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David N. DeVries

The Pleasure of Influence: Dunbar's *Golden Targe* and Dream-Poetry

Dunbar's *The Golden Targe* has elicited a wide range of critical response and interpretation in this century. Broadly speaking, the variety of response falls into two categories. For purposes of this paper I shall label the categories reflexive and representational; these categories refer to what a particular critic decides is the subject of the poem. By representational I mean the view that sees the poem as embodying a reaction to or a rumination on extra-poetic experience; by reflexive, the view that the subject of the poem is the poem—or poetry—itself.¹ This critical dichotomy, I shall argue, derives

¹For good, brief reviews of the history of the critical reception, see Denton Fox, "Dunbar's *The Golden Targe*," *ELH*, 26 (1959), 311. Also, Pamela M. King, "Dunbar's *The Golden Targe*: A Chaucerian Masque," *SSL*, 19 (1984), 115.

On the representational side, cf. James Kinsley, who claims that "Dunbar's theme is the failure of 'Resoun with schelde of gold' to defend him from 'Venus chevalry'"; *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. J. Kinsley (Oxford, 1979), p. 245. See also, E. Allen Tilley, "The Meaning of Dunbar's 'The Golden Targe,'" *SSL*, 10 (1973). Tilley reads the poem as enacting its tradition (the tradition of *Le Roman de la Rose*) "as a complex way of treating man's relationship to nature and the possibilities of perverting that relationship through the debasement of reason by a yielding to the appetites" (231).

On the reflexive side, cf. the article by Fox, in which he claims that "another way to look at the *Targe* is to consider it a poem about poetry." (319). See also, Lois Ebin, "The Theme of Poetry in Dunbar's 'Goldyn Targe,'" *ChauR* 7, No. 2 (1972), 147-159; Ebin, "Dunbar's 'Fresch anamalit termes celicall' and the Art of the Occasional Poet," *ChauR* 17,

from the very nature of the poem. It is in fact both representational and reflexive; it represents and comments upon an experience engendered (and constituted) by the traditions which the poem reflects. Though Dunbar wrote at, as it were, the chronological and geographical edge of the European Middle Ages, he was still primarily a medieval poet; his poetry did not so much look forward as back. Because of the *Targe's* complex relationship with the various traditions which lie behind it, and because this complex relationship is itself in many ways the subject of the poem (insofar as the traditions and the *Targe* itself are concerned with representing the vagaries of human experience, particularly the experience of love), it is possible to read the poem both reflexively and representationally. I am proposing that Dunbar's poem be read in the context of dream-poetry in general as well as Dunbar's other work in order to highlight the poem's multi-valent resistance to "final" readings, readings which seek to limit the poem's resonant play with a single "meaning."

A cursory glance through the notes to *The Golden Targe* in Kinsley's edition indicates how deeply influenced Dunbar was by Chaucer in particular, and the traditions of dream-poetry in English in general. Harold Bloom has claimed that the anxiety of influence—"the melancholy of the creative mind's desperate insistence upon priority"—is the pervasive subject of post-Enlightenment poetry.² It is instructive to read Bloom when thinking about the relationships between Medieval poets, if only because it makes starkly evident how essentially different Medieval poetry is from Romantic and post-Romantic poetry.³ What Bloom claims about influence in post-Renaissance

No. 4 (1983), 292-99; A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 191-97.

There are critics who seem to mediate between the two camps, who argue that the poem acknowledges itself as poem and still purports to 'be about' something else, but the categories are still there. See, for instance, King; Frank Shuttleton, "An Imperial Flower: Dunbar's *The Golden Targe* and the Court Life of James IV of Scotland," *SP* 72 (1975), 193-207; Tom Scott, *Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems* (Edinburgh, 1966).

Spearing's book, along with Denton Fox's work (the article cited above and his article on Dunbar and the Middle Scots in *Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature* [University, Alabama, 1966] pp. 164-200) are among the most useful of the works on Dunbar.

²Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York, 1973), p. 13.

³Or perhaps I should say how different medievalists are from romanticists. Spearing, in *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1985), seeks to extend Bloom's analysis of the anxiety of influence back into the fifteenth century, pp. 107-9. For a trenchant critique of Bloom's theory, see Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 318-37.

English poetry—"there are no texts, but only relationships between texts:⁴—is certainly in some senses true about Medieval poetry (more particularly true as one recognizes that most of the "texts" of Medieval poems which we read are modern editorial approximations). Medieval poets revel in their relationships with other poets. That so much scholarship has been a factory of source-hunting indicates, if nothing else, how Chaucer, for instance, in many ways is simply an amalgam of earlier poets and that his "genius" lies not so much in his originality as conceived in post-Romantic terms, but in his skill with existing material.

The ability to wield images, phrases and themes from precursor poems is particularly well displayed in the *Targe*. Instead of an anxiety of influence, though, it seems to me that the abandon with which Dunbar and his fellow *makars* quarry the poems of their precursors manifests a desire to remain within the discourse, the artifice, of poetry, while often, as with Dunbar, at the same time recognizing their own poems' inadequacy in relation to the precursors. Of course this recognition was traditionally hypostatized in the Middle Ages via the modesty *topos*.⁵ In fact, the appearance of this *topos* in *The Golden Targe* is a major ground of contention between the two categories of interpretation.

Michel Zink, writing about the appearance of this *topos* in Houn de Mery's *Tournoiement Antecrist*, claims that it represents a desire on Houn's part to prolong his reading of Chretien de Troyes and of Raoul de Houdenc. Zink claims:

His repeated homage to the two poets, his sense of being unable to equal them and of having nothing more to say after them . . . all of this has the same cause. He is incapable of detaching himself, in order to turn to writing, from the fascination he feels as a reader; for him, to write under the inspiration of Chretien and of Raoul is to sustain and to express the impressions that he received while reading them . . . To enter into the world of his favorite authors is a metaphor. One never enters there except by the imagination, which is stimulated by reading. But Huon's reading . . . is prolonged by the writing of a poem, whose argument is precisely that the narrator enters into the world of his two models.⁶

⁴Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York, 1975), p. 3.

⁵Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and The Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), pp. 83-5.

⁶Michel Zink, "The Allegorical Poem as Interior Memoir," *Yale French Studies*, 70 (1986), 121.

This is an interesting, perhaps not altogether satisfactory, interpretation of the modesty topos. This reading privileges the reflexive category because it identifies the subject of the poem as poetry and yet it makes some reference to a representational reading because it is so evidently psychological—the poet desires the discourse of poetry because of some sort of pressure to fix impressions (a sort of "reader-response"-engendered "intentional fallacy"). It seems, though, that Zink has not adequately dealt with the fact that the sort of *envoi* which expresses humility in the face of the precursors was a formula, a rhetorical topos, something which one was expected to do at a certain point. As such, it seems to me that it would be difficult to ascertain the psychological quality/stimulus which prompted any poet to employ the topos.⁷ Be that as it may, the notion of wanting to remain within the discourse of a particular form of poetry is, I think, a valuable notion in relation to Dunbar. We shall return to it later.

But what I perceive to be the failure on Zink's part to acknowledge the rhetorically formulaic nature of Huon's humility is symptomatic. Modern critics often have trouble assessing the affective value of the rhetorically self-conscious poetry of the Middle Ages, particularly the poetry of fifteenth-century England and Scotland. This trouble is particularly evident in relation to *The Golden Targe*. Tom Scott, for instance, claims that the *Targe* represents Dunbar condemning "the poetry of abstraction and of romantic love [Scott's version of allegory and dream-poetry] in favour of a poetry of the concrete and actual" (p. 44). Scott identifies Dunbar's "coda to his reverend masters" as of a piece with "the allegory of *amour courtois*," and argues that in Dunbar "the old allegorical type of poetry is yielding to the new concrete type" which Scott calls realistic. Similarly John Speirs has complained that the *Targe* and *The Thrissil and the Rois*, Dunbar's other masterful dream-vision, are lifeless, empty "show pieces" and that the *envoi* celebrating Chaucer and Gower as rhetoricians is "inappropriate," that Dunbar "goes wrong here as a critic, at the same time unconsciously revealing why here he goes wrong also as a poet."⁸

More recently, however, there has been a growing awareness that these sorts of criticisms are motivated by a too-severely post-Romantic view of poetry as something like Wordsworth's emotion recollected in tranquility and

⁷The frequent use of the modesty topos in late medieval poetry, in fact the highly rhetorical nature of such poetry, might be traced to the peculiar social status of poets in a courtly society. The complicated protocol of behavior which evolved in the courts can be seen as a set in which the rhetorical protocols invoked by *artes poetriae* are a subset. Cf. Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers* (Toronto, 1980).

⁸John Speirs, *The Scots Literary Tradition* (London, 1962), p. 56.

rendered in the language of the common man.⁹ Rather than view Dunbar's *envoi* as a mistake, we should attempt to understand it within the context of the poem and its traditions.

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

O morall Gower and Ludgate laureate,
 Your sugurit lippis and tongis aureate
 Bene to oure eris cause of grete delyte;
 Your angel mouthis most mellifluate
 Oure rude langage has clere illumynate,
 And fair ourgilt oure spech that imperfyte
 Stude or your goldyn pennis schupe to write;
 This ile before was bare and desolate
 Off rethorike, or lusty fresch endyte. (ll. 253-70)

These stanzas have been most profitably analyzed by Fox and Ebin, and my discussion owes much to their insights.¹⁰ Through the repetition and echoing of certain words and images, Chaucer and his two fellow makars are identified with Nature and the sun and other life-giving forces which are among the consolations offered the dreamer in the frame around his dream. Just as "Naturis nobil fresch anamalyng" made "Suete," "soft," "Halesum," and "attemprit, sobir and amene" the landscape, so Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate have illuminated the tongue.

Chaucer is given the privileged position, through; and not merely by having a stanza to himself. Gower and Lydgate are referred to as having "sugurit lippis and tongis aureate." Earlier in the poem, in an example of the traditional *occupatio* or *occultatio*, Dunbar claims that no one could "wel endyte" the beauty of the landscape in the dream frame, not even Homer or Cicero:

⁹See, for instance, Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London, 1970), pp. 4-21; and, in relation to Dunbar, Fox, p. 313 and Ebin.

¹⁰Fox, pp. 332-3; Ebin, 1972, pp. 152-3.

Noucht thou, 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. 67-72, emphasis added)

While the contrast between the ancient writers and the English poets is meant to heighten the importance of the English poets, the precise echo of the two crucial phrases serves to link Gower and Lydgate more closely with Homer and Cicero.

In addition, only Chaucer "This mater coud illumynit have full brycht." Chaucer is the source of "all the lycht" of English poetry. This praise is, in fact, reminiscent of Chaucer's own praise of Petrarch in the "Clerk's Prologue":

Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete,
 Highte this clerk, who rethorike sweete
 Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie.¹¹

Obviously the value of illumination, of bringing light to or drawing light out of matter, is preeminent for these poets. Lois Ebin has written of how Dunbar's use of the terms enaming and illuminating underscores his desire to fix, "to translate the impermanent event, the occasion of the poem, into a more enduring artifact" (Ebin, 1983, p. 298). While Ebin is certainly right (though what "the event" which prompted the poem may have been is difficult to judge), the value these poets assign to illumination is even more profoundly important in terms of Medieval aesthetic theory. As Rosemund Tuve wrote, "This resultant 'light' is simply that 'illumination'—revealing harmony, order, proportion—which had been indicated time out of mind as an attribute of works of art achieving formal excellence, by Cicero, by Augustine, by Aquinas."¹² Rhetoric as Dunbar seems to have understood it was a means of bringing order and harmony, of bringing light, to poetry.

Now whether the privileging of rhetoric as an element of poetic making within the poem means that the subject of the poem must then necessarily be poetry is an open question. In order to consider this question we should con-

¹¹*The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, et al. (Boston, 1987).

¹²Rosemund Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago, 1947), p. 29. See also, J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1954); pp. 264ff.; Patricia Kean, *Chaucer: The Art of Narrative* (London, 1972), pp. 232ff.; Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 21-60.

sider *The Golden Targe* as a dream-poem. Dream-poetry, by the time Dunbar was writing, was an extraordinarily consistent and popular form. Most major poets of the later Middle Ages in England and France had employed the form in one way or another, and Dunbar himself had used the form in a variety of ways.¹³ By Dunbar's time, the dream-poem had acquired something like a set of formulas which poets used and adapted as they saw fit.

A. C. Spearing has argued that "essentially a dream-poem, from the fourteenth century on, is a poem which has more fully realized its own existence as a poem . . . [it makes us aware] that its status is that of an imaginative fiction . . . in short that it is not a work of nature but a work of art" (*Dream-poetry*, pp. 4-5). If Spearing is right, then that fact, along with the value which rhetoric is accorded within the poem, seems to tip the scales in favor of the reflexive reading of the *Targe*. There are, however, examples of dream-poetry from the fifteenth century which do not overtly foreground their status as created works, which are not preoccupied with the nature of fiction. It is instructive to consider Dunbar in relation to these poets, because the contrast highlights some of Dunbar's unique qualities while indicating, as well, how 'traditional' he was. Along these lines I would like to consider a poet who used the dream-poem in some interesting ways: Charles d'Orleans.

It is noteworthy that Charles and another prisoner of the English in the early fifteenth century, James I of Scotland, turned to the dream-poem in order to render their experiences in poetic form. The sequence of ballades, roundels, complaints, songs and caroles which constitutes Charles's English poems is a fascinating narrative and allegorical account of two love affairs. The entire sequence is cast within the frame of an allegorical conversation with Cupid, Venus and Fortune. Within the larger allegorical frame are a number of ballades and complaints which either directly employ the dream-poem form or which make use of the form in a variety of ways. There are French versions of a number of the poems, though mainly from the first half of the sequence.

In the simplest terms the sequence tells the story of the poet's renunciation of Love after the death of his first lady and his subsequent reaffirmation of Love after Venus and Fortune introduce him to a second lady. Like *The Kingis Quair*, then, Charles's poems seem to have an autobiographical impetus. In fact, the editors of the *EETS* edition of the English poems have ar-

¹³In Kinsley's edition, see, for instance, numbers 3, 10, 50, 51, 52 (some scholars, including W. Mackay Mackenzie, an earlier editor, see this as three separate poems), 53, 54, 55, 56.

gued that the English versions display a passion and vigor that the French versions lack.¹⁴

It is certain that Charles enacts some interesting variations on the dream-poem form. For instance in Ballade 8 in the *EETS* edition, "When y am leyd to slepe as for a stounde," one anticipates on the basis of the first line a dream to follow. Instead we find that he cannot rest: "To haue my rest y kan in no manere" (l. 2). This too is traditional; often the poet tosses and turns for hours before falling asleep. For instance, in *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer is kept awake because his reading has troubled him. Even James I has trouble falling asleep in his poem. But in Charles's poem, instead of eventually falling asleep and dreaming, we learn he is being kept awake because, "For alle the nyght my hert *aredith* round" (l. 3, emphasis added). His heart is reading a book called, in the French version, "Romaunt de Plaisant Penser,"¹⁵ wherein are written all the deeds of his dead lady. This represents a wonderful twist on the traditional setting of the insomniac poet reading.

In Ballade 70, "In the forest of noyous hevyness," we are presented with a vision without the usual framework of the dream. And in Ballade 72, "Whan fresshe phebus day of seynt valentyne," Charles performs perhaps his most interesting variation of the dream-poem. The first stanza, with its echoes, sets up the expectations of a dream or vision of some kind:

Whan fresshe phebus day of seynt valentyne
 Had whirled vp his golden chare aloft
 The burnyd bemys of it gan to shyne
 In at my chambre where y slepid soft
 Of which the light that he had with him brought
 He wook me of the slepe of *heuynes*
 Wherin forslepid y all the night dowltes
 Vpon my bed so hard of *newous* thought
 (ll. 1-8, emphasis added)

¹⁴*The English Poems of Charles of Orleans*, ed. Robert Steele and Mabel Day, *EETS* 215, 220 (Oxford, 1946; rept. 1970), 304-5. The attribution of the English versions to Charles has been controversial, although according to his most recent editor, "most people are now convinced that Charles did in fact write the poems that comprise this manuscript [British Library, MS Harley 682, which contains the English poems and some of the French]," Sarah Spence, *The French Chansons of Charles D'Orleans* (New York, 1986), p. xxiv. Spence's edition is invaluable in that it contains the complete French *chansons*, modern English translations, and Middle English versions of the French where available. I rely on both the *EETS* and Spence's edition for my citations.

¹⁵Charles, "Ballade de la Nuit Sans Sommeil," in *Anthologie Poétique Française: Moyen Age*, ed. André Mary (Paris, 1967), p. 209.

"Newous" and "heuynes," occurring so closely together, of course recall Ballade 70 and so, I think, indicate the intended setting of the earlier Ballade. In addition, comparison with the opening of the French version of Ballade 72 indicates that Charles had been reading some English poetry:

Le beau souleil, le jour saint Valentin,
 Qui apportoit sa chandelle alumée
 N'a pas long temps, entra bien matin
 Privéement en ma chambre fermée. (ll. 1-4)

The elaborations in the English version (Phebus and his golden chair whirling aloft) echo Chaucer's "Appollo whirleth up his chaar so hye," (*Squire's Tale*, l. 671) and the opening of *The Floure and The Leafe*.¹⁶ Whichever poem was the source of Charles's lines, it is evident he was acquainted with English poetry.

But instead of falling back to sleep and dreaming, as happens in Dunbar's *The Golden Targe*, Charles is kept awake by the noise of birds "in a croft / Myn eye biside." The birds "pletid ther latyne / To haue with them as nature had them wrought / Ther makis forto wrappe in wyngis soft." This, of course, reminds one of Chaucer's dream-poem masterpiece, *The Parliament of Fowls*. But Charles, again, has worked a marvelous variation on the tradition. In Chaucer's dream the birds make joyful noise after Nature had blessed their procreative pairing. Here the birds wake Charles from his dream and remind him of what he lacks.

In addition to the Ballades there are two longer, more developed dream-poems. The first (called "Vision in Complaint" in the *EETS* edition) is a vision in which the allegorically personified Age comes to tell the poet that Elde is coming to claim him. The second is a truly remarkable poem in which the dreamer-poet, after writing a complaint on the stability of Fortune as cause of sorrow (itself a twist on the more traditional complaint about Fortune's instability), dreams of meeting first Venus and then his new lady in the company of the goddess Fortune. The poem seems at once to be both (almost devoutly) traditional and yet deeply personal. It is set on a rocky seacoast where the poet finds "a benche of mosse & gras / So moche y-growe and eek so verry soft / That is was lijk a Carpet as me thought." Upon this mossy rock he writes his complaint and then falls asleep. His dream begins on a rocky seacoast from which he sees, like Botticelli's canvas, naked Venus rising from the waves with a flowing scarf and a crown.

¹⁶Charles refers to the game of the Flower and Leaf in two ballades, one of which is a dream-poem.

The goddess demands to know why he leads his life "As an ancre madame in clothis blake." His response to her is a long, mournful and beautifully evocative explanation that wherever he goes and whatever he sees he is reminded of his dead lady. The lines pile on the associations with a remorselessness and attention to detail which reminds one of the poems Hardy wrote after his first wife died. The list culminates with:

But y se deth so crewelly devowris
 Suche folkis fayre and in cheef of their flowris
 That as me thynk hit is a choys in vayne
 To chesen that on shalle not long attayne.

The dream concludes with the appearance of Fortune and his new lady in her company; Fortune and Venus assure him that he shall win her affection. He wakes and immediately meets the lady in the company of some sporting youth.

According to Macrobius's dream classification, a popular manual in the Middle Ages, Charles's dream is a combination of an *oraculum* and a *visio*; an *oraculum* because in it a "revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire." It is a *visio* in that it actually comes true.¹⁷ In addition to fitting Macrobius's categories, Charles's dream-poem, personal as it seems, is deeply indebted to a variety of traditions. The appearance of both Venus and Fortune and their descriptions are both traditional, as is the progression from one goddess to the next. In the *Kingis Quair*, for instance, the movement is from the goddess of love to the goddess of wisdom and finally to Fortune. In fact the implication that ultimately love is under the sway of Fortune (that is, that falling in love renders one more critically vulnerable to the influence of Fortune) aligns this poem with James I as well as with Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyda*, and with *Le Roman de la Rose*.

Charles's and James's abilities to use the traditions in order to render their private experience or to, as it were, work out personal conflicts, show the vitality and adaptability of the traditions. In the previous century the *Pearl*-poet had performed a similar forging of private concern and poetic tradition, but Charles reaches a new pitch of personalizing the tradition. Charles was writing in the third and fourth decades of the fifteenth century. All this would seem to suggest that critics like Scott and Speirs are simply wrong to accuse the traditions of lifelessness, where life is conceived of as

¹⁷Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William H. Stahl (New York, 1952), pp. 88-90. The extent of Macrobius's popularity and influence has recently been called into question; see Alison Peden, "Macrobius and Mediaeval Dream Literature," *Medium Aevum*, 54 (1984), 59-73.

meaning something like emotional sincerity. It seems to me that claiming Dunbar is signing the death certificate of a particular form of poetry simply because we cannot identify precise biographical referents is misguided.

In fact, in his use of the dream-poem form Dunbar does in one sense seem to be up to something quite different from Charles or James. Simply in terms of the values adumbrated within the actual dream-visions, it is clear that Dunbar has a distinct perspective. Both James and Charles claimed that Love has a place within an emotional and psychological scheme which recognizes the priority of reason or Wisdom. In the *Kingis Quair* the dreamer proceeds from Venus to Minerva. In Charles's long dream-poem, Venus arrives with "on hir hond and Owle" (l. 4765). The Owl was the symbol of Pallas Athena (Minerva in James's poem). The apparent meaning of the allegory of *The Golden Targe*, however, is that reason is not sufficient to withstand the onslaught of love. Even the fact that Venus and her company are portrayed as an attacking force, "As falcoune swift desyrouse of hir pray" (l. 54), indicates the distance between Dunbar and the earlier poets.

Whereas the two earlier dream-poems were examples of what Macrobius called *oraculum* and *visio*, Dunbar's seems to be an enigmatic *somnium*, a dream which, "conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding" (p. 90). A straightforward interpretation of the dream would seem to indicate that its 'message' is, as stated above, that reason is insufficient to withstand love. But there are complications. For instance, the members of the two courts are an interesting lot. Within Venus's crew we find, as we would expect, Aurora, Flora, Juno, Proserpyna, Diana, Fortune and Lucina. The presence of Fortune within this party seems to indicate that Dunbar was in line with the tradition. But also present are Cleo, "Pallas and prudent Minerva." Dunbar surely knew that Pallas and Minerva were two names for the same entity and that she was understood as the goddess of wisdom. What, we may ask, is Wisdom doing in an army which is going to attack Reason? Similarly Cleo, "that help of makaris bene," seems an odd ally of an attack on Reason.

In the next court we find just as odd a group. First we find Cupid, understood as the mature god of love, not the impish blind boy of Ovid. As in Chaucer's *Parliament* (cf. ll. 212ff.), Cupid is filing his darts. Cupid's court is described in terms borrowed from a number of sources, among them Cresseid's dream in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*. In both poems Mercury is described as the god of rhetoric: "Thare was Mercurius, wise and eloquent, / Of rethorike that fand the flouris faire," (the *Targe*, ll. 116-7). Considering the value rhetoric is given at the end of the poem, the fact that the god of rhetoric is a member of the court of the god of love is quite interesting.

Now why the goddess of wisdom, the muse of History, and the god of rhetoric should be in a courtly love meadow within a poem which is supposed to be showing that Romance is obsolete and dangerous, unhealthy" (Scott, p. 44), is indeed perplexing. I do not believe it is enough to say that Dunbar's poem 'means' that Reason and rationality must be closely and rigorously maintained in the face of the temptation of passion, for to do so ignores the framing material of the poem. Obviously this sort of moralistic message is a part of the poem, and Dunbar used elements of dream-poetry elsewhere to embody similar messages. For instance in "The Merle and The Nychtingaill" the poet, on a crystal clear May morning, hears a dispute between two birds which resolves with the advice to love God:

Me to reconfort most it dois avail
 Agane for lufe, quhen lufe I can find none,
 To think how song this merle and nychtingaill:
 All lufe is lost bot upone God allone. (ll. 117-20)

But *The Golden Targe* involves something more than its allegorical message. The crisis of the dream is precipitated when the dreamer creeps too close to the courts of love. At least one other of Dunbar's poetic narrators gets into trouble by virtue of his eager spectating (one is tempted to say voyeurism). In *The Tretris of the Two Marrit Wemen and the Wedo*, the narrator commits the discourteous act of eavesdropping, and for his pains has some of his delusions about women and love disabused. Here, in the *Targe*, because the sight of the courts was so tempting the poet draws too close and must suffer the consequences:

Thair observance rycht hevynly was to here:
 Than crap I throu the levis and drew nere
 Quhare that I was rycht sudaynly affrayit,
 All throu a luke quhilk I have bought full dere.
 (ll. 132-5)

To insist, though, that the allegorical message of the dream is the 'meaning' of the poem, one must ignore both the framing material and the implications of the constituents of the courts of love. By invoking one of the Muses and the god of rhetoric within the dream, Dunbar has drawn a link between that portion of the dream before the battle and the framing material with its *envoi*. As has been remarked often, one of the major motifs of the framing landscape is the brilliant light-filled imagery. The poem fairly dazzles in the opening stanzas, everything gleams and shines, reflecting the light of "the golden candill matutyne" (l. 4). Just so Chaucer and his fellow poets are praised for the light of their work. And, of course, the dream opens with the ship of the court of Love descending "Wyth merse of god, brycht as the

(l. 238, emphasis added), an obvious echo of the "pulder" that blinded Reason. To make the echo more resonant, the dreamer/poet describes how the explosion:

Till that the reke raise to the firmament;
 The rochis all resownyt wyth the rak,
 For rede it semyt that the raynbow brak.
 (ll. 238-40)

The explosion threatens the firmament where the Sun, and by metaphoric implication Chaucer, reside. And the rainbow, the preeminent symbol of color, seems to be broken.

By a daring paradox, this same blinding and subsequent separating violence, which seems to have reft the landscape of artifice for the dreamer, restores the landscape of artifice to the poet:

And as I did awake of my sueving
 The joyfull birdis merily did syng
 For myrth of Phebus tendir bemes schene;
 Suete war the vapouris, soft the morowing,
 Halesum the vale depaynt wyth flouris ying,
 The air attemperit, sobir and amene;
 In quhite and rede was all the felde besene
 Throu Naturis nobil fresch anamalyng
 In mirthfull May, of eviry moneth quene.
 (ll. 244-52)

This is followed by the *envoi* and the entire poem comes to a neat paradox: the desire to draw close to the artifice of the *amour courtois* engenders a melancholy which is 'healed' by the larger artifice of the poetic tradition in which *amour courtois* is celebrated.

But the poem finally ends with a further complication:

Thou lytill quair, be evir obedient,
 Humble, subject, and symple of entent
 Before the face of eviry connyng wicht:
 I know quhat thou of rethorike hes spent;
 Off all hir lusty rosis redolent
 Is none in to they gerland sett on hicht;
 Eschame thar of, and draw the out of sicht.
 Rude is thy wede, disteynit, bare and rent;
 Wele aucht thou be aferit of the licht.
 (ll. 271-9)

The last line of the poem is remarkable. In view of the supreme value which light has been given in the rest of the poem and, by extension, the entire po-

etic tradition behind the poem, and in view of what happens within the dream, to end by claiming that the poem does well to be fearful of the light is wonderfully ambiguous.

And I think that it is precisely because of this ambiguity that this poem so easily supports divergent readings. If we take the final line to refer to the poem qua poem, then the line admonishes the poem for not living up to its precursors. If we connect the line with the allegory of the dream, then we can read the line as a warning to be wary of the allurements of the dazzling surface of artifice. In fact, I believe that these readings are no exclusive, but rather that the poem entails them both. The poem embodies the desire to remain within the discourse of poetry, while embedding within itself the recognition of the limits of that discourse.

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