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

R. D. Drexler

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"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 it 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-insom-
niac 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 mud-
dled, but what he creates is verse, not poetry. Look at Dun-
bar'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 dis-
tress 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 beauti-
ful 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 avaylle . . .   (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 impor-
tant 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" be-
cause Henryson's poem, "The Thre Deid-Pollis"--which almost
certainly preceeded the "Lament for the Makaris" since Henry-
son 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 impor-
tant 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 willing-
ness 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 preceeds 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 medicius medicamine non redimendus
> Quicquid agat medici pocio vado mori[10]

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,
> thurghe fyght in felde i wane þe flour;

> Na fightis me taght þe dede to quell
> weend to dede, soth i ʒow 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 pic-
torially 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 men-
tioned 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. Further-
more 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 trans-
lation 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 cunne,
> 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 drama-
tic nature of the genre here he gains by it. The direct ap-
peal 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 assum-
ing 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 worthye 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 ex-
pressed 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 Dun-
bar'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 Mait-
land 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 con-
fines of his stanza to individualize each *makar* and immorta-
lize 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 *Trea-
surer'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 informa-
tion 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 architec-
ture of the poem as a whole. The poem is cast as a personal
meditation on death—this is made apparent by Dunbar's re-
ference to his sickness and his impending death at the begin-
ning 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 uncertainness 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 approp-
riate 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-conscious-
ness; the moral commonplaces, which are the sense impressions
of the dying poet's mind, dominate the poet's thoughts driv-
ing 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 ten-
uous; the poet that spoke in the opening stanza seems to have
been subsumed by his material. But to feel this is to be in-
sensitive 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 men-
tioned 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 be-
come 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 conven-
tional become personal. The poet plunges deeper into his
consciousness and the pictures drawn from his cultural heri-
tage become pictures that directly touch on his own state.
This explains why stanzas about unknown poets can be so mov-
ing. 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 mov-
ing:

> 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 senti-
mental, but its true power comes from the context in which it
is placed. The fact that the names in it are essentially un-
known 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 omit-
ted from anthologies because it is considered to be of histor-
ical 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 tradition-
al 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 ever-
lasting. 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 ab-
ject 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 under-
stand its human position. If we as modern readers have
trouble connecting convention with real life, it is only be-
cause 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 pur-
pose that so completely sets Dunbar apart from his predeces-
sors 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 Macken-
zie (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 com-
pared 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 interest-
ing 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 play-
ing with the tradition, revitalizing it through humor, and in
that sense he and Dunbar have something in common. The com-
parison, 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 quota-
tions 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 biblio-
graphy. Hereafter referred to as Stegemeier, *Folksong*. Hell-
mut Rosenfeld, *Der Mittelalterliche Totentanz Entstehung--
Entwicklung--Bedeutung* (Cologne, 1968), pp. 37-38, Biblio-
graphy 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 Ham-
mond, *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 Stammler,
Der Totentanz-Entstehung und Deutung (Munich, 1948), pp. 9-17.
Hereafter referred to as Stammler, *Totentanz*.   For a discus-
sion of the connection between the three traditions see
Stammler, *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 provi-
sionally 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 re-
stricted, 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 refer-
red 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 foot-
note 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.