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Oral narrative style in Middle Scots (1978)[1]

Edited by Caroline Macafee, 2015

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[98] I begin with a passage from the Lanark Town Council records, date perhaps 1613.

1. *John Campbell's Complaint*[2]

Johne Campbell compleines and reportes to your wosdomes that
I being upon Mononday was on viij dayes ocopiet with my craft and
caling coming hambe to get at euin sick portion as God sendit in
come ane man th*a*t I newer knew of befoir and incontinent thairefter
in comes Thomas Moat and sayes go pay your lauing and he says he
would no for him and sua or I wist thay wer in otheres loges and
in comes Johnne Moat and sa they wer red without skaith and the
said man ganges his way and leues behind him his bonat and his

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The text has been edited for uniformity of style with other Aitken papers and some bibliographical references have been expanded or added. The original page and note numbers are shown in square brackets. The change of bibliographic style means that some of the original notes have been dropped. 'Scottish', with reference to the language, has been replaced by 'Scots'. Since digital publication does not suffer the same constraints of space as hard copy, I have laid out some lists of examples more expansively, though it will sometimes be obvious that they started off as connected text in the original.

[2] [1] Transcribed from a leaf now bound in with, but probably originally additional to, the paper stock for the 1590–1615 volume of Lanark Town Council Records. The Complaint, the only entry in this hand, occupies one side of the leaf; the reverse contains rough notes (? by the town clerk) for various dates in 1613. A less accurate transcription may be found in the *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Lanark* (1893: 121–2).

Editor's note: AJA originally planned to include a discussion of this text in 'Variation and variety in written Middle Scots' (1971, 2015). His draft adds the further details:

> The leaf in question has all the appearances of a stray 'foul paper' only accidentally bound in with the formal register, perhaps a jotting used by the burgh clerk for preliminary and casual notes. John Campbell's complaint on the verso is in a large, bold, mainly italic hand in very black ink, which appears nowhere else in the register (which is in mainly secretary hands). In the printed extracts from the burgh records ... the complaint is dated 17 November, 1614, but any date which may have existed on the original has been obliterated by a strip of opaque paper pasted across the top of the sheet, apparently to strengthen it.

See the Addendum to 'Variation and variety in written Middle Scots' in the present edition for additional colloquial texts. Macaulay's work on discourse features of Modern Scots (1991) provides an interesting comparison with Older Scots.

sword and he beand lodgit in Bessie Wilkeines hous scho reqweistis
me maist ernestlie to sie give I could do anie thing to get them
reconseilit and swa I gang to Gorg Ballantynes hous and thair I
find that man and Johne Conighame drinkin and I say gwdschir come
and resaw yowr geir again and he said he wald and I lewes them and
as soon as I tornit my bake on them thay hard Johon and Thomas
Moates command to the dor they rais as they wer in ane radg and
thay will ryue the lok of the bwtle dor and the las of the hous sine
scho gawis me the kie til opin the dore and Georg Balantyn sing
(*sic*) me at the dore he being fwl of drink makes ane schowe or ane
mint to me sa I gawe him gwd wordes Then we siting doun
Gorg Balantyn Johne Moat Thomas Moat John Coninghame and I swa we
continewes in drinking qhill euerie man was his pynt about then I
wald stay na langer bot offerit to pay my lawing and the said
John Coninghame said I sould no gang and I wer hangit and I said
I sould gar my vife pay for me and I micht not stay swa he bendis
to his sword and sa my wif gripes him and sa scho he and sword and
all goes to the grund togider and sa thair brek the sword and wer
not I schanchit to get the brokin sword in my hand he had felit me
w*ith* ane colraik and to be schort I thocht newer sa lang for the
bail3ies til hawe sein ye form

The effect of this is impressionistically obvious. I suppose most readers – and still more so, hearers – would describe the effect as that of a highly unstudied, informal kind of written narrative, reading almost as a tape-recording of an impromptu story, the kind of thing we might expect of a narrator concerned only to convey the facts without any pretension at variety or elaboration – a naïve, unstudied piece of [99] narrative. What I shall be trying to do in this paper is to specify fairly precisely the linguistic features which produce this effect and then to see how far they characterise a small class of Middle Scots writings and of course what kind of writings these are.

So I want to itemise what seem to be the optional linguistic features which are presumably responsible for this effect. Non-optional features, such as John Campbell's spelling system and many grammatical and lexical characteristics of his passage, are irrelevant for this. I will not specify individually all the relevant features, but treat some of these by generalisations.

Let us begin by noting that John Campbell's preamble – down to the word *sendit* in line 3 – is, for him, unusually elaborate in its grammar: with two pairs of co-ordinated synonyms and two parenthetic present participle clauses both of these themselves displaying much internal modification, including the pious circumlocution which here replaces some directer way of saying 'my dinner'. And the same preamble features recognisably 'literary' words of Romance origin (in *compleines*, *reportes*, *ocopiet* and *portion*), such as are common enough in most Middle Scots prose but not found in such density elsewhere in this passage. The preamble is only loosely attached to the rest of this passage, since the connecting word *that* is separated by the parenthetic clauses from its dependence so that the clause *in come ane man* reads like a fresh start. Let us regard it as stylistically atypical of the rest, being John Campbell's passing nod of stylistic deference to the solemnity of the law-court situation.

I propose to generalise on the sentence-structure of the rest of the passage by saying this is what I shall call non-complex, that is, it scores very low for frequency of subordinate clauses which are not grammatically obligatory,[3] and what noun and verb modification there is is of

[3] [2] Regarding, for example, a restrictive relative clause as grammatically obligatory and a non-restrictive one as not, or direct objects of transitive verbs or verb complements as obligatory. In addition to the present participle

minimal complexity and much of this is also grammatically obligatory, such as restrictive noun post-modifiers or adjective or verb complements; in short, it scores low for grammatical dependence. I shall be treating in a similar cursory way the other passages I shall consider. You will also note that the verbs are predominately in the active voice – passives and impersonals are rare.

With one exception the least marked form of the available reporting verbs is used, namely *say* prefixed to the reported speech. Another common and probably fairly unmarked Older Scots reporting verb is *quoth* but John Campbell fails to avail himself of this. The exception is the expression *reqweistis me maist ernestlie*, which we may [100] suspect of formal connotation, John Campbell again temporarily remembering that this is a statement in court.

Of the subordinate clauses which do occur, more than half – six in all – are present participle clauses: four of these of the absolute or self-contained or fully parenthetic type (that is, with the grammatical subject expressed within the clause itself so that there is no overt structural relationship beyond the clause, as *he beand lodgit in Bessie Wilkeines hous*) and two of the relative type (that is relating to an antecedent subject in another clause, as *Georg Balantyn s[e]ing me at the dore ... makes ane schowe ... to me*). Like finite verb relative clauses, but unlike finite verb adverbial clauses, one property of this sort of clause is to allow the author to leave unexpressed and often unclear and perhaps undecided the exact relationship of the action of the subordinate clause to that of the main clause – it has to be inferred from the context, it is not defined by an explicit subordinator like *after* or *when* or *because*. This instance of lack of explicitness represents one affinity of this passage with colloquial speech, which commonly displays a lower degree of explicitness or redundancy (both grammatical and lexical) than most other kinds of discourse.

Another construction which is highly recurrent in the passage I will be considering is the so-called thematic fronting of the adverbial of direction modifying a verb of motion or conveyance. This is the variation on the normal or unmarked *Thomas Moat came in* by the marked construction *In came Thomas Moat.* This is a practice which some English grammars allege is often used "to convey a dramatic impact" (e.g. Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: §8.28, p. 228). Three examples occur here. I am uncertain whether the inversion of *sa ther brek the sword* (line 26) is to be regarded as fully 'normal' or was unusual enough to be rhetorical in its effect.

Another 'marked' feature is the copious use of the historic present tense, varying unpredictably with the regular past tense, invoked, according to some grammars, for "vivid narrative" (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: §3.29 note, p. 43) or as a "vividly reporting present" (Visser, 1963, 1966: §779 f.).[4] I count 17 instances in the passage, in addition to the construction *thay will ryue the lok* (line 16), which since this is in reference to past time, counts as a further example.[5]

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clauses mentioned in the text, virtually the only non-obligatory or gratuitous structures are the adverb clauses *or I wist* and *as soon as I tornit* etc. (line 14) and the parenthetic *to be schort*, but the first two of these add narrative information. The clause *wer I not schanchit* (line 27) provides non-dispensable information.

[4] [5] See also Meier (1974: 201), where the 'historical present' in certain Middle English texts is said to have "the indisputable effect of actualizing the description". In Older Scots a third narrative tense option is the periphrastic form of the past tense, expressed by the auxiliaries *did* or *gan, can, couth* (and its formal variants *coud* etc.), followed by the infinitive without *to*, but these usages are confined to verse: *gan, can* and *couth* to narrative verse generally, Barbour, alliterative verse, Henryson, Douglas *et al.*; *did* chiefly, though not solely, to 'Chaucerian courtly' narrative, such as Dunbar's love-allegories.

[5] [6] The inflectional rules for the historic present tense differ from those for the regular present, since here the inflected form is an option whatever the person or number. Temporarily the uninflected form (*I gang, I find, I say*) of the singular supervenes (lines 11, 12), but John Campbell then reverts to the 'normal' invariable inflected form (*I lewes*).

Editor's note: i.e. 'normal' for the historic present tense. *We continewes* (lines 20–21) is another example.

In this passage inter-sentence linkage is nearly always actually expressed, through by the semantically emptiest coordinators, namely *and*, plus a few *sa*'s, *then*'s and *but*'s. Against 26 sentences introduced by one of these coordinators, we find only one example of parataxis (at *they rais as they wer in ane radg*, line 15). [101] Asyndetic sentence-linking is not a feature of John Campbell's style though, as a matter of fact, asyndeton of the subordinato r *that* is nearly regular with him: but there *is* a single occurrence of subordinator *that*, in the 'preamble'.

So we have a succession of minimally complex active sentences, employing little non-obligatory subordination except for parenthetic and non-parenthetic present participles clauses, linked by the most commonplace co-ordinators, making copious use of the historic present tense and including three examples of the 'in came he' word-order.

It is presumably characteristic of a naive or quasi-naive storyteller that the order of the events narrated is throughout strictly chronological. So adverb clauses of explanation invariably precede not follow the main clauses relating to the events explained: so with *he beand lodgit* etc. (line 9), *he being fwl of drink* (line 18), *as soon as I tornit my bake on them* (line 14), and *and wer not I schanchit* etc. (line 27).

The vocabulary of the passage is fairly vernacular. There is a fairly high proportion of vocabulary items of mainly or exclusively Northern or Scottish provenance – *lauing, loges, red, skaith, ganges, gang, las, schow, mint, about, lawing, gang, gar, gripes*. Conversely, there are few indeed of the Latin and French lexical options that are often favoured over their older Germanic and denizenised French alternatives in most Middle Scots prose and some Middle Scots verse: *reqweistis* rather than *askis* and *resaw* rather than *get*. Otherwise options of this sort are, as noted above, confined to the 'preamble'. (*Reconseilit* had apparently long superseded *saucht*, and native alternatives to *continewes* – such as *haldis*, or *haldis on* or *furth* – seem not well evidenced in *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST), so these are not to be reckoned as optional 'literary' items.) Perhaps, though, the few occurrences of non-vernacular items are enough to permit us to say that this does not represent a studied or contrived Scottishness of vocabulary as do some of the verse flytings. Doubtless this is John Campbell's regular vocabulary of daily speech, here, perhaps unusually for him, applied to a literary task.[6]

There are some possible instances of more or less strongly marked colloquialisms: in *ganges his way*, *gang* was doubtless less formal in its connotations than its French-derived synonym *pas* (as the DOST material for both words suggests); doubtless more formal ways of expressing *in otheres loges* could have been found. In matters of word form, I suggested in an earlier article that certain phonetically [102] reduced forms of 15th or 16th century origin are much commoner in informal or quasi-colloquial contexts than in the more formal contexts (Aitken, 1971: 195–7). Here the single possible instance of this is *no* which in this text replaces the unreduced *nocht* or the pan-British type *not*, which last was by this time superseding *nocht* as the regular literary form. The form of *schanchit* is subliterate rather than informal (Aitken, 1971: 201).[7] Other characteristics of the spelling-practice of this piece, such as the normal early 17th century anglicisms of spelling *go* and *anie* (as against *ga* and *onie*), are irrelevant here.

2. From: *A sermon, preached by Mr. James Row, Minister at Strowan, In St. Geillie's Kirk [1638], which has been commonly known by the name of Pockmanty Preaching.* Edinburgh, n. d. [? 1750]. (Hereafter referred to as the *Pockmanty Preaching*.)

[6] Editor's note: in a MS draft of 'Variation and variety in written Middle Scots' (1971, 2015), AJA makes the additional point that *form* in the sense of 'A way of behaving oneself, an instance of behaviour of a given kind' was a fairly novel and perhaps colloquial use of this word in English and Scots. He cites OED (s.v. *Form* n. 14b), which quotes a first example from Shakespeare then a Scottish example of 1616.

[7] Editor's note: Meurman-Solin is reluctant to label the <sch> for <ch> spelling 'sub-standard' as it occurs rather widely in otherwise conservatively spelled texts (1993: 243).

> Yea, they made not only a Horse but an Ass of the Kirk of Scotland. How sae, quo' ye? What mean ye by this? I'll tell ye how. they made Balaam's Ass of her; ye ken weel eneugh Balaam was going an unlucky gait, and first the Angel met him in a broad way, and then the Ass bogled and started, but Balaam got by the angel, and till her; and battand her sufficiently, that was when Episcopacy came in, and then they gave the Kirk of Scotland her paiks; afterwards Balaam met the Angel in a strait gait, and then she startled more than before; but Balaam till her again and whaked her soundly, that was when the five articles of Perth were brought in; the third time the Angel met Balaam in sae strait a gait that the Ass cou'd not win by, and then it pleased the Lord to open blind Balaam's eyes, and that is this happy day's wark. Now God has opened all our eyes; we were like blind Balaam, ganging an unlucky gait, and riding post to Rome; and what was gotten behind him upon the Ass, wat ye? I'll tell you; there was a Pockmanty. And what was in it trou ye? but the Book of Canons and of Common Prayer, and the High Commission; but as soon as the Ass sees the Angel she fa's a flinging and a plunging, and o'ergangs the Pockmanty, and it hings by the strings on the one side, and aff gaes blind Balaam, and he hings by the hough on the other side, and fain was the carle been on the saddle again, and been content to leave his Pockmanty. But, beloved, let not the false swingour get on again, for if he gets on again, he will be sure to get on his Pockmanty also.

Despite the lateness of the text chosen – it seemed unnecessary for my present purposes to research into the somewhat complex and obscure textual history of this piece – I propose to treat this as a specimen of 17th century Scots. The extraordinary popularity of this work – perhaps it was the only Scottish sermon ever to achieve something like best-seller status – was apparently due to its combining an attractive theme (episcopacy-bashing) with a startling manner (it was exceptionally informal and vernacular in its style, both informal and very Scots). Some of its stylistic differences from John Campbell's Complaint are due to obvious differences of function, as a sermon, not a simple report. But in its narrative, it displays a number of obvious [103] analogues with the style of the previous passage: minimally complex syntax, historic present tense, fronting of the direction adverbial, vernacular diction, along with a few other features not represented in the John Campbell passage, which I shall now specify.

The fronting of the adverbial of direction is I believe much the commonest of the word-order inversion rhetorical devices used in the sort of text I am considering. Two others, which similarly employ a departure from normal word-order to shift the semantic emphasis of the sentence, occur in the *Pockmanty Preaching*. One is a simple 'far be it from me' one, here *And fain wad the carle been on the saddle again* (for the ellipsis of the infinitive *have* in this sentence, see below and note [17]). The other has two slightly different forms: one is the rhetorical question and answer and the other the 'who was there but so-and-so' construction (in our case *What was gotten behind him on the Ass? I'll tell you* and *What was in it ... but*). Both of these differ from the simple declarative sentence in combining the suspense effect of a question awaiting an answer with the change of emphasis obtained by moving the theme to the regular focus-position at the end of the structure. Though I am aware intuitively of the occasional incidence of the first of these in Modern Scots oral narrative, I have as yet failed to trace a recorded example. The second, though rarer than any of the devices we have so far

considered, does occur quite often in the practice of some narrators. I know of it in a passage of recent tape-recorded oral narrative from Avoch, Black Isle, and in stories in Chambers' *Popular Rhymes* (1870: 72, 73, 74, from 'Nurse Jenny's narrative of *Whuppity Stoorie*')[8] and *Tocher*.[9]

The *Pockmanty* passage also exemplifies the option of ellipsing the verb element[10] in prepositional and phrasal prepositional verbs of motion, as *Balaam till her again* (line 9), or, e.g. *he ups* (historic present) or *up* (past tense) *with his fist*. In modern English and Scots these usages seem to the present writer mainly confined to oral and informal narrative, but the evidence of the grammars and dictionaries seems inconclusive.[11]

The third Middle Scots specimen I want to bring forward is the well known 16th century comic poem, found in the Bannantyne MS (fols. 120b–121b; see *The Bannantyne Manuscript*, 1928: 320–24) (and also a lost 17th century copy[12]), the *Wyf of Awchtirmwchty*. Since this poem is readily accessible in the STS edition of the MS and in many anthologies it is unnecessary to quote its text here. My references are to the *The Bannantyne Manuscript* (1928).

In its general syntactic tendencies this piece is very like the [104] other passages we have considered. There is the same consistency in favouring minimal complexity of sentence-structure, except that branching sentences (co-ordinate sentences with ellipsis of a shared constituent or constituents, commonly the shared subject) are here more frequent, and there are two with more than one branch, one of which overruns a stanza division (line 49). At the phrase level, pre- and post-modification are no more common and what there is no more complex. The favoured reporting verb here is *quod*, but its use is equally uninventive and unvaried.

Between sentences we mostly meet the same simple co-ordination by *and*, varied with the occasional *than* and *but*, but there is also some parataxis (absence of visible linking) and several cases of asyndeton (at lines 52, 86, 94 and 96), and one of the special type of asyndeton which omits low-information sentence-initiating words (which Jespersen, 1931, has called 'prosiopesis') at line 41. Similarly asyndeta occur in some other kinds of Older Scots narrative verse, notably Hary's *Wallace* and the alliterative verse, such as Holland's *Howlat*.

As well as these general tendencies the passage offers a number of the specific feature we have already met. These are examples of the parenthetic present participle clause at lines 15 and 56. And in this poem thematic fronting of motion and direction adverbials occurs more prolifically than in any other text I know: 12 examples in 120 lines. In three instances, all three with the past tense verb *come*, metrical and rhyme requirements condition the choice of the option with the dummy-subject *there* and subject-inversion (lines 51, 59 and 73). A fourth construction (line 65) employs the subordinator *that* to avoid a juxtaposition of two stressed syllables, so maintaining the regular metrical progression of the line: the only other examples of this construction I know are also in Middle Scots verse, with, perhaps, a similar

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[8] [9] Examples of the question and response method of supplying interesting narrative details in a narrative are common in some of the tales in *Popular Rhymes* as well as, of course, folk tales *passim*.

[9] [10] E.g. in narratives by story-tellers from South Ronaldsay, Orkney, in *Tocher* 26 (pp. 95, 97).

[10] [11] So, at least, is how this usage is described in the dictionaries, which appear at present to provide the main source of evidence: see, e.g., OED. s.v. *To* prep. A 1c (a), *Out* adv. 13 and 13b, *Up* adv. IV; DOST. s.v. *Out* adv. 1 c.

[11] [12] Information is more copiously and readily available on those constructions involving a modal auxiliary (*will*, *shall*, *must* etc.) as *I'll up and bar the door* or *I'll away home*, and the proverbial *Murder* etc. *will out*. For examples and discussion see Visser (1963, 1966: §178 f., p. 163 f.), and Jespersen (1931: §15.2(3), p. 238, and §17.1(2), p. 266). The presence of the modal of course implies a mainly dialogue distribution for this feature (as in *The Wyf of Awchtirmwchty*), as also does the imperative mood in imperatives like *Up!* or *Away with him!*

[12] [14] See Templeton (1967). I have not examined this version of the poem for the purposes of this article.

motivation.[13] The other examples display simple fronting of the adverbial (without subject inversion in any of them): at lines 37, 38, 61, 75, 96, 97 and 113.

Other inversions for shift of prominence occur at line 16 (*Betwene thay twa it was na play*) and, in dialogue, at line 20 (*Content am I to tak the pluche my day abowt*), perhaps at lines 76, 84, 105 and 107, but, most strikingly at lines 79, 80, where a sentence constituent which would otherwise bear no emphasis, is moved to prominence in the thematic position with the help of a recapitulatory pronoun. In more modern use this construction seems also largely oral in its distribution. More generally, the redundant use of anticipatory or recapitulatory pronouns, [105] as at line 90, seems very largely limited to oral or quasi-oral use in Modern English (and perhaps more freely and with less motivation, in Modern Scots) (see Quirk & Geenbaum, 1973: §14.37, p. 428).[14]

In this poem the simple past tense predominates strongly over the historic present, albeit examples of the latter (lines 41, 51, 59) do appear, as well as one instance of a 'substitute perfect' tense (perhaps invoked for rhyming purposes): *The burne ... Away fra him the scheitis hes tane* (rhyming with *stane*), line 96. There is also a single example of the periphrastic past tense with *did* (line 65), certainly not a common feature of this type of narrative: was it a 'literary' borrowing, used for metrical convenience rather than verisimilitude? There is one example of the common Older and Modern Scottish construction which ellipses *have* after past tense modal verbs[15] at line 103: *Scho fand all wrang that sould bene richt*. Ellipses of the main verb element in a prepositional verb of motion, here preceded by an auxiliary, are confined to the dialogue (lines 19, 119).[16]

Like the pieces we have already considered, the *Wyf of Awchtirmwchty* displays a very thoroughly vernacular and un-Latinate choice of vocabulary. Not all of this is dictated by the content, though it is true that, for example, the local and Scottish dairy-making terms no doubt are. Indeed the poem, being the work of art it is, is perhaps self-consciously or studiedly vernacular in a way that John Campbell's *Complaint* is apparently not. It contains several vernacular neologisms:

jwmill (line 66) (first recorded 1529);

tippill owt (line 3) (*tipple* v., late ME and Early Modern English, in this sense 1560 intr., 1581 tr.);

stour v. (line 65) (a Scotticism; first occurrence of this 'conversion' of *stour* n. (flying dust, 1456–));

mow v. (line 84) (this *intr.* use is a Scotticism, 1529–);

hairt n. (line 38) (only Older Scots occurrence in this sense (stomach), but in Modern Scots);

likkit (line 52) (? only occurrence in this sense (gobbled));

and *sorow* (lines 68, 72) (first occurrence of this Scottish use as an emphatic negative).

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13 [15] These are at Douglas' *Æneid* I. i. 53 (*The quhile our sey that salit the Trojanys*) and Burel's T*he Passage of the Pilgremer* I. 14 (*Than owt that come the modiwart*) (in Wood ed., 1977).

14 [16] Scottish examples occur frequently in both dialogue and narrative. For examples of the latter see e.g. *Tocher* 6 (pp. 172, 176), *Tocher*, 23 (p. 77 (twice), p. 79 etc.). The feature also occurs in so far unpublished narratives in Scots recorded on tape by the Linguistic Survey of Scotland.

15 [17] See DOST vol. III. Additions and Corrections, s.v. *Have* v.; and Grant and Dixon (1921: 63–4, 120).

16 [18] In addition to the commonplace dialogue features of interrogative sentences, optatives and imperatives, other features met only in the dialogue here are the new enclitic forms of modal verbs, *ȝeis*, *Is*, *Iill* (lines 29, 43, 116), and the use of *thair* as the non-specific or bisexual pronoun (line 91).

There are several idioms of mainly informal or colloquial distribution, including *to hald one's tung* (line 115) and *(up) to the ene* (up to the eyes) (lines 88, 90). The latter is apparently recorded otherwise only in Dunbar's comic poem on 'The Fenȝeit Freir of Tungland' line 107 and in Modern Scots and English from the early nineteenth century: evidently this expression was long transmitted only in colloquial currency.

This poem has the highest density of occurrence of any work [106] of the reduced members of certain words which underwent phonetic reduction in the 15th or 16th centuries and which, as recent spoken language innovations, were evidently avoided in certain serious and dignified kinds of writing though characteristic of comic and narrative verse (Aitken, 1971: 196–7). In view of this distributional restriction we may regard these, for Older Scots, as colloquialisms. These are:

end (where the rhyme implies the reduced form *en*) (line 9);

evin (the rhyme requires *ein*) (lines 10 and 33);

and *this strene* (line 92);

all (the rhyme requires *aw*) (line 52);

and *mow* (mouth) (line 75);

as well as the form, not in rhyme and therefore of less certain authenticity, *fow* (full) (line 92);

and the enclitic forms of the present tense modals *ȝeis*, *Is* and *Iill* (lines 29, 43, 116: only in the dialogue, see note [18]).

In all these ways the poem presents features already encountered in our prose passages and adds some others which, I have suggested, may be more at home in oral than in literary use.

But it is of course far from being an artless work. It makes use of some simple rhetorical artifices which (once more) we encounter in 'authentic' narrative such as the tales in Chambers' *Popular Rhymes* and in *Tocher*: the examples of litotes (lines 4, 74 and 84), and of anaphora (lines 68–9, 83, 87–8, 88–90, 98, 99, 101 f.).[17] The illusion that this is popular narrative is completed by a number of incidental remarks which remind us that the story is a performative act by a personal or present narrator, who appears seven times in the first person. In three instances early in the poem (lines 2, 7, 14) this is in parenthetic references to an anonymous folk authority (*as I hard it tawld, Gif it be trew as I hard say, as I hard say*), in one instance in an invocation of his own of divine punishment on his heroine for her action, introduced by the performative expression *I pray* (line 34), and in three cases with the assertive reporting verb *I trow* (lines 62, 73, 104). There is one other parenthesis of explanation (line 50) in this instance not accompanied by an overt verb of report. In these ways the narrator's presence in and emotional involvement with the literary event are made explicit. A similar awareness of a speaking narrator and a quasi-interlocutory audience are to be found in the *Pockmanty Preaching* passage, though here by a different means: that of frequent use of tag-questions in the second person plural (*wat ye? trou ye?*) and, once, an overt promise of explanation (*I'll tell you*), including both narrator and audience.

Some of the features I have been isolating seem to have an informal [107] or colloquial or oral distribution, either throughout their recorded history or in modern use, such as:

Who was there but so-and-so,

[17] [20] For example, stories in *Tocher* 6 (172–8), *Tocher* 14 (214–5, 225 f.), and *Popular Rhymes* (1870: 49–50, 57, etc.).

Balaam till her again,

the ellipsis of *have* in *Fain wad the carle been on the saddle*,

strings of co-ordinated simple sentences,

branching sentences,

asyndetic relationship between sentences,

the lexical tendencies noted,

or, in Middle Scots, the use of certain phonologically reduced forms.

Other features we have encountered are not exclusively colloquial: the parenthetic present participle clause, for example, has appeared earlier in my own prose in this paper in a clearly non-colloquial environment. Still, even though these options are not confined to use in colloquial texts, they do seem to occur more frequently than in a non-colloquial texts, since the latter draw upon a more extensive and varied repertory of usages than the colloquial texts do. In this sense, the parenthetic present participle clause, for example, is a feature of this 'oral' style, though far from confined to this.[18]

None of the features I have commented upon is obsolete today, though of course there have been changes elsewhere in the language. In colloquial usage, including Modern Scots which is of course inherently colloquial, we now prefer the objective form of the personal pronoun in parenthetic present participle clauses – *him being a lodger in her house* rather than *he beand lodgit* etc. –, there have been changes in the applications of modal auxiliaries, *wer not* no longer functions to introduce a conditional clause with negative force, colloquial modern Scots has largely abandoned the subjunctive form of the verb (e.g. *had* in line 27 of John Campbell's *Complaint*, *be* in line 7 and *dryt* in line 28 of the *Wyf of Awchtirmwchty*). There have been substantial changes of various sorts in vocabulary, and in Modern Scots reduced forms which were stylistically marked in Middle Scots are now regular in the most vernacular styles – so the stylistic significance of these is different from that in Middle Scots. In other respects the three pieces under review would pass, with of course suitable modernisation of their spellings, as modern vernacular Scots.

In the aggregate their stylistic tendencies are on the other hand in striking contrast to those of some other well-known kinds of Middle Scots narrative writing, such as Bellenden's translation of *Boece* in prose or Dunbar's *Goldyn Targe* in verse. In these writings one meets such characteristics as:

a generally high level of grammatical redundancy;

frequent explicitness and much variation in sentence-linkage;

much complexity and variation in sentence-structure;

(in the prose) a large use of passive and impersonal constructions, much phrasal modification;

(in the verse) constant contrived syntactical matching of phrases, clauses, sentences and stanzas, and a literary and Latinate vocabulary, far less Scots and vernacular than that we meet in the pieces we have been examining.

Of course the features we have been considering do occur sporadically in other Middle Scots writings, though nowhere else clustered in the same density as in our own pieces. Some approximation to this, however, may be seen in, for example the account of the upsetting of

[18] [21] See Visser (1963, 1966: 1132 f. and 1148 f.) and Jespersen (1946: §6.1 f., p. 45 f.), for discussions and examples.

the St Giles Day procession in Edinburgh in 1558 in Knox's *History* (Laing ed.: I, 258 f.) or in the Rev. Robert Bruce's story of the stormy meeting between the meeting of the ministers of Edinburgh and the King following the Gowrie affair of 1600 (*The Bannatyne Miscellany*: I, 163 f.). In verse, concentrations of the features we have been considering are much more widespread, in such works as *The Freiris of Berwick*, *Christis Kirk on the Grene* and *Kynd Kittock*, though in none of these as densely as in the *Wyf of Awchtirmwchty*.

But for similar clustering of all the features I have been mentioning a still closer match is Modern Scots oral narrative, as well as, for many of the relevant features, Modern English oral narratives. Some indications of this have already been mentioned above and in the Notes. Convincing examples are the texts there quoted, from Chambers' *Popular Rhymes* (1870: 49 f.) and from the numerous School of Scottish Studies recordings of these transcribed in its journal *Tocher* (e.g. nos. 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 26).[19] Many of the same features appear frequently in the chapbook anecdotes of Dougal Graham, the eighteenth century Glasgow worthy (see MacGregor ed., 1883); clearly Dougal is writing in the manner of the oral anecdotist. Some, too, will be found in Scott's 'Wandering Willie's Tale' in *Redgauntlet*, as befitting an oral tale, and doubtless in other literary pastiches of the oral yarn.

My postulation is that the constellation of features I have pointed out in the three Middle Scots texts discussed is characteristic of oral narrative of the folk-tale or oral anecdote kind. Most of these features might plausibly be predicted for impromptu memorial story-telling, where a limited range of simple stylistic tricks is available but the kind of elaboration possible in premeditated literary work is not, and where the narrators are not typically or necessarily learned persons commanding a wide range of non-vernacular vocabulary. Any further suggestion beyond this as to how this set of conventions for this kind of story-telling arose I am not at present able to offer.

[109] My suggestion is that John Campbell unselfconsciously wrote in his oral narrative manner, that the *Pockmanty Preaching* passage represents a more or less conscious mimicking of the oral story style, and that the *Wyf of Awchtirmwchty* is a quite self-conscious pastiche of this kind of story.

We may also guess that this was the style which characterised what the author of the *Complaynt of Scotlande* (1549) called *flet taylis* (which I take to mean 'fireside tales') which he seems to oppose to *stories*. Among those narratives whose titles he lists, the *Red Etin*, the *Black Bull of Norroway* and the *Well at the World's End*, all appear in modern tradition, told in a style with the very characteristics we have been considering.[20] Presumably it was the same sort of story that the author of *Colkelbie Sow*'s grandame, Old Gurgunnald (2, 257; 3, 149–52) told, also called by him *wyfis tailis*.

When a Middle Scots author, the author of the *Kynd Kittock*, let us say, or John Knox, thematically fronts motion adverbials, uses successions of minimal simple sentences, prefers present participle clauses to finite verb clauses, employs the 'who was there but' idiom, uses historic present tense, and so on over the features we have met, he may be assumed to be aiming at the effect of a racy, personal narrator of folk-tale or popular anecdote.

My prime motive in this paper was not solely to establish these points, if indeed they can be called established. Rather it was an attempt in one small little-regarded corner of Middle Scots literature to apply my own variant of the technique of linguistic stylistics. This technique has not yet to my knowledge been applied to any branch of Middle Scots literature (at least in published form: I have been doing so for a fair number of years in lectures).

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[19] Editor's note: many of these recordings are also now available online at Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/ (accessed 2 March 2012).

[20] [22] All e.g., in Chamber's *Popular Rhymes*. Also 'the tail of the pure tynt' in *The Complaynt of Scotlande* 1549 (Murray ed., 1872: 63), has been identified, by Leyden (1801) and Murray, with 'the pure tint Rashycoat': see *Popular Rhymes* (1870: 66–70).

It seems to me that this must provide results of interest not only to historians of the language. For instance, why did Blind Hary choose his unique asyndetic, paratactic, non-complex syntax for most of his narrative? Was it because he could not help it or because he thought it was most appropriate to his aims, and, if the latter, how? Does he or does he not lose these characteristics in his grand style prologues and other grander passages? The answer to such questions might help to settle whether there is any truth in M. P. McDiarmid's (1968–69) hypothesis of embedded 'heroic lays' in the poem. Does the style of Wyntoun's 'Anonymus' differ from that of Wyntoun himself?

But of course the usefulness of such study is not confined to [110] simple either/or authorship questions, as in these instances. After more such work had been done we would possess a reasonably detailed and, if somewhat greater rigour and formality than I have displayed here were applied, precise stylistic map of Older Scots writing. This would I believe reveal the stylistic norms for each of the several clearly distinguishable varieties of Older Scots. Literary critics of particular works would then no doubt want to note when in these works the norm was being followed and when departed from, and to consider why.

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