

The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy

by

William Dunbar

normalized and glossed

by

Michael Murphy

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The flyting was a verbal competition in which the participants vied in heaping abuse of all sorts on each other, some of it quite gross. It was presumably, at least in part, a literary game.

Dunbar addresses himself at first to Sir John Ross, about whom little is known. He tells Ross that his flyting is in response to something objectionable written by Kennedy and Quintin. Quintin is obscure, but Kennedy was a poet of some note, an MA graduate of Glasgow University, and was from a well-connected family, claiming, with some justification, to be of “the king’s blood” (l. 417). Dunbar’s characterization of him as poverty stricken and ill educated is “bizarre satiric fantasy.”¹ Presumably Kennedy’s characterisation of Dunbar, a cleric and court poet, is equally invalid.

Indeed Ross, Quintin and Kennedy all figure respectfully in Dunbar’s **Lament for the Makars:**

In Dumfermline he [Death] has done roun
With Maister Robert Henryson;
Sir John the Ros embraced has he:
Timor mortis conturbat me. (Fear of Death troubles me)

He has now taken, last of aw,
Good gentle Stobo and Quintin Shaw,
Of whom all wightes has pité:
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Good Master Walter Kennedy
In point of death lies verily,
Great ruth it were that so should be:
Timor mortis conturbat me

Since he has all my brethren ta’ne,
He will not let me live alane,
On force I must his next prey be:
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Priscilla Bawcutt speculates reasonably that though the **Flyting** is generally attributed to Dunbar only, the Kennedy bits may well have been written by Kennedy.²

¹ James Kinsley, **The Poems of William Dunbar** (Oxford, 1979), p. 285.

² **The Poems of William Dunbar** (Assoc. For Scottish Lit. Studies:Glasgow, 1998), vol. 2, p.428.

Linguistic notes for the modspell version:

Grammar: Present tense verbs and nouns in the plural of the original Scottish use **-is**: *fische wyvis cryis*: fish wives cry (231); *the boyis as beis owt thraws* : The boys as bees out-throw (217-218) Where possible those feature has been regularized to modern form. The **-is** of plural nouns is generally rendered **-es** or **-s**; in verbs the **-is** is dropped. The following lines illustrate the changes to both nouns and verbs:

Uther pure beggaris and thow ar at debaittis Other poor beggars and thou are at debates
Decrepit karlingis on Kennedy cryis owt Decrepit carlings on Kennedy cry out. (135-6)

Verb: 2nd singular present tense: *thou pretendis* (42), *thou callis* (97), *thow plukkis* .. And *she pullis*(157) Where possible the **-is** of the 2nd person is changed to more familiar **-est**: *thou pluckst* & *she pulls*. This is not always possible or desirable. It seems impossible and indeed unnecessary to be rigidly consistent in this matter. In the following short passage I have adopted now one way, now another to yield a comprehensible and fairly metrical line:

Sen thow on me thus, lymmer, leis and trattillis
And findis sentence foundit of envy,
Thy elderis banis ilk nycht rysis and rattilis

is rendered thus:

Since thou on me thus, lymmer, lies and rattles, (*rogue, liest & chatterest*)
And findest sentence founded on envy,
Thy elders' bonès each night rise and rattle (313-15)

The **-it** of past tense or past participle of weak verbs is rendered as **-ed**:
Discendit: descended ; *dissobeyit*: disobeyed .

The **-and** form of present participle is rendered **-ing**: *pretendand*: pretending (l. 26)

Each contestant consistently refers to the other as **thou** and **thee** rather than **you**. That feature is kept, in part because it is quite familiar, and in part because the use of **thou** is possibly (and appropriately for this poem) disrespectful.

The precise meaning of many of the insulting words is often in doubt even among expert scholars; hence the frequency of the question mark in the glosses. While the general intent of many such words is reasonably clear, the text invites the ingenuity and creativity of the reader.

Readers who would like to know what they are missing in the original spelling, should compare the modspell rendering of lines 25-48 with the original spelling version below on pages 2 & 3.

The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy

Dunbar speaks first

"Sir John the Ros, a thing there is compiled
 In general by Kennedy and Quinting,
 Which have themselves above the starrès styled.
 But had they made of menace any mynting
 In special, such strife should rise but stinting;
 Howbeit with boast their breasts were as bended
 As Lucifer that from the heaven descended,
 Hell should not hide their harns from harmès hinting.

*any threat
 without ceasing
 Although ...puffed up
 their brains from harm's blows*

The earth should tremble, the firmament should shake,
 10 And all the air in venom sudden stink,
 And all the devils of Hell for redour quake,
 To hear what I should write with pen and ink;
 For an' I flyte, some sege for shame should sink,
 The sea should burn, the moon should thole eclipse,
 Rocks should rive, the world should hold no grips,
 So loud of cair the common bell should clink.

*for terror
 if I flyte some man ... will
 moon will endure e.
 about danger the town bell*

But wonder loth were I to be a bard.³
 Flyting to use right greatly I eschame,
 For it is neither winning nor reward,
 20 But tinsel both of honour and of fame,
 Increase of sorrow, slander, and evil name.
 Yet might they be so bold in their backbiting
 To gar me rhyme and raise the fiend with flyting
 And through all countries and kingrics them proclaim."

*I am ashamed
 empty of
 make me ...the devil
 kingdoms*

Quod Dunbar to Kennedy (via Ross)

Kennedy's response

³ Clearly "bard" is not a positive word for Dunbar. He associates it, as he associates "flyting," with Gaelic or Ersh poets from the Scottish Highlands, clearly inferior to "makars" like himself from the Lowlands.

Original spelling (Modspell on following page)

"Dirtin Dumbar, quhome on blawis thow thy boist,
 Pretendand thee to wryte sic skaldit skrowis,
 Ramowd rebald, thow fall doun att the roist
 My laureat lettres at the and I lowis.
 Mandrag mymmerkin, maid maister bot in mows,
 30. Thrys scheild trumpir with ane threidbair gown,
 Say '*Deo mercy*' or I cry thee doun,
 And leif thy ryming, rebald, and thy rowis.

"Dreid, dirtfast dearch, that thow hes dissobeyit
 My cousing Quintene and my commissar.
 Fantastik fule, trest weill thow salbe fleyit.
 Ignorant elf, aip, owll irregular,
 Skaldit skaitbird and commoun skamelar,
 Wanfukkit funling that Natour maid ane yrle,
 Baith Johine the Ros and thow sall squeill and skirle
 40. And evir I heir ocht of your making mair.

"Heir I put sylence to thee in all pairtis.
 Obey and ceis the play that thow pretendis,
 Waik walidrag and werlot of the cairtis;
 Se sone thow mak my commissar amendis,
 And lat him lay sax leichis on thy lendis
 Meikly in recompansing of thi scorne,
 Or thow sall ban the tyme that thow wes borne:
 For Kennedy to thee this cedull sendis."

Quod Kennedy to Dumbar

Juge in the nixt quha gat the war

Kennedy's Response

Modern Spelling

"_Dirtin Dumbar, on whom blows thou thy boast,
 Pretending thee to write such skalded scrolls?
 Raw-mouthed ribald, thou fall down at the roast
 My laureate letters at thee an' I loose.
 Mandrake mymmerkin, made master but in mows,⁴
 30 Thrice shilled trumper with a threadbare gown,
 Say 'Deo mercy' or I cry thee down,
 And leave thy rhyming, ribald, and thy rolls.

*Dirtbag
 scabrous verses
 you'll fall @ contest? feast?
 If I let loose
 mannikin ...in jest
 Triple trickster
 mercy from God ?
 Rolls of parchment*

"Dread, dirtfast durch, that thou hast disobeyed
 My cousin Quintin and my commissar.
 Fantastic fool, trust well thou shalt be flayed.
 Ignorant elf, ape, owl irregular,
 Skalded skaitbird and common skamelar,
 Wanfucked foundling that Nature made an yrle,
 Both John the Ross and thou shall squeal and skirle
 40 An' ever I hear aught of your making more.

*dwarf
 my deputy
 Flayed ? or put to flight?
 mangey rascal & c. scrounger
 misbegotten f. ...a midget
 scream
 If ever ...versifying*

"Here I put silence to thee in all parts.
 Obey and cease the play that thou pretends,
 Weak walidrag and varlet of the cards;⁵
 See soon thou make my commissar amends,
 And let him lay six lashes on thy lends
 Meekly in recompensing of thy scorn,
 Or thou shall ban the time that thou wast born:
 For Kennedy to thee this schedule sends."

*the charge you allege
 W. midget & low servant*

loins, backside

will rue

Quod Kennedy to Dumbar

Judge in the next who got the worse

⁴ A mandrake was a forked, vaguely manlike root to which various properties were fancifully assigned, some them malignant. *Mymmerkin* ...The first of a number of references to Dunbar's small stature. *Made master* ...Given a Master's degree in jest.

⁵ Kinsley's edition has "cards", hence knave at cards; others have "carts." In either case the reference is derogatory in some way.

Dunbar again, directly to Kennedy this time:

"Erse bryber bard, vile beggar with thy brats,
 50 Cuntbitten crawdon Kennedy, coward of kind,
 Ill-fared and dried as Danesman on the ratts,
 Like as the gledds had on thy gules snout dined,
 Mismade monster, each moon out of thy mind,
 Renounce, ribald, thy rhyming, thou but roys.
 Thy treacher tongue has ta'en a Highland strynd,
 A Lowland arse would make a better noise.

Vagabond Irish (Gaelic) poet...rags

C. craven K.

*shriveled ...on the execution wheel
 the birds... red nose*

*You only rave
 tone*

L'land arse beats H'land Erse

"Revin ragged rook, and full of ribaldry,
 Scuttering scorpion, scauld in scurrility,
 I see the haughtein in thy harlotry

Beat-up

scold? scalded? skald? Or all 3

haughtiness

60 And into other science nothing slie,
 Of every virtue void, as men may see.
 Quitclaim clergy and cleik to thee a club,
 A bard blasphemer in brybery ay to be,
 For wit and wisdom a wisp from thee may rub.

in o. learning not sly = n. skillful

*Quit c. & take up
 poverty*

Wisp of straw

"Thou sperest, dastard, if I dare with thee fight.
 Yea, Dagonè dowbart, thereof have thou no doubt.
 Wherever we meet, there to my hand I hight
 To rid thy ribald rhyming with a rout.
 Through all Britain it shall be blowen out,
 70 How that thou, poisoned piller, got thy paks;
 With a dog leash I shape to gar thee shout
 And neither to thee take knife, sword, nor axe.

You ask

D = false god dope

I promise

a blow

p. robber got whipped?

intend to make you

"Thou crop and root of traitors treasonable,
 The father and mother of murder and mischief,
 Deceitful tyrant with serpent's tongue unstable,
 Cuckold, crawdon coward, and common thief,
 Thou purposed for to undo our lordès chief
 In Paisley with a poison that was fell,
 For which, bryber, yet shall thou thole a brief.
 80 Piller, on thee I shall it prove myself.

craven c.

chief lords OR our chief lord

deadly

beggar ...suffer an indictment

Thief

"Though I would lie, thy froward physnomy

Even if I lied (in court), your ugly mug

Does manifest thy malice to all men.
Fie, traitor thief, fie, Ganelon fie, fie! ⁶

Fie, fiendly front far fouler than a fen,
My friends thou reprovéd with thy pen.
Thou liest, traitor, which I shall on thee prove,

devil's face ... a midden

Suppose thy head were armed times ten,
Thou shalt recry it, or thy crown shall cleave.

*Even if
withdraw it*

"Ere thou durst move thy mind malicious,
90 Thou sawst the sail above my head up draw.⁷
But Aeolus, full wod, and Neptunus,
Mirk and moonless met us with wind and waw,
And many hundred miles hence could us blow,
By Holland, Zealand, Jutland, and Norway coast,
In sea desert where we were famished aw.
Yet came I home, false bard, to lay thy boast.

*v. angry
Dark ... w. and wave
did blow us
Jutland poss. Shetland
In open sea ...all*

"Thou callst thee rhetor with thy golden lips.
Nay, glowering gaping fool, thou art beguiled.
Thou art but gluntoch, with thy giltin hips, ⁸

rhetorician

100 That for thy lounry many a leisch has fyld.
Wan-visaged widdefow, out of thy wit gone wild,

*Knavery m. a. leash has defiled (?)
pale faced gallows bird*

Loathly and lousy, as lathand as a leek,
Since thou with worship would so fain be styled:

loathsome ? Livid?

Hail, sovereign senyeour, thy balls hang through thy breek.

Sovereign lord ...breeches

"Forworthen fool, of all the world refuse,
What ferly is't though thou rejoice to flyte?
Such eloquence as they in Ershry use,
In such is set thy thraward appetite.

*Ill shaped
What marvel
Irishry = Gaelic Scotland
perverse delight*

⁶ *Ganelon* is Bawcutt's reading, an attractive one in the context of accusations of treason, since Ganelon who had betrayed Roland was nearly as noted a traitor as Judas who had betrayed Jesus. Kinsley's reading is "glengor loon." (venereal fool)

⁷ Dunbar here refers to some storm at sea that he experienced, a fact apparently well known at the time. Its relevance is not clear.

⁸ *Gluntach* may mean "with dirty or knobbly knees." *hips* seems to be a kind of euphemism for *arse* (see lines 110, 200, 491), though euphemisms might seem out of place in a poem like this. So *giltin hips* possibly means "covered with yellow shit," hence "shitty arse." It rhymes with *golden lips* in more than phonetics.

Thou hast full little feill of fair indite.

110 I take on me: a pair of Lothian hips

Shall fairer English make, and more perfite
Than thou canst blabber with thy Carrick lips.⁹

*feeling for good writing
I declare, my Lowland backside(?)*

"Better thou ganis to lead a dog to skomer,
Pined pickpurse piller, than with thy master pingill.

Thou lay full prideless in the peas this summer

And fain at even for to bring home a single,

Syne rub it at another old wifes' ingle.

But now in winter for purteth thou'rt traiked,

Thou hast no breeks to let thy bollocks jingle,

120 Beg thee a bratt for, bard, thou shalt go naked.¹⁰

*you're suitedto be dogwalker
starving p. pillagerfight*

fireplace

*W. poverty worn out
breeches to prevent your balls banging
a rag*

"Lean, larber lounge, lousy in lisk and loin,
Fie, skoldered skin, thou art but skyre and skrumple:
For he that roasted Lawrence had thy grun3e,¹¹

And he that hid Saint John's eyes with a wimple,

And he that dang Saint Austin with a rumple

Thy foul front had, and he that Bartholomew flayed.

The gallows gapes after thy graceless gruntill,

As thou wouldst for a haggis, hungry gled.

*Skinny, impotent l. / in groin
scorched s. ... creased and crinkled
thy snout*

w. cloth

hit St Augustine w. fishtail

Thy ugly face

craves your evil mug

h. kite

"Cumberworld crawdon, no man counts thee a kers.

130 Sweir swappit swanky, swinekeeper ay for swats,¹²

Thy commissar, Quintin, bids thee come kiss his arse.

He loves not such a forlane loon of lats,

He says thou skafs and begs more beer and oats

Nor any cripple in Carrick land about.

Other poor beggars and thou for wage debates,

C. craven ... a piece of cress

worthless lout in behavior

you scrounge

Than any

compete

⁹ Carrick was a Gaelic speaking area. As with line 56 above, the assertion may be that Dunbar can make better English poetry farting with his Lowland arse than Kennedy's lips speaking in the accents of his Highland Erse.

¹⁰ (Unless) you beg for a cloth as cover ...

¹¹ Kennedy has the face of executioners of three saints mentioned: St Lawrence who was roasted on a gridiron; St J. Baptist who is sometimes depicted with a blindfold; St. Bartholomew who was skinned alive (flayed). St. Augustine of Canterbury had fish tails thrown at him by some English who did not wish to be converted which is why their descendants all have tails.

¹² "Lazy large layabout who keeps swine in return for small beer."

Decrepit carlings on Kennedy cry out.

old women

"Matter enough I have, I bid not feign,
 Though thou, foul trumper, thus upon me lied.
 Corrupt carrion, high shall I cry my segne.
 140 Thinkst thou not how thou cam'st in great need,
 Greeting in Galloway like to a gallows breed,
 Raming and rolping, begging cow and ox.
 I saw thee there in(to) thy watheman's weed,
 Which was not worth a pair of old gary socks.

I don't have to invent

Cheater

war cry

*Whining and yawping
 woodsman's (outlaw's) clothes*

"Erse katherene, with thy poke breik and rilling,
 Thou and thy quene as greedy gledds ye gang
 With pokes to mill and beg both meal and shelling.
 There is but lice and long nails you among,
 Foul heggirbalds, for hens thus will you hang.
 150 Thou has a perilous face to play with lambs.
 A thousand kids, were they in folds full strong,
 Thy lymmer look would fley them and their dams.

Gaelic rustler w. tartan bag & bad shoes

your wench like g. kites you go

W. bags husks, shells

Chicken thieves?

Deadly gaze w. put to flight

"Into a glen thou hast, out of repair,
 A loathly lodge that was the leper men's.
 With thee a soutar's wife of bliss as bare,
 And like two stalkers steal in cocks and hens.
 Thou pluckst the poultry and she pulls off the pens.
 All Carrick cries: 'God give this doxy be drowned!'
 And when thou hearst a goose cry in the glens,
 160 Thou thinkst it sweeter than sacring bell of sound.

in remote place

shoemaker's w.

quills, feathers

God grant this whore

church bell

"Thou Lazarus, thou loathly lean tramort,¹³
 To all the world thou mayst example be,
 To look upon thy grisly, piteous port;
 For hideous, haw, and holkit is thine eye,
 Thy cheekbone bare, and blaikened is thy ble.
 Thy chops, thy jowl gars men for to live chaste;
 Thy gane, it gars us think that we must die.
 I conjure thee, thou hungered Highland ghost.

corpse

appear.ance

h., dark and ho:Lllow

Blanched is thy face

cause men

Your look makes us

"The larbar looks of thy long, lean craig,
 170 Thy poor pined throat, peiled and out of ply,

tired l. ...neck

scrawny t., thin & slack

¹³ The Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead.

Thy skoldered skin, hued like a saffron bag,
 Gars men despise their flesh, thou spirit of Gy.¹⁴
 Fie, fiendly front, fie, tike's face, fie, fie!
 Ay lounging like a loikman on a ladder
 With hangèd look, ay wallowing awry,
 Like to a stark thief glowing in a tedder.

weathered
Makes menghost
Devish look...dogface
hangman (or man to be hanged)
always twisting sideways
in a noose

"Nice nagus nipcaik with thy shoulders narrow,
 Thou lookest lousy, loon of loonès aw,
 Hard hurcheoun hirpling, hippèd as a harrow,
 180 Thy rigbone rattles and thy ribs on row,
 Thy haunches hirkliis with hukbones hard and haw,
 Thy loathly limbs are lean as any tree's.
 Obey, thief bard, or I shall break thy gaw.
 Foul carrybald, cry mercy on thy knees.

cheapskate miser
all
hedgehog limping; h. as harrow = ?
backbone
hunker w. hip bones h. & dark
Gall = spirit
Carrybald ?

"Thou pure, pinhippèd, ugly averill
 With hurkling bones holking through thy hide,
 Reisted and cryned as hanged man on a hill,
 And oft beswakkèd with an o'erhigh tide
 Which brewès mickle barret to thy bride.
 190 Her care is all to cleanse thy cabroch hows,
 Where thou lies sawsy in saffron, back and side,
 Powdered with primrose, savoring all with cloves.¹⁵

carthorse
withered & shriveled
often hit
much trouble
thy scrawny hocks
sauced

"Forworthin wirling, I warn thee, it is witen
 How, skytting skarth, thou has the hurle behind.
 Wan wriggling wasp, more wormes hast thou beshitten
 Nor there is grass on ground or leaf on lind.
 Though thou did first such foly to me find,
 Thou shall again with more witness than I.
 Thy gulsoch gane does on thy back it bind,¹⁶

Misbegotten wretch ... it is known
Shitty monster, you have a runny behind
Than there istree
filth
yellow face

¹⁴ Ghost of Guido, hard to exorcise. From a popular ghost story.

¹⁵ The implication seems to be that Kennedy cannot control his bowels, and so his back and sides are basted with saffron-colored excrement that his wife has to clean up; it gives off a stench that is compared sarcastically to the aroma of primroses and cloves. Saffron was also a food spice. The food-excrement image is clearly deliberately gorge-raising..

¹⁶ Bawcutt admits the lines 198-9 are difficult and probably corrupt. She speculates they may mean: "You will [fall sick] again with more witnesses than myself. You cannot rid yourself of it because of your past jaundice."

200 Thy hosting hips lets never thy hose go dry.

Your leaky behind

Your academic gown is "borrowed", the schoolboys throw stones at you, you're poverty-stricken, without even a horse; the washerwomen take in their laundry at your approach, fishwives throw things at you.

"Thou held the borough long with a borrowed gown ¹⁷

And one caprowsy barkèd all with sweat,

garment stained

And when the lads saw thee so like a loon,

They bickered thee with many bah and bleat.

They hooted

Now up-a-land thou liv'st on rubbèd wheat,

in Highlands ... on hand-rubbed w.

Oft for a cause thy boardcloth needs no spreading

tablecloth

For thou has neither for to drink nor eat,

But like a beardless bard that had no bedding.

"Strait Gibbon's heir, that ne'er o'ersted a horse,

heir to nothing ?/ never rode

210 Bla, barefoot bairn, in bare time wast thou born.

Thou bringst the Carrick clay to Edinburgh Cross,

E. town center

Upon thy bootings hobbling, hard as horn.

boots

Straw wisps hangs out where that the wats are worn.

leather w. worn

Come thou again to scare us with thy straws,

If you come

We shall gar scale our schools all thee to scorn

get our scholars to scorn thee

And stone thee up the causeway where thou goes.

"Of Edinburgh the boys as bees out throw

And cry out, 'Hey, here comes our own queer clerk!'

scholar

Then fleest thou like an owlet chased with crows

220 While all the bitches at thy bootings bark.

Thy boots (heels)

Then carlings cry: 'Keep kerchiefs in the mirk.

Old women ... hide your kerchiefs

Our gallows gapes. Lo, where *he* graceless goes!'

Another says: 'I see him want a sark.

needs a shirt

I rede you, cummer, take in your linen clothes.'

I advise you, neighbor

"Then runs thou down the gait with gild of boys

And all the town tikes hanging in thy heels.

Dogs

Of lads and loons there rises such a noise

While rouncies run away with cart and wheels

horses

¹⁷ The implication is that he deceived the town (borough) and kept a school in a borrowed (academic) gown, implying also that he was not a graduate. (In fact he was an M.A.). Note the play on *borough / borrow*.

And cager avirs cast both coals and creels
 230 For rerd of thee and rattling of thy boots.
 Fishwives cry 'Fie!' and cast down skills and skeils,
 Some clashes thee, some clods thee on the cutis.

cart horses .. & baskets
Noise
baskets and tubs
Some strike, some pelt ... ankles

"Loon like Mahoun, be boun me to obey,¹⁸
 Thief, or in grief mischief shall thee betide.
 Cry grace, tike-face, or I thee chase and fley,
 Owl, roar and yowl, I shall defoul thy pride,
 Peeled gled, both fed and bred of bitches side
 And like a tike, pick- purse, what man sets by thee?
 Forflitten, cuntbitten, beshitten, barked hide,
 240 Climb ladder, file tedder, foul adder, I defy thee!¹⁹

make you flee

scrawny bird

values you

Outflyted,

"Mauch mutton, bit button, peeled glutton, heir to Hillhouse,²⁰
 Rank beggar, oyster dredger, flay fleggar in the flet.
 Chitterling, rough rilling, lick shelling in the millhouse,
 Bard rehator, thief of nature, false traitor, fiend's get,
 Filling of tauch, rak sauch, cry crauch, thou art o'erset!
 Mutton driver, girnall ryver, yad swiver, foul fall thee!
 Heretic, lunatic, purspick, carling's pett,
 Rottin crok, dirtin dok, cry cok, or I shall quell thee!"

maggoty m.
flea catcher ? in hall
rough hide, husk-licker
worthless poet
of tallow , stretched rope, surrender
granary robber, mare mounter
old hag's fart ?
rotten sheep, dirty arse, say 'surrender'

Quod Dumbar to Kennedy

Kennedy's turn again

¹⁸ "Lunatic like Mahoun, prepare to obey." Mahoun, regarded in MA as some kind of false god or devil. The heavy internal rhyming seems to signal that this section is coming to an end. Kennedy does the same at the end of his next section.

¹⁹ *Climb ladder* seems to refer to climbing a gallows ladder, and *tedder* to the noose up on the gallows. There is a lot of gallows "humor" in the poem.

²⁰ One assumption is that Hillhouse means much the same as Strait Gibbon in 209: heir to nothing. But see below a reference to the Lord of Hillhouse (520), also in the context of eating. So possibly it is another version of "Peeled glutton."

"Dathan, devil's son, and dragon despitous,
 250 Abiron's birth and bred with Belial,
 Wod werewolf, worm, and scorpion venomous,
 Lucifer's lad, foul fiend's face infernal,
 Sodomite separate from saints celestial,
 Put I not silence to thee, shepherd knave?
 An' thou anew begins to rhyme and rave.
 Thou shalt be made bleat, blear-eyed bestial.

*Rebel (to Moses). OT: Numbers 16.
 child of Abiron, ally of Dathan...devil.*

*Mad w. / worm = snake
 lad = servant*

If you

"How thy forbear is come I have a feill:²¹
 At Cockburnspath, the writ makes me ware,
 Generate betwixt a she-bear and a de'il,
 260 So was he called De'il-bear and not Dumbar.
 This De'il-bear, generate on a mare of Mar,
 Was Corspatrik, earl of March, and by illusioun
 The first that ever put Scotland to confusion
 Was that false traitor, hardly say I dare.

*information
 writings say
 devil*

begotten on

"When Bruce and Balliol differed for the crown,
 Scots lords could not obey English laws.
 This Corspatrik betrayèd Berwick town
 And slew seven thousand Scots within the walls.
 The battle syne of Spottismuir he gart cause,
 270 And came with Edward Longshanks to the field
 Where twelve thousand true Scots men were killed
 And Wallace chased, as the chronicle shows.

*competed
 would not*

*battle then ... he caused
 Edward I*

W. was routed

"Scottish lords chieftains he gart hold and chessone
 In firmance fast while all the field was done,
 Within Dumbar, that old spelunk of treason.
 So English tikes in Scotland was abone.
 Then 'spoiled they the holy stone of Scone,²²
 The cross of Holyroodhouse, and other jewels.
 He burns in Hell, body, bones, and bowels,

*he = Edward did hold.& accuse
 in prison
 D. Castle, old cave
 E. dogs conquered S.*

²¹ Kennedy makes some hard accusations about Dunbar's unpatriotic forebears. Gospatrick, earl of Dunbar & March, had sided with the English king, Edward I Longshanks, and opened the gates of the town of Berwick to him. Accusations include monstrous couplings and bestiality in Dunbar's treacherous family.

²² Edward seized revered Scottish treasures: the stone of Scone that rested under the throne of Scottish Kings; the crown jewels; and the cross of Holyroodhouse which supposedly contained fragments of the "holy Rood," the true cross of Christ.

280 This Corspatrik that Scotland has undone.

"Wallace gart cry a council into Perth
 And called Corspatrik traitor by his style.
 That damnèd dragon drew him in desert ²³
 And said he kend but Wallace king in Kyle.²⁴
 Out of Dumbar that thief he made exile
 Unto Edward and English ground again.
 Tigers, serpents, and toads will remain
 In Dumbar walls, todes, wolves, and beastis wild.

W. did call

??????

foxes, wolves

"No fowls of effect amongst those binks
 290 Build nor abide, for nothing that may be.
 Those stones of treason as the brimstone stinks.
 Deil-bear's mother, cassin in by the sea ²⁵
 The warit apple of the forbidden tree
 That Adam ate when he tint Paradise,
 She ate, envenomed like a cockatrice,
 Syne married with the devil for dignité.

No birds of worthmounds

cast up by the sea
 cursed
 lost

Then m.

"Yet of new treason I can tell thee tales
 That come on night in vision in my sleep:
 Archibald Dumbar betrayed the house of Hailes
 300 Because the young lord had Dumbar to keep;
 Pretending through that to their room to creep,²⁶
 Right cruelly his castle he pursued,
 Brought him forth bounden and the place rescued,
 Set him in fetters in a dungeon deep.

*Dunbar castle
 Intending or hoping
 attacked
 recovered*

"It was against both nature and good reason

²³ Drew him in desert. The meaning is unclear, but Bawcutt points out that the desert is the natural home of dragons.

²⁴ William Wallace, leader of the Scottish resistance to England, was eventually betrayed by a Scot, sent to England where he was hanged, drawn and quartered as a traitor. He owned land in Kyle, and Corspatrik's taunt says he knows him as king of Kyle only.

²⁵ It is probably the apple not the mother which is thrown up by the sea.

²⁶ Apparently Archibald captured a castle of Hailes and handed it over to the English hoping it seems, to have Dunbar castle returned to his family in exchange. The younger Hailes (the young lord) had been put in charge at Dunbar castle.

That Deil-bear's bairns were true to God or man, *children*
 Which were both gotten, born, and bred with treason,
 Beelzebub's ovis and curst Corspatrick's clan. *B's grandchildren*
 Thou wast priested and ordained by Satan
 310 For to be born to do thy kin defame
 And gar me show thy ancestors' shame. *& cause me to show*
 Thy kin that lives may wary thee and ban. *Curse*

"Since thou on me thus, lymmer, lies and trattles, *rogue, liest & chatterest*
 And findest sentence founded on envy, *findest*
 Thy elders' bones each night rise and rattle:
 Upon thy cors vengeance, vengeance they cry. *thy body*
 Thou art the cause they may not rest nor lie.
 Thou sayst for them few psalters, psalms or creeds
 But gars me tell their trentals of misdeeds ²⁷ *but cause me to relate*
 320 And their old sin with new shame certify.

"Insensate sow, cease, false Eustase heir,²⁸
 And know, keen skald, I hold of Alathya,²⁹
 And cause me not the cause long to declare
 Of thy curst kin, De'il-bear and his ally-a.
 Come to the Cross on knees and make a cry-a,
 Confess thy crime, hold Kennedy the king,
 And with a hawthorn scourge thyself and dyng.
 Thus dree thy penance with *deliquisti quia*. *Scourge & strike yourself*
endure ... "Because you have sinned"

"Pass to my commissar and be confessed,
 330 Cower before him on knees and come in will, *& submit*
 And syne gar Stobo for thy life protest. *And then get S. to intercede*³⁰
 Renounce thy rhymes, both ban and burn thy bill, *thy indictment of me?*

²⁷ Trentals were 30 daily masses said for the souls of the dead. Here used sarcastically to indicate how long it takes to trot out the sins of the Dunbars.

²⁸ This seems to refer to unorthodoxy. Pseustis is a character in a medieval schoolbook, a shepherd who represents paganism in poetic debate with a shepherdess, Alatheia, who cites scripture. So Dunbar is heir to a pagan.

²⁹ A "skald" is a Norse name for a poet, one that Dunbar seems to hold in about as little esteem he holds a "bard."

³⁰ Stobo, a royal functionary and apparently a poet, because he is among those Dunbar laments in the *Lament for the Makars*.

Heave to the heaven thy hands and hold thee still.
 Do thou not thus, bogane, thou shall be brint
 With pitch, fire, tar, gunpowder, and lint
 On Arthur's Seat or on a higher hill.

If you do not, churl, ... burnt

high hill in Edingurgh

"I perambulate of Parnaso the mountain,
 Inspired with Mercury from his golden sphere,
 And dulcely drank of eloquence the fountain
 340 When it was purified with frost and flowèd clear.
 And thou come, fool, in March or Februare
 There to a pool and drank the paddock rod
 That gars thee rhyme into thy termès glod
 And blabbers that annoys men's ears to hear.

frogspawn

That makesin wretched terms

"Thou lov'st no Ersh, elf, I understand,
 But it should be all true Scotmen's lede.
 It was the good language of this land
 And Scotia it caused to multiply and spread ³¹
 While Corspatrik, that we of treason read,
 350 Thy forefather, made Irish and Irish men thin,
 Through his treason brought English rumples in. ³²
 So would thyself, mightst thou to him succeed.

Gaelic (Irish)

Language

scarce (by killing) ?

E. fishtails

"Ignorant fool, into thy mows and mocks
 It may be verified that thy wit is thin;
 Where thou writes 'Danesmen dryit upon the rattis,'
 Danesmen of Denmark are of the king's kin. ³³
 The wit thou should have had was castin in
 Even at thine arse backward with a staff sling.
 Therefore, false harlot whoreson, hold thy tongue,
 360 De'il-bear, thou deafs the devil thine eme with din.

suffered (see l. 51)

thy uncle

"Whereas thou said that I stole hens and lambs,
 I let thee wit I have land, store, and stacks.
 Thou would be fain to gnaw, lad, with thy gams

I'll have you know

gums ?, jaws

³¹ Bawcutt says that Scotia was the mythical daughter of Pharaoh and wife of the Greek prince Gadelus from whom the Gaelic people are descended.

³² The English have fishtails as punishment for pelting St Augustine with fish. See l. 125 above.

³³ King James IV's mother was a Danish princess.

Under my board smoch bones behind dogs' backs.
 Thou hast a tome purse, I have steads and tacks;
 Thou tint coulter, I have coulter and plow.
 For substance and gear thou hast a withy tough
 On Mount Falcoun about thy crag to rax.

my table soup bones(?)
empty p. ...homesteads & farms
You lack a plowshare
w. tough = hanging rope
On French gallows around your neck to stretch

"And yet Mount Falcoun gallows is o'er fair
 370 To be defiled with such a fruitless face.

too good

Come home and hang on our gallows of Aire.
 To earth thee under it I'll purchase grace;
 To eat thy flesh the dogs shall have no space,
 The ravens shall rive nothing but thy tongue roots.
 For thou such malice of thy master moots,
 It is well set that thou such barat brace.

in Scotland
to bury ... I'll buy the right
rip out
speakest
fitting ... such fate endure

"Small finance among thy friends thou begged
 To staunch the storm with holy mulds thou lost.³⁴
 Thou sailed to get a dowcare for to dredge it,
 380 It lies closed in a cloth on Zealand coast.
 Such reule gars thee be servèd with cold roast
 And sit unsuppered oft beyond the sea
 Crying "*caritas*," at doors, "*amore Dei*,"
 Barefoot, breechless, and all in duds updoast.

you tried ... diver
Shetland?
such behavior makes you
Charity ...for the love of God
Dressed in rags

"De'il-bear has not ado with a Dunbar.
 The earls of Moray bore that surname right,
 That ever true to the king, and constant were,
 And of that kin came Dunbar of Westfield knight.
 That succession is hardy, wise, and wight
 390 And has nothing ado now with the De'il.
 But De'il-bear is thy kin and kens thee well
 And has in Hell for thee a chamber dight.

strong
knows thee
Prepared

"Cursed croaping crow, I shall gar crop thy tongue
 And thou shall cry *cor mundum* on thy knees.
 Durch, I shall ding thee till thou dryte and dung,
 And thou shall lick thy lips and swear thou liest.
 I shall degrade thee, graceless, of thy greis,

croaking
"Create a clean heart in me, O lord."
Dwarf ...shit & dung
take back your academic degrees

³⁴ A rather obscure reference to "holy ashes" that Dunbar had bought with borrowed money (?) and could not recover after he had supposedly lost them in the sea-storm that he mentions so proudly above. Why this mishap should leave him supperless abroad is not clear.

Scaile thee for scorn and shere thee of thy scule,
 Gar round thy head, transform thee to a fool,
 400 And syne for treason trone thee to the treis.

*dismiss & cut you off from school (university?)
 shave
 And then ... lock thee in the pillory(?)*

"Raw-mouthed ribald, renegade rehatour,
 My lineage and forebears were ay loyal.
 It comes of kind to thee to be a traitor,
 To ride a-nights, to rug, to reive and steal.
 Where thou puts poison to me, I appeal
 Thee in that part — prove it, piller, with thy person!
 Claim not to clergy, I defy thee, garcon.
 Thou shall buy it dear with me, durch, an' thou deal.

*rascal ?
 by nature
 to plunder, rob
 See l. 77-78 above: I challenge
 On that score ... thief
 Don't claim benefit of clergy, boy
 dwarf, if you dare*

"In England, owl, should be thine habitation.
 410 Homage to Edward Longshanks made thy kin,
 In Dunbar they received him, the false nation:
 They should be exiled Scotland, more and myn.
 A stark gallows, a withy, and a pin
 The head point of thine elders' armes are,
 Written above in poesy: "Hang Dunbar,
 Quarter and draw, and make that surname thin!"

*town of Dunbar
 one and all
 a noose
 coat of arms
 rare, extinct(?)*

"I am the king's blood, his true special clerk
 That never yet imagined him offence
 Constant in my allegiance, word, and work,
 420 Only depending on his excellence,
 Trusting to have of his magnificence
 Guerdon, reward, and benefice bedene
 When that the ravens shall rive out both thine ene
 And on the ratts shall be thy residence.

*sufficient
 eyes
 Execution wheel*

"From Etrike Forest forthward to Dumfries
 Thou beggèd with a pardon in all kirks
 Collops, curds, meal, groats, grisis, and geese,
 And under night while stole thou staggs and stirks.
 Because that Scotland of thy begging irks,
 430 Thou scapes to France to be a knight of the field;
 Thou hast thy clamshells and thy burdon kelde.
 Unhonest ways all, wolroun, that thou works.

*as a pardoner ? In churches
 pigs
 Sometimes stole horses & bullocks
 vagabond pilgrim?
 pilgrim badges & staff
 Scoundrel*

"Thou may not pass Mount Barnard for wilde beasts,³⁵
 Nor win through Mount Scarpre for the snow;
 Mount Nicholas, Mount Godard — there arrests
 Brigands such boys and blinds them with a blow.
 In Paris with the master buriawe
 Abide, and be his prentice near the bank,
 And help to hang a-piece for half a frank,
 440 And at the last thyself shall thole the law.

*Such fellows
 chief executioner*

*i.e. half a frank apiece
 shall suffer*

"Hautein harlot, the devil have goods thou hast!
 For fault of puissance, piller, thou mon pack thee.³⁶
 Thou drank thy thrift, sold and wedsett thy clothes.
 There is no lord that will in service take thee.
 A pack of fleaskins finance for to make thee
 Thou shall receive in Danskin, of my tally;
 With *De profundis* 'fend thee; an' that faily,³⁷
 I shall send the black de'il for to back thee.

Haughty h., the devil take

& pawned

Danzig from my account ?

"Into the *Katherine* thou made a foul cahute,
 450 For thou bedrate her down from stern to steer.
 Upon her sides was seen [that] thou could shite.
 Thy dirt cleaves to her tows this twenty year.
 The firmament nor firth was never clear
 While thou, De'il-bear, de'il's birth, wast on the sea.
 The souls had sunken through the sin of thee
 Were't not the people made so great a prayer.

*K. was a shipcabin
 defiled*

*Ropes
 neither sky nor sea*

*would have sunk
 If it weren't that*

"When that the ship was signed and under sail,
 Foul brow, in hold thou proposed for to pass.
 Thou shot and was not siker of thy tail,
 460 Beshat the steer, the compass, and the glas.
 The skipper bade gar land thee at the Bas.
 Thou spewed and cast out many a loathly lump
 Faster than all the mariners could pump,
 And now thy womb is worse than e'er it was.

*was blessed
 Ugly face
 vomited(?) & weren't sure of
 the wheel
 Ordered you on land*

Your stomach

³⁵ Dunbar, he says, was scared to cross the Alps into Italy.

³⁶ For want of power (money?) you must carry your own pack (?).

³⁷ "Defend yourself with the penitential psalm 'Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O lord, Lord hear my voice.' And if that fails, I will send"

"Had they been proved so of shot of gun
By men of war, but peril they had past.
As thou wast loose and ready of thy bum,
They might have ta'n the collum at the last,³⁸

*had they been tested by
they'd have passed without harm*

For thou wouldst cuck a cartfull at a cast.
470 There is no ship that will thee now receive,
Thou 'filèd faster than some fifteen might lave,
And mired them with thy muck to the mid-mast.

would shit

defiled ... wash down

"Through England, thief, and take thee to thy foot,
And boun with thee to have a false bot wand.
A horse marshall thou call thee at the meet
And with that craft convoy thee through the land.
Be nothing argh, take ferily on hand.
Happen thou to be hanged in Northumber,
Then all thy kin are well quit of thy cumber,
480 And that must be thy doom, I understand.

???

*Don't be loath, move quickly (?)
You'll probably be
encumbrance*

"High sovereign lord, let never this sinful sot³⁹
Do shame from home unto your nation!
Let never none such one be called a Scot,
A rotten crock, loose of the dok, there down!
From honest folk devoid this loathly lown
In some desert where there is no repair;
For 'filing and infecting of the air,
Carry this cankered corrupt carrion.

*Rotten sheep, w loose bowels
exile this l. fool
no access
defiling*

"Thou wast conceivèd in the great eclipse,
490 A monster made by god Mercurius,
No hold again, no whoa! is at thy hips.

*M. patron of thieves
No hold, no stopping*

Infortunate, false, and furious,
Ill-shriven, wan-thryven, not clean nor curious,
A myten full of flyting, flyrdom like,
A crabbéd, scabbéd, ill-faced messan tike,

*under-grown
a runt who likes jeering (?)
mongrel dog*

³⁸ The meaning of this line is indeed obscure. Kinsley's suggestion that "tane the collum" might mean "capture the ship" hardly goes with the "For" of the following line which implies that whatever happened would have some connection with Dunbar's capacity to "cuck a cartful" of excrement. Moreover "They" of that line would apply more reasonably to "they" of the ship Dunbar was on.

³⁹ Presumably addressed to the king.

A shit but wit, schir and injurious.

without wit, cutting (?)

"Great in the glaykis, good master Gilliam guks,⁴⁰

William

O'er imperfect in poetry or prose.

All closes under cloud of night thou cucks.⁴¹

500 Rhymes thou of me, of rhetoric the rose?

Lunatic lymer luschbald, loose thy hose

lying drunk (?), drop your pants

That I may touch thy tone with tribulation

whip your bottom

In recompensing of thy conspiracy,

Or turse thee out of Scotland — take thy chose!

Take yourself.....choice

"A benefice who would give to such a beast

A parish

But if it were to jingle Judas bells?

Take thee a fiddle or a flute, and jest!

Undought, thou art ordainèd to naught else.

Unworthy

Thy clouted cloak, thy scrip, and thy clamshells

patched c. (& other pilgrim gear)

510 Cleke on thy cors, and fare on into France,

Put on your body

And come thou never again but a mischance.

The Fiend fare with thee forward o'er the fells.

hills

"Cankered Cain, tried trowan Tutivillus,⁴²

Mermaid, mymerken, monstir of all men,

dwarf

I shall gar bake thee to the lord of Hillhouse⁴³

I'll have you baked

⁴⁰ The commentators gloss "glaykis" as "sexual desire, lasciviousness" or "folly" or "deception"; and "guks" as either a noun "fool" or a verb "act foolishly." No combination of these makes much sense. Since 497 refers (perhaps sarcastically) to Dunbar's academic degree, and 498 and 500 to poetry, prose and "rhymes", perhaps the reference is to literary (in)competence.

⁴¹ "Closes" (noun) could mean either close-stools, privies, or more insultingly, the small passageways or courts between street and tenement, implying that Dunbar fouls up such places at night to people's annoyance and disgust.

⁴² Titivillus was a mischievous devil familiar from some medieval plays. "Tried trowan" seems to mean something like "convicted truant or vagabond."

Cain, the name of the first murderer and earth wanderer, was an all round term of abuse in the Middle Ages. The giants and monsters of the earth were "Cain's kin" from **Beowulf** onwards. Dunbar was thought to have been a friar at one time, and Wycliffe often refers to friars' houses as Cain's castles; Cain was reputedly begotten at a time of year when copulation was forbidden; and his father was the Devil himself

⁴³ Possibly another jest at Dunbar's small stature, so that he could be baked like a small chicken in a pie, or toad in the hole. Hillhouse was also mentioned above (241) but in neither case is the reference clear.

To swallow thee in stead of a pullet hen.
 Fowmart, fasert, fostered in filth and fen,
 Foul fond, flend fool, upon thy physnom fie !
 Thy dok of dirt drepis and will never dry,
 520 To tume thy tone it has tired carlings ten.

*Young hen
 polecat, craven, ...and dungheap
 F. Idiot, flend(?) , fie on they face
 thy arse drips w.
 To clean thy backside .. 10 old women*

"Conspirator, cursed cocatrice, hell caa,
 Turk, trumper, traitor, tyrant intemperate,
 Thou ireful attercop, Pilate *apostata*,
 Judas, Jew, juggler, Lollard laureate,
 Saracen, Simonite proved ⁴⁴, pagan pronunciate,
 Mahomet, mansworn, buggerist abominable,
 Devil, damned dog, sodomite insatiable,
 With Gog and Magog great glorificate.

*h. jackdaw
 cheat
 angry poisonous spider
 heretic
 perjurer
 Glorifier of pagan giants*

"Nero thy nephew, Goliath thy grandsire,
 530 Pharaoh thy father, Egypta thy dame,⁴⁵
 Dei'l-bear, these are the causes that I conspire.
 Termagantis tempise thee, and Vespasian thine eme,
 Beelzebub, thy full brother, will claim
 To be thine heir, and Caiphas thy sector,
 Pluto thy head of kin and protector,
 To Hell to lead thee on light day and leme.

*thy mother
 The accusations I make
 Ranting devils inspire you, V. thy uncle
 C. (who condemned Jesus) thy executor
 In broad daylight*

"Herod thine other eme, and great Egeas,
 Marciane, Mahomet, and Maxentius,
 Thy true kinsmen Antenor and Aeneas,
 540 Throphe thy near niece, and stern Olibrius,
 Puttidew, Baal, and Eyobulus —
 These fiends are the flour of thy four branches,
 Stirring the pots of Hell and never staunches.
 Doubt not, Deil-bear, *tu es diabolus!*

*other uncle ... E. (who martyred S. Andrew)
 M. (a heretic) / M. / M. murderer of S. Catherine
 betrayers of Troy in med. belief
 T= Criseyde?; O. martyred S. Margaret
 P= Wandering Jew; B = false god, E = ?
 those devils
 n. stop
 Thou art the devil*

"Deil-bear, thy spear of war, but feir, thou yield —
 Hanged, manged, adder-stanged, strynde *stultorum* —
 To me, most high Kennedy, and flee the field.
 Prikkéd, wicked, convicted lamp *Lollardorum*,

*outmatched
 crazed, adder-stung, kin of fools
 light of heretics*

⁴⁴ Simonite. Simony was the sin of buying or selling ecclesiastical office.

⁴⁵ Egypta was supposed to be the name of Potiphar's wife who tried to seduce Joseph, and when he rebuffed her, she had him thrown in prison.

Defamed, blamed, shamed *primas paganorum*,
Out, out, I shout, upon that snout that snivels!
Tale teller, rebeller, indweller with the devils,
Spink, sink with stink *ad Tartera Termagorum*."

chief of pagans

Midget, sink to the Hell of devils

Quod Kennedy to Dumbar

Judge ye now here who got the worse

END