DICTIONARIES AND THE EDITING OF EARLY SCOTTISH LITERATURE

Janet Hadley Williams
Australian National University

'Dictionaries', and 'Scottish Literature' are words readily understood, but the operative one in my title, 'Editing', is rather opaque. First thoughts might be of a classic scene, now made almost obsolete by computer technology. This is of the cutting room floor, where (depending on the point of view) the worst or best bits of film footage have been edited, ruthlessly cast aside by a producer preparing a final product for the cinema.

In its definition, the *Oxford English Dictionary* includes this cinematic sense of the word, but also others. Among them (all listed under the verb, *Edit*, to which the student is directed from the entry for the noun, *Editing*), the first sense given is of most interest here: 'To publish, give to the world (a literary work by an earlier author, previously existing in MS.)'. *OED*'s accompanying citation, from William Enfield's *The History of Philosophy...drawn up from Brucker's Historia critica philosophiae* (London, 1791), says it more simply: '[Abelard] wrote many philosophical treatises which have never been edited'.

Wisely, if to present frustration, the *OED* has not addressed in detail the question of how the literary work is to be prepared for publication, but it is more informative in its entry for the term *Editor*. This echoes the briefer one written long before it by Samuel Johnson, in his *Dictionary of the English Language*: 'One who prepares the literary work of another person...for publication, by selecting, revising, and arranging the material'. In general terms this is helpful. In these days when camera-ready copy can be produced by anyone with the right software and skills, it is possible to have a good idea about the later stages of the publishing process, yet the questions that must be addressed before those stages are reached remain unanswered: 'Selecting in what ways? Revising on what principles? Arranging according to what critieria?'

When these queries are applied more specifically, to the editing – the preparing for publication – of Scottish literary works written in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, then the perplexity about how the process is to be carried out is increased. A recent editor of William Dunbar's poems has

called the process 'a nightmare and a challenge,'[1] but the difficulties of editing Scottish literary works were recognised in the 1560s. George Bannatyne, who compiled one of the most valuable sources of early Scottish literature, warned the readers of his manuscript miscellany that they must correct his errors of transcription, advising them to 'blame me' (4) who has '[b]ot lait begun to lerne and till translait, / My copeis awld mankit and mvtillait' (7).[2]

These words seem extreme, yet the material in question often fits the descriptions old, defective, and mutilated. Texts or versions of texts now lost might be physically well preserved in a manuscript miscellany such as Bannatyne's, but not always. They can also be found, with the problems that go with these less stable locations, on flyleaves, or margins of student textbooks, within accounts, and in council records. Preparing them for publication is problematic, for the texts, frequently surviving as single copies only, and almost always not the original written in the hand of the author, can be incomplete, water-damaged, rat-infested, crumbling and smelly, or near to illegible.[3]

Physical condition put aside, the texts themselves might have words struck through, or blank spaces left where words or lines could be expected. These might indicate various forms of censorship (of undoubted interest in themselves yet not helpful in establishing the text as its author wrote it), made to allow the text to conform to the fashions, moral outlook, or religious beliefs pertaining to the era of the copyist, or evidence that the copyist has had an imperfect exemplar from which to work. There could be anglicisation of the Scots, perhaps as a reflection of the copyist's education, or possibly because of the growing influence of English printers at this time. Older word forms might be written over, or other words then considered more modern written above. Even more confounding, a text might reveal (perhaps by a word that does not rhyme, or is out of keeping with the rest) that the scribe has taken on the role of reviser, and has seen no reason why he should not insert his own 'improvements', or substitute his own regional expressions for those the original author first wrote.

---

1 James Kinsley, *The Poems of William Dunbar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. vii.

2 Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. MS 1.1.6 [Bannatyne MS], p. 59, 'The Wryttar to the reidaris'.

3 See Marion Stewart and Helena M. Shire (eds), *King Orphius, Sir Colling, The Brother's Lament, Litel Musgray: Poems from Scottish Manuscripts of c.1586 and c.1630* (Cambridge: The Ninth of May, 1973), p. 18.

Where, by good fortune, two or more versions of the same early Scottish text have survived they may differ greatly in word, phrase, stanza order or number, yet not always sufficiently to lead an editor to the version that could have greater authority. Where more than one version of a text exists, the decision about greater value can be an important part of editing, the object always in view being to publish a text that is as close to the original as can be achieved from the material now extant.[4]

At the later date of these surviving versions, scribes were not only churchmen but literate merchants, civil servants, notaries and lawyers.[5] Knowing the name of the author, they might omit it from their manuscript copy, or they might not know it, or else make a guess based simply on what else is nearby in the exemplar. An instance is a poem ascribed to 'Clerk' in one manuscript, yet attributed to Dunbar in two others, and without attribution in another.[6] Similar challenges accompany the attempt to establish the composition date of literary work existing only in late copies; internal evidence, such as a reference to a particular event or a certain pope, cannot always be trusted, and there are very few instances where a word or usage can be used with certainty to pin down the date, for a word might have had a long life in oral colloquial use before being written down.[7]

---

4 In this exercise the editor must direct efforts towards 'establishing what an author wrote' and resist 'conjecturing what he should have written': see further, Derek Prearsall, 'Texts, Textual Criticism, and Fifteenth Century Manuscript Production', in Robert F. Yeager (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1984), p. 128.

5 On these manuscript copyists, see, for instance, Theo van Heijnsbergen, 'The Interactions between Literature and History in Queen Mary's Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Manuscript and its Prosopographical Context', in A. A. MacDonald, Michael Lynch and Ian B. Cowan (eds), *The Renaissance in Scotland. Studies...Offered to John Durkan* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 183–225, and Catherine van Buuren, 'John Asloan and his Manuscript: An Edinburgh Notary and Scribe in the days of James III, IV and V (c. 1470–c. 1530)', in Janet Hadley Williams (ed.), *Stewart Style 1513–1542* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996), pp. 15–51.

6 'In secreit place this hindir nycht' is attributed to 'Dumbar' in both Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys Library, MS 2553 [Maitland Folio MS, c. 1570], p. 311, and Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ll.v.10, fols 34^{v}–35^{r} [Reidpeth MS, c. 1622–23]. In the Bannatyne MS (c. 1568), fols 103^{v}–104^{r}, it is attributed, in a later hand, to 'Clerk'. In the Osborn MS (New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Music MS 13), fol. 51^{r}, it is unattributed.

7 *DOST*'s *Buttok(e, –ock, n.*(*b*), *Buttok maill*, a fine for immorality, is a likely instance, recorded only in the later sixteenth century.

There are many who would find these puzzles offputting, and believe that someone who persists, in spite of them, in wanting to edit five-hundred-year-old Scottish literary texts for publication is deserving condemnation by the same term Mrs Grantly used to describe her stubborn husband the Archdeacon and their equally stubborn son the Major, in Trollope's *Last Chronicle of Barset*: 'cross-grained'.[8] Yet there are few dull moments in editing. Who else but an editor of early texts would be required to explore areas as diverse as devil-lore and medieval dogs? And while there is nothing optional about finding answers to the various puzzles if the edition is to be useful to future readers, the great historical dictionaries, especially the *OED*, the *Middle English Dictionary* and *The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* provide valuable help.

For the editor of early Scottish literature, *The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, or *DOST*, which covers Scots words from the twelfth century to the seventeenth, has a central place. It offers (sometimes at the price of hard searching) assistance with words having many different spellings in early Scots. It explains the sense of words that no longer exist, and defines the early understanding of words still in use but changed in sense.[9] *DOST* also sheds light on the connotations of Scots words, and explains usage. Like the *OED*, the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* provides many citations. It notes with some subtlety how a particular word was used; for example, whether it only appeared in verse, or was sometimes used figuratively as well as literally. Gathered, this information can confirm an editor's initial thinking about a word, but might as often cause total revision. The examples in the remainder of the article have been chosen to demonstrate a few of the ways in which *DOST* can have an impact on editing; how, by providing the sense of a word, *DOST* can affect the meaning of the literary text as a whole; how *DOST* assists in the interpretation of tone; contributes to the identification of an unknown author; helps to pin down a work's distinctive stylistic features, or enables a better assessment of one author's response to others.

8 Anthony Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1994), p. 503.

9 W. A. Craigie, A. J. Aitken, J. A. C. Stevenson, H. D. Watson, and M. G. Dareau (eds), *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* [*DOST*] (1931–2002), 62 fascicles in 12 vols. (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1931–1977; Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983–1991; Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994–2002). It is online, together with the *Scottish National Dictionary* [*SND*], at: www.dsl.ac.uk/dsl/

A little poem beginning, 'My gudame wes a gay wif' shows the hidden value of consultation of *DOST* for sense.[10] The poem tells how Kittok, a woman who loved to drink, dies of thirst, and then sets out confidently for heaven. At heaven's gates, she cunningly slips past St Peter when he is not looking. God, seeing all, laughs heartily. Once in heaven, Kittok becomes Mary's henwife, but after seven years of living a pious life, putting up with Heaven's sour ale, she sneaks to the nearby alehouse. On her return Kittok is refused re-entry by an unforgiving, and more vigilant, St Peter. When he hits her on the head with a club as punishment, Kittok runs back to the alehouse, to remain there, pouring the pitchers, and brewing and baking.

The poem seems to be simple fun, as well as another example of a medieval sport, the outwitting of St Peter.[11] Consultation of *DOST*, however, shows that an editor must make no assumptions. To take the first words, 'My gudame was a gay wif.' *My* establishes a relationship between the narrator and the subject of the poem. *Wif*, as might be known, was used as a general term for 'woman' as well as for 'wife'. The word 'gudame' seems to need no gloss. But when *DOST's* entry for this word reveals that the primary sense of *gudame* is 'grandmother' there is a sudden light that reaches every corner of the poem. If the narrator purports to be a grandson telling of the life of his grandmother, first impressions of the narrative as straightforward fun need revision. The grandson's biography of Kittok (at least after the first five lines describing her) cannot be first-hand reporting, or even close to the truth; the grandmother is no longer alive to vet, inform or influence her grandson's comments. This is an opportunity exploited to the full in the grandson's vividly imaginative tales of Kittok's life after death. Speaking of Kittok's journey to heaven the grandson mentions, for example, how she wanders off the main path, encounters a newt riding on a snail, hails them, and then rides with them, an inch behind the tail (presumably, since she has

---

10 The poem, which has the popular title 'Kind Kittok', is thought to have been written in the late fifteenth century, but is now known from two sixteenth-century copies, the earlier a printed text (one of the earliest associated with Scotland), Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, sa.6(10), poem three, biv^{v}–bv^{r} [pp. 192–3], c.1507, and the later in the Bannatyne MS, folios 135^{v}–136^{r}, a copy not directly related to the sole print just mentioned. Of these two, the earlier version must be a preferable basis for an edition, with the later text informing it where there are obvious printing errors.

11 Traditionally the keeper of the keys to heaven (cf. Matthew 16: 19), St Peter was in folklore, jest-books and exempla a foil to Christ, and was often tricked into admitting the unworthy into heaven; see Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk-literature* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955–1958), K2371.1, K2371.1.2, K2371.1.5.

no mount, drawn slithering along by means of the snail's silvery-slippery trail).

Once *DOST* alerts the editor to the playful treatment of narrator and subject (in the instance just told recalling the small topsy-turvey comedies of manuscript marginalia, where a man might engage in combat with a snail, or ride astride it pursuing a stag),[12] further ambiguities and ironies can be identified, many of them closely connected by alliteration, but not by good sense or logic. Kittok's grandson says that she was 'gay'—that is, cheery; but also that she was 'ryght gend'. Thanks to *DOST*, *ryght gend* is explained, as 'rather foolish'. True, a person might be both cheery and foolish; but the grandson adds that she was 'like a caldrone cruk' (4), like a hook that holds the pot over the fire – (is her nose being described?) – but also that she was 'cler vnder kell' (4), beautiful under her caul or cap.

The grandson also notes that Kittok died of thirst, yet that she made 'a gud end' (5). This is an even greater anomaly, for the phrase 'gud end' was not in this medieval era commonly associated with death by drinking to excess.[13] A 'good end' involved penitence, and the last sacraments, as in *DOST*'s citation from the *Liber Pluscardensis*: 'Scho mad a gud end, and deit with all gud devys [acts].'

Subsequently, in Kittok's divinely favoured entry into heaven – placed at the very centre of the poem as if to emphasise her state of grace – and in the references to her virtuous work as henwife to Our Lady, there are touches of the saint's-life narrative. They are comically overturned when the grandson reveals that Kittok, at the pinnacle of her heavenly virtue, succumbs to temptation in a most unsaintly way, and rejects her exalted office in favour of a place at the alehouse. What the poem becomes, because with *DOST*'s help the status of the narrator has been identified, and thus various ambiguities along the way, is a comic eulogy to a non-saint, by one who convivially claims kinship with her. Kittok's grandson ends the poem urging his friends, 'Drink with my guddame, as ye ga by' (38).

'My gudame' is anonymous, although it has been linked to William Dunbar, on no more evidence than its proximity to other poems by him, but another comic poem has an ascription, 'Lichtoun monicus [Lichtoun

---

12 See Lilian M. C. Randall, 'The Snail in Gothic Marginal Warfare', *Speculum*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (1962), pp. 358–367.

13 On the 'Last Things' and the medieval attitude towards death, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 301–37.

monk]', in one of the two manuscripts in which it is preserved.[14] Further, another poem, a serious work on a Lenten theme with the opening line, 'O mortall man remembir nycht and day', is ascribed to the same poet.[15] These extra details add to the editing challenge, since the poem in question is not a religious or moralising composition but an entertaining account of a dream. Yet *DOST*, by helping to establish which surviving version of the comic text might be closer to the original, uncovers a witty gift for the absurd that might be that of a clerical, educated author.

The two versions of Lichtoun's comic poem each have ninety lines of predominantly five-stress rhyming couplets and a similar narrative order of events, but they differ in many words and phrases. These differences, sometimes affecting the sense, cannot be seen as scribal errors. For instance, the first line of version one throws out a challenge to the listener, 'Quha doutis dremis is bot phantasye?', recalling disputation that was part of the training in logic of the university Arts degree. Version two's 'Quha doutis bot dremis is greit fantasie?,' is slightly closer to a shared assumption, a rhetorical question not requiring an answer. Each line has interest; neither provides an editor with sufficient reason to believe that one or the other might be closer to what the author first wrote.

The challenge for debate (or the assumption) is left hanging. The narrator next tells how he fell into an extreme state of ecstasy in which he dreamed that the king of farye imprisoned him and bound him with a long rope of sand. Even so, the dreamer manages to escape, by taking his little toe into his mouth and casting himself 'Outthruch the volt and percit nocht the pend' (18). With *DOST*'s assistance the exit line becomes: 'Out through the vaulted arch without piercing the roof.' The gymnastic feat, perfectly conveying the spatial freedom of a dream world, is included in both versions of the poem, but they then diverge.

In version one, the somersaulting dreamer loses his temper because, when he lands, he hits his head upon 'ane know of reme' (20); in the other version, however, his head hits a 'kirne of reim'. *DOST* enlightens. Version one's words refer to a 'knoll of cream', and thus create delightful farcical nonsense: if landing on a pile of cream could ever be described as injurious, it must be to dignity, not bones. Version two's *kirne* makes 'churn of cream'. Landing on a metal or wooden churn might do a bit of damage to the head. Is the text of version two then the better reading?

---

14 Bannatyne MS, folios 101^{r}–102^{r}; Maitland Folio MS, pp. 152–55.

15 Bannatyne MS, folio 48^{r}'. The poem has a sobering refrain, 'Memento homo quod cinis es.'

On the contrary; both versions of the poem follow this detail with another, that the dreamer recovered from the head bump by drinking from a well that had been dry for seven years (23). This miracle (with the many others not mentioned here that follow), is in keeping with the absurd nonsense of version one,[16] but not the good sense, now suggestive of an inattentive copyist, of version two. That earlier aside about the seemingly pitiless binding with a long rope of sand, no threat to any prisoner, may be added to the references to the injury from a pile of cream and the dry well that quenches thirst and heals. With *DOST*'s help, the teasing tone of the poem is established, and with it, there is a tiny insight into which version of the two – that in which the inventive unreality is sustained – an editor might prefer.

Another now-anonymous early poem, called 'Duncan Laideus alias MacGregor's Testament,'[17] illustrates *DOST*'s role in author identification. The sole copy of the 'Testament' is written in one of the manuscripts owned by Duncan Campbell, seventh laird of Glenorchy, whose family was interested in book collecting, and had a taste for heroic and chivalric literature.[18] Anti-heroic in its satiric focus on a highland outlaw called Duncan MacGregor, notorious from about 1513–1552, the poem could be called an unofficial item in its manuscript. It is found at the back of the volume, which has been turned upside down by the scribe so that he could use the last page as another page one. At the front, occupying many leaves,

16 The poem here and in later lines (such as 32, 'Quhair clokkis clekkis crawburdis in cokkil schells [Where beetles hatch crows in scallop shells]') recalls the ancient topos of *adynata* (impossibilities), in the medieval era often associated with an antifeminist stance, in the form: 'when this (impossibility) happens, then my love will be true'.

17 'Laideus' represents the Gaelic for 'the Lordly'.

18 See Priscilla Bawcutt, 'The Boston Public Library Manuscript of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*: Its Scottish Owners and Inscription', *Medium Ævum*, Vol. 70 (2001), pp. 80–94; Janet Hadley Williams, '"We had the ky and thai gat bot the glaikis": Catching the Echoes in *Duncan Laideus' Testament*', in Sally Mapstone (ed.), *Older Scots Literature* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), pp. 346–69; Emily Wingfield, '"Ex Libris domini duncani / Campbell de glenwrquhay / miles": *The Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour* in the household of Sir Duncan Campbell, seventh laird of Glenorchy', in Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (eds), *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 161–174.

is a very long poem on the heroic exploits of King Alexander the Conqueror, written in a different hand.[19]

The poet of the 'Testament' assumes the voice of Duncan, who boasts of his successful cattle raids, and of how, by his own wicked efforts, he outwitted those in power and escaped detection until (in his own eyes), Fortune withdrew favour. For its dark comedy the poem deserves to be better known; Duncan's formal farewell to his favourite places, for example, echoes other Gaelic examples, such as that of the literary figure, Deirdre, for her native land, but Duncan's deep regret is for the highland glens and straths where he cleverly took the 'reddiest [most accessible] geir' (405)!

With sixty-three stanzas, the poem is long enough, one might hope, to contain details that could help to identify the author. He wears his outlaw mask with relish, but not in a way that assists the outlaw's cause, which suggests that the poet might be someone close to the Campbell family, who in the expansion of their lordship were at first allies of the MacGregors, but then instrumental in their loss of power. As just briefly noted, the author seems to have known Gaelic literature,[20] but there are echoes, too, of Chaucer and lowland Scots works such as Hary's *Wallace*.[21]

What else is distinctive? With *DOST* to assist, it is possible to discover that there is a specialist sense to many words and phrases in the poem that might otherwise be passed over as common usage. These include the pairs *gang and ryde*, *band and seill*, and *searche and seik*. *DOST*, by noting that set phrases such as *band and seill*, used literally to mean a documentary bond or contract formally agreed, but also figuratively to symbolise an obligatory tie (*DOST*, *band*, *n.* 3d), were based on legal formulae, shows that the author who used them possibly had legal training.

The words for the activities *Reif*, *Murthere*, *Slauchtir*, *Recept* [Receiving], and *Commone Thift* [Ordinary Stealing], listed in the

19 Gilbert Hay, *The Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour*, ed. John Cartwright, 2 vols (II and III), Scottish Text Society 4th Series, 16, 18 (Edinburgh and Aberdeen, 1986–90).

20 See further W. Gillies '*Gun ann ach an ceò*. "Nothing left but their mist": Farewell and Elegy in Gaelic Poetry', in Sally Mapstone (ed.), *Older Scots Literature* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), pp. 370–396.

21 Cf. for example, Blind Hary, *Hary's Wallace*, ed. M. P. McDiarmid, Scottish Text Society, 4th Series, 4 and 5 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1968–1969), VIII, ll. 1359–1360: 'Than rang [reigned] I furth in cruell wer and payn / Quhill we redemyt partof our land agayn', and Duncan's 'Syne [Then] rang I furth in tyranie alway / Slayand just men that neuir did offence' (ll. 50–1).

'Testament' as the names of Duncan's household officers, support this tiny clue. For instance, *Reif* [Robbery], an aspect (together with masterful theft and depredation) of 'stoutreif',[22] was associated particularly with robbing a person's house. Its use thus deepens the irony when Duncan appoints Reif as his steward, the official in charge of his domestic affairs. Appointing *Murther* and *Slauchtir* as his chamber officers, Duncan notes that they are 'ever of the one profession [aye of ane professioun]' (10). In doing so, he is also pointing out that he knows there is a legal distinction between them; that murder was considered to be killing with forethought felony, and that slaughter, in principle, was considered unpremeditated killing. Helpfully, *DOST* not only notes this legal distinction, but provides several early references, such as Skene's *Regiam Majestatem. The Avld Lawes and Constitvtions of Scotland*, in support.[23]

When gathered together, these details put into contention as author of the 'Testament' Duncan Campbell's notary (the person who would draw up contracts and deeds, administer oaths and undertake other legal duties for the seventh laird). This person, William Bowie, is also known in record as tutor to Duncan's grandsons, and a writer of Latin poetry that still survives.[24] Whether or not Bowie is the author of the 'Testament', *DOST* has brought into better focus the type of person who might have been the poem's author.

Via *DOST*'s generous documentation, it is possible for an editor to identify distinguishing aspects of the style of some early Scottish writers and thereby begin to understand at greater depth the qualities of a particular writer. *DOST*'s material on the phrase, *mak my maine*, 'make my lamentation,' provides an illustration. In cross-referenced entries, under the nouns *Man(e n.*1, *Mon(e, n.*1, the anglicised form of the same word, and the variant, *Mene, n.*2, *DOST* notes the great frequency of early occurrences of the phrase.

The citation evidence shows that a *Mane* was not a few words of complaint spoken in haste, but something more elaborate. 'Mak my main'

---

22 See *DOST*, *reif*, *n.* 1, senses 1 and 2.

23 See *DOST*, *Slauchtir*, *n.* See also A. D. M. Forte, 'Law and Lexicography: *DOST* and Late Medieval and Early Modern Scottish Shipping Law', in Christian J. Kay and Margaret A. Mackay (eds), *Perspectives on the Older Scottish Tongue: A Celebration of DOST* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 61–72.

24 See Cosmo Innes (ed.), *The Black Book of Taymouth with other papers from the Breadalbane charter room* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1855), (unpaginated) prefacing poems to the *Black Book*.

appears in the fourteenth-century Scottish *Legends of the Saints*, for instance, within the story of Eugenia. It is her nobleman father, Philip, governor of Egypt, who makes 'gret mane', in his grief after his daughter, beginning her journey towards sainthood, secretly leaves home.[25] This instance implies the formality underlying the use of this expression, but another citation, from Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, is more directly revealing. It is the shocked and unhappy king Orpheus, 'Half out of mynd' (128) after the sudden seizure of his wife Eurydice, who takes up his harp and makes his 'mone' (133). The ceremonial seriousness of the lament is signalled not only by the harp accompaniment, but by the use, in a poem of seven-line rhyme royal stanzas, of a more elaborate ten-line stanza and elevated diction. These signals that the literary *main* was a considered act, appropriate to tragic circumstances, are also present in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*. In that poem Cresseid herself, condemned by the gods, weeps and makes her 'mone': 'O sop of sorrow, sonkin into cair, / O catiue Cresseid, now and euer mair / Gane is thy ioy and all thy mirth in eird' (407ff).

A composition by David Lyndsay written in the 1530s begins in a similar register: 'Allace, quhome to suld I complayne / In my extreme necessitie? / Or quhame to sall I mak my maine?' An editor with *DOST*'s citations to hand recognises this, and is able to appreciate what Lyndsay is, and is not, doing when he opens with these lines. Lyndsay's subject, announced in the title of his poem, *The Complaint and Publict Confessioun of the Kingis Auld Hound callit Bagsche*, is not a king, or a nobleman, or, like Cresseid, the daughter of a high priest, but a disgraced hunting dog. The moral earnestness of the more elaborate laments is borrowed here for a mock-tragic purpose.

In this poem about an ageing hunting hound who has become unacceptably aggressive and proud, a variety of words – *bouchour*, *ratch*, *messane*, *tyke* – refer to other dogs at and about the court. *DOST* shows that these terms are not mere synonyms to relieve the monotony but are worth editorial notice, helping to reveal the character of this particular dog and the themes of the poem. Bagsche tells, for example, that when he was condemned to hang for his offences against other dogs and courtiers, the king did not enforce his sentence, but instead, because he was old, allowed him to wander. Because of this concession, the old hound laments, his foes were able to pursue him; as he puts it, 'euery bouchour dog doun dang me [cast me down] / Quhen I trowit [trusted] best to be ane laird' (69). In

[25] *Legends of the Saints*, ed. W. M. Metcalfe. 4 vols. STS 1st Series, 13, 18, 23, 25. (London and Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1888–1896), XXXI, 216.

DOST, the line from the poem appears as a citation, identified as an attributive use of the noun *boucheour*; it is evident that this type of dog, not well-bred, was kept for the slaughtering. The use of the words *bouchour dog* thus form a stark contrast to the description Bagsche offers of himself as a 'laird', and underlines how far he has fallen from favour.

Two other words, *messane* and *tyke*, also provide some telling contrasts that contribute to the characterisation of this truculent dog. *Messane*, as the *OED* and *DOST* record, was the word for a small cosseted animal, a pet, deriving from Scots and Irish Gaelic, *measan*, a small dog (*s.v. Messan(e, n.*). When Bagsche ironically offers advice to upcoming favourites of the king on how to behave, he warns, 'Na messane reif to make the riche [rob no lap-dog to enrich yourselves],' adding, 'Chais no pure tyke frome his midding' (189). The word *Tyke* was as familiar in the fifteenth century as it is now as the word for a mongrel, an ill-bred dog. In some of its accompanying citations, *DOST* documents a particular usage of *Tyk(e, n.*), that of the 'middin tyke', a low-grade cur who lived on and of the midden. Bagsche's proverbial-sounding admonition, 'Chais no pure tyke frome his midding' (189), in company with the warning not to exploit the helpless, pampered *messan*, has added power, encompassing the rich and poor of the dog world and, by extrapolation, the human world of the royal court and beyond.

Two late manuscript collections have each preserved a substantial satiric poem known as 'Roullis Cursing'. The two copies are not always coherent, and a third, copied from one of these others, disappointingly records less than half the text as we now have it.[26] The two longer versions have many editorial difficulties. Lines are omitted, words are crossed through, others replaced.

Our understanding of sections of this difficult poem depends almost totally on *DOST*. Like real life excommunications,[27] although perhaps with tongue in cheek, the poem's speaker curses the sinners (who have stolen Sir John Roull's fowls) from head to toe, and in every activity, dooms them to suffer tribulation, adversity and disease. All of these ways of suffering are described in detail; the diseases, for example, are separately listed, beginning with 'Dum deif or edroposy / Maigram madnes or missilry /

---

26 Bannatyne MS, folios 104^{v}–107^{r}; Maitland Folio MS, pp. 141–48; Reidpeth MS, folios 32^{v}–33^{v}.

27 For an example in Scots prose, dated 1525, see St Andrews, St Andrews University Library MS BX1945.L2, fos. 204^{r}–206^{v}, transcribed in *St Andrews Formulare 1514–1546*, ed. Donaldson et al. (Edinburgh: J. Skinner for the Stair Society, 1942–1944), pp. 268–271.

Appostrum or the perlocy / Fluxis hyvis or huttit ill [scorned abusively] / Hoist heidwark or fawin ill' and, after many similar lines, finishing with 'The mowlis and in thair sleip the mare / The canker als and the caters / And never to be but schot of blude / Or elf schot thus to conclude.'

Many of these illnesses are now unknown, or have a radically different spelling: *DOST* notes that 'edroposy', for instance, is dropsy; 'maigram' is migraine; and 'missilry'? This is another word for leprosy. 'Appostrum,' which appears in the other version as two words, 'Ane postrume,' is the word for an abcess; 'perlocy' is palsy; 'mowlis' is chilblains; 'mare', because sleep is associated with it, the nightmare.

The line 'Hoist, heidwark, or fawin ill' seems impenetrable, apart from the second word, which suggests (and is) a headache. But *DOST* has an entry for the noun, variously spelled, *Host, Hoist*. The *Dictionary* records versions of the word in Early Middle English, Norwegian, Danish, Old Norse, Low German, and Middle Dutch, and defines it as 'coughing as an ailment'. Among the accompanying citations there is even one, from the *Complaynt of Scotland*, which recommends coriander as a remedy.

The third illness in the line, 'fawin ill', presents a mystery. *DOST* has the verb, *fawin*, 'to feign', but only a moment is needed to recall that the list in 'Roull's Cursing' is of real illnesses, so 'feigning ill' does not seem to be the right sense here. In *DOST* a clue is eventually found, one suggesting that the scribe was unfamiliar with the term, or found the handwriting in his exemplar illegible, or that he copied carelessly. In its entry for the participle adjective *falland*, 'falling', *DOST* has the term *falland ill*, meaning epilepsy.

Of the last two maladies to be endured forever, *DOST* records that *Schot of blude* is a bloody discharge, but *elf schot* is not so easily defined. Notably, the citation from 'Roull's Cursing' is the earliest recorded, and without *DOST* the editor would be struggling, for the *OED*'s citations are much later and its definition less detailed. In *DOST elf schot* is 'a pain, illness or disease, caused, in popular belief, by a shot from an elf or fairy arrow, and used by witches' [(*S(c)hot, S(c)hote, S(c)hoit, n.*1, sense 10)]. An editor of the poem must acknowledge the difficulties posed by *elf schot*, but *DOST* has allowed the editor to take the poem's reader a long way from misunderstanding or total incomprehension.

Dictionaries, especially the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, play an indispensable role in the editing of early Scottish literature. A recent edition of Dunbar's poems, currently a widely-used textbook in the United States, demonstrates how, without this valuable tool, editors may go far astray. In Dunbar's poem, 'I that in heill wes,' Death is acknowledged as

triumphing over all, even over valiant knights ‘Anarmyt vnder helme and scheild’. Would that the editor of the US edition, who glossed ‘Anarmyt’ as ‘Unarmed’, had consulted *DOST*, for the word means the exact opposite, ‘Armed’.[28] *DOST* and the other major dictionaries are themselves the benign yet powerful weapons by which editors can be truly ‘Anarmyt’.

[28] John Conlee (ed.), *William Dunbar: The Complete Works* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications for TEAMS, 2004), ‘I that in heill wes and gladnes’, l. 21.