



Tayis Bank: A Critical Edition

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Introduction: The Bannatyne Manuscript

'Tayis Bank' is taken from the Bannatyne manuscript (c.1568), which is now held by the National Library of Scotland under the catalogue number NLS Adv. MS. 1.1.6.¹ It was compiled by George Bannatyne (1545-1608), a wealthy merchant on the fringes of courtly society. The Bannatyne manuscript is remarkable not only for its size, reaching an incredible 800 folio pages, but also for its scope. Containing over 400 poems ranging from short moral maxims to long works such as David Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. William Ramson notes that the selection of poems 'which is certainly courtly rather than popular, and which is predominantly Scottish [...] draws on a variety of markedly different genres, from the most serious to the most inconsequential, from the professedly instructional to the simply entertaining, from the most aureate and ceremonial to the most familiarly colloquial', although the majority can be considered to be courtly in nature.²

Just as remarkable is Bannatyne's own editorial intervention. Whilst there is no chronological separation of verse, the manuscript is divided into five sections according to theme: 'ballatis of theologie', 'ballatis full of wisdom and moralitie', 'ballatis mirry', 'ballatis of luve' and 'fabillis of esop with diuers vpir fabillis'. Even within these sections, Bannatyne has made use of additional subdivisions, editorial titles, attributions to poets and even the occasional editorial comment, as with his explanation of the decision to abridge *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. That these comments have been written in a different ink suggests that the Bannatyne manuscript underwent regular amendment. Ramson argues that this careful attention to detail reveals 'that Bannatyne had a schema in mind and selected poems to fit it –rather than including everything that came to hand'.³ Precisely what the intention behind this schema was remains unclear. Sebastiaan Verweij has noted that the Early Modern period marked a sharp increase in the 'cementing of family and kinship relations by means of cultural expression', so it is not out of the realms of possibility that this manuscript served a very domestic purpose, intended only for the Bannatynes themselves and their immediate circle.⁴ However Ramson tells us that on reading the manuscript, Scott praised Bannatyne for 'preserving that which was really worthy of preservation', for 'seeking to put 'the Lays of the Makars out of the reach of oblivion'.⁵ With poems from across the reigns of four Scottish monarchs, it cannot be denied that the Bannatyne manuscript, whatever its original purpose, acts as a proud statement of the beauty and variety to be found in the canon of Older Scots literature.

Themes and Significance

Perhaps the most obvious theme in 'Tayis Bank' is that of courtly love, which is primarily explored through natural imagery. The use of a 'garden of love' is by no means unique to this poem, derived instead from French *dix amoureuse* such as Froissart's *Le Paradis d'Amour*. As in 'Tayis Bank', Froissart's narrator begins his tale surrounded not only by nature, but specifically nightingales.⁶ Likewise in *Le Bleu Chevalier*, the narrator discusses the knight's lady with him whilst surrounded by nightingales. This connotation between courtly love and nightingales is also discussed in the Middle English poem *The Nightingale and the Owl*. James Baker has similarly suggested that the lark (l.27) can also be considered to be symbolic of lovers.⁷ By presenting these symbols of courtly love before the introduction of Margaret, the poet clearly and conveys the amorous relationship between these two figures to the reader immediately.

¹ George Bannatyne and W. Tod Ritchie, *The Bannatyne Manuscript, Written In Tyme Of Pest, 1568* (Edinburgh: Blackwood for the Scottish Text Society, 1930).

² A. J. Aitken, Matthew P. McDiarmid and Derick S. Thomson, *Bards And Makars* ([Glasgow]: University of Glasgow Press, 1977), p. 173.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴ Sebastiaan Verweij, *The Literary Culture Of Early Modern Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 140.

⁵ Aitken, McDiarmid, and Thompson, *Bards and Makars*, p. 174.

⁶ Sarah Carpenter and Sarah Dunnigan, *'Joyous Sweit Imaginatioun': Essays on Scottish Literature in Honour of R.D.S. Jack* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 21.

⁷ James V. Baker, 'The Lark In English Poetry', *Prairie Schooner*, 24:1 (1950), 70-79
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40624200?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents> [accessed 20 May 2016].

However the natural imagery in this text also suggests that Margaret has a certain uncanny quality to her. Perhaps the best example of this is the appearance of a holly plant (l.11) under which the narrator hides, which is highly unusual in a spring scene. Even disregarding its conspicuous appearance in May, the holly carries highly supernatural connotations, as can be seen in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Likewise, those who spend too long under trees tend to have some kind of supernatural experience or vision, as Heurodis does in *Sir Orfeo*. Indeed, Margaret's appearance in this text is far more similar to Heurodis' appearance to Orfeo in the wilderness than it is to typical courtly love poetry, she leaves as quickly as she has entered, without even acknowledging the narrator. This is mirrored almost exactly in *Sir Orfeo* when the poet states that 'yern he biheld hir, and sche him eke, /Ac noither to other a word no speke' (l.323-4).⁸ Likewise Margaret and the narrator's inability to communicate with one another suggests that there is something supernatural about her.

An indication as to her true nature can be found in her name. Whilst 'Margaret' can refer to the disc consumed in the Eucharist, it is also synonymous with pearls, a connection which is made explicit on the next line. This use of pearls to express loss, most famously used in 'Pearl' is also present in Drummond's work, as his narrator expresses mourning for the lost of his love in *Songs* by saying 'That living Snow, those crimson Roses bright, /Those Pearles, those Rubies, which did breed desire' (ll.ii.5-6).⁹ It is not reasonable to suggest then that, like Orfeo, the narrator of 'Tayis Bank' has fled into the wilderness after the loss of his ladylove, only to be presented with a ghostly apparition of her. This same language of loss is employed in John Stewart's 'Of Ane Symmer Hous', in which the narrator describes a bour which has been abandoned for the winter season, saying: 'Thow many lament And I vith duill Indyt /for laik of hir quham now, alace, we lois: /for I reiosit in hir color quhyt' (l.5-7).¹⁰ Although 'lois' could simply mean he has lost the affection of his love, DOST suggests that it can also be used to refer to bereavement. Like Tayis Bank, Stewart conveys the beauty of the narrator's mistress through use of the white, pearl like imagery, and conveys the depth of his grief through the empty spaces left behind her. Interestingly, both poems also make use of 'bour' imagery as the setting for the male narrator's seat of reflection, despite the fact that this is traditionally a feminine space. However this use of gendered space only serves to heighten the sense of grief at the absence of the respective narrator's lovers.

Both Henry Weber and Alastair Cherry have stated that 'Tayis Bank' was composed on Margaret Drummond of Perth, who was contracted to marry James IV before her untimely, and by some accounts suspicious, death. Cherry has even gone so far as to suggest that James IV composed the verse himself, as he was reported to have kept her in his heart and 'had masses said for her soul until the end of his days'.¹¹ Certainly this would explain the poet's choice of setting, as the River Tay circles around Perth, Margaret's family home, yet is never able to actually reach it. Although there is no explicit use of *locus amoenus*, the use of this technique was so prevalent amongst courtly love poetry of this period that it could still easily be present in the inclusion of a river, symbolically acting as the River Styx. As in the Greek myth of Orpheus, upon which *Sir Orfeo* was based, the River Styx separates the central lovers, eventually meaning that Orpheus can only see his lover from afar in the underworld before they are separated forever.

Genre

'Tayis Bank' is somewhat difficult to place, as it contains aspects of a wide variety of genres, the most obvious of which is the *chanson d'aventure*. This genre, derived from French courtly love poetry, is defined by Judith Davidoff as a poem which opens with a framing fiction in which the narrator states that one spring day he 'wandered out alone one day and had an encounter that triggered an edifying lesson'.¹² 'Tayis Bank' certainly uses many literary conventions of this genre, such as an absence of contextual information beyond the conventional May setting and a vague sense of place, particularly woodlands, sketched out in sparse detail. The reader is not told why the poet narrator has entered the wilds and he never reveals his identity, acting almost as an everyman figure. Davidoff has suggested that this feature of *chanson d'aventure* allows it 'to suggest both universality and symbolic associations [...] the I becomes didactic in both a personal and universal way'.¹³ This instructive core, which could range from a spiritual concern to the wooing of a lady, is neatly tied to the tradition of

⁸ Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., 'Sir Orfeo', *Robbins Library Digital Projects*

<<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-sir-orfeo>> [accessed 24 May 2016].

⁹ Carpenter and Dunnigan, *Joyous Sweet Imaginaioun*, p. 138.

¹⁰ John Stewart and Thomas Crockett, *Poems Of John Stewart Of Baldynneis From The Advocates' Library*, Edinburgh (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1913), p. 166.

¹¹ Alastair Cherry, *Princes, Poets & Patrons* (Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1987), p. 26.

¹² Judith M Davidoff, *Beginning Well* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), p. 36.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 47.

courtly love through the stereotypical use of a May morning. Although 'Tayis Bank' follows the basic structure of *chanson d'aventure*, it cannot rightly be considered to belong to this genre as there is no moralizing impact, as can be found in a poem such as 'The Kingis Quair', during which the narrator experiences the transformative power of love and becomes a better leader for it. The poet narrator does not encounter a guide to instruct him, he does not win the fair lady's heart and does not appear to have learnt anything from the encounter.

'Tayis Bank' also contains some aspects of dream vision poetry, particularly when Margaret's mysterious and uncanny nature is considered. Although the poem seems to set itself up as a dream vision, the reader is never entirely sure whether or not the narrator has fallen asleep. It is unclear whether this is the result of a disruption in transmission or if the poet is playfully looking towards the tradition of dream vision poetry to further emphasize Margaret's dreamlike otherworldly quality. *Confessio Amantis* however, which can be considered a dream vision analogue, explores courtly love in the same didactic way as a dream vision might, drawing heavily on the personification of virtues and ideas, without the narrator explicitly falling asleep. 'Tayis Bank' could perhaps then be considered another one of these dream vision analogues, which does not entirely adhere to the requirements of the genre.

Style

When compared with the aureate, highly wrought comparisons to jewels which characterize courtly love poetry, and particularly Dunbar's work, it becomes clear that the language of 'Tayis Bank' is relatively simple – but this is not to be confused with simplistic. Instead the poet has opted for more natural imagery, elevating the beauty of both the setting and Margaret through ideas of cultivation. Drawing on early pastourelle forms, the narrator of 'Tayis Bank' describes Margaret's beauty in great detail yet never expresses his love for her, nor do the two figures interact. Although Helen Sandison has suggested that this, combined with the poet's decision to shy away from imagery with sexual connotations, is an attempt not to offend James IV if indeed 'Tayis Bank' does concern Margaret Drummond.¹⁴ However when one considers Alexander Scot's love poetry, in which he says 'Als gud luv cumis as gais, /Or rather bettir' it is just as likely that this is due to the Scot's natural disposition away from 'expressing too much tenderness' as Kurt Wittig puts it.¹⁵ Yet despite this lack of overly ornate language, the poet still demonstrates the kind of skillful construction that one might expect of Dunbar, particularly through the extensive use of alliteration and internal rhyme. 'Tayis Bank', like 'Robene and Makyne', makes use of the traditional ballade form of the troubadours: eight line stanzas with a regular rhyme scheme (a b a b a b a b). Wittig notes that an important aspect of Scots poetry is that its rhythms were often determined by music, particularly dances: 'the use of traditional metres, often very complicated; of internal rhymes that might just be musical phrases; and of frequent refrain on a thematic word'.¹⁶

A Note on the Text

'Tayis Bank' is written in Older Scots, which may be unfamiliar to the majority of readers. It is worth noting that there are several differences in pronunciation and spelling to Middle English, such as the use of 'Quh' in place of 'wh'. For the most part, the spelling of the manuscript is preserved. However, the following points should be noted.

- All capitalisations are editorial. The scribe of the Bannatyne manuscript has chosen to capitalise words in the middle of lines, particularly improper nouns, as a way of highlighting key ideas. Whilst this is a common feature of manuscripts of this period, it has been disregarded in order that this edition may be brought in line with current critical conventions. Honorific titles have been capitalised where they precede a personal name, such as 'Dame Natouris' (l.83).
- Punctuation is also editorial to bring the poem in line with modern literary conventions, as the scribe chose not to include any punctuation of their own. As this edition is aimed at students encountering Scots poetry for the first time, I have chosen to intervene with regards to grammar rather heavily at times in an attempt to clarify potentially confusing passages.

¹⁴ Helen Estabrook Sandison, *The "Chanson D'aventure" In Middle English* (Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Bryn Mawr College, 1913), pp. 64-5.

¹⁵ Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition In Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), p. 119.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

- Letters which are used interchangeably, such as u/v and i/j have been transcribed as they appear in the manuscript.
- All abbreviations have been silently expanded with the exception of 'E' (l.64), used in place of 'eye', so as not to interfere with the rhyme scheme of the stanza.
- For the sake of clarity, long 's' has been transcribed as 's'.
- Thorn [þ] has been retained.
- Any scribal errors have been amended in square brackets and referenced in the textual notes.
- Although word division is infrequent in this text, the few instances have been brought in line with modern conventions and referenced in the textual notes.
- Textual notes have been used to denote disparities which cause a significant change in the interpretation of a passage rather than inconsistencies in spelling so as to not confuse secondary school readers to whom such information is irrelevant.
- The text has been glossed on page to improve the ease of reading for students.
- The title 'Tayis Bank' is editorial. I have chosen this title as it is the one by which it has become best known, allowing students to more easily research the poem if they so choose.
- The abbreviation DOST has been used to refer to *The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*.

Tayis Bank

- 41 Wod winterⁱ with his wallowand^o wynd,
But weir^o away wes went,
Brasit^o about with wyld wodbyndⁱⁱ
Wer bewis on þe bent.^o
*expelled, withering
spring
embraced
branches*
- 45 Allone vnder þe lusty lynd^o
I saw ane lusum lent^{oiii}
That fairly war so fare^{iv} to fynd
Vndir þe firmament.
*delightful lime tree
beauty entered*
- 50 Scho wes þe lustiest on lyfe,^o
Allone lent on a land,
And farest figour^o [besid fyve]^{17 v}
That evir in firth^o I fand.^o
Hir cumly cullour^o to [discryve]^{o18}
I dar nocht tak on hand,^{vi}
*most beautiful alive
appearance
wood, found
pleasing complexion, describe*
- 55 Moir womanly borne of a wyfe
Wes Neuer I dar warrand.^o
warrant
- 60 To creatur þat wes in cair,^o
Or cauld^o of crewelty,
A blicht blenk^o of hir vesage^o bair
Of baill^o his bute^o mycht be.
Hir hyd,^o hir hew,^o hir hevinly hair
Mycht havy hairtis vphie^o
So Angelik vnder þe air
Neuir wicht^{ovii} I saw with E.^o
*distress
cold
cheerful glance, face
sorrow, remedy
skin, complexion
heart uplift
woman, eye*
- 65 The blossumes þat wer blyth^o and brycht
By hir wer blacht^o and blew.^{oviii}
Scho gladi^o all þe foull^o of flicht
That in þe forrest flew;
Scho mycht haif comfort king or knycht
*glad
pale, blue
gladdened, birds*
- 70 That ever in cuntre I knew
As waill^o and well of wardly^o wicht
In womanly vertew.
choicest, worldly
- 75 Hir cullour cleir,^o hir countenance,
Hir cumly^o cristall^{ix} ene,^o
Hir portratour^o of most pleasance
All pictour did prevene.
Off every vertew to avance^o
Quhen ladies prasit bene,
Ryttest^o in my remembrance
*bright
handsome, eye
appearance
surpass
heighten*
- 80 That rose^x is rutit^o grene.
*truest
rooted*
- 85 This myld, meik, mensuet^o Margrite,^{xi}
This perle polist most quhyt,^o
Dame Natouris^{xii} deir dochter discreit,
The dyamant^o of delyt.^{xiii}
*gentle
white
diamond*

¹⁷ The meaning of this passage is extremely unclear. It is usually transcribed as 'be sic syve', for which there is no agreed translation into modern English. It is my belief that this is a combination of scribal error and misreading of the manuscript. In secretary hand, the final letter of 'sic' could easily be a 'd' which has been rushed, not reaching the capital line. If this is the case, 'be sic' is actually the word 'beside' which has been divided. It is worth noting that word divison is not uncommon in this period. Likewise the long 's' that would be present in 'syve' looks very similar to an 'f'. This would give the whole passage the meaning 'fairest figure beside five that ever I did find in the woods'.

¹⁸ discryve] discryve (scribal error corrected).

Ane figour more perfyte,
Nor non on mold^o þat did hir meit
Mycht mend^o hir wirth a myte.

earth
improve

Explanatory Notes

ⁱ *winter with his wallowand wynd*. Winter is often personified as a male figure when discussing its characteristic wind. Compare Henryson, *Morall Fabillis*, l.1693: 'God off the wynd'. See Henryson, D.lib.rochester.edu, 2016.

ⁱⁱ *wodbynde*. A creeping ivy like plant.

ⁱⁱⁱ *lusum lent*. DOST defines lent as 'passing into' but also 'to be brought to life' in some cases. This would suggest that Margaret is some kind of ghostly apparition rather than a real woman. Furthermore this carries the implication that the woman has been lent to him for a short amount of time, but like the narrator of *Pearl*, he must give her back.

^{iv} *fare*. DOST defines this as 'beautiful' but it also carries connotations of brightness and cleanliness. Compare with *Pearl*, l.36: 'that precios perle wythouten spotte'. Like the narrator of *Pearl*, the narrator of 'Tayis Bank' expresses the value of their beloved (whether romantic or platonic) through reference to their purity, arguably a sign of their rarity when used in conjunction with the pearl imagery found in l.81-2. See D.lib.rochester.edu, 2016.

^v *besid fyve*. Whilst this could literally be comparing Margaret to five other women, the number five has great significance in medieval literature, acting as a symbol of a number of concepts. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the five pointed star on Gawain's shield acts as a reminder of the five wounds of Christ, whilst Schimmel has suggested that in classical astronomy five is seen to be the number of Venus, the goddess of love, which is particularly apt in the context of 'Tayis Bank'. Furthermore she reminds her readers that the pentagram found on Gawain's shield is also called 'the lovers' knot'. It is also possible that this use of the number five is a reference to the five zones of the world found in medieval Macrobian maps. If so, this passage would imply that in all five zones of the world, Margaret is the fairest to be found. See Schimmel and Endres, 1993 and Lasalle.edu, 2016.

^{vi} *tak on hand*. According to DOST, an idiom meaning 'to take responsibility for'.

^{vii} *wicht*. Can refer to a person of any gender, however DOST also suggests that it can mean 'a being not of this world, chiefly a supernatural being such as a fairy or spirit, also, a celestial being'. This would further suggest that Margaret is some sort of otherworldly vision of the narrator poet's dead lover.

^{viii} *By hir wer blacht and blew*. The poet uses Petrarchan pastoral conventions here by stating that the beauty of nature pales in comparison with the beauty of Margaret. Use of this convention is not uncommon in C16th love lyric. Compare Drummond, 'Songs', l.xxxviii, 10-14: 'Faire are the Meads, the Woods, the Flouds are faire, /Faire looketh Ceres with her yellow Haire, /And Apples Queene when Rose-cheekt Shee doth smile. /That Heaven, and Earth, and Seas are faire is true, /Yet true that all not please so much as you.' See Jack, Carpenter and Dunnigan, 2007.

^{ix} *cristall ene*. DOST suggests that the use of 'cristall' is meant to infer brightness. Compare Dunbar, 'The Merle and the Nightingale', l.1-2: 'In May as that Aurora did up spring, /With cristall ene chasing the cluddis sable'. The Aurora referred to here is the Roman goddess of the dawn. Similarly in classical literature, the goddess Athena is frequently described as being bright eyed or having flashing eyes. Thus by describing Margaret as having 'cristall ene', the poet links her to a more supernatural than earthly form of beauty. See Dunbar, D.lib.rochester.edu, 2016.

^x *That rose is rutit grene*. This phrase is likely drawing on the allegorical dream vision poem *Roman de la Rose*. In this the rose is used to refer to both the lady being romanced and used as a symbol for female sexuality. As a seminal work of courtly literature, it will undoubtedly have influenced this work.

^{xi} *Margrite*. Whilst this could simply be a personal name DOST states that Margrite may also mean 'pearl'. For the full implications of this description of the poet narrator's object of love as a pearl, see themes section of introduction.

^{xii} *Dame Natouris*. This is a personification of nature. Such personification of concepts and ideas is a common feature of medieval dream poetry. See genre section of introduction.

^{xiii} *dyamant of delyt*. Courtly love poetry of this period often used luxurious imagery such as rich jewelry and precious stones to express beauty. This is particularly apparent in the work of Dunbar and Drummond. Compare Drummond, 'Songs', l.vi.7-11: 'Your pure and burnish'd Gold, your Diamonds fine. /Snow-passing Ivorie that the Eye delights: /Nor Seas of those deare Wares are in you found, /Vaunt not, rich Pearle, red Corral, which doe stirre /A fond desire in Fooles to plunge you Ground'. In this extract Drummond, like the 'Tayis Bank' poet, merges the natural and the artificial to praise the poet narrator's object of desire, elevating her beauty beyond the realms of both. See See Jack, Carpenter and Dunnigan, 2007.

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