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Grace G. Wilson

Barbour's *Bruce* and Hary's *Wallace*:
Complements, Compensations and Conventions



In 1488 and 1489, John Ramsay copied Hary's *Wallace* and John Barbour's *Bruce* into a pair of manuscripts.¹ John Jamieson edited them as a pair in 1820.² Before and after Jamieson, other readers felt a similar inclination to place the two poems side by side.³ This impulse is natural, for the *Bruce* and the *Wallace* are alike in several basic ways. The *Bruce*, finished by 1378, is the earliest long (13,645 lines in McDiarmid and Steven-

¹Matthew P. McDiarmid, editor, *Hary's "Wallace," Scottish Text Society* (hereafter *STS*), 4th series, 2 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1968-69), I, ix, n. 1. All citations from the *Wallace* are from this edition.

Matthew P. McDiarmid and James A. C. Stevenson, editors, *Barbour's "Bruce": "A freedom is a noble thing", STS*, 4th series, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1980-85). All citations from the *Bruce* are from this edition.

²John Jamieson, editor, *"The Bruce"; and "Wallace"* (Edinburgh, 1820).

³See, for example, Walter Scott in his Introduction to *The Lord of the Isles*: "I could hardly have chosen a subject more popular in Scotland than anything connected with the Bruce's history, unless I had attempted that of Wallace." *The Complete Poetical Works of Scott*, ed. Horace E. Scudder (Boston, 1900), p. 312. For comparison, see W. A. Craigie, "Barbour and Blind Harry as Literature," *The Scottish Review*, 22 (1893), 173-201, and George Neilson, "On Blind Harry's *Wallace*," *Essays and Studies*, 1 (1910), 85-112. See particularly Ian Walker, "Barbour, Blind Harry, and Sir William Craigie," *SSL*, 1 (1963-64), 205.

son's edition) Scottish narrative poem to survive. It covers the period from 1290 to 1332 and treats Robert Bruce's coming to power and his reign as King Robert I. The poem's expressions of patriotism and liberty are classic. When Hary wrote, some hundred years later, he probably saw his work as augmenting or even "surpassing Barbour's achievement."⁴ The *Wallace* too has a large subject: the rise, struggle, and martyrdom of William Wallace, the Scottish freedom-fighter who from 1296 until his execution in 1305 very actively resisted the occupation of Scotland by the English under King Edward I, Hammer of the Scots. The poem is long, 11,877 lines. Its tone is patriotic, if harshly so. Hary referred to Barbour's *Bruce* and borrowed many lines and images and even episodes from it, thereby himself seeming to invite comparison of the two poems.⁵

The *Bruce* and the *Wallace* stand out as great peaks among foothills. Regardless of the works written between 1350 and 1480 that have disappeared, their rediscovery could hardly change the towering influence of the *Bruce* and the *Wallace*.⁶ Together the two poems block out their own period of Scottish literary history, a period focused on and moved by the Wars of Independence.

Each work is a compilation of some facts and some lore about its hero. Each was accepted as a historical record, and each replaced much of the material that had gone into it. Each responded to questions that for various reasons could not be answered by the facts at hand.

One especially insistent question is whether Wallace and Bruce at any time came into contact, and if so, in what relationship. No evidence of their meeting has been discovered. Barbour's poem does not even refer to Wallace. The reason may be simply that Barbour did not want to include irrelevant material in his verse biography.⁷ But the presence of Wallace

⁴McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, lix. Friedrich Brie, in *Die nationale Literatur Schottlands* (Halle, 1937), p. 251, states his opinion that the *Wallace* was intended to augment the *Bruce*, not supplant it.

⁵See McDiarmid, *Wallace*, II, notes, pp. 129, 137, 138, and elsewhere, for spots in the poem where Hary may have borrowed from the *Bruce*. James Goldstein in some unpublished work is making a detailed study of Hary's use of Barbour.

⁶See Matthew P. McDiarmid, "The Northern Initiative: John of Fordun, John Barbour and the Author of the 'Saints' Legends," in *Literature of the North*, ed. David Hewitt and Michael Spiller (Aberdeen, 1983), p. 3.

⁷Agnes Mure Mackenzie, *An Historical Survey of Scottish Literature to 1714* (London, 1933), pp. 41-2, and Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh, 1958), p. 16.

might have been more diminishing than irrelevant, as he was a major Scottish patriot roughly contemporary with Bruce (Bruce b. 1275; Wallace, b. 1270?) who was martyred for Scottish independence before Bruce had even decisively joined the fight.

Hary's motives would have differed from Barbour's, for Wallace's reputation could only have benefitted from direct association with Bruce's progress toward kingship. While most historians agree that Wallace consistently fought, and governed, in the name of John Balliol,⁸ Hary shows him supporting Bruce (Book VII, lines 757-8; VIII, 146; XII, 965-7). He also presents two legendary encounters between Wallace and Bruce (XI, 442-547 and 588-619) which are central to the plot and tone of the poem but not sustained by historical evidence.⁹ Wallace, after somehow leading the Scots to kill 30,000 Englishmen at the Battle of Falkirk (XI, 435-6) despite receiving a severe wound from Bruce, is approached by Bruce on the banks of the River Carron. Wallace so effectively upbraids Bruce for fighting his countrymen that Bruce resolves to do so no longer, and the next day he promises Wallace that he will join the Scottish effort as soon as he can get free of his allegiance to Edward.

Hary, by so drastically bending and augmenting the facts, expresses a feeling that many readers of the two poems must share. By all accounts, more and less historical, Wallace and Bruce each had immense personal force and magnetism. It is natural for anyone with Scottish sympathies to wish—even to assume—that the two great Scottish warriors of the time had pooled their forces. (Consider, for example, their paired statues at the gate of Edinburgh Castle.) But historians have not been able to demonstrate that Wallace and Bruce worked together directly. It is as if again and again the record sets out to tantalize, and to encourage rumor-mongering, by just failing to make a connection between them. For example, Bruce murders John Comyn about six months after Wallace's death, in February of 1306, but scholarly attempts to find a link between the two events have not succeeded.¹⁰ The effort for Scottish independence closed

⁸For example, Andrew Fisher, *William Wallace* (Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 134, 138; and Lauchlan Maclean Watt, *Scottish Life and Poetry* (London, 1912), p. 58. McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, lxxv, n. 1, is an exception. G. W. S. Barrow, in *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh, 1988), p. xii, writes that in 1299 "Wallace . . . had a foot in the Bruce camp."

⁹See Barrow, p. 346, n. 61, and Fisher, p. 82 and p. 84, n. 27, for Bruce's possible support to the Scots at Falkirk.

¹⁰Fisher, p. 130. On the contrary, more indicative of their relationship may be the fact that Bruce, after submitting to Edward in 1302, was present on the English side at

the Wallace chapter before opening the patriotic Bruce one. But, sentiment preferring to see the two heroes on the same page, Hary makes the adjustment. Bruce's early coolness to the Scottish cause as embodied in Wallace can be more easily accepted if it is seen as part of a larger pattern in which Wallace, after battling on almost alone and dying a martyr, hands the cause over to Bruce. The ironic poignancy of the connection increases with Hary's staging of Wallace's capture during a period when Wallace is waiting to meet Bruce (XII, 979-82). Readers of the *Wallace* are less disheartened by their hero's doubts and setbacks because they can bear in mind Bruce's military and political successes to come. The lasting impression of Wallace left by the poem is of the seasoned patriot instructing the youth whose potential for kingship he can see despite obscuring circumstances. For Hary's version of history to have been so avidly taken up and propagated,¹¹ Hary must have known what it was that people wanted to believe, or perhaps already did believe.

History does not tell us, either, just what eventually made Bruce cast his lot with Scotland against Edward I. Hary offers us some sanguine imaginings, perhaps part of contemporary thinking. Like other popular literature of all periods, from anecdotes to sensational news stories, Hary's linking of Bruce and Wallace fills a gap. Many of his other contributions do the same thing. For example, Andrew of Wyntoun referred to "gret gestis and sangis" of "his gud deidis and his manheid," but gave no details.¹² Hary's readers, eager (as are we) for information about those years, must have gratefully accepted the "gestis" that Hary seems partly to have gathered up and partly to have fabricated. Then too, people would have wanted to know what Wallace was thinking before and during his execution,¹³ and Hary tells that. It is tempting to believe that the gap-filling

Happrew in 1305 (Fisher, p. 117). See Barrow, p. 344, n. 38, for the possibility that Bruce could have knighted Wallace. For a historian's treatment, appearing since the present article was written, of some closely related material, see Andrew Fisher, "A Patriot for Whom? Wallace and Bruce: Scotland's Uneasy Heroes," *History Today*, 39 (February 1989), 18-23.

¹¹Walter Scheps, "William Wallace and his 'Buke': Some Instances of their Influence on Subsequent Literature," *SSL*, 6 (1968-69), 220-37. See J. F. Miller, "Blind Harry's 'Wallace,'" *Records of the Glasgow Bibliographical Society*, 3 (1913-14), 1, for the large number of editions.

¹²The passage from Wyntoun is cited in McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, lxxviii.

¹³I have recently come across a quaint literary hoax which supports this idea: *The Trial and Execution of Sir William Wallace 1305*, by a Friend and Eye-witness "Scotus Ignotus," edited and annotated by William Jolly (Paisley, 1908).

stories which last are those which have some special rightness and resonance, even beyond their powers of simple wish-fulfillment.¹⁴

The overall similarities between the historical Wallace and Bruce have already been touched on. Their patriotism (once established), skill in warfare, particularly guerilla warfare,¹⁵ and general magnitude made them stand out. In most other respects, however, they diverged, sometimes widely: in their social class, their political capital and goals, the kind of opposition they faced, the arc of their careers, the manner of their deaths. To some degree, the historical Wallace and Bruce were natural complements: they were about as far apart as two men of their time could be and still accomplish so much. A major historical reason for the defeat of Wallace seems to have been that, unlike Bruce, he could not induce enough noblemen, of higher rank than his own, to unite behind him. But he himself filled a military and perhaps political vacuum by motivating common soldiers and making them readier by their skills and outlook to fight for a leader more national in his influence, as Bruce came to be.

Some of these historical differences are reflected in the literary treatments. Within his poem, each protagonist sums up patriotic heroism. But when juxtaposed, the two make a more complete whole—more complete, but less tidy, less clear-cut. Some gaps, such as the question about Wallace's influence on Bruce, are closed or at least patched over, but others open up; some are profound indeed.

A major difference between the *Bruce* and the *Wallace*, one that has understandably deterred some scholars from studying the poems together, is that the *Bruce* presents mostly historical fact, while the *Wallace* is mostly fiction. Strict historical investigators have found little in Barbour to complain of, especially after 1306.¹⁶ Hary's inventiveness stands out the more strongly with the *Bruce* serving as a foil for his poem.

¹⁴See Andrew Lang on Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather*, when he writes that Scott "gives us the cream of the anecdotes and semi-historical legends, which are what everybody ought to know." *Sir Walter Scott* (New York, 1906), p. 187.

¹⁵Most historians (for example, Fisher, p. 137) maintain that Bruce learned some of his martial technique from Wallace. Barrow, p. 92, amends that traditional wisdom: "Ironically, it was not the middle-class Wallace but the aristocratic Bruce who possessed the genius for guerilla warfare."

¹⁶Acceptance is not blanket, of course. See Wittig, p. 20; Barrow, pp. 312-13; and Lois Ebin, "John Barbour's *Bruce*: Poetry, History, and Propaganda," *SSL*, 9 (1971-72), esp. 224-8.

A second basic difference, one that must contribute to Barbour's greater reliability, is temporal: the amount of time that elapsed between the events and the poet's writing them up. Barbour recounted in the 1370s happenings of the years from 1296 to 1332. Several commentators have said that in his youth Barbour might have spoken to men who had fought at Bannockburn, and he would have known some of their descendants.¹⁷ This link with the history would have encouraged an apparently natural inclination to veracity.

By contrast, Hary, writing in the 1470s about the events of 1296 to 1305, could not have spoken to any eyewitnesses. Lord Hailes, and many historians since, have considered Hary to be "an author who either knew not history, or who meant to falsify it."¹⁸ A recent critic puts the matter delicately: the Wallace of the poem is "both a figure of history and a fiction of the poet's imagination."¹⁹ But unless Hary had a much vaster store of factual material at his disposal than now exists, he needed to invent a great deal of external and internal action in order to fill out a twelve-book poem.²⁰ Indeed, the very lack of information may have appealed to a man of Hary's novelistic talent.

A third difference between the *Bruce* and the *Wallace*, insofar as the scanty evidence allows a judgment, is in the relations of the two authors to the courts of their periods, and in the resulting tone of each work. Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen, received safe-conducts to travel twice to France and twice to Oxford to study, in 1372 was appointed clerk of audit of the king's household, and in 1373 and the early 1380s served more than once as auditor of exchequer.²¹ He might thus almost be described as courtly, at least in his functions. In light of Lois Ebin's conclusions about how seriously and closely the *Bruce* comments on Scottish politics of the years 1332 to 1375,²² we may infer that Barbour felt himself to be something of an insider at the court. As such, he would have been unlikely to come out too strongly against even such an ineffectual king as Robert II.

¹⁷See McDiarmid's Introduction to the *Bruce*, I, 3-4 and 39-40; and Wittig, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸David Dalrymple, *Annals of Scotland*, 3rd edition, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1818), I, 298-9.

¹⁹Elizabeth Walsh, "Hary's Wallace: The Evolution of a Hero," *SLJ*, 11 (1984), 18.

²⁰See McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, lxxv ff., and Brie, p. 253.

²¹Skeat, *Bruce*, I, xxix-xxxi.

²²Ebin, esp. pp. 236-42.

Supported by and supporting the powers that were, Barbour did his chastening in a relatively indirect, positive, and gentle fashion.

Hary, in partial contrast, seems to have been less close to the administration of his day. He is a more elusive figure in the records than Barbour, generally.²³ Five payments to him at court have been recorded,²⁴ but Hary proclaims that no one paid him to write his poem (XII, 1432-3). Despite his literary and martial knowledge, he must have been more of an outsider than Barbour. Thus, when he criticized the jealousy among Scottish nobles and the policy of accommodation with England that he perceived, he had less desire and less need than Barbour to moderate his tone or soften his message.

Two further major differences are matters less of historical fact than of literary effect. One is in the texture of the poems themselves. The *Bruce* seems more consistent in its build-up, more gradual, more linear, in spite of its greatly varying narrative pace,²⁵ its episodic construction, and its important secondary heroes James Douglas, Thomas Randolph, and Bruce's brother Edward. Bruce's own development seems to be in one direction, from defensive guerilla fighter to dignified and commanding ruler.²⁶ The episodes, though numerous, are channeled into the attainment of several goals: first, survival, then coronation, then the preservation and consolidation of the kingdom. For Bruce and Scotland both, those things had to be done, and in that order.

The *Wallace*, though intense, moves forward less smoothly. In the *Bruce*, scenes of fighting, except for the account of Bannockburn, are rather brief and are crucial in showing Bruce's development as a leader.

²³W. H. Schofield, *Mythical Bards and "The Life of William Wallace"* (Cambridge, MA, 1920), p. 12, thinks that "Hary" is a pseudonym. And Ranald Nicholson refers to "Blind Harry (or whoever wrote in his name) in" *Scotland: The Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1974), p. 489. The most recent opinion about the author is that "Hary" is "probably a surname" and does not refer to "the 'Blin Hary' lamented by Dunbar" [in "Lament for the Makaris"]. M. P. McDiarmid, "The Metrical Chronicles and Non-alliterative Romances," in *The History of Scottish Literature*, I, ed. R. D. S. Jack (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 32.

²⁴McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, xxviii-xxix.

²⁵See Ebin, p. 218: 408 lines cover the first nineteen years, over 6,000 the next nine, and more than 1,500 the two days of the Battle of Bannockburn.

²⁶See Bernice W. Kliman, "Speech as a Mirror of *Sapientia* and *Fortitudo* in Barbour's *Bruce*," *Medium Aevum*, 44 (1975), 160, on Bruce's "progress from outlaw king . . . to beloved, intelligent leader."

By contrast, the *Wallace* separates quite sharply the martial encounters from other kinds of events and from the exploration of psychological states. Wallace himself has several faces: boisterous young male, fighting machine, mourner, strategist, leader, sensitive reflective thinker, martyr. Whether shown in progression or more sharply juxtaposed, they reveal Wallace to have an even more fixed purpose than Barbour's Bruce: for Hary's Wallace, killing numberless Englishmen, freeing Scotland, and staying alive are inseparable goals, and most of the episodes advance them all.

A related difference between the poems, major if paradoxical, is that Wallace, with his violent and direct approach to conflict, is also the character whose inner life is portrayed in subtle detail. Hary records every step in his hero's emotional and intellectual and (eventually) spiritual journey. Wallace's sorrows could hardly be greater. His campaign against the English, even as reordered and expanded by Hary, is a losing struggle much of the time. His sacrifices are absolute: father and brother early on, then wife, uncle, friend of his bosom, other captains, liberty (through betrayal by a close friend), and finally life. For the historical Wallace, almost all his experience must have resembled Bruce's desperate months in the heather in 1306 and 1307. Even with Hary presenting the exploits as far more consistently effective than they were, the inevitability of exile or death is clear enough. Such a career would drive a man to introspection, whereas success, even after much effort and suffering, may not, as it does not in Bruce as interpreted by Barbour.

To sum up, where Bruce functions as a model, Wallace seems more primal, more an archetype. Barbour's Bruce is more consistent, closer to a "monolithic symbol"²⁷ than was the historical Bruce. He emerges as a not untypical man of his time, though on a grand scale. His virtues, in life as in the poem—courage, a sense of destiny, foresight, perseverance—are the kind that can and should be imitated, particularly by leaders or rulers.²⁸ The historical Bruce had a past, an ongoing position, however difficult, and a potentially royal future. Wallace, in contrast, would be very hard to copy. Much of his appeal, historical or literary, is that in his actions he never wavered. Where Bruce had single-mindedness thrust upon him, Wallace was born single-minded. His virtues and faults are inseparable. In fact, they are the same characteristics: love of fighting, and deep feel-

²⁷This phrase comes from A. M. Kinghorn, "Scottish Historiography in the 14th Century: A New Introduction to Barbour's *Bruce*," *SSL*, 6 (1968-69), 140.

²⁸Ebin, pp. 222, 237, and 242, argues convincingly that Barbour was holding Bruce up to Robert II as a model king of Scots.

ing, especially loyalty and vengefulness. His energy, his swift rise, his total commitment, all help make him unique. Where Bruce saw most things, except John Comyn, by the light of day, Wallace's illumination came from the torches of night raids and the flickers of phantasmagoria. As McDiarmid writes, "Wallace is himself the fire that he sees."²⁹ His powers of inspiration are also distinctively his. A product of extreme circumstances, he would not fit into any other kind of historical situation. In life as in the poem, his patriotism appears to have been innate, uncomplicated in his mind by feudal obligation or other ties with England. In his own time, those men who were more conventionally political must have found him something of an embarrassment,³⁰ a loose end, an odd man out (hence in part his absence from the *Bruce*), and while the *Wallace* presents him as affable and socially adept, it cannot entirely smooth the rough edges off his singularity. His history in the most important sense seems to begin with his death and martyrdom, when people must have begun to see how difficult he would be to replace.

The fact that Scotland had the two kinds of heroes—both dazzling, both examples, but only one of whom could be followed even at a distance—is a major reason that the period from 1296 to 1329 is so impressive in itself, and has been so fruitful for literature.

The images of the two heroes diverge in part because each poem is shaped by the literary habits of its period. In the effort to describe each work, critics have pointed out various generic components.³¹ For example, both poets use romance meters, and the *Bruce* shares with romance something of its enclosed world and its emphasis on knighthood. The *Wallace* contains several romance-like descriptive set-pieces (for example, III, 1-10; VI, 9-16; VIII, 1183-93) and the surprisingly courtly interview with the French-English queen (VIII, 1215-1468). Each poem recounts a struggle that is epic in its magnitude and desperation. Each shows the substantial influence of geste and ballad. Each aspires to be taken as history. First impressions might lead us to call the *Bruce* a verse biography-chronicle-romance-epic and the *Wallace* a verse biography-hagiography-romance-epic. Frustrating as such attempts to categorize must be, they help point up that the poems' failure to match neatly with the literary

²⁹McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, xciv.

³⁰See Fisher, p. 135.

³¹See Ebin, pp. 219-20.

norms is part of their nature and may help account for their popularity and influence.

But neither poem arose out of a vacuum. The *Bruce* has roots in what Kinghorn calls "Anglo-Norman romances of chivalry such as *Fierabras* and *Alexander*."³² Bruce does read the "romanys off worthi Ferambrace" to his men to divert them as they cross Loch Lomond in great danger (III, 435-66). These works do not depend as much upon self-discovery through love as do the more classic French romances that define the genre, but the set forms of portraiture and battle-description, the episodic construction, and the brisk movement, helped considerably by the octosyllabic couplet,³³ are all present and have carried over into the *Bruce*. Though more legendary in their foundations than Barbour's work, the Anglo-Norman models usually have some basis in history. Wittig believes the theme of the *Bruce* to be that "the conventional knightly virtues—prowess, chivalry, loyalty, patriotism itself—are of no account unless they are supported by the ideals of 'fredome' and 'richt.'"³⁴ Barbour, under the discipline of the actual events of both Bruce's time and his own, took the heroic narrative that had given voice to feudal, pre-national loyalties and enlisted it in support of national feeling. Using some romance conventions and adapting others, he carried verse-romance back towards its origins in *chanson de geste*.³⁵ By thus reaching into the literary past, he made his work express its time with notable firmness and consistency.

Hary drew on several different traditions but followed no single one as closely as Barbour did verse romance. The twelve-book format is particularly reminiscent of epic, as are the headlong speed of Wallace's movements and the scene that includes the lament for John Graham (XI, 553-86). Affinities with romance and with *geste* have been mentioned already,³⁶ as have the poem's historical pretensions. The handling of the entire period from Wallace's betrayal by Menteith until his execution is tragic, and the account of Wallace's death bears the marks of hagiogra-

³²Kinghorn, p. 139.

³³See Wittig, p. 23, and T. F. Henderson, *Scottish Vernacular Literature: A Succinct History*, 3rd rev. edn. (Edinburgh, 1910), p. 47.

³⁴Wittig, p. 13.

³⁵James Kinsley writes of the *Bruce* that "its spirit is that of the old *chansons de geste*". "The Mediaeval Makars," in *Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey*, ed. James Kinsley (London, 1955), p. 3.

³⁶For *geste*-like material in the *Wallace*, see McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, lxxviii-lxxiii.

phy.³⁷ The *Wallace* is unusual not only in the number and variety of its generic elements, but in their intensity: thinking about more than one at a time produces some strain in the reader's mind. For example, the overgrown boy who breaks the churl's back with a pole (II, 29-45) does not much resemble either Bruce's long-suffering adviser or Edward's martyred foe. Even in the fifteenth century, a period of more literary experiments and transitions than most, the *Wallace* stands out as a hybrid. The anomalous nature of the poem reflects its anomalous hero. As Wallace, man or literary figure, does not fit into established categories, neither does his poem.

More recent writers dealing with Wallace have faced the same problems Hary did. First, sharing the feeling that Bruce should have cooperated with Wallace, Jane Porter and Nigel Tranter, among others, linked them, Porter very closely.³⁸ Second, in the ongoing scarcity of documentation of Wallace's life, writers since Hary, more and less historically minded, have used his gap-filling rumors, legends, inventions, and the exploits borrowed from Bruce's career.³⁹ Wishful thinking lies behind most of these developments. In Wallace's case especially, the shape of historical achievement—sudden appearance followed immediately by a string of successes, then defeat and near-silence with some diplomatic activity, then less successful skirmishes, recapture, and execution—is as frustrating now as it was in the 1470s or 1480s. Hary did such an effective job of tidying up and filling out the historical record that his version became the accepted, popular one, if not the only one. Even the Wallace ballads that Child has recorded are based on Hary.⁴⁰ Given this apparent inclusion of all materials that Hary could find or make, the surprising thing is that the *Wallace* hangs together as well as it does.

McDiarmid submits that the force fusing the numerous and divergent generic components of the *Wallace* is Wallace's personality.⁴¹ For a hero who is so unvaryingly vengeful, Wallace does indeed develop, from an

³⁷See McDiarmid, *Wallace*, II, 277-9.

³⁸Jane Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs* (London, 1809), passim; Nigel Tranter, *The Wallace* (London, 1975), esp. pp. 147 and 185 ff.; and Sir George Douglas, *The Pageant of the Bruce* (Glasgow, 1911), pp. 15-16.

³⁹See Neilson, pp. 93-101 for examples, and McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, bxxvi ff.

⁴⁰McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, lxxix, n. 2.

⁴¹McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, esp. lxxxvii and ciii-cv, and making the point even more strongly in "The Metrical Chronicles and Non-alliterative Romances," p. 32.

eager and thoughtless youth into a driven and almost gloating man and finally into a resigned and pensive prisoner who hopes (justifiably, Hary tells us) in heaven.

In handling his hero's personality, each author was influenced by the literary manners of his period. By fourteenth-century standards, Barbour delineated Bruce's individual personality in some detail. Hary in the next century was drawn to a more lyric and confessional mode.⁴² As one critic has written, the great inwardness and emotionalism of Wallace bring to mind one of "the tragic figures of the Elizabethan stage,"⁴³ or perhaps the protagonist in a Jacobean drama. Wallace's fears, the violence he sees, performs, and suffers, the phantasms that haunt him, his fierce piety, all belong as much to the early modern age as to the medieval one. Among its other partial generic designations, the *Wallace* could be called a revenge tragedy.⁴⁴

In fiction as in life, Wallace's and Bruce's personal styles were so different that the two figures could not easily have coexisted in the same poem: one or the other would have had to take second place, and in neither poetry nor history does that seem to have happened. By arranging for Wallace to speak to Bruce before and after Falkirk, Hary carried the imaginary scenario of their interaction about as far as a writer could take it and still hope to be considered a faithful chronicler.

It has become a commonplace of literary history to say that Scottish writers have been preoccupied with historical subjects and forms, reluctant to branch out. One such statement is G. Gregory Smith's:

the historical habit rules in Scottish literature, in all its higher and more imaginative work . . . quite apart from the influence of popular affection in establishing the reputation of Blind Harry and Lyndsay and others by some sort of historical sympathy, the literature, in its matter and certainly in its form, is deliberately and exceptionally conservative.⁴⁵

Barbour and Hary, especially when taken together with Fordun, Wyntoun, and Bower, helped found a specifically historical tradition in the litera-

⁴²McDiarmid and Stevenson, *Bruce*, I, 50-51: "as Huizinga observes, writers of the next [fifteenth] century felt a greater compulsion to develop and dramatise their feelings."

⁴³McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, cvi.

⁴⁴See Bric's section heading in his chapter on Wallace: "Wallace als Rächer [Avenger]," p. 237.

⁴⁵G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character & Influence* (London, 1919), p. 59.

ture. Once the *Bruce* and the *Wallace* had been written, they became part of history in the sense that no one could attempt either subject without referring to Barbour's or Hary's version. Each author in some ways said the last word on his hero, and the two poems together formed a strong unit. Barbour adapted to his special purpose many of the resources of classic medieval literature. Hary was at least equally original in his own direction: McDiarmid calls the *Wallace* "one of the few really original poems produced in the long interval between the passing of the medieval scene and the emergence of the Renaissance."⁴⁶ The finality of both treatments was enhanced by the way Scottish history seemed to have arranged itself in suspenseful and spectacular patterns; several commentators have remarked that the most imaginative fiction could hardly match Bruce's actual adventures.⁴⁷ History was less all-providingly helpful in the case of Wallace, but in Hary the factual outline found a most enthusiastic, not to say flamboyant, embellisher. Perhaps Scottish literature owes some of its ultra-historical temper less to the proclivities of its writers than to the high color of its history.

One of the less edifying debates in literary criticism is that which seeks to praise either the *Bruce* or the *Wallace* at the other's expense.⁴⁸ It is difficult to think of two other poems from any period which set each other off so effectively. In any case, popular opinion long ago decreed what critics can only confirm, that whether their works are taken separately or together, Barbour and Hary wrote for the ages, inimitably.

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Vernon J. Harward, late of Smith College. Special thanks go to the St. Andrews University Library and the New York Public Library.

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⁴⁶Wallace, I, civ.

⁴⁷Barrow, p. 165; and A. M. Mackenzie, p. 42.

⁴⁸Notably, Craigie and Neilson: see note 3 of this study. More recently, McDiarmid, *Wallace*, I, cvii, has contrasted Hary's "realism and honesty" on the subject of war with the "bland matter-of-factness that Barbour so well maintains."