Postgraduate English

www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english

ISSN 1756-9761

Issue 41 Winter 2021

Editor:

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Autobiography and modernity traditionally go hand in hand in literary and sociological studies. Jacob Burckhardt’s notorious formulation of ‘The Development of the Individual’ and birth of subjectivity in *trecento* Italy, spreading north during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, has been largely discredited as a paradigm for describing historical and cultural change.[1] Yet the fact remains that in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Western Europe people started writing in different ways about themselves. Humanism, increased literacy, and confessional reform are among the factors usually cited as contributing to the appearance in the later sixteenth century of such recognisably autobiographical works as *The Autobiography* (1558-63) of Benvenuto Cellini and Michel de Montaigne’s *Essays* (publ. 1580, 1588, and 1595). But where can one look for earlier examples of ‘account[s] of a person’s life given by himself or herself’ with attention to literary form?[2] The scholar’s usual

This work was supported by AHRC Northern Bridge (grant number AH/L503927/1).

[1]Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. Middlemore (London: Allen & Unwin, 1944 [first publ. 1860]); rebutted in, for example, David Aers, ‘A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists: Or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the “History of the Subject”’, in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. idem (New York, NY: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 177-202.

[2]‘Autobiography’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <www.oed.com > [accessed 30 September 2020]. In what follows, I adopt Philippe Lejeune’s classical definition of autobiography: ‘a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person, focusing on [his/her] individual life, in particular the story of [his/ her] personality’ Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine M. Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 4. For recent discussions of the alternative generic and material contexts in which late medieval and early modern life-writing was conducted, see Barry Windeatt, ‘Medieval Life-Writing: Types,

recourse when seeking evidence of the autobiographical impulse in pre-modern literature is to the spiritual confession—the genre inaugurated by Augustine's *Confessions* (397-400 AD), and which has a fifteenth-century English specimen in *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1436-38).[3] Less forthcoming, however, are literary accounts of late medieval persons' interests in *this* world, as opposed to their preparations for the next. Letters, commonplace books, and financial accounts provide evidence of what Europe's emerging middling classes chose to record about their material circumstances, but little sense of the scripting or self-consciousness associated with later autobiography.[4] 'This longing to leave behind at least some testimony that we ever existed may be universal', observes Barry Windeatt;[5] but do there exist in late medieval Europe precursory or alternative traditions of what might retrospectively be described as autobiography?

One place that one can begin to look is the period's court poetry. '[T]he milieu of the court', remarks Jon Robinson, 'was one in which the courtier's quest for wealth, power and privilege fostered a dark, aggressive and competitive individuality'.[6] Poetry, especially allegorical poetry, often framed as a dream, served as versatile mode for satire, eulogy, and instruction at court, as well as for more personal reflections on poets' lives and literary careers.[7] The mode and form enjoyed particular popularity at the late medieval Scottish court.

Encomia, Exemplars, Patterns', in *A History of English Autobiography*, ed. Adam Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 13-25; Kathleen Lynch, 'Inscribing the Early Modern Self: The Materiality of Autobiography', in ibid., pp. 56-69; and Suzanne Trill, 'Life-Writing: Encountering Selves', in *Handbook of English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Ingo Berensmeyer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 108-35.

[3]See, for example, Brian Cummings, 'Autobiography and the History of Reading', in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. idem and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 635-57; and Windeatt, 'Medieval Life-Writing', pp. 20-25.

[4]On the 'overt redeployment of existing scripts' in early forms of autobiography, see Adam Smyth, 'Introduction: The Range, limits, and Potentials of the Form'', in *English Autobiography*, ed. idem, pp. 1-10, at pp. 2-5.

[5]Windeatt, 'Medieval Life-Writing', p. 13.

[6]Robinson, *Court Politics, Culture and Literature in Scotland and England, 1500-1540* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 25; cp. David Starkey, 'The Age of the Household: Politics, Society and the Arts *c.* 1350-*c.* 1550', in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen Medcalf (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 225-90, at pp. 276-77.

[7]Alistair Fox, *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 5-6.

Poems ranging from King James I's *The Kingis Quair* (*c.* 1424) to Sir David Lyndsay's *Dreme* composed about a century later (*c.* 1526) demonstrate the enduring facility of framed first-person allegory for authorial self-representation within the bounds of literary convention. Of special interest to the history of autobiography is the more oblique approach to life-writing evidenced by the courtly dream poetry of perhaps the best known of the 'Scots Makars', William Dunbar (*c.* 1460-1513?). Dunbar's poetry offers a vivid representation of the society and spectacle of the court of James IV (1473-1513; r. 1488-1513), though little biographical information about the poet himself. His poetry is celebrated for its great tonal and generic variety; but this very versatility poses problems for the recovery of '[t]he "real" Dunbar'.[8] The dream poem is a form much favoured by Dunbar, though apparently as a medium for writing about his position at court, rather than autobiography in the classic sense of the term. In poems such as *The Goldyn Targe*, *The Thrissil and the Rois*, and 'This hinder nycht, halff sleiping as I lay', Dunbar affirms his role as a *makar* or 'maker' at court, but positions himself as the exponent of a lively, literary, court culture, rather than a psychologically complex, individuated self. In this, I suggest, Dunbar's poetry demonstrates an alternative approach to autobiography: the development of a corporate rather than an individual sense of identity, and a pathway for thinking about quasi-autobiographical self-representation outside of the Burckhardtian paradigm of the Renaissance development of the individual.

Dunbar is the quintessential poet of the late medieval Scottish court, one among the 'mony seruitouris' ('Schir, ȝe haue mony seruitouris, 1) of James IV.[9] Having become a bachelor at the University of St Andrews in 1477, where he graduated as a 'licentiate' or

[8]Priscilla Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 3-5, p. 5 quoted.
[9]In *The Poems of William Dunbar*, 2 vols, ed. Bawcutt (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1998). All references to Dunbar's poems are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

master in 1479,[10] the documentary evidence for Dunbar's biography is almost exclusively in relation to his service at court. The royal pension of £10 which he received in 1500 was doubled to £20 in November 1507 and quadrupled to £80 in August 1510;[11] the final recorded payment was made on 14 May 1513, after which date, Dunbar disappears from the historical record.[12] It is unclear whether Dunbar's pension was a reward for his literary activities—he may also have served as a clerk or even a chaplain in the royal household.[13] What is certain, in either case, is the centrality of the Scottish court—its customs, characters, and occasions—to Dunbar's literary career.[14] It provided him with his primary audience[15] and served as the imaginative stimulus for the most spectacular, if enigmatic, of his allegorical dream poems: *The Goldyn Targe*.

At first, the *Targe* seems an unlikely example of late medieval autobiography. Opinion is divided as to its date of composition: Priscilla Bawcutt, detecting the influence of the *Targe* on Gavin Douglas's *Palice of Honour*, written in around 1501, dates the poem to the 1490s;[16] Roderick J. Lyall argues for an opposite direction of influence, and a *terminus ante quem* of 1508, when the *Targe* was published at Edinburgh by the printers Walter

[10]*Acta facultatis artium Universitatis Sanctiandree: 1413-1588*, 2 vols, ed. Annie I. Dunlop (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1964), I, pp. 199, 206. Note, however, that '[i]t is not definitely established that the William Dunbar, student at St. Andrews, was the later poet.' Ibid., I, p. lxxxvi, n. 1.
[11]*Registrum secreti sigilli regum Scotorum*, 8 vols, ed. Matthew Livingstone et al. (Edinburgh: H. M. General Register House, 1908-82), I, 80, 323. For a summary of the recorded payments made to Dunbar by the Treasurer between 1501 and 1513, calendared in *Compota thesaurariorum Regum Scotorum*, 13 vols, ed. Thomas Dickinson et al. (Edinburgh: H. M. General Register House, 1877-78), II-IV, see Douglas Gray, *William Dunbar* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), p. 4, nn. 13-14.
[12]*Compota thesaurariorum*, ed. Dickinson et al., IV, 442. Note, however, that the Treasurer's accounts for August 1513 to June 1515 have not survived.
[13]Dunbar was ordained as priest shortly before celebrating his first mass before James IV on 17 March 1504. *Compota thesaurariorum*, ed. Dickinson et al., II, 258. He is referred to as a chaplain in a deed of 13 March 1509, edited in *The Protocol Book of John Foular, 1503-1513: Volume I* [continued], ed. Margaret Wood (Edinburgh: J. Skinner & Co., 1941), p. 540.
[14]As stated in Priscilla Bawcutt, 'William Dunbar', in *Edinburgh The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Volume I: From Columba to the Union (until 1707)*, ed. Ian Brown et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 295-304, at pp. 296-98.
[15]Which included readers and also, quite probably, auditors. For discussion of the possible performance contexts for Dunbar's verse, see R. D. S. Jack, 'The Dramatic Voice of William Dunbar', in *The Best Pairt of Our Play: Essays Presented to John J. Gavin: Part 1*, ed. Sarah Carpenter, Pamela King, Meg M. Twycross, and Greg Walker (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 73-89.
[16]Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. Bawcutt, II, 414.

Chepman and Andrew Myllar.[17] It is tempting to follow John A. Burrow in his assessment of the *Targe* as 'a "masterwork", in the old sense of the term, that piece of work by which a craftsman gained the recognized rank of "master"',[18] and thus to date the poem relatively early in Dunbar's literary career. The poem itself, however, provides no such biographical clues. The poet's craft, rather than his name and biography, is Dunbar's chief interest in the *Targe*, and there is little attempt to develop the textual first person beyond its basic rhetorical function as a point of view for the scene that unfolds.[19] Dunbar's matter is drawn from what A. C. Spearing describes as the 'Chaucerian Tradition' of medieval dream poetry:[20] the *Targe*'s allegory, observes William Calin, is 'derived from, and influenced the most by, *Le Roman de la Rose* [begun by Guillaume de Lorris, 1225-40; completed by Jean de Meun, *c.* 1270-77]',[21] its nine-line stanza first appears in Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite* (late 1370s), and there are numerous verbal and thematic echoes of *Troilus and Criseyde* (mid 1380s), Chaucer's dream poems, John Lydgate's *Complaint of the Black Knight* and *Reson and Sensuallyte* (both early fifteenth-century), and *The Kingis Quair*.[22]

The action of the *Targe* can be summarised briefly. An unnamed poet-narrator falls asleep in a 'rosy garth' (l. 40), where he dreams of a ship with a white sail approaching land. A company of goddesses led by Nature and Venus disembark and 'Enterit within this park of most plesere, | Quhare that I lay, ourhelit with leuis ronk' (ll. 92-93). There, the goddesses are

[17]Lyall, 'The Stylistic Relationship between Dunbar and Douglas', in *William Dunbar, 'The Nobill Poyet': Essays in Honour of Priscilla Bawcutt*, ed. Sally Mapstone (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001), pp. 69-84, at p. 70.
[18]Burrow, 'William Dunbar', in *A Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry*, ed. Bawcutt and Janet Hadley Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), pp. 133-48, at p. 137, quoting Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. Bawcutt, II, 414.
[19]Anthony J. Hasler understands the '"I"' of the *Targe*, like all of Dunbar's textual first persons, 'as above all a rhetorical figure, a troping pronoun mediating text to audience but retaining in the process an essential multiplicity and openness'. Hasler, 'William Dunbar: The Elusive Subject', in *Bryght Lanternis: Essays on the Language and Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, ed. J. Derrick McClure and Michael R.G. Spiller (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), pp. 194-208, at p. 195.
[20]Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 171-218.
[21]Calin, *The Lily and the Thistle: The French Tradition and the Older Literature of Scotland: Essays in Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 54.
[22]See Bawcutt's notes in Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. Bawcutt, II, 413-21.

met by Cupid and a retinue of gods, with whom they 'sang ballettis' (l. 129), play instruments, and dance. Suddenly, Venus spies the concealed poet-narrator and 'bad hir archearis kene | Go me arrest' (ll. 138-39). He is shielded from their arrows by Reson with his 'goldyn targe' (l. 157), until the lady 'Plesence kest a pulder in his [i.e. Reson's] ene, | And than as drunkyn man he all forvyit' (ll. 205-06). Unprotected, the poet-narrator is wounded by the archers' arrows 'And yoldyn as a woful prisonnere | To lady Beautee' (ll. 209-10). This imprisonment is short-lived, for, upon the delivery of the poet-narrator by the lady 'Departing' unto 'Hevyness' (ll. 226-27), the god Eolus blows his trumpet 'And sudaynly in the space of a luke | All was hyne went, thare was bot wildernes' (ll. 232-33). The gods and goddesses are returned to the ship; it fires its cannon, the earth shakes, and 'For rede it semyt that the rainbow brak' (l. 241). The poet-narrator awakes, and the poem ends with a eulogy for Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, followed by a final envoy addressed to 'Thou lytill quair' (l. 271).

The artificiality and conventionality of the *Targe* has drawn a mixed critical response—part of a larger complex of difficulties surrounding Dunbar's canon. It is no longer usual to see the *Targe* dismissed as, in the words of C. S. Lewis, 'allegorical form adapted to the purposes of pure decoration'—a virtuoso performance in the 'aureate' style, for which the limited action is imported wholesale from the *dits amoureux*.[23] Critics such as Lyall and Bawcutt argue that the defence of Reson against the archers of Venus may convey a more pointed Christian allegory than has previously been assumed.[24] Other readings, building on Denton Fox's influential assessment of the *Targe* as 'a poem about poetry', have emphasised its metapoetic aspects—most notably, the imagery of illumination and eulogy of the English

[23]Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*: *A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 252. Note, however, that Lewis is here defending the *Targe*'s 'aureate' style—'when the thing is well done, it gives a kind of pleasure that could be given in no other way'. For a forceful attack on the *Targe*'s 'idle verbiage', see John Speirs, *The Scots Literary Tradition: An Essay in Criticism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1940), pp. 37-40, p. 37 quoted.
[24]Roderick J. Lyall, 'Moral Allegory in Dunbar's *Golden Targe*', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 11:1 (1973), 47-65; Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, pp. 92-103, 310.

literary triumvirate. Rarely, however, has the *Targe* been considered as an expression of the autobiographical impulse. Its first six stanzas constitute a masterful amplification of the dream poem's astrological setting; its focus, however, is the 'stern of day' announced in the opening line (and again in lines 4 and 7), and the illumination of the scene below. A textual first person is introduced at line 3—'I raise and by a rosere did me rest'—but is quickly forgotten, lost amidst a dazzling landscape 'anamalit' (l. 13), 'ourgilt' (l. 27) and 'enlumynit' (l. 45) by solar special effects. An inexpressibility topos in lines 64-72—'Discriue I wald, bot quho coud wele endyte […]' (l. 64)—briefly returns attention to the poet-narrator as the reporter of the dream, and the mention of 'My lady Cleo, that help of makaris bene' (l. 77), specifically to his status as a *makar*. However, throughout much of the rest of the narrative, the primary function of the *Targe*'s poet-narrator is as an observer—as signalled by the repeated phrase 'Thare saw I…' (ll. 73, 82, 87, 109, 112, 114, 160 ['I saw cum'], 223 ['I saw hir nevire mare'], 224)—until his wounding, imprisonment, and awakening from the dream in lines 208-46. There is no attempt, in the final stanzas, to include some internal account for the composition of the poem; its allegory is seemingly detached from any historical individual or occasion.

This compression of the dream poem's narrative apparatus and limited visibility of the poet-narrator are recurrent features in Dunbar's canon. His later dream poem, *The Thrissil and the Rois*, written in celebration of the marriage of James IV and Margaret Tudor in 1503, begins with the sudden appearance of 'fresche May' (l. 15) to the poet-narrator in bed. After some initial resistance, he obeys May's command to 'Awalk [...] And in my honour sume thing go wryt' (ll. 22-23)—specifically, an allegorical account of the royal nuptials. The description that follows of the crowning by Dame Nature of the lion, eagle, and thistle—King James's heraldic symbols—and, finally, 'the fresche Rose of cullor reid and quhyt' (l. 142)—that is, the Tudor Rose of Queen Margaret—is ostensibly reported by the poet-narrator from

his position in the 'lusty gairding gent' (l. 44). However, having established this vantage, Dunbar devotes no further attention to his textual double; the reader is reminded of his presence only in the final stanza:

> Than all the birdis song with sic a schout
> That I annone awoilk quhair that I lay,
> And with a braid I turnyt me about
> To se this court, bot all wer went away.
> Than vp I lenyt halflingis in affray,
> And thus I wret, as ȝe haif hard toforrow,
> Off lusty May vpone the nynt morrow.
>
> (*Thrissil*, ll. 183-89)

Even this represents a greater development of the textual first person than is usual of Dunbar. The opening frames of his satirical and amatory visions, notably 'Apon the Midsummer Ewin, mirriest of nichtis' (*The Tretis of the Tua Maritt Wemen and the Wedo*),[25] and also his vision of the Passion, 'Amang the freiris within ane cloister' (*Ane Ballat of the Passioun*), do not exceed two stanzas, and can sometimes consist of as little as a first line. Perspective rather than self-representation is at issue here. In each poem, a poet-narrator is introduced as the observer of the scene, usually in a pose which is appropriate to his subject—lying 'in till a trance' ('Off Februar the fyiftene nycht', l. 3), concealed within a garden (e.g. *Tretis*, ll. 13-16), or at prayer 'Amang the freiris'. These opening frames establish a point of view, but do not develop the poet-narrator beyond his essentials as a generic type. A closing frame, if included at all, is similarly brief and non-specific. Not infrequently, a textual first

[25]Not a dream poem, but framed as a bawdy love debate overheard by a poet-narrator in a pleasant garden.

person refers to the inscription of the preceding account, as in *The Thrissil and the Rois*, quoted above, or, in *The Tretis of the Tua Maritt Wemen and the Wedo*: 'And I all prevely past to a plesand arber, | And with my pen did report ther pastance most mery' (ll. 525-26). Yet the purpose of the device is to reaffirm the internal dramatic structure of the poem, rather than to point out its human author. The same is true of Dunbar's abbot of Tongland poems. The subject of 'As ȝung Awrora with cristall haile' and 'Lucina schyning in silence of the nycht' is the ill-fated flight of one John Damian, abbot of Tongland from 1504 to 1509. From 1503 to 1509, Damian enjoyed lavish royal subsidy for his alchemical experiments,[26] the 'seir fassionis' ('As ȝung Awrora', l. 57) satirised by Dunbar. However, besides these references to Dunbar's contemporary at court, neither poem includes much biographizing detail. In structure and theme, the diabolical visions recall Dunbar's 'Off Februar', 'This nycht before the dawing cleir' (*How Dumbar wes Desyrd to be ane Freir*), and 'This nycht in my sleip I wes agast'. Conventional too is the satirical account in 'As ȝung Awrora' of doctors 'fenyt' and 'nevir [...] put to preif' ('As ȝung Awrora', ll. 17, 45),[27] the feathered abbot's mobbing by birds (ll. 69-128),[28] and, in 'Lucina schyning', the appearance of 'dame Fortoun with fremmit cheer' (l. 11), and her pronouncements on worldly mutability. The argument of the latter poem concerns Dunbar's favourite topic: his desired benefice. Fortoun predicts that, until an abbot flies 'amang the crennys' (l. 24), meets a dragon, begets the Antichrist, 'And than it salbe near the warldis end' (l. 38), the poet-narrator will never be granted promotion. The poet-narrator's delight when, upon waking from his dream, he learns that, 'Fle wald an abbot up into the sky | And all his fedrem maid wes at device' (ll. 44-45) recalls the ironic self-deprecation of Chaucer's dream poems: just as in *Fame* Geffrey's claimed reluctance to receive further instruction from Jupiter's Eagle, 'For y am now to old' (l. 995), seems

[26]John Read, 'Alchemy under James IV of Scotland', *Ambix*, 2 (1938-46), 60-67, at pp. 61-62.
[27]Cp. the dismissal of alchemical practices in the eight Prologue to Douglas's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (completed 1513, ll. 94-95).
[28]See David Parkinson, 'Mobbing Scenes in Middle Scots Verse: Holland, Douglas, Dunbar', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 85 (1986), 494-509.

designed to amuse a contemporary audience familiar with the historical Chaucer, so in 'Lucina schyning' Dunbar's textual double is presented as blithely unconcerned that his grant of a benefice will coincide with the end of the world![29] The few biographical details inserted into each poet's framed first-person allegories work to create an ironic distance, rather than a presumed equivalence, between the historical poet and his textual double: they are alike in their occupation and putative desires; but there is little danger of mistaking the poet-narrator of the dream for the historical poet at court.

It is necessary, it seems, to think in a different way about autobiography and Dunbar. His poetry betrays little interest in recounting an individual life. His subject, certainly in *The Goldyn Targe* and *The Thrissil and the Rois*, but also, though exhibiting fewer features of his high style, the satirical and petitionary pieces, is rather the courtly milieu in which he writes. It is in the representation of the court, I suggest, rather than the representation of his own character, that Dunbar's poetry intimates an autobiographical impulse. The court, no less than the self, is a fluid concept in late medieval and early modern Europe, and remains so in modern scholarship.[30] Though the royal court is seen to have developed more institutionalised forms in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England and Scotland, it remained an indefinite entity, including not only the salaried members of the *domus providencie* (overseen by the Steward, under whom were the Treasurer and Controller) and *domus regie magnificenie* (overseen by the Chamberlain), but also the ambassadors and provincial gentry, scholars, artisans, and more than one indigent poet with more temporary or tangential connections to the royal household.[31] Writing of the association between Dunbar's exact English contemporary, John Skelton, and the royal courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII,

[29]On the 'comic ironies' of 'As ȝung Awrora', see further Bryan S. Hay, 'William Dunbar's Flying Abbot: Apocalypse Made to Order', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 11:4 (1974), 217-25, p. 220 quoted.
[30]For a recent overview, see Anthony J. Hasler, *Court Poetry in Late Medieval England and Scotland: Allegories of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 2 and 175, nn. 10-12.
[31]See Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 13-70.

Elizabeth Evershed notes that '[i]n most courts of the period, the members' sense of themselves as a community may be understood as an act of self-imaging accomplished through symbols of identification such as group entertainments'.[32] Ceremony, recreation, and art helped to generate a shared range of experience at court, and to inculcate common tastes and values. Its stylised display supplied the aesthetic and ethical paradigms for synthesising the vagaries of court life—the 'symbols of identification' which were the *sine qua non* of the court as a socio-political grouping. Dunbar's poetry provides just such symbols. He embraces the heterogeneity of Scottish court life and reinscribes it as a variegated poetic corpus. He displays as great, if not a greater, modal and generic variety as any Scottish or English poet working in this period, but always with recourse to King James and his court as his ultimate point of reference. In this, Dunbar's poetry can be taken as an example of autobiography before autobiography in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Europe. He has been described, in a critical anthology of sixteenth-century Scottish verse, as 'the most useful indicator, not just of the court's tastes, but of its sense of itself as an entity'.[33] Yet one can go further, for as in any autobiographical account, the life at court evoked by Dunbar has undergone a literary rescripting in order to make sense of the community that he describes. There is a discernible effort in Dunbar's poetry to suggest felicitous or at times startling parallels between his poems—to develop networks of imagery and poetic techniques that delineate his courtly milieu. He professes to represent, while in practice he reinvents, love, praise, and ribaldry at the Scottish court.

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[32]Evershed, 'John Skelton's Courts, Real and Imagined', in *Ambition and Anxiety: Courts and Courtly, c. 700-1600,* ed. Giles E. M. Gasper and John McKinnell (Durham: Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 2014), pp. 139-63, at p. 141.

[33]*Poetry of The Stewart Court,* ed. Joan Hughes and W. S. Ramson (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1982), p. 9; cp. Joanne S. Norman's contention, in one of a series of essays dealing with the problem of recovering 'the real, the true William Dunbar' from the diverse modes and manners exhibited in his verse, that '[t]he character of Dunbar as revealed/concealed in his poems […] is not […] the extension of an individual but the representative voice of a function or culture.' Norman, 'Dunbar: Grand Rhetoriqueur', in *Bryght Lanternis,* ed. McClure and Spiller, pp. 179-93, at p. 189.

This is autobiography, I propose, not of an individual alone, but also of a time, a place, and a patron, and is as literary as it is historical. The point can be illustrated by reference to one of the most generically diverse, and least studied, of Dunbar's framed first-person allegories: 'This hinder nycht, halff sleiping as I lay'. The poem is another satirical piece on the subject of Dunbar's desired benefice; however, unusually amongst the satires and petitionary poems, 'This hinder nycht' takes the form of a framed first-person allegory. The poem's opening frame, in which the poet-narrator lies half-sleeping in his chamber—luxuriously decorated 'in ane new aray' (l. 2)—recalls the opening of the *Thrissil* (quoted above), as well as the transformed bedchamber of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* (ll. 321-36). Dunbar's meter—stanzas of five five-stress lines rhyming *aabba*—has specific associations with the love complaint,[34] as does the poet-narrator's melancholic sickness, personified in the allegorical figures Distres, Hiwines (cp. the *Targe*'s Hevynesse), and Langour. Dunbar has not forgotten the petitionary purpose of the poem. The themes of unrequited love and unrewarded service are highly compatible: Discretioun's appeal to Nobilnes (the personification of kingly virtue) that the poet-narrator 'hes lang maid seruice thair [i.e. at court] in vane' (l. 53); the melancholy that excludes him from its revels; and the issue of the unequal distribution of patronage—satirised in the figure of Schir Iohne Kirkpakar—are each familiar from Dunbar's other, non-narrative petitionary poems. This is just one example of the generic cross-reference and blurring of allegorical significations at play, and sometimes at odds, in 'This hinder nycht'. At the mid-point of the poem, the allegorical figure Ressoun appears as the 'constant wycht' (l. 60) who can apparently obtain justice for Dunbar's textual double. An audience familiar with the *Targe* might recall the

[34]Cp. *The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse* (in which the purse is addressed as 'my lady dere' [l. 2]); Sir John Clanvowe (*c.* 1341-91), *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* (*c.* 1386? x 1391), and Dunbar's own 'Sweit rois of vertew and of gentilnes'. I owe these references to Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. Bawcutt, II, 353. Note, however, Dunbar's use of the metre in the diabolical visions 'Lucina schyning' and *How Dumbar wes Desyrd*, apparently confirming the poet-narrator's suspicion in 'This hinder nycht' that his disturbed dream is a 'fary' or illusion (l. 111; cp. l. 11).

failure of another personification of reason to defend that poem's poet-narrator from the arrows of desire;[35] whilst elsewhere, in Dunbar's short devotional piece, 'Saluiour, suppois my sensualite', 'ressoun' appears as the moral faculty that 'biddis my rys' (l. 4) and renounces sensual desires. Further imaginative associations are suggested by Dunbar's reprising of another *Targe* motif, the awakening of the poet-narrator by a shot fired from a cannon:

> Than as ane fary thai to duir did frak,
> And schot ane gone that did so ruidlie rak
> Quhill all the aird did raird the ranebow vnder.
> On Leith sandis me thocht scho brak in sounder,
> And I anon did walkin with the crak.
>
> ('This hinder nycht', ll. 111-15)[36]

The apocalyptic overtones resonate with another of Dunbar's religious poems, the *Passioun*, in which, at the end of the vision,

> For grit terrour of Chrystis deid
> The erde did trymmil quhair I lay,
> Quhairthrow I waiknit in that steid,
> With spreit halflingis in effray.
>
> (*Passioun*, ll. 137-40).

[35]As with most of Dunbar's poems, the order of composition for the *Targe* and 'This hynder nicht' is uncertain, though an early 1507 date has been proposed for the latter poem on the basis of a possible reference to an event of July 1506 in lines 111-15 (see below). Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. Bawcutt, II, 467.
[36]Cp. also the ending of Lyndsay's *Dreme*.

One need not attempt to synthesise these various intertexts for 'This hinder nycht'; what is important to recognise is the potential of Dunbar's poetry to move from the secular to sacred, from eulogy to eschatology, whilst never exceeding the bounds of a putative court culture. Discretioun's mention of 'New Ȝear' (l. 55) as the occasion for royal gift giving is corroborated by the Treasurer's accounts; the 'lordis at the Cessioun [Lords of Session]' (l. 74; cp. l. 62) to which Ressoun is recommended was the distinctive judicial arm of the king's council; and the intriguing allusion at the end poem to the firing of a cannon 'On Leith sandis' may refer to a real event of July 1506.

James IV's enthusiasm for ships and guns is well attested: his great warships, *Margaret* and *Michael,* were built and armed at Leith between late 1502 and early 1512;[37] the port was also the site of the 'Kingis Werk' or arsenal where the king stored his cannon.[38] The Treasurer's accounts for 9 July 1506 record a payment of 9s. 8d. 'to the pynouris of Leith quhilk carrying the irn gun to the sandis shut hir their before the King', and of 20d. 'to tua men that helpit schut the samyn'.[39] Bawcutt suggests that lines 111-15 of 'This hinder nycht' may recall the incident, and that 'line [114] might imply that it [i.e. the cannon] exploded'.[40] Without further documentary evidence, Bawcutt's suggestion must remain conjecture; and it is equally possible that line 114 refers to the breaking of the 'ranebow' rather than the 'gone' (see below). Yet no definite connection is required between 'This hinder nycht' and a particular court occasion to note Dunbar's deliberate rescripting of Scottish court life in the poem. James's interest in artillery is also thought to have informed the explosive ending of Dunbar's *Targe,*[41] where, back on board the ship, the gods and goddesses

[37]Jane E. A., Dawson *Scotland Re-Formed, 1488-1587* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 76-77.
[38]*Compota thesaurariorum*, ed. Dickinson et al., I, ccxx.
[39]Ibid., III, 203-04.
[40]Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. Bawcutt, II, 469.
[41]Frank Shuffleton, 'An Imperial Flower: Dunbar's *The Goldyn Targe* and the Court Life of James IV of Scotland', *Studies in Philology*, 72:2 (1975), 193-207, at pp. 200-01.

> …fyrite gunnis with powder violent,
> Till that the reke raise to the firmament.
> The rochis all resownyt with the rak,
> For rede it semyt that the rainbow brak.
>
> (*Targe*, ll. 237-43)

Here, in a cataclysmic finale, Dunbar evokes and exceeds even the most ambitious spectacles prepared by the king's gunners. Pamela M. King, extending the historical cross-reference, adopts a 'metaphoric view of the poem as masque, tournament or disguising', in which the ship can be compared to the pageant cars seen at contemporary court entertainments, and Dunbar's 'emblematic arrangement' of the gods and goddesses to the quasi-dramatic tableaux devised for tournaments and royal entries.[42] Frank Shuffleton goes further still, arguing that the probable occasion for the composition of the *Targe* was the tournament of the 'Black Lady' held at Edinburgh in May 1508—in which the king himself seems to have participated—and that Dunbar's poem 'might quite likely have been one of the banquet entertainments'.[43] Shuffleton's suggestion is not generally accepted. But again, the association of the *Targe* with a particular court occasion is of less immediate importance than its reflection, and consolidation, of a multifaceted court culture. The Scottish king seems to have actively encouraged this easy assimilation of the formal, informal, and imaginary aspects of court life. Dunbar's mock-eulogy for 'My ladye with the mekle lippis' ('Lang heff I maid of ladyes quhytt') has been interpreted as a response to the king's assumption of the role of the Black Knight at the 1508 tournament.[44] 'Schir, lat it neuer in toune be tald', meanwhile—a petition for seasonal livery in which the indigent poet adopts the persona of

[42]King, 'Dunbar's *The Golden Targe*: A Chaucerian Masque, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 19:1 (1984), 115-31, at pp. 116, 118, and 122-25; cp. Jack, 'Dunbar's Dramatic Voice', pp. 82-85.
[43]Shuffleton, 'Imperial Flower', p. 203; cp. King, 'Chaucerian Masque', p. 121 (though King dates the *Targe* somewhat earlier).
[44]*Poetry of the Stewart Court*, ed. Hughes and Ramson, p. 8; Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, pp. 249-52.

'ane ȝowllis ȝald' ('an old horse at Christmas')—is followed in its unique manuscript witness by a stanza with the heading *Reponsio regis*, in which the king instructs his 'thesaurer' to 'Tak in this gray hors, auld Dumbar' (ll. 71-70).[45] The court *makar* is the poetic as well as the financial beneficiary of this playful intermingling of art and life, for just as Dunbar's *making* justifies James's pageants and patronage as the pursuit of a literary ideal, so Scottish court life—whether at its most spectacular or more mundane—animates Dunbar's poetry.

It is unusual to conceive of autobiography in terms of display rather than introspection, in relation to a community rather than an individual, but such is the direction taken by the autobiographical impulse in Dunbar. Dunbar's poetry recounts not his own life, but the life of the court. Like all autobiography, that account is subject to rescripting; and Dunbar is in part responsible for the literary court culture that he describes. His poetry celebrates and gives form to the whole gamut of Scottish court life: its spectacles and great personages, its rivalries and religion, its pastimes and professed morals—much as the classic autobiography gives shape and meaning to the vicissitudes of an individual existence. Recurrent forms and images help to root Dunbar's writings in a recognisable, historically specific, literary culture. Prominent among those forms is framed, first-person allegory, deployed by Dunbar for the representation of a particular court, rather than a quasi-autobiographical textual double. His dream poetry offers a suggestive alternative to autobiography focused on the individual, and recommends further investigation of late medieval court poetry as a powerful medium for the autobiographical impulse.

[45]Cambridge University Library, MS Ll.5.10 (Reidpeth Manuscript [compiled *c.* 1622-23]), fol. 1^{v}. Lines 1-32 are also extant in Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys Library MS 2553 (Maitland Folio), p. 18 (originally a complete copy); and Reidpeth, fol. 14^{r-v}. Possible evidence for the granting of the petition appears in the Treasurer's accounts: an entry dated 27 January 1506 records a payment of £5 made to Dunbar 'for caus he wantit his goun at ȝule'. *Compota thesaurariorum*, ed. Dickson et al., III, 187.

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