
Allan H. Maclaine

University of Rhode Island

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ALLAN H. MACLAINE

The Christis Kirk Tradition:
Its Evolution in Scots Poetry to Burns

Introduction

The continuity of literary tradition is common to all literatures, but has a peculiar force and consistency in the poetry of Scotland. The Scottish poets have always been especially tradition-bound, loath to experiment with new forms of expression, and usually content to pour new wine into old bottles, to work within the limits of old and familiar methods. The long history of what I shall call the Christis Kirk tradition is a most striking illustration of this general truth. Indeed, the Christis Kirk tradition is in some respect a unique phenomenon; for it is extremely unusual for a poetic form as highly specialized as this one to survive through generations of changing poetic fashions. The Christis Kirk genre began in the fifteenth century, and lived on through four centuries of almost continuous development, culminating in The Holy Fair and The Jolly Beggars of Burns. In fact, the type persisted through the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth, represented by such poems as David Walter Purdie’s The Kirk (1885) and George Douglas Brown’s untitled poem (1901) in praise of his native village of Ochiltree, Ayrshire.1 After

1 Purdie’s very pedestrian effort, largely derived from Burns’s Hallow’en and To a Haggis, was first published in his Warblings from Etmick Forest (1881), but is more accessible in David Herschell Edwards ed. Modern Scottish Poets, 11th Series (Brechin [Scot.], 1888), pp. 298-300; Brown’s work, which also shows the pervasive influence of Burns (especially of The Holy Fair and Hallow’en), may be found quoted at length (10 stanzas) in James Veitch, George Douglas Brown (London, 1912), pp. 160-161. Among a fairly large number of Christis Kirk poems written in the early 19th century the following may be cited: Robert Lochore’s Walter’s Weddin’, a long (10 stanzas), mediocre piece, influenced by Burns’s Hallow’en; and even more by Allan Ramsay’s continuations of Christis Kirk, first printed in James Grant Wilson ed. The Poets and Poetry of Scotland (New York, 1876), 1, 382-385; James Lumsden’s Alf and Lowrie, describing in 21 stanzas (modified from the traditional form) a Saturday ramble of two Edinburgh schoolboys, in his Edinburgh Poems and Songs (Haddington [Scot.], 1899), pp. 59-61; Lumsden’s At Winter Night in the same volume (pp. 44-46), which contains a panoramic description of Edinburgh’s High Street in the Christis Kirk manner; and John Breckensridge’s
Burns, however, the tradition entered a decadent phase, with the works written in this style tending more and more to be rather artificial and imitative poetical exercises, so that for practical purposes the significant history of the Christis Kirk genre ends with Burns. This important strand in the history of Scots poetry has never been studied as a whole, though many scholars have generally recognized its existence.

All poems in the Christis Kirk tradition conform more or less to a single pattern established by its two fifteen-century prototypes, Christis Kirk on the Green and Peebles to the Play, and may be defined in general terms as poems describing the humors of lower class life on some festive occasion, such as a wedding, a fair, or a country dance. The method of description is for the poet to give a total impression of the whole crowded and colorful scene of holiday merriment, confusion, horseplay, ribaldry, drunkenness, practical joking, and good-natured abandon through highlighting carefully chosen details. The poem is usually given structure and coherence through the introduction of a few rapidly sketched characters who lend specific human interest to the scene and provide the basis for a slender thread of narrative. In all cases the scene is described from the point of view of an amused spectator who takes no part in the action and is presumably on a higher social and intellectual level than the rustic merrymakers. The poem is swift-paced, with rapid and frequent transitions, full of robust movement and vivid detail. As for metrical form, most of the specimens of this type conform to a traditional and fairly complex pattern: a stanza consisting of two quatrains of alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter, with the addition of a “bobwheel” of one or two lines at the end. The examples given below illustrate the many slight variations of this basic pattern.

Such, in brief and general terms, are the fundamental ingredients of the Christis Kirk formula. The purpose of this study is to trace (with some critical comment) the evolution of this characteristically Scottish genre through four centuries of development, showing what happened to it in the hands of poets of many different generations, how it was gradually modified, expanded, and adapted through the years to fit new

social conditions and new artistic purposes, until it finally evolved into something rather different from what it started out to be, yet still retaining the unmistakable stamp of its remote ancestry. Finally, I shall try to adduce reasons for the astonishing longevity of this very distinctive art form.

The Fifteenth Century

The two fifteenth-century poems already mentioned, Christis Kirk on the Green and Peblis to the Play, are the earliest surviving specimens of the Christis Kirk genre, though there may well have been older poems of this type which are now lost. Indeed, this supposition seems to be highly probable, judging from a reference in the first stanza of Christis Kirk to two other poems of the same type, Falkland on the Green and Peblis to the Play. The latter, of course, we have, but the poem on Falkland has perished. These facts would lead one to suspect that the two surviving pieces are merely representative of perhaps a considerable number of fifteenth-century poems of the same kind. However this may be, since Christis Kirk and Peblis alone were preserved for posterity and became famous in Scotland, they became for all practical purposes the prototypes of the tradition.

The dates and authorship of these two pieces have long been disputed. George Bannatyne, in his monumental manuscript collection of ancient Scottish poetry completed in 1568, assigns Christis Kirk to King James I of Scotland; and, writing in 1521, the historian John Major credits the same author with Peblis, (or “At Belayn” as he calls it, a name deriving from the first two words of the poem). Since the two poems are very similar in content and style, these two bits of evidence, as T. F. Henderson has pointed out, tend to corroborate each other;

2 This conjecture is supported by the evidence of George F. Jones in “‘Christis Kirk’ ‘Peblis to the Play’ and the German Peasant-Brawl,” PMLA, LXVIII (1953), 1101-1123, who shows that these poems have many parallels in themes and satiric motifs in a group of South German poems dating from the 13th through the 15th century. This article contains an illuminating discussion of the folklore elements in Christis Kirk and Peblis, stresses the satiric intention of the author, and suggests that the peasant types portrayed in the poems reflect a literary convention for the most part, and do not necessarily correspond to reality.


and the obvious conclusion is that both pieces were composed by James I, a cultured monarch who is known to have written poetry and to have been the author of the famous love-allegory, *The Kingis Quair*. In 1627, however, the historian Thomas Dempster assigned to King James V a poem which he described as "De Choreis rusticis Falkirkensibus, epos vernacule, lib. I. quo nihil ingeniosius aut Graeci aut Latini ostentare possunt." This title has been taken to refer to *Christis Kirk*, though the assumption seems to me to be a very dangerous one in view of our incomplete knowledge of ancient Scottish poetry. At any rate, Bishop Edmund Gibson, probably taking this hint from the unreliable Dempster, credited James V with *Christis Kirk* in his 1691 edition of the poem,7 and in so doing encouraged the growth of a tradition in favor of the later James's authorship. However, in the eighteenth century, with the rediscovery of the Bannatyne and Maitland Manuscripts there came a reassertion of James I's claims to both poems; and a full-scale critical battle ensued between the scholars favoring James I and those who stood for James V. In more recent years the controversy has been highlighted by the disagreement of two very reputable scholars, Walter W. Skeat and Thomas F. Henderson. Professor Skeat, in 1884, came out for James V or at least for his period, in a rather full treatment based mainly on internal evidence,8 only to have his arguments very ably and, to my mind, decisively refuted by Henderson in his *Scottish Vernacular Literature* (pp. 104-111). The question has never been finally decided, however, and continues to be debated.

Though it is no part of my purpose to enter into a full discussion of this very complex and specialized problem of authorship, a brief review of the facts is necessary to substantiate my belief that these poems date from the fifteenth and not from the sixteenth century. The scholars who have argued for the authorship of James V have failed to convince chiefly because they have not been able to explain away satisfactorily the plain statements of fact by Major and Bannatyne. It seems hardly credible that both men, sound and careful men at that, writing independently of each other, could have been confused or mistaken in this matter. Indeed, those critics who, like Skeat, have argued that *Peblis* as well as *Christis Kirk* belongs to the reign of James V have simply chosen to ignore histori-


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cal fact. Once we accept, as I think we must, that the poem mentioned by 
Major, At Beltayn, is Peblis to the Play or some variation of Peblis, then 
it becomes manifestly impossible that James V was the author. For at 
the time of Major's writing, 1521, James V was only nine years old. 
Furthermore, in assigning Peblis to James I (1594-1437), Major clearly 
believed that the poem was almost a century old in 1521. Therefore, 
whether or not Major was right about the author of Peblis, his testimony 
proves beyond any reasonable doubt that the poem cannot possibly have 
been written in the sixteenth century, that it belongs rather to the first 
half of the fifteenth century. Strenuous attempts have been made by 
critics favoring James V to shake this evidence of Major's, to cast doubt 
upon Major's accuracy, and so forth. But no amount of such argument 
can get around the fact that the poem seemed old enough to Major in 
1521 for him to assign it to James I. It is inconceivable that Major 
could have been so utterly and fantastically wrong as to mistake a brand 
new work for one that was nearly a hundred years old. His testimony 
alone, then, establishes Peblis to the Play as a product of the fifteenth 
century, probably of the years between 1400 and 1450.

The external evidence for a fifteenth-century date for Christis 
Kirk is not so strong as for Peblis, but the probabilities are all in favor 
of it. It is, of course, conceivable that Bannatyne, in assigning this poem 
to James I in 1568, made a slip of the pen and wrote "first" instead of 
"fifth." Much has been made of this possibility by Skeat and others. At 
the same time, nearly all the authorities on both sides of the question 
agree that Christis Kirk and Peblis, being very similar in style and language, 
are at least roughly coeval, if not by the same author. Add to this the 
facts that Bannatyne did write "Quod K. James the first," that Dempster's evidence to the contrary came much later and is highly question-
able in the bargain, that in the first stanza of Christis Kirk there is a 
familiar reference to Peblis as though the latter work had recently 
captured the public imagination, and that Bannatyne's ascription is greatly 
strengthened and corroborated by the independent evidence of John 
Major, and one cannot escape the conclusion that Christis Kirk, though 
perhaps not by James I, though perhaps not even by the same author as 
Peblis, at least belongs to the same period, namely 1400-1450.

Peblis to the Play, the older of the two poems, is a richly humorous 
and vivacious description of a group of country people coming into the 
town of Peebles to enjoy the sports and festivities held there annually at

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8 See, e.g., George Eyre-Todd ed. Scottish Poetry of the 16th Century (London, 

“Beltane,” a Celtic holiday on the first of May. The action of the poem falls naturally into five divisions, and may be summarized briefly as follows. The first eight stanzas portray in vivid detail the preparations for the day and the events of the journey to Peebles. Here we see the excited young girls getting their clothes ready for the big day with some coy embarrassment over unpressed kerchiefs and sunburnt faces; the villagers gathering on the road to Peebles, with bagpipes playing and groups singing as they march exuberantly along under a cloudless sky; and the young men meeting a group of local girls and pairing off for the day’s festivities. Stanzas 9 to 14 describe a ludicrous tavern scene in Peebles itself. Having arrived at the town, the group of rustics gaily enters a tavern to order food and drink. A fight breaks out between two of the young men over the reckoning, a fight which quickly develops into a general brawl and overflows into the street outside. In the next group of five stanzas a burlesque episode is introduced involving a “cadger” (street peddler) and his wife. The cadger, at first an innocent bystander, becomes entangled in the brawl outside the tavern and gets a severe drubbing. Fiercely swearing vengeance, the cadger is finally dragged out of the gutter by his wife, who does her best to calm his rage for fear that he will suffer further damage. At this point (stanza 19) the riot is broken up, with seven of the more belligerent being thrown in the stocks. The good humor of the group is restored, however, when one of their number, Will Swane, proposes an old-fashioned dance. They all gather in a field on the outskirts of town to dance uproariously to the tune of the pipes. Finally, in the last three stanzas the joyous day comes to an end, and we are presented with a touching little vignette of the young men bidding farewell to the girls and promising to meet again on the next feast day in Peebles.

Such, in short, is the content and structure of Peblis to the Play. But no summary can possibly give an impression of the remarkable verve and craftsmanship which this piece displays. Two or three individual stanzas, however, will illustrate its most prominent characteristics. The opening lines are marked by a fairly elaborate pattern of alliteration, a device which is used in varying degrees throughout the poem:

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10 For the best text of this poem, see The Maitland Folio Manuscript, ed. W. A. Craigie, STS, 2nd Ser. 7 (Edinburgh, 1919), 1, 176-180. I have slightly modernized the texts of passages quoted from the manuscripts of Peblis, Christis Kirk, and Syminie and his Bruder as follows: the “thorn” letter has been replaced by “th”; the letter “s”, when it has the sound of “y” (as in “za” = “ye”), is rendered as “y” ; the double letter “ff” where it simply indicates capitalization is given as “F”; all abbreviations are spelled out; and modern punctuation and capitalization are supplied throughout. Otherwise the original spelling is retained.

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At Beldane quhen ilk bodie bownis  
To Pheblis to the play,  
To heire the singin and the soundis,  
The solace, sawth to say;  
Be forth and forreth fyrth thay found,  
Thay grayshhike thame full gay;  
God wait that\textsuperscript{13} wald thai do thay stound,  
For it wes thair feist day.  Thay said,  
Of Pheblis to the play.

The most cursory glance at this stanza will give an impression of its extreme technical complexity. As Henderson has pointed out,\textsuperscript{12} it is an interesting combination of the ballad and romance methods, each quatrain being rhythmically equivalent to the common four-line ballad stanza (though here the quatrains are linked within the stanza by a very exacting rime scheme), while at the same time an alliterative pattern, typical of the northern metrical romances such as Sir Tristrem, is superimposed on the already difficult stanzaic form. The "bobwheel" at the end is in the nature of a refrain rounding off each stanza, the last line ("Of Pheblis to the play") being repeated throughout. In this arrangement, the short tag-line ("Thay said") is called the "bob," and is followed by a longer line or "wheel" which is metrically equivalent to the last line of the stanza proper.

It is obvious that the verse form as established in this opening stanza is difficult and confining for a long poem of some 260 lines. The author of Pheblis seems to have realized this fact; for after sticking more or less rigidly to his original pattern through the first four stanzas, he begins at stanza 5 to introduce variations, using three rimes in the octave, though occasionally reverting to the two-rime scheme of the opening stanzas. From stanza 5 on, the rime scheme thus becomes fairly fluid, though it will be noted that the same rime is used for all the trimeter lines in each octave, the variations occurring only in the tetrastich lines. At the same time, the heavy alliteration of the first stanza gradually breaks down as the poem gets under way; and although alliteration continues to be noticeable here and there throughout the poem, the author seems quickly to have given up the notion of using it regularly and consistently in each stanza. The fact that the Christis Kirk verse form began to reveal this tendency toward a limited degree of fluidity from the beginning will be of some interest in connection with later modifications of the traditional stanza.

\textsuperscript{12} The manuscript gives this word as "chay," undoubtedly a slip of the pen for "that."

\textsuperscript{13} Scottish Vernacular Literature, pp. 111-112.
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The variations noted above enabled the author of Peblis to achieve a degree of flexibility, to tell his story more naturally and effectively than he might otherwise have done. Even with the variations, however, the stanza remains a difficult one; and the author handles it with an ease and a technical dexterity which are altogether remarkable. Take, for example, the two stanzas below. In the midst of the brawl, the cadger leaps to his gray mare, presumably to chase an opponent. But the horse's girth breaks, and the cadger falls off into the gutter:

His wyf come out, and gaif ane schout,
And be the fute scho gat him;
All be diris drヴw him out;
Lord God, richt weil that sat him!
He said, "Quhair is yon culroun knaif?"
Quod scho, "I reid ye lat him
gang hame his gaitis." "Be God," quod he,
"I sall anis haue at him Yit,
of Peblis to the play."

"Ye fylit me, fy for schame!" quod scho;
"Se as ye hauie drest me!
Flowl fellig ye, stir?" "As my girdin brak,
Quhat meikle deuill may lest me?
I waite [nacht] well quhat it was,
My swin gray meir that lest me,
or gif I wes farlochin faynt,
And syn lay down to rest me Yonder,
of Peblis to the play."

The robust humor of this passage is, of course, wholly delightful. But equally admirable is the skill with which the author, here and elsewhere in the poem, creates rigorous and realistic dialogue while remaining within the rigid limitations of the verse form. This deft use of dialogue, allowing us to hear the actual speech of the various characters, helps materially in bringing the scene to life, and enhances its actuality and liveliness. Frequent use of this kind of direct quotation became, indeed, one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Christis Kirk tradition, persisting through the eighteenth century.

From what has already been said about Peblis to the Play, it should be clear that the piece is far from being a primitive folk poem. There is nothing primitive about it except the subject matter itself. Peblis, in common with the other surviving specimens of the Christis Kirk tradition, belongs to a broad and important classification of ancient Scots poetry which consists of art poems dealing with folk themes. Such poems are, of course, sharply distinguished from the folk poetry itself, though they were often influenced by it. In Peblis, the intricacy of the metrical
form alone precludes the possibility of a folk origin, whereas the skill with which the form is handled makes it certain that the poem is the work of an accomplished craftsman, a conscious and sophisticated artist. There are, moreover, clear indications that the poem is aristocratic in origin. The entire work is a burlesque, gently satiric in tone, written not from the point of view of the rustics portrayed, but from the point of view of an amused and superior onlooker who makes good-natured fun of their antics. The tone of tolerant amusement comes out most strongly in such stanzas as the following, where the poet describes the entrance of the rustics into Peebles and the townspeople’s reaction:

Than thai come to the townis end
Withoutin more delay,
He before, and scho before,
To se quha wes maist gay.

All that luikit thame vpon
Leache fast at their array;
Sum said that thi wer merkat folk,
Sum said the Queene of May
Of Peebles to the play.

Such stanzas were certainly not written for the amusement of the common folk whom they satirize, but rather for the amusement of the upper classes, for the relatively small cultured segment of the population in fifteenth-century Scotland.

Despite the earthiness of material, *Peblis to the Play* is a fine poem. The passage of time and changes in language and social customs have, of course, dulled much of its point for modern readers. The full flavor of its wit, the subtler niceties of its phrasing are, unfortunately and inevitably, beyond our reach today. But in spite of these obstacles, the truth and reality of the poem, its genial humor, abounding vigor, and often brilliant execution, still shine through to us even after five hundred years. For sheer vitality and excellence of technique, *Peblis to the Play* can surely stand comparison with anything produced in England during the fifteenth century; and it remains today one of the classic specimens of ancient Scottish poetry.

*Christis Kirk on the Green*,14 the companion-piece of *Peblis to the Play*, resembles the latter very closely in most respects, but differs from *Peblis* in two or three rather interesting ways. For one thing, there is a simpler structure and much less variety of action in *Christis Kirk* than in the earlier poem. *Christis Kirk* opens with six stanzas describing a lively country dance on the village green, giving instances of the flirtations

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14For the best text, see *Baun. MS.*, II, 262-268. Also in *Mailand Folio MS.*, I, 149-155.
which are being carried on among the younger men and women present. At stanza 7, two of the villagers, "Robene Roy" and "Jock," quarrel over one of the girls, and a fight ensues. In the next group of five stanzas we are presented with a burlesque archery contest, as the friends of Robene Roy and Jock reach for their bows and arrows and shoot wildly at each other. So poor are their aims that no single arrow strikes home, and the contest shifts to a hand-to-hand brawl with fists and cudgels. The final ten stanzas of the poem are taken up with the events of the barbarous free-for-all which results. Christis Kirk ends with the fight still in progress, and thus lacks the neatly rounded and more logical conclusion of Peblis. The battle is portrayed, however, in verse that has a rollicking dash, a cumulative momentum, as one vividly sketched picture after another flashes before our eyes in breathless succession. Whatever Christis Kirk lacks in firmness of structure is compensated for by the excitement of its action, the wealth of its barbaric and earthy detail, and the boldness of imagination it displays. In these respects it surpasses the more moderately paced Peblis.

*Christis Kirk* is written in the same distinctive meter as Peblis, as the famous opening stanza shows:

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Was nevir in Scotland hard nor sore
Sic dansiing nor deray,
Nowthir at Falkland on the green
Nor Peblis at the play,
As wes of wowaria, as I wene,
At Chrystis Kirk on one day,
Their come our kitris wuschin clene
In their new kirtillis of gray, Full gay,
At Chrystis Kirk of the green.
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Here, it will be noted, occurs the familiar references to Peblis and to another similar poem, *Falkland on the Green*, now lost. This opening stanza is obviously identical in form to the beginning of Peblis, having the two-rime scheme in the octave, exactly the same sort of "bobwheel", and alliteration. But whereas in Peblis, as we have seen, the author soon departs from the two-rime scheme and frequently introduces a third rime in the octave, in Christis Kirk the strict two-rime pattern is maintained throughout the twenty-two stanzas of the poem. In addition, in Christis Kirk the alliteration, too, is sustained, being employed with notable consistency in every stanza. The alliteration is particularly heavy in such lines as

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Off all thir madynis myld as matid
Wes rane so gympst as Gillie;
As ony rote ber rude wes reid,
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Hir lyre wes lyk the lillie; skin
Fow yellow yellow wes hir heid... full

The exigencies of this extremely confining rime scheme and alliteration inevitably force the author of Christis Kirk into an occasional awkward phrase or far-fetched rime; but on the whole he manages to carry the poem through with a seeming ease, and with an apparently inexhaustible fund of rimes, which are truly extraordinary. So well does he succeed, in fact, so briskly does the poem move, that the reader tends to be swept along totally unaware of the very great technical difficulties that the author has overcome. From a purely technical point of view, Christis Kirk is a tour de force even more remarkable than Peblis.

Most of what has already been said concerning the artistic purposes inherent in Peblis applies equally well to Christis Kirk. It, too, is an aristocratic work, a good-natured burlesque of peasant customs and peasant character, written by a conscious and intellectual artist, and addressed to an upper class audience. The tone of its satire is very similar to that of Peblis, though here the humor is slightly broader and less restrained. The stanzas depicting the absurd archery contest are, of course, especially pointed in their satiric intention. Here is one of them:

With that a freynd of his cryd “Fyl!”
And vp ane arrow drew;
He forgie it so forcioursly
The bow in flenderis flew;
Sa wes the will of God, trow I,
For had the tre bene trew
Men said that kend his archery
That he had slane anew, / That day,

At Christis Kirk on the grene.

This mockery of the rustics' bungling performance with bow and arrow is good fun. But even better are some of the later passages in the poem, where the poet explodes the false bravery and boastfulness of some of the characters and exposes them as rank cowards. The stanzas on the minstrel, on “Huchoun,” and on the village “soutar” (cobbler) are all in this vein and are irresistibly funny. Perhaps best of all, however, is the final stanza on “Dick”:

Quhen all wes done, Dik with ane aix
Come furth to fell a fiddor.
Quod he, “Qhais ar yone hangit smaix
Rycht now wald slane my bruder?”
His wyfe bad him, “Ga hame, gud glaikis!”
And sa did Mgs his muder.
He turned and gais came bith thair paikis,
For he durst ding rane vidit, / For fair,
   At Christis Kirk of the grene that day.

[13]
It is worth noting that in this passage, and very often throughout both *Christis Kirk* and *Pebils*, the last line of the octave together with the bob-wheel itself is used to drive home the satiric meaning of the stanza as a whole. The content of each stanza is skillfully manipulated so as to lead up to the climatic "punch line" at the end, an effect which is, of course, enhanced by a strong final rime. This device was destined to become a traditional feature of the *Christis Kirk* genre.

The broadly comic quality of the stanza just cited is typical of *Christis Kirk* as a whole. The poem is crowded with boisterous action, sly mockery, and swift, vivid characterization. Its peculiar power lies, however, not in isolated passages, but in the exhilarating cumulative impact of the whole. Though the scenes it portrays are perhaps somewhat too crude, its action too primitively brutal, for it to be wholly attractive to modern tastes, it remains an extraordinary achievement. With its incomparable vitality and realism, its breathtaking tempo, and brilliant technique, *Christis Kirk* stands beside *Pebils* as unquestionably one of the finest performances of the century in British poetry.

The popularity of *Pebils* and *Christis Kirk* seems to have gradually increased during the latter part of the fifteenth century to rise to a peak in the sixteenth. We find that *Pebils* was familiar to Major in 1521; and Sir Richard Maitland obviously considered the poem important enough to include it in his invaluable manuscript anthology of Scottish poetry completed shortly after 1586, the sole surviving source for the text of *Pebils*. *Christis Kirk* was transcribed in both the Bannatyne (1568) and Maitland Manuscripts, and was, moreover, directly imitated by Lindsay, Scott, and other sixteenth-century poets. From the first, *Christis Kirk* seems to have been the more famous of the two pieces. There are many more early references to it than to *Pebils*; and *Christis Kirk*, almost alone among Scottish vernacular poems, continued to flourish during the long winter of the seventeenth century, the "dark age" of Scottish poetry. Texts of the poems were printed in 1643, 1660, 1663, 1684, 1691, and 1706; and it was given a highly publicized revival by Allan Ramsay in no less than six separate editions which he published between 1718 and 1724.44 *Pebils*, on the other hand, seems to have dropped out of sight during the seventeenth century, not to be rediscovered until the mid-eighteenth century when the Maitland Folio Manuscript was brought to light. *Pebils* remained in manuscript until 1783, when it was published for the first time by John Pinkerton.19

44 For bibliographical data on all of these editions, see Wm. Geddie, *A Bibliography of Middle Scots Poets*, STS, O. S. 61 (Edinburgh, 1912), pp. 95-98.

19 *Select Scottish Ballads* (London), II, 1-14.
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The influence of both poems, and of the tradition they established, upon Scots poetry of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was, beyond question, very powerful and pervasive. This influence was by no means limited to poems written directly in imitation of them or strictly within the Christis Kirk genre. Relatively few pieces of the pure Christis Kirk type have, in fact, survived from these centuries. But the existence of a considerable number of poems which exhibit unmistakable signs of Christis Kirk influence and can be located, as is were, on the fringe of the tradition attests to the enormous vitality of the genre. These borderline poems can be divided into two general categories: (1) poems which are not in the distinctive stanza but which, nevertheless, have similar themes of social satire, kinds of humor, settings, characters, methods, and artistic purposes; and (2) poems which are written in the Christis Kirk form, but which differ in other respects.

An interesting specimen of the latter type is a fragment recorded in the Bannatyne Manuscript and known as Symmie and his Bruder. The date of Symmie is problematic, since there is absolutely no external evidence to go on beyond the mere fact that it was in existence in 1568 when George Bannatyne wrote it down. Judging from the antiquity of its language and style, however, one can conjecture that it originated in the first half of the fifteenth century, about the same time as Peblis and Christis Kirk. The fragmentary condition of the poem as it appears in the Bannatyne Manuscript would seem to support such an early dating.

Symmie and his Bruder is written in the strict form of the Christis Kirk stanza; and, like Peblis and Christis Kirk, it is broadly satiric in intention. Unlike them, however, Symmie is mainly a clerical satire rather than a purely social satire on peasant characters. It concerns two scoundrels in St. Andrews who disguise themselves as begging friars. "Symmie" and his brother thrive so well in this character, both financially and amorously, that the brother virtuously decides to marry a local widow. The rest of the fragment describes some primitive and rather obscure proceedings on the wedding day, and then abruptly ends. Here is a typical stanza:

Quhen thay wer welthifull in thair wynnyng,
Thay puft thame vp in prydy;
Bot quhair that Symy levit in synnyng,
His bruder wald half ane beyrd.
Hit weddoed fra the beginnyng
Wes neir ane month tydi;
Gif scho wes speedy sy in spynnyng.

16 For text, see Bann. MS., III, 39-43.
Tak witness of thame beyt, / Ilk ane,  
Baith etc. [Sym & his bruder.]

From this sample it will readily be seen that Symmie, too, is an artistic rather than a folk poem. At the same time, and perhaps because the poem has suffered greatly in transcription, it is decidedly inferior to Peblis and Christis Kirk in technique, style, and general effectiveness. It differs from them further in being a purely narrative poem about two rascals, rather than a general burlesque of an entire group of varied peasant characters. The satire in Symmie is, of course, more specific and serious in its implications than in the other pieces, it being one of countless fifteenth-century poems attacking the scandalous personal and professional corruptions of the mendicant friars. In spite of these differences, however, Symmie and his Bruder is clearly and closely related to the Christis Kirk tradition by virtue not only of its identical verse form, but also of its upper class origin, its satiric overtones, and its broad and boisterous comedy.

Of the two great makers of the latter half of the fifteenth century, Robert Henryson and William Dunbar, only Dunbar seems to have been strongly influenced by the Christis Kirk genre. It is worth nothing, however, that Henryson, in his immortal pastoral, Robene and Makyne, deals with country characters in a humorous way and writes in a stanza form identical with that of Christis Kirk minus the bobwheel, using the same meter, rime scheme, and heavy alliteration. The works of Dunbar, on the other hand, show traces of kinship with the Christis Kirk tradition in places. Though Dunbar wrote no poems in the distinctive stanza, or at least none that has survived, and though his social satires deal not with rustics but with the common tradesmen of the town, several of these satires, such as The Ballad of Kynd Kittcock, Amendis to Telzouris and Sowetris, and This nycht in my sleip I wes agast, bear a strong resemblance in tone, purpose, salty humor, and uproarious comedy to the Christis Kirk genre. Additionally, echoes of the opening lines of Christis Kirk ("Was nevir in Scotland hard nor sene / Sic dancing nor derye") appear in the refrain of the General Satire ("Sic hunger ... Within this land was nevir hard nor sene") attributed to Dunbar, and in a phrase from the poem On his Heid-Ake (dancing nor derye"). The influence of Christis Kirk on Dunbar is most clearly discernible, however, in his scurrilous burlesque entitled The Turnament. This amazing poem is in reality a combina-

18 For the six Dunbar poems mentioned here, see respectively The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. John Small, STS, O. S. 2, 4 (Edinburgh, 1884), Vol. II, poems
tion of two originally independent genres: the *Christis Kirk* genre and the mock tournament genre. The latter method of social satire seems to have been in considerable vogue in Britain at the close of the Middle Ages, being represented in Scotland by the work of Dunbar, Lindsay and Scott, and in England by the anonymous *Tournament of Tottenham.* But in Scotland, the mock tournament idea seems to have been closely associated from the beginning with the *Christis Kirk* tradition, and finally to have been absorbed by it. This association undoubtedly derives from the fact that *Pebbis* and especially *Christis Kirk* itself, the two prototypes of the tradition, both contain burlesque descriptions of pitched battles between rustics, battles which are suggestive of the mock tournament method of satire. Consequently, all three of the early Scottish mock tournament poems, by Dunbar, Lindsay, and Scott, are more or less closely related to the *Christis Kirk* tradition. Lindsay's *Justing* shows traces of direct imitation of *Christis Kirk on the Green* itself, while Scott's *Justing and Debatt* is written in the *Christis Kirk* stanza. After the sixteenth century the mock tournament genre as such died out altogether, but it is interesting to note that slight vestiges of its early association with the *Christis Kirk* tradition continued to crop up in later *Christis Kirk* poems such as the seventeenth century *Poemo-Middlinia* and Burns's *Jolly Beggars.*

Dunbar's *Tournament* is a double satire, ridiculing both the upper class custom of the tourney and the lower class characters in the mock heroic contest. His contestants are a tailor and a "sowter" or cobbler, representatives of two trades which seem to have been in particularly bad odor and were frequently satirized by the Scottish poets. Dunbar's mockery of the uncouth manners, absurd appearance, and false courage of these tradesmen is surely typical of the *Christis Kirk* tradition. Even more striking is the emphasis he places upon the abject cowardice of the tailor and cobbler when their bombastic pretensions are put to the test, an emphasis which is reminiscent of several passages already noted in *Christis Kirk.* When the rivals march out onto the field after each has made extravagant boasts of certain victory, both the cobbler and the tailor are so frightened that the one vomits and the other befools his saddle out of sheer terror. This notion of fear causing spontaneous bowel

numbered as follows: No. 5 (also *Bann. MS., III, 10-11*); No. 28 (*Bann. MS., II, 298-100*); No. 34 (*Bann. MS., III, 1-4*); No. 14 (*Bann. MS., I, 79-82*); No. 78 (not in *Bann. MS.*); and No. 27 (*Bann. MS., II, 295-298*).

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evacuation is, of course, widespread in the literatures of many nations and many periods; but it is perhaps significant that in the eighth stanza of Christis Kirk this same notion is broadly hinted at, where the author comments wryly after one of his characters has been missed by an arrow aimed point-black at him, "I can nocht say quhat mard him." The recurrence of this idea in Dunbar's poem would be of no importance by itself, but when added to the other marks of resemblance noted above it helps to establish a link between The Tournament and Christis Kirk, and to suggest that Dunbar's piece, though in the main a daringly original burlesque performance typical of Dunbar's astonishingly versatile genius, was, nevertheless, written under at least the partial influence of the Christis Kirk tradition. The tone of the satire in The Tournament is more devastating and less genial than in the Christis Kirk poems; but the rude horseplay, the uproarious comedy, and rollicking tempo of the Christis Kirk genre are all there.

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND