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R. D. Drexler

Dunbar's "Lament for the Makaris" and the Dance of Death Tradition



"Lament for the Makaris"¹ is regarded by many critics as Dunbar's finest poem. Like his other moral poems it draws a diverse set of poetic conventions, but unlike many of these poems it has fused these conventions into a convincing whole.

In terms of the conventions it uses, the poem falls into four parts--the first four stanzas (lines 1-16), the next seven (lines 17-44), the next twelve (lines 45-92), and the final two (lines 93-100). The opening section is informed by the conventions of the moral poems Dunbar uses repeatedly. The second section is an adaptation of the conventions surrounding the Dance of Death. The third section is an interpolation of those conventions. The final section again reverts to the conventions of the moral poems.²

Much of the cohesiveness of the poem and much of its power arises from the refrain--"*timor mortis conturbat me.*" This refrain is used in several Middle English poems including one by Lydgate.³ The refrain being part of the Response in the Nocturn of Matins in the Office of the Dead would have, setting aside its poetic use, been widely familiar.⁴

For our purposes it is interesting to glance for a moment at the use to which Lydgate put his refrain in his poem, "So as I lay this othir nyght."⁵ The first stanza is replete with conventions;

So as I lay this othir nyght

In my bed, tournyng vp so don,
 Whan *phebus* with his beemys bryght
 Entryd the signe of the *lyon*,
 I gan remembre with Inne my reson
 Vpon wourdly mutabilite,
 And to recoorde wel this lesson:
Timor mortis conturbat me. (1-8)

Lydgate uses the love vision convention of the post-insomniac and the astrological dating convention--which here is historically pointless and, since the poem is set at night, artistically rather odd. The most important point to be made about the stanza, however, is that it is simply a collection of conventions commonly used at the beginnings of poems and that the refrain is used not to set a mood, nor to reinforce the intellectual and emotional meaning of what has already been said, but only to act as a general introductory statement of what is to follow. Lydgate's stanza is craftsman-like in the sense that he proves in it that he is able to juggle a number of conventions without allowing the meaning to get muddled, but what he creates is verse, not poetry. Look at Dunbar's opening stanza:

I that in heill wes and gladnes,
 Am trublit now with gret seiknes,
 And feblit with infermite;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (1-4)

The refrain clearly presupposes a personal fear of death, not simply the subject, death, in general. Further the word, "*conturbat*," implies more than simple fear, implies the distress that Dunbar evokes by contrasting his past health, "heill," with his present infirmity.

Lydgate's poem does deal with death--intellectually the initial stanza suffices--but in a most mechanical way. The following seven stanzas present an abbreviated summary of the Bible proceeding chronologically from Adam through the Book of Revelations. The ninth stanza is devoted to the nine worthies who mercifully are not named, and the one following to beautiful women. Having run out of people, Lydgate in the next stanza enumerates worldly goods and asks what they avail. This stanza is followed by two more conventional ones--the first dealing with the transitoriness of youth and the second with the transitoriness of the seasons. Finally in the next stanza Lydgate sums up what has gone before:

ffor there was nevir so myghty born,
 Armyd in platys nor in maylle,

That whan deth doth hym assaylle
 hath of diffence no liberte
 to thynke a fore what myght awaylle . . . (115-119)

And that is all the point there is as Lydgate tells us in the injunction with which he concludes the poem: "Empreente this mateer in your mynde,/ And remembre wel on this lesson" (121-122). Lydgate's poem is conventional in the worst sense of that word, conventions that begin and end as footnotes to a theme.

To see more clearly how extraordinary Dunbar's handling of convention in this poem is we should look at the conventions of the Dance of Death, the poem's most important foundation.

There are three different traditions surrounding the Dance of Death itself that help explain "Lament for the Makaris". The oldest of these traditions is known as the Legend of the three Living and three Dead.⁶ This legend apparently came from the east, where it is found as early as the 3rd century, and is found in the west in the 11th century.⁷ It exists in many forms, but in general it deals with a meeting which occurs when three living men come upon three corpses; the settings vary. The dead point out that all that seems important on earth becomes meaningless after death; they emphasize that the three living men, in spite of their personal beauty, power, fame, wealth, etc. will, in the end, become like them, decomposing corpses. The poems on this theme end with an exhortation to the living to repent and seek God's mercy, for that alone can save them from death.

This tradition is important to "Lament for the Makaris" because Henryson's poem, "The Thre Deid-Pollis"--which almost certainly preceded the "Lament for the Makaris" since Henryson is mentioned in it as being already dead (lines 81-82)--is a modification of this theme. Henryson has man in general--"O sinfull man"--and not three living men addressed and the three dead have become three skulls, but all the other important points remain, including the final exhortation. Lines 36-40 in particular remind us of Dunbar's poem:

Aganis deid na man may mak defense.
 the empriour, for all his excellenss,
 King & quene, & eik all erdly stait,
 peure & riche, sal be but differenss,
 Turnit in ass, and thus in erd translait.

Besides this similarity, the poem is evidence of either a lack of knowledge of the details of the tradition or a willingness to experiment with it. Dunbar's poem displays the same lack or willingness, and this poem of Henryson's makes the

anomalies in Dunbar's treatment of tradition less distressing.

The second tradition is present in its full form in two English manuscripts--Lansdowne 397 and the British Museum Manuscript, Royal 8 B vi--the first of which was written in the first half of the 15th century.⁸ The poems in both manuscript are in Latin, not the vernacular. It is usually referred to as the "Vado mori" tradition from the two words that begin each stanza.⁹ The "Vado mori" tradition precedes the Dance of Death tradition, appearing in the 13th century. It apparently introduced the idea of arranging the different estates according to rank. Like Dunbar's poem and like the Dance of Death poems, poems in the "Vado mori" tradition begin with six introductory lines reminding man that all must die; these poems close with a prayer asking God or Christ to forgive the sins of mankind.

I have already mentioned that the most serious drawback to considering "Lament for the Makaris" an example of the Dance of Death tradition is the fact that neither Death nor Death's victims are represented as dancing in the poem. In fact the only reference to dancing comes in line 11 where Dunbar describes the "stait of man" as "now dansand mery, now like to dee," a play of opposites where dancing specifically means life, not death. The "Vado mori" tradition, then, provides us with the essential ideas contained in the Dance of Death shorn of the dance element.

Besides that, one of the features of the Dance of Death that Dunbar exploits quite successfully is the irony inherent in the taking of some of Death's victims, most specifically the knight and the physician. The knight, in his proper occupation, usurps Death's prerogative, and thus the knight's eventual defeat at the hands of Death is seen in the Dance of Death tradition as ironic. Similarly the physician in life devotes his efforts to defeating Death in others, but in the end he cannot defeat Death in himself. The stanzas on the knight and the physician in the "Vado mori" poems preserve this irony:

Vado mori miles victor certamine belli
 Mortem non didici vincere vado mori
 Vado mori medicus medicamine non redimendus
 Quicquid agat medici pocio vado mori¹⁰

There are several abbreviated versions of the Latin "Vado mori" tradition in English including a free translation of the Latin stanza on the knight:

I Wende to ded, knight stithe in stoure,
 thurghе fyght in felde i wane þe flour;

Na fightis me taght þe dede to quell
weend to dede, soth i ȝow tell.¹¹

If we look now at Dunbar's stanza on the knight, we see that except for the phrase, "Vado mori," "I wende to ded," it is remarkably similar:

He takis the knychtis in to feild,
Anarmit under helme and scheild;
Victour he is at all mellie;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (21-24)

Similarly the stanza on the physician, "medicyne," like the stanza in the "Vado mori" tradition revolves around the fact that while saving others the physician cannot save himself:

In medicyne the most practicianis,
Lechis, surrigianis, and phisicianis,
Thame self fra ded may not supple;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (41-44)

The third tradition behind "Lament for the Makaris" is the tradition of the Dance of Death itself. It is a product of the 15th and 16th centuries, although apparently originating in the 14th century.¹² It is difficult, and apparently with the evidence now available impossible, to determine whether the Dance of Death first originated in illustrations or in literature;¹³ it is sufficient to say that by the time the Dance of Death became popular the illustrations and verses had been joined into a greater whole. Properly there are two traditions included in the Dance of Death; the older called the Dance of the dead in which corpses lead the dance and the more modern--and one that eventually subsumed the other--the Dance of Death in which Death as an abstract represented pictorially as a skeleton leads the dance. Dunbar's poem belongs to the more modern tradition.

Dunbar, almost certainly, saw at least the illustrations of the Dance of Death, and may have been familiar with Lydgate's translation of the French version. If Dunbar had, in fact, visited France and if he had visited Paris, he could have seen one of the two most famous pictorial representations of the Dance of Death at that time--the other being in Basel--in the cloisters of the Church of the Holy Innocents and could have read the verses that Lydgate had translated. Even if Dunbar had not visited Paris, the great fame of the Dance of Death of the Holy Innocents almost certainly would have been mentioned from time to time in the court of James IV by those who had seen it.

However Dunbar would not have had to go to Paris. Dunbar was the priest who in various manuscripts is represented as delivering the poem, "To London," (Mackenzie's No. 88) during Christmas week of 1501 at a dinner given by the Lord Mayor in London.¹⁴ While in London, it is very likely that he would have gone to the old St. Paul's, and there he would have seen in the cloisters a depiction of the Dance of Death, apparently derived from the one in the Holy Innocents in Paris, and could have read Lydgate's verses. The cloisters are no longer in existence, having been destroyed in 1549 by the Protector Somerset in order to get stone for the building of the original Somerset House. However both John Stowe in his *Survey of London* and Sir Thomas More have left descriptions of the illustrations.¹⁵ Besides the Dance of Death at St. Paul's there exist or have been recorded as once existing eleven other examples in England.¹⁶

In Scotland, one example of the Dance of Death still exists in Rosslyn Chapel, which can be dated from about 1450.¹⁷ The figures in Rosslyn Chapel are carved on the vaulting ribs and have in many cases been defaced; however from 19th century descriptions we know that most of the estates mentioned by Dunbar were carved there. On one rib containing four figures, for example, we are told that "a warrior with helmet, sword and spear" is the uppermost figure; on another rib the figure of "a Lady seated in a chair;" on a third, containing seven groups of figures, a child and directly below a married couple.¹⁸ Furthermore, probably because of the limited space, Death is represented only once and then as crouching, not dancing. In other words very much as in Dunbar's poem, the idea that Death will take everyone, regardless of position in life remains, but the idea of a dance has been lost.

It is tempting to say, from the evidence at Rosslyn Chapel, that Dunbar's source of inspiration was pictorial and not literary; certainly by saying so we could account for the fact that dancing has been eliminated from "Lament for the Makaris."

If we glance for a moment at Lydgate's treatment of the Dance of Death this impression is strengthened. Compare his stanza on the knight--called in his poem the "Cunstable"--with Dunbar's quoted above. Death speaks in this stanza:

It is my ryght to arest you and constreyne
With vs to daunce, my mayster Sir Cunstable:
For more stronger than euer was Charlemain,
Death hath afforced, and more worshipable;
For hardines ne knightode, this no fable,
Nor strong armure of plates ne of maile,--
What gayneth armes of folkes most notable,
Whan cruell death list hem to assayle? (137-144)

We notice that Death speaks directly to the Cunstable--in the following stanza the Cunstable answers--and the sense that the poem is a dialogue is scrupulously maintained. Furthermore Lydgate articulates the unspoken moral of the encounter in the final two lines of the stanza where Dunbar lets the irony bear the moral. But these features in Lydgate's translation are forced on him by the literary tradition. This is also true of the other differences.

Lydgate's prolixity defeats the emotional impact of the stanza, just as Dunbar's terseness establishes it. This is generally true of the two treatments, Lydgate had Death tell the physician:

For al your craft and study of medicine,
 [And] all the practike and science that ye kunne,
 Your lyues course so farre forth is yrunne,
 Ayein my might your craft may not endure. (419-422)

Dunbar confines himself to: "Tham self fra ded may not supple." In fact only in one place is Lydgate's treatment noticeably superior to Dunbar's, and that is with the young child. In Lydgate's translation, the child answers Death's summons:

A,a,a,a, woorde I cannot speak;
 I am so yonge; I was borne yesterday.
 Death is so hasty on me to be wreake,
 And list no lenger to make no delaie.
 I come but now, and now I go my way;
 Of me no more tale shall [ye] be told.
 The wyll of God no man withstonde maye;
 As soone dyeth a yong [man] as an olde. (585-592)

Alongside this Dunbar's treatment is mannered.

That strang unmercifull tyrand
 Takis, on the moderis breist sowkand,
 The bab full of benignite;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (25-28)

What in other places Lydgate has lost because of the dramatic nature of the genre here he gains by it. The direct appeal of the young child is much more effective than Dunbar's traditional figures. In all cases Lydgate's strengths and weaknesses come from the tradition he is following. By assuming that Dunbar's model was pictorial, and not literary, we can account for the strengths and weaknesses of his treatment.

What this examination of the treatments shows is that they

are very different indeed, and that while "Lament for the Makaris" can be placed within the Dance of Death tradition, the relationship between the tradition of the poem is rather complex. Did Dunbar find his inspiration in the carvings in Rosslyn Chapel? Was he, in fact, following a modified version of the "Vado mori" tradition? Or was he simply using what suited him from all the available traditions? Dunbar's other poems and Henryson's treatment of the traditions of the Legend of the three Living and three Dead in "The Thre Deid-Pollis" suggests the last possibility, but, in the end, we cannot be sure.

I have already mentioned in connection with the "Vado mori" tradition that the initial section of "Lament for the Makaris" dealing with the uncertainty of the world and the certainty of death was found in it. This is also true of Lydgate's Dance of Death. Specifically in the second stanza Lydgate writes:

Death spareth nought low ne high degre,
Popes, kynges, ne worthy Emperours.

This corresponds almost exactly with the fifth stanza of Dunbar's poem:

On to the ded gois all Estatis,
Princis, Prelotis, and Potestatis,
Baith riche and pur of al degre;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (16-20)

Similarly the final stanza of Dunbar's poem is repeated at the end of Lydgate's translation. Dunbar writes:

Sen for the deid remeid is none,
Best is that we for dede dispone,
Eftir our deid that lif may we;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (97-100)

Lydgate writes:

Mans lyfe is nought els, platly for to thinke,
But as [a] wind[e] which is transtory,
Passing ay forth, whether he wake or winke,
Toward this daunce, haueth this in memorye,
Remembryng aye there is no better victory
In this life here than fle syn at the least;
Than shal ye reygne in paradise with glorye.
Happy is he that maketh in heauen his feast! (641-648)

This brings us back to the poem itself. We have already

discussed in the body of this chapter the moral sentiments expressed in the opening section of the poem, and we have seen that the idea of the section itself is an integral part of both the "vado mori" tradition and the Dance of Death proper. The second section, too, is largely derivative as we have seen. Lastly the final section has also been suggested by tradition. This leaves us with the third section which is the longest and in many ways the most interesting. Here all of our arguments about how much Dunbar was indebted to tradition and to what tradition he was indebted can be put into perspective. The idea of creating a Dance of Death for poets is not explicit in any tradition, and by creating one we see that whatever Dunbar's knowledge of the tradition, he would not have hesitated to alter what he found for his own purposes.

Most of the names in Dunbar's Dance of Death of the poets are obscure, occurring only in contemporary court records or sometimes attached to a poem or two in the Bannatyne or Maitland Folio Manuscripts. Chaucer, Lydgate, and Gower in stanza 13 (lines 49-52), Barbour, the author of the *Bruce* in line 61, Blind Hary in line 69, who wrote the *Wallace*, and Robert Henryson in line 82 are well-known and Walter Kennedy in lines 89-92, largely because of *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie* (Mackenzie's No. 6) can be said to be more than a name.

Of the others we possess little or no poetry, and what biographic evidence we possess is of the more general kind. This does not, however, interfere in the slightest with our enjoyment of the poem. Dunbar is able within the brief confines of his stanza to individualize each *makar* and immortalize him in a way that is not dependent on biographical fact. Look at the poet, "Merseir," mentioned in stanza 19 (lines 73-76). There are four men by this name mentioned in the *Treasurer's Accounts*--James, Peter, William, and Andrew, two poems are ascribed to "Mersar" in the Bannatyne Manuscript, Lyndsay mentions him, and that is all. Yet the compliment Dunbar pays brings him to life quite as effectively as a tome of information might:

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

In this stanza on Merseir, Death does not just claim its victim, but it takes from Merseir his writing. This is not the stylized action of Death that lies at the heart of the "Vado mori" and Dance of Death tradition but rather a re-direction of emphasis. In the stanza on John Clerk and James Afflek--probably Auchinleck--he does the same thing:

That scorpion fell hes don infek
 Maister Johne Clerk and James Afflek,
 Fra balat making and tragidie;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (57-60)

But finally it is not the pieces that make this poem great but the whole. It is not the fact that Dunbar can forge well constructed stanzas, but the fact that the whole is able to establish and sustain a single rich, powerful emotion.

The refrain itself and the fact that it is perceptively used contributes greatly to the poem's success. However the most important factor in the poem's success is the architecture of the poem as a whole. The poem is cast as a personal meditation on death--this is made apparent by Dunbar's reference to his sickness and his impending death at the beginning and the end; the traditional material used in it is meant to be what the poet is thinking and not meant to stand as isolated moralizing.

The opening stanza in which the poet describes his own sickness stands as an introduction to and reference point for the next three that discuss the uncertainty of life. We are meant to understand that these three stanzas are a reflection of a personal crisis in the poet's life and not simply appropriate sentiments. The fear of death does trouble the poet, and as the poem gets underway we can hear this fear echo in the refrain; we can also hear the moral commonplaces from sermons as they surface in his mind: "The flesche is brukle, the Fend is sle," "No stait in erd heir standis sickir." It is almost as if the poem were employing stream-of-consciousness; the moral commonplaces, which are the sense impressions of the dying poet's mind, dominate the poet's thoughts driving out what we know as the real world.

The poet's meditation continues, and the stanzas on the transitoriness of life give way to thoughts on the inevitable decline of all estates. To a modern reader, perhaps, the personal control of the poem at this point might seem tenuous; the poet that spoke in the opening stanza seems to have been subsumed by his material. But to feel this is to be insensitive to how the poem is built. These seven stanzas that deal with the decline of all estates, as we have seen, draw on the Dance of Death tradition and mark the dance of the thoughts of death that dominates the poet's consciousness. I have mentioned that the repetition of the refrain contributes greatly to the power of the poem; the repetition also establishes the slow dirge-like rhythm in the poem that makes the Dance of Death in these stanzas a fitting expression of the poet's thoughts. These stanzas also mark the transition from the single *sententia* that echoed through the previous three

stanzas to the individual pictures that well up here. As the poet gets deeper into his meditation his thoughts of death become more graphic--and by implication more deeply felt--and move away from simple verbal echoes.

At this point the poem turns to a lament for the dead *makars*. This represents a crucial point in the poem because it is here that the thoughts of death that have been conventional become personal. The poet plunges deeper into his consciousness and the pictures drawn from his cultural heritage become pictures that directly touch on his own state. This explains why stanzas about unknown poets can be so moving. This fine stanza from the second part of the poem is perhaps Dunbar's most successful adaption of tradition:

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

The success of this stanza depends on the fact that it does not waste sentiment on the victims of death but sadly recounts death's victories. Dunbar is able to include a sense of the life of the traditional figures--the lady's beauty and the knight's strength--while making it clear that they are only part of the general dance.

This stanza, however, from the third section is more moving:

That scorpion fell hes done infek
Maister John Clerk, and James Afflek,
Fra balat making and tragidie;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (57-60)

This stanza like the one above is well made and not sentimental, but its true power comes from the context in which it is placed. The fact that the names in it are essentially unknown adds to, rather than detracts from, the overall effect of the stanza because it personalizes the *sententia* about death invoked in the second section. This section forcibly brings home the moral commonplace that no man escapes death.

Were it not for the third section, which is sometimes omitted from anthologies because it is considered to be of historical interest only, the poem would never advance beyond its conventional material. It is in this section that the poem takes on its unique character, and it is here that the poet's meditation commits itself to the personal course it has begun.

The capstone of the poem is the penultimate stanza:

Sen he hes all my brether tane,
 He will necht lat me lif alane,
 On forse I man his nyxt pray be;
Timor mortis conturbat me. (92-96)

In this stanza the poet has reached the lowest stratum of his consciousness. The *sententia*, the conventional pictures, the memories of his fellow poets have been understood by his troubled mind, and he has arrived finally face to face with his own death. In this stanza the refrain has become the echo of his personal fear; this is the end of the gradual change in denotation of the refrain from a simple part of the liturgy, through a general comment on death and a moral comment on specific deaths, to the concrete embodiment of the poet's own terror. This describes the movement of the poem generally. The poet in the initial stanza tells us he is "trublit now with gret seiknes," and the subsequent poem is his attempt to find a language, and as part of this process to understand, to describe his own death. He moves through the language that his culture has given him, discarding phrase after phrase and image after image as his understanding grows, until at last he faces his own end, without *sententia* and without traditional images in simple direct language.

The final stanza moves away from this direct confrontation to a moral commonplace--since death cannot be escaped, we should prepare ourselves for it so that we may find life everlasting. This is an expression of the only consolation for a man facing death offered to some one of this historical period; the only alternatives to this commonplace are despair and abject terror. The calm control Dunbar has exercised over the tone of the poem would be inexcusably shattered by either of these alternatives; the poem must end as it does. This does not mean that the final stanza represents a withdrawal from the insight achieved in the penultimate stanza; rather we view the commonplace in the final stanza in light of the preceding one. The commonplace is not a pious rationalization of death but the only reed left for the dying poet. The commonplace is made meaningful because at this point we can clearly understand its human position. If we as modern readers have trouble connecting convention with real life, it is only because we live in a world which has discarded tradition as a meaningful explanation of human experience. The fault is in us. In "Lament for the Makaris" Dunbar has preserved the connection our culture has lost.

It is this complete fusion of tradition with poetic purpose that so completely sets Dunbar apart from his predecessors and contemporaries. Lydgate is an intelligent poet and cannot be faulted for murky thinking or slovenly handling of

tradition, but nowhere does he achieve what Dunbar achieves here. This poem is the zenith of Dunbar's achievement and stands as a lasting memorial to what it is possible for a *makar* to create.

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NOTES

1. All quotations from "Lament for the Makaris" are taken from *The Poems of William Dunbar*, edited by W. Mackay Mackenzie (London, 1932), the only complete edition of Dunbar's poetry now in print. The line numbers are included in the text.

2. Villon's *Ballade des dames du temps jadis* is often compared to "Lament for the Makaris." See *The Poems of William Dunbar*, edited by John Small, STS, Series 1, Nos. 2, 4, 16 (Edinburgh & London, 1884-93), Introduction by Aeneas J. G. Mackay, I, cxxxi-cxxxii, and note by Small, III, 90. Also see A. M. Kinghorn, "Dunbar and Villon--A Comparison and a Contrast," *MLR*, LXII (April, 1967), 195-208. This effort is largely misdirected. There is no evidence, outside of the chronological possibility, that Dunbar knew anything of Villon. Villon's life makes the possibility that his poetry would have turned up in the court of James IV rather remote although James would have found certain things in common with the poet. The difference in the two poet's lives--Dunbar was a court poet apparently trained in the Church while Villon was a criminal--further separates them. In spite of A. M. Kinghorn's article, which takes thirteen pages to admit as much, the only interesting comparison between the two rests in the fact that both worked with the same conventions when those conventions were dying. Compare, for example, the second stanza from the *Ballade des dames du temps jadis* with the seventh stanza of the poem, "Epitaffe of King Edward the fourth," a traditional "ubi sunt" poem often attributed to Skelton. Villon is playing with the tradition, revitalizing it through humor, and in that sense he and Dunbar have something in common. The comparison, however, especially for the "Lament for the Makaris" is not particularly fruitful.

3. Frank Allen Patterson, *The Middle English Penitential Lyric* (New York, 1911), pp. 100-108. Hereafter referred to as Patterson, *Penitential Lyric*. There are a total of seven

poems in Middle English that use this refrain. See Brown and Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse*, nos. 375, 376, 693, 1444, 3160, 3743, and 4077. Number 696, by John Audelay, is particularly good. See *The Poems of John Audelay*, ed. Ella Keats Whiting, EETS, Old Series 183 (London, 1931), pp. 211-212, poem 51.

4. See *A Selection of English Carols*, ed. Richard Greene (Oxford, 1939), p. 237. On the same page Greene also quotes this inscription from a tomb at Wilney of one Richard Wayman and his wives that would indicate that the refrain was a commonplace:

Man in what state that ever thou be
Timor Mortis should trouble thee,
For when thou least wenyst,
Veniet te Mors superare.

Greene dates this inscription around 1500.

5. Patterson, *Penitential Lyric*, pp. 104-108. All quotations are taken from this edition, and the line numbers are included in the text.

6. See Émile Mâle, *L'Art Religieux de la Fin du Moyen Age en France* (Paris, 1908), p. 388. Henri Stegemeier, *The Dance of Death in Folksong, with an Introduction on the History of the Dance of Death* (Chicago, 1939), pp. 26-28, with bibliography. Hereafter referred to as Stegemeier, *Folksong*. Hellmut Rosenfeld, *Der Mittelalterliche Totentanz Entstehung--Entwicklung--Bedeutung* (Cologne, 1968), pp. 37-38, Bibliography on p. 34. Hereafter referred to as Rosenfeld, *Totentanz*.

7. Stegemeier, *Folksong*, p. 26.

8. Eleanor Prescott Hammond, "Latin Texts of the Dance of Death," *MP*, VIII, (1910-1911), 399-400 prints both texts. Hereafter referred to as Hammond, *Latin Texts*.

9. See Stegemeier, *Folksong*, pp. 28-29. Rosenfeld, *Totentanz*, pp. 38-43, with bibliography on p. 342. And Hammond, *Latin Texts*, pp. 399-410.

10. Hammond, *Latin Texts*, p. 401, lines 13-14, 21-22.

11. In Cotton Manuscript Faustina B. vi, Part II. Other versions also printed by Brown from British Museum Additional

Manuscript 37049 and Stowe Manuscript 39.

12. Stegemeier, *Folksong*, p. 3. Also see Wolfgang Stammer, *Der Totentanz-Entstehung und Deutung* (Munich, 1948), pp. 9-17. Hereafter referred to as Stammer, *Totentanz*. For a discussion of the connection between the three traditions see Stammer, *Totentanz*, pp. 36-38.

13. Stegemeier, *Folksong*, p. 3.

14. Following David Laing in his 1834 edition of Dunbar's poems all editors have assigned "To London," at least provisionally to Dunbar. The relevant facts are these: We know from the *Treasurer's Accounts* (printed in the Scottish Text Society edition of his poems, vol. I, p. clv.) that sometime after December 20, 1501, and before May 15, 1502, Dunbar was paid the five pounds due him of his pension from the previous Martinmas which, as the undated entry says, "Wes payit to him eftir he com forth of England." We know that a Scottish embassy to England was in London at Christmas time 1501 to discuss the marriage of Margaret Tudor and James IV. And we further know from the Guildhall Manuscript (See *The Great Chronicle of London*, ed. A. L. Thomas and J. D. Thornley [London, 1938], pp. 316-317) that "In tyme of which dyner (the Lord-Mayor's dinner) a Scottysh preyst syttyng at oon of the syde tablys made thys balade" ("To London"). Given that the poem is in one of Dunbar's manners, that Dunbar was in England at the time, that travel between the two countries was restricted, that Dunbar was probably a priest and that a priest read the poem, the conclusion that Dunbar is the author is difficult to avoid.

15. James Clark, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Glasgow, 1950), pp. 11-13. Hereafter referred to as Clark, *Dance of Death*.

16. See Rosenfeld, *Totentanz*, p. 353 for a list of sites and bibliography.

17. Clark, *Dance of Death*, pp. 17-21.

18. Clark, *Dance of Death*, pp. 19-20. On page 20 see footnote 1.

19. John Lydgate, *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen (3 Pts.; Washington, 1923), III, 1029. All subsequent quotations taken from this edition, and the line numbers are included in the text.