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BARBOUR'S BLACK DOUGLAS¹

David Parkinson

John Barbour's depiction of James Douglas intermittently tests the limits of the *fredome* that the *Bruce* famously upholds.² Throughout the *Bruce*, Douglas emerges as a dynastic founder, a mighty ancestor accumulating honors to be enjoyed and accomplishments to be emulated by his descendants. Barbour's poem has been described as "the main conduit by which the memory of Sir James Douglas was preserved inside late medieval Scotland and the political and military power wielded by his descendants given an aura of ancient and unquestionable legitimacy."³ Nevertheless, Barbour's exposition of Douglas's character and actions recurs to instances in which this protagonist departs from the chivalric pattern.⁴ His story alongside Robert Bruce's (and those of his more

¹ Infusions of help made this essay possible. Preliminary work was presented at the workshop *To speik off science, craft or sapience: Knowledge and Temporality in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, under the auspices of *Episteme im Bewegung* at Freie Universität Berlin, 3–4 September 2015; the author is grateful to Regina Scheibe and Andrew James Johnston for this opportunity. Members of the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of Edinburgh commented perceptively on a later stage of this project. A Visiting Research Fellowship at the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities supported further progress; the author especially wishes to thank the Director, staff, and fellows of IASH for their collegiality. For their searching comments, the author thanks Rhiannon Purdie, Heather Giles and SSL's anonymous readers.

² Matthew P. McDiarmid and James A. C. Stevenson, ed., *Barbour's Brus*, 3 vols, STS, 4th ser. 12–13, 15 (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1980–85), Book 1, ll. 225–40; subsequent quotations from this work are provided from this edition with some modernization of spelling, and cited by book and line numbers.

³ Steve Boardman and Susan Foran, "Introduction," in *Barbour's Bruce and its Cultural Contexts*, 6–8, referring to A. A. M. Duncan's theory in his edition (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), 14–16, that Barbour used an earlier life of Douglas.

⁴ Sonia Våthjunker, "A Study of the Career of Sir James Douglas: The Historical Record *versus* Barbour's *Bruce*," PhD Aberdeen, 1992, 178–79; cf. Anne McKim,

conventionally honor-bound lieutenants Edward Bruce, Walter Stewart, and Thomas Randolph, later earl of Moray), Douglas is distinguished by his being exceptionally crafty, resourceful and relentless.⁵ His association with yeomanry and the forest has a rather different range and focus than might be expected for a hero within the ambit of medieval historiography, romance, and epic.⁶ In the *Bruce*, Barbour associates James Douglas with Ettrick Forest⁷—verging into the mysterious forest of romance⁸—and also with trickery and deception, edging into the repertoire of a Hereward or even a Robin Hood.⁹ Douglas is cumulatively distinguished and complicated by his sylvan associations and his own menacing resourcefulness. Crossing between chivalry and *slycht* in the interest of protecting autonomy, Douglas regularly exchanges the role of “flower of chivalry”¹⁰ for that of “denizen of the woods.” Aware of the recurrent

“James Douglas and Barbour’s Ideal of Knighthood,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 17 (1981): 167–80.

⁵ A. A. M. Duncan, “Barbour, John (c. 1330-1395),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB] (2004–) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1336>, accessed 26 August 2016]; Steve Boardman and Susan Foran, “Introduction: King Robert the Bruce’s Book,” in *Barbour’s Bruce and Its Cultural Contexts* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), 7; Boardman, “‘Thir nobill eldrys gret bounte’: *The Bruce* and Early Stewart Scotland,” *ibid.*, 191–212 (207).

⁶ Rhiannon Purdie, “Medieval Romance and the Generic Frictions of Barbour’s *Bruce*,” in *Barbour’s Bruce and Its Cultural Contexts*, 51–74 (74).

⁷ Michael Brown, *The Black Douglases: War and Lordship in Late Medieval Scotland* (East Linton, Scotland: Tuckwell, 1998), 18–19. On the composition, status, and maintenance of forests in medieval Scotland, see Mark L. Anderson, *A History of Scottish Forestry*, 2 vols (London: Nelson, 1967), I: 85–157, with particular attention to Ettrick Forest, pp. 101–06, 164–81.

⁸ Jacques le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 52–58; Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 22–23, 26, 54–55; cf. Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 48–49, 91–93, 100.

⁹ In focusing such associations on Douglas, Barbour may be additionally “diverting the audience’s attention from parallels they might otherwise draw between the outlawed Bruce and folk heroes such as Robin Hood,” Purdie, “Medieval Romance and the Generic Frictions,” 68.

¹⁰ In the *Bruce*, he is called (for example) “worthy James,” “the douchty lord off Douglas,” “this gud lord,” “the gud schyr James” (II.573, X.343, 373, XV.321). Douglas’s surpassing worthiness is acknowledged even by his foes: Nigel Bryant, trans., *The True Chronicles of Jean le Bel, 1290-1360*, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), pp. 40, 47, 52–54; Sir Thomas Gray, *Scalacronica 1272-1363*, ed. and trans. Andy King, Surtees Society 209 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 71, 99, 117; Sarah L. Peverley, “Anglo-Scottish Relations in John Hardyng’s Chronicle,” in *The*

friction between later Douglasses and the descendants of Robert I,¹¹ Barbour depicts a “good” James Douglas at home in the wildness of the Borders, prone to weirdly playful acts of violence that “raise questions of ... dramatic effect.”¹² Considered as literary as well as military events, this anti-hero’s exploits lie beyond the scope of anything his comrades attempt.

While such changes might have originated in any biographical materials on which Barbour would have drawn,¹³ their selection and location point to some further purpose. This could in some part be to refresh and re-engage the audience, limits to whose attentiveness might be held to necessitate the inclusion of interludes and diversions running athwart the larger ethical import.¹⁴ Theo van Heijnsbergen describes the motives and precedents for such episodes in strengthening “mutual understanding and trust between author and reader” through “*enargeia* (‘liveliness’), i.e. writing that makes the reader or listener feel he is an eyewitness himself, and which can thus both amplify what is described and ‘secure an emotion.’”¹⁵

Pursuing this line of enquiry requires further reflection about the defining tendency in medieval and early-modern Scottish writing at key junctures to inset lively episodic narrative, typically featuring scenic description, racily idiomatic dialogue, and specialized terms—the spirited, eventful tale of Macbeth in Wyntoun’s *Original Chronicle* comes to

Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600, ed. Mark P. Bruce and Katherine H. Terrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 69–86 (pp. 72–73). In the *Bruce*, Sir John Hainault is so impressed with Douglas’s leadership that he declares him worthy to “‘governe the empyr of Rome’” (XIX.474). On *slycht* in Scottish military tactics, see Alastair J. Macdonald, “Trickery, Mockery and the Scottish Way of War,” *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. 143 (2013): , 313–38.

¹¹ Brown, *Black Douglasses*, 42–43, 124–26.

¹² Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery, and Oren Falk, “Introduction,” in *‘A Great Effusion of Blood’? Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery, and Oren Falk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3–18 (p. 3); the authors proceed to ask, “[D]id descriptions of bloodletting shock audiences, titillate them, or leave them unmoved?”

¹³ Speculation about such materials has been stimulated by A. A. M. Duncan’s comments on this topic in the introduction to his edition of *Bruce*, pp. 14–16.

¹⁴ On this theme, see the defence of recreation in Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. D. E. R. Watt *et al.*, 9 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987–98), II: 425 (Book 4, chapter 50), with discussion by Sally Mapstone, *Scotichronicon*, IX: 333; see also the defence of recreation in “Johannes,” *Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. W. M. Metcalfe, STS 1st ser. 13 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1884), I: 122–23 (V.455–504).

¹⁵ Theo van Heijnsbergen, “Scripting the National Past: A Textual Community of the Realm,” in *Barbour’s Bruce and Its Cultural Contexts*, 75–99 (p. 89).

mind.¹⁶ Such episodes give their audience opportunities to replenish their energies, while confirming their opinion of the characters and events thus treated. Tidy as this explanation may be, however, it does not fully account for the ways in which departures from the main line of narrative may at least figuratively raise specters. It could be illuminating to consider further how Barbour's depiction of Douglas's actions involves a comparable interplay of playfulness and menace. Barbour presents a Douglas who is adept at traditional practices of outdoor life, at home with the landscape and weather of his native regions, and increasingly skilled at exploiting borders, verges, and extremes of behavior as of topography in his incursions into occupied space. In acquiring and wielding these powers, Barbour's black Douglas at moments achieves a striking contrast with his more conventionally chivalric peers; and in presenting him thus, Barbour may be merging literary characterization into political comment.

Douglas has wider latitude to perform, in part because his origins and associations are both humbler and more eventfully unsettled than those of a Bruce, a Randolph, or a Stewart.¹⁷ Douglas enters the *Bruce* in a rapid succession of prefatory vignettes: Sir William Douglas is imprisoned by the English (I.281–87); “gret vaslage” is predicted for the “litill page” his son (288–89), who escapes to Paris (323–45); learning of his father's death, James comes to St. Andrews, where Bishop William of Lamberton welcomes him (353–62); at Stirling Castle, Edward I rebuffs the bishop's request for James's instatement as lord of Douglas (407–41). Douglas's story begins as that of a lost heir who plays in turn at being an outcast and a dutiful son. Giving up a carefree life among the “rybbaldaill” of Paris (335),¹⁸ James serves Bishop Lamberton, who “gert him wer / His knyvys foruth him to scher” (I.355–56, II.91–92); the detail of the young Douglas carving the Bishop's meat sets a mild precedent for Douglas's less courteous acts of carving later on. While emphasizing Douglas's rightful cause and gentle breeding, Barbour is already alluding to his occasional outbreaks of inglorious wildness.

Edward I dismissed James to “[g]a purches land quharever he may” (I.425, 433); and Douglas proceeds to do exactly that. Barbour's telling of

¹⁶ Rhiannon Purdie, “Malcolm, Margaret, Macbeth and the Miller: Rhetoric and the Re-Shaping of History in Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 41 (2015): 45–64 (at p. 56).

¹⁷ Cf. Sally Mapstone, “Scotland's Stories,” in *Scotland: A History*, ed. Jenny Wormald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 255.

¹⁸ Barbour likens him to Robert of Artois (1287–1342), whom Philip VI deprived of his title and whose urging of Edward III to declare war on France was celebrated in the *Voeux du héron*. Barbour describes Robert as one who survived royal wrath by “feynyeing of rybbaldy” (I.341).

Douglas's story intermittently traces the romance pattern Edward unwittingly sets out for the dispossessed son of noble birth. As Barbour portrays him, Douglas enters his own element outdoors. After the defeat at Methven, with Robert and his people living off the land like outlaws, Douglas quickly shows his skill and zest at procuring game and especially fish:

For quhile he venesoun thaim brocht
 And with his handys quhile he wrocht
 Gynnys to tak geddis and salmonys,
 Trowtis, elys, and als menounys (II.577–80).

His woodcraft is suited to his native district, where his capacity to devise and carry out stratagems seems most creatively free and dangerous. The connection between Douglas and the forest becomes refrain-like. He emerges from it (“In all this tyme James of Douglas | In the forest travailand was”; IX.677–78, *cf.* X.343–44), and recedes back into it (“Synne till the forest held his way”; VIII.515, *cf.* XV.418–19). “Now let him in the forest be” is an apt gesture of closure for an episode of Douglas's woodland adventures, a tidy evocation of the storyteller turning from one topic to another, and also a drolly portentous way to suggest that those adventures are ongoing, just beyond the reader's ken (XV.569; *cf.* IX.1–2).¹⁹

One way of thinking about the distinctive presence of Douglas from his earliest appearances in the *Bruce* might be to consider his association with the recurrent shifts and discontinuities in what has been generally recognized to be a highly fluent narrative. In the syntax of Barbour's verse, Jeremy Smith perceives a “much looser” structure than in later Scots verse style, “with clauses linked by coordinating conjunctions ... and parenthetical statements”; Smith considers these features to resemble “usages found in the spoken mode” that are “characteristic of medieval verse romances and of other texts modelled on them.”²⁰ A link between continuity and “the

¹⁹ On such narrative formulae and the intermittent shift into the present tense, see A. J. Aitken, “The Language of Older Scots Poetry (1983)” and “Oral Narrative Style in Middle Scots (1978),” *Collected Writings on the Scots Language*, ed. Caroline Macafee (Perth: Scots Language Centre, 2015), consulted 23 September 2016, at <http://medio.scotslanguage.com/articles/view/id/4507>. See also James Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland: Historical Narrative in Medieval Scotland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 142.

²⁰ *Older Scots: A Linguistic Reader*, STS 5th ser. 9 (2012), 55. On the *Bruce*'s affiliations with romance, see R. James Goldstein, “I Will My Process Hald’: Making Sense of Scottish Lives and the Desire for History in Barbour, Wyntoun, and Blind Harry,” in *A Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt and Janet Hadley Williams (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006), 35–47; Nicola Royan, “A Question of Truth: Barbour's *Bruce*, Hary's *Wallace* and *Richard Coer*

impression of authenticity” has been posited in Barbour’s style; but so have the poet’s “quick dramatic scenes of movement and action.”²¹ Possibly Barbour is mediating between a “formally continuous narrative aiming at completeness at the episodic level”²² and a more discontinuous, episodic mode of narration. The interventions Douglas makes into the flow of the narrative may impart something of these qualities to the poem as a whole.

His path to honor blocked, Douglas becomes “essentially the leader of a peasant militia,” wedded to the forest, his followers more like yeomen than knights.²³ From the outset of his guardianship of the forest, Douglas already seems fully-fledged and well-versed. His earliest incursion into inhabited space shows him acting with much less assurance, however. His attack on his native village’s parish church, St Bride’s “almost goes awry through premature action.”²⁴ Like other outlaw heroes, Douglas prepares a disguise for his homecoming: “Bot, for that men suld nocht him ken, | He suld ane mantill have, auld and bar, | And a flail, as he a thresscher war” (V.316-18). In the attack, mistakes proliferate. After a chancy fight in the church, capturing the castle nearby seems almost anticlimactic. Only two not very stalwart men have remained there, a porter and a cook. Douglas enters the gate “for-owtyn debate” (V.386) and finds a feast ready for the high occasion of Palm Sunday. He sits down ‘and eyt all at layser’ (V.390). He seizes any goods and armaments that can be carried off. Only then, and hardly in the heat of action, he orders the making of a “foul mellé” (V.404) of “quheyt and flour and meill and malt” (V.398), with wine, and the blood and flesh of executed prisoners.²⁵ The “men off that countré” wonder at the

de Lion,” *International Review of Scottish Studies*, 34 (2009), 75-105; Purdie, “Medieval Romance and the Generic Frictions.”

²¹ On fluency, J. A. W. Bennett, *Middle English Literature*, ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), quoted at p. 102 (also p. 118); and Caroline Macafee and A. J. Aitken, “A History of Scots to 1700,” *DOST* § 9. 2. 2. On discontinuity, Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), quoted at p. 23.

²² John McGavin, *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 4.

²³ Boardman, “‘Thar nobill eldrys gret bounte,’” 209–10; Goldstein, *Matter of Scotland*, 191.

²⁴ Barbour, *Bruce*, ed. Duncan, 31. This is not the first instance in the *Bruce* of bloodshed in a holy place, Robert having stabbed his former ally John Comyn “at the hye awter” in the Greyfriars’ Church in Dumfries, with momentous consequences; *Bruce*, II.25–36 (l. 33).

²⁵ *DOST, mellé*, n. Nicola Royan detects a parody of the elements of the Mass, in “A Question of Truth,” p. 92; an allusion to Palm Sunday may also be detectable in the son’s return to his citadel.

scene because it “was unsemly for to se,” but also because of the sheer excess of materials involved; “swa fele thar mellyt wer.” In their name for it, “the Dowglas lardner” (V.407–10), a certain reveling in lavishness is blended with the macabre.²⁶ As shown by the recurrence of the anecdote in later versions of the Douglas story, the gruesome meat-cellar becomes part of the heroic ancestor’s mystique.²⁷ Douglas had earlier been praised for showing loyalty in carving of meat, a skill betokening good nurture and gentle manners, but now his aptness with carving becomes horrific.²⁸ Converting the slaughtered enemy into mock foodstuffs may recall the “supremely diabolical performance” of cannibalism that King Richard “gleefully” indulges in in the Middle English romance *Richard Coer de Lyon*.²⁹ Nevertheless, Barbour’s treatment is comparatively reserved.³⁰ After extolling Douglas’s raid as a *gud beginning*, an *unlikely thing* that may yet produce a *conabill ending* (V.262–63, 265–66), the poet ventures upon the Douglas Larder as much by downplaying as articulating its sinister unlikeliness.

Feasting and mutilation intersect again in Barbour’s depiction of Douglas. Much later in the poem, an English attack on Douglas’s manor at Lintalee stirs him to retaliate with a violence that Barbour chooses to handle allusively, with irony and understatement. The English attack is designed to provoke Douglas to open battle and, as if to hit him in an especially tender spot, the attackers target trees. Sir Thomas Richmond “thocht he his men wald mak | To hew Jedwort Forrest sa clene | That na tre suld tharin be sene” (XVI.366–68).³¹ Douglas responds by enlisting the forest:

Than byrkis on athyr sid the way
That young and thik war growand ner,
He knyt togidder on sic maner

²⁶ *DOST*, s.v. *lardener*, -ar, n. 1. “A larder or store-room for meat and other provisions, a meat-cellar.”

²⁷ *David Hume of Godscroft’s The History of the House of Douglas*, ed. David Reid, 2 vols, STS, 4th ser. 25–26 (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1996), I: 80–81.

²⁸ *Bruce*, e.g. I.353–56, II.91–92; cf. XVI.451–62, XIX.566–67.

²⁹ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 31, 64, 74; Peter Larkin, ed. *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Medieval Texts Series (Rochester: Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015), 6–7, 17–20.

³⁰ Cf. Piero Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. Joan K. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 48, on the “ferocity” of Barbour’s depiction.

³¹ McDiarmid detects a traditional quality to the phrasing here (McDiarmid and Stevenson, I: 100).

That men moucht nocht weill throu thaim rid (XVI.398-401).

Catching wind of a raid being mounted by “ane clerk Elys | With weill thre hunder ennymys” on Lintalee (445-46), Douglas hastens to reclaim his manor. An English chronicle has it that Douglas returns to Lintalee to discover the noble *schavaldour* (brigand, raider)³² Clerk Elias and his colleagues enjoying a tasty meal. So the chronicle goes, Douglas wrathfully beheads Elias and places the severed head on the corpse’s anus.³³ The mutilation betokens the shame due to anyone who comes uninvited to Douglas’s table, or into Douglas’s forest. In contrast to this English account, Barbour handles Douglas’s retaliation at Lintalee thus:

... with suerdis that scharply schar
 Thai servyt thaim full egrely.
 Slayn war thai full grevously
 That wele ner eschapyt nane.
 Thai servyt thaim on sa gret wane
 With scherand swerdis and with knyffis,
 That weile ner all left the lyvys.
 Thai had a felloun efter mes.

That sowrchargis to chargand wes (XVI.451-62).

An echo is perceptible of Barbour’s depiction of Douglas in his youth, carving the bishop’s meat (I.355-56, II.91-92). Now the language of carving and serving is laden with a roughly playful irony that continues in the final couplet, which McDiarmid translates as “They had an ill sort of delicacy, that extra dish was too heavy (for their digestions).”³⁴ If anything, Barbour thus intensifies the topic of Douglas’s proclivity to violence at dinnertime; but this is evidently not the moment in the rising trajectory of heroism for the explicit barbarity of another Douglas Larder. By such exploits as the surprise at Lintalee, Douglas keeps up his reputation as a fearsome guardian of the Borders and ensures that the English will be the more reluctant to enter Scotland. His persona sets a harshly effective standard for his successors and ensures that he will long be remembered by the English:

³² *OED*, *shavaldour*, n.; *DOST*, (*schavaldour*), *schavaldwr*, n.; *MED*, *shavaldour*, n. In the Cambridge MS of Barbour’s *Bruce*, the word appears only once, and not in this episode, but with similarly pejorative significance: V.205; see Klaus Bitterling, *Der Wortschatz von Barbour’s “Bruce”* (PhD diss. Freie Universität Berlin, 1970), 417.

³³ In his *ODNB* biography of Douglas, A. A. M. Duncan gives prominence to this dubious exploit, as recorded in British Library, Harleian MS 655, in an anonymous chronicle of the reign of Edward II, relevant extracts in *Illustrations of Scottish History, From the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century; Selected from Unpublished Manuscripts in the British Museum, and the Tower of London*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (Glasgow: Maitland Club, 1834), 1-10 (3-4).

³⁴ McDiarmid and Stevenson, I: 100.

The drede of the lord of Dowglas
 And his renoune sa scalit was
 Throw-out the marchis of Ingland
 That all that war thar-in wonnand
 Dred him as the fell devill of hell;
 And yeit haf ik hard oft-syis tell
 That he sa gretly dred wes than
 That quhen wivys wald childer ban,
 Thai wald rycht with ane angry face
 Betech thaim to the blak Douglas (XV.553–62).³⁵

To be effective, the Douglas mystique involves a degree of demonization. Thus his reputation extends into the household lore of his enemies as that of a formidable, capricious “nychtbur” (XVI.482) who is ineradicably part of the landscape of the Borders. Implicitly, this is the role Scottish defenders ought to play.³⁶ “The black Douglas” (e.g., XV.562) now assumes the role in national mythology of the borderland protector *par excellence*, with more than a touch of the supernatural.³⁷ Associated at first with James Douglas’s hair color and dark complexion,³⁸ blackness is becoming a much more nuanced, complex indicator of his distinctiveness.

On occasion, Douglas’s signature blend of violence and creativity seems to achieve a strange balance. Compared to the near-disaster at St Bride’s and its macabre outcome, his capture of Roxburgh Castle proceeds neatly according to a carefully crafted script, one that succeeds through technological advance (a new type of siege ladder), stagecraft, sheer effrontery, and an ominous convergence of events.³⁹ For both the poet and

³⁵ This detail was sufficiently important to merit a rubric in the Edinburgh MS of the poem: “Quhow ye uywis of Ing[land] ... to ye blak Dougles” (McDiarmid and Stevenson, I: 121).

³⁶ Barbour’s witness parallels English descriptions of Douglas’s waging “war with brutality”; Michael Brown, *Black Douglasses*, 21. Cf. McDiarmid on the necessarily “grim business of guerrilla warfare”; McDiarmid and Stevenson, I: 98. On the strategy involved, see Iain A. MacInnes, “‘Shock and Awe’: The Use of Terror as a Psychological Weapon During the Bruce-Balliol Civil War, 1332–1338,” in *England and Scotland in the Fourteenth Century: New Perspectives*, ed. Andy King and Michael A. Penman (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 40–59.

³⁷ Brown, *Black Douglasses*, 19.

³⁸ In his initial description of Douglas (I.375–406), Barbour compared him to dark-haired Hector, a passage discussed in Emily Wingfield, *Trojan Legend in Medieval Scottish Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), 58–60; see also Purdie, “Medieval Romance and the Generic Frictions,” 61–64.

³⁹ According to Barbour, Douglas “Set all his wit for to purchas | How Roxburgh throw sutelté | Or ony craft mycht wonnen be” (X.360–62). The Scottish capture of Roxburgh Castle is also depicted as cunningly planned and executed in the *Chronicle of Lanercost*; *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. Joseph Stevenson

the protagonist, it is one of the most skilled performances of the poem. Readers, James Hogg notable among them, have responded imaginatively to Barbour's handling of the scene.⁴⁰ Taking place "on the Fasteryngis evyn rycht | In the begynnynng of the nycht" (X.377–78), the attack seems of a piece with the evening's Shrovetide festivities. The occasion frames the episode, imparts its character, and ensures its outcome. Draped in black cloaks, Douglas and his troop approach the castle in single file on all fours, "Ryght as thai ky or oxin wer" (X.386). Cattle should be tethered on a night like this; two guards on the wall of the castle joke about what led the farmer to neglect his roaming herd, and what they expect will ensue. At their ease while merrymaking proceeds within, the two guards unknowingly predict the fate of the garrison. Their words rebound upon themselves: what they suppose are cattle likely to be captured by the Douglas in fact signify their own fate as the Douglas's victims; what seems to them evidence of a rustic mishap in the making, amusing to watch from the safe height of the wall, will turn out to have been an intimation of their overthrow. The approach offers its onlookers a jolly prospect that they disastrously fail to recognize in the spirit of the season, as a disguising.⁴¹

Scaling the wall and overcoming the few defenders, Douglas's troop enter the hall.

The folk wes that tyme halily
 Intill the hall at thar daunsyng,
 Syngyng, and other wayis playing;
 And apon Fasteryngis Evyn, this
 As custume is to mak joy and blys
 Till folk that ar into pousté—
 Swa trowyt thai that tyme to be.
 Bot, or thai wyst, rycht in the hall
 Douglas and his rout cummyn war all,
 And criyt on hycht, "Douglas, Douglas!" (X.442–51).

The moment links with earlier episodes in the *Bruce*. In contrast to the attack on the church of St Bride, the battle-cry goes up at the right moment, instantly overawing the celebrating throng. With the reference to Shrovetide merrymaking as customary for people secure in their power and

(Edinburgh: Maitland Club, 1839), 223. See also *Scotichronicon*, ed. Watt, VII: 348–51 (XII.19).

⁴⁰ Wittig, *Scottish Tradition in Literature*, 19; James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Man: A Border Romance*, ed. Judy King and Graham Tulloch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 376.

⁴¹ Though late, some Scottish evidence exists for dancing and *gysing* as traditional festivities on *Fasternis evin*; see the entries in *DOST* for *fasterevin*, *fasternevin*, *fasternisevin*, *fastin(g)evin*, and *fastin(g)iseven*; see also Priscilla Bawcutt, ed., *The Poems of William Dunbar* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1998), II: 383–85.

privilege, the celebration momentarily assumes a moral and even an allegorical significance.⁴²

The taking of Roxburgh Castle has further points of reference and comparison. It comes in the midst of a sequence of three Scottish assaults on fortifications in the south of Scotland. The sequence rises in strategic significance, with the taking of Linlithgow carried out by local farmers and depicted in suitably pastoral terms, followed by the Roxburgh episode and concluding with Sir Thomas Randolph's capture of Edinburgh Castle cast in an epic mode;⁴³ emulating Douglas's success at Roxburgh, Randolph takes a stealthy approach at Edinburgh (X.511-34), and finds for once a way to balance his beloved "hey chevalry" with "sumkyn slycht" (X.522, 524). Each episode in the sequence creates opportunities for comparison with the others; the episodes at Linlithgow and Edinburgh provide a clarifying foil to Douglas's taking of Roxburgh, in which jollity merges into retribution, and chronicle into pastime and allegory. Each exploit in the sequence succeeds through stealth and trickery; but the similarity serves more to strengthen what is peculiar about Douglas than to incorporate him tidily into a trend of rising success at taking castles from the English. The spectacle of what is readily assumed to be a herd of roaming oxen broken free from their tethers on this night of loosened restraints shows Douglas as a dramaturge and chief performer who has grasped something fundamental about couching violent intent in the guise of festivity. The approach of his men to Roxburgh, and the suddenness with which they announce their commander's presence to the dancers in the hall, bring Douglas into an intense connection with the poet powerfully evoking these scenes: imagine the danger when the poet's vividness of representation is coupled with the hero's malign intent.

Barbour's account of the 1327 skirmishes in Weardale is the culmination of his depiction of Douglas as an intruder who wields shadow, light, silence and noise with overpowering effect to overawe and deceive

⁴² On the topic of the castle besieged by vices, see Roberta Cornelius, *The Figurative Castle: A Study in the Mediaeval Allegory of the Edifice with Especial Reference to Religious Writings* (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Bryn Mawr College, 1930), 14-36, Malcolm Hebron, *The Medieval Siege: Theme and Image in Middle English Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 136-50, and Christiania Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 89-90. Barbour makes a similar application during his earlier account of the climactic English attack on Kildrummy Castle, when a fire is set in the thatched roof of the castle hall; fire is compared to pride, in that it cannot remain hidden; *Barbour's Bruce*, IV.119-24.

⁴³ Barbour includes a heroic analogy with Alexander's taking of Tyre (X.708-40), St Margaret's depicted prophecy of the attack (X.742-60), and finally an encomium of Randolph (X.781-92).

his enemies. His eerie resourcefulness, insight into the surrounding topography, and grasp of developing circumstances and opportunities make him a master of illusion and mood.⁴⁴ His apt recourse to courtly and lowly modes of speech as befits the occasion captivates the trust of his compatriots. In the course of the extended episode, he comes to seem impossibly, unforgettably lucky. As the deviser of spectacular solutions to the Scots' problems at Weardale, Douglas proves indispensable. As if in parallel, Barbour's refinement of this model prepares the developing tradition of poetry in Scots to rehearse scenes in which narrative and stylistic overturns are brilliantly staged and full of nuance. In his rendering, Barbour exhibits the attentiveness and responsiveness he ascribes to his protagonist. The Weardale sequence reveals an ongoing, at times pronounced modulation of style. Barbour so commits his lexical energies to verisimilitude that he touches with apparent learning and assurance upon specialized vocabulary as topically appropriate.⁴⁵ The text appears to be maneuvered in concert with the protagonist's performance. When he adopts Douglas's voice, Barbour's handling of style can be felicitous. As the bringer of resolution to a suspenseful episode, Douglas provides the poet with an enabling model for his own manner of narration.

To approach this climactic linkage between narrator and character thus calls for consideration of Barbour's, and Douglas's, terms. Prominent are those primary indicators of historical veracity, the names of places and people, and the associated factual details, some of which it is possible to verify: the Scottish force was encamped on the north side of the River Wear; the Scots lit many fires and made much noise in order to alarm their enemies;⁴⁶ and they withdrew from their position without being noticed.⁴⁷ The narration anchors more or less firmly upon history, and Barbour demonstrates his command over what at the outset of the *Bruce* he called *suthfastnes*. Well told, true things are pleasing for an audience to hear about (I.9-10). Here as intermittently elsewhere, however, Barbour bends facts, to draw attention to key figures, or to raise the stakes for his protagonists: thus the *new maid king*, Edward III, was not *auchtene yer auld* when he led his army into Weardale (XIX.273, 280), but a mere

⁴⁴ With reference to this campaign, English chroniclers make a similar assessment of "Jacobus de Douglas, miles baldus et cautelosus," *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. Stevenson, 231.

⁴⁵ The ensuing analysis was carried out with reference to Klaus Bitterling's detailed study of Barbour's language in his *Wortschatz*; also consulted was Nicola Pantaleo, "The Polyglot Puzzle: Geographical and Military Lexicon in Barbour's *The Bruce*," *Textus: English Studies in Italy*, 10 (1997), 287-99.

⁴⁶ Bryant, trans., *True Chronicles of Jean le Bel*, 46.

⁴⁷ Gray, *Scalacronica*, ed. and trans. King, 99.

fourteen. At moments, the factual detail reminds the audience of the narrator's privileged access to witness and memory, as with the almost casual observation that Douglas was wearing a gown over his armor during the first clash between the armies (XIX.354). These details function in part to confirm the audience's faith in the recitation. Associated with these markers of factual detail are the many prominent items of military jargon: for instance, the *ost*, *battaillis*, *discourriours*, "good array," *timmeris*, *crakis*, *archers*, *bikker*, *gret cumpany*, *courser*, *buschement* and *enbuschement*, *banners*, "jousting of war," *jupertis*, and *tranowntyn*. With these are no less prominent idioms pertaining to action on the field: *prikand*, *traversit*, *lingand*, *trumpit*, *assaill*, *scrimin*. Two of these terms Barbour identifies as unusual, *timmeris* and *crakis* (XIX.398–405), the English use of helmet crests and cannons being as yet new to the Scots (though the latter were previously experienced at the siege of Berwick, XVII.250–52). Concrete detail increases verisimilitude and thus adds to the authority conveyed by the narration.

So far, Barbour's terms appear to confirm audience expectations and secure its approval. Barbour's topographical terms do not work quite so straightforwardly. Here is a sample: *hey rig*, *dale*, *strekitt weill*, *the water*, *sumdeill stay*, *park*, *mos*, *sykis*. At the outset, prominent prepositions and adverbs intensify location and motion: *toward*, *outour*, *down*, *up*, *upon*, *till*, *fra*, *dounwart*, *apon*. These markers cannot be predicted to operate in tidy alignment with the factual and military terms. In some, as with *the water*, positive implications seem uppermost, with associations with refuge, advantage, and reunion. With others, notably the *mos* and *sykis*, the danger, difficulty, and degradation they entail is mitigated by the protection they offer. Even here, the cumulative effect is to increase the audience's appreciation of Douglas's command of the situation.⁴⁸ The protagonist's perspective and direct discourse ensure the cohesion of the sequence. Primacy of attention goes to what Douglas discovers, says, and brings to pass. He rides out to view the arrival of the English forces (XIX.287–88), notices the English maneuvers to lure and ambush the Scots (343, 445–47), finds a secure location for the Scottish camp (488–89), devises a route around the English lines in order to attack them at an undefended point (532–34; also 582), and plots an escape route (645–46). Through the protagonist's perspective, the audience learns about the lay of the land, so that the rate of discovery becomes equivalent. Barbour's audience knows even before the Scottish army and other commanders do. This privilege ends when this audience is not apprised of the escape route until Douglas tells his superior, Thomas Randolph, earl of Moray. Until that chastening

⁴⁸ A rather different perspective is conveyed by Jean le Bel; *True Chronicles*, trans Bryant, 47–49.

moment, they are attuned closely to Douglas's exceptional learning about topography, tactics and disposition. This learning increases the audience's assurance, but when it is withheld, that assurance plummets, to be replaced by the reminder that everything depends on the narrator's conveyance of the protagonist's perceptions, reactions, and decisions.

For verisimilitude and vividness but also for qualities more difficult to identify, direct discourse demands high focus in Barbour's narrative sequence. In the *Bruce*, such discourse tends to be especially vivid, full of the "pithy talk" that Wittig describes as "laconic and popular," and Bennett as "laced with terse proverbial wisdom".⁴⁹ These qualities are evident in the passages of dialogue in the sequence, with a straightforward instance of direct discourse occurring early in the sequence, and more complex ones appearing later. The former, simpler exchange is between Douglas and Randolph, the commander of the Scottish forces. Douglas addresses his superior in respectful and complimentary terms, as "sic a capitayn | That swa gret thing dar undreta" (XIX.294–95, 299–301); but then, swearing "be saynct Bryd" (Bridget, the patron of his birthplace; 302), he becomes more assertive. As the audience has learned through Douglas's eyes, the odds vastly favor the English. In his determination to face these odds in open battle, Randolph seems doctrinaire and quixotic.⁵⁰ In contrast, Douglas conveys a more pragmatic awareness of options as fluid and dynamic. His realism appeals to the vox populi: after Douglas speaks, it is not Randolph who agrees, but an undefined collective audience that "assentyt" (XIX.718).

It is especially worth noticing the contrast between timely knowing and ignorant unknowing, as the audience experiences these through direct discourse. These features combine in a climactic episode in the sequence, Barbour's depiction of the night raid on the English position. This raid is recognized by the chroniclers as a particular instance of Douglas's prowess and acumen.⁵¹ The event demands and receives full orchestration. Douglas has mustered and briefed his strike force. They have ridden hard through the forest. Now everything is quiet, and attention shifts to the English camp:

Ane Inglis man that lay bekind
 Him be a fyr said till his fer,
 "I wat nocht quhat may tyd us her,
 Bot rycht a gret growyng me tais.
 I dred sar for the blak Douglas."
 And he that hard him said, "Perfay

⁴⁹ *Scottish Tradition in Literature*, 21; *Middle English Literature*, 106.

⁵⁰ McDiarmid and Stevenson, ed. *Bruce*, I: 105-06; cf. X.511-760, XVIII.28-184.

⁵¹ Having witnessed the events he narrates, Jean le Bel provides an especially spirited account; Bryant, trans., *True Chronicles*, 47.

Thow sall haiff caus, gif that I may."
 With that with all his cumpany
 He ruschynt in on thaim hardely (XIX.556–64).

The decisive term is the present participle *bekand*. The verb *beke*, to expose to warmth, to bask, to enjoy warmth, here used reflexively, seems now very much a Henrysonian word; Denton Fox noted its connotation of "dangerous complacency" in the *Fables* and *The Testament of Cresseid*.⁵² The premonition of danger and the English soldier's confession of his visceral horror arise from the midst of warmth, wellbeing, and fellowship. The unnamed soldier confides to his neighbor that he cannot dispel his dread of the *blak Douglas*, when his "neighbor" is the black Douglas. The word *blak* appears rarely in the *Bruce*, and exclusively in reference to Douglas.⁵³ It has ignited at this point. Speak of the devil, and here he is, taking the confession of one consumed with fear of him. Douglas mockingly promises to give good cause for this fear, and the action and noise suddenly whirl up:

With sperys that scharply schar
 Thai stekyt men dispitously.
 The noys weill sone rais and cry,
 And they stabbyt, stekyt, and slew,
 And pailyownys down yarne thai drew.
 A felloun slauchter maid thai thar
 For thai that liand nakit war
 Had no power defens to ma,
 And thai but pité gan thaim sla (XIX.566–74).

It is as nightmarish a moment as any in the *Bruce*. With the violent exertion of the attackers and the helpless proneness of the naked victims, the exploit has become a grotesquery. The phrase "scharply schar" echoes previous scenes of carving meat but also of dismembering bodies: the attentive slicing of the bishop's dinner; the dishing up of the English occupants at Lintalee.⁵⁴ The reader is invited to celebrate the exploit and even to participate in it vicariously, but also to deplore it. The modulations in this scene, first subtle and incremental, then vast and infused with both horror and grim triumph, represent one of the most disturbing scenes in Older Scots verse. The disturbance is heightened by Douglas's offhand remark that "we haf drawyn blud" (XIX.625). Susan Foran cites Barbour's account of the night raid to argue that

⁵² *The Poems of Robert Henryson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 268, 343.

⁵³ Such architectonic handling of language deserves to be considered in formulating hypotheses about the compositional history of the *Bruce*, about which see Boardman and Foran, "Introduction," 11–12, and Duncan, ed. *Bruce*, 8–11. Barbour evidently wove motifs into the larger span of his work.

⁵⁴ Bitterling, *Wortschatz*, 417–18.

violence marks the text.... This is conveyed through conventions found in romance, and in outlaw tales, and such violence is justified because it is enacted to reinstate the correct state of affairs, a recovery of patrimony.⁵⁵

Instead, such disparate literary material may actually detract from the triumph of the scene: in departing from the English camp, for example, Douglas is almost overcome by “a carle” wielding a club (XIX.590–98, 612–16). In his handling of the murky doings of the night-raid, Barbour foregrounds such unseemly, inglorious encounters and juxtapositions.⁵⁶

As a military maneuver, the raid is shocking but not decisive, and the English continue to tighten their hold on the Scottish position. Douglas must adopt a new means to hearten the beleaguered Scots. At earlier moments of dismay and doubt, King Robert had been depicted playing the role of an “accomplished storyteller” who knows “the effects of a good story well told.”⁵⁷ Now Douglas takes up the role of storyteller; but his tale of a fox and a fisherman seems humbler than Robert’s heroic romances. In it, a fisherman has built a hut by a river; returning from a night’s work, he sees by the glow from his fireplace that a fox is in the hut, gnawing on a salmon. Hurrying to the door and drawing his sword, he shouts at the fox, “You thief, get out!” The fox looks for an escape route, but the only way out is where the man stands threateningly. The fox notices a grey homespun mantle on the cot, and drags it with his teeth over onto the fire. When the man sees this, he rushes to the fire to rescue the mantle. The fox departs in haste and keeps going until he reaches his den. While the man considers himself badly tricked, the fox gets away unharmed (XIX.654–87). Douglas applies the tale to the situation in which the two armies are

⁵⁵ “A Nation of Knights? Chivalry and the Community of the Realm in Barbour’s *Bruce*,” in Boardman and Foran, ed., *Barbour’s Bruce and its Cultural Contexts*, 137–48 (p. 142).

⁵⁶ The discussion of this episode might be compared to the ongoing debate over the *Doloneia* in *Iliad*, Book X, as recently in Kathleen Garbutt, “An Indo-European Night Raid?,” *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 34.1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 183–200; cf. Casey Dué’s discussion of the traditional topic of the ambush, in “Maneuvers in the Dark of Night: *Iliad* 10 in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Homeric Contexts: Neoanalysis and the Interpretation of Oral Poetry*, ed. F. Montanari, A. Rengakos, and C. Tsagilis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 165–73.

⁵⁷ Robert’s narrative skill has been much noted. A valuable study is W. F. H. Nicolaisen, “Stories and Storytelling in Barbour’s *Brus*,” *Bryght Lanternis: Essays on the Language and Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, ed. J. Derrick McClure and Michael R.G. Spiller (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), 55–66 (quoted at 63). The commonly cited instance of Robert’s recourse to narrative to hearten his followers is his telling of the “[r]omanyis off worthi Ferambrace” during the crossing of Loch Lomond, III.435–66 (l. 437); an earlier instance is his pair of tales about Hannibal and Julius Caesar, III.187–299.

placed. The English suppose they are blocking the Scots' retreat, but Douglas has discovered another route he describes as a bit wet. He predicts a short forced march will bring the Scots army out of reach of the English. For now they need to convey the impression they are strongly emplaced, well provisioned, and in good spirits: hence the bonfires, fanfares, and merry-making. That night they will proceed homeward, past the encircling English lines. The English will in turn consider themselves badly tricked (XIX.688–97).

Rhiannon Purdie calls Douglas's tale "a striking choice ... unchivalric to the point of being anti-chivalric."⁵⁸ In this spirit, it may be worth noting how the tale suits its teller, with his celebrated skill at fishing; it is curious that the fisherman draws a sword, not a knife, and perhaps even that, as at St Bride's and the Douglas Larder, a mantle plays a significant part. There is something anecdotal about the tale. It involves minimal anthropomorphosis: this is a straightforwardly foxy fox, at least until it experiences "full gret dout" (XIX.672) at the fisherman's threats. Dragging the mantle onto the fire might tip the story over the brink of plausibility for most listeners, almost but not quite into fable proper.⁵⁹ In Douglas's telling, genre and register are clearly demarcated in context. Along with its shift into an unexpected genre, folktale, the tale includes a high incidence of words that are otherwise rare or unattested in the *Bruce*. These terms can largely be accounted for topically and generically. A cursory survey reveals the following: *Nettis* occurs only here, as does *dur/dure*; beds are not frequent elsewhere in the *Bruce*; *loge/luge* appears elsewhere as a verb, while here, uniquely, it functions nominally; *salmound*, unsurprisingly, is not abundant in the *Bruce*, appearing previously only in the description of Douglas's own skill at fishing (II.579). When the fisherman calls the fox a *reiffar*, it is the unique usage in the poem. The *lauchtane* mantle—grey, homespun—is a borrowing from Gaelic *lachdunn*.⁶⁰ Of equal interest is the idiom *get out*: "The fox gat out" in haste from the lodge (XIX.682). This

⁵⁸ "Medieval Romance and the Generic Frictions," 73.

⁵⁹ Douglas is narrating a version of Aarne-Thompson folktale Type 67, current in Flanders, and traced in Scots-Gaelic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his study of Barbour (cited above, note 38), Nicolaisen cites Richard Bauman, "The Folktale and Oral Tradition in the Fables of Robert Henryson," *Fabula*, 6 (1963): 108–24 (120); Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. *Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*, FF Communications No. 3, 2nd revision (Helsinki, 1973), 37, type 67*; and Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-books, and Local Legends*, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–58), IV: K634.1.

⁶⁰ *DOST*, *lauchtane*, *lawchtane*, adj.

last colloquialism is followed by two appearances of *get away*, also otherwise rare in the *Bruce*: “The fox scaithles gat away”; shortly after, the Scots “may na gat away” (XIX.687, 692). The adverbial idiom *a nycht* is quite rare; elsewhere it signals the onset of a surprise attack. The initial *quhilum*, “A fischer quhilum lay | Besid a river,” is also rare in the *Bruce*. The transitive verb *red*, “rescue from burning,” appears only once previously in the *Bruce* (IV.132). Some of these features bespeak the craft described, its humbleness and ruralness; others may connect significantly with the wider poem.

On the whole, these items distinguish the tale stylistically from the surrounding texture. They establish parallels between the fox’s predicament and the one facing Douglas’s listeners. The change of register they effect draws the dramatic audience into receptivity, to perceive a hitherto unconsidered escape from their predicament: like a good harper, archer, or king, Douglas is lowering the tension to gather resolve for a new exertion, but one in a new, not quite chivalric mode. The narrative parallel well advanced between the fox and the Scots, the tale is more apt than has sometimes been supposed.⁶¹ In the night raid, the English mantle was scorched, and the fisherman’s attention has been directed toward it; all that remains is for the Scottish fox to hasten back to its den. Douglas has the situation in hand. The vividness and tidiness of his tale seem chosen to beguile his keyed-up commander and comrades into relieved assent at a moment of high tension. This inset narration in direct discourse repays attention for the distinctiveness of its language and style. For succeeding audiences of the poem, Douglas’s narration offers his affinity with the fox and its feral presence of mind as the best choice for the Scots in a tough spot. The tale may also remind such audiences of other places in the poem (the Douglas Larder, Lintalee) where finding evidence of interlopers dining in spaces he considers his own tips Douglas into extreme action. In the recurrently reciprocal campaigns that take up much of the latter half of the *Bruce*, in which the right to hold land, use property, or consume goods is in constant dispute, the roles of interloper and possessor have become so prone to sudden reversal that they almost seem to contain each other: which is the one able to use fire as an ally, and which the one who brandishes a sword and owns a dingy mantle?

At Weardale, both Douglas and Barbour display their aptness to carry out unexpected changes of direction and pace. Trapped by a massively superior, growing English force, and enspirited by Douglas, the Scots commit two unexpected acts, one which pushes toward the demonic in its extreme violence and the other which reaches into the landscape in ways not to be predicted as humanly possible. In the moments of trespass and

⁶¹ E.g., McDiarmid and Stevenson, III: 106.

resolution that ensue, the protagonist but also the poem take momentous steps, ones with lingering consequences for Scotland, its historiography, and its literature.⁶² Barbour's portrayal of Douglas as contained and uncontainable, clearly articulated and suddenly inscrutable, emerging from and receding into his forest, epitomizes this boundary-testing.⁶³ Douglas's most memorable exploits are those in which Barbour's listeners and readers feel they have become eyewitnesses to both victory and savagery. To attend to such moments in the *Bruce* is to experience a clarity of depiction that tests the bounds of commemoration and instruction. The horrible larder, Douglas's "oxen" at Roxburgh, the eldritch encounter at the campfire, the homespun tale of the fox, all carry an excess of meaning, beyond the demands of historical accuracy. Their recounting moves past the *suthfastnes* that Barbour extols in the opening lines of his poem, and may reveal something of what he meant there by *carpyng*.⁶⁴

The *Bruce* does not end with the escape from Weardale, and Douglas eventually leaves his forest. The romance of Douglas's career, as told by Barbour, moves into a final phase that circles back and ascends. King Robert dies of what Barbour calls "malice off enfundeyng" (XX.75), an illness resulting from prolonged exposure to the elements during Robert's fugitive wanderings.⁶⁵ Douglas undertakes to carry the king's heart into battle against the "Sarazenis" in Spain, where he is killed. Compared with Hector when he is first mentioned in the *Bruce* (I.375–406), Douglas finally earns from the poet the accolade of comparison with a Roman hero, Fabricius. As the poem draws to a close, Barbour mentions the interment

⁶² Though the evidence is late, it is possible that Barbour is working within a tradition about King Robert's precepts of defence, a tradition conveyed in verses attached to Bower's *Scotichronicon*: *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, ed. D. E. R. Watt, vol. 6: Books XI and XII, ed. Norman F. Shead, Wendy B. Stevenson, D. E. R. Watt *et al.* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991), 320–321. These verses may have formed "part of the verse chronicle which can be attributed to Bernard abbot of Arbroath" (432; also p. xviii). The author of this essay is grateful to Dolly MacKinnon, IASH Visiting Research Fellow, for noting the relevance of these verses to the present discussion.

⁶³ Cf. Caroline Macafee and A. J. Aitken's assertion that Scots poets "play with the boundaries between genres [...] but the motivation was irony or humour, not the confusion or elimination of boundaries for the future," in "A History of Scots to 1700," *DOST* § 9.1.

⁶⁴ van Heijnsbergen, "Scripting the National Past," 78, 85.

⁶⁵ For the claim that Robert had leprosy, see *Chronicon de Lanercost*, 10; *True Chronicles of Jean le Bel*, trans. Bryant, 34, 52. This diagnosis is considered by G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 418–19; cf. Michael Penman, *Robert the Bruce King of the Scots* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 302–04.

of Douglas's bones at the church of St Bride, in his home village. The poem is upholding the loyal, honorable son, as Douglas had upheld Bruce's enshrined heart; but the wily, ferocious Douglas of the forest persists, not too far from the Borders.

Barbour's evocative, sometimes alarming rendering of individual scenes makes the *Bruce* a more complicated precedent for later Scots literature than tends to be recognized.⁶⁶ Showing how the power of Scotland regained awhile the capacity to resist incursion, Barbour claims a strong role for the poet, at once a memorialist and a skilled performer. He celebrates his protagonists' resistance but also lingers over its more troubling implications. Thinking about the Douglas Larder, Lintalee, Roxburgh Castle, and Weardale as sites for Douglas's exceptional exploits, one may note how Barbour is purposefully preparing Douglas a realm to himself—not too close to the throne. In associating this character with the forest and its byways, the poet also indulges some elements of lower style and indeed a venturesome narrative latitude. It has been noted that Barbour shapes the *Bruce* with an eye to the intermittently fraught regional politics that shaped relations in and beyond the 1370s between James Douglas's son Archibald and the reigning Stewart, Robert II.⁶⁷ Archibald, "the Grim," has been posited as a supporter or even a patron of Barbour's work; but Barbour's shaded depiction of Archibald's father complicates any such identification.⁶⁸ Barbour portrays the formidable, victorious James Douglas as already marked with an otherness that disqualifies him from a permanent place in the inner circle. It is fascinating how in the most highly colored Douglas episodes, Barbour feints toward the outrageous and transgressive in depicting this leading character's improvisations, at times brilliantly modulated, at crucial moments deafeningly violent and horrifically bloody. It is no less fascinating that the poet experiments with reflecting or imitating in his own mode of narration Douglas's modes of action and discourse. Giving Douglas his own liminal space, Barbour is providing for later Scottish poets a memorable, influential precedent for incorporating into their literary structures departures into, and incursions

⁶⁶ This aspect of Barbour's practice has long been commented upon: see, e.g., Cosmo Innes, ed., John Barbour, *The Brus: From a Collation of the Cambridge and Edinburgh Manuscripts* (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1856), xxv; W. W. Skeat, ed., *The Bruce, or The Book of the Most Excellent and Noble Prince Robert de Broys, King of Scots, Compiled by Master John Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen*, 2 vols, EETS es 11, 21, 29, 55 (1870-89; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), I: lxvii; Wittig, *Scottish Tradition in Literature*, 23-24; J. A. W. Bennett, *Middle English Literature*, ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 105-06; Duncan, ed. Barbour, *Bruce*, 13.

⁶⁷ Brown, *Black Douglases*, 67-71, 124-25.

⁶⁸ The case is summarized in Boardman and Foran, 4-5, 14-16.

from, disorderly, disturbing spaces. From a certain political perspective the inhabitants of such spaces are unfit to reside at the courtly center; but, as Barbour cannot help demonstrating, in that unfitness they claim imaginative primacy.

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