (11.41-42)

A much more subtle linking of two lines is in the description of the sun shining down on the garden:

The purpour sone, with tendir bemys reid,
 In orient bricht as angell did appeir. (11.50-51)

The first line in this pair has the pattern p b, in the words purpour and bemys. The second line reverses the first with a b p pattern in bricht and appeir. The two lines alliterate with each other in a perfectly symmetrical pattern, although both lines lack internal consonantal alliteration. The second line does, however, have vocalic alliteration in "orient," "angell," and "appeir." The impression of barrenness in the first line of the pair is reversed by the second, in which an extremely rich pattern of alliteration is revealed. The effect of these two lines exactly parallels that of a dawn sun, when darkness gives way to the bright colors of the sunrise.

Dunbar can use alliteration to create units longer than two lines. A particularly fine example of a larger group of lines linked by alliteration is in the praise the Rose receives from the birds after her crowning:

The lark scho song, "Haill, Roiss, both reid and quhyt,
Most plesand flour, of michty cullouris twane;"
 The nychtingaill song, "Haill, naturis suffragene,
 In bewty, nurtour and every nobilness,
 In riche array, renown and gentilness". (ll. 171-175)

The first and last lines of the group alliterate on r, framing the passage. The center lines alliterate on nasals, m in the second line, n in the following two. These lines are bound into a tight group both by the almost symmetrical arrangement of alliterating sounds and by a phonetic relationship which was known in the Middle Ages, as the Venerable Bede indicates in De Arte Metrica, "Sunt et liquentes litterae quattuor, l, m, n, r."³⁹

A few traditional alliterative phrases appear in the "The Thistle and the Rose." Dunbar uses the phrase "fro 3eir to 3eir" (l.75) again. The description of the Rose as "this cumly quene" (l.156) is a traditional attribution (Fifield, p. 333). Another phrase, "wyld weid" (l.139) lacks a specific precedent in Fifield's lists, but seems related to such phrases as "wilde woude" and "wylde word" (Fifield, p. 358). Placing "wild" before any noun beginning with w appears almost formulaic.

Parallels and contrasts play an important role in the poem. The sleepy poet's reaction to May's command to arise and write something contrasts comically with the traditional poetic descriptions of May which open the poem. When she first appears at the poet's bed, May resembles the goddess of "The Golden Targe":

Me thoct fresche May befoir my bed vpstude,
 In weid depaynt of mony diuerss hew,
 Sobir benyng, and full of mansuetude,
 In brycht atteir of flouris forgit new,
 Hevinly of color, quhyt, reid, broun and blew,
 Balmit in dew, and gilt with Phebus bemys,
 Quhill all the houss illumynit of hir lemys. (ll.15-21)

When ordered to get out of bed, the poet sees May in a much less idealized fashion:

"Quhairto," quod I, "sall I vpryss at morrow,
 For in this May few birdis herd I sing?
 Thai haif moir causs to weip and plane thair sorrow,
 Thy air it is nocht holsum nor benyng;
 Lord Eolus dois in thy sessone ring;
 So busteous ar the blastis of his horne,
 Amang thy bewis to walk I haif forborne". (11.29-35)

May accepts this description of herself with rather strained good humor, and orders the poet to get busy: "With that this lady sobirly did smyll,
 / And said, 'Vpryss, and do thy observance'" (11.36-37). Nature is compelled, however, to amend the weather before the coronation ceremony can begin:

Dame Nature gaif ane inhibitioun thair
 To ferss Neptunus, and Eolus the bawld,
 Nocht to perturb the wattir nor the air,
 And that no schouris, nor blastis cawld,
 Effray suld flouris nor fowlis on the fold;
 Scho bad eik Juno, goddes of the sky,
 That scho the hevin suld keip amene and dry. (11.64-70)

The contrast between the idealized May morning demanded by the dream vision genre and the typical May morning in Edinburgh serves an important function in this poem. Through this contrast Dunbar announces that he is producing a highly contrived artifact in which reality must, if necessary, be altered to fit the demands of art. As a "maker," Dunbar's primary interest in poetic surfaces has been previously noticed.⁴⁰ In the first hundred lines of "The Thistle and the Rose," Dunbar clearly indicates his recognition of a dichotomy between his poetry and any reality it may be said to represent. He seems to view poetry, at least in the aureate style, as a highly artificial exercise. This statement of his attitude toward his poetry is important, and it is perhaps significant he makes it

not in a direct statement, but rather through juxtaposition and contrast as might an alliterative poet.

After having the poetic narrator contrast a real Edinburgh May morning to an idealized poetic one, Dunbar places his narrator in another amusing contrast:

Quhen this wes said, depairtit scho, this quene,
 And enterit in a lusty gairding gent;
 And than, me thocht, full hestely besene,
 In serk and mantill [eftir hir] I went
 In to this garth, most dulce and redolent. (11.43-47)

The picture of the poet, newly awakened, dressing himself as rapidly as possible to follow the queen into a beautiful allegorical garden is perhaps worthy of Chaplin's tramp suddenly finding himself in an opulent setting.

The two contrasts I have discussed are comical, and their comedy forms a contrast to the tone of the poem as a whole. Dunbar's narrator, complaining first about the weather, then clownishly getting himself into the garden, seems a poor figure to narrate the serious, if joyous, scene in which Nature crowns the beasts and plants. The contrast is all the more jarring if we remember that the poem is intended as a compliment to King James IV and his new Queen, Margaret Tudor. There is a sense, however, in which this contrast of comic to serious is perfectly suited to the poem's occasion. For Dunbar, marriage could be a fertile source of humor, as "The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" clearly shows. Although marriage is an immensely important occasion, it has never been immune to jokes. A certain amount of contrast between humor and seriousness seems inherit in the subject of marriage. The contrast is magnified when the wedding is a matter of state. The juxtaposition

of comic and serious is perhaps ironic, but seems to fit the topic.

More importantly, the comic contrast of the narrator to the poem's topic serves as a compliment to the King. In the role of the narrator, Dunbar contrasts himself to the splendor of the King, represented in the poem by the Lion, and to the Queen, represented by the Rose. The contrast is an act of humility, like a deep bow, complimenting the person whose relative position is elevated. The contrasts in this poem tell as much as the allegorical figures, and considerably more than direct statement, which is rather scarce. Although contrasts alone could never prove any influence of the alliterative tradition, they can show a poet's mind still working in channels first marked by the alliterative poets.

Dunbar's remaining ceremonial poems are of somewhat less critical interest. They are brief, relatively straightforward, but still highly ornamented pieces, written to honor a specific person or occasion. "Blyth Aberdein" is occasioned by Queen Margaret, although it praises the city of Aberdeen for its reception of the Queen rather than the Queen herself. The alliteration in this poem is quite heavy, 52.8%.

In "Blyth Aberdein" Dunbar uses alliteration, and consonance between alliterating lines, to frame stanzas, and to link stanzas. I am using "consonance" loosely to refer both to the juxtaposition of identical and of phonetically related, but not identical, consonants such as p and b. The first two lines of the poem, for instance, alliterate on b:

Blyth Aberdein, thow beriall of all tounis,
The lamp of bewtie, bountie, and blythnes. (ll. 1-2)

The final line of the stanza, which is the refrain of every stanza except the last, picks up the alliteration:

Be blyth, and blisfull, burgh of Aberdein. (1.8)

The b of Aberdein begins an unstressed syllable, but it does create a consonance at the end of the line. Dunbar may link stanzas by making the first line of a stanza alliterate on b, repeating the alliteration of the previous line, the refrain, and enclosing the stanza by making it begin and end with the same alliteration. The fifth stanza, for instance, begins:

And syne the Bruce, that euir was bold in stour. (1.33)

A more frequent, and more subtle, form of linkage between stanzas is the use of consonance between the refrain of a stanza and an early line of the following stanza. In four of the nine stanzas of the poem, the first alliterating line works on p. An example is the first line of the third stanza:

Ane fair processioun mett hir at the Port. (1.17)

The alliteration on p is carried through the next two lines in the rhyme words of each line, pleasantlie, and disport (metrically the stress on this word falls on the final syllable). The final four lines of the eighth stanza follow a symmetrical pattern based on consonance of b and p.

An riche present thay did till hir propyne;
 Ane costlie coup that large thing wald contene,
Couerit and full of cunzeitt gold rycht fyne:
 Be blyth and blisfull, burgh of Aberdein. (11.61-64)

The p's and b's frame two lines both alliterating on c. Interestingly, the next line, which opens the final stanza, alliterates on p:

O potent princes, pleasant and preclair. (1.65)

Although Dunbar seems to have been aware, at least intuitively, of some phonetic relationships, it is unusual for him to use one such relation,

that between the bilabial stops b and p, as consistently in equivalent positions as he does in this poem.

Dunbar availed himself of traditional alliterative formulas in this poem, although with occasional reworkings to suit his purposes:

Dunbar	Fifield
bewtie, bountie (1.2)	of bounte, beaute; bounte, beaute (p. 431)
blyth and blissfull (1.8)	blipe yblessed (p. 176)
press of peopill (1.50)	prees of people (p. 440)
Richelie arrayit (1.10)	ricchest men on aray (p. 248)
seimlie sort, in ordour weill	semely in sight; semely to
besein (I. 46)	see (p. 442)
wisdome, and of worthines (1.4)	worthy, witty, and wys (p. 446)

Although not all the formulas are repeated exactly here, the basic alliterating elements, such as "Richelie arrayit" and "ricchest . . . aray" are the same or closely related in Dunbar's poem and Fifield's lists.

"The Ballad of Lord Bernard Stewart, Lord of Aubigny" was written to honor that noble on the occasion, according to the headnote of the Chepman and Myllar print reprinted in the STS edition (II, 59) of his "cumyng to Edinburghe in Scotland send in ane ryght excellent embassat fra the said maist crystin King to our mast Souuerane lord and victorius prince James the ferde." The amount of alliteration in the poem is roughly average for Dunbar, 41.9%. Dunbar uses the alliteration in the poem to produce fine artistic effects. For example, identical alliteration and parallel structure bind three lines, which emphasize Lord Bernard Stewart's soldierly qualities, and his attachment to Scotland:

Welcum most valyeant and victorius;
 Welcum invincible victour moste wourthy;
 Welcum our Scottis chiftane most dughty. (11.19-21)

The first two lines are linked by the alliteration of v and by the similarity in meanings of the words. The first line of the group carries a

stylistic trait of the alliterative tradition which Dunbar uses less frequently than some others, absolute adjective.⁴¹ All the lines are linked by a parallel structure, in the general pattern "Welcome most (adjective)." The last two, lacking alliteration to link them, are joined by a more precise parallel syntax, "Welcome (modifier noun) most (adjective.)"

In another stanza, alliteration is skillfully tied to the meaning of the text:

Is none of Scotland borne faithfull and kynde,
 Bot he of naturall inclinacioune
 Dois favour the, withe all his hert and mynde,
 Withe fervent, tendir, trew intencioun;
 And wald of inwart hie effectioun,
 Bot dreyd of danger, de in thi defence,
 Or dethe, or schame, war done to thi persoun;
 To quham be honour, lawde and reuerence. (11.33-40)

The stanza is divided into two parts after the fourth line. The alliteration straddles the two parts. The first three lines lack alliteration, while the first half of the stanza builds to a mini-climax marked by the alliteration in the fourth line. The second half of the stanza explains the depth of Lord Bernard Stewart's "tendir, trew, intencioun." Each line of the second half of the stanza, except the refrain, alliterates. The vocalic alliteration of the fifth line provides a mellifluous bridge to the two lines alliterating on d. These lines, the last two before the refrain, say that Lord Bernard Stewart would die himself before he would permit "dethe, or schame" to befall Scotland. The d's provide a consonance with the t alliteration which began the series, while the repeated alliteration on d gives these lines, and their meaning, incredible force.

Dunbar draws little from the traditional alliterating phrases in this poem. Only one expression, "clerk, Knight" (1.7) has a parallel in

Fifield's lists, "clerk ne kni3t" (p. 133).

Lord Bernard Stewart's death provided the occasion for another poem, "Elegy on the Death of Bernard Stewart, Lord of Aubigny." The poem is relatively short, only 32 lines, but virtually packed with alliteration, with 62.5% of the lines alliterating. The sheer amount of alliteration in this poem makes emphasis by alliteration alone almost impossible, although Dunbar does manage to link some lines by alliteration, or parallel structure:

O duilfull death! O dragon dolorous!
 Quhy hes thow done so dulfullie devoir
 The prince of knychtheid, nobill and chevilrous,
 The witt of weiris, of armes and honour. (11.17-20)

The first line of this group is divided into half-lines, joined by alliteration and chiasmus. The final two lines are joined by their opening with parallel statements, "The (noun) of (noun)."

Although alliteration may lose most of its emphasis when it is used as extensively as it is in this poem, the absence of alliteration may have a remarkable effect. Only three lines of the final stanza alliterate:

Pray now for him, all that him loveit heir!
 And for his saull mak intercessioun
 Unto the Lord that hes him bocht so deir,
 To gif him mercie and remissioun,
 And namelie we of Scottis natioun,
 Intill his lyff quhom most he did affy,
 Forgett we nevir into our orisoun
 To pray for him, the flour of chaveilrie. (11.25-32)

The relative absence of alliteration in this stanza produces a feeling of quiet, which seems suited to the request for prayers. It is as though the bells and choirs have ceased, and we are left in quiet to meditate and pray.

Three of Dunbar's aureate poems are religious. "Rorate Celi Desuper" and "Done is a Battell on the Dragon Blak" concern respectively the birth and resurrection of Christ. "Ane Ballat of Our Lady" is a hymn to Mary.

"Rorate Celi Desuper" has an approximately average amount of alliteration for Dunbar, 43.8%. The alliteration in the poem contains some rather interesting touches. The first alliteration in the poem falls on a pair of lines, which alliterate on consonant clusters:

Fro the ross Mary, flour of flouris:
The cleir Sone, quhome no clud devouris. (11.4-5)

The alliteration in both lines falls on a consonant followed by l, an unusual decoration which places emphasis on Mary, and on the double entendre of "The cleir Sone."

An interesting symmetry occurs when Dunbar reminds the clergy of their duty to the Christ Child:

All clergy do to him inclyne,
And bow vnto that barne benyng,
And do 3our obseruance devyne
To him that is of kingis King;
Ensence his altar, reid and sing
In haly kirk, with mynd degest. (11.25-30)

The first four lines of the group are framed by alliteration on cl and c. The intervening two lines also alliterate on stops, b and d, so that there is a consonance binding these lines into a unit. The fifth line, with its vocalic alliteration, offers a pleasing contrast to the series of stops preceding it, while the final line of the sequence echoes the c alliteration with the word kirk.

After this alliterative sequence for the clergy, the next two stanzas have very little of the ornament, with only two lines alliter-

ating in each stanza. The final stanza, however, has alliteration in every English line but one:

Syng hevin imperiall, most of hicht,
 Regions of air mak armony;
 All fishe in flud and foull of flicht,
 Be myrthfull and mak melody:
 All GLORIA IN EXCELSIS cry,
 Hevin, erd, se, man, bird, and best,
 He that is crownit abone the sky
 Pro nobis Puer natus est. (11.49-56)

At the end of the poem, it seems that heaven and all creation are singing the praises of Jesus. The sudden burst of alliteration, after two stanzas, has much to do with this effect.

Dunbar borrows from the traditional alliterative vocabulary for this poem. The phrase "of kingis King," (1.28) corresponds closely to the traditional "kyng of kyngis" (Fifield, p. 332) as to the Old English formula "cyninga cyninge" (Oakden, II, 202). "Blud to by" (1.21) seems descended from "bloode bought" (Fifield, p. 329). Dunbar's most interesting use of a formula in this poem is "All fische of flud and foull of flicht," (1.51), which combines elements of two traditional phrases, "be fisches in be flude," and "fische and foull fleoyng" (Fifield, p. 238). By joining fish, who swim under the sea, and birds, who fly above the sea and earth, Dunbar seems to encompass all living creatures merely by mentioning those who live at the extremes of depth and height.

"Done is a Battell on the Dragon Blak," which celebrates the resurrection, enjoys a reputation as a technical masterpiece. Tom Scott calls it "one of the noblest poems in the Scottish language, and the finest religious one." He adds that "it is the product of the greatest technical

mastery in the whole range of Scottish verse from Barbour to the present."⁴² C. S. Lewis, generally a more cautious critic than Scott, terms it "speech of unanswerable and thundering greatness. From the first line . . . to the last . . . it vibrates with exultant energy. It defies the powers of evil and has the ring of a steel gauntlet flung down."⁴³ Both Denton Fox and Scott comment on the skillful use of alliteration in the poem.⁴⁴ The poem is a very effective example of Dunbar's use of the alliterative tradition.

The amount of alliteration in the poem, 45.7%, is close to Dunbar's average. The patterning of the alliteration is, however, very effective, as an examination of the first stanza will show:

Done is a battell on the dragon blak,
 Our campioun⁴⁵ Chryst confoundit hes his force;
 The zettis of hell ar brokin with a crak,
 The signe triumphall rasit is of the croce,
 The diuillis trymmillis with hiddouss voce,
 The saulis ar borrowit and to the bliss can go,
 Chryst with his blud our ransonis dois indoce:
 Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. (ll.1-8)

The first two lines of the poem contain interlocking alliteration on d and b. The second line continues the double alliteration, with a string of three c's followed by two f's. The alliteration on c is continued in the rhyme words of the next two lines, crak and croce. This interlineal alliteration links Christ's victory over Satan, described in the first two lines, with the results of that victory, the breaking of the gates of hell and the raising of the cross. Meanwhile, the devils tremble with hideous voices and without alliteration. Alliteration returns in the next line, however, when the redeemed souls are permitted to ascend to the bliss of heaven.

The second stanza uses alliteration, although with fewer of the intricate linking devices of the first:

Dungin is the deidly dragon Lucifer,
 The crewall serpent with the mortall stang;
 The auld kene tegir, with his teith on char,
 Quhilk in a wait hes lyne for ws so lang,
 Thinking to grip ws in his clowss strang;
 The mercifull Lord wald nocht that it were so,
 He maid him for to fel₃e of that fang:
 Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. (11.9-16)

The second line of the stanza includes a possible alliteration between serpent and stang, depending upon how closely Dunbar followed the tradition of permitting the cluster st to alliterate only on itself. It is interesting that the four lines describing Lucifer, the second through fifth of the stanza, are framed by phrases crewall serpent and clowss strang, creating a pattern of consonance with the repetition of a c followed by s or st.

The third stanza is the climax of the poem, the description of Christ in victory. As the third of five stanzas, it is directly in the center of the poem, preceded by two stanzas describing the victory and the defeated Satan, and followed by a description of the world after Christ's victory. By placing the climax in the center, Dunbar gives the poem an effect of symmetry. This stanza also has the most elaborate alliteration and consonance in the poem:

He for our saik that sufferit to be slane,
 And lyk a lamb in sacrifice wes dicht,
 Is lyk a lyone rissin vp agane,
 And as gyane raxit him on hicht;
 Sprungin is Aurora radius and bricht,
 On loft is gone the glorious Appollo,
 The blissfull day departit fro the nycht:
 Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. (11.17-24)

This stanza contains the only two lines in the poem linked by identical alliteration, the second and third. The phrases "lyk a lamb" and "lyk a lyone" are linked both by alliteration on l and by parallel structure. The careful linkage emphasizes the contrast between the two natures of Christ being presented, the sacrificial lamb and the lion-like conqueror of Satan. The next two lines lack alliteration, but have a pattern of consonance based on r, which as a resonant complements the l's of the preceding lines. The pattern of r begins with raxit in the fourth line. In the fifth line, every word except the auxiliary and conjunction has an r in a stressed syllable. The pattern of consonance continues into the sixth line of the stanza with a return to l in loft, glorius, and Apollo, although the line alliterates on g.

The last two stanzas have relatively little alliteration:

The grit victour agane is rissen on hicht,
 That for our querrell to the deth wes woundit;
 That sone that vox all pail now schynis bricht,
 And dirknes clerit, our fayth is now refoundit;
 The knell of mercy fra the hevin is soundit,
 The Cristin ar deliuerit of thair wo,
 The Jowis and thair errour ar confoundit:
 Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro

The fo is chasit, the battell is done ceiss,
 The presone brokin, the jevellouris fleit and flemit;
 The weir is gon, confermit is the peiss,
 The fetteris lowsit and the dungeoun temit,
 The ransoun maid, the presoneirs redemit;
 The feild is win, ourcumin is the fo,
 Dispult of the tresur that he gemit:
 Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. (11.25-40)

With almost no alliteration, these lines are a sharp contrast to the third stanza. The effect is appropriate, however, since the fruits of victory are not allowed to overshadow the glory of the victor. Dunbar's topic is Christ's victory, and although he praises the result of the

victory, he is careful not to distract the reader's attention from the victory' itself. The major poetic device of these two stanzas is parallel structure, especially in final stanza in which almost every line begins with a noun followed by a passive verb. So many parallels could become dull, but in this instance they work beautifully. The poetic excitement builds to the third stanza, whose ornamentation is almost as deafening as the battle between Christ and Satan. After the battle, the Christians are left to count their new blessings in peace. The sense of peace is matched by the sudden drop of alliteration, while the multiplicity of blessings is emphasized by the long series of parallels.

"Ane Ballat of Our Lady" has the most complicated stanza form of any of Dunbar's poems. The poem is divided into twelve line stanzas, in a ballad meter which alternates tetrameter and trimeter lines until the ninth line of each stanza. The ninth line is a Latin refrain, "Aue Maria, gratia plena!" The last three lines continue the alternation of line lengths, the tenth line being trimeter. The five lines of tetrameter have one rhyme, the six lines of trimeter another, so that there are only two rhyming sounds in each stanza. In addition to the end rhyme, the tetrameter lines have internal rhyme, requiring three rhyming words in each line. In each stanza, Dunbar must find fifteen rhyming words for the tetrameter lines, and six for the trimeter lines. In such a demanding stanza form, we might expect to find less alliteration, since the necessity of finding words to fit a highly restrictive rhyme scheme would seem to preclude any additional ornamentation. In fact, however, the poem has alliteration in 48.1% of its lines, a reasonably high figure even for Dunbar.

Fra fall mortall, originall,

Ws raunsound on the rude. (ll. 73-84)
 * * *

The first two lines alliterate on the same consonant, p. The first five alliterating lines alliterate on stops, p, t, c, and b. The pattern is broken up somewhat by the alliteration on f just before the refrain, but the f is placed between two lines alliterating on b to form a symmetrical pattern. The consonant of the internal rhyme syllable is l, which, as a resonant, provides a striking phonetic contrast to the alliterating stops through most of the stanza. The alliterating stops are supported, however, by the rhyme on the trimeter lines, -ud(e). The last line of the stanza provides a very satisfying resolution by reversing a pattern we have come to expect throughout the stanza. The alliteration in the last line is on r, a resonant, while both alliterating words end with a stop, d. This reversal in the last line ties together two opposing groups of consonants which have been in tension with each other throughout the stanza. By binding the two groups together, the line provides an excellent conclusion to the stanza and to the poem.

Dunbar employs a number of traditional alliterative formulas in this poem. The traditional phrases and their counterparts in Fifield's lists are presented below:

Dunbar	fifield'
fair, fresche flour-de-lyce (l.42)	freschest floure, fressh
fresche flour (l. 10)	flour (p. 338)
prince of pryss (l. 46)	þe Prince of pes (p. 349)
rialest rosyne (l. 8)	rose ryal (p. 351)

Dunbar treats the formulas with his usual freedom, adding a rhetorical

and horticultural flourish to the traditional "fressh flour" to create the "fair, fresche flour-de-lyce." A similar metamorphosis makes the "rose ryal" into the "rialest rosyne." Although Dunbar uses the traditional formulas loosely, he nevertheless uses them. Aside from alliteration itself, these phrases are Dunbar's most obvious borrowings from the alliterative tradition.

In conclusion, it is possible to see that Dunbar draws on the alliterative tradition to create stylistic effects throughout his aureate poetry. He uses alliteration extensively, sometimes to draw attention to individual lines, sometimes to join groups of lines. His carefully patterned alliteration forms a brilliant complement to the poetry's meaning. Even when he draws on the alliterative formulas, he frequently gives them new meaning either through unexpected variations, or by placing them in unexpected contexts. Dunbar borrows from the alliterative tradition to link parts of his poems, and to enrich his style. Much of the compactness and brilliance of his poetry comes from his skillful use of this tradition.

Notes

¹Stanley Greenfield, A Critical History of Old English Literature (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1965), p. 133.

²Greenfield, p. 165.

³Greenfield, p. 222.

⁴Dorothy Everett, Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. Patricia Kean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 27-28.

⁵F. J. Amours, "Introduction," Scottish Alliterative Poems in Rhyming Stanzas, STS, Ser. 1, Nos. 27, 38 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1897), pp. vii.

⁶The Poems of James VI of Scotland, ed. James Craigie, STS, Ser. 3, No. 22 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1955), I, 76-77. The full title of King James's work is Ane Schort Treatise, Conteing Some Revlis and cautelis to be obseruit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie.

⁷J. P. Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester Univ. Press, 1930-35), I, 244.

⁸Ants Oras, "Spenser and Milton," in Sound and Poetry, ed. Northrop Frye, English Institute Essays 1956 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 114-115.

⁹Oras, p. 116.

¹⁰Merle Fifield, "Alliteration in the Middle English Lyrics," Diss. Univ. of Illinois 1960, p. xi.

¹¹For additional discussion of vocalic alliteration, see Paul Kiparsky's essays, "Metrics and Morphonemics in the Kalevala," in Studies Presented to Roman Jakobson by his Students, ed. Charles C. Gribble (Cambridge, Mass.: Slavia Publishers, Inc., 1968), pp. 137-198; and "The Role of Linguistics in a Theory of Poetry," Daedalus 102 (1973), 231-244.

¹²Oakden, I, 236.

¹³Fifield, p. xii.

¹⁴Oakden, I, 201-202.

¹⁵Everett, pp. 26-27.

¹⁶Everett, p. 38; Oakden, II, 195-379; Larry Benson, Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1965), p.136.

¹⁷Fifield, pp. 132-498, catalogues alliterative phrases from five sources, including thirteenth century lyrics, Harley MS 2253, fourteenth century religious lyrics, fifteenth century religious lyrics, and fifteenth century secular lyrics. Oakden, II, 195-379, has gathered alliterative phrases primarily from Old English and the alliterative revival. All references to these lists will be cited in the text.

¹⁸Denton Fox, "The Poetry of William Dunbar," Diss. Yale 1956, pp. 18-63; John Cooper Mendenhall, Aureate Terms: A Study in the Literary Diction of the Fifteenth Century, Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1919 (Lancaster, Pa.: Wickersham Printing Co., 1919); and John Conley, "Four Studies in Aureate Terms," Diss. Stanford, 1956.

¹⁹Benson, p. 124. Conley, p. 41, makes a distinction between aureate diction and the poetic diction of the alliterative tradition: "Archaic diction was not considered aureate, however, although it is a common enough ornament in Classical literature and may well be a part of the alliterative tradition in English: the largely foreign character of aureate terms is again revealed." Both archaic and foreign words would, however, by their unfamiliarity, produce similar effects in poetry, and the two traditions could be easily mingled.

²⁰Everett, p. 47.

²¹Benson, p. 148.

²²Jerome Mandel, "Contrast in Old English Poetry," The Chaucer Review, 6 (1971), 1.

²³Betty Jane Fisher, "William Dunbar: A Study in Contrasts," Diss. Univ. of Wisconsin, 1965.

²⁴Mandel, p. 3.

²⁵Benson, pp. 157-158.

²⁶Everett, p. 23.

²⁷Fox, The Poetry of William Dunbar, p. 44.

²⁸Denton Fox, "Dunbar's The Golden Targe," ELH 26 (1959), 331-334; Lois A. Ebin, "The Theme of Poetry in Dunbar's 'Golden Targe'," The Chaucer Review, 7 (1972), 147-159; F. Allen Tilley, "The Meaning of Dunbar's 'The Golden Targe,'" Studies in Scottish Literature, 10 (1973), 220-231.

²⁹Fox, "Dunbar's The Golden Targe," p. 311.

³⁰Fox, "Dunbar's The Golden Targe," p. 321.

³¹The phoneme /k/ is sometimes spelled k in Dunbar, but is more frequently c. I have cited alliteration on any spelling of /k/ as c in my text, mainly because both Fifield and Oakden have alphabetized phrases alliterating on /k/ under c in their lists.

³²Fox, "Dunbar's The Golden Targe," pp. 332-333.

³³Fox, "Dunbar's The Golden Targe," p. 316.

³⁴Fox, "Dunbar's The Golden Targe," p. 317.

³⁵Ebin, p. 151.

³⁶Ebin, p. 152.

³⁷Johannes Fuhrmann, Die Alliterierenden Sprachformeln in Morris' Early English Alliterative Poems, und im Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight. Diss. Kiel 1886 (Hamburg: William Hintel's Buchdruckerei, 1886), p. 28.

³⁸Greenfield, pp. 75-76, "The poet, working on the degree of expectancy set up by the traditional collocation, or by his own creations of habitual patterns, could deliberately extend or frustrate that expectancy in various ways."

³⁹Patrologiae Latina, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1863), Vol. 90, col. 151.

⁴⁰Fox, "Dunbar's The Golden Targe," p. 331.

⁴¹Benson, pp. 129-130.

⁴²Tom Scott, Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 300.

⁴³C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 96.

⁴⁴Fox, "The Poetry of William Dunbar," pp. 107-108; Scott, p. 301.

⁴⁵I assume that the c of campioun has its usual value of /k/. The DOST lists Old Northern French campiun as well as Old French champiun as sources for the word, which ultimately goes back to Latin campio. The "Glossary" of the STS edition links campioun to Old English and Danish kamp, meaning "fight." The spelling points toward a pronunciation of /k/ as does its possible association with words in Old English and Danish, and the Romance etymology seems to leave this pronunciation as at least a possibility.

CHAPTER III

THE COMIC STYLE

Dunbar's comic poems are perhaps the most accessible to the modern reader. The intricate ornamentation of the aureate poems is likely to seem artificial today, while the celebration of unfamiliar events, the conventions of a Roman de la Rose courtship, and the consciously artificial language create barriers between the poetry and the reader. The comic poems have the same ornate workmanship--the alliteration, the unusual vocabulary--but in these poems the language heightens the comic effect in a way that evokes an immediate response. The appeal of the comic poems is so strong that John Speirs has been led

to suggest that the core of his living achievement, that part of his achievement which we read as if it were contemporary, consists, not of the ceremonial poems, The Golden Targe, The Thrissil and the Rois, but of the comic and satiric poems, The Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo, The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sinnis, the goliardic blasphemies, The Flyting, The Satire on Edinburgh, and the more acrid and radical satires that merge into the saturnine poems that give his work as a whole, for all its intense vitality, its dark cast.¹

While not going quite as far as Speirs, I would like to suggest that the style of the comic poems is at least as complicated as that of the aureate poems. The comic poems are, in fact, of special interest in this study since they are, in many cases, the poems most clearly written in the alliterative tradition.

The most important of Dunbar's comic poems are "The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," written in unrhymed alliterative long lines, and "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy" written in rhymed alliterative verse. These two poems, then, will be discussed first in this

chapter. The rest of the comic poems are so diverse as to defy any simple system of classification. It is possible, however, to place them in three rough groups. First there are attacks on characters; these poems, and the apologies they occasioned, account for roughly half of Dunbar's comic work. Second, a few of the comic poems deal with religious themes. Finally, one group can only be classified as obscene.

"The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" has the soundest critical reputation of any of Dunbar's comic poems. It is the only one of his poems in any style, to my knowledge, to have become the subject of a book-length study.² Another critic calls "The Tretis" the only comic poem which "is truly extraordinary."³ Critics who have censured the poem have usually been too shocked by its contents to consider its merits. In A. J. G. MacKay's "Introduction" to the STS edition, for example, the poem represents in women "a special depravity in the sex which in better times maintains standards of purity" (I, lxxxii). To a twentieth century woman, however, the poem is a "very modern debate,"⁴ in which "the speech is charged with intimate mockery, and the wild unrepression of the ladies' complexes is set up with true irony between a beautiful opening and a beautiful end."⁵

The opening of the poem is just after midnight on Midsummer's Eve, when the poet finds three beautiful ladies drinking wine and talking in an arbor. As he remains hidden, listening to their conversation, one of the ladies, a widow, asks the other two their opinions on marriage and promises to give her own in return. The first woman to speak would like for women to have free choice of mates, and for marriage to be for one year only, so that she could change husbands annually. Her husband is

ugly, jealous, lecherous and impotent. She can tolerate him only by forcing him to pay dearly in dresses and jewelry for her favors. The second woman has a husband who appears to be young and handsome, but he has worn himself into impotence through adultery. She too would welcome the opportunity to change mates. The widow has had two husbands. The first, a disgusting old man, she pretended to love while keeping a paramour on the side until the old man left most of his estate to her son, although the child was born after the husband had become impotent. Her second husband was a merchant, whom she despised for his low birth. The more he attempted to please her, the greater both her dominance and her contempt became. She parted him from his wealth to raise her own children like nobles, and added insult to injury by gossiping about his inadequacies. Now that her second husband is dead, she attends church to look over the young men, but keeps a damp sponge ready to feign tears if she sees any of her late husband's friends. She is charitable if there is anyone around to see her, and goes on pilgrimages more for the company than the pardons. Meanwhile, she entertains as many lovers as possible. The party continues as the poet retires to record their conversation and to ask which of the ladies the reader would prefer to be wedded to.

The first topic we need to discuss in "The Tretis" is the versification. The poem is written in the extended form of the alliterative long line developed by the poets of the alliterative revival.⁶ In the extended long line, the number of stressed syllables, as well as the number of unstressed syllables, may vary within certain limits. Each line must have at least four stresses:

/ / / /
 Bot als fresche of his forme, as flouris in May. (l. 87)

Lines with five stressed syllables are very frequent:

/ / / / /
 I drew in derne to the dyk to dirkin eftir myrthis. (l. 9)

Although less common, lines with six stresses are possible:

/ / / / / /
 And sais, "My souerane sueit thing, quhy sleip 3e no betir?" (l.221)

Dunbar generally follows the convention of not permitting the final stressed syllable to alliterate. The verse is also conservative in that it is usually possible to divide a line into half-lines by a caesura before the next to last stress. Sentence and clause boundaries generally correspond to the end of a line rather than to the caesura. Tom Scott is correct when he says that in "The Tretis" "the consciousness of the hemistich as being the true unit of the verse is submerged, having been replaced by the Romance concept of the 'line', the 'versus', as the unit of metre."⁷ In this poem a metrical concept from iambic verse seems to have influenced Dunbar's use of the old alliterative line, just as elements from alliterative verse influenced his iambic poems.

The unrhymed alliterative verse of "The Tretis" was already somewhat archaic by the time the poem was written. By the late fifteenth century most alliterative poetry in Scotland was in rhymed stanzas. The question of what effect this verse might have had on Dunbar's original audience is intriguing. At first glance, "The Tretis" seems to offer concrete support to King James VI's contention, discussed in the previous chapter, that alliterative verse was suited only to the comic insults of flyting. As the three women rail against their husbands, the effect

is certainly that of a flyting. William Craigie supports this view that alliterative verse lends itself to abusive humor when he writes that Dunbar "saw in alliterative verse greater opportunity for easy composition, racy discourse, and a free use of the abusive epithets which the three women agree in applying to their husbands."⁸

Craigie would be correct if the tone of the poem were uniformly abusive. The poem begins, however, with a very courtly description of the ladies and the poem's setting:

Apon the Midsummer ewin, mirriest of nichtis,
 I muvit furth allane, neir as midnight wes past,
 Besyd ane gudlie grene garth, full of gay flouris,
 Hegeit, of ane huge hicht, with hawthorne treis:
 Quhairon ane bird, on ane bransche, so birst out hir notis
 That neuer ane blythfullar bird was on the beuche harde:
 Quhat throw the sugarat sound of hir sang glaid,
 And throw the sauar sanatiue of the sueit flouris,
 I drew in derne to the dyk to dirkin eftir mirthis;
 The dew donkit the daill and dynarit the foulis. (ll.1-10)

A. D. Hope finds "no hint of parody in the opening passage and the poet returns to the elevated and idealised treatment of the scene at the end as seriously and as enthusiastically as he began."⁹ The alliterative line in "The Tretis" is, then, used for two purposes, as James Kinsley has observed, "It is a vehicle both for coarse description and self-expression, and for elaborately ornamental description."¹⁰ Kinsley feels that "by the time of James IV, the alliterative line was associated chiefly with sophisticated and serious types of poetry, especially romance."¹¹ Kinsley adds that "the alliterative line, losing nothing in flexibility and compactness, but gradually increasing in force is turned to a new and unexpected use in the speech of the first wife."¹²

Kinsley reads "The Tretis" as an essay in contrasts in which the

choice of the alliterative line plays a major part:

The centre of the Tretis is the contrast between appearance and reality, between the ideal world of courtly poetry and the 'spotted actuality' of the three women's minds and habits; and to this end a metrical form chiefly associated with sophisticated courtly description and narrative is suddenly turned into the medium of erotic reminiscence. 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.¹³

Basing an entire poem on an implicit contrast is certainly within the alliterative tradition, and Kinsley seems correct in saying that the verse itself contributes to the effect of this contrast. Dunbar himself alludes to the comic irony of the speech of the three women in contrast to the high style of the opening and closing lines of the poem. When the widow finishes her monologue, Dunbar begins the transition to the epilogue with the line, "Quhen endit had her ornat speche, this eloquent wedow." (l. 505). The use of the word "ornate" seems clearly ironic, since Dunbar indicates what he usually means by "ornate" language when, in "The Golden Targe," he praises Homer "For all thine ornat stilis so perfyte" (l. 68).

The relation of the alliterative verse form to the contrast between the language of the central section of the poem and its opening and closing lines is, however, more complicated than Kinsley seems to realize. When he says that alliterative verse was "chiefly associated with sophisticated courtly description and narrative," he is overstating his case. While James VI's remarks on alliterative verse should not be taken as gospel, they should not be ignored. We must also take into account that while Dunbar used parts of the alliterative tradition in

all of his poetry for artistic effects, he used alliterative verse itself, either rhymed or unrhymed, only in comic poems. Dunbar's contemporaries also used alliterative verse generally in their humorous efforts, such as Robert Henryson's "Sum Practise of Medycine,"¹⁴ and Gavin Douglas's "Proloug" to the eighth book of his translation of the Aeneid.¹⁵

The attitude of Dunbar's audience to the versification of "The Tretis" must have been ambivalent. The form was associated on the one hand with the tradition of courtly romance. On the other hand, the audience was accustomed to hearing the form used comically in more recent poetry. When first hearing, or reading, this poem, the audience would have had to decide whether Dunbar was using the versification in its traditional purpose, courtly romance, or for its more recent purpose, humor. For the first forty lines, Dunbar beguiles his audience into believing that he is using the alliterative line for its traditional purpose, poetry in the high style. Seeing or hearing a recent poem, the audience must have expected a comic piece if it were in alliterative verse, but they could not have been sure. In the first forty lines, then, Dunbar manages to disappoint the audience's expectation, while remaining faithful to the alliterative tradition. In the body of the poem, Dunbar disappoints the expectation he has so carefully fostered by turning the poem to what the audience probably originally expected, comedy. By twice disappointing the expectations of the audience, Dunbar greatly magnifies the impact of the contrast between the tone of the opening and the speeches of the three women. That one of the disappointments relies on the audience's expecta-

tions from alliterative verse itself emphasizes the role of the verse form in the "contrasts between appearance and reality" which Kinsley finds in the poem.

Since the verse form of "The Tretis" demands that every line alliterate, it is obviously impossible for alliteration itself to give any sort of emphasis. Nevertheless, Dunbar uses the alliteration artistically by creating patterns of alliterative sounds, a technique which had been used earlier in the Morte Arthure.¹⁶ For example, the first woman draws a contrast between the chains of matrimony and her ideal of free choice in four lines all alliterating on the same consonant:

3e speir, had I fre chois, gif I wald cheis better?
Chen3eis ay ar to eschew; and changeis ar sueit:
 Sic cursit chance till eschew, had I my chois anis,
 Out of the chen3eis of ane churle I chaip suld for euir (ll. 52-55)

A more extended example of the same technique is in the widow's speech, as she describes her behavior in church:

I haif a water sponge for wa, within my wye clokis,
 Than wring it full wylely, et wetis my chekis;
With that wateris myn ene, and welteris doune teris.
 Than say thai all, that sittis about, "Se 3e nought, allace!
 3one lustlese led so leley scho luffit hir husband:
 3one is a pete to enprent in a princis hert,
 That sic a perle of plesance suld 3one pane dre!"
 I sane me as I war ane sanct, et semys ane angell;
 At langage of lichory I leit as I war crabit:
 I sich, without sair hert, or seiknes in body;
 According to my sable weid I mon haif sad maneris,
 Or thai will se all the suth; for certis, we wemen
 We set us all fra the syght to syle men of treuth (ll. 437-449)

The first three lines alliterate on w and form a cohesive unit in which the widow describes her technique of producing tears if any of her late husband's friends should happen to see her. She carries water in a sponge which she can wring to make tears run down her cheeks. The next

four lines describe the public reaction to the widow's performance with her sponge. Alliterating s l p p, these lines begin a more complicated pattern. The widow describes the onlookers, "Then all those sitting around say: 'Alas, do you not see yonder unhappy creature, who loved her husband so faithfully. It is enough to impress pity in a prince's heart, that such a pearl of delight should have to endure such suffering as that.'"¹⁷ The widow gives a candid description of herself in the following six lines. The first two lines of this section alliterate s l, just as the first two lines of the description of the public reaction. The two pairs of s and l lines have a close logical relation. The first s l pair describes the response she receives, while the second pair concentrates on her own actions. Even the imagery of the two pairs is consistent. In the first s l pair, the widow is praised for her marital fidelity; in the second pair she upholds her chastity by pretending to be shocked by indecency. In the final four lines, alliterating on s, the widow returns to the theme of deception with which she began the passage. In the first two of these s lines, she continues to describe her demeanor: "I sigh, though my heart is not sad or my body sick. I have to keep up sober behaviour to go with my black weeds." The contrast of her motives with her outward appearance forms a sharp contrast in the remaining two s lines: "Otherwise they will see the truth; for truly we women set ourselves to blind men to the sight of truth." The contrast within these four lines embodies the contrast between the appearance and the reality of the women on which both the passage and the entire poem are built. The passage begins and ends with deception. We know of the widow's duplicity when she tells about her sponge. The poem then shifts to the

result of the deception, closely linked by alliteration to the widow's description of her mannerisms. As we become involved in the details of her feigned piety and mourning, we almost forget the motive behind it until the last two lines, which jolt us back into the reality with which we began. That we should almost be deceived after knowing of her treachery beforehand makes her performance both plausible and horrifying.

In "The Tretis," Dunbar links lines by alliteration to create another effect, one which is unusual in unrhymed alliterating poetry. In some passages, lines are joined in groups of two, creating the effect of couplets. Dunbar uses this technique after the widow has finished her speech and the poem returns to the higher tone of the opening:

Thus draif thai our that deir night, with danceis full noble,
 Quhill that the day did vp daw, et dew donkit the flouris;
 The morow myld wes et meik, the mavis did sing,
 And all remuffit the myst, et the meid smellit;
 Siluer schouris doune schuke, as the schene cristall,
 And berdis schoutit in schaw, with thair schill notis;
 The goldin glitter and gleme, so gladid ther hertis,
 Thai maid a glorius gle amang the grene bewis.
 The soft souch of the swyr, et sovne of the stremys,
 The sueit sawour 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.
 Than rais thir ryall roisis, in ther riche wedis,
 And rakit hame tother rest, through the rise blwmys;
 And I all prevely past to a plesand arber,
 And with my pen did report thair pastance most mery. (11.511-526)

Although sentence boundaries tend to fall at the ends of these alliterative couplets, the lines alliterating on identical letters do not form groups of meaning, as in the portion of the widow's speech analyzed above. In this passage, it seems that the meaning has been forced to fit the artificial pattern of paired lines. In this instance, Dunbar's experience with rhymed stanzas has influenced his use of alliterative verse. These

couplets serve to give a very regular tone to the epilogue of the poem, contrasting to the tone of the women's speeches.

Lines are grouped in "The Tretis" by alliteration for two purposes. A series of closely related lines may be bound into a unit by alliterating on the same sound to emphasize the importance of that group. Alliteration may also bind lines into pairs, creating the effect of couplets. Used over an extended passage, this technique can give the entire passage an ornate, elevated tone, but has little direct connection with meaning. Both techniques are used extensively in "The Tretis," since 52.6% of the lines of the poem are adjacent to a line alliterating on the same sound.

As might be expected in an alliterative poem, Dunbar draws on the traditional stock of alliterative formulas. A few of Dunbar's phrases may be compared with Merle Fifield's lists:

Dunbar	Fifield
bird on ane bransche (l. 5);	byrde in bewe; bird on brere
birdis on bewch (l. 205)	(p. 431)
blythfullar bird (l. 6)	blīful biryd (p. 132)
gress that grew (l. 24)	gressys grewe (p. 436)
a luke without lust (l. 188)	lust forto loke (p. 438)
perle of plesance (l. 443)	perle of prise (p. 440)
prese of peple (l. 475)	press of people (p. 440)
riche ruby (l. 367)	ryche Ruby (p. 441)
walkand for wo (l. 213)	þan walkynnīs my wo (p. 445)
weddit wemen (l. 41)	a wedded woman (p. 445)
Wise women (l. 451); So wisly,	wisdom and womanhed; womanly
and so womanly (l. 496)	and wyiss (p. 446)

Only two of these phrases call for any critical comment. The phrase "a luke without lust" comes from the second woman's speech, in which she complains that her husband's desires far outstrip his performance. The phrase Dunbar gives her is a skillful inversion of the more traditional "lust forto loke." The widow claims that people call her a "perle of

plesance," which might even implant pity "in a princis hert" (1.442). Lines alliterating on pearl, plesant, and prince were familiar in alliterative poetry; for example, the opening line of Pearl: "Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye."¹⁸ Such associations give a quite clear indication of what the people around her thought of the widow, making the contrast with her more candid self-revelation all the more dramatic.

Although I have found no evidence that hegies and hight were joined in any traditional alliterative formulas, the combination seems to have become formulaic for Dunbar, since he uses the combination both in "The Tretis" and in "The Golden Targe." The garden of the three women of "The Tretis" is "Hegeit, of any huge hicht" (1. 4). In the garden of "The Golden Targe," "the hegies raise on hicht" (1. 34). The repetition of this pair in the two poems proves little, but it does indicate that, like an alliterative poet, Dunbar was willing to repeat alliterative phrases he found useful in certain contexts. This phrase, for example, occurs in a description of a very courtly garden in the spring in both poems. The connection with "The Golden Targe" also perhaps gives an indication that the opening lines of "The Tretis" should be taken as "aureate," in the sense in which I have used the term. Dunbar's motives for putting the introduction to this poem in an elevated style have been discussed.

"The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy" is Dunbar's only poem in rhymed alliterative verse, a form which had previously been used in several long Scottish poems.¹⁹ Flyting, an exercise in humorous abuse, seems to have been an established verse form in Scotland in the fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries. King James VI alludes to flyting, and King James V wrote a flyting on Sir David Lindsay, to which Lindsay replied. The reply suggests that the flyting was a verbal duel, in which harsh language was exchanged without real malice, and in which the author of a flyting expected a reply in kind:

Schir, with my Prince pertenit me nocht to pley:
 Bot sen your grace hes geuin me sic command,
 To mak answer, it must neidis me obey.²⁰

A modern analogue to the flyting might be the modern American custom of the "roast," in which a distinguished guest is made the butt of a series of humorous monologues and skits, then sometimes invited to reply.

The critical response to "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy" may be best described as confused. John Speirs, who considers the comic poems the best of Dunbar's work, has unreserved enthusiasm for "The Flyting":

The two poets abuse each other like two fishwives, though it is of course a kind of game. It is a comic tour de force of sheer language, but because the language is in this case living language, the coarse-textured vigorous language of the actual popular speech, it does not separate the poet from life but carries him towards it, its own life, wild, savage, uncivilized as its humor . . . is here.²¹

Tom Scott, however, is so appalled by the contents of the poem that, while he can admire the virtuosity of the performance, he must condemn the poem:

For all its great technical skill--and for all its revelation of the high standard achieved technically, not only by Dunbar, but also by Kennedy--this is a thoroughly "bad" poem. Poetry is not merely verse, nor wealth of language, nor any other merely technical or clever thing; it is the spirit of life more abundant making these merely technical matters into a thing of life-giving virtue.²²

Scott's censure is based on his own notions of what constitutes a fitting topic for poetry, not anything in the poem itself. Scott's error, it seems to me, lies in taking the abuse of the poem far too seriously. Speirs seems correct in saying that the poem is a game. Speirs, on the other hand, errs when he says that "The Flyting" is the "language of actual popular speech." Unless we want to believe that early sixteenth century Scotland was inhabited by linguistic supermen, it is impossible to imagine Edinburgh fishwives flyting at one another with the style of Dunbar. Denton Fox is more accurate when he says that "The Flyting" is "baroque and exuberant, with its multiplicity of rhymes, but is also stiff and formalized because its involved pattern is so perfectly regular."²³

The language of "The Flyting" is as carefully contrived as that of any of Dunbar's aureate poems. Even the stock of abusive words "considered as poetic diction . . . would still have been unusual enough to qualify as a sort of low-life equivalent to 'aureate terms.'"²⁴ Engaged in a poetic battle, the two "makars" attempt to demonstrate their virtuosity with every tool of their craft. This self-conscious virtuosity gives the poem particular stylistic interest.

Dunbar begins the duel by challenging Kennedy. In a three stanza passage, Dunbar alludes to possible flytings by Kennedy, and warns him that unless he abandons poetry, he will have to contend with Dunbar. The final stanza of the challenge is worth quoting, since it tells us something of the posture adopted by combatants before beginning a flyting:

But wondir laith wer I to be an baird,
 Flyting to vse, for gritly I eschame;
 For it is nowthir wyning nor rewaird,
 Bot tinsale baith of honour and of fame,

Inces of sorrow, sklender, and evill name;
 3it mycht thay be sa bald, in thair bakbytting,
 To gar me ryme, and rais the feynd with flytting,
 And throw all cuntreis, and kinrikis thame proclame.(11.17-24)

Dunbar professes to be reluctant to join in a flyting, because in it there is neither "winning nor reward, but loss both of honor and fame, increase of sorrow, slander, and evil name." Only the infamy of his opponent can drive him to the dirty work of exposing the scoundrel: "Yet might they be so bold, in their backbiting, to make me rhyme, and raise the fiend with flyting, and proclaim them through all countries and kingdoms." The plural they refers to Kennedy and Quinting, who had apparently jointly authored a flyting on Sir John the Rose. Dunbar begins the challenge, "Schir Johne the Ross, ane thing thair is compild / In generale be Kennedy and Quinting, / Quhilk hes thame self aboif the sternis styld" (11.1-3). Nothing is now known of either Sir John the Rose or of Quinting. Kennedy accepts the challenge in three stanzas, warning Dunbar to surrender before he loses: "Say Deo mercy, or I cry the doun, / And leif thy ryming, rebald, and thy rowis" (11.31-32).

Dunbar's portion of "The Flyting" cannot be summarized. He attacks Kennedy's appearance, his wardrobe, and his poetry, ending on a hilarious account of Kennedy entering Edinburgh pursued by boys and dogs. Kennedy's attack cannot match the comical, abusive force of Dunbar's. He draws a fanciful etymology of Dunbar's name, and rails on alleged treasons by Dunbar's supposed Lowland ancestors.

The first stanza of Dunbar's attack is typical of the whole:

Irsche brybour baird, wyle beggar with thy brattis,
Cuntbittin crawdoun Kennedy, coward of kynd,
 Evill farit and dryit, as Denseman on the rattis,

Lyke as the gleddis had on thy gulesnowt dynd;
Mismaid monstour, ilk mone owt of thy mynd,
Renunce, rebald, thy ryming, thow bot royis,
 Thy trechour tung hes tane ane heland strynd;
 Ane lawland ers wald mak a bettir noyis. (ll. 49-56)

Because of the unusual language of "The Flyting," perhaps a paraphrase is in order: "Irish beggar (or thief) bard, vile beggar with your brats, vagina-bitten coward Kennedy, coward by nature, getting along evilly, and as shrivelled as a Dane on the wheels, as though the kites had dined on your yellow nose; mismade monster, that moans out of your mind, renounce, ribald, your rhyming, you only rave; your trecherous tongue has taken a highland strain; a lowland ass wald mak a bettir noise." The first four lines appear to be a series of unrelated abuses, reviling Kennedy as a beggar, a thief, and a coward. Calling him "cuntbitten" after mentioning his "brattis" is, however, a nice touch. The second half of the stanza is a reasonably connected discourse. Although Kennedy is both a "mismade monstour," and a "rebald," there is a steady attack on his poetic abilities. He moans and raves because he writes as a Gaelic-speaking Highlander. The attack builds to the triumphant conclusion, "Ane lawland ers wald mak a bettir noyis." This line is the only one in the stanza which does not alliterate, emphasizing the poor quality of Kennedy's work. The conclusion of the stanza reveals one point about the construction of the first four lines. The opening insult, "Irsche brybour baird," is carefully chosen to give the stanza a sense of balance, since Dunbar finally attacks Kennedy as a Gaelic poet. The word brybour serves a function beyond supplying an alliteration. Carrying connotations of both "beggar" and "thief," it embodies two of the major lines of insult

Dunbar intends to follow throughout the poem. These two techniques--name-calling and brief narrative passages which serve as a frame for more name-calling--are used in most of the poem.

Brief passages of narration may be linked by alliteration, as in part of Dunbar's description of Kennedy's reception when he comes to Edinburgh:

Off Edinburgh, the boyis as beis own thrawis,
 And cryis owt ay, "Heir cumis our awin queir Clerk!"
 Than fleis thow, lyk and howlat chest with crawis,
 Quhill all the bichis at thy botingis dois bark:
 Than carlingis cryis, "Keip curches in the merk". (ll. 217-221)

The first line alliterates on b, the second on c. The third line lacks alliteration, while the last two repeat the b, c pattern of the first two. The first two lines describe the boys of Edinburgh, who throng out to cry, "Here comes our own strange clerk." Kennedy, who flees like an owl chased by crows, is forced to retreat without the dignity of alliteration, which is lavished on the dogs and shrews of Edinburgh in the next two lines. The dogs bark at Kennedy's heels, while the shrews cry to keep their head-dresses hidden in the dark. The identical alliteration in the first two and last lines emphasizes the parallel action of the boys, dogs, and women, all noisily pursuing Kennedy, who is sandwiched ignominiously in the middle of them.

Interlocking alliteration is used effectively in other portions of "The Flyting." Pretending to be passing along reports from Kennedy's friend Quinting, Dunbar says Quinting gives this account of Kennedy's relations with the beggars:

He sayis, thow skaffis and beggis mair beir and ait is
 Nor only cripill in Karrik land abowt:
 Uthir pure beggaris and thow ar at debaittis,
 Decrepit karlingis on Kennedy cryis owt. (ll. 133-136)

Kennedy wanders and begs more beer and oats than any cripple in Karrik. He quarrels with other beggars, and decrepit hags cry out against him. These lines come at the end of a stanza to form a climax whose effect is heightened by their alternating alliteration on b and c.

Dunbar uses the common linking device of alliterating adjacent lines on the same letter:

Thow speiris, dastard gif I dar with the fecht?
3e dagone, dowbart, thairof haif thow no dowt!

The linking is particularly effective here, since the first line poses a question which the second answers. Question and answer are bound tightly together. "You ask if I dare fight with you? You devil, dullard, of that have no doubt."

Another device used occasionally in "The Flyting" is multiple alliteration within a single line:

All Karrik cryis, God gif this dowsy be drownd. (l. 158)

A series of stops, two c's, two g's, and two d's, move across the line in an almost deafening array. Since this device is used sparingly, it is extremely effective when it occurs. In this case, it reflects perfectly the noise of a whole county crying for someone's life.

In the final stanza of "The Flyting," Dunbar creates a string of invective seldom matched in English literature. The prosody of this stanza will be analyzed in Chapter 5. The most important device to be discussed here is internal rhyme:

Mauch muttoun, vyle buttoun, peilit gluttoun, air to Hilhouse;
* *
Rank beggar, ostir dregar, foule fleggar, in the flet;
 * * *
Chittirlilling, ruch rilling, ilk schilling in the milhouse;
 * *
Baird rehatour, theif of natour, fals tratour, feyndis gett;
 * *

Filling of tauch, rak sauch, cry crauch, thow art our sett;
 Muttoun dryver, girnall ryver, 3adswyvar, fowll fell the:
 Herretyk, lunatyk, purspyk, carlingis pet,
 Rottin crok, dirtin dok, cry cok, or I sall quell the. (ll.241-248)

Internal rhymes are marked by underlining, alliteration by the asterisk (*). A paraphrase of this may be helpful: "Maggoty mutton, vyle dumpy fellow, naked glutton, heir to Hillhouse, strong beggar, oyster dredger, foul flatterer into the house, guts [in] rough [Highland] shoes, like husked grain in the millhouse, enemy bard, thief of nature, false traitor, fiend's brat, lump of tallow, gallows' bird (lit. 'stretch halter'), cry like a caught hen, you are overcome; sheep stealer, meal thief, mare fornicator, foul befell you: heretic, lunatic, pickpurse, old woman's pet, rotten ewe, filthy anus, give up, or I shall quell you." The insults in the stanza range from obscene, such as "mare fornicator," to incomprehensible to modern readers, such as "rough hide shoes, like husked grain in the millhouse." The effect of this string of insults is enhanced by internal rhyme, a device Dunbar uses elsewhere only in his most ornate aureate poem, "Ane Ballat of Our Lady." Each line contains three internal rhymes which differ from those at the ends of lines. Generally, each internal rhyme of a line contains one insult. Each epithet thus gains a special linguistic prominence, and is connected to its neighbors linguistically if not logically, so that the original has a force and sense of coherence completely lacking from the paraphrase.

Dunbar had two precedents for the use of internal rhyme. Late Old English and early Middle English alliterative poetry had sometimes used rhyme to link half-lines, with or without alliteration.²⁵ Latin poetry, however, offers a verse form, the versus leoninus, which uses internal

rhyme in a manner more closely resembling Dunbar's use of it in "The Flyting":

Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus.
 Ecce minaciter imminet arbiter ille supremus:
 Imminet, imminet, ut mala terminet, aequa coronet,
 Recta remuneret, anxia liberet, aethera donet . . .
 Patria splendida terraque florida, libera spinis,
 Danda fidelibus est ibi civibus, hic peregrinis.²⁶

Dunbar has successfully adapted a popular technique from medieval Latin poetry to his own purposes. After writing over two hundred lines of rhymed alliterative verse, Dunbar suddenly subordinates alliteration to internal rhyme. The surprise at the change greatly increases the force of the final stanza. In a technical duel of poets, Dunbar has pulled a coup which is hard to match. He has combined not only end-rhyme and alliteration, a common rhetorical ornamentation in fifteenth century Scotland, but has added a device from one of the most ornate forms of Latin poetry.

Dunbar does not draw heavily from the traditional alliterative formulas in "The Flyting." "Treichour tung" (l. 55) seems clearly related to "traytors tongis" (Fifield, p. 444); while "wit and wisdome" (l. 64) is part of the same formulaic group as "his wisdom and his witte" (Fifield, p. 256). The poem has few, if any, other formulas, however. The explanation for the relative absence of a rather common trait of alliterative poetry in "The Flyting" probably rests in the content and vocabulary of the poem. Most of the alliterative poetry that has survived does not have the rich variety of abuse of "The Flyting," so that Dunbar was forced to find original alliterations for most of his invective.

Despite its elaborate invective, "The Flyting" probably implies no real ill will between the verbal sparring partners. In any case, Dunbar gives Kennedy a kind mention in the "Lament for the Makaris":

Gud maister Walter Kennedy,
In poynt of dede lyis veraly,
Gret reuth it wer that so suld be;
Timor Mortis conturbat me. (ll. 89-92)

Not all of Dunbar's abusive poetry may be considered exercises in poetic craftsmanship, however. When he uses his pen against people he seems to have disliked, the results are devastating.

One of Dunbar's genuine victims was John Demian, Abbot of Tunghland. An Italian physician, Demian appears in the Treasurers' Accounts in 1501, receiving funds for medical supplies. When his interest turned to alchemy, Demian received larger grants from the King, earning the enmity of many in the court besides Dunbar. Demian's reputation is reflected by Bishop Leslie's comment, written in 1570, that Demian was "sa desceitful, and has sa craftie and curious ingin to begyl, that he persuadet the king of his gret cunning in al thing natural, cheiflie in that politik arte, quhilk quha knawis tha cal him an alcumist; bot his intention only was to milk purses."²⁷ By 1507 an item had appeared in the Treasurers' Accounts that a large amount of money had been "lent be the Kingis command to the Abbot of Tunghland, and can nocht be gotten fra him."²⁸ It is not surprising that anyone as financially successful as the Abbot of Tunghland would be disliked by Dunbar, who was constantly writing poems attempting to wheedle a little more money out of the King.

Dunbar's chance for poetic revenge on Demian came when the Abbot attempted an experiment with flight, leaping from Stirling Castle with

wings of birds' feathers attached to his arms. Bishop Leslie records that:

He makis to flie vp in the air; bot or he was weil begun,
his veyage was at an end, for this deceiuer fel doun with
sik a dade, that the bystanders wist not; quhither tha
sulde mair meine his dolour, or meruel of his dafrie. Al
rinis to visit him, tha ask the Abbot with his wings how
he did. he [sic] ansuers that his thich bane is brokne,
and he hopet neuer to gang agane; al war lyk to cleiue of
lauchter, that quha lyk another Jcarus wald now flie to
hevin, rychnow lyk another Simon Magus mycht nott sett
his fute to the Erde.²⁹

Dunbar turned the abbot's unsuccessful experiment into "Ane Ballat of the Fenzzeit Freir of Tungland, How he Fell in the Myre Fleand to Turkiland," a fanciful, satiric account of Demian's career leading up to his abortive flight.

Dunbar frames his poem as a dream vision, in which a Turk goes to Lombardy, where he kills a friar and steals his habit to avoid baptism. The imposture is successful since he is literate. After taking up medicine, he comes to Scotland, where many die as a result of his treatment. He avoids mass, and prefers working at some study which leaves his head as blackened as a smith's. After failing to make the quintessence, he puts on feathers in an attempt to fly back to Turkey. Once in the air the birds attack him so fiercely that he jumps out of his feathers, landing in the mud where he hides from the birds for three days. The noise of the birds wakes the dreamer.

"The Fenzzeit Freir of Tungland" should not be considered a flyting for two reasons. First, it is not in flyting form, that is, it is not in strictly alliterative verse. Although alliteration is used heavily, 60.1% of the lines alliterate, the figure is far less than the 78.0%

of alliterating lines in "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy." Second, the poem has too well developed a narrative for a flyting. The friar's career, although Dunbar's account is obviously fanciful, is developed in a clear, chronological order. The friar is characterized more by accounts of his actions and their results than by the sheer name-calling of the flyting. For example, Dunbar sustains his charge that "In leichecraft he was homecyd" (l.33) with a series of instances:

He cowth gif cure for laxatyve;
 To gar a wicht horss want his lyve,
 Quha evir assay wald, man or wyve,
 Thair hippis 3eid hiddy giddey.
 His praktikis nevir was put to preif,
 But suddane deid, or grit mischeif;
 He had purgatioun to mak a theif
 To dee withowt a widdy. (ll.41-48)

The most interesting fact about alliteration in "The Fenzzeit Freir of Tunmland" is its distribution. Dunbar has an unerring sense of cases in which less is more. Given the amount of alliteration in the poem, each eight-line stanza should have about five alliterating lines. When the friar fails in his alchemical experiments, this figure drops to two:

Me thoct seir fassonis he assail3eit,
 To mak the quintessance, and fail3eit;
 And quhen he saw that nocht avail3eit,
 A federem on he tuke,
 And schupe in Turkey for to fle;
 And quhen that he did mont on he,
 All fowill ferleit quhat he sowld be,
 That evir did on him luke (ll. 57-64)

The next stanza has only one alliterating line, as the birds attempt to decide what this creature is up in the air, although alliteration comes into play again in the last three lines of the stanza as the birds decide to make their attack:

The rukis him rent, the ravynis him druggit,
 The hudit crawis his hair furth ruggit,
 The hevin he nicht not bruke. (ll. 70-72)

The last line of the stanza is linked to the preceding one by alliteration on the h of hevin. The following three stanzas describe the attack of the birds; these stanzas have 87.5% of their lines alliterating, proportionately more than the poem as a whole. The effect is to give a great deal of linguistic force to the birds' assault.

Although I found no traditional alliterative formulas in "The Fenzzeit Freir of Tunland," the poem does share one formulaic expression with "The Flyting." In "The Fenzzeit Freir," Dunbar refers to "sound of sacring bell" (l.50). In "The Flyting" he uses the expression "swetar than sacrand bell of sound" (l. 160).

In some cases it is impossible to determine whether Dunbar meant for an attack to be comic, or whether any true dislike lies behind an obviously comic attack. A poem which may or may not have been intended as comic is "In Vice Most Vicius He Excellis," sometimes called "For Donald Owre, Epitaph." Donald Owre was the son of the last of the Lords of the Isles, who had ruled a semi-independent group of earldoms and maintained their status through alliances with the English against the Scottish crown until James IV forced the forfeiture of the Lordship in 1494. Owre rallied a few Highland chiefs for a rebellion in 1503, but he was captured by 1505. Dunbar's poem is written as an epitaph, although Owre was still alive at the time.³⁰

Dunbar uses a variant of the alliterative bob-wheel stanza for this poem. It is written in six line stanzas, in which the first two

lines have eight syllables each, and the remaining four have only four syllables. The rhyme scheme is a a b b b a. There is alliteration in 11 of the 14 octosyllabic lines, while only three of the 24 shorter lines alliterate. The reason for the lack of alliteration in the shorter lines is probably that there is simply no room for it in such a short line.

The following is a typical stanza:

The fell strong tratour, Donald Owyr,
Mair falsett had nor vdir fowyr;
Rowme ylis and seyis
In his suppleis,
On gallow treis
3itt dois he glowir. (ll. 19-24)

The short lines give the poem a very rapid rhythm, but the effect is hardly comic. Dunbar seems more interested in denouncing the traitor than in satirizing him, and the fast rhythm seems intended more to hasten the hanging than to create a rapid, rollicking merriment.

It is hard to tell, on the other hand, whether there is any real malice behind "Of James Dog, Kepar of the Quenis Wardrop." James Dog must have been surly enough when filling one of Dunbar's requisitions to provoke the poet into an attack. Dog's last name is an irresistible temptation to Dunbar:

The Wardraipper of Wenus boure,
To giff a doublett he is als doure,
As it war off ane futt syd frog:
Madame, 3e heff a dangerouss Dog! (ll.1-4)

When Dunbar presents his requisition, the dog is ready to bite; friendly words produce only barks. The dog is big enough to guard the wardrobe from "the grytt Sowdan Gog-ma-gog" (l. 19), and is much too big for a lap dog. Dunbar advises the Queen to find a smaller pet:

He is owre mekle to be 3our messan,
Madame, I red 3ou get a less ane. (ll. 21-22)

The feminine rhyme of messan and less ane has a certain comic charm to it.

The amount of alliteration in this attack is about average for Dunbar, or 45.8%. This figure includes, of course, the alliteration in the refrain, "a dangerous Dog" repeated every four lines. Dunbar uses one formula, "mekle of mycht" (l.17; Fifield, p. 439) to alliterate with mastyf.

The satire of James Dog must have created a strong enough response to make Dunbar change his tune. He wrote another poem saying that James Dog's "faithfull bruder and maist freind I am" ("Of the Same James, Quhen he had Plesett Him," (l. 3). Dunbar goes on to say:

Thocht I in ballet did with him bourde,
In malice spaik I newir ane woord,
Bot all, my Dame, to do 3ou gam:
He is na Dog; he is a Lam. (ll. 5-8)

Dunbar's humor is not confined to personal attacks. "Of a Dance in the Quenis Chalmer" is a genial comic poem about a few courtiers. Each participant in the dance receives a one stanza description of his activities, including Dunbar, who uncharacteristically includes himself in the comedy. Although only one of the dancers sounds graceful, everyone seems to have a good time, and none of the descriptions is long enough to qualify as an attack. The third stanza is a reasonable sample of the whole:

Than cam in Maister Almaser,
Ane hommilty jommelye juffler,
Lyk a stirk stackarand in the ry;
His hippis gaff mony hiddouss cry.

John Bute the Fule said, "Wa es me!
 He is bedirtin,--Fy! fy!"
 A mirrear Dance mycht na man se. (ll. 15-21)

As in the aureate poems, Dunbar expands his vocabulary here to meet his needs. The word juffler comes probably from the verb juffle, according to the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue, and seems to mean a clumsy person.³¹ Hommilte jommelte is an imitative form, according to the DOST. Combined with juffler, the imitative phrase sets up a rapid rhythm, with both internal rhyme and alliteration. The effect of the line accords well with the picture of the energetic if uncoordinated dancer. The alliteration of the next two lines combines with consonance to maintain a mad pace. Stirk and stackarand alliterate, and in each word the alliterating cluster is followed by a k. The stops in the cluster and after the vowel in both stressed syllables slow the line, while the repetition sets up a heavy rhythm. The alliterating words both have r's after the alliterating clusters and their vowels, which ties these words by consonance to the final word of the line, ry. The clumping rhythm of the stops, moving at the end of the line to the more resonant r, which has been present all along, matches perfectly the clumping, swaying motion of an ox staggering in the rye. John Bute the Fool is linked by alliteration on his epithet to his remark in the next line, "Fy! Fy!" The line "He is bedirtin,--Fy! fy!" lacks one syllable after the caesura, and ends on two equally strong stresses. This line momentarily breaks up the rhythm, and the dance, because of Master Almaser's embarrassment. The festivities continue, however, in the refrain: "A mirrear Dance mycht na man se." The series of resonants,

m, n, and r, give the line a smoothly flowing quality, providing a nice transition into the next dancer.

The amount of alliteration in "Of a Dance in the Quenis Chalmer" is very heavy, with 55.1% of the lines alliterating. While alliteration is used carefully within the line, it is not used extensively in this poem to bind lines into groups. Lines alliterating on the same sound are usually separated by at least one line:

He stackerit lyk ane strummall awer,
That hap schackellit war abone the kne:
To seik fra Sterling to Stranawer. (ll. 11-13)

The same technique may encompass the refrain line:

For luff of Mwsgraeffe, men tellis me;
He trippet, quhill he tint his pantoun:
A mirrear Dance mycht na man se. (ll. 26-28)

The reasons for the lack of line linkage probably lie in the structure of the poem and its dance-like rhythm. Since each dancer receives exactly one stanza, there is little need for special patterning. Creating units larger than a line within a stanza could interfere with the rhythm on which so much of the effect of the poem depends.

Dunbar uses a much more traditional dance motif in "The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis." Morton Bloomfield terms this "one of the great poems on the cardinal sins. Encased in a vision framework, it belongs to the category of the medieval journey to the otherworld; but, unlike many of this type, it is enlivened by humor and poetical power."³² Dunbar's use of the alliterative tradition contributes greatly to the "poetical power" Bloomfield finds in the work. Alliteration is used heavily in the poem; over half the lines, or 51.6%, alliterate.

Denton Fox has commented on the use of alliteration on the stanza on Sloth. Before going into Fox's analysis, I will quote the stanza:

Syne Sweirnes, at the secound bidding,
 Come lyk a sow out of a midding,
 Full slepy wes his grunzie:
 Mony sweir bumbard belly huddroun,
 Mony slute daw and slepy duddroun,
 Him serwit ay with sounzie. (ll. 67-72)

Fox finds in the stanza

a great deal of strict discipline, most evident, perhaps, in the two lines which start with "Mony". The parallelism of these two lines is precise and extensive: the anaphora is balanced by the rhyme which, being feminine like the other rhymes in this passage, is at once more complete and better adapted than a masculine rhyme to give the impression of languishing reluctance. In this couplet, too, even the antepenultimate syllables rhyme, the y's of belly and slepy. Both lines have the same s-alliteration, and the alliteration of b in the first line is countered in the second line by the repetition of d, the other voiced oral stop. And the very scansion of the two lines is identical.³³

Fox does not mention that the alliteration on s truly holds the stanza together. The first and last lines alliterate on s, and a word beginning with s comes in one of the first four positions of each line. Fox concludes, "The heavy vowels, linked alliteration, and pounding rhythm of the first half of the stanza perfectly express the slow, dragging, but frantic dance into which Sloth and his companions are reluctantly compelled."³⁴

Another effective use of alliteration is in the stanza on Ire, in which Dunbar uses alliteration to link lines:

Than Yre come in with sturt and stryfe;
 His hand wes ay vpoun his knyfe,
 He brandeist lyk a beir:
Bostaris, braggaris, and barganeris,
 Eftir him passit into pairis,
 All bodin in feir of weir. (ll. 31-36)

The alliteration emphasizes Ire's mannerisms; he comes in combining strut and strife, and swaggers like a boar. The b alliteration of the third line, describing Ire himself, is tied to the second half of the stanza, describing his chief followers, "Bostaris, braggaris, and bar-generis." The effect of these b's is complemented by the next line, which alliterates on p, the voiceless counterpart to b. The alliteration of the stanza is rounded out by bodin, meaning "prepared," in the final line. Ire's followers, prepared in array of war, are a nice result of the antics of their chieftain.

Another sort of alliterative patterning is used in the stanza on gluttony:

Full mony a waistless wallydrag,
 With waimiss vnweildable, did furth wag,
 In creische that did incress;
 Drynk! ay thay cryit, with mony a gaip,
 The feyndis gaif thame hait leid to laip,
 Their lovery was na less. (ll. 97-102)

The first two lines are linked by alliteration on w, the last two by alliteration on p. The third and fourth lines have a kind of linkage of their own. The third line alliterates on the cluster cr, which is repeated in the fourth line in the verb cryit. So much linkage in one stanza creates the effect of large unwieldy blocks, which represent perfectly the excesses of the gluttons and the heavy, awkward bodies they must drag around because of their sin.

At the end of the poem, Dunbar strikes at one of his favorite targets, the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders. The devil decides that a Highlands show would be a fitting conclusion to a dance of sins:

Than cryd Mahoun for a Heleand pad3ane;
 Syne ran a feynd to feche Makfad3ane,³⁵
 Ffar northwart in a nuke;
 Be he the correnoch had done schout,
 Erschemen so gadderit him abowt,
 In Hell grit rowme thay tuke. (11.109-114)

It is interesting to note that the Highlanders seem to account for a rather large proportion of the population of Hell. Although the Devil may be anxious enough for their souls, the Highlanders' Gaelic language is too much even for him:

Thae tarmegantis, with tag and tatter,
 Ffull lowd in Ersche begowth to clatter,
 And rowp lyk revin and ruke:
 The Devill sa devit wes with thair 3ell,
 That in the depest pot of hell
 He smorit thame with smvke. (11.115-120)

The ironic image of the devil bedeviled is a fitting end to the poem. The devil is subject to chance and failure; his schemes do not work out as he intends them. Such a theme seems appropriate for a poem written at the beginning of Lent, a period of penitence intended to undo the work of the devil on earth.

Another sort of comedy is that of "In Secreit Place this Hyndir Nycht." A delightful bawdy dialogue between a young lady and her lover, this poem could marginally be considered an example of rhymed alliterative verse. Alliteration occurs in 71.4% of its lines, only 8.4 percentage points below the 79.8% alliteration of "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy." The poem is courtly enough in its beginning:

In secreit place this hyndir nycht,
 I hard ane beyrne say till ane bricht,
 "My hwny, my hart, my hoip, my heill,
 I haue bene lang 3our luifar leill,
 And can of 3ow get confort nane;
 How lang will 3e with danger deill?
 3e brek my hart, my bony ane!" (11.1-7)

The young man calls his love a few pet names, protests his faithfulness, and complains that he receives nothing in return: "My hony, my heart, my hope, my health, I have long been your true lover, and can get no comfort from you." He even uses the traditional courtly love figure of "danger," which C. S. Lewis defines as "the lady's 'snub' launched from the height of her ladyhood."³⁶

In the second stanza, the pretense of courtliness quickly drops to reveal the earthier side of the affair:

His bony beird wes kemmit and croppit,
 Bot all with cale it wes bedroppit;
 And he wes townysche, peirt, and gukit;
 He clappit fast, he kist, and chukkit,
 As with the glaikis he wer ouirgane;
 3it be his feiris he wald haue fukkit;
 3e brek my hart, my bony ane! (ll. 8-14)

The first line of the stanza retains a courtly air of description, which is bolstered by double alliteration. The next two lines create a startling reversal by their more earthy description of the boy; his beard is dribbled with broth, and he is townish, pert, and foolish. The lack of alliteration on these lines emphasizes the contrast to the ornate descriptions which have preceded them. The alliteration of cale in the boy's beard in the second line with kemmit and croppit in the first is a linguistic link which magnifies the irony of a neatly trimmed and combed but broth-splattered beard. The alliteration continues in the fourth line to the end of the stanza alliterating on c to maintain the link with cale, and kemmit and croppit. The alliteration has now taken on a comic tone, completing the contrast between the opening description and the true appearance of the lover.

The girl gives a good account of herself in her first speech of

the dialogue:

"Tehe!" quod scho, and gaif ane gaufe,
 "Be still my cuchair and my calfe,
 My new spanit howffing fra the sowk,
 And all the blythnes of my bowk;
 My sweit swanking, saif 3ow allane,
 Na leid I luiffit all this owk;
 Full leifis me 3our graceles gane." (ll. 22-28)

After a giggle, the girl calls the young man a series of names which may imply affection, but which are still less courtly than the names of the first stanza. The meaning of cuchair has been lost, but the young man is also a calf, and a big fellow newly weaned from sucking, a reference to the boy's previous statement that he had not loved anyone else since he was weaned. The young fellow is so irresistibly attractive that she had not loved another man for a whole week. The eccentric nature of her taste is indicated by her refrain, "I love full well your graceless throat."

The humour of the rest of the poem rests in the bizarre names the lovers find for each and in their obscene suggestions. Both names and suggestions are enlivened by the alliteration. For instance, the girl uses double alliteration in one of her addresses:

My belly huddrun, my swete hurle bawsy. (l. 38)

The b h h b pattern, divided by a caesura, is almost a perfect old alliterative line. The play of this time-honored form of ornamentation against the meaning of the line, "My glutton, my sweet diarrhea victim," is hilarious. In the same stanza, the girl adds a line alliterating on g to the refrain to create an effective pair:

Tak gud confort, my grit-heidit slawsy,
 Full leifis me 3our graceles gane. (ll. 41-42)

The play on different kinds of heads, and by implication the sorts of necks under them, adds to the comedy of these lines, and gives a new resonance to the girl's refrain.

Despite the strange diction of this poem, Dunbar finds use for two traditional alliterative formulas in it. One occurs in the courtly first stanza, where a touch of traditional diction is highly appropriate to the genteel effect Dunbar wants to contrast to the rest of the poem. The boy's calling himself "3our luifar leill" (l. 4) corresponds closely to another phrase, "to luf her leill" (Fifield, p. 438). The other formula is used in an unexpected, shocking context:

3our heylis, quhyt as quhalis bane,
Garss ryiss on loft my quhillelillie. (ll. 33-34)

The first line contains a perfectly traditional figure, "whyte as whalles bone" (Fifield, p. 445), and there is certainly nothing unusual about applying such an image to the lady's neck. This lapse into traditional diction gives the next line added force, because of the alliterative connection of quhillelillie, meaning "penis," to the rather courtly image which has gone before.

Because of limitations on space, I have not discussed all of Dunbar's comic poems, but I have tried to analyze a representative sample of them. I have discussed the two major ones, "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," and the "Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy," and I have attempted to touch on the major themes of Dunbar's comic poetry. There are still two important groups of comic poems which I have passed over in this chapter. Some of Dunbar's petitionary poems, asking the King for more money, are in a humorous vein. Since the humor of these poems

depends more on the stance adopted by the poet, such as "The Petition of the Gray Horse, Auld Dunbar," than on elaborate stylistic effects, they will be discussed in the next chapter. Another group of comic poems is macaronic, mingling lines of English and Latin, such as "The Testament of Mr. Andro Kennedy," and "We that are Heir in Hevins Glory," a parody of the Office of the Dead praying that the King be delivered from the Purgatory of Sterling to the Heaven of Edinburgh. The first stanza of "The Testament of Mr. Andro Kennedy" is typical of the macaronic poems:

I, Maister Andro Kennedy,
 Curro quando sum vocatus,
 Gottin with sum incuby,
 Or with sum freir infatuatus;
 In faith I can nought tell redly,
 Unde aut vbi fui natus,
 Bot in treuth I trow trewly,
 Quod sum dyabolus incarnatus. (ll. 1-8)

The comedy of these poems depends on the interplay of Latin and English lines, and owes little to the native alliterative tradition.

Notes

¹John Speirs, The Scots Literary Tradition, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 55.

²A. D. Hope, A Midsummer Eve's Dream (New York: Viking, 1970).

³Arthur K. Moore, The Secular Lyric in Middle English (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1951), p. 195.

⁴Rachel Annand Taylor, Dunbar: The Poet and his Period (1931; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), p. 50.

⁵Taylor, p. 51.

⁶Marie Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 190-210, discusses this form of the alliterative line. I have differed from her analysis in that it seems to me, at least in "The Tretis," a line may have more than four stressed syllables, all of approximately equal rank.

⁷Tom Scott, Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 309.

⁸William Craigie, "The Scottish Alliterative Poems," Proceedings of the British Academy (1942), p. 223.

⁹Hope, p. 7.

¹⁰James Kinsley, "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," Medium Aevum, 23 (1954), 35.

¹¹Kinsley, p. 35.

¹²Kinsley, p. 35. Hope comes to a similar conclusion: "One thing at least seems clear: the poet meant to surprise his auditors. He meant them to think they were about to hear a courtly romance or a courtly dream allegory, perhaps something along the lines of his poem 'The Golden Targe,'" p. 7.

¹³Kinsley, p. 35.

¹⁴The Poems of Robert Henryson, ed. G. Gregory Smith. STS, Ser. 1, No. 58 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1908), III, 150-153.

¹⁵Vergil's Aeneid Translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas, ed. David F. C. Coldwell. STS, Ser. 3, No. 27 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1959), III, 117-122.

¹⁶Marie Nelson, "Submorphemic Values: Their Contribution to Pattern and Meaning in the Morte Arthure," Language and Style, 6 (1973), 289-296.

¹⁷I have used throughout Hope's paraphrase of "The Tretis," pp. 270-299.

¹⁸Pearl, ed. E. V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 1.

¹⁹Five such poems are in Scottish Alliterative Poems, ed. F. J. Amours, STS, Ser. 1, No. 27, 38 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1897).

²⁰"The Answer to the Kingis Flyting," The Works of Sir David Lindsay, ed. Douglas Hamer, STS, Ser. 3, No. 1 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1931), I, 101-104.

²¹Speirs, p. 64.

²²Scott, p. 178.

²³Denton Fox, "The Poetry of William Dunbar," Diss. Yale 1956, p. 151.

²⁴Fox, p. 148. Although Fox cites examples from another of Dunbar's comic poems, the comment certainly applies to "The Flyting," for which Fox says such terms are best suited.

²⁵Dorothy Everett, Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. Patricia Kean (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955), p. 26.

²⁶Ernst Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series, No. 36 (1953; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 151-2 cites this excerpt from a poem on the Last Judgment and Paradise by Bernard of Morlaix. I translate:

It is the last hour; the times are worst; let us watch.
Behold, the supreme judge bends down threateningly. He
bends down, he bends down, that he might end evil, crown
the just, recompense the good, free the fearful, and
grant them heaven, the splendid fatherland and flowering
country, free of thorns and cares, which is to be given
to the faithful citizens there, who are strangers here.

²⁷Bishop Johnne Leslie, The Historie of Scotland, trans. James Dalrymple, ed. E. G. Cody, STS, Ser. 1, No. 19, 34 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1895), II, 124-5.

²⁸Cited by John W. Baxter, William Dunbar: A Biographical Study (1952; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 168.

²⁹Leslie, II, 125. I am indebted to Baxter, pp. 167-170, for the preceding discussion of the Abbot of Tunland.

³⁰Baxter, pp. 140-141.

³¹A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue, ed. William Craigie and A. J. Aitken (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937--).

³²Morton W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins (1952; rpt. East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1967), p. 237.

³³Fox, pp. 145-146.

³⁴Fox, p. 146.

³⁵I agree with the STS edition in rejecting the suggestion that this name was used because it is one of the harsher Highland names (I, ccxliii).

³⁶C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (1936; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 124.

CHAPTER IV
THE PLAIN STYLE

In the poems of the plain style, Dunbar drops the more obvious stylistic ornaments of the aureate and comic poems. The plain style has a much simpler vocabulary than the other two styles, with their frequent use of unfamiliar Latinate or abusive expressions. Dunbar continues to use alliteration in the plain style, but generally without the careful patterning of the other two styles. The overwhelming impression of these poems is one of simplicity and directness,¹ an impression which many readers find quite appealing. Arthur K. Moore, for example, considers the lyrics of the plain style Dunbar's best work: "As an allegorist, Dunbar is an accomplished decorator; as a lyric poet, he is frequently competent, occasionally inspired. His talent if anything is lyrical."²

The poems of the plain style will require less comment here than those of the other styles for two reasons. First, these poems have little of the stylistic complexities seen in Dunbar's other work, and, second, their stylistic effects, in most instances, owe little to the alliterative tradition. For purposes of discussion, the poems of the plain style may be divided into three groups. The first group is the petitions, addressed to the King, and requesting either a benefice or increased financial support. The second group might be termed complaints, in which Dunbar criticizes such topics as his rivals at the royal court and the condition of the city of Edinburgh. The final classification is the moral poems, generally meditations on the inevitability of death and the necessity of preparing one's soul.

Dunbar wrote so many petitionary poems to King James IV that he has gained a rather unfortunate reputation as a poetic beggar. T. S. Dorsch, for example, writes:

The reader of Dunbar soon comes to associate him with one particular kind of court poem, the petition for preferment. Preferment is a constantly recurring theme in his verse, even in poems in which he is not actually pressing his claims for advancement. Of the eighty to ninety poems which may with reasonable certainty be ascribed to him, very nearly a quarter either directly or indirectly relate to his lack of advancement, his failure to secure even the modest benefice to which, at the least, he feels he is entitled by his talents and by years of loyal service to the king.

The sheer volume of the petitionary poetry, coupled with Dunbar's attempts to paint his condition as darkly as possible within the poems, implies that he lived the life of the starving poet. Dorsch even suggests that Dunbar's approach was faulty and that he "might have been more successful in his appeals if he had spoken less about his poetry and more about his work as a civil servant, a clerk of some sort, or if he had shown more respect for the king's own special interests, such as medicine and surgery."⁴ Dunbar's carefully cultivated image of poverty is deceptive, however. In fact, he seems to have done rather well for himself in court. In 1510 he was granted a royal pension of £80 a year, which was to continue until he was appointed to a benefice of £100 a year. By the standards of the day, it was a considerable income.⁵ Although he never achieved the benefice he longed for, he was far from being poor. It is possible, of course, that his success is attributable to his persistent efforts on his own behalf.

The best known of Dunbar's petitionary poems is probably "The Petition of the Gray Horse, Auld Dunbar," in which he requests a new

suit of clothes at Christmas. The point of assuming the role of a horse that has grown old and feeble in the King's service is a pun in the refrain:

Schir, lett it nevir in toun be tald,
That I sould be ane 3uillis 3ald! (ll. 5-6)

A 3ald is an old, worn-out horse, and the phrase 3uillis 3ald, or "Yule's horse," resembles Yeel's Jade, a term applied to anyone unable to follow the custom of wearing a new piece of clothing at Christmas (STS edition, III, 295). Apparently the King appreciated the joke and the appeal was successful, if the "Responsio Regis" at the end of the poem is correctly attributed:

Eftir our wrettingis, thesaurer,
Tak in this gray horss, Auld Dunbar,
Quhilk in my aucht with schervice trew
In lyart changeit is in hew.
Gar howss him now aganis this 3uill,
And busk him lyk ane beschopis muill,
For with my hand I have indost
To pay quhat euir his trappouris cost. (ll. 67-75)

The amount of alliteration in the poem is unusually great, with 69.9% of its lines alliterating. The effect of all this alliteration, however, is rather disappointing, because, uncharacteristically for Dunbar, there is little pattern in it. No two lines are linked by identical alliteration, and the poem has no repeated patterns of alliterating sounds, with the obvious exception of the refrain. The alliteration is strewn fairly evenly through the poem, like boughs of holly through the hall, to create a general impression of decoration.

Individual lines in the poem, however, use the alliteration perfectly as a complement to meaning. The two alliterating lines, excepting the refrain, of this stanza seem to work particularly well:

I am ane auld horss, as 3e knaw,
 That evir in duill dois drug and draw;
 Great court horss puttis me fra the staw,
 To fang the fog be firthe and fald.
 Schir, lett it nevir in toun be tald,
 That I sould be ane 3uillis 3ald!.(ll. 31-36)

The second line has four d's, three in an uninterrupted sequence of monosyllables, and the fourth on a monosyllable separated from the others only by a conjunction. A series of stops tends to slow a line because it is difficult for the mouth to move smoothly from a stop to another sound. Three identical stops beginning as many syllables magnifies the effect of slowness. Another element tending to slow the line is the addition of another letter to the alliteration in the last two words. Duill and dois, which alliterate on d, are followed by drug and draw, which alliterate on the cluster dr. The slowness of the line and the increase in the alliterating consonants make it seem to drag along as slowly as an old horse who feels his load grow heavier with every step. The fourth line of the stanza, which may be paraphrased "To take the moss by shore and field," also has four alliterating words, but they are arranged to produce a very different effect. Each alliterating f falls on a monosyllable, but the words are separated from each other by prepositions or conjunctions to produce a perfectly regular iambic line in which every stress alliterates. As the only such line in the poem, it stands out to give the reader an indelible picture of the old horse, pushed away from the straw, forced to feed on the moss he finds growing "be firthe and fald." It is interesting that this phrase is the only alliterative formula in the poem, related to such phrases as "frith and fell" and "in frith and felde" (Fifield, p. 435).

Another petitionary poem, "To the King, That He War Johne Thomosunis Man," deserves special mention for its audacity. "Johne Thomosunis Man" is a traditional Scottish expression for a man who is governed by his wife. Baxter comments on this poem, "It would be interesting to know how far, if at all, the King's munificence to Dunbar was due to the influence of Queen Margaret, with whose household his poems show him to have been closely concerned."⁶

Dunbar uses alliteration very sparingly in this poem, with the exception of one stanza:

The mersy of that sweit meik Rois,
Suld soft 3ow, Thirsill, I suppois,
Quhois pykis throw me so reuthles ran;
God gif 3e war Johne Thomosunis man! (ll. 21-24)

Dunbar uses the rose, traditional symbol of the English Tudors, to represent Queen Margaret, a Tudor princess. The thistle, a symbol for Scotland, refers to the King. Dunbar had applied the same images to King James and Queen Margaret in the aureate poem "The Thistle and the Rose," a celebration of the royal wedding. The use of these images, coupled with the alliteration of the stanza, is perhaps a reminder of that poem, and by implication, of Dunbar's previous poetic services. In any event, Dunbar skillfully exploits the contrast of the rose and the thistle. He hopes that the sweet, meek rose will soften the thistle, whose prickles run mercilessly through the poet.

Turning to the complaints, we find Dunbar frequently crying out against persons whose rewards in court have exceeded his own. In "Dunbar's Remonstrance to the King," for example, he contrasts two lists of persons who find favor with the King. First Dunbar lists the King's useful servants, who have earned their rewards:

Kirkmen, courtmen, and craftismen fyne;
Doctouris in jure, and medicynes;
Divinouris, rethoris, and philosophouris,
Astrologis, artistis, and oratouris;
Men of armes, and vailgeand knyghtis,
 And mony vther gudlie wichtis;
Musicians, menstralis, and mirrie singaris:
Chevalouris, callandaris, and flingaris;
Cun3ouris, carvouris, and carpentaris,
Beildaris of barkis, and ballingaris;
Masounis, lyand vpon the land,
 And schip-wrichtis heward vpon the strand;
Glasing wrichtis, goldsmithis, and lapidaris,
Pryntouris, payntouris, and potingaris;
 And all of thair craft cunning,
 And all at anis lawboring,
Quhilk peisand ar and honorablie;
 And to 3our hienes profitable. (ll. 3-20)

The King's useful servants include churchmen, courtiers, fine craftsmen, doctors of law and medicine, diviners, eloquent writers or speakers, philosophers, astrologers, artists, soldiers, valiant knights, musicians, minstrels, singers, coiners, carvers, carpenters, shipbuilders, glaziers, goldsmiths, jewellers, printers, painters, and apothecaries. These people deserve "Bayth thank, rewarde, and cherissing" (l. 24).

The second group includes the people who perform no useful services in the court, but are rewarded anyway. This group includes:

Fen3eouris, fleichouris, and flatteraris;
Cryaris, craikaris, and clatteraris;
Sonkaris, groukaris, gledaris, gunnaris;
Monsouris of France, gud clarat-cunnaris;
Innopportoun askaris of Yrland kynd;
 And meit revaris, lyk out of mynd;
Scaffaris, and scamleris in the nuke,
 And hall huntaris of draik and duik;
Thrimlaris and thriftaris, as thay war woid,
Kokenis, and kennis na man of gude;
Schulderaris, and schowaris, that hes no schame,
 And to no cunning that can clame;
 And can non vthir craft nor curis
 Bot to mak thrang, Schir, in 3our duris. (ll. 39-52)

The useless people in court include pretenders, butchers, flatterers, criers, drivellers, sharpers, deceivers, gunners, French gentlemen who are only good wine tasters, inopportune Irish (probably Highland) beggars, meat stealers, spongers, intruders, persons who hunt duck only in the hall, pushy people, rogues who do not even know a good man, in short a group which knows how to do nothing except to crowd in the King's doors.

Both of these lists are set off from the rest of the poem, to some extent, by alliteration. Every line of the second list alliterates, as do most lines of the first. The problem with this technique is that Dunbar seems to be attempting to use alliteration to achieve opposite effects in the same poem. In the first list the alliteration seems intended to be ornamental, emphasizing the worth of the persons included in it. In the second, the alliteration seems to be used as it is in "The Flyting," to create a tone of abuse. Dunbar uses alliteration successfully to achieve both effects, but in different poems. When the same technique is used for diametrically opposed purposes in the same poem, as it is here, the overall impression is one of confusion.

A much more successful complaint is "Satire on Edinburgh." While the amount of alliteration, 31.2%, is below Dunbar's average, the poem is indebted to the alliterative tradition in the variant of the "bob-wheel" structure which concludes each stanza. The stanzas are seven lines in length. Each line has eight syllables, except the fifth, which forms the "bob" with only six syllables. The "bob" rhymes with the preceding line, linking the "bob-wheel" to the rest of the stanza, and with the last line to complete the "wheel." The first stanza demonstrates the form:

Quhy will 3e, merchantis of renoun,
 Lat Edinburgh, 3our nobill toun,
 For laik of reformatioun
 The commone proffeitt tyne and fame?
 Think 3e nocht schame,
 That onie vther regioun
 Sall with dishonour hurt 3our name! (ll.1-7)

The "bob-wheel" serves as a refrain, in that the "bob" and the last line of the stanza remain fairly consistent throughout the poem. The "bob" and final line always rhyme schame with name, indicating quite clearly what Dunbar thinks of Edinburgh's reputation.

Dunbar uses alliteration effectively for linkage in this poem. Alliteration helps, for example, to link the second and third stanzas:

May nane pas throw 3our principall gaittis,
 For stink of haddock is and of scaittis;
 For cryis of carlingis and debaittis;
 For fensum flyttingis of defame:
 Think 3e nocht schame,
 Befoir strangeris of all estaittis
 That sic dishonour hurt 3our name!

 3our stinkand s[ty]ll that sstandis dirk,⁷
 Haldis the lycht fra 3our parroche kirk;
 3our foirstairis makis 3our housis mirk,
 Lyk na cuntray bot heir at hame:
 Think 3e nocht schame
 Sa litill polesie to wirk
 In hurt and sklander of 3our name! (ll. 8-21)

The penultimate line of the first stanza quoted alliterates on st, the same cluster as the first line of the next stanza. Syntactically, the two lines are unrelated; Edinburgh's shame before strangers is that they cannot pass through the streets without being offended by stinking fish or noisy arguments. That the stinking "styll," or narrow passage, shuts off light from the church is a shame because it indicates a lack of policy. The identical alliteration creates the poetic impression, however, that

all the conditions Dunbar has described are equally embarrassing to the city "Befoir strangeris of all estaittis."

Another alliterative linkage occurs after Dunbar complains about the quality of public music provided in Edinburgh, "3our commone men-strallis hes no tone" (l. 29). He adds:

Cunningar men man serve Sanct Cloun
And neuir to vther craftis clame. (ll. 31-32)

Both lines alliterate on c, and the link is strengthened by the fact that the last words of both lines alliterate on the same cluster, cl. The consonance of the liquids, r and l, following the c's in the second line brings the two lines to a nice climax. The identity of "Sanct Cloun" is a puzzle which three of Dunbar's editors have solved in three different ways. The STS edition suggests, surely incorrectly, "Is Saint Clown a name for the Court Fool, who had his servants to wait on him?" (III, 350). Mackenzie claims that the saint is "canonically unknown," but that he also appears in Sir David Lindsay's Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis.⁸ James Kinsley identifies "Sanct Cloun" with "cluanus, a sixth-century Irish abbot, invoked before eating and drinking in Lindsay's Satyre."⁹ Whether "Sanct Cloun" be taken as a patron of folly or gluttony, if better men than the minstrels might do nothing but serve him, it seems the quality of their music left much to be desired.

Only one expression in "Satire on Edinburgh" seems related to traditional alliterative formulas. In a pair of lines discussed previously, "Cunningar men man serve Sanct Cloun, / And neuir to vther craftis clame," (ll. 31-32), the joining of cunningar and craftis must have been suggested by traditional expressions such as "for crafte ne for cunnige" (Oakden,

II, 345). The terms, cunning, craft, and claim, seem to have been linked in Dunbar's mind as a formulaic group since he uses another variation of the same words in "Remonstrance to the King," "And to no cunning that can clame; / And can non vther craft nor curis" (ll. 50-51).

"Meditatioun in Wyntir" combines the traits of the complaint and the moral poem. The beginning of the poem is a complaint, no doubt justified, about winter weather in Edinburgh. The dark, wet days lead Dunbar into a state of restless anxiety in which he begins to consider his precarious condition in court. He is counseled in this mood by four personifications. Patience advises him to wait until Fortune has had time to "wirk furthe hir rage." (l. 23). Prudence asks him why he wants to continue trying for something, presumably security within the royal court, which he will probably never obtain. Age gives him a courteous command which he cannot disobey, "My friend, cum neir, / And be nocht strange, I the requer" (ll. 31-32). Unlike the other personifications, Death acts before speaking. He first opens his gates, then reminds Dunbar that he must pass "Vndir this lyntall" (l. 39). After these visitations, the poet is overcome by a fear which will only be relieved by the approach of spring, "3it, quhone the nycht begynnys to schort, / It dois my spreit sum part confort" (ll. 46-47).

The most effective use of alliteration in this poem is in the penultimate stanza, which comes immediately after Death's visitation:

For feir of this all day I drowp;
 No gold in kist, nor wyne in cowp
 No ladeis bewtie, nor luiffis blys
 May lat me to remember this:
 How glaid that ever I dyne or sowp. (ll. 41-45)

This stanza has a remarkable pattern of alliteration and consonance. The first three lines all alliterate on stops, d in the first, c in the second, and b in the third. In the second line, the alliteration on c is complemented by consonance with g, the corresponding voiced stop. The unstressed words of the line have another pattern of consonance in that each of them either begins or ends with the same letter, n. The line is divided into half-lines, which are linked both by the alliteration and by parallel structure, "(negative) (noun) in (noun)." The third line has an even more elaborate pattern. The line alliterates on a stop, b, which occurs in the same positions, the fourth and eighth, as the alliterating stops of the previous line. The line has an additional alliteration on l, to create an interlocking pattern of l b l b. The consonance on n is carried over from the previous line in the negatives No and nor. Like the second line, the third is divided into half-lines, which are linked both by alliteration and parallel structure in the pattern "(negative) (genitive noun) (noun)." After building to such a crescendo of alliteration, consonance, and parallel structure, it would be jarring to return suddenly to the unadorned verse of the remainder of the poem. The fourth line forms a transition back to simplicity with a pattern of consonance which is almost, but not quite, alliteration: "May lat me to remember this." That the m's of this line alliterate is doubtful since two of them fall on unstressed monosyllables. It is undeniable, however, that the line has an exceptionally strong consonance. The fourth line is linked to the third, moreover, by alliteration between the l of lat and the l's of the third line. Like n, both l and m are resonants, so that the line complements the consonance on n which has been running

through the previous two lines. These lines are the only ones in the poem in which Dunbar mentions the possible pleasures of court life--wealth, good wine, beautiful women. Their rich ornamentation is a dramatic contrast to the rather simple style of the rest of the poem. This linguistic contrast between the poet's own musings and the description of the court seems to parallel the contrast between the anxiety-ridden poet and the pleasure seeking courtiers around him.

Of all Dunbar's moral poems, "Lament for the Makaris," in which he mourns the deaths of fellow poets, is probably the best known. The poem is divided into two parts. In the first he considers the inevitability of death, while in the second he enumerates the poets who have died. The refrain, "Timor Mortis conturbat me," borrowed from the Office of the Dead,¹⁰ helps to unify the parts of the poem and to emphasize the poet's dread of death.

The main function of the alliteration of this poem is linkage. In the third stanza, for instance, alliteration is used to join opposites:

The stait of man dois change et vary,
Now sound, now seik, now blyth, now sary,
Now dasand mirry, now like to dee;
Timor Mortis conturbat me. (ll. 9-12)

The s's of the second line enumerate possible conditions of man: sound, sick, troubled. The different meanings are joined by the alliteration. The third line has a similar linkage in the alliteration of dansand and dee, dancing and death. The parallel structure imposed by the adverb now, used six times in two lines, emphasizes the bewildering uncertainty of life. We move from health to sickness, joy to sorrow, merry dancing to death, with horrifying rapidity. The stanza carries us through the

changes so quickly that they seem simultaneous, a feeling reinforced by the repeated now. The second and third lines offer a convincing illustration of the first line of the stanza, "The stait of man dois change et vary."

The following stanza is also extremely effective in its use of alliterative linking of lines:

No stait in erd heir standis sickir;
 As with the wynd wavis the wickir
 [So] wavis this warldis vanite;
 Timor Mortis conturbat me. (ll. 13-16)

The first line of the stanza is essentially a repetition of the first line of the previous stanza. Just as the state of man is variable, no condition on earth is certain. Dunbar simply replaces the image of mankind with that of the world. The next two lines, linked by alliteration on w, elaborate on this new image; the vanity of the world waves like a willow in the wind. The alliterative linkage gives the two lines special prominence, while the repeated w's become onomatopoeic for the rushing, shifting wind.

Dunbar also uses a more subtle alliterative linkage between lines in the "Lament." In one stanza, for example, only one line alliterates, although the stanza is bound together by alliteration between lines:

That strang vnmercifull tyrand
 Tak[is] on the moderis breist sowkand
 The bab, full of benignite;
 Timor mortis conturbat me. (ll. 25-28)

The "vnmercifull tyrand" of the first line is linked to "the moderis breist" in the second by alliteration on m. The second and third lines are bound by the alliteration of breist and the b's of the third line. The gentleness and security of the image of the baby on its mother's

breast is linked to death, showing that indeed there is no safety on earth from the tyranny of death.

The next stanza uses an even more complex form of linkage involving alliteration, rhyme and parallel construction:

He takis the campion in the stour,
The capitane closit in the tour,
The lady in bour full of bewte,
Timor Mortis conturbat me. (ll. 29-32)

Denton Fox has analyzed the linkages in this stanza, pointing out that the stanza consists of three statements, each describing one of death's victims: "These statements are bound together: 'campion in the stour' is connected, by alliteration, rhyme and parallel construction, with 'capitane closit in the tour,' which in turn is connected, by construction and by rhyme, with 'lady in bour.'"¹¹

The transitional stanza, in which Dunbar turns from a general meditation on the inevitability of death to the list of individual poets who have died, uses alliteration for another purpose:

I see that makaris amang the laif
Playis heir ther pageant, syne gois to graif;
Sparit is nocht ther faculte;
Timor Mortis conturbat me. (ll. 45-48)

Dunbar sees that the makers are like everyone else; they play their pageant here, then go to the grave. The second line has two alliterations, p in the first half-line, "Playis heir ther pageant," and g in the second half-line, "syne gois to graif." The change in the alliteration underscores the inevitable transition from life to death, earth to grave. The third line is an ironic commentary on the virtuosity of the second, "Sparit is nocht ther faculte."

The list of the departed makers occupies the last half of the poem. The most interesting stylistic feature of this section of the poem is the variation in ways of describing death. The first three stanzas of this part of the poem provide a good example of the technique:

He hes done petuously devour,
The noble Chaucer, of makaris flour,
The Monk of Bery, and Gower, all thre;
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

The gude Syr Hew of Eglintoun,
Et eik, Heryot, et Wyntoun,
He hes tane out of this cuntre;
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

That scorioun fell hes done infek
Maister Iohne Clerk, and James Afflek,
Fra balat making et trigide;
Timor Mortis conturbat me. (ll. 49-60)

Death can devour people, or carry them out of the country. The image in the third stanza is more elaborate, making death a cruel scorpion that poisons makers, rendering them incapable of writing. In this stanza the second poet, James Afflek, is linked to the verb of the first line, infek, both by rhyme and alliteration. The other poet, Maister Iohne Clerk, is tied to James Afflek by slant rhyme. The linkage emphasizes the fact that the two poets are hopelessly caught by the scorpion's venom.

Only one other stanza of the "Lament" requires any comment, not because of its stylistic content, but because it is Dunbar's only literary criticism:

He has reft Merseir his endite,
That did in luf so lifly write,
So schort, so quyk, of sentence hie;
Timor Mortis conturbat me. (ll. 73-76)

Whatever we may learn of Dunbar's attitude toward poetry from the closing of "The Golden Targe" must be garnered from an examination of his imagery,

not from direct statement. Dunbar makes explicit statements about Kennedy's writing in "The Flyting," but these should not be taken seriously. This stanza is the only one in the "Lament" in which Dunbar makes a specific comment about the writing of any of the makers, and it is the only direct comment on poetry that I know of in his writing. Dunbar's taste for poetry that is "So schort, so quyk," is reflected in his own work. His longest poem is just over 500 lines, and he seldom goes over 100 lines. Unlike many fifteenth century English poets, Dunbar seems to have preferred brief, tightly packed poems. Dunbar is less consistent in providing his poetry with a "sentence hie." His "sentence" is frequently the desire for a benefice, and the "sentence" of the comic poems is anything but "hie."

In the "Lament for the Makaris," Dunbar uses the sort of ornamentation provided by the alliterative tradition without disturbing the overall impression of simplicity in the poem. The amount of alliteration is moderate, 32%, and the alliterative linkages, while effective, do not call attention to themselves. In its use of alliteration, the "Lament" is typical of the poetry of the plain style, which shows far less influence of the alliterative tradition than either the aureate or the comic poems. Since by Dunbar's day the tradition had become mainly a source of ornamentation, it is natural to find the tradition least active in the least decorated poems. When alliteration is used in these poems, it seems to be primarily a linking device, or a means of contrasting a short, highly decorated passage, usually a stanza, to the rest of a rather plain poem.

Notes

¹Denton Fox, "The Poetry of William Dunbar," Diss. Yale 1956, p. 107.

²Arthur K. Moore, The Secular Lyric in Middle English (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1951), p. 195.

³T. S. Dorsch, "Of Discretion in Asking: Dunbar's Petitionary Poems," in Chaucer und Seine Zeit; Symposium für Walter F. Schirmer, ed. Arno Esch (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968), p. 286.

⁴Dorsch, p. 287.

⁵J. W. Baxter, William Dunbar: A Biographical Study (1952; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), pp. 281-282.

⁶Baxter, p. 184.

⁷In the manuscript, the line reads "3our stinkand Scull that standis dirk," but the c of Scull seems to have been changed from a t. Baxter, p. 110, n. 4, comments on the line and its emanation in the STS edition: "The alteration in the MS. touches only the second letter of the word, and the last three letters ('ull') are unaltered. The word has therefore never been 'styll'; and, had it been so, it is unlikely that Dunbar would have returned to the very same phrase in line 38. Unless we are to prefer a meaningless 'stull' for which there is no evidence, the likeliest explanation is that the scribe, misled by the two first letters of 'stinkand', was beginning the next word with 'st', when he became aware of his slip and corrected the 't' to 'c'. It has been pointed out (S[chipper], ed. p. 86) that a 'style' (narrow passage) could scarcely keep light from a church, whereas a school could." I find Baxter's objection to the emanation unconvincing for two reasons. First, it is not as unlikely as Baxter supposes that Dunbar would return to the same phrase later in the same poem. In "The Golden Targe," he uses the phrase "with bow in hand ybent" twice within 36 lines. The repetition of an alliterative phrase should be no cause for surprise in Dunbar. Second, Schipper is wrong in saying that a narrow passage could not keep the light from a parish church. The narrow passage requires an opposite wall close to the church, or it would not be a narrow passage. This opposite wall could easily keep light from the church, and a narrow passage is much more likely to be "stinkand" than a school. The STS edition (III, 349) cites David Laing, who edited Dunbar's poetry in 1834, as authority for "a narrow passage which extended from the north side of St. Giles's Church. . . . It long continued to be a place noted for filth, robberies, and assaults." The punctuation of the STS note is garbled, so that it is impossible to determine how much of this, if any, is a direct quote from Laing. In summary, the manuscript has a t which was subsequently changed to a c. Although a case can be made for both readings, the t in my judgment makes more sense. Even if the reading scull is accepted, however, my argument on the alliteration of the line is unaffected, since stinkand and standis maintain the st pattern of alliteration.

⁸W. Mackay Mackenzie, ed. The Poems of William Dunbar (1932; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 215.

⁹James Kinsley, ed. William Dunbar: Poems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 128.

¹⁰Mackenzie, p. 202.

¹¹Fox, p. 212.

CHAPTER V

PROSODY

It is traditional in criticism to say that Dunbar was capable of writing in two verse forms: the four-stress alliterative line inherited from Old English, and the iambic line borrowed through Chaucer from the Romance languages. John Thompson, for example, writes of iambic pentameter, "The line was certainly used by Dunbar and others in Scotland, along with the alliterative line."¹ This view of Dunbar's metrical practice has recently been challenged by Tom Scott, who cites Thompson's statement to add that it is "precisely what I very much doubt. It seems to me that what emerges from Dunbar's practice may be misinterpreted as 'iambic', but that what he is actually doing is combining elements of the Teutonic stress system with elements of the Romance syllabic one."² Scott's suggestion is intriguing, because if Scott is right Dunbar was writing in a new, previously undiscovered, hybrid verse form. Scott has difficulty, however, specifying what elements of the two systems are combined, or how that combination takes place.³

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Dunbar's prosody in the light of recent work in linguistics to determine whether or not it is possible to find any elements of the alliterative four-stress line in the portion of Dunbar's poetry which Thompson considers "obviously" iambic. The chapter will be divided into three sections: first, an explanation of the Halle-Keyser system of prosody, which has been the basis of my investigation of Dunbar's metrics; second, a revision of the Halle-Keyser system on the basis of Paul Kiparsky's work; and, finally,

an examination of Dunbar's poetry to see if the revised system produces any evidence that his prosody has been influenced by the alliterative tradition. Before explaining the Halle-Keyser system, however, a general survey of traditional metrics may be helpful in demonstrating the Halle-Keyser system's relationship to previous theories.

Conventional prosodists have usually defined an iambic foot as an unstressed syllable, followed by a stressed syllable. A series of five such feet constitutes a line of iambic pentameter:

/ / / / /
The perly droppis schake in silvir schouris ("Targe," l. 14)

Repeated in every line of a poem, this pattern would become monotonous, so poets have varied the pattern, for example by inverting the first foot:

/ / / / /
Ryght as the stern of day begouth to schyne ("Targe," l. 1)

Prosodists have recognized the existence of such variations, and the difficulty of accounting for them, at least since the eighteenth century when Thomas Tyrwhitt wrote: "It is agreed, I believe, that, in our Heroic Metre, those Verses (considered singly) are the most harmonious, in which the Accents fall upon the even Syllables; but it has never (that I know) been defined, how far a verse may vary from its most perfect form, and yet remain a verse."⁴

Twentieth century prosodists have struggled with the problem Tyrwhitt poses, which is to determine the boundary between allowable variations, and non-iambic lines. Lascelles Abercrombie, for example, refers to the alternating pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables of iambic pentameter as "the base to which actual speech rhythm is referred."⁵

The relation between the base and the speech rhythm of a line of poetry is described by three laws, the first of which states that "all verse must equally give Rhythmic Constancy persisting through Rhythmic Variation." The remaining two laws restate the paradox of the first: "Verse must not give a repeating pattern without any variation," and "The variation must not destroy the repeating pattern."⁶ Abercrombie is certainly correct as far as he goes. Repetition of one rhythmic pattern would be boring, so poets create other patterns. What Abercrombie cannot explain is what these other patterns have in common which makes them variants of one "base" pattern.

Robert Bridges attempts to make his definition of an iambic line and of the allowable exceptions more specific. He defines iambic pentameter as "a decasyllabic line on a disyllabic basis and in rising rhythm (i.e. with accents or stresses on the alternate even syllables); and the disyllabic units may be called feet."⁷ There are three allowable exceptions to this line:

- I. Exceptions to the number of syllables being ten,
- II. Exceptions to the number of stresses being five,
- III. Exceptions in the position of the stresses.⁸

His definition of the iambic line is accurate, and his exceptions include every possible variation from iambic pentameter. The flaw in Bridges' system is that it permits everything as a possible variant of iambic pentameter. It is impossible to imagine any sequence of nine to eleven syllables which would not be a line of iambic pentameter under this system.

A recent handbook on prosody, written from a conventional standpoint, recognizes the distinction between a metrical pattern and the

speech rhythm of a line of verse, but leaves the relation between the two in a state of confusion:

Scansion is not a mere diagram of the meter, repeating the basic unit over and over. Neither is it a transcription of the prose rhythms, giving all the subtleties and varieties of pronunciation. It is a combination, a system of notation that attempts, as far as usefully possible, to indicate the main characteristics of the meter and the main deviations of the rhythm from the metrical pattern.

Malof calls the relation between the speech rhythm of a line and the metrical pattern "counterpoint," which "means, from the musical analogy, the presence of two or more melodies at the same time. We are not able to recite two rhythms at the same time, but we can convey some sense of their interplay by compromising between them. The compromise is recorded in our scansion."¹⁰ Malof fails to clarify the nature of the compromise. Since the scansion describes neither the speech rhythm of a line, nor the metrical pattern, it is difficult to know what the scansion does represent, or what use it has. It is significant that Malof mentions, but does not define, "the main deviations of the rhythm from the metrical pattern." We seem to be back where Tyrwhitt left us in the eighteenth century.

Trywhitt, Abercrombie, Bridges, and Malof appear to agree on one central issue. A poem written in iambic verse has a basic metrical pattern on which each line of the poem is built, but individual lines may deviate from that pattern in some degree. None of them can define the relation between a line and its abstract pattern by determining allowable limits of variation with any precision. The appeal of the Halle-Keyser system is its claim to have solved this problem by determining, in Tyrwhitt's phrase, "how far a verse may vary from its most perfect form

and still remain a verse." Halle and Keyser define allowable variations by a series of rules: any line which does not violate these rules is metrical, while a line which violates the rules is deemed unmetrical. Their system also generates a measurement of metrical complexity, which is the degree to which a line varies from the basic metrical pattern. As I hope to demonstrate below, the major flaw of their system is that it fails to take adequately into account linguistic complexity, the variations from the spoken norm which are permissible to adjust a line of poetry to a metrical base. After explaining the Halle-Keyser system, I will develop an approach to linguistic complexity based on Paul Kiparsky's theory of morphophonemic variation in poetry.

The Halle-Keyser system was first proposed in 1966¹¹ and extensively revised in 1971.¹² It is the 1971 version which has been used in this study. The system has two parts, the Abstract Metrical Pattern, and a set of Correspondence Rules. The Abstract Metrical Pattern is a series of positions, which may be filled by syllables under the conditions described by the Correspondence Rules. For iambic pentameter, the Abstract Metrical Pattern has ten positions:

WS WS WS WS WS

The symbol W represents a position which would normally be occupied by an unstressed syllable, but which may, under certain conditions, be occupied by a stressed syllable. The symbol S represents a position which would normally be occupied by a stressed syllable, but which may be occupied by an unstressed syllable. The terms stressed and unstressed will be discussed more fully below. The simplest representation of the Abstract Metrical Pattern is a line of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables:

/ / / / /
 Dyane the goddesse chaste of woddis grene ("Targe," l. 76)
 WS W S W S W S W S

Frequently, however, an iambic line may have an additional unstressed syllable after the final S position:

Bot lyk ane berdles baird, that had no bedding ("Flyting," l. 208)
 W S W S W S W S W S X

To accommodate such lines, it is necessary to add a special position to the Abstract Metrical Pattern:

WS WS WS WS WS (X)

This special position is labeled X. An X position may be filled only by an unstressed syllable. The position is in parentheses to indicate that it is optional. This adjustment accounts for what is conventionally termed the "feminine ending." One other adjustment is necessary for "headless" lines, those which leave the first W position unoccupied:

∅ In desert quhair we wer famist aw ("Flyting," p. 95)
 W S W S W S W S W S

For these lines, the Abstract Metrical Pattern is modified as follows:

(W)*S WS WS WS WS (X)

The first W, like the final X, is placed in parentheses to indicate that it is optional. An asterisk is added to indicate that leaving the first W vacant, unlike leaving the X vacant, adds a degree of metrical complexity to the line.

The Correspondence Rules are divided into two parts. The first describes the matching of syllables to the Abstract Metrical Pattern, the second the placement of stressed and unstressed syllables. The simplest matching of a line of poetry to the Abstract Metrical Pattern is a one to one correspondence of syllables to positions. In other words,

a position is occupied by one and only one syllable. The first correspondence rule is stated:

A position (S, W, or X) corresponds to a single syllable
 The working of this rule has been amply demonstrated by the examples used in developing the Abstract Metrical Pattern. In some lines two syllables occupy one position:

Kest beriall bemes on emerant bewis grene ("Targe," l. 39)
 W S W S W S W S W S

For wit and wisdome ane wisp fra the may rub ("Flyting," l. 64)
 W S W S W S W S W S

I have loosely termed the placement of two syllables in one metrical position metrical elision. Metrical elision does not imply that two syllables must become one in pronunciation. Halle and Keyser explain:

The assignment of syllables to positions is, of course, strictly metrical. It does not imply that the syllables assigned to a single position should be slurred or elided when the verse is recited. The correspondence rules are not instructions for poetry recitations. They are, rather, abstract principles of verse construction whose effect on the sound of the recited verse is indirect.¹³

Metrical elision may occur when two vowels are adjacent, as in beriall, or when two vowels are separated by certain consonants, as in emerant and wisdome ane. These lines may be accounted for by a second correspondence rule:

A position (S, W, or X) corresponds to a single syllable

or

to a sonorant sequence incorporating at most two vowels

The term sonorant includes vowels; liquids, /r/ and /l/; nasals, /n/, /m/, and /ŋ/; and glides, /y/, /w/, /h/, and /ɛ/.¹⁴ A sonorant sequence

consists of either two adjacent vowels, or two vowels separated by a liquid, nasal, or glide. A metrical elision adds one degree of complexity to a line since it violates the first correspondence rule, but not the second.

The second part of the Correspondence Rules describes the placement of stressed syllables within the line of verse. Before explaining these rules, however, it is first necessary to discuss the meaning of the term stress. Most speakers of English would agree that in the word poetry the first syllable receives the greatest stress: po e try. In a sentence such as "John is going to Scotland," most speakers would agree that John and the first syllables of going and Scotland receive greater stress than either is or to. Defining the phonological properties of stress is much more difficult than citing examples of it. Seymour Chatman writes, "How do the variables of pitch, loudness, length, and quality operate together to signal 'stress'? We do not entirely know, but it is clear that their use is mixed and redundant in any act of speech, that is, more than one cue almost always occurs, even though one would be enough to signal 'stress.'"¹⁵ If the signals of stress are so variable, how do we perceive them as the single phenomenon of stress? According to Chatman, "The connection seems to be that of muscular sympathy, a sort of unconscious judgment of the physiological effort one would need oneself to produce the sounds."¹⁶ Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle seem to agree that the perception of stress is really a sympathetic response on the part of the hearer:

For example, there is little reason to suppose that the perceived stress contour must represent some physical property of the utterance in a point-by-point fashion;

a speaker who utilizes the principle of the transformational cycle and the Compound and Nuclear Stress Rules should "hear" the stress contour of the utterance that he perceives and understands, whether or not it is physically present in any detail. In fact, there is no evidence from experimental phonetics to suggest that these contours are actually present as physical properties of utterances in anything like the detail with which they are perceived.¹⁷

If stress is perceptual, our problem is to determine which words, or syllables, are perceived as stressed in poetry. Halle and Keyser discuss the placement of metrically significant stress:

We assume that metrically significant stress is borne only by major category words, i.e., by nouns, verbs, adjectives, nonclitic adverbs (such as therefore, however) and verbal particles (such as up in eat up). All other classes of words are metrically unstressed; this is true of conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, pronominal adverbs (such as how, when) and copular verbs (such as is, are, have, etc.) We include among major category words any word with emphatic or contrastive stress. If a major category word has more than one stressed vowel only the main or full stress in the word is metrically significant, and we indicate this by marking the fully stressed vowel with the accent (/). Thus a word such as anticipate has two stressed vowels, of which only the antepenultimate is fully stressed since its stress is greater than the remaining stresses in the word. Only this stress is metrically significant. Notice that in a compound word like blackbird both stresses would count metrically since both stresses are full stresses within their respective words, namely black and bird.¹⁸

Halle and Keyser assume that only lexical stress is relevant to metrics, that is, some categories of words always bear stress, while other categories never bear stress. The appeal of such a system is its simplicity. It is easy to mark "major category words" as stressed, and all other words as unstressed. The stresses may then be related to the Abstract Metrical Pattern by a set of rules to be explained below. Although I will later raise some objections to purely lexical stress, I will use

the Halle-Keyser definition of metrical stress in the explanation of their system.

In polysyllabic words, the primary stress, which according to Halle and Keyser is the only metrically significant stress, is determined in Middle English by two rules. The native portion of the Middle English vocabulary is stressed as in Old English. Three features of Old English stress need to be kept in mind:

- (a) Prefixed nouns have primary stress on the prefix and some lower stress on the stem vowel.
- (b) Other words have primary stress on the first syllable of the word stem (not the prefix).
- (c) In compound nouns the first element has primary stress.¹⁹

In addition to its native vocabulary, Middle English has a large number of loan words, borrowed chiefly from Latin and Old French. The stress of Latin words generally falls on the penult if that syllable contains a tense vowel, or if the vowel is followed by two or more consonants. Otherwise, the stress of Latin words falls on the antepenult. Words borrowed from Old French are generally stressed on the final syllable, unless the final syllable contains / ə /, in which case the stress falls on the penult.²⁰ Latin names ending in -us sometimes receive stress on the final syllable, usually to avoid unmetrical readings or for the sake of rhyme.²¹

Some words apparently take stress under either Romance or Old English stress rules. For example, Dunbar stresses resoun on either syllable:

/ / / / /
 Than come Resoun, with schelde of gold so clere ("Targe," l. 151)
 / / / / /
 But Resonn bure the Targe wyth sik constance ("Targe," l. 169)

Many proper names seem to have had the same freedom of stress.

When we have decided which syllables of a line bear stress, we may turn to the second part of the Correspondence Rules, which describes the placement of stresses in the Abstract Metrical Pattern. The first rule describes the most neutral matching of stresses to positions:

Fully stressed syllables occur in S positions only and in
all S positions

This rule may be illustrated by an example which has been previously cited as a perfectly regular line:

/ / / / /
 The perly droppis schake in silvir schouris ("Targe," l. 14)
 W S W S W S W S W S

In this example every S position is filled by a fully stressed syllable; every W position by an unstressed syllable.

In many lines, however, at least one S position is filled by an unstressed syllable:

/ / / /
 Or Phebus was in purpur cape revest ("Targe," l. 7)
 W S W S W S W S W S

For lines such as these, a second alternative is added to the Correspondence Rules:

Fully stressed syllables occur in S positions only but not
in all S positions

This rule permits unstressed syllables to be placed in S positions, but does not permit stressed syllables in W positions. It broadens the first

alternative by allowing everything included in the first alternative plus another category of lines. The rules are ordered, so that the first rule must be applied first. Only if the line contains any violation of the first rule is the second applied. Was is underlined in the scansion to indicate that it has exhausted one alternative, thereby adding one degree of complexity to the line.

In some lines, a fully stressed syllable is placed in a W position:

/ / / / /
Ryght as the stern of day begouth to schyne ("Targe," l. 1)
W S W S W S W S W S

For lines such as this a third alternative is necessary:

Stress maxima occur in S positions only but not in all S positions

The term stress maximum refers to a fully stressed syllable with unstressed syllables on both sides of it in the same line, and in the same syntactic constituent. A syntactic constituent is whatever comes between major syntactic breaks, which Halle and Keyser explain as follows: "What Jespersen termed 'pauses' . . . are, in fact, major syntactic breaks within the line. More often than not they are represented orthographically by commas, semi-colons or colons. Further, it is a fact about the rules of English stress placement that they operate within but not across major syntactic breaks."²² In other words, a fully stressed syllable is not a stress maximum if it is the first or last syllable in a line, or it is adjacent to another fully stressed syllable, or if it is adjacent to any punctuation mark which indicates a pause. The third alternative prevents only stress maxima, a sub-class of fully stressed syllables,

from occurring in W positions. A fully stressed syllable which is not a stress maximum, that is, one which is at the beginning of a line, or adjacent to another fully stressed syllable, or adjacent to a pause, may occur in a W position. The third alternative is ordered after the first two. Since two alternatives must be exhausted before the third can be invoked, the third alternative adds two degrees of complexity to a line. In the example cited above, Ryght is a fully stressed syllable, but is not a stress maximum because it is line-initial, and is therefore allowed to fall on a W position. It is underlined twice to indicate that it has added two degrees of complexity to the line.

The line used as an example in the previous paragraph, "Ryght as the stern of day begouth to schyne" ("Targe," l. 1) is a very common variant in English iambic verse, the initial trochee. Prosodists have used a great deal of ink attempting to explain why this variation is so frequent as to be almost a regular feature of iambic verse.²³ Halle and Keyser claim that their system offers a straightforward explanation of the initial trochee because it does not place a stress maximum in a W position: "In terms of the theory presented here, the lines require no special comment. They are a natural consequence of a theory which bases its prosodical analysis on stress maxima and even position occupancy."²⁴ Under the Halle-Keyser system, the same would be true of the following hypothetical line:

	/		/		/		/	/
I'd	like	to	sit	at	home	and	read	Dunbar
W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W S

In this line the last foot has been inverted. A stress maximum does not

fall on a W position, however, since the first syllable of Dunbar is adjacent to another stress, read. Although the line has, according to the Halle-Keyser theory, the same metrical complexity as a line with an initial trochee, it is intuitively difficult to take my hypothetical line as iambic pentameter. In their study of Chaucer, Halle and Keyser assert that the almost invariable stress on the final S position "is related to Chaucer's rhyming practice which requires that only syllables bearing some degree of stress may rhyme. As a consequence, the stress maximum in the tenth position is without interest."²⁵ As William K. Wimsatt says, "One presumes that the blank verse of Shakespeare or Milton normally places a stress in the tenth position for some other reason."²⁶ Clearly, the Halle-Keyser Correspondence Rules do not correctly predict the behavior of English pentameter lines. A better solution may be found in Paul Kiparsky's observation that "increase of metrical strictness towards the end of the line is an interesting and almost constant feature of numerous widely differing metrical systems of the world."²⁷ Halle and Keyser's assumption that a set of rules applies equally to all parts of the line seems invalid for English, and, if Kiparsky is correct, for most other languages.

To this point the Halle-Keyser system has been derived step by step. The complete system may be stated as follows:

(a) Abstract Metrical Pattern

(W)*S WS WS WS WS (X)

where elements enclosed in parentheses may be omitted and where each X position may be occupied only by an unstressed syllable

(b) Correspondence Rules

(i) A position (S, W, or X) corresponds to a single syllable

or

to a sonorant sequence incorporating at most two vowels

(immediately adjoining or separated by a sonorant consonant)

Definition: When a fully stressed syllable occurs between two un-

stressed syllables in the same syntactic constituent within

a line of verse, this syllable is called a "stress maximum"

(ii) Fully stressed syllables occur in S positions only and in all S positions

or

Fully stressed syllables occur in S positions only but not in all S positions

or

Stress maxima occur in S positions only but not in all S positions.²⁸

To apply the system to a line of poetry it is necessary to mark the fully stressed syllables, then to match the line to the Abstract Metrical Pattern using the first part of the Correspondence Rules. A metrical elision adds one degree of complexity since it exhausts the first alternative of part (i). The placement of stressed syllables is then checked against part (ii) of the Correspondence Rules. An unstressed syllable in an S position adds one degree of complexity, since it exhausts the first alternative of part (ii). A stressed syllable in a W position adds two

degrees of complexity, since it exhausts two of the alternatives of part (ii). A stress maximum in a W position renders a line unmetrical. The complexity of a line is a measurement of how far it varies from the most neutral iambic pattern of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. The working of complexity in extreme cases may be seen by comparing a line from "The Golden Targe" with a complexity of zero to one from "The Flyting" with a complexity of eight:

/	/	/	/	/						
Than	come	Resoun,	with	schelde	of	gold	so	clere	("Targe," 1. 151)	
W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	

/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
<u>Mauch</u>	<u>muttoun,</u>	<u>vyle</u>	<u>buttoun,</u>	<u>peilit</u>	gluttoun,	air	to	Hilhouse		
W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	X
("Flyting," 1. 241)										

Each underlining indicates one degree of complexity. Straight lines show complexity produced by placement of stresses; lines with turned down corners mark metrical elisions (Dunbar's rule for metrical elision differs from that of the standard theory, as will be established below). The first line is a neutral iambic pentameter line. It would be a misnomer to call it a "perfect" iambic, since the other line is equally "perfect" in that it fits the iambic pattern, although in a somewhat more complicated way. Complexity per se does not make a line either good or bad. Complex lines and simple lines may be used to achieve aesthetic effects in different contexts.

To this point my purpose has been to explain the Halle-Keyser system of prosody. As the example from "The Flyting" in the last paragraph indicates, some adjustments in the system are necessary before it can be applied to Dunbar. My adjustments are based on the theories of

Paul Kiparsky, who has argued that poetic diction may be based on stages of a phonological derivation other than the phonetic output:

We can think of the meter as a kind of filter that accepts only sentences of a certain form and that a line must pass in order to be acceptable in poetry. In Rigvedic (as in Latvian and in Icelandic) the line can pass the filter not only in its phonetic shape, but also at certain earlier stages of the phonological derivation. Let us term the possibilities of scansion the metrical range. If the line passes the filter at any stage in the metrical range, it is acceptable. Otherwise, it is rejected and thrown into the prose bin.²⁹

That the metrically relevant representation may be more abstract than the phonetic output has already been demonstrated in our discussion of metrical elision, in which it was maintained that the fact that two syllables are placed in one metrical position does not mean that they must be slurred or elided in speech. What I hope to establish here are the rules which constitute Dunbar's metrical range. These rules will explain metrical elision, and the poet's freedom to make certain suffixes syllabic. I will also propose rules concerning stress options to explain apparent anomalies produced by Halle and Keyser's assumption that only lexically based stress is relevant to meter. My conclusions are based on scansions of 1,119 lines, excluding Latin refrains, from fourteen poems, chosen to represent all varieties of Dunbar's style.³⁰

The Halle-Keyser metrical elision rule, which provides that two syllables may be put into a single position if their vowels are either adjacent or separated by a sonorant consonant (i.e., a resonant) does not work for Dunbar, as the following examples demonstrate:

To that conditioun, sa God me saif ("Johne Thomosunis Man," 1. 18)
 W S W S W S W S

The flesche is brukle, the Fend is sle ("Lament for the Makaris,"
 W S W S W S W S 1. 7)

Except a menstrall that slew a man ("Dance of the Sevin Deidly
 W S W S W S W S Synnis," 1. 106)

Nixt eftir myd nycht, the myrthfull morrow ("Of the Changes of
 W S W S W S W S X Lyfe," 1. 18)

The mercifull Lord wald nocht that it were so ("Done is a Battell
 W S W S W S W S on the Dragon Blak,"
 1. 14)

None of the underlined syllables in these examples can be explained by the Halle-Keyser theory's rule of metrical elision, since in none of them is the vowel adjacent to another vowel, or separated from another vowel by a single resonant.

The best explanation of these syllables is an observation which Dudley Hascall makes in surveying Lydgate's prosody of "a phonetic convention which entered the poet's grammar at least in Chaucer's time and has remained a part of it ever since. A syllabic sonorant consonant (i.e., /n, m, l, r/, preceded or followed by /ə/ can be reduced, for metrical purposes, to nonsyllabic status."³¹ I understand /ə/ to be a vowel in an unstressed syllable subject to reduction. This convention would account for the apparently extra-metrical syllables in the examples given above.

Hascall's observation may be formalized as follows:

$$[ə] \rightarrow \emptyset / * \left[\begin{array}{c} C \\ +son \end{array} \right] *$$

where the environment enclosed by asterisks (*) is a mirror image

This rule seems to be a generalization of a rule formulated by A. M.

Zwicky for the natural language:³²

$$/ə/ \rightarrow \emptyset / \left\{ \begin{array}{c} r \\ l \\ m \end{array} \right\} \left[\begin{array}{c} v \\ - \text{stress} \end{array} \right]$$

To see how Hascall's observation actually operates in the poetry, we may consider D. Gary Miller's derivation of the word mercifull as it appears in the last example above:³³

	1	3	
			merci+ful
(1)	Weak-stressed V-reduction		mercə+fəl
(2)	ə -deletion		mercə+ fl

Miller comments on the derivation: "The phonetic output for Dunbar is trisyllabic [mercəfəl] (or the like) but the relevant level for the meter is the output of syncope ([ə]-deletion), i.e., dissyllabic [mercəfl]."³⁴

It is still necessary, however, to revise Hascall's rule to account for the fact that Dunbar avoids metrical elisions at the ends of lines.

The word orient, for example, may undergo metrical elision within a line:

I saw approach agayn the orient sky ("Targe," l. 50)
 W S W S W S W S W S

It does not undergo metrical elision in line-final position, however:

The ruby skyes of the orient ("Targe," l. 38)
 W S W SW S W S WS

Here orient rhymes with firmament (l. 37), redolent (l. 40), goulis gent (l. 41), and resplendent (l. 44). That metrical elision does not occur in line final positions may be incorporated into the rule by formulating it as follows:

$$[ə] \rightarrow \emptyset / * _ \left[\begin{array}{c} C \\ +son \end{array} \right] * \#(\#) [+segment]$$

where the portion of the environment enclosed by asterisks is a mirror-image while the remainder of the environment remains constant

Dunbar's reason for avoiding line-final metrical elisions is perhaps to simplify the task of finding rhymes. If the poet were to place the first syllable of orient, for example, in a final S position, using metrical elision to place the last syllables of the word in an optional extrametrical X position, he would be forced to attempt to find a rhyme word identical, after its final stress, to all three syllables of orient.

Accepting Hascall's rule, deleting an unstressed vowel on either side of a resonant, eliminates the need for a special rule deleting intervocalic y which is frequently proposed for Dunbar. G. Gregory Smith, for example, writes that y "medial, between two vowels (written u), disappears in pronunciation." Words such as evil and nevir "are to be taken as monosyllables."³⁵ Dunbar's poetry indicates that the rule could hardly be as broad as Smith writes it. Although elision of two vowels separated by y is frequent, it is not invariable:

Wp raise the lark, the hevyns menstrale fyne ("Targe," l. 8)
W S W S W S W S W S

Doun throu the ryce a ryuir ran with stremys ("Targe," l. 28)
W S W S W S W S W S

In every example of elision across intervocalic y which I have found, the second vowel is unstressed, and followed by a resonant:

Albeid that thow were never sa stout ("Meditation in Wynter," l.38)
W S W S W S W S

How glaid that ever I dyne or sowp ("Meditation in Wynter," l.45)
W S W S W S W S

And then I saw baith hevin and hell ("Dance of the Seven Deidly Synnis," l. 4)
W S W S W S W S

The Devill suld haif no dominatioun ("Sanct Saluatour," l.29)
W S W S W S W S X

Rute of all evill and grund of vyce ("Dance of the Seven Deidly
W S W S W S W S Synnis," l. 56)

When an unstressed vowel following an intervocalic v does not precede a resonant, elision does not take place:

Meik David and fair Absolone ("Memento, Homo, Quod Cinis Es,"
W S W S W S W S 1. 12)

According to our first phonological rule, the poet has the option of deleting an unstressed vowel in the environment of a resonant. The second phonological rule gives the poet the option of ignoring the common deletion of the unstressed vowel in the suffixes -is and -it. The ending -is is used in the plural and genitive forms of verbs, as well as most forms of present active indicative verbs; -it occurs in the past tense and past participle of verbs. That the vowel in these suffixes is subject to poetic options has been previously noted. G. Gregory Smith, for instance, writes, "The old -is (-ys) is still common, but is gradually disappearing before -s. In M. Sc. prose the syllabic value is generally lost, but in verse -is is pronounced, especially in monosyllables or dissyllables with a final accent. It is also sounded in disyllables with an initial accent, when the pronunciation does not make a trysyllabic word. . . . But all examples in verse are conditioned by prosodic necessity."³⁶ The behavior of the vowel in the suffix -it is similar to that of the vowel in -is, as Smith observes, "The i is frequently elided; but in verse metrical need is its own law. In longer words, where the accent is penultimate or antepenultimate, reduction is usual."³⁷ What I hope to add to Smith is a more explicit account of the behavior of the vowels of these suffixes.

The behavior of the -is suffix on nouns is conditioned partially

by word-length and partially by phonological environment, with no significant difference between plural and genitive markers. The following statistics, therefore, represent total occurrences of -is, appended to nouns without regard to its morphological function. The statistics do not include occurrences of -is at the ends of lines. The behavior of -is in line-final positions will be discussed below. When added to a monosyllabic noun, -is tends to be syllabic if it is followed by a consonant, and non-syllabic if followed by a vowel. In the sample of Dunbar's verse which I scanned, of 133 instances of -is before a word beginning with a consonant, 101 (75.9%) are syllabic, while 32 (24.0%) are non-syllabic. When followed by a vowel, the suffix is syllabic in 15 of 44 occurrences (34.0%), and non-syllabic in 29 (65.9%). The suffix -is seldom adds a syllable to the length of a polysyllabic noun (1 of 112 occurrences). In such cases, however, the poet has the option of retaining the vowel of the suffix while deleting another unstressed vowel in a resonant environment, as Smith observes in the form moderis: "In verse the -is value is retained by the elision of e, modris, which does not increase the length of the word."³⁸

The syllabic value of -is in line-final positions is ambiguous. Generally, it seems to be non-syllabic, for example, paikis, "blows," rhymes with aix, "axe" ("Flyting," ll. 70, 72). In "The Golden Targe," skyes (l. 108) "skies," rhymes with wyse (l. 100), "wise," and devise (l. 104) "devise." In "Memento, Homo, Quod Cinis Es," however, some line-final -is forms seem syllabic. In this poem, the antepenultimate line of each stanza rhymes with the Latin refrain, "Quod tu in cinerem reuerteris." Two of the rhymes with the refrain are clearly dissyllabic:

heir is (l. 6), "is here," in weir is (l. 22), "is in doubt." In equivalent positions, however, we find feiris (l. 30), "fears," and teiris (l. 38), "tears." While the vowel of the suffix is frequently deleted at the ends of lines, the poetic option of retaining the vowel seems to operate in line-final positions.

As a verbal suffix, -is is generally non-syllabic in all environments. In 69 occurrences of -is added to a monosyllabic verb, the suffix is non-syllabic in 57 (82.6%). There is no significant difference between instances of the suffix followed by a consonant and those followed by a vowel.

The vowel of -it, on the other hand, is generally retained. When added to a monosyllabic verb, the suffix is syllabic in 54 of 74 occurrences (72.9%). Following vowels or consonants seem to have no significant effect on the syllabic value of the suffix. Generally, the suffix does not add a syllable to the length of a polysyllabic verb. In 70 occurrences, -it remains syllabic without the metrical elision of another vowel within the verb in 23 (32.8%) instances. The remaining 47 (67.1%) instances do not add a syllable to the length of the word, but another vowel in a resonant environment may have been dropped. For example, the "Glossary" of the STS edition gives as the preterite of oppin, "open," both oppinnit and opnyt. In the second instance, an unstressed vowel followed by a resonant has been deleted. Frequently orthography is not so helpful, and it is difficult to determine whether the vowel of the suffix or a vowel in a resonant environment should be dropped, as in these lines:

/ / / / /
 Apparalit quhite and red, wyth blomes suete
 / / / /
 Anamalit was the feldewyth all colouris ("Targe," ll. 12-13)

The analogy with opnyt would suggest that the first words of each line are appar'lit and anam'lit, but apparal't and anamal't are still possible.

At the beginning of the discussion of the syllabic value of -is and -it it was assumed that a rule in the poet's grammar deleted these vowels, and that the poet has ignored this rule when the suffixes are syllabic. It could be objected that a more straightforward explanation of the variations in the syllabicity of the suffixes, since they are so frequently non-syllabic, is that the real poetic option is the addition of a rule permitting the poet to insert the vowel. There are two arguments for the position that the poet could optionally ignore a rule deleting the vowels in these suffixes. The first argument is historical. Both -is and -it are Scottish orthographic variants of forms which were syllabic during most of the Middle English period. As a late Middle English writer, Dunbar lived in a transitional period when these forms were losing their syllabic value. Whatever his practice in common speech, he may well have been aware that by making -is or -it syllabic in poetry he was ignoring a relatively recent contraction. The second argument is that if we assume a general rule deleting the vowel in these suffixes, it is easier to explain forms such as opnyt. Taking oppinnit as an approximation of the underlying form, we can derive opnyt simply by applying Hascall's rule which deletes the unstressed vowel in a resonant environment, leaving dissyllabic opnyt. If we assume that the vowel of the suffix must be added, the derivation requires two steps--the application of Hascall's rule as above plus the application of the rule

inserting a vowel into the suffix. Such a two-step derivation is poorly motivated because the output is metrically equivalent to the underlying form. If the vowel of the suffix is inserted, we would have to posit an underlying form along the lines of /opin+t/, which is dissyllabic, as in the output opnvt.

The poetic option of recovering the normally syncopated vowel in the suffixes -is and -it points out the inability of the Halle-Keyser system to account for linguistic complexity. The syllabic value of -ed, the equivalent of Dunbar's -it, remained recoverable in poetry until the nineteenth century. Robert O. Evans is correct in saying that we should regard "syllabic -ed as another device, a conscious archaism."³⁹ The recovery of the vowel in the suffixes -is and -it is as much a poetic artifice as the suppression of an unstressed vowel adjacent to a resonant. Logically, it would seem that the recovery of a normally syncopated vowel should add as much complexity to a line as the syncope of a normally pronounced vowel. In the Halle-Keyser system, however, the recovery of a normally syncopated vowel adds no complexity to the line because the vowel is recovered in the application of the very first correspondence rule, which states, "A position (S, W, or X) corresponds to a single syllable." Metrical complexity is by definition the count of the number of rules exhausted before a syllable may be accounted for. Since the syllabic -is and -it are accounted for in the first rule, no rules are exhausted and there is no complexity.

In addition to the two syncope rules I have proposed, it is necessary to posit four poetic options in regard to stress.⁴⁰ The first two

involve optional uses of the Compound Stress Rule. The third option is based on the Nuclear Stress Rule, and the fourth is based on the Monosyllable Rule, to be explained below. In my discussion of stress options, I have adopted an intermediate degree of stress, to be marked $_$. This intermediate stress is not specified as secondary or tertiary; it is merely some degree of stress which is less than full stress. Intermediate stress may occur freely in S and W positions. In an S position, an intermediate stress is assumed to be metrically significant; in a W position an intermediate stress is assumed to be metrically insignificant.

For the purposes of this discussion of Dunbar's use of the Compound Stress Rule, Sanford Schane's informal statement of the rule is sufficient: "In compounds, the left-most primary stress is retained; other stresses are weakened."⁴¹ These weakened stresses may be regarded as intermediate stresses. Halle and Keyser maintain, quite correctly in many instances, that both words of a compound maintain metrically significant stress.⁴² The placement of words with derivational affixes in Dunbar's poetry provides strong evidence that Dunbar could generalize the Compound Stress Rule to include derivational affixes. In the following line, for example, it seems clear that the last word should have stress on both its first and last syllables:

/	/	/	/	\	
In	May,	in	till	a	morrow
W	S	W	S	W	S

myrthfullest "Targe," 1. 9)

The etymology of myrthfullest points to stress on the first syllable, since the word comes from Old English and should take stress on the first syllable of the stem. The alliteration of the line also indicates that the stress should be myrthfullest. The final syllable of the word,

however, also falls on an S position, and rhymes with three obviously stressed words, rest (l. 3), nest (l. 6), and revest (l. 7), indicating that the final syllable should also take some degree of stress. The most straightforward solution to the problem is to assume that myrthfullest functions metrically as a compound, with a word boundary rather than a morpheme boundary between the second and third syllables. The structure of the word could be represented:

##myrth+full#est##

The symbol # indicates a word boundary, and the symbol + a morpheme boundary. There are two word boundaries at the beginning and end of myrthfullest to represent the boundary of the word preceding it, and boundary generated by the sentence. Treating the word as a compound places the main stress on myrth-, and intermediate stress on -est, giving a stress pattern consistent with the rhyme scheme of the stanza, the alliteration of the line, and the etymology of the word.⁴³

The problem of rhyme on apparently unstressed syllables is not unique to Dunbar. Halle and Keyser usually solve the problem by assuming that a word in such cases may be stressed on the final syllable in accordance with the Romance Stress Rule. They cite as an example the word la3ande in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," which is stressed la3ande in an alliterative long line (alliterating with lote3 and lorde, l. 988). They claim, however, that the word is stressed la3ande in a rhyming bob-wheel, "wip lyppe3 small la3ande" (l. 1207, rhyming with blande, l. 1205). They comment on the example:

It is not our purpose to argue that participial forms were stressed on the suffix in any actually spoken dialect

in English. Such forms are always artificial creations of the poet. In order to create them, however, he must have been able to make active use of the principle in accordance with which Romance words were stressed. But this is just another way of saying that the poet's dialect contained two stress rules, one inherited from Old English . . . and the other introduced into the language together with the newly acquired Romance words.⁴⁴

The difficulty with their explanation in this instance is that it ignores the alliteration of the rhyming line (la₃ande and lyppe₃) Admittedly alliteration is not required in the rhyming bob-wheels of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" as it is in the alliterative lines of the poem. Nevertheless, many of the bob-wheel lines carry both rhyme and alliteration, and it is unlikely that the poet would ignore alliteration in assigning stress, especially in an alliterative poem. Treating the word as a compound, allowing some degree of stress on both syllables, seems to me a better solution. It has at least as much linguistic justification as assigning Romance stress to the word, and it violates neither of the two metrical schemes combined in the bob-wheels--rhyme and alliteration.

Another solution to the problem of normally stressless syllables in rhyming positions is that of Dudley Hascall, who has proposed a "Rhyming Rule" which states, "If a word is rhymed, the syllable which carries the rhyme is considered to have full stress, whether or not it has linguistic stress."⁴⁵ Hascall argues, correctly it seems to me, that poets are not obligated to rhyme only syllables with primary stress (p. 364). What Hascall does not take into account is that rhyming syllables generally bear at least intermediate stress, which is produced by options within the poet's metrical range. It is unnecessary to

postulate a rule assigning rhyming syllables a stress which Hascall admits "is not linguistically derived" (p. 363).

In the previous examples, the Compound Stress Rule was generalized to include words with derivational affixes to give these affixes metrically significant stress. Dunbar may also extend the Compound Stress Rule to deprive an element in a compound of metrical stress, as he does in this line:

\	/	\	/	\	/	/	/	\
Mauch	muttoun,	vyle	buttoun,	peilit	gluttoun,	air	to	Hilhouse
W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W
					S	W	S	W
								S
								X

("Flyting," l. 241)

The intermediate stresses on the modifiers will be discussed below. The important feature of the line here is the final word, Hilhouse, "Hillhouse." The first element of the compound, bearing full stress, has been placed in an S position. The second element of the compound, with weakened stress, is in an extrametrical X position, which, according to Halle and Keyser, "may be occupied only by an unstressed syllable" (English Stress, p. 169). In this instance, the element with intermediate stress behaves as though it were stressless.

The next option I wish to discuss is an extension of the Nuclear Stress Rule. Sanford Schane's informal statement of the rule will be adequate for this discussion: "In phrases, the right-most primary stress is retained; other stresses are weakened."⁴⁶ Like the Compound Stress Rule, the Nuclear Stress Rule may be generalized to deprive reduced stresses of metrical significance, as in the following lines:

\	/	\	/	\	/	/	/	\
Mauch	muttoun,	vyle	buttoun,	peilit	gluttoun,	air	to	Hilhouse
W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W
					S	W	S	W
								S
								X

\ / \ / \ / \ /
 Rank beggar, ostir dregar, foule fleggar, in the flet ("Flyting,"
 W S W S W S W S W S 11.241-242)

The intermediate stress on in in the second line will be justified below. The first seven positions of each line are occupied by noun phrases, each consisting of an adjective or participle followed by a noun. Under the Nuclear Stress Rule, the adjective and participles take less stress than the nouns. Since Dunbar is careful in these lines to place the modifier in each phrase in a W position and the noun in an S position, he seems clearly to be using the Nuclear Stress Rule to maintain the iambic rhythm. The effect of these lines is quite different from that of a series of nouns, as in this line from Kennedy's portion of "The Flyting":

/ / / / / /
 Collapis, cruddis, mele, grotis, grisis, and geis ("Flyting," l.
 W S W S W S W S W S 427)

The line means; "Lumps of meat, curds, meal, groats, young pigs, and geese." In the sequence mele, grottis, grisis Kennedy has placed three roughly equal stresses together, and has placed a fully stressed word in a W position. In Dunbar's line, equal stresses do not adjoin, and the modifiers, their stresses weakened by their syntactic positions, do not carry metrical stress.

The final option to be discussed involves placement of metrically significant stress on normally stressless non-lexical words. According to Halle and Keyser non-lexical items such as auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and pronouns do not take stress, except emphatic stress. When an auxiliary verb, for example, appears in an S position, it adds one degree of complexity to the line. This theory predicts that auxiliaries should appear more frequently in W positions in which they would not render the

line more complex. In 107 occurrences of the auxiliaries has, was, and were in my scansion of Dunbar's poetry, 51 (47.6%) are in W positions, while 56 (52.3%) are in S positions. Clearly in this situation, the Halle-Keyser system has made a false prediction.

Since the empirical evidence does not support the view that an auxiliary verb in an S position adds a degree of complexity to a line, we may investigate the possibility that Dunbar's metrical range includes the option of giving such words some degree of stress. The basis for such an option is suggested by Elizabeth O. Selkirk's "Monosyllable Rule," which states, "Monosyllabic syntactic dependents become stressless when they precede their heads."⁴⁷ The operation of the rule in modern English may be adequately demonstrated by citing Selkirk's examples:

They ^owere ^oin ^oa [/]collective.

Lou ^owas [\]under ^othe [/]weather.

They wanted very much ^ofor [\]Gladys ^oto [/]enjoy dancing.

We were glad that ^oyour ^opeople [\]came to the SDS convention.

It was bigger than ^olast [/]year's [\]was.

Who ^ohas ^oOtto Hecker [/]been talking to?

Why ^ohave ^othose [\]people [/]left?

They stayed till ^othe ^ocops [/]came.

While ^oSilber [\]fussed, the students were organizing.

They knew that ^oin ^oa [\]short [/]while more would be involved.

The prisoners feared that ^oafter ^othe [\]press [/]left the shit would come down.⁴⁸

This rule appears to have been operating in Dunbar's grammar, as the following examples indicate:

/ / / /
 Hes playit thair pairtis, and all are gone ("Memento, Homo, Quod
 W S W S W S W S Cinis Es," l. 13)

/ / / / /
 Thy trechour tung hes tane ane heland strynd ("Flyting," l. 55)
 W S W S W S W S W S

/ / / / /
 In mirthfull May, of ewiry moneth Quene ("Targe," l. 252)
 W S W S W S W S W

Monosyllabic auxiliary verbs, possessives, and prepositions in these lines precede their heads, fall in W positions, and appear to take no stress. In environments in which the Monosyllable Rule does not apply, however, non-lexical words appear to take intermediate stress in Dunbar's poetry:

/ \ / /
 Discriue I wald, bot quho coud wele endyte ("Targe," l. 64)
 W S W S W S W S W S

/ \
 In battell him abowt ("Fenzeit Freir of Tunland," l. 92)
 W S W S W S

/ \
 As at a monster thame amang ("Fenzeit Freir of Tunland," l. 110)
 W S W S W S W S

The possibility that, as a poetic option, Dunbar placed intermediate stress on words which are subject to the Monosyllable Rule but which occur in S positions, such as quho in the first example, will be discussed below. In the first example, wald follows its head, Discriue, in a syntactic inversion. It occurs in an S position, and seems to take some degree of stress. In the last two examples, the prepositions abowt and amang are not subject to the Monosyllable Rule because they are not monosyllables, nor do they precede their syntactic heads. The metrical evidence that they are stressed is overwhelming. They fall in S positions, they rhyme--abowt with dowt (l. 96); amang with owsprang (l. 111),

line so effective artistically. It is interesting to note that if we assume that the Monosyllable Rule operated in Dunbar's grammar, but that he could optionally disregard it to give syntactically dependent monosyllables intermediate stress, we arrive at a conclusion very close to that of King James VI, who wrote of monosyllables, "The maist pairt of thame are indifferent, and may be in short or lang place, as ze like."⁴⁹

In summary, I have proposed that Dunbar's poetic grammar contains six optional rules. The first permits the syncope of an unstressed vowel adjacent to a resonant. This rule, incidentally, eliminates the need for a metrical elision rule in the Correspondence Rules of the Halle-Keyser system. The second rule permits the poet to ignore the normal syncope in the suffixes -it and -is. The last four rules concern stress. The poet may optionally treat an affix as an element of a compound, giving it metrically significant stress. He may extend the Nuclear and Compound Stress Rules to render some stresses metrically insignificant, and he may ignore the Monosyllable Rule to stress words which, according to the Halle-Keyser theory, do not bear lexical stress.

These rules eliminate many occasions for metrical complexity under the Halle-Keyser system. The question now arises of how, if at all, one may measure the complexity of a line taking into account both linguistic and metrical options. Although the total complexity of a line certainly depends on a delicate interplay of metrical and linguistic options, metrical complexity cannot be measured with linguistic complexity because the purpose of linguistic options is to avoid metrical complexity. Until we understand more fully the relationships between ordinary language and poetic language, and poetic language and poetic

form, attempts to create numerical measurements of complexity will be premature. Halle and Keyser admit that their measurements work well in "extreme" cases,⁵⁰ but extreme cases are those in which such measurements are least needed. At present, numerical measurements can only be awkward confirmations of what is self-evident to any reader.

To this point my purpose has been to develop a system which will adequately describe Dunbar's metrical practice. If the system is to have any value in a literary study, it must tell us something about Dunbar's poetic artistry. More specifically, if it is to have any relevance to this study, it should show whether Dunbar's prosody shows any traces of influence from the alliterative tradition. In fact, in a number of lines, Dunbar creates remarkable combinations of iambic and Germanic four-stress verse patterns.⁵¹

Perhaps the most interesting examples of the merger of iambic and Germanic verse forms are those lines in which Dunbar has left a position within the line vacant.⁵² This device is quite common in fifteenth century English poetry, as Dudley Hascall points out in his study of Lydgate's prosody.⁵³ Eleanor Hammond is quite correct when she connects Lydgate's use of this technique with the Germanic four-stress line: "It looks as if the monk thought in half-lines, and, having accepted a line-form headless in the first half, saw no reason why the second half should not be headless."⁵⁴ Dunbar uses this device much less frequently than Lydgate. When Dunbar leaves a position vacant, the effect is usually to divide a line into well balanced half-lines, frequently linked by alliteration:

/ / / /
 Aufull and sterne, Ø strong and corpolent ("Targe," 1. 113)
 W S W S W S W S W S

/ / / /
 My heid did 3ak Ø 3esternicht ("My Heid Did 3ak 3esternicht," 1. 1)
 W S W S W S W S

\ / / /
 As with the wynd Ø wavis the wickir ("Lament," 1. 14)
 W S W S W S W S X

In each instance, the vacant position is a W which comes between fully stressed syllables. The adjoining stresses force a slight pause, which both maintains the rhythm of the iambic line by taking roughly the same amount of time as an unstressed syllable, and creates a caesura, making the lines into perfectly formed Germanic alliterative lines.⁵⁵

A more extended example of the interplay between Germanic four-stress and iambic meters is in the last stanza of Dunbar's portion of "The Flyting":

/ / / / /
 Mauch muttoun, vyle buttoun, peilit gluttoun, air to Hilhouse;
 W S W S W S W S W S X

/ / / /
 Rank beggar, ostir dregar, foule fleggar, in the flet;
 W S W S W S W S W S

/ / / /
 Chittirlilling, ruch rilling, lik schilling in the milhouse;
 W S W S W S W S W S X

/ / / / /
 Baird rehatour, theif of natour, fals tratour, feyndis gett;
 W S W S W S W S W S

/ / / / /
 Filling of tauch, rak sauch, cry crauch, thow art our sett;
 W S W S W S W S W S

/ / / /
Muttoun dryver, girnall ryver, 3adswyvar, fowll fell the:
 W S W S W S W S X

/ / / / /
 Herretyk, lunatyk, purspyk, carlingis pet,
 W S W S W S W S W S

 / / / /
 Rottin crok, dirtin dok, cry cok, or I sall quell the. (ll. 241-248)
 W S W S W S W S W S X

Metrical elisions have been underlined. While every line of this stanza is iambic, it produces an effect very close to that of "The Tretis":

Ane bumbart, ane dron bee, an bag full of flewme,
 Ane skabbit skarth, ane scorpioun, ane scutarde behind (ll. 91-92)

(A bumbler, a drone bee, a bag full of phlegm, a scabby
 scrag, a scorpion, a poop-bum)

Dunbar makes these lines resemble Germanic verse in two ways.

First, he adds unstressed syllables to the lines using Hascall's rule, which permits unstressed vowels in resonant environments to be discounted metrically. While these syllables do not occupy metrical positions, they are pronounced, as the internal rhymes prove. In the first line, for example, muttoun, buttoun, and gluttoun rhyme, although the final syllables of muttoun and buttoun are metrically discounted, while the final syllable of gluttoun occupies a W position. Dunbar also uses the Nuclear Stress Rule to deprive the adjectives and participles of these lines of metrical stress. The combination of metrically elided, but still pronounced, syllables and reduced stresses creates the impression that, like an alliterative poet, Dunbar is freely adding syllables between full, metrical stresses.

At the same time, however, Dunbar achieves another effect which would be impossible in a Germanic line. Although by Dunbar's day, the alliterative line was not necessarily limited to four stresses, its form depended on a reasonably constant number of stressed syllables, usually

between four and seven. The addition of too many stresses to these lines would destroy their metrical form. In iambic verse, however, stress and metrical options allow the poet to add stresses to the line, as long as the number of positions remains constant. Even metrically insignificant intermediate stresses still bear some stress, and Dunbar exploits this fact to place far more stresses in each line in the final stanza of "The Flyting" than he would dare place in an alliterative line of "The Tretis."

The final stanza of "The Flyting" is a brilliant combination of techniques borrowed from the alliterative tradition and from iambic versification. Like the alliterative poet, Dunbar has the freedom to add syllables between metrical stresses. Like the iambic poet, he has stress options which enable him to add stresses to his line without damaging the form. The result of this combination of iambic and Germanic technique is a stanza of incredible weight and speed; the number of stresses (or normally stressed words) creates the weight, while our efforts to gallop over the intervening syllables to get to the next metrical stress create the speed. In his finale to "The Flyting" Dunbar seems to be attempting to prove his mastery of versification by writing iambic and Germanic verse at the same time.

In conclusion, this chapter has, hopefully, accomplished two things. First, in examining the Halle-Keyser system of prosody, we have found the system inadequate because it fails to take into account linguistic as well as metrical options. Secondly, we have found some concrete support for Tom Scott's suggestion, cited at the beginning of the chapter, that what Dunbar "is actually doing is combining elements of the

Teutonic stress system with elements of the Romance syllabic one."⁵⁶

While there is some support for Scott's position, his conclusion is far more sweeping than the evidence will justify. Although Dunbar sometimes combines elements of the iambic and Germanic verse systems with immense skill, the effect of these combinations depends precisely on their rarity. It is unlikely that either the poet or the reader could bear more than eight lines like the last stanza of "The Flyting." Dunbar writes iambic verse, with occasional variations based on the alliterative tradition.

Notes

¹John Thompson, The Founding of English Metre (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 2-3.

²Tom Scott, Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 312. Cf. C. S. Lewis, "The Fifteenth-Century Heroic Line," Essays and Studies, 24 (1938), 28-41.

³Scott, pp. 306-331. He does, however, provide good metrical analyses of individual passages.

⁴Thomas Trywhitt, ed. The Canterbury Tales (London, 1775-78), IV, 105.

⁵Lascelles Abercrombie, Principles of English Prosody (London: Adelphi, 1923), p. 96.

⁶Lascelles Abercrombie, pp. 56-57.

⁷Robert Bridges, Milton's Prosody with a Chapter on Accentual Verse, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 1.

⁸Bridges, p. 1.

⁹Joseph Malof, A Manual of English Meters (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 3-4.

¹⁰Malof, p. 17.

¹¹Morris Halle and Samuel J. Keyser, "Chaucer and the Study of Prosody." College English, 28 (Dec. 1966), 187-219. This version of their theory is criticized from a conventional viewpoint by W. K. Wimsatt, "The Rule and the Norm: Halle and Keyser on Chaucer's Meter," College English, 31 (May 1970), 774-788. A different transformational approach to prosody is suggested in Karl Magnuson, and Frank G. Ryder, "The Study of English Prosody: An Alternative Proposal," College English, 31 (May 1970), 789-820. Halle and Keyser reply to Wimsatt and to Magnuson and Ryder in "Illustration and Defense of a Theory of the Iambic Pentameter," College English, 33 (Nov. 1971), 154-176. Magnuson and Ryder respond in "Second Thoughts on English Prosody," College English, 33 (Nov. 1971), 198-216.

¹²Morris Halle, and Samuel J. Keyser, English Stress: Its Form, Its Growth, and Its Role in Verse (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 164-180.

¹³English Stress, pp. 171-172.

¹⁴Noam Chomsky, and Morris Halle, The Sound Pattern of English (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 85, define the term sonorant as distinguishing "vowels, glides, and nasals from non nasal (obstruent) consonants." Liquids are consonantal and vocalic, while glides are non-consonantal and non-vocalic, p. 83. For a complete chart of distinctive features, see pp. 176-177.

¹⁵Seymour Chatman, A Theory of Meter (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), p. 49.

¹⁶Chatman, p. 48.

¹⁷Sound Pattern of English, p. 25.

¹⁸"Illustration and Defense," p. 157.

¹⁹English Stress, p. 89.

²⁰Stress placement for both French and Latin loan-words in Middle English may be stated by a Romance Stress Rule, which appears in "Chaucer and the Study of Prosody," p. 192, as follows:

1. Assign primary stress to the final vowel of a simple word if that vowel is long.
2. If the vowel is short and followed by any number of consonants, including none, then look at the next to the last syllable.
3. If the penultimate syllable is strong, that is, contains a long vowel, or any vowel followed by two consonants, then assign major stress to the vowel of that syllable.
4. If the penultimate syllable is not strong, then stress the antepenultimate syllable.

For a more complete, although much more technical, explanation of the Romance Stress Rule, see English Stress, pp. 97-109.

²¹English Stress, p. 104.

²²"Chaucer and the Study of Prosody," p. 203.

²³For example, see Otto Jespersen, "Notes on Metre," reprinted in The Structure of Verse, ed. Harvey Gross (Greenwich, Conn.; Fawcett Publications, 1966), p. 112.

²⁴"Chaucer and the Study of Prosody," pp. 198-199.

²⁵"Chaucer and the Study of Prosody," p. 198.

²⁶Wimsatt, p. 777.

²⁷ Paul Kiparsky, "Metrics and Morphophonemics in the Kalevala," in Studies Presented to Roman Jakobson by His Students, ed. Charles C. Gribble (Cambridge, Mass.: Slavia Publishers, 1968), p. 138.

²⁸ English Stress, p. 169. This system is considerably more complex than the version of the theory presented first in "Chaucer and the Study of Prosody," p. 197.

Principle 1.

The iambic pentameter verse consists of ten positions to which may be appended one or two extra-metrical syllables.

Principle 2.

A position is normally occupied by a single syllable, but under certain conditions may be occupied by more than one syllable or by none.

Condition 1.

Two vowels may constitute a single position provided that they adjoin, or are separated by a liquid or a nasal or by a word boundary which may be followed by h-, and provided that one of them is a weakly stressed or unstressed vowel.

Condition 2.

An unstressed or weakly stressed monosyllabic word may constitute a single metrical position with a preceding stressed or unstressed syllable.

Principle 3.

A stress maximum may only occupy even positions within a verse, but not every position need be so occupied.

Definition.

A stress maximum is constituted by a syllable bearing linguistically determined stress that is greater than that of the two syllables adjacent to it in the same verse.

The major advantage of the latter version of the system presented in English Stress is that it presents a much more explicit account of the positioning of stresses.

An alteration to the version of the theory presented in English Stress has been proposed by Samuel R. Levin, "A Revision of the Halle-Heyser Metrical Theory," Language, 49 (1973), 606-611, who objects to the second part of the correspondence rules as formulated by Halle and Keyser: "It is not as though each successive alternative in their rules defines a class of lines which includes the class defined by the earlier alternative(s) as a proper subclass; what actually takes place here is that each successive alternative simply defines a new class of lines," p. 610. Levin proposes a new set of rules, pp. 608-609.

1. Fully stressed syllables occur in all S positions.
2. Fully stressed syllables occur in S positions only.
3. Stress maxima occur in S positions only.

Levin admits, however, that his rules "will yield exactly the same results as Halle and Keyser's," p. 609.

²⁹Paul Kiparsky, "Metrics and Morphophonemics in the Rigveda," in Contributions to Generative Phonology, ed. Michael K. Brame (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1972), p. 186. Kiparsky also discusses his theory in "Metrics and Morphophonemics in the Kalevala," and in "The Role of Linguistics in a Theory of Poetry," Daedalus, 102 (1973), 231-244.

³⁰The poems include from the aureate style "The Golden Targe" (279 lines), "Done is a Battell on the Dragon Blak" (35), "Ane Ballat of our Lady" (77); from the comic style Dunbar's portion of "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy" (224), "Of a Dance in the Quenis Chalmer" (49), "The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis" (120); from the plain style "Lament for the Makaris" (75), "Memento, Homo, Quod Cinis Es" (42), "Of the Changes of Lyfe" (20), "Meditatioun in Wynter" (50), "My Heid Did 3ak 3esternicht" (15), "Sanct Saluator: Send Siluer Sorrow" (35), "Petition of the Gray Horse, Auld Dunbar" (66), "To the King That He War Johne Thomosunis Man" (32). I have not counted Latin refrains, so that "Lament for the Makaris," for example, with 100 lines less 25 Latin refrains leaves 75 lines of English to scan. A total of 391 lines, or 34.9% of the total sample, comes from the aureate style, 393 (35.1%) from the comic style, and 335 (29.9%) from the plain style.

³¹Dudley L. Hascall, "The Prosody of John Lydgate," Language and Style, 3 (1970), 132.

³²Cited by Elizabeth O. Selkirk, "The Phrase Phonology of English and French," Diss. MIT, 1972, p. 181.

³³D. Gary Miller, "Language Change and Poetic Options," unpublished paper, Univ. of Florida, 1975, p. 11.

³⁴Miller, p. 11.

³⁵G. Gregory Smith, Specimens of Middle Scots (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1902), p. xxviii.

³⁶Smith, p. xxxi. Cf. Johannes Kaufman, "Traité de la Langue du Poète Écossais William Dunbar," Diss. Bonn 1873 (Bonn: Carl Georgi, 1873), p. 78: "Le génitif est marqué par le préposition of, ou par la terminaison is, qui s'ajoute au mot désignant la possesseur. Ordinairement la voyelle de cette terminaison ne sonne pas, mais quelquefois cet is fait une syllable à part."

³⁷Smith, p. xxxvii.

³⁸Smith, p. xxxi.

³⁹Robert O. Evans, Milton's Elisions, Univ. of Florida Humanities Monographs, No. 21 (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1966), p. 9.

⁴⁰Joseph C. Beaver has discussed poetic options regarding stress in "Current Metrical Issues," College English, 33 (Nov. 1971), 177-197; "The Rules of Stress in English Verse," Language, 47 (1971), 586-614; and "A Stress Problem in English Prosody," Linguistics, No. 95 (1973), 5-12.

⁴¹Sanford A. Schane, Generative Phonology (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 101.

⁴²"Illustration and Defense," p. 157.

⁴³In Sound Pattern of English a word boundary (#) is permitted to remain in place within a word, for example, p. 367 [v# [v#ring#]v#]ing#]v, [N# [v#establish#]v#ment#]N, of p. 370 [A# [A#cunn+ing#]A#est#]A.

⁴⁴English Stress, pp. 107-108.

⁴⁵Dudley L. Hascall, "Some Contributions to the Halle-Keyser Theory of Prosody," College English, 30 (Feb. 1969), 363.

⁴⁶Schane, p. 101.

⁴⁷Selkirk, p. 42.

⁴⁸Selkirk, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁹"Ane Schort Treatise," in The Poems of James VI of Scotland, ed. James Craigie, STS, Ser. 3, No. 22 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1955), I, 73.

⁵⁰English Stress, p. 176.

⁵¹The terms Germanic line, four-stress line, and alliterative line are used interchangeable in this chapter. For a more detailed explanation of the line and its development in Middle English see Jakob Schipper, A History of English Versification (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), pp. 15-124. For additional treatment of the Germanic verse form in Middle English see Marie Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Survey (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962); and J. P. Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester Univ. Press, 1930-35). Halle and Keyser discuss Old English alliterative verse in English Stress, pp. 147-164. See also Samuel J. Keyser, "Old English Prosody," College English, 30 (Feb. 1969), 331-356. James Sledd criticizes Keyser's article in "Old English Prosody: A Demurrer," College English, 31 (Oct. 1969), 71-74. Keyser replies to Sledd in "Old English Prosody: A Reply," College English, 31 (Oct. 1969), 74-80.

⁵²For a discussion of this device in English poetry see David Abercrombie, "Some Functions of Silent Stress," in Edinburgh Essays in

English and Scots, ed. A. J. Aitkin, et al. (London: Longman, 1971), pp. 147-156.

⁵³"The Prosody of John Lydgate," p. 139.

⁵⁴Eleanor Prescott Hammond, English Verse Between Chaucer and Surrey (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1927), p. 84.

⁵⁵Donald C. Freeman, "Current Trends in Metrics," in Current Trends in Stylistics, ed. Braj B. Kachru and Herbert F. W. Stahlke, Papers in Linguistics Monograph Series, No. 2 (Edmonton, Canada: Linguistics Research, 1972), pp. 67-81, argues for a blend of Germanic and iambic structures in the versification of Emily Dickinson. Freeman includes a discussion of vacant positions.

⁵⁶Scott, p. 312.

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VITA

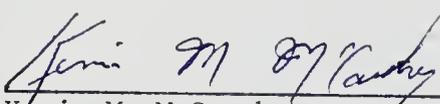
N. Lindsay McFadyen was born on April 18, 1947 in Sherman, Texas. He attended public schools in Tampa, Florida, and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Florida Presbyterian College in June 1969. Since that time, he has been a graduate student in the English Department of the University of Florida, where he received his Master of Arts degree in March 1971. During most of his graduate study, he has been a teaching assistant at the University of Florida.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Richard H. Green, Chairman
Professor of English

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Kevin M. McCarthy
Associate Professor of English

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



D. Gary Miller
Assistant Professor of Romance
Languages

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dean, Graduate School