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What's the 'Matter'?: Medieval Literary Theory and the Irish Campaigns in *The Bruce*

R. D. S. Jack

As Arestotill, giff as men redis
He had folowyt his kindly dedis,
He had bene fals and covetous,
But his wyt maid him virtuous
(*Bruce*, IV, 740–3)

I 'Strange Lines'

John Barbour's *Bruce*, composed in the mid 1370s, is the first long poem in the Scots vernacular. It contains twenty books, the first thirteen of which trace the Wars of Liberty from their origins until triumph at the Battle of Bannockburn. At this point the Irish 'matter' enters the poem. Chronologically, this is understandable. After all, when Bruce won control of Scotland, the 'opening up of a second front in 1315 could have come as little surprise to Edward II'.[1] Most modern readers, however, find Barbour's treatment of that campaign an unwise artistic choice.

When one analyses the Irish material in more detail these worries are confirmed. Barbour does not just give a parenthetic nod in the direction of chronology and chronicles. The entirety of Book XIV (554 lines) is devoted to Edward's embarkation in Ireland and the early battles in his campaign. The first 265 lines of Book XV continue the description. A resounding victory over the Anglo-Irish army suggests success for his endeavour. But while the opening to Book XVI (334 lines) continues the victorious tale and brings King Robert I to the island, doubts begin to dominate. Divisions between the two brothers and flaws in Edward's character anticipate failure. This possibility is realised in Book XVIII. In the first 242 lines of that book an adventure which began with victory over the Anglo-Irish forces ends with defeat at the same hands. Edward Bruce dies, his failure gives new hope to Edward II of England (XVIII, 229–31) and the Irish 'matter' ends.[2]

[1] Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1991), 125.

[2] References and quotations follow *Barbour's Bruce*, ed. Matthew McDiarmid and James

The topical and structural implications raised here are serious. Topically, Barbour's critics wonder why, in a poem about liberty, the clear lesson taught by Bruce's victory over English power is blurred by extended analysis of a failed Scottish attempt to deprive another land of its freedom. Structurally, they believe the first Scottish 'makar' or 'word builder' is creating a poor edifice. Either it should end with Bannockburn and eliminate the Irish material or that material should itself be re-organised. Why, for example, does Barbour move backwards and forwards from Ireland to Scotland, from Edward Bruce to (predominantly) Sir James Douglas in a poem about Bruce? (See Books XV, 319–574; XVI, 335–510; XVIII, 259–436.) Can he not decide on his hero or his topic?

Factual criticisms follow. As Barbour's editors highlight,[3] he promises historical 'suthfastnes' in Book I (1–20) yet his account includes four different kinds of 'lie'.

(1) Events: He simplifies events, for example merging Edward Bruce's two campaigns into one (XIV, 1 > XV, 265).

(2) Characters: He simplifies characterisation. Stereotypes dominate with all candidates for heroism (and particularly Edward Bruce) being measured against criteria of courage and wisdom. The historical cast list is also reduced. For example, Richard Clare's dominant role as English leader is achieved by granting him positions he did not hold and placing him in battles he never attended (e.g. XIV, 254–7: as Lieutenant of Ireland; XIV, 389–91 as Earl of Ulster).

(3) Anecdotes: He adds unauthorised anecdotal evidence. One example is when Bruce halts his entire army until a pregnant washer-woman has been safely delivered (XVI, 275–96).

(4) Structures: The linear calendar of chronicles sometimes gives way to other patternings of history. Mythically, in Book XIV, 312–16 Edward Bruce is compared with Judas Maccabeus. In terms of Christian history the dates and events surrounding the siege of Carrickfergus (Book XV, 98–108; 243–53) are manipulated to place them within Easter week. Mysteriously, numerological patterns, mostly associated with the fortunate number three, are introduced (e.g. XVI,1–4; 49–52).[4]

Stevenson, Scottish Text Society, 3 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1978–81). I have normalised 'y' to 'th'; 'w' to 'v'.

[3] A.A. M. Duncan's edition, *John Barbour: The Bruce* (Edinburgh, 1997) has excellent historical notes.

[4] The direct ontological signing power of numbers was, in medieval times, based on Job

At best, such critics damn Barbour with faint praise. The origins of Scottish literature are bound to be naïve, even when the author concerned is a learned archdeacon and university graduate. This study proposes a different approach. Modern concerns about the poem derive from modern critical expectations. How do these criticisms fare when approached from a diachronic perspective?

To begin with, the different kinds of 'lie' noted only exist if one's criterion for accuracy is mimetic and naturalistic. That these 'errors' are all measured against political evidence also reflects a predominantly realistic or materialistic world vision. The structural issues, for their part, derive from supposed imbalances within the natural story line. But are these, realistic, mimetic, political and naturalistic assumptions shared by Barbour? What was *his* training? How did *he* define the 'truth' of his poem? For if he worked from different artistic premises, we may still find his work synchronically dissatisfying but we cannot dismiss him as a naïve artist.

The biographical evidence concerning Barbour is at best patchy but one fact provides a secure basis for examination. As McDiarmid has convincingly argued, he was a learned man with a Scottish degree followed by study in Paris, then the centre of European Aristoteleanism.[5] This effectively removes the assumption of early critical naivety. As Christian and Aristotelian, Barbour lived at the time of Chaucer's 'newe science' (*Parlement of Foules*, 24–5) when Greek theory met Scholastic refinement. As Minnis has demonstrated, this period saw the full flourishing of the twelfth century renaissance in literary theory: 'From the thirteenth century until the end of the Middle Ages, Aristotle was *the* Philosopher.' He concludes that 'no other branch of poetic theory would have so long and prestigious a history in Western Europe'.[6] Using only the most basic motifs within that tradition – the causal line and the categories of allegory – I shall re-consider the critical problems outlined above.[7]

38.4–7 and the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 11.17–20. See John MacQueen, *Numerology* (Edinburgh, 1985), 1–46 [14].

[5] McDiarmid I, 4–5.

[6] *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott (Oxford, 1988), 1–11 [9]. In this Introduction as in his *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (London, 1984) Minnis convincingly refutes the idea that medieval literary theory was at once peripheral, naive and conducted on rigorous theological premises.

[7] A summing up of these premises, and of the 'causal line' is provided by Timothy A. Robinson in *Aristotle in Outline* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1995). For accounts of the causal line and allegoresis in the commentating tradition see *Medieval Literary Criticism* 12–64 and 321–4, 396–8 respectively.

What, then *are* the basic tenets of this 'new science'? Dante (1265–1321) arguably the greatest Scholastic poet provides a valuable guideline. For him the problems we have encountered at the literal level of interpretation are not the end of the matter. Instead he asks his readers to see such 'versi strani' (strange lines) as signs that fiction has translated truth in different terms, accessible only to those who seek them out (*Inferno* IX, 61–3). With this in mind, I shall reconsider the factual, topical and structural problems encountered in both the Irish matter of the *Bruce* and, where apposite, the poem as a whole. To do this, I shall concentrate on Aristotle's position classically while employing Hugh of St Victor (c1096–1141) Geoffrey of Vinsauf (fl 1198–1216) and Dante as touchstones for the Scholastic approach.

II Medieval Poetics: 'The Final Cause'

The first factual difficulty noted is, in Dr Johnson's terms, Barbour's sin 'against the faith of chronicles.' The Irish campaign as described in the *Bruce* merges Edward Bruce's first advance to Ardee in September 1315 with his later, November campaign into Leinster, Kildare and Leix. The many historical inaccuracies which result dominate the notes of his editors . Nor is the Irish section alone in offering apparent lies of this kind. Throughout the poem, obvious perversions of fact are presented from the outset. In Book I, Edward I is lengthily condemned for returning viciously from a crusade he never went on (I:139–48) while Douglas's father, against all evidence is transformed into a patriotic martyr figure. (I:282–5) Nor should it be forgotten that these are knowing lies. The *Bruce* reveals that its author had read many of the texts whose evidence he denies including Fordun, Guido de Columnis and Gaulterus Anglicus.

The major assumption here is that Barbour's prime aim is imitation of the actual. But the most basic categories of Scholastic thought propose a different end. Aristotle, as Scholasticism's prime source, proposed an essentially causal account of knowledge which was applied in different ways across all disciplines. When the final cause (*causa finalis*) in that line was applied to Rhetoric and Poetics effective moral persuasion of a given audience emerged as the aim rather than mimesis *per se*, 'It is . . . the hearer that determines the speech's aim and object.' (*Rhetoric* I.3.1358b1). The same view is mirrored by Dante when reflecting on his *Divina Commedia*. The poet, he

comments, aims 'to remove those living in this life and bring them to a state of happiness'.[8]

Therefore the pertinent question is no longer 'Does the poem represent life accurately?' It becomes 'Which audience was Barbour addressing?' A reasonably clear answer is available. Records indicate that Barbour wrote under the patronage of Robert II and was paid for writing the poem.[9] That the *Bruce* looks forward to a golden age under that King is consistent with this evidence as is its warning that an alliance between king and nobles is needed to fulfil this 'Stewart Myth.' Interestingly, it is in Book XIII, after the account of Bannockburn and immediately before the Irish campaign is described that Barbour looks forward to the sixth year of Robert II's reign and prophesies in this way.

> God graunt that thai that cummyn ar
> Off his ofspring manteyme the land
> And hald the folk weill to warand
> And mayteyme rycht and leawte
> Als wele as in his tyme did he. (XIII, 718–22)

Only if the weak figurehead nobles of Richard II's time listen to the poem and follow the example of their predecessors under Robert I will that golden age emerge.

This hypothesis is clearly supported in Aristotelean and Scholastic thought. For Aristotle the end of poetry as branch of Rhetoric is not only affective, it is affective within the area of practical morality. Thus its aim is 'to urge us either to do or not to do something' (*Rhetoric* I.3.1358b1). Dante agrees. Poetry belongs to the 'branch of philosophy (dealing with) morals or ethics . . . not for speculation but with a practical object' ('Can Grande' §16). To understand why this is so, the first cause in the line of analysis must be introduced.

III Medieval Poetics: 'The Efficient Cause'

Once the 'end' of medieval making is understood in persuasive terms, it is easier to see why characters as well as events may be understood as factual lies

[8] Dante, 'Epistle to Can Grande' §15 (Cited in Minnis, 462).
[9] McDiarmid I, 7–11 [10].

which point to moral truths. To make this clearer, the first – authorial – cause has to be drawn in. The poet/orator in Aristotelean terms is called the 'efficient cause' (*causa efficiens*) in two senses. The first highlights artificiality – he is 'effective' within the disciplinary code of rhetorical persuasion; the second signs the presence behind him of the Original Cause (God) outside of time and text. The latter will be discussed more fully later. At this point it may be noted that it explains the most frequently noted 'lie' of all, Bruce's genealogical transformation into an unhistorical amalgam of grandfather (Competitor), father (Earl of Carrick) and self (I: 37 – 478) mysteriously signs the Christian God, three in one.

The more basic authorial issue of effectiveness demands further changes of perspective from the modern reader. Poetry in that time was defined artificially as a verbal signing system whose categories were assumed to differ from those of the world and, therefore, make accurate, naturalistic imitation impossible. (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.2.1357b1; *Poetics* I.1.1447a10). Even if it were obliquely available to the 'maker' it was always viewed as an easier (and therefore inferior) option. Geoffrey of Vinsauf in his *Poetria Nuova* for example, calls the line of nature 'sterile' and compares it unfavourably with the 'fertile' invented endings of art. (97 – 102)[10]

It was also defined aurally and memorially as the opening to the *Bruce* reminds us (I: 1 – 6; 13 – 16). These considerations make simplification of events and characters not an aberration but the appropriate aim of a morally persuasive art. As Hugh of St Victor had noted, 'memoria' is only effective when 'reducing to a brief and compendious outline things which have been written or expressed at great length.'[11] Another agreement between memorial and poetic theory is relevant here and highlighted by Mary Carruthers. Both simplify for the same, tropological end – 'the formation of moral virtues.'[12] Barbour's simplification of the two Irish campaigns and his deployment of Clare as a conveniently malevolent English anti-type to Scottish virtue would, therefore, recommend themselves memorably and morally.

By defining himself as a writer of Romance (I: 446) rather than chronicle, however, he assumes to himself another non-realistic freedom. While, like the historian, he must pay attention to the particular and the actual, his specialised

[10] Ernest Gallo, *The Poetria Nuova and its Sources in Early Doctrine* (The Hague, 1971), 21. Quotations follow this text.

[11] *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St Victor*, ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor (New York, 1961), Book III, Chapter 3:11, 93. Quotations follow this text.

[12] See Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge, 1990), 156 – 188 [156].

talent should be directed towards kinds and potentiality. The poet's prime function goes beyond what actually happened to embrace what *might* happen (*Poetics* 9.1451a).[13] That is, instead of concern with actuality, mimetic realism, and politics as expressed in writing, the medieval writer highlights potentiality, aurality, artifice, and practical morality. How does this affect our reading of his 'lies'?

Most obviously an affective piece of oratory designed to move the figurehead nobles of Robert II's court to courageous action would account, in the Irish section, for Douglas being set up as the major counter-type to Edward Bruce. More broadly, it explains why a lengthy passage (I: 274–444) confirming that nobleman as a type of courage, loyalty and prudence and containing the 'lies' about his father's martyrdom precedes any detailed description of the king himself. But if the poet wants to establish an easily memorable moral icon of chivalric perfection against which lesser men may be measured, both length and historic inaccuracy become justified. The poem, then, does have two heroes as the opening suggests (I: 29). And at the end, it is Douglas who completes his king's desired crusade and Douglas's death which leads into the dénouement via another long and explicit statement of his knightly virtues. Those who thought of poetry as a set of signs destined to instil good action would have applauded the artist for pointing to higher truths rather than cavilling about factual errors.

The modern concern that Barbour fails to present real people and instead measures his heroes and villains against the twin classical ideals of wisdom (*sapientia*) and courage (*fortitudo*) (e.g. I, 22; 2, 263 etc.) would not have been shared in the Middle Ages either. Aristotle, after all, had given poetry philosophical primacy over the historian precisely because 'its statements are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are singulars' (*Poetics* 9, 1451b1). As a result it imitates not 'a given individual. but . . . a given type' (*Rhetoric* I.2.1356.b1). As a vehicle for presenting Ideas, the humourised character was also more evidently a product of artifice and more easily assimilated in the memory. Stereotypes were, therefore, highly regarded within the commentating tradition.

Nor are Barbour's heroic types confined to Homer's qualities of courage and wisdom. He adds Virgil's test of 'pietas' (moral goodness). Thus, while Edward I may match Bruce in martial wisdom and bravery, his character and motivations are overtly evil, with any historic evidence suggesting the

[13] Quotations follow *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ., 1984).

contrary being omitted or re-written to keep that opposition persuasively clear.[14]

Viewed in aural, artificial and affective terms, the Irish matter confirms this simplified, moralised methodology. Historians stress the difficulty in determining 'the motives which lay behind the Irish expedition'.[15] In Barbour's poem only one reason is presented for its ambitious initiation and ultimate failure. Edward Bruce anticipates Shakespeare's Hotspur in his pride and immoderate ambition (XIV, 1–7; XVI, 325–34). The Shakespearean example underlines the fact that we are here concerned with simplified mythic patterns of history.

It is important to remember, at this point, that many medieval historians also felt free on these grounds, to pattern and even invent facts so that the higher aim of moral 'suthfastnes' be clearly transferred to their audience. As Goldstein and others have demonstrated, when Barbour deserts the faith of chronicles, he need not always claim the freedom of the poet to justify himself; he need only define which side he has joined in the Historiographers' War.[16]

And in that context, the apparent loss of focus, moving attention from Edward Bruce to Douglas in three of the 'Irish' books can be seen in a more positive light. The opening account of Douglas's youth established him as Hotspur's counter-type, the wise, courageous Henry Bolingbroke. If Shakespeare, in his fictive presentation of the Tudor myth, contrasts Henry IV's wisdom against the intemperate rashness of Hotspur, so Barbour in his much earlier Stewart myth concentrates on Edward Bruce's lack of restraint in selfish pursuit of honour. Chronicles are denied or manipulated to present his listeners with two clearly contrasted alternative models for their own behaviour. To make that choice even easier the underlying selfishness of Edward Bruce's conduct is explained in the same vicious terms – pride (XVIII, 83) reserved elsewhere in the poem for Edward I and the devil.

Both Barbour and Shakespeare extend analysis beyond individuals to relationships and the ability to accept good counsel. The challenge of liberty is not dependent on the king alone; it involves all levels of society with the nobility having, once more, a key medial position in maintaining the hierarchical harmony. Rather than criticising Barbour for his lack of psychological nicety one should perhaps praise him for patterning his extended oration in such a way

[14] Edward's genuine claims to the throne for example are played down while his Christianity is called into question by his return from the invented crusade.

[15] Lynch, *Scotland: A New History*, 125.

[16] R. James Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland* (Lincoln, Neb., 1993). Chapters 2, 3.

that these qualities are repetitively, and therefore effectively, recommended in action.

IV Medieval Poetics: 'The Material Cause'

This naturally draws in both the second stage of the causal line and introduces the third kind of anecdotal 'error' factually. What is the causal 'matter' (*causa materialis*) of the *Bruce* and how (if at all) does the Irish material contribute to it? As it is in this context that the Irish section is singled out uniquely for criticism this part of the argument is crucial.

The naturalistic, political argument which produces these problems can be swiftly summed up: 'The theme, as presented in Book 1 is a simple one which may be encapsulated in the single line, "A fredome is a noble thing". The 13 books which lead to Bannockburn not only illustrate that theme clearly and triumphantly, they also suggest that, politically, the *Bruce* anticipates a democratic approach to government, fitting for a nation later to be defined in terms of the democratic intellect. The Irish section, however, is at odds with this model. Even if one sees it in Goldstein's terms as 'another war of liberation urged by a Gaelic people united against English oppression' (197) rather than a dubious attempt to enforce Scottish power in a foreign land – the aim remains less clearly libertarian. Tonally and structurally the Irish expeditions are also unsatisfactory. The major hero, Bruce, loses and passes from defeat to death. Douglas then carries his heart on crusade before himself dying. And although a new order is promised by one of Edward Bruce's wise counsellors – Randolph – the work ends on a whimper.'[17]

Again, a medieval Aristotelean would find these premises unconvincing. As a philosopher, his views on liberty differ markedly from those advanced by Barbour's critics. For him, liberty was anything but a clear and absolute concept. Linking it with justice and defining it contingently, he concluded that no system of social justice could offer freedom to all. The idea of democracy did not appeal either; he preferred hierarchical systems, and opted for benevolent leadership as the best, failed model available.[18]

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[17] Duncan, *John Barbour: The Bruce* regards the final holy section of Book XX as such a 'perfunctory obit' that he does not even print lines 607–30 of the poem.

[18] This discussion of Liberty in the *Bruce* is presented at greater length in my earlier article "(A!) Fredome is a noble thing!", *Scottish Studies Review,* I (2000) 26–38, [29–31]. See also Curtis N. Johns, *Aristotle's Theory of the State* (Basingstoke, 1990).

As a poetic theorist, the stolidly political premise of the argument would have troubled a man who had quidditatively allowed the poet freedom to range persuasively across the entire allegorical range. For although he believed that the end of poetic persuasion *was* limited to the practical and the ethical, mimesis remained the means to that final cause. And here, uniquely, the poet could range across the entire sentential hierarchy. For Aristotle and the Scholastics, the literal/historical level of application was part of this but only as the foundation of a poetic building whose medial verbal courses concerned moral practice and theory and which rose at its highest levels to religion and anagogy. Constructing these allegorical levels of application remained the true task for the 'word builder's artistry'.[19]

And where in this topical hierarchy did the political vision come? It stood below the philosophical, the divine and the ontological. At these higher levels alone absolute values might exist. Political themes were lower simply because they were humane or 'trivial' in the terms of the Seven Liberal Arts. As Aristotle himself noted, 'It would be strange to think that the art of politics or practical wisdom is the best knowledge since man is not the best thing in the world' (*Nichomachean Ethics* VI.7.1141a1).

So what precisely is the libertarian theme which frames the Irish material? Far from simply stating that liberty is a noble thing, Barbour admits that its definition is humane and therefore contingent. Only those who have known the contrary state of thraldom, can understand freedom, because politically speaking, 'contrar thingis ever-mar, Discoveringis off the tother ar.' (I: 241–2). He is now on the verge of Boethius' hydra theme as described in Book IV Pr. 6 of *De Consolatione Philosophiae.* The hydra's body is human free will; its innumerable tentacles, the different questions human liberty raises in all disciplines from politics to metaphysics. In medieval times, this problem was related to the question of justice human and divine.[20] It was also in this context, that the feudal vow's value as a microcosm for dialectical analysis was recognized. The strengths and limitations of that bond could be variously examined across all levels of application from the personal and the marital via politics and morality to the Old and New Testaments.[21]

And that is precisely what Barbour does. In true Scholastic fashion, he follows his contingent (unclear) Aristotelean premise by testing it against the

[19] Hugh of St Victor outlines the architectural metaphor and discusses its implications in *Didascalicon*, Books V and VI.

[20] See Charles S. Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice* (Baltimore, 1958) 57–69.

[21] See Beatrice's speech in Dante's *Paradiso* V, 16–84.

most difficult case possible. Kings and nobles may talk of liberty but what of the lowest ranks? How can even the most just society guarantee liberty to a serf when he is feudally bound to obey at once his wife and his lord, whose demands may be instantaneously invoked yet be mutually exclusive? The length of this exemplum – it covers thirty two lines (I, 243–74) – as well as the openly admitted failure to solve it other than mysteriously (I, 243–74) indicate its importance and confirm the broad allegorical context within which liberty is introduced.

Nor should the sympathy shown to the thrall be taken as a sign that Barbour advocates political democracy. While the first Book foresees Scotland's success in the wars of liberty and attributes it to all levels of society placing country before self, the reason for that is not political but mysterious. God, ineffably, has decided Scotland's fate beyond time (I, 34–6; 131–4; 176–7; 606–9). Barbour, therefore, is not a hypocrite as some critics suggest. He did own serfs but he did not advocate a level society. Throughout the Romance (IX, 64–72; also II, 170–4; 504–10; III, 755–62) and in the Irish section particularly (XIV, 101–3; 330–1 XVI, 1–14; 305–17), he consistently sides with Aristotle's favoured mode of government – hierarchy under a benevolent leader.

The Christian God's position as 'original cause' also explains many of the anecdotal additions to the poem, including the example of Bruce and the washer-woman. Its unauthorised presence is consistent with the medieval view of history which accepted that its subject was at best a repository of illustrative examples rather than a record of facts. It is necessary to show that Bruce possesses the defining New Testament virtue of mercy and so the washerwoman enters the tale.

V Medieval Poetics: 'The Formal Cause'

It is within these parameters of difference that the remaining formal issues have to be considered. Do the broad criticisms raised at the outset concerning the Irish matter's structural ineffectiveness and topical irrelevance remain when the '*causa formalis*' comes under scrutiny? Does the last link to be considered in the causal chain remove those doubts about confused chronology outlined in the fourth group of 'lies'?

Certainly, the criteria used to define these problems have already been discredited. The natural line of organisation is, for Aristotle and the commen-

tators only the foundation of the poetic structure. More difficult, more varied and more artistic are the artificial orderings of 'matter' which reflect hidden, allegorical truths. As Hugh puts it, 'After the reading of history, it remains for you to investigate the mysteries of allegories' (*Didascalicon,* Book VI, Chapter 4). On these grounds different kinds of patterning reflect its polysemous nature. They are not signs of confusion but of the verbal architect's precision because 'History follows the order of time; to allegory belongs more the order of knowledge' (*Didascalicon*, Book VI, Chapter 6).

The fullest account of the various 'ordines artificiales' possible is found in Vinsauf's *Poetria Nuova*. With it as authority, how might the linear and patterned courses of the *Bruce* have appeared to a fourteenth century audience?

The major artistic advantage of artificial construction is its freeing of the story line from the single order of time. For example, the centre of the tale may become the major focus. 'The high point of the work does not radiate only from the very end, but has a double glory: the end of the work and the middle, Art can draw a pleasant beginning out of either' (*Poetria Nuova*, 118–20). This bias might be signed by 'amplificatio'. Within the artificial structuring of the *Bruce*, therefore, Bannockburn *has* a major focus – as centre of the construction (Books X– XIII) – and this is signed by making it the longest single episode.

The Irish episode's valid structural and topical relationship to the story of Liberty is further confirmed. Ireland enters that story as the first example of liberty's obverse side, thraldom, within the subtle Aristotelean argument, 'As Walis was and als Ireland, That he put to swilk thrillage' (I, 100–1). The Scots learn from this negative example and oppose Edward I, winning a triumphant, series of victories which are absolutely guaranteed being God-determined. The question of how liberty may be maintained, without necessary divine aid, is considered after Bannockburn in the Robert II passage. It is in this context as an examination of the limits of 'actual' rather than 'absolute' liberty that the Irish passage is needed to carry the libertarian argument forward.

This contrast between divine and humane in a poem whose final cause is an open-ended challenge to Robert II's nobles determines the other 'strange' structural choices. The movement of focus from Ireland to Scotland, from Edward Bruce to faithful followers like Douglas was seen to set an imperfect knight against his perfect counterpart rather than reflecting authorial indecision. The 'truth' taught at the end underlines this contrast. Anagogically, where harmony alone exists, Bruce and Douglas close heroic lives with holy

deaths. In the uncertain political world where divine protection is not guaranteed an open-ended story line reflects the uncertain future faced by Scotland's present rulers. These contrasted structures effectively offer the clearest possible challenge to these 'auditouris'; in the disparity lies both 'matter' and motivation.

Is there a means of checking this? As Hugh of St Victor argues, only the highest, spiritual courses of the verbal building reconcile all others. 'The deeper meaning admits no contradiction; it is always harmonious, always true' (*Didascalicon,* Book VI Chapter 11). Further, the good word builder only lays down the bricks of the story line *after* he has decided upon an appropriate form. The 'causa formalis' thus becomes a sign of the topic chosen.

So what would that form be in the *Bruce* if the diachronic hypotheses advanced so far have substance? Aristotle had no doubt that the unmoved mover had circular form and ruled the spheres (*De Caelo* I–II; *Physics* VIII; *Metaphysics* XII).[22] Boethius popularised the idea and Vinsauf highlighted that form within his list of artificial orderings, 'The part which comes first in order awaits outside the door of the work; but let the ending enter first, a fitting precursor, and let it pre-empt the seat, like a more worthy guest, or almost like the host itself. Nature has placed the ending last, but the veneration of art defers to and, lifting up the lowly, raises it on high' (112–7).

When the hermeneutic issue is posed in this way, the structural 'lies' which opened this study become self-evident proofs. Mythically, a circular ordering is suggested. By comparing the Scots to the Maccabeans Barbour invokes the Christian parallel with Israel and a journey which led from Spain via Ireland to Scotland. The latter half of the poem with its Irish passage in which Edward Bruce is compared to Judas Maccabeus (XIV, 312–6) and Douglas goes to Spain in the holy cause offers a historical pattern which returns to its origins.

If this pattern is only suggested, the allegorical and anagogical circles are much clearer. Numerologically, the 630 lines of Book 20 exactly mirror the 630 lines of Book 1. The final verse paragraph of Book 20 echoes the end of the first verse paragraph in Book I and each celebrates that God outwith time who knows the end of the narration before it began. (I, 129–35). Prophetically too, Bruce's victory is announced, alpha within omega, at the outset (II, 85–90).

[22] Lindsay Judson's article, 'Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover' in *Self-Motion: From Aristotle to Newton,* ed. by Mary Louise Gill and James G. Lennox (Princeton NJ., 1994), 155–71 offers a good account of this area in Aristotle's thought.

Even the 'strange' factual 'lie' of Edward I's non-existent crusade is explained when artificial circularity is contemplated. That invention allows a perfect exemplary antithesis to be presented. At the start, the English king gives up a holy war for materialistic reasons; at the end, Bruce defeats death to complete *his* crusade.

Even the last group of factual lies associated with the Irish episodes are explained by this account of structure. Christian history and, most significantly, the relationship of the Easter week to its penitential cause, the fall of Adam, may defy chronicles. But when the auditouris hear that a truce was called 'in sic tyme as on Pasche day/Quhen God rais for to sauf mankin/Fra wem of auld Adamys syne' (248–50) they are reminded of those higher spiritual values and immutable ontological 'facts' which are part of the poem's persuasive end. Similarly the substitution of significant dates and numbers for actual ones point beyond contingency and facts to divine ordering and the mysteries of the Wisdom of Solomon – 'Thou hast ordered all things by number and weight'.

Every one of the 'strangenesses' noted at the start of this study has now been re-translated in alternative 'truthful' terms. This has been done while confining diachronic evidence to the most widely held ideas and most influential writers within the medieval commentating tradition. In particular, the relevance (in artistic, topical, structural and persuasive terms) of the most frequently criticised section of all, 'the matter of Ireland,' has been demonstrated. It is, therefore, perhaps time to stop blaming Barbour for doing badly things he wasn't attempting in the first place.

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