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Matthew P. McDiarmid

*Rauf Colyear, Golagros and Gawane, Hary's Wallace:
Their Themes of Independence and Religion*

Early Scots chroniclers say that Edward I was on his way to the Holy Land, or was about to go there, when the disputed Scots succession tempted him to play the conqueror. One wonders if in *Golagros and Gawane* the idea of Arthur journeying to the Holy Land, and en route succumbing to a like temptation was suggested by the statement of the chronicler.

Edward's first action in war is described by Andrew Wyntoun who had access to the now lost records at St. Andrews. It is the taking of Berwick and massacre by his soldiery of inhabitants of both sexes, young and old, not excluding priest and nun, till stopped by one incident:

Thus were þai slayand þare sa fast
All þe day ouer, quhill at þe last
The King Eduard saw at þat tyde
A woman slane, and of hir syde
A barne he saw fall out sprewland,
Besyde þe moder slane lyand.
"Laisses!, Laisses!", þan cryit he,
"Lief of!, Lief of!", þat word suld be.

The relevance of this passage to the following argument is its illustration of the two sides of man's nature in war.

For my argued conviction of a single authorship of the above poems I must refer you to my edition of *Wallace*,¹ though further points are added

¹*Hary's Wallace*, ed. Matthew P. McDiarmid. 2 vols., STS, 4th Series, 4-5 (1968-9),

here, particularly the common concern with the theme of [or question] of killing. For the man, we have Dunbar's reference to him in 1505 as having been blind and being now dead. We can dismiss John Mair's vivid picture of him, painted forty years after the *Wallace* (c. 1478), a blind-born bard fed and clothed by his betters, dismiss it first because of Hary's careful reading of Barbour, Wyntoun, *Scotichronicon*, *Scalacronica* in French, perhaps both the *Alexandre* and *Percival* in French, the *Historia Karoli Magni*, Boethius, so many romances, Chaucer of course. Then there is his fond use of legal terms such as a landholder would know, his use of military terms and patent knowledge of real warfare, soldiers, he observes, "want thai fud thai rak nocht of the laiff" (anything else). Perhaps he soldiered in France, hence his use of French terms; *rue*: *rew*; *père d'armes*: *fadir* in armis; *en roel rouge* (as a red circle) Scotticized identically as "in ruall ay of reid" both in *Rauf* and *Wallace*. Blindness came perhaps with the bursting of the cannon that killed his mentioned friends Wallace of Craigie, Ramsay of Colluthie, 1479. Another mentioned friend, Sir James Liddel, of the same Fife parish as Craigie and Ramsay (Auchtermontzie where the only MS was scribed), was baillie of the king's rebellious brother, the Duke of Albany, and was executed a little after the fall of the besieged castle of Dunbar. Stirring times and unfortunate friends, sharing a strong distrust of the king's policy of English matrimonial alliances, a policy that was indeed to make Scotland lose its independence some generations later. Last, he is at court only when it is at Linlithgow, in which area "Hary" is found as the *surname* of clerics, landowners and one knight.

But now to the mind in the poems. *Rauf* surprises us by having a serious Christian intent. Charlemagne storm-lost meets the testy, independent collier, in his house forgets that it is the host's place to show courtesy, and is felled for want of manners, as is Sir Kay in *Golagros*, "The hous is myne," says *Rauf* (ll. 146-7). The king still grateful bids the collier bring coals to court and ask for him by the name of Wymound. Back in Paris, where every "rew" is celebrating the best Yule France has ever known,² after Bishop Turpin's mass in Saint Denis Charles bids Sir Roland bring a man to him coming out of the country. Roland disapproves, this is a day for rest, Christian meditation, attendance at mass, an odd touch which tells us something

I, cviii-xxxii. Further references will be to book and line number, and will appear in the text.

²*Rauf* seems to notice Louis XI's inauguration of the uncanonical Feast of Saint Charlemagne 1475, see Monstrelet. Turpin's procession of priests is from *The Sege of Melayne* also used in *Wallace*.

about the author. His mission only angers Rauf who will see no one but Wymound, "Schir Knycht, it is na curtasie commounis to scorne."³

At court, Rauf thrusts through nobles only to hear Wymound, obviously the king, tell how rudely he was lessoned. The lords call for Rauf's death. Charles replies with a sentiment that would be strange in the circumstances, from a king of Hary's period, "I hald the counsall full euill that Cristin man slais" (l. 747), makes the collier a knight with armour to suit, no more the mere "rousty" blade such as young Wallace, too, once owned (II, 372). But to Rauf the king's words have meant nothing. He has but one idea of his new duty, to rush out and kill somebody, preferably Roland. In the event he mistakes a Saracen envoy for Roland, tries to kill him, and the two are only separated by the timely arrival of Roland with the better notion of converting him. He succeeds, though the offer of two duchies is not a particularly religious argument, they swear shield-friendship, a ritual that binds Wallace and Sir John the Graham.

The Christian way clearly means something to the poet, but there is more of it in the ironic *Golagros*. Arthur is on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to make an offering to the "saikles" (sinless) Christ, but a fine castle whose lord holds of no king speaks to the covetous conqueror in him. The admonitions of his good councillor Spinagros go unheeded. Returned, convincing siege-work begins, conveniently gives way to knightly encounters. Let widows weep, says the late pilgrim, he will "reve" his foes "their rentis." Knights are killed, he weeps for his own, praises God for one success, only to weep again when hearts burst at encounter, presumably as before for his own dead knight.

It is now that a theme enters religiously important here and in *Wallace*, only glanced at in *Rauf*, Fortune. A knight yielding to Arthur's Sir Kay says, "Quhair that fortune will fail/ Thair is na besynes may avail" (l. 865), but her action and meaning are made most clear in the fate and words of good Golagros. On a "brae" (slope) his "feit founderit him fra," and Gawain's knife is at his throat. He had spoken splendidly for his independence (ll. 447-53) when first asked to yield it. Still he refuses to submit, and Gawain, another Roland, feels as Charlemagne did, he has no wish to kill. Golagros thinks of one alternative. He will yield, but let his lords decide for themselves when they hear him. Here Hary's legal habit of mind come sin amusingly, how much better if he had Galagros's promise written down with "signete and sele," but he will trust in "Drichtin [God] sa deir." Another Hary touch, Wyntoun made Wallace's slain love his "lemman" (mistress), Hary gave the hero a wife and daughter, and that is what Golagros has, no

³Compare Spinagros, "It hynderis neuer to be heyndly of speche" (l. 358).

French *amie*. The lords accept Golagros's argument that the wheel of Fortune is driven by Christ, so he is obeying Christ's will. Will they still accept him as "gouvernor" (a term more applicable to Wallace)? They will. Arthur, till the grief-stricken, able only to exclaim more as landlord than great king, "Now is the Round Table rebutit [set back] richest in rent!," is so delighted that he releases Golagros from allegiance in full feudal form, all the proper legal terms employed.

Good knights dead for his greed, widows made to weep as he threatened, the result has made the action a sorry *Much Ado About Nothing*. The one thinking man with Arthur is Spinagros, who speaks for the poet. He condemns the whole enterprise, along with Arthur's pursuit of earthly power, that "lycht as Leif of the lynd" (l. 289) must come down, a thought similarly expressed in *Wallace*, "All warldly thing has nocht bot a sesoune" (IV, 9). He praises Golagros for a well known Christian virtue Arthur lacks, despite his great personal strength and his power, he is "meik as ane child" (l. 350). This is the only romance in which Arthur is a subject for religious ironic criticism. Perhaps after the *Wallace*, for I now think the latter is echoed in Golagros, as above noted, and it was written immediately before the romance, the poet could not take the knightly world seriously.

It is, of course, in *Wallace* that the opposition, the world's way and Christ's way, Caesar's demands and God's, as Christ so challengingly puts it, is more forcefully, even terribly, presented. Here is no happy resolution as in Golagros, no absurd all-friends-together ending as in *Rauf*, serious statements though both poems may make. This is The Tragedy of William Wallace, in that Fortune, the will of God, call it what you like, did not allow him to do or end other than he did.

Young Wallace, his father and brother killed, forced to flee from home with his mother, is first described thus, "Sad [grave] of countenance he was bathe auld and ying" (I, 201), a youth with a mission, only briefly able to know happiness. He is eighteen now, drawn and quartered at twenty-nine. From the first a cause has been forced on him, to kill his country's invaders where he can, and so is soon a prisoner in his native Newtoun of Ayr,⁴ near to death and questioning God's will to do anything for the right. In this mindless Fortune why "suld ony ensur"? Can it really be God that turns the wheel? (II, 214). And the question so many must ask, "Quhi will thow giff thi handewerk for nocht?" (II, 186). The answer is not in the English mistaking him for dead, throwing his body out to be taken and nursed back to

⁴It is not till later that there is record of a Wallace at Elderslie, Renfrewshire. Hary says his first nurse was "of the Newtoun of Ayr" (II, 258). His source will be his friend Sir William Wallace.

health by his old nurse, but in a vision that his friend Master John Blair, the name of a friend of Hary,⁵ interprets uncertainly. A lady who may "be our lady" but could be Lady Fortune blesses him, promises him reward only in heaven (VII, 130). Blair may not be sure, but we remember Golagros identifying fortune with the will of God (as did Dante), and so accepting it. Young Wallace could not, because of what he saw happen in Scotland. And after the vision comes the greatest of English atrocities. eighteen score of Western landowners are summoned to the Barns of Ayr to swear fealty, but are there hanged, his beloved uncle, sheriff of Ayr, among them. This in time of peace. Wallace has his revenge, fires the Barns, and watches till the flame had "that fals blud ourgayne" (VII, 470). Christ's way and that of either side are hardly the same, and the poet knows it.

Something of this knowledge is allowed to show even amid the ferocity of guerilla warfare that so repels us, and that Wallace introduces so successfully. He discriminates in this respect, that he always spares women, children, priests, something our bombs did not do in the last war. What are we to make of so-called Christians is the poet's cry for all the men necessarily dead in the defensive action of Elcho Park, English and Scots alike: "Of cristin blud to se it was gret syn / For wrangwis cause, and has beyn mony day (X, 224-5). And Wallace is aware always of what he does for his cause, prays every morning, then goes forth to kill. Earlier the poet had said of war in Europe, "it has na hap to ho" (VII, 196), it goes on and on.

It is just after the Elcho action that the poet introduces a new and interesting direction for Wallace's mind, his mother dies, all hi kin, his young wife, are dead, and "He seis the world sa full of fantase" (X, 853), everywhere unreal. This is developed in the great Book XI. At the Battle of Falkirk a Stewart refuses to acknowledge him as Governor. Wallace bitterly withdraws his men and merely covers the retreat. That day he sees Bruce, his rightful king fight on the English side, "Allace," he said, "the world is contrar-lik" (unnatural) (XI, 210). Next morning, on the battlefield "Among the ded men sekand the worthiast" (XI, 561), he finds and embraces the body of his shield-friend Sir John the Graham. At that moment something in Wallace seems to die too. When he covered the retreat at Falkirk it was said, "Mekill he trowys [trusts] in god *and* his awn weid" (weapons) (XI, 327), but he is felt now to be a lonely figure. There is always the cause, but can he rely on his own countrymen? He wins Bruce over to the Scots side, and doing that has won, but for himself there is only a frustrating and terrible end.

⁵Blair translated Mandeville's *Travels* for the king; Mandeville's idea of the Pope vouching for the truth of his narrative is used at the end of the *Wallace*.

With Bruce in Scotland he had meant to leave a fighting ever more unreal, and "serue God and the kyrk," (XII, 962) he had no wish to "bid her our lang" (XII, 1368). But waiting alone for Bruce to come he is seized by a treacherous friend, a Stewart, and sold to the English.

It is an invention of Hary that the returned spirit of an old English monk tells a young friend that Wallace is about to enter heaven, and the young man cried out "slauchter is to god abhominabill" (XII, 1283). I mention it here only as showing Hary's religious awareness of the great issue of killing even in a rightful cause.⁶ He gives the same awareness to his hero, who nonetheless cannot repent. He wants out of a world that has become so unreal. He dies steadfastly reading, held to his eyes, the psalter book of his boyhood. I think that in that picture the poet sees the only answer to his problem there can be, as the hero sees it too, the answer is with God, in Charlemagne's words, "na better bot God at the last" (p. 83, l. 31).

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⁶Doubtless Hary knew the Church's concept of a just war, but Scotland had found that the argument from power moved the Popes to the English side. In nuclear days can there be a "just war?" Was the concept ever Christ-like? Certainly Hary feels uneasy about war, whether just or unjust, despite his anti-English feelings.