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Stefan Thomas Hall

“Quham dowis thow Scot?”  
Scottish Identity in Blind Hary’s *Wallace*

In his great Scottish epic poem, *The Wallace*, Blind Hary channels the strength and identity of Scotland into a single man who was little more than a commoner, a knight of the lowest rank, and a hero who had laid the foundation for Bruce’s ultimate triumph. Wallace was not a king or a land-owning noble or a peasant, and his social class has been the subject of debate.<sup>1</sup> Blind Hary does not call Wallace “schir,” even though we know that Wallace was knighted at some point in 1297 or 1298 (Barrow, pp. 136-7). Blind Hary simply says he was “Of worthi blude” (1.18), and his ancestors were “Of hale lynage and trew lyne of Scotland” (1.22).<sup>2</sup> Hary may have shied away from the title “schir” for his hero on purpose, distancing Wallace from the class of ambitious Scottish nobles whose concerns for preserving their land holdings prompted many of them for a long time to remain loyal to Edward I of England. But Hary does use the term “lord” for Wallace at one point, and he takes a moment to explain what the word means, or rather what he believes the word *should* mean:

Wallace a lord he may be clepyt weyll,  
Thocht ruryk folk tharoff haff litill feill

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<sup>1</sup>On Wallace’s social status, see G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (London, 1965), p. 117. Henceforth Barrow.

<sup>2</sup>All citations of *The Wallace* are by book and line number from Matthew P. McDiarmid’s edition, *Hary’s Wallace (Vita Nobilissimi Defensoris Scotie Wilelmi Wallace Militis)*, Scottish Text Society, 4th Series, 4-5 (1968-9). Henceforth *Wallace*.

Na deyme na lord bot landis be thar part.  
 Had he the world and be wrachit off hart  
 He is no lord as to the worthines.  
 It can nocht be but fredome, lordlyknes (7.397-402).

Though rustic or ignorant people do not consider a man a “lord” unless he owns land, Hary asserts that true lordliness is to be found in one’s heart and is dependent on having freedom, not on owning land.<sup>3</sup> Echoing Barbour, then, Hary claims that freedom is a necessary condition for nobility, but not something only for the nobility. According to Paul Strohm, in the fourteenth century English knights “enjoyed the same *gentil* status as the great aristocrats, though clearly without enjoying the benefits conferred by hereditary titles and accompanying revenues of the latter group.”<sup>4</sup> Scottish knights, such as Wallace or his father and uncle and brother before him, who owned little or no land, would have been in a similar situation to the English knights of whom Strohm speaks.

Though Wallace *was* a knight, he was also an outlaw and a martyr for the Scottish national cause, executed before he got to see his nation’s independence won by Bruce in the 1320s. While Hary’s poem does indeed narrate the heroic acts and deeds of William Wallace and his supporters, it is remarkably anti-feudal, anti-legal, and *The Wallace* shares many stylistic and ideological features with other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century outlaw tales such as *The Tale of Gamelyn* and *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, which promote violence to avenge the abuses committed by unjust government authorities, lawyers, sheriffs, church officials, even kings.<sup>5</sup> Wallace redefines what it means to be noble and Scottish, and the national identity which emerges from the poem is both heroic and racial, with the outlaw-hero Wallace as the greatest representative of the noble Scottish race. The poem makes the argument that Wallace’s military achievements and the nationalism he inspires in the Scottish people clear the way for Robert Bruce eventually to become king of Scotland. Hary’s use of the outlaw tale in order to create a national epic for Scotland brilliantly combines the two genres and offers us a champion of the Scottish race, a dif-

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<sup>3</sup>See McDiarmid’s editorial note to 7.403.

<sup>4</sup>“The Social and Literary Scene in England.” In *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, eds. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge, 1968), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>See Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval England* (London, 1961), pp. 217-8 (henceforth Keen); Richard W. Kaeuper, “An Historian’s Reading of *The Tale of Gemelyn*,” *Medium Ævum*, 52 (1983), 52-4; T. A. Shippey, “The Tale of Gamelyn: Class Warfare and the Embarrassments of Genre,” in Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert, eds., *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance* (London, 2000), p. 84; and John Scattergood, *Reading the Past: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Portland, OR, 1996), p. 98.

ferent kind of hero than Barbour or Holland had done. Looking at the structure of Hary's twelve-book poem reveals that *The Wallace* is episodic,<sup>6</sup> but Scottish nationalism and the outlaw-hero's pursuit of justice provide the structural gel that keeps the poem together thematically.

It is clear that *The Wallace* contains what Thomas H. Ohlgren calls "core ingredients of the outlaw narrative."<sup>7</sup> Ohlgren enumerates various outlaw models, including the "Social Bandit," the "Good Outlaw," and the "Trickster" (pp. xxiii-xxix), and conflating these three models we can arrive at a composite portrait of the medieval literary outlaw that resembles Wallace in many ways. Medieval outlaws challenge corrupt or unjust governments, and they are forced to leave society, living usually in the "greenwood," with other characters on the fringes of society who become the outlaws' loyal and honorable followers and share the outlaws' causes. They must use trickery and disguises, sometimes dressing as women, in making their escapes or in order to re-enter the society from which they are banned. The outlaws long to return to society,<sup>8</sup> but along with this longing there remains the desire to reform society and rid it of the injustice, oppression, and corruption of the law and law enforcement. When outlaws secretly re-enter an unreformed society, they usually wind up in some sort of altercation with government officials. But the audiences of these tales realize the outlaws are morally superior to the corrupt system which they oppose.<sup>9</sup> Outlaws like Robin Hood or Gamelyn, according to Maurice Keen, have "no part to play on the grand political stage" (p. 191), yet we can distinguish between outlaw tales based in historical figures like *The Wallace* and those based on popular traditions like *The Tale of Gamelyn* and *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (Keen, pp. 188-90). Ultimately, certain outlaws like Wallace or Hereward can become national heroes, and their personal struggles for justice often mirror their nations' struggles (Keen, pp. 209-10).

Wallace had been officially outlawed in 1296, and in Hary's poem he fights for justice, or, as Hary calls it, "rychtwysnes." Hary says of Wallace:

... thi haile mynde, labour and besynes,  
Was set in Wer and werray rychtwisnes (2.5-6).

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<sup>6</sup>See Grace G. Wilson, "Barbour's *Bruce* and Hary's *Wallace*: Compliments, Compensations and Conventions." *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 25 (1990), 195-6 and 198.

<sup>7</sup>See Thomas H. Ohlgren's Introduction to *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English* (Stroud, 1998), p. xvi. Henceforth Ohlgren.

<sup>8</sup>See Denton Fox and Hermann Pálsson, *Grettir's Saga* (Toronto, 1974), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>9</sup>Keen believes outlaw tales represent "genuine discontent with the working of the law" (p. 205), and sees the admiration felt by audiences for outlaws as indicative of a diseased governmental system in medieval society (p. 207).

Violence is seen as a necessary means to an end, “rychtwysnes” as opposed to the existing feudal laws in England and Scotland. This is what Wallace tells Bruce after Falkirk:

....“Stud thow *rychtwys* to me,  
Cowntir-palys I suld *nocht* be to the” (11.523-24).

Wallace encourages Bruce to pursue “rychtwysnes” as he himself has done instead of feudal rights. As the monk’s vision in Book 12 states, “rychtwysnes” is above earthly law. To prove this, the spirit in the monk’s vision tells him that the church bells will ring of their own accord at the very moment Wallace’s soul leaves his body and passes into heaven:

....“Forsuth this is no fabill.  
He is Wallace, defendour off Scotland,  
For *rychtwys* wer that he tuk apon hand.  
Thar *rychtwysnes* is lowyt our the lawe,  
Tharfor in hewyn he sall that honour hawe” (12.1284-88).

\* \* \*

Than said the spreyt, “This wytnes thow sall have.  
Ȝour bellis sall ryng, for ocht at Ȝe do may,  
Quhen thai him sla, half ane hour off *that* day.”  
And so thai did. The monk wyst quhat thaim alyt.  
Through braid Bretane the woice tharoff was scalyt” (12.1296-1300).

Though Wallace is an outlaw by English law, and though he is a murderer by law, he is nevertheless one of the righteous in God’s law. Righteousness is above the worldly law which condemns Wallace. Though he has killed many Englishmen, this is no crime in God’s eyes, and the church bells prove this.

Hary’s poem is not an historical chronicle, and it is through the outlaw tale genre that Hary constructs his national epic. Hary himself dismisses the idea that he is writing a chronicle history: “Off Cornikle quhat suld I tary lang?” (1.143). Indeed, one of Hary’s peculiarities is his sense of time. The only year Hary mentions in the whole poem is 1297, and this does not come until line 107 of book 6! I can only partially agree with Keen who suggests that Wallace’s story “cannot be divorced...from the story of Edward’s I’s hammering of the Scots.... If...dates are forgotten, the stories lose their point altogether” (Keen, p. 211). It is true that the historical context of the Scottish wars for independence is necessary, but Hary could have just as easily omitted the only year date he mentions, and his national epic would have the same effect. Wallace’s opposition to the English is timeless, and Hary may even intentionally obscure time in *The Wallace*. We have also seen that Hary intentionally obscures Wallace’s class, and I believe these two strategies of obscuring are

related, generically in the outlaw tale, and thematically in Hary's attempts to redefine Scottish nobility and racial identity.

To Hary, what was important about Wallace was not that he was a knight or a commoner, but that he was a Scot. Hary tells us that Wallace was "Of worthi blude" (l. 18) and that his ancestors were "Of hale lynage and trew lyne of Scotland" (l. 22), and this Scottish lineage is all-important to Hary. It identifies Wallace with Scotland the nation, but it also identifies Wallace and Scots in general through reference to their worthy ancestors. For Hary the past was important, and Scots of his day, he argues, are connected to Scots of yore. But Hary intentionally avoids specific references to time in his poem. McDiarmid takes up the challenge of explaining this:

I refer to the series of chronological data that he inserts with such seeming casualness among his fictions. Inconsistent as they are with history, they are made consistent with themselves, and show Hary arranging not only events but their appropriate times within a well-prepared scheme (*Wallace*, I, lxxviii).

McDiarmid supplies the dates in his chronology of *The Wallace*, and he feels obligated to justify Hary's historical errors and the poems' internal inconsistencies.

The crux of the matter is that Hary's sense of time was not that of the modern historian. McDiarmid suggests that 1297 was the only year that Hary could include "without blatantly contradicting himself and needlessly provoking criticism" (*Wallace*, I, lxxix, n. 1), but I feel Hary's motives for omitting specific year-dates were more profound. His opening lines lament that Scots are forgetting their ancestors:

Our antecessowris that we suld of reide  
And hald in mynde, thar nobille worthi deid  
We lat ourslide throw werray sleuthfulnes,  
And castis ws *euir* till vthir besynes.  
Till honour Ennymyis is our haile entent,  
It has beyne seyne in thir tymys bywent,  
Our ald Ennemys *cummyn* of Saxonys blud,

\* \* \*

3hit we suld thynk one our bearis befor (l.1-7; l.15).

Here Hary's notion of Scottish national identity finds expression which is inherited from Scottish ancestors who fought and died to make the nation free. Hary's ultimate desire seems to have been to bring Wallace to life, to put his hero immediately before his audience, and to impress upon them that this man was one of them, and an ideal Scot: "Gret harm, I thocht, his gud deid suld be smord" (12.1434). The blood of Scots past, Hary argues, still flows through the veins of Scots today. Scottish national identity is inherited, it is in the

blood, it is in the race of Scots.<sup>10</sup> Hary's sense of time, more folkloric and legendary than historical, re-enforces his sense of national identity.<sup>11</sup>

Hary's rhetorical flourishes in describing the months serve to set the mood of his poem rather than the time, and even when he does tell us a specific number of days or months or years have passed, he is still vague. So for instance, "In Ioyows Iulii, quhen the flouris suete..." (3.1) leads to "Bot Scotland sa was waistit mony day..." (3.11) and "Wictaill worth scant or August could apper..." (3.13). From plenty to want, from joy to travail, the months mirror the nation's condition and re-enforce Hary's ideas about the agency of fortune. The changing seasons mirror the spells of war and peace. Hary summarizes six years and seven months for us with a nice flourish of antithetic parallel repetition on the word "now." When Hary tells us that Wallace was tortured by the English for thirty days (12.1351) it is because thirty days is a dramatically long time for his hero to have been tortured. Similarly, Hary tells us Wallace was executed on a Wednesday, and we know this is inaccurate. But when he adds that Wallace died on Wednesday just like the martyrs Saints Oswald, Edmund, Edward, and Thomas (12.1305-08), we cannot fail to realize his intent. Historical chronology is further skewed by the prophecy which drives Hary's poem. Even more than Barbour, Hary was keenly interested in prophecies concerning England and Scotland. In fact, Hary may have read Barbour's passing reference to Thomas the Rhymer's prophecy in *The Bruce* and deliberately expanded the idea for his own poem.<sup>12</sup> It gave him a plan for his epic, and the length of the books grows after he realizes what this plan is. What written sources of such prophecies Hary would have had to hand we can only speculate, but prophecies would not have been limited to written media and would have circulated in various oral forms. Hary tells us how Edward I removed the Stone of Scone to London, and tradition has it that wherever this stone rests, there Scots shall rule, and Hary prays that St. Margaret's heirs will some day rule England (1.131-32). Hary also takes great delight in telling us that English clerks know from their own readings of the prophecies that a Wallace will drive them out of Scotland, and so when Wallace is captured and

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<sup>10</sup>So argues R. James Goldstein, "Blind Hary's Myth of Blood: The Ideological Closure of *The Wallace*." *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 25 (1990), pp. 70-82. Henceforth Goldstein.

<sup>11</sup>See Walter Scheps, "Middle English Poetic Usage and Blind Harry's *Wallace*," *Chaucer Review*, 4 (1970), 291-302. Scheps writes, "He is especially uninspired in his transitions from one event, or time, to another.... This kind of abrupt transition is typical of oral poetry" (p. 300).

<sup>12</sup>According to Barbour, William Lamberton, Bishop of St. Andrews, hopes that Bruce will fulfill the prophecy of Thomas the Rhymer and rid Scotland of the English. See *The Bruce*, ed. A. A. M. Duncan (Edinburgh, 1997), 2.78-90.

thrown in jail, Hary dramatically laments that the prophecy is "out" and Scotland is lost (2.164-70).

The most striking example of prophecy in *The Wallace* is Thomas the Rhymer's in Book 2. Thomas actually makes an appearance in *The Wallace* in order to prophesy that Wallace will defeat the English and drive them out of Scotland three times before his death (2.288-359). Hary here and elsewhere in his poem probably refers to no real written prophecy, and I would suggest that the prophecies he cites in the poem were his own fictions, which, like so much else in *The Wallace*, were literary creations based on various oral traditions with which Hary would have been familiar. Many prophetic rhymes and utterances were attributed to Thomas and to Merlin which Hary could have heard. What is unique about Hary's references to prophecies in *The Wallace* is that the English, and especially Percy, are constantly mentioning them. The Englishmen in Hary's poem know they are going to be beaten by Wallace because that is what their own prophecies tell them. It is part of Hary's blatant and brilliant fiction that he resurrects Thomas the Rhymer to prophesy Wallace's triple victory over the English. Whether or not Hary actually believed that Thomas was alive and uttering prophetic rhymes in 1296 or 1297 makes no difference. He used the folklore effectively. Hary's fiction of Thomas and his prophecy justifies his whole literary and nationalistic agenda and lends credibility to his hero's actions and victories, at least for those unskeptical Scots patriots who knew of Thomas and were willing to believe such things.

As a believer in prophecies, Hary had company. There was Barbour, though he was not wholly convinced that prophecies governed real world actions.<sup>13</sup> Walter Bower, on the other hand, did not shy away from including prophecies in his *Scotichronicon*, relating how Thomas had predicted Alexander III's death, and including reference to the visions of St. Andrew giving Wallace a sword to fight for Scotland.<sup>14</sup> While sixteenth-century historian John Mair expresses the strongest skepticism and disdain for such common folklore, later scholars continued to try to authenticate the existence of Thomas the Rhymer. Even in the nineteenth century there were people who believed in Thomas's existence and in his prophetic powers, just as there were people who seem to have believed the majority of Hary's fictions were true. Thomas was a folk figure, like Wallace, who had some basis in a real person. It is not necessary to know the actual details of his life: only the traditions are important to storytellers. Hary, who has become a folkloric figure himself, preyed upon the folk beliefs of his own nation and turned them into his own fictionalized his-

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<sup>13</sup>See Barbour's discussion of prophecies, astrology, and necromancy, *The Bruce*, 4.668-775. Barbour comments, "Me think quha sayis he knawis thingis / To cum he makys gret gabingis" (4.768-69).

<sup>14</sup>See Wallace, I, xciv-xcv, and notes to 7.71-152.



tory of Scotland because they fit his nationalistic sentiments effectively. McDiarmid says that Hary's poem "would not have been received as it was if its readers had not been made to believe, or want to believe, in the Wallace it portrayed" (*Wallace*, I, lxxxvii). The root of this willingness of Scots to believe such fictions may be found in Scottish nationalism: Scots felt the need to authenticate and express a national identity, even if this identity was based on fiction and folklore.

Ultimately, Wallace's actions in the poem are overdetermined, as if Hary felt the need constantly to justify his hero and his poem to the audience. Besides the prophecies, fortune determines Wallace's actions. In the opening of Book 6, Hary gives us a full account of his views on fortune, using the same meter as Chaucer's *Monks' Tale*, because, as McDiarmid writes, according to the Monk it was the most appropriate meter for tragedy (see *Wallace*, II, 181). Hary's mastery not only of this poetic form but also of the traditional medieval portrait of Dame Fortune, her wheel, her double face, is no less than brilliant.<sup>15</sup> Hary shouts out dramatically against Fortune who will not leave his hero in the peacefulness of matrimony:

Fy on fortoun, fy on thi frewall quheyll,  
 Fy on thi traist, for her it has no lest.  
 Thow *transfigowryt* Wallace out off his weill  
 Quhen he traistyt for till haiff lestyt best.  
 His plesance her till him was bot a gest.  
 Throw thi fers cours that has no hap to ho  
 Him thow our-threw out off his likand rest,  
 Fra gret plesance in wer, *trawaill* and wo (6.89-96).

Fortune's wheel has transfigured Wallace from happy, peace-loving husband back into the Scottish warrior full of hatred for the English. But while Hary seems to be dramatically lamenting the sad destiny of his hero thrust on him by Fortune, the poet would have no story to sing were it not for the agency of Fortune. Hary asks rhetorically,

Quhat is fortune? Quha dryffis the dett so fast?  
 We wait *thar* is bathe weill and wykit chance,  
 Bot this fals world *with* mony doubill cast,  
 In it is *nocht* bot werray wariance.  
 It is nothing till hewynly gowernance.  
 Than pray we all to the makar abow,

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<sup>15</sup>See 6.57-64. Hary also makes good poetic use of "Now lieff...now leiff..." in two separated stanzas, contrasting Wallace's happiness in the first with his longing to return to war in the second. See 6.49-56 and 6.81-88. See further his use of "Now... Now..." repetition at 4.335-42.

Quhilk has in hand of iustry the ballance,  
That he vs grant off his der lestand lowe (6.97-104).

Peace cannot last in a world full of "variance," and Wallace is obligated to rescue Scotland and kill Englishmen. Wallace is who he is because he kills Englishmen. He could not live without spilling their blood, just as mortal men cannot live without food:

It was his lyff and maist *part* of his fude  
To se thame sched the byrnand Sothroun blude (2.9-10).<sup>16</sup>

Hary makes the case that while Fortune, both good and wicked chance, causes the variance in the world, justice is in God's hands. Wallace is the one chosen by Fortune to execute God's justice. So along with the prophecies that govern both Wallace's actions and Hary's poem, Fortune plays her traditional role, and Wallace's killing of Englishmen is sanctioned by God's demands for justice.

Hary employs yet another literary device, the dream vision, further determining Wallace's actions in the poem. Wallace has two visions which both turn out to be prophetic.<sup>17</sup> In the long dream in Book 7, Wallace, kneeling at the altar top pray, dreams that an old man gives him a sword and shows him from atop a mountain the whole realm of Scotland burning. Then a queen puts out the fire, chooses the dreamer as her love, and tells him he will redress the wrongs committed in his country and redeem his nation. She gives him a book written in three parts—brass, gold, and silver—but before he can read the book he awakes (7.65-115). Wallace goes to a clerk and asks him to interpret this dream, which he does (7.119-52). The old man, he tells Wallace, is St. Andrew, the mountain is knowledge, the fire is Wallace himself who will both literally and metaphorically burn the English who invade Scotland. The queen he says is either Fortune or the Virgin Mary, further linking the religious and secular agencies which drive Wallace's actions. The book is the broken land of Scotland which Wallace "mon rademe be worthines off hand" (7.142), although he will also have to "suffer mekill payne" (7.146). With the patron saint of Scotland, Fortune and/or the mother of God supporting his hero's actions, *Blind Hary's* poem could almost write itself, and it was certainly Hary's nationalism that yoked these figures and Wallace's destiny together.

Hary's poem has been seen as a reaction to Barbour's *Bruce*, and without comparing and contrasting them, we can see that the two poems are remarka-

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<sup>16</sup>See Goldstein, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup>See *Wallace*, 12.361-62.

bly different, each a literary masterpiece in its own right.<sup>18</sup> While Hary obviously borrowed from Barbour, he also had a purpose all his own: “Gret harm, I thoct, his [Wallace’s] gud deid suld be smord” (12.1434). But what the relationship between the two heroes, the two poems, and the two authors might be has consistently bothered critics. George Neilson, for instance, thoroughly and systematically goes through *The Bruce* and *The Wallace* and ably details where Hary has seemingly appropriated for his hero the acts and deeds of Robert the Bruce: “Plagiarism is not nearly the word for such literary pillage. Harry nearly uproots Barbour.”<sup>19</sup> Walter Scheps points out, however, that the cast of leading characters in Hary’s poem is entirely different than Barbour’s and that “in regard to the characters upon whom Harry is to concentrate most of his attention, he is not very indebted to Barbour.”<sup>20</sup> Scheps further argues that instead of revering Robert the Bruce and modeling Wallace on him, Hary actually paints the Bruce in the “worst possible light” (p. 23). Scheps even suggests that Hary for some reason may have hated Bruce, Barbour, and *The Bruce* itself, and that Hary aimed at “the removal of Barbour and Bruce from national esteem and their replace with Harry and Wallace” (p. 24).

Hary’s poem was a reaction to Barbour’s poem and the Bruce, but not a reaction inspired, as Scheps has argued, by his hatred of Barbour or Bruce. Hary seems to have been embarrassed by Bruce’s early political loyalties, but by the second half of the fifteenth century Bruce had already become a national icon. Hary had to find a way to praise Bruce while contrasting Bruce’s feudal ambitions with Wallace’s national ones. So, just after Thomas the Rhymer’s prophecy is uttered about how Wallace would rescue Scotland three times, Hary makes a sort of apology that Wallace may be seen as the greater of the two heroes:

All worthi men that has gud witt to waille,  
 Be war that 3he with mys deyme nocht my taille.  
 Perchance 3e say that Bruce he was none sik.  
 He was als gud, quhat deid was to assaill,  
 As off his handis, and bauldar in battaill,  
 Bot Bruce was knawin weyll ayr off this kynrik;  
 For he had rycht we call no man him lik.

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<sup>18</sup>Jan C. Walker, “Barbour, Blind Harry, and Sir William Craigie.” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 1 (1964) points out that “the poems belong to two different ages, two different genres” (p. 206).

<sup>19</sup>George Neilson, “On Blind Harry’s *Wallace*,” *Essays and Studies*, 1 (1910), 97.

<sup>20</sup>Walter Scheps, “Barbour’s *Bruce* and Harry’s *Wallace*: The Question of Influence,” *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, 17 (1972), 21.

Bot Wallace thris this kymrik conquest haile,  
In Ingland fer socht battaill on that rik (2.351-59).

This is not the language of hatred, but of caginess. Bruce did indeed have the right to the throne, Hary admits, but Wallace was the braver fighter and fought for justice. Here is a poet trying to correct Wallace's omission in his predecessor's poem, while trying not to criticize the Bruce overmuch, regardless of whether or not Bruce deserves such criticism. Wallace too speaks highly of Bruce throughout the poem and calls him his king. Hary was no iconoclast but a man creating an icon of his own in Wallace for all of Scotland to admire alongside Bruce. There is little doubt which man Hary admired more, but Goldstein reminds us that "by Hary's time, Bruce's right had become deeply ingrained in the Scottish consciousness" (Goldstein, p. 75). Hary's own pain, caused by the knowledge that Bruce fought for Edward I against Scotland, is revealed in Wallace's pain at seeing his rightful king on the opposite side at Falkirk.<sup>21</sup>

The heroes of the two poems are ultimately different kinds of men, from different classes, with different beliefs, and the poems end in markedly different ways. Bruce was a powerful noble who enforced his claim to the Scottish throne. Wallace was a lesser knight whose military accomplishments had seen him promoted to that rank. Bruce accomplishes his goal and becomes king of Scotland, and even Bruce's noble death is without flaw, except that Douglas never actually made it to Jerusalem with his heart.<sup>22</sup> But the end of William Wallace, despite Hary's best efforts to portray him as a martyr, is truly sad. Wallace achieves the prophecy that he will drive out the English three times, but he does not share in Scotland's freedom which he helped to win, nor is he able to see Bruce crowned as rightful king of Scotland. *The Wallace* is not a failure because of this, but it is a different kind of story with a different kind of hero and a different sense of national identity than *The Bruce*.

While we can detect Hary's nationalistic (even racist) beliefs through the bellicose relationships between the Scots and the English, the most reliable indicators of Hary's ideas of race and nationality are the speeches in the poem. McDiarmid makes an interesting statement that I believe needs to be elaborated: "It is what Wallace says, in set speech, soliloquy, or dialogue, that makes the strongest impact on the reader" (*Wallace*, I, cv). It is in the dialogue that Hary's notions of Scottish identity are given brilliant expression. Hary's Anglophobia cannot be denied. Hary, like his hero, is a racist. In one of the earliest scenes in the poem in which we see our hero in action, racism rears its head. Wallace, only eighteen years old at the time according to Hary (1.192),

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<sup>21</sup>See 11.203 ff. See also 8.240-44.

<sup>22</sup>Even this was remedied later by Holland in stanza 37 of *The Buke of the Howlat*.

has his first run-in with the English in Dundee when he kills Constable Selby's twenty-year-old son (1.203-56). Selby junior calls Wallace out for being dressed smartly and owning a decent knife: "Thow Scot, abyde" (1.215). Selby identifies Wallace by his race. Wallace is a Scot, and if the second-person "thow" address were not rude enough, young Selby next tells Wallace, "Ane Ersche mantill it war thi kynd to wer" (1.217). Suggesting that a Scot was no better than an Irishman would have been highly insulting in Hary's time. In Book 7 (lines 641-47), for instance, Hary relates with obvious disgust that Makfadʒan's army has a number of Irishmen in it. Apart from Stephen of Ireland, Hary has little good to say about the Irish anywhere in *The Wallace*, especially those who are opposed to Wallace and the Scots. For young Selby, and, we can add, for Hary, Wallace is conspicuous because he does not fit the stereotype of the downtrodden Scot who likes to feel the hand of his English oppressor. Wallace, as Selby points out, goes against the "kynd" as defined by stereotype. Hary's hero is a Scot "of worthi blude," not some lowly Gael. So, when the insulting racist Selby demands Wallace's knife, Wallace does indeed give it to him by stabbing him to death.

Throughout *The Wallace*, Hary's Englishmen address the Scots as "thow" because they consider them inferior. But in Hary's hands, "thow Scot" becomes an ironic phrase (at least when Wallace is the Scot being addressed) because while the English soldiers believe they are asserting some sort of authority over the Scots and expressing their superiority with "thow," in Hary's poem they invariably wind up dead for uttering these words. So, for instance, at l. 398, Wallace turns the tables on Percy's soldier who demands the fish he has caught: "Wallace ansuerd, said, 'Thow art in the wrang.'" Wallace's bold use of "thow" to a "superior" takes the Englishman by surprise,<sup>23</sup> and the soldier calls Wallace out: "Quham dowis thow, Scot? In faith thow serwis a blaw" (1.399). He is of course the first to die as Wallace kills three of the five Englishmen. Likewise, when the English swordsman challenges Wallace,

Lychtly he sperde, "Quhi, Scot, dar thow nocht preiff?"

Wallace said, "ʒa, sa thow wald gif me leiff."

"Smyt on," he said. "I defy thine accioune" (3.361-63).

It is worth noting that Lekpreuik's 1570 text reads "thy Natioun" instead of "thy accioune" in line 363,<sup>24</sup> and Lekpreuik's line more clearly expresses the racism that consistently boils over in the other dialogues between Wallace and Englishmen in Hary's poem.

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<sup>23</sup>See McDiarmid's brief editorial note to l. 398.

<sup>24</sup>See McDiarmid's textual variants for 3.363.

Later, Wallace's letter to Edward I employs "thow" with even more nationalistic pride and force:

*Thow* reyffar king chargis me throw cas  
That I suld cum and put me in *thi* grace.  
Gyff I gaynstand *thow* hechtis till hyng me.  
I wow to God and *euir* I may tak *the*  
*Thow* sall be hangyt, ane exempill to geiff  
To kingis off reyff als lang as I may leiff.  
*Thow* profferis me *thi* wage for till haiff.  
I *the* defy, power and all the laiff  
At helpis *the* her off thi fals nacioun.  
Will god *thow* sall be put off this regioun,  
Or de *tharfor*, contrar thocht *thow* had suorn.  
*Thow* sall ws se or ix houris to-morn  
Battaill to gyff magra off all *thi* kyn,  
For falsly *thow* sekis our rewme *with-in* ( 6.381-94)<sup>25</sup>

Counting the second-person pronouns in Wallace's letter to Edward, we can see that he uses some form of "thow" fourteen times, an average of one per line. Wallace's language here is taunting and insulting, and optimistically expressive of his and the Scots' superiority to the English and Edward I.

So any time we read "Thow Scot" we realize that at least one Englishman is probably going to die. One notable exception to this is during Wallace's thirty days of torture (12.1351). The English send a clerk to record Wallace's last words: "'Thow Scot,' he said, 'that gret wrangis has don...'" (12.1355). Wallace, chained to an oaken bench, does nevertheless bravely defy the clerk's arguments that he has committed any crime and "smyld a litill at his langage" (12.1384). The insulting phrase, "Thow Scot," then, in Hary's poem is transformed into a signifier of national and racial pride. It calls specific attention to Scots nationality and in Hary's ironic way to their superiority to the Southrons. If the English want to use this kind of language, Hary suggests, that had better be able to back it up with force. Ironically, the English in the poem are not able to back up their language of superiority with martial prowess, and Hary seems to take immense pleasure in having his hero called "Thow Scot" and then telling us how Wallace bashes the brains out of the Englishman who has called him that. On the other hand, when Wallace uses forms of the second-person "thow" to an Englishman, we soon realize that he does have the martial prowess to back up his language of superiority and Edward I, who is afraid to

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<sup>25</sup>For emphasis I have italicized the "th" forms of the second-person pronouns.

fight Wallace, seems to realize this as well.<sup>26</sup>

Through Wallace's voice, then, we hear not only Hary's own voice but also Scotland's voice. Like Bruce, Wallace's speech is distinctive and part of his identity. When Bruce tried to conceal his identity after the bloodhound episode he was still recognized by his speech (*The Bruce* 7.125). Similarly, after Wallace swims the Forth of Firth in late February, the widow who gives him shelter and nurses him back to health recognizes him by his speech (*Wallace*, 5.320-435). Wallace tries to conceal his identity by speaking in Latin to the Red Reiver when he vanquishes him (9.284 ff). The Red Reiver says "My hart will brek bot I wyt quhat thou be" (9.355) because he reckons that no man on earth could have defeated him "Except Wallace that has rade-myt Scotland" (9.359), and he is relieved when Wallace tells him who he is.

That Wallace has the right to speak for Scotland is challenged in one of the most significant scenes in the poem. In Book 11 before the fighting begins at Falkirk, Stewart is urged by Commyn to take charge of the army away from Wallace. This he explains is the Stewart's right as Wallace's feudal lord. When Stewart confronts Wallace about this, they argue over the interpretation of the fable of the owl, puffed up with pride in his borrowed feathers, as we see in Sir Richard Holland's *Buke of the Howlat*.

The Stewart said he wald the wantgard haiff.  
Wallace ansuerd and said, "Sa god me saiff,  
That sall ʒe nocht als lang as I may ryng,  
Nor no man ellis quhill I se my rycht king.  
Gyff he will cum and tak on him the croun  
At his commaund I sall be reddy boun.  
Throw goddis grace I reskewed Scotland twys.  
I war to mad to leyff it on sic wys,  
To tyn for bost that I haiff gowernd lang" (11.119-27).

When Stewart hears Wallace's reply, he mistakes Wallace's concern for doing what is best for the nation (having the militarily brilliant and inspirational Wallace lead the Scots) for pride:

Stewart tharwith all bolnyt in-to baill.  
"Wallace," he said, "be the I tell a tail."  
"Say furth," quod he, "off the fairest ʒe can."  
Wnhappyly his taill thus he began.  
"Wallace," he said, "thow takis the mekill cur.  
So feryt it be wyrkyng off natur,  
How a howlat complend off his fethrame,

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<sup>26</sup>When Wallace is in France, however, the "ʒe" forms of the second-person pronoun are consistently used in dialogue. See, for instance, the altercation at 12.160 ff.

Quhill Deym Natur tuk off ilk byrd but blame  
A fayr fethyr and to the howlat gaiff.  
Than he through pryd reboytit all the layff.  
Quhar-off suld thow thi senȝe schaw so he?  
Thow thinkis nan her at suld thi falow be.  
This makis it thow art cled *with* our men.  
Had we our awn thin war bot few to ken.”  
At thir wordis gud Wallace brynt as fyr.  
Our haistely he ansuerd him in Ire.  
“Thow leid,” he said. “The suth full oft ha ben,  
Thar haif I biddyn quhar thow durst *nocht* be seyn,  
Contrar Enemys, na mar for Scotlandis *rycht*  
Than dar the howlat quhen *that* the day is *brycht!*  
That taill full meit thow has tauld be thi sell.  
To thi desyr thow sall me *nocht* compel.  
Cwmyn it is has gyffyn this *consaill*.  
Will God, ȝe sall off ȝour fryst purpos fail.  
*That fals traytour that* I off danger *brocht*  
Is wondyr lyk till bryng this Realm till *nocht*.  
For thi ogart *othir* thow sall de,  
Or *in presoun* byd, or cowart lik to fle.  
Reskew off me thow sall get nane this day.”  
Tharwith he turnd and fra thaim raid his way (11.129-58)

Wallace, of course, bristles at Stewart's accusations, and addresses him not with the polite “ȝe” form of the second-person pronoun, reserved for one's superiors, but with “thow” (see above). Stewart asserts the feudal right he has over Wallace, suggesting that the proud Wallace does not know his place in the feudal hierarchy and is putting on airs. Wallace, naturally, sees things differently, and it should come as no shock to us that he disagrees with Stewart's interpretation of the fable. Wallace argues that he should lead because he had been fighting longer for Scotland's rights than Stewart and had earned any feathers he might be perceived as wearing. His pride was pride in the nation, not pride in feudal titles and honor.

So when Wallace says it is his duty to defend Scotland,

Because I am a natyff Scottis man  
It is my dett to do all *that* I can  
To fend our *kymrik* out off *dangeryng*. (8.545-47)

we cannot doubt his sincerity, nor does it clash with the destiny which has been thrust on Wallace through the poem. Elsewhere in the poem Wallace also speaks of his sense of duty. Hary leaves no doubt in our minds that it is Wallace's duty to drive the English out of Scotland. This is what the prophecies and dreams and fortune determine for our hero, and Wallace understands this.



The dialogue between Wallace and Bruce after Falkirk is perhaps the biggest fiction of Hary's entire poem, and so naturally it is here that the author's beliefs are most directly expressed. The two men are desirous to hear one another speak, to understand the other man through his words:

"Langage off the," the Bruce said, "I desyr."  
 "Say furth," *quod* he; "thow may for litill hyr.  
 Ryd fra *that* ost and gar thaim bid *with* Beik.  
 I wald fayn her quhat thow likis to speik." (11.449-52)

We notice that Hary has Wallace and Bruce consistently use the second-person "thow" pronoun which would have been used between equals. Bruce wonders why Wallace will not accept peace from Edward. And while Wallace does not deny Bruce is his rightful king, he cannot understand why Bruce fights against his own people. To Wallace, Bruce's actions are false and treasonable:

"Quhy wyrkis thow thus and mycht in gud pes be?"  
 Than Wallace said, "Bot in defawt of the,  
 Through thi falsheid thin awn wyt has myskend.  
 I cleyrn no *rycht* bot wald this land defend,  
 At thow wndoys throu thi fals cruell deid.  
 Thow has tynt twa, had beyn worth fer mair meid  
 On this ilk day *with* a gud king to found,  
 Na v mylȝon off fynest gold so round  
 That *eur* was wrocht in werk or ymage *brycht!*" (11.457-66)

"Through thi tresson, *that* suld be our *rycht* king.  
 That willfully dystroyis thin awn off-spryng." (11.471-72)

It is clear that the two men argue their positions from different sets of beliefs, and it is clear that Wallace is expressing Hary's nationalistic ideology, an ideology of heritage and pride in the Scottish race. Bruce, however, speaks for the feudal system and encourages Wallace to cash in on its benefits. He tells Wallace that Edward could make him a noble so that he "*mycht* at liking leiff" (11.478) if he would swear fealty to him. Wallace calls Edward a "fals king" (11.481) and tells Bruce,

"I cleyrn no thing as be titill of *rycht*,  
 Thocht I *mycht* reiff, sen god has lent me *mycht*,  
 Fra the thi crowne off this regioun to wer,  
 Bot I will *nocht* sic a charge on me ber.  
 Gret god wait best quhat wer I tak on hand  
 For till kep fre that thow art gaynstandand.  
 It *mycht* beyn said off lang gone her off forn,  
 In cursyt tym thow was for Scotland born.

Schamys thow *nocht* that thow *neuir* 3eit did gud,  
Thow renygat deuorar off thi blud? (11.483-92)

For Wallace and for Hary, being a Scot is not about feudal titles and owning lands. True nobility is in the Scottish race and their longing for justice. Once again we return to the idea of “rychtwysnes” being opposed to law, in this case feudal law, for Wallace tells Bruce:

“Stud thow *rychtwys* to me,  
Cowntir-palys I suld *nocht* be to the.” (11.523-24)

Bruce understands Wallace’s words only later when, as Goldstein points out (pp. 71-72), he is mocked by the English soldiers for eating the blood of his fellow Scots—his own blood he realizes—which he has forgotten to wash from his hands before sitting down to dine (11.535-40):

Than rewyt he sar, fra resoun had him knawin  
At blud and land suld all lik beyn his awin. (11.543-44)

When the two men meet next, Wallace asks Bruce, “Rewis thow...thow art contrar thin awin?” (11.594). Bruce responds,

“Myn awin dedis has bet me wondyr sar.”  
Quhen Wallace hard *with* Bruce that It stud sua  
On kneis he fell, far contenans can him ma.  
In armes son the Bruce has Wallace tane. (11.596-99)

Hary says, “I can *nocht* tell *perfytyl* thar langage” (11.601), but he does not have to do so since it is all his own fiction anyway. He tells us that the two men come to an agreement: while the Bruce cannot break his promise to Edward just yet, he promises never to fight against Scots again. So while Hary and his hero both agree that Bruce is rightful heir to the Scottish crown, and while Bruce did later embrace the popular nationalism and use it to become king of Scotland, it is Wallace who will always be the nation’s first voice, the chief spokesman, and the Bruce’s inspiration. It is Wallace who made Bruce’s rise to the throne possible.

We must recognize the ideology that informs Blind Hary’s poem as more than the racism and Anglophobia which many critics have claimed it to be. Hary was resolutely anti-English, but he was also concerned with class issues in Scotland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Recent critics have tried to discover the “real” Hary and have tried to make arguments based on scant evidence that his poem was an anti-royal allegory directed at King James III. But while Hary begins his poem by lamenting the fact that Scots are forgetting their ancestors and honoring their English enemies, and while he treats Wallace as the chief representative of Scottish identity instead of King Robert the

Bruce, the poem is not explicitly anti-royal, even if Hary did feel embarrassment for Bruce's initial loyalty to Edward I and Bruce's inability to see the "richtwis" which opposed "thrillage" and feudalism. Hary brilliantly creates the dialogue between Wallace and Bruce after Falkirk for his anti-feudal platform, but not an anti-royal platform, attributing to the influence of Wallace the Bruce's conversion to the Scottish national freedom party as well as Bruce's and Scotland's ultimate triumph over the English. Hary's poem can be regarded as a tragic late medieval outlaw tale which yokes legendary and folkloric motifs with national history. Like the outlaw stories of *The Tale of Gamelyn* and *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, *The Wallace* promotes violence to achieve justice and sets moral "rychtwisnes" in opposition to English and feudal law. Blind Hary gives us a righteous and historical/legendary outlaw-hero, driven by his sense of duty, his moral obligation to his nation, and by the forces of prophecy, dream vision and fortune. Hary intentionally obscures historical chronology, removing the action and the hero from history into the realm of myth and legend. Likewise, Hary intentionally obscures Wallace's class status to distance him from the Scottish nobles and knights who had bought into the feudal system and had betrayed their national as a result. Through his choices of genre and presentation, through his selective strategies of inclusion and exclusion, and through his insistence on the nobility of the Scottish race regardless of class, Hary redefines what it means to be both noble and Scottish. To be truly Scottish *is* to be noble.

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