

Sacrilege, Sacrifice and John Barbour's *Bruce*

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Narratives of Inauguration

Barbour's *Bruce*¹ is a poem cherished by historians, and one well served by them, not least in its recent edition by A.A.M. Duncan. Yet there are episodes in it - and, I contend, even structures controlling its overall narration - that they cannot explain. Not even with the aid of ideological criticism such as is provided by Foucault or Althusser can much be made of several important incidents in the text, such as the pair of hunting scenes in Books Six and Seven, during which time the protagonist is a fugitive in Galloway, or the spectacular violence of the so-called Douglas Larder in Book Ten. Likewise, while Bruce's murder of his fellow baron John Comyn is a matter of historical record, and its political impetus in establishing the rebellion that led to his kingship is undeniable, Barbour's narrative treatment of it in *The Bruce*, as a sacrilege, has anthropological facets that extend beyond the comfort zone of historical, or even historicist, criticism. Anthropology was the headline discipline of structuralism in its day, bringing to wide critical attention Lévi-Strauss and other great systematizers; its paramount influence on other genres of scholarship was sharply cut off by the advent of poststructuralism, which dismissed its comparative and universalizing practice as anti-historical. Yet it is to this body of criticism that I return, at least to one renegade continuator of it, in the form of the French critic and rogue theologian René Girard. His work from the 1970s, *Violence and the Sacred*, provides a means of access to a ritual plane in Barbour's medieval, clerical work, although not one governed by the Christian liturgical and imaginative forms that readers might expect.² The narrative accomplished on this plane is critical to the

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foundation, or re-foundation, of royal order after a usurpation, yet it is more than a dynastic expedient;³ rather, it is a story that, even as it bridges the gaps in credibility and legitimacy attendant upon a new royal line, primally reinforces the governing fictions of kingship as an institution.

The institution of kingship that I imagine here is not politically or ideologically, but mythically, constituted. This is not to deny the operation of the first two levels in the formation of Bruce's kingship, nor the extent to which practical politics and the abstractions of ideology are discursively created, but simply to add another layer to the picture: to use a bygone phrase, a deep structure. For, as Girard remarks, the 'relative failure of Frazer, Freud or Robertson Smith is no reason to regard their insistence on getting to the bottom of things as foolish or outdated.'⁴ Parts of the Girardian argument I am about to advance, insofar as they concern abjection, the dark side of the category that is the sacred, will be familiar to readers of psychoanalytic criticism, yet I have chosen not to follow the Kristevan route, either, in the belief that the textual transactions that are performed by Barbour in Bruce's name concern, not a series of steps in the engendering of a universal human psyche, but the reiteration of a pattern that contributes its force to the maintenance of a unique social category: the king.

To do this is to claim that the Archdeacon of Aberdeen's historiographical poem inhabits an anthropological domain, located midway between the contingencies of historical events and any synchronic structures that might be imagined to allow humans in general to cope with them, that is, in a space that recognizes cultural difference but is prepared to acknowledge transhistorical parallels. This is an area into which literary-anthropological study of medieval romance fits comfortably⁵ and the sections and aspects of the text I will address could be called the most romanced features of the book Barbour wrote - scenes situated in the forest, locus of *aventure*, transformation and outlawry, episodes of hyperbolical masculine violence, moments that illuminate the relations between a king and his faithful vassal. Barbour read French romances and his work is informed by them in various ways,⁶ yet I do not wish to suggest that the focal points of my discussion are generically foreign to the rest of the text, interjections of a literary - to wit, fictional - enterprise into an otherwise historical project. The poem is more than a narrative history with romance frills; the sites I identify, far from being excrescences,

are critical to identifying its main structure. These densely symbolized portions of the text aid significantly in determining the poem's genre and as such are crucial to grasping its aims.

The genre of *The Bruce*, despite generations of criticism, remains a vexed question. It has been called a history, a chronicle, a chivalric biography,⁷ a *speculum principis*,⁸ and latterly, a specimen of life-writing.⁹ Medieval historiographical genres are difficult to pin down and frequently blur together, sharing a similar rationale and deploying similar narrative techniques; many critics tacitly admit this and accept the poem as a mixed form, a *bricolage* drawing on a variety of generic resources, while mining the text for whatever type of information happens to interest them, be it historical or rhetorical. Yet what might appear as a non-invasive attempt to make Barbour's text speak to us piecemeal, ostensibly free of the demand that it conform to the contours of an identifiable and possibly anachronistic generic form, is by no means a value-neutral strategy.¹⁰ We cannot responsibly do without the work that the category of genre does for us; in establishing a horizon of expectations for a text's production, genre remains the critic's best resource for uncovering the vestiges of authorial intention. Intentions of one sort or another are widely imputed to Barbour: the intention to praise freedom, to exhort and define the community of the realm, to describe an ideal king, to defend the legitimacy of the Bruce lineage.¹¹ Such intentions are a byproduct of critical teleology, born of specific passages and thematic analyses of the text. These diverse and separable intentions can multiply indefinitely without exhausting the text's meaning unless and until we posit an overarching scheme to contain them: we need to reach a conclusion about the poem's total shape - its genre - not as an afterthought, but as an initial step in determining the interpretative possibilities offered at every juncture of the poem.

Therefore, in the spirit of controlling limitation, I propose this generic category: the poem is a narrative of inauguration. There are others - among them the massive body of texts generated in support of the Lancastrians after Henry IV's usurpation of the English throne in 1400,¹² or the biographical apologia Anna Comnena wrote on behalf of her father, the usurping Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus, in the *Alexiad*. Many more, I believe, could be identified right across the European Middle Ages. Their salient feature is a story in which a king seizes a throne by violence, violence which is both celebrated and obscured, yet goes on to exercise paradigmatically legitimate rule; Christian

messianism, as invoked by medieval authors or modern critics, is insufficient to explain either their structure or their narrative power. While it is true that narratives of inauguration involve an understanding of the king as a sacred being, the type of sacrality that is reflected in their re-enactment of originary violence is one that the concept of the messianic ruler as it is traditionally constructed cannot contain.

When medieval scholars like Marc Bloch or Ernst Kantorowicz have discussed sacral kingship in Europe, it has tended to be in self-referential terms, with the aid of a large body of accumulated theology and theory derived from specular literature and Roman law.¹³ The idea of the sacrality of the king is discussed in Greek and Hebrew theological terms; it is considered positively, as a foundation of monarchy, a great political idea and one of the remote grounds of law and order. Scholars focus on thaumaturgy, *lèse majesté*, or the king as the image of Christ, presenting the king as a critical link in the great chain of being, a series of ritual correspondences that connect divine and human order. What they have tended not to talk about is the other side of sacrality, the part that generations of anthropologists from the turn of the century to the 1970s and after identified in Third World kingships: namely, that a sacral object is repulsive, that awe is a form of fear. A considerable volume of scholarship exists on African royal inauguration rites, for example, in which the king is ritually defiled and isolated - locked in a dark hut, physically abused, pelted with stones or rotten fruit, compelled to handle taboo objects or eat unclean food, required to commit real or symbolic transgressions of blood taboos, incest or homicide.¹⁴ René Girard cites a comprehensive example: at inauguration, the king of the Incwala of West Africa must eat noxious foods, be sequestered, and commit incest with a tribal sister, all to increase his *silwane*, a word which expresses 'the condition of being like a wild beast' (110). The king's *silwane* must always exceed anyone else's. The royal *silwane* is then ritually transferred to a cow, which is torn to pieces by the crowd.

The Incwalan inaugural rite is about the aggressive delimitation of categories in which at first the king himself, and then a sacrificial image of him, is violently excluded. While the king experiences abjection, pushing him outside the boundaries of the community, he is simultaneously reclaimed and welcomed, after his negative energy has been siphoned off and destroyed in dummy form. His inauguration is a strategic deployment of the

king's awfulness, a process of celebrating its power and bringing it forward to be temporarily seen. It does not finally concern exclusion but a radical and binding acceptance. It is also an act of reciprocity, a bargain: the king is subjected and humiliated, made to pay for his subsequent power of subjection and rule. If the king suffers abjection, he does not do it like anybody else, but uniquely: he enacts and exposes the process, and takes its power, absorbing inadmissible categories and showing his dangerous and chaotic power. This humiliating and transgressive ceremony is about recognition - what Kantorowicz called *parousia*, recognition of the king as a sacred being¹⁵ - and, unlikely as it might seem, it provides a surprisingly useful blueprint for reading the otherwise murky and repetitive hunting sequences in *The Bruce*, as I will demonstrate below. For Girard's theory provides another way of understanding the king as radically representative both of community and divinity, as a sacred channel between the two spheres.

As a final step, before I begin a series of specific readings of Barbour's text, I should clarify exactly what is at stake in using Girardian theory to interpret *The Bruce*; comparing the poem to an African inaugural ritual, or understanding the king as sacred in the Girardian sense is not a superficial matter of identifying a sequence of shared motifs. Rather, to do so implies a specific function for the category of the sacred, namely to contain and occlude the processes of human violence through which societies - and in my elaboration, kingships - are founded. For Girard, human violence is the originary principle in the creation of all forms of social order, a force so potent and contagious that no culture can afford to admit its operation openly and must mythologize it, typically into the actions of gods or quasi-divine legendary heroes. This foundational yet destructive violence erupts into societies at moments that Girard calls sacrificial crises, periods of spreading chaos and feud in which social boundaries are transgressed and erased, confusing friend and enemy, kin and non-kin, male and female, man and animal. Girard chiefly applies his analytical model to classical texts that deal with war and its aftermath, the material of Homeric epic and Sophoclean drama, contending that the ritual process conducted in these texts, usually understood as battle between us and them, or war between two distinct cultures, actually describes an event of social breakdown that is at once more local and more universal. It is my argument here that the wars of independence of fourteenth-century Scotland,

uncomfortably closer to home, nonetheless operate the same way: the conflict described is less a case of definitive, ethnic or cultural war between the Scots and the English than a test case of the paradigm of European monarchy. Despite the undeniable presence of an expansionist neighbour and its legal and military encroachments and attacks, much of the swirling violence in Barbour's text is civil; one of the crucial operations enacted by the text is the gradual decipherment and reascription of Scottish and English identities according to their allegiance to Bruce, in default of any other descriptor. Bruce is not just an opportunist seizing his chance during an interregnum but a necessary manifestation of the final principle through which Scots know themselves in the face of the loss of distinction imposed by sacrificial crisis.¹⁶

This means that Barbour's text, and his poetic effort to re-mythologize the period and to contain its centrifugal forces in the sacred persona of Bruce the king represents a true historical intervention: writing a generation after Bruce's life and after the second series of dislocations following upon the claims of Edward Balliol and the disinherited (the second phase of the wars of independence 1332-57), during a brief window of kingly order in a disastrous century, Barbour is helping his society to avoid another outbreak of civil destruction by dint not of rationalizing, but of mystifying, Bruce's rise to power. Authors, individual or collective, who participate in the genre of inaugural narrative are necessarily caught up in this project of cultural mystification: it is the genre that allows the conflicting impulses of their works - to praise yet censure the king, to insist on his simultaneous uniqueness and ubiquity, to hold up his incoming violence as paradigmatic and not arbitrary, as somehow more kingly than the law-abiding behaviour of his coevals who inherit their thrones - to cohere. A narrative of inauguration imposes its own logic because it fulfils a specific need, the need to resolve a sacrificial crisis, a condition of spiralling disorder that makes itself felt only at the margins of the king's story as it is too terrible to look upon directly and for which the king himself is a figure. John Barbour, author of an ambitious and complete life of the king who emerged victorious from the worst period of violent terror in Scotland's recent history was, I believe, conscious of his work as a process of national reparation - its old designation as a national epic is correct to this extent - as well as an act in the service of his dynastic heirs in the name of social order. The scope of *The Bruce* means we can attribute to Barbour a deliberate series of narrative

choices in his work, as we cannot with writers of more fragmentary or composite narratives directed at the same end, yet it is not my purpose here to extol the prescience of the archdeacon or even the unity of his poem. Readers feel disjunction throughout Barbour's text, a sense that he is working at the edge of his poetic resources, relying on images that are oblique even to him as he tries to discipline a diverse body of texts about Bruce and his compatriots into a continuous story. Yet this strain is not just evidence of the task of compilation; it stems from the explosive nature of the material itself, the frightful truth of communal violence during the wars of independence and the competing metaphors used to explain and yet obfuscate it.

The Kingdom Desolat

Barbour begins his story with a picture of the kingless kingdom *desolat* (1.40) after the death of Alexander III. Scotland is a kind of wasteland, familiar to readers of French romances, a place deprived of the magical fecundity and ordering power of its rightful ruler.¹⁷ Yet its desolation is unquiet, a landscape of violent baronial squabbling. The subject of their conflict is genealogy, the ordering principles of kinship (1.41-70), rapidly complicated by the encroaching action of their southern neighbour and ostensible ally Edward I (1.91-224). At stake in the initial baronial arguments, and again in the picture of the country under Edward I's repressive overlordship, are a series of social distinctions: heir and non-heir (in the competing claims of Bruce and Balliol), friend and enemy (Edward I changes from one to another), noble and commoner (noblemen from the recently conquered country of Wales are forced to run on foot as *rebal-daille* in Edward's army, 1.103). The boundaries of property and personhood are endangered by acts of rape, theft and trespass. Free men are treated as bondsmen, and innocent people are hanged as criminals. Categories are collapsing, allegiances are proliferating, social division increasing: the scenario of sacrificial crisis.

Barbour's initial description is not about character exposition; it is not the backstory of Bruce and his familial or genealogical entitlements, as they are so telescoped as to be senseless and play no further part in the narrative. Nor does it concern community consensus: none is reached about royal legitimacy, and self-government dissolves into repetitive dissension. While Barbour certainly blames the English king for acts of violent disorder and

bewails the oppressions inflicted by his officers upon Scots, he does not - and cannot - move to any aggregative position of us and them, as the community he describes is too fragmented. Indeed he is forced to discuss the predicament of the Scots people metaphorically, as a form of *thrillage* or legal servitude,¹⁸ for lack of an explicit means of identifying their problem, which is one of loss of identity, one so profound it evades formulation in language. It will take the entire course of Barbour's work for this problem to achieve articulation and solution, and even then it will remain one that he continuously expresses in metaphor, as the Scots as subjects are recreated around and through the figure of their king. Bruce's royal authority emerges out of Barbour's initial scene of disorder, not as a rational answer to it (e.g. as the correct lineal heir of the previous king, or as the baronial peer most acceptable to the aristocratic polity) but as its avatar or embodiment. Thus his first defining act as king is an act of symbolic and taboo violence: the killing of Comyn in Greyfriars kirk.

Inaugural Sacrilege and the Murder of Comyn

In Book Two, Bruce's spectacular murder of John Comyn, baronial rival and Balliol supporter, before the altar in Greyfriars Kirk, leads directly to his inauguration ceremony at Scone. Despite the appalling nature of this act, Barbour clearly presents it as a king-making moment and has an authoritative character comment upon it: as soon as the bishop of St Andrews receives the letter 'That tauld him how slayn wes that baroun' (2.82), he responds with the hope that Bruce will now become king, according to the prophecies of Thomas of Ercildoune (2.86-89). The bishop identifies Bruce's action as a ritual event of the kind rendered intelligible by prophecy, magical or transcendental interpretation. When Edward I hears of Bruce's usurpation, it is presented as two conjoined events: Bruce '[h]ad brocht the Cumyn till ending,/ And ... syn had maid him king' (2.197-98). As word spreads through the country that Bruce has killed Comyn (2.78-79), it is taken by all to be a sign that he will be the new ruler. It is, in fact, the murder of Comyn, and not the hurried ceremony at Scone, which Barbour does not describe, that ritually creates his rule; in an important detail, he is hailed as king by James Douglas while still en route to the stone.

The imagined lay audience of Bruce's violent exploit may comprehend Bruce's action as a political murder, removing a factional rival. Barbour does not speculate about the causes of the

widespread public belief in Bruce's incipient kingship after the death of Comyn, but he does offer a rationale for the killing in its politico-legal dimension, configuring it as an act of royal justice (1.483-630). Comyn is described as tempting Bruce into making a bid for the throne, promising his support, and then betraying this agreement (as contained in an indenture, a legal document) to Scotland's overlord, Edward I. This act of personal and national betrayal (Comyn turns over a fellow baron and fellow Scot to the foreign suzerain) is defined by Barbour as treason, a definition which attributes to Bruce, the object of betrayal, a royal status - acting against him is acting against the polity or the kingdom.¹⁹ The poet, in including this narrative, allows a revenge killing in the process of baronial feud to be ideologically converted into the abstractions of governance, of *lèse majesté* and crime against the crown. The action of Bruce in destroying Comyn is made politically tenable, contained by the category of justice: the murder, *qua* murder, disappears and the death of Comyn is the first act of royal rule-enforcement.

Yet the sacrilege remains, and it must be expiated: because he 'gave na gyrrh to the auter,' (2.44) violating sanctuary, writes Barbour, 'Ik hard never in romanys tell/ Of man sa hard frayit as was he' (2.45-47). It is the status of Bruce's action as a sacrilege that impels the next section of the action, in which the new king is repeatedly humiliated. In killing a man inside a church, a demarcated sacred space, Bruce commits a sin more grave than the earthly crime of murder, Barbour's text suggests. We might see this as an assertion of Barbour's clerical privilege: violence committed in church, even against a layman, threatens the security of all clerics, breaking the boundary that divides them from lay powers and their violent forms of coercion. Yet even as the sacred confines of a church serve to separate out clerical and lay powers, they also bring them together: any person entering a church becomes holy, participating in its sacredness. This is what is contained in the idea of sanctuary: in effect, clerical immunity is extended to any persons found within its spatialized purview, regardless of their innocence or guilt in the eyes of external laws. Comyn, inside Greyfriars kirk, became a person in a category transcending guilt or innocence, the category of the sacred which reveals itself by the containment of such binaries:²⁰ though guilty, he is held as innocent by the divinity and his ministers, by an enormous and arbitrary power that does not ground its claim to authority in human judgement. Bruce, in killing Comyn in the

kirk, sets himself against that power, at least temporarily, an act monstrous in its magnitude. Further, in committing his atrocity in a sacred place, Bruce necessarily himself partakes in the category of the sacred, and several aspects of his crime reveal its dangerous, bond-breaking force. He kills a fellow baron, acting against his own class; he kills a fellow Scot, acting against his own people; most grotesquely, he kills a man before an altar like a sacrificial beast, confusing the boundary between animals and men.²¹

Anne McKim has identified an Old Testament parallel to Bruce's sacrilegious killing, in the murder of a Jew who practices idolatry on the orders of a foreign king, on the very altar of his unclean sacrifices, by the priest Mathathias, father of Judas and Jonathan Maccabeus (1 Macc. 2:23-30).²² This event likewise precipitated the flight of the leader into the wilderness and initiated an uprising. Barbour explicitly compares the Scots to the Maccabees at 1.465-66 and it is reasonable to assume that the book of Maccabees provided a narrative model for this incident. Yet to adduce this parallel is not to explain the ritual mechanism through which the king's transgressive action produces his authority, nor can it offer conclusive reasons for the shape of Bruce's ensuing expiatory journey and its pervasive use of animal motifs.

In order to appreciate the relevance of the specific ways in which Bruce is *frayit* in the wilderness - for he undergoes a process that exceeds standard forms of Judeo-Christian penitential suffering - it is necessary to understand the sacred transactions that occur in the kirk at the moment of inaugural sacrifice and how they are linked to the ongoing scenario of sacrificial crisis. Just as the figure of the king emerges obliquely out of the initial scene of primal disorder, as an emanation of the forces of civil dissension, so Bruce emerges from the violent display at Greyfriars saturated with sacred force, replicating the boundary-shattering energy of the divine power he has challenged. He represents the human community fatally at war with itself, the failure of the normal human limits that govern everyday life: he is sacred or godlike, metaphoring an inadmissible power. In containing this power within himself, he begins to draw it out of the community like a poison. His act of sacrilege, in logically continuing or articulating the latent violence of the community, one that must culminate in the breakdown of the whole human order, dehumanizes his victim by turning him into an animal under the sacrificial knife. The effect of this act is reciprocal: once that boundary is broken, Bruce is also turned into an animal.

In breaking this series of taboos, he manifests his *silwane*, his inhuman power, and during the subsequent fugitive period in the woods and hills of Galloway he continues to appear in the guise of a wild beast.

One further Girardian process is enacted in the kirk, and its violence is directed, not at the person of Comyn, but at the English king Edward I and his claim to overlordship of Scotland. By the point of Comyn's murder, Bruce, formerly Edward I's vassal, has been declared an outlaw (as a result of having claimed the crown in the indenture in Comyn's possession). Already outlawed, and under threat of execution (judicial violence already enacted on a series of Scots according to Edward I's laws), he has nothing to lose in the killing of Comyn. Yet by making his death so spectacular, he insults the English king, destroying his retainer and flouting his laws; in killing a fellow baron, fellow Scot, and a fellow Christian before an altar in church, he exceeds in transgressive force even those laws Edward I has lately been applying in his violent rule of the country. Perversely, through a process known as mimetic rivalry, of which Edward I is the object, Bruce asserts his suitability to rule Scotland by proving that he can perform more monstrously than his royal rival. Violent and arbitrary Edward I may be, yet he is not willing simultaneously to efface his own humanity and that of one of his own subjects in such an act of sacrilegious murder. Turning himself into an animal, he escapes every vestige of the English king's authority: animals know no law.

The King Hounded

Barbour states that he 'herd never in romanys tell' (2.46) of such testing or punishment as Bruce undergoes after the sacrilege at Greyfriars. Where we might expect a clerical writer to gesture toward a religious genre - the penitential manual, for example - at this juncture, in which Bruce is expected to expiate his sin, the archdeacon instead identifies the chivalric genre of romance as the typical arena in which empowering masculine suffering is enacted. There is a subgroup of romances, those of Sir Gowther or Sir Ysumbras, and their French antecedents, for instance, that are explicitly penitential and in which the knightly hero experiences extended and episodic purgation after an act of violence or transgression.²³ Yet Barbour need not have these specifically in mind, for periods of penitential hardship in wild places, episodes involving the madness or bewilderment of the chivalric protagonist,

are familiar in the genre at large, as experienced by such famous exemplars as Lancelot and Percival. Overall, by providing a generic cue in using the word *romanys*, Barbour contextualizes Bruce's upcoming period of disenfranchisement and disorientation, despite its embarrassing military losses and confusions in the wild, as productive of status. Bruce's manly performance in contending with *aventure* and its misfortunes marks him as an appropriate figure of the baronial class - hence the poem's identification as a chivalric biography by some scholars - but chivalric identity alone is not the object of his quest. So total is his loss of identity over the course of this humiliating sequence that it can only be made up by the acquisition of a similarly absolute status: the status of king.

After the inaugural sacrilege and its attendant inauguration ceremony, the nascent king and his small following lose the battle of Methven. He is forced into hiding in the hills, where he must keep continuously on the move. He and his men suffer from lack of food, sleep and shelter. He has trouble keeping up morale and experiences desertions. His authority is challenged by several lords as he passes through their territory. His wife and daughter are captured by the English. Over the course of the action in Books Three through Six, the new ruler is systematically deprived of the fixtures of feudal identity: he is forced from the fortified towns and garrisons that are the sites of culture and contest in this society toward its uncultivated margins, vertical social bonds are broken in the desertions by retainers in his army and by the territorial lords who do not acknowledge his rule, his womenfolk and the horizontal bonds of kinship that they encode (one of them is Marjorie, future wife of Walter Stewart and mother of king Robert II, Barbour's patron) are stolen. While it is fair to say that this pattern reproduces the historical events of Bruce's early reign, insofar as they can be determined from other sources, we must remember that Barbour's governing concept for this section involves the king being *frayit* as in a *romanys*: the narrative is made meaningful not as chronicle but by its enaction of ritual processes and reproduction of literary-mythic forms. Thus when we come to Books Six and Seven and the weirdness of their scenes in the woods we should not be surprised. The dog-eat-dog world that they evoke is not a departure but a continuation of Bruce's ritual trajectory, as he becomes briefly and eerily identified with the categories of animal and criminal that he had ritually imposed on Comyn at Greyfriars.

From 6.470-7.78 of Barbour's poem, Bruce is hunted through Galloway by John of Lorne and his men with a pack of hounds: he is tracked through the wild landscape like animal quarry or a fleeing criminal. All human assets and connections are stripped away and he is alone. He is pursued by a group and risks being torn apart by the dogs if caught (i.e., experiencing *sparagmos*, ritual dismemberment, punishment that marks itself out as representative of group action upon a sacrificial individual). This is the nadir of his exclusion, the final result of the transgression he performed before the altar: his *silwane*, the royal power of being like a wild beast, is so fully manifested (in Girardian terms, desymbolized) that he is misrecognized as not-human, game, even food. He escapes the fury of the pursuing group, however, and bears his primal animal energy away from them into the wilderness.

Next we witness a process akin to the transfer of the royal *silwane* in the Incwalan ceremony from king to sacrificial cow. Again alone in the wood, Bruce goes hunting himself in company with a pair of hounds, and is attacked by three human enemies whom he kills with the dogs' help (7.404-94). This is a dangerous moment in the text, in which the fundamental categories of man and animal are shifting and unsettled. It is difficult to say, for example, what Bruce's status is *vis à vis* the hounds at the beginning of the sequence: is he master or fellow animal? How fully metaphored is the king's unruly power? What point has he reached in the transformative cycle from the fleeing beast that he was in the previous episode to the human authority he is bound to become? It is only in the violent action jointly performed by Bruce and the dogs upon the three men who attack him that these categories resolve: in killing them, he imposes upon them the status of animal/criminal that he himself had borne in his flight from John of Lorne and his dogs. In a *mêlée* that is about defining the status of the human, Bruce proves his mastery, and thus his humanity, subordinating the dogs as men do in hunting and dehumanizing their quarry, and his own, shedding the animal identity he had assumed, projecting and destroying it. The *silwane* manifested in the breaking of taboos at Comyn's death is transferred and diffused, and Bruce re-orders the defining feudal event of hunting with himself at its apex. The text provides a final cue linking this event back to the murder at Greyfriars, as the men are described as waiting to find the king alone in order to take vengeance 'for Jhon Comyn his sak' (7.430). Bruce himself

claims that the three men were slain for their 'tresoun,' the same word he had used of Comyn's original action (7.493). Moreover, in his modest acknowledgement of the feat of killing all three, he says that he 'slew bot ane forouten ma/ God and [Bruce's] hund has slayn the twa' (7.491-2), pointing to a rectified world in which the divine plane, the human plane and the animal plane all co-operate as separable but complementary forces.

If we want further proof that royal recognition (*parousia*), acknowledging the sacred properties of the king, is the main topic of this section, we have only to look at the brief episode that separates the two hunted/hunter scenes. Here a poor woman in a cottage takes in the fugitive Bruce after he escapes the hunting party. She doesn't know who he is, and praises King Robert in his hearing. He self-identifies verbally, and she gives him her two sons as liegemen. She first misrecognizes the king, seeing him distorted as a beast or an outlaw, and then recognizes him in a linguistic transaction, cementing his royal identity gesturally by giving him lordship over her sons (7.240-66). The king's speech act in the cottage, naming himself, is critical to establishing his authority, but it is bracketed by the hunting scenes on either side of it; Barbour subordinates even the familiar motif of the king-in-disguise, available in another subcategory of the *romanys* that he invokes as the controlling genre of this part of the text,²⁴ to the generally wordless operations of Bruce's inaugural humiliation and recovery.

In a narrative sequence that returns obsessively to the figure of the sacrificial animal and the boundaries of the human that are encoded within it, there is one final episode, with its own sacrificial beast, that remains to be considered. It occurs at 7.110-226 of the poem and prefaces Bruce's entry into the widow's cottage. Three unnamed men appear in the wood carrying a ram (*wethir*). Meeting Bruce and a single foster-brother, they ask them the whereabouts of Robert the Bruce, as they wish to join him. Bruce, cautious, tells them he can lead them to him but does not reveal his identity, introducing the king-in-disguise motif that is to figure again in the widow's cottage. It is gratuitous here and does not exercise its normal testing function, as the men immediately recognize him anyway, explicitly by his speech - and implicitly, by whatever animal senses serve to identify things in this wild locale. Their appearance on an uninhabited moor with a single sheep suggests that they have stolen it, or at least failed to return it to its owner if they found it straying; they are criminalized

(as vagabonds, 'lik to lycht men and waverand' 7.112), as is the king himself at this point, still being sanctioned for his sacrilege. The party of five take shelter in a ruined house, a place in which culture has lapsed and been taken over by nature. There the *wethir* is killed and shared by all and should establish a guest-host relationship, a form of community, indeed perhaps an outlaw community. Yet any bonds conferred by the ceremonious action of sharing freshly-slaughtered meat, usually an honorific event, are immediately broken: the men then attack Bruce in his sleep. This cowardly action, likewise breaking the codes that govern masculine feudal honour, allows them to overcome and kill the unnamed foster-brother who has fallen asleep on guard (thus failing in his feudal and familial duty). The three men are then killed by Bruce single-handedly.

Present in this story are the same confusions and replications of category that we have encountered elsewhere in this section: the men kill the *wethir*, and attempt to kill the king. The king escapes, but the kinsman is killed in his stead. Foe and kinsman alike endanger the king's life. All die. The king survives. A strange parity is established between the *wethir*, the king and the kinsman, all objects of the unknown men's assault, yet the king is elided and it is the kinsman who ends up in the position of the sacrificial animal. *Silwane* is obviously at play in this scene, yet it is motile: the attacking strangers behave like beasts in flouting social codes, the sleeping kinsman is slaughtered like the *wethir*, but finally, the supreme *silwane* resides in the figure of Bruce and his superhuman effort in destroying three men at once. It seems to me that in this scene we have a rehearsal for the ritual transfer of the royal *silwane* that is effected in the second hunting scene, a testing of the mechanism; many of the same motifs are present. The kinsman is killed by the sacrificers obviously in lieu of Bruce, and they wished to dispose of the king dishonourably without granting him the rights of a man, replicating the animal-killing they had performed on the *wethir*: so far the action runs in the same direction as the first hunting scene, in which Bruce is the fleeing animal before John of Lorne's hounds. When Bruce rises up after the killing of the kinsman and turns his unanswerable violence upon his attackers, he performs an action similar to the one he does in his subsequent and final hunting scene, achieving mastery over them. Yet his mastery is not yet definitively human; he kills them in a burst of fury that could belong either to a cornered predator or to a martial man. He has not yet fully shaken

off the beast-identity that everyone who encounters him in the wood seeks to attribute to him, including the men with the *wethir*. It is the presence of the two hounds, domesticated predators, obedient to Bruce, in the subsequent and final hunting scene that allows the normal boundaries of identity to be reinscribed, as the process comes full circle: Bruce hunts other men with dogs as he himself was hunted, leaving his animal self behind with their carcasses. The king emerges from the woods to meet his captains and organize his first strategic defeat of the English army. His period of inaugural metamorphosis is over and he has at last become the kind of political animal who would have been recognized by Aristotle, a man and leader of men.

The Lieutenant, His King, His Rite and Their Larder

Bruce is not alone in behaving like a beast in Barbour's poem. Indeed, if we understand him and his transgressive action as sacred in the Girardian sense, he cannot be; he is merely the locale in which the spreading violence of the community is gathered up and concentrated. The actions of James Douglas, the second major character of the narrative, make this fact clear as he mimes the king's violent and transformative actions at several points. The most memorable of these is the Douglas larder, a massacre in church, reproducing the king's inaugural sacrilege. This event occurs in Book Five, midway between the murder of Comyn in Book Two and the ram incident in Galloway in Book Seven, and it is imagistically connected to both.

Douglas is the ultimate king's man in the text, who hails Bruce as king before his inauguration at Scone, and who carries Bruce's heart on crusade after his death. He is described in modern scholarship as Bruce's 'lieutenant' although Barbour does not use the word.²⁵ In the poem, however, he does function as the king's *lieu-tenant*, his placeholder or substitute: obeying and conveying the king's orders, emulating his exploits, and acting, at times, as an extension of the royal persona, a double or foil of the king. Unlike the king himself, who is rehabilitated after his exclusion and shape-shifting in the forest and made into a picture of more conventional rule and order, Douglas retains a dangerous, violent, shifting character, as is expressed in his epithet, the Black Douglas.²⁶ In this, he both illustrates the extent to which unruly magnatial power requires regulation by redeeming royal authority (containing in himself the factional and violent energy of the barons in the opening scene) and allows the now inadmissible animal and

trickster persona of the king to survive in circumscribed form.

The Douglas Larder is a surprise attack on Douglasdale, his own estate now occupied by the English, in which he slaughters the entire garrison in church, eats their food which is ready and waiting, and then takes all the bodies, beheads them, and leaves them in the cellar mixed with the stores of flour, malt and wine (5.335-410). This amazing counter-ceremony occurs on Palm Sunday (the victims are described processing to St Bride's church with palms, 5.335-39)²⁷ and involves grotesque Eucharistic parody: confusion of blood, wine, bread and bodies. As the unmetaphorizing of the Eucharist indicates, the event evokes ritual cannibalism, as the bodies of men are mixed with food, and Douglas and his men devour the food prepared for their enemies; metaphorically, they eat them. The threat of cannibalism and its attendant breakdown of the human/animal boundary, as well as the violent interruption of the decorum of a feast both prefigure Bruce's eat-or-be-eaten scene with the unknown attackers and the ram in Book Seven. As a cleric, Barbour's primary association with a sacrificial lamb or sheep would undoubtedly be the feast of Easter,²⁸ the week following the Palm Sunday of Douglas's celebrated attack. While the temporality of the king's sojourn in the woods is hard to decipher, Bruce's scene with the feast of *wethir* follows the Douglas larder episode and recalls it structurally, making it at least possible that Barbour meant it to occur at Easter, that most sacrificial of Christian holidays. Certainly the king as it were expires and rises, dying and yet not dying in the paradoxical and sacred mode of Christ, on that occasion.²⁹

Important as Eucharistic parody and its universal sacrilegious energy is to the event of the Douglas larder, the scene is evidently also related to the definitive and local sacrilegious event of Bruce's murder of Comyn in the kirk at Greyfriars. Spectacularly violent as Douglas's version is, in killing more men in a sacred space, it nonetheless cannot reproduce the transgressive power of Bruce's original, in part because it follows it and is obviously mimetic, but chiefly because the victims are not fellow Scots. It was the erasure of the friend/enemy distinction that made Bruce's inaugural sacrifice terrifying, particularly in light of the *de facto* claim to kingship that it instituted: the king shows his willingness to destroy one of his most valuable assets, his own subjects. Douglas's killing of Englishmen (foreigners occupying his own ancestral lands), no matter how many, even in church, cannot achieve parity; the only way to make this action compete

with Bruce's inaugural killing is by means of the theatrical abuse of the bodies. Unable to parade the dangerous inappropriateness of their deaths as political subjects, Douglas at least makes sure that the animal/human (food/not food) distinction is insultingly broken, in this respect showing the same disrespect for categories displayed by the various hunters who are determined to pursue Bruce as an animal.

Conclusion: The King at the Heart of the Violence

The world in which such gestures are intelligible, and necessarily repeated in the structures of rivalry and feud, is the world of sacrificial crisis, a problem that does not go away until the end of Bruce's reign with his death and the passing of the throne to his son David II according to the standard and pacifying principle of inheritance. Indeed, as late as 1320 Bruce is still killing Scots in symbolic and brutal ways in a series of judicial executions following from the celebrated Soules conspiracy (19.1-140); the ongoing contest of allegiances and spectre of violence barely contained is nowhere better illustrated than at this trial, in which several prominent Scots are drawn and beheaded and one celebrated Englishman implicated in the plot is released. Bruce's royal metamorphic force, as formerly manifested in his forest episodes, is still present and operating in the theatre of royal judgement, as the power is vested in him to shift and recombine the boundaries of friend and enemy, native and foreigner, according to his transforming will. I do not suggest that Bruce's punitive actions at the Soules trial, at least according to Barbour's presentation of it, are extraordinary; the violent reascription of social distinctions is necessarily part of any trial for treason, that dangerous category that encompasses crimes against the community (and for which the legal penalty was a form of *sparagmos*, the tearing apart of the body as if by group action) and its avatar, the king. Indeed what I mean to suggest is the exact opposite: namely, that the power of being like a wild beast, the sacred boundary-bursting power that Bruce exhibits at crucial points in the text - when he kills Comyn as an inaugural sacrifice, when he changes into an animal in the wood and is chased away from the community by dogs - is in fact the standard and guaranteeing power of the institution of kingship. Bruce the usurper, figure of anarchy who seizes his throne by violence, is simply a literal rendering - a desymbolization - of the latent arbitrary force of royal rule. To claim this is not merely to exalt the strongman,

to identify a Nietzschean individual beyond good and evil who succeeds in imposing his will on others. It is rather to assert the need of the community to be ruled, for the king's monstrosity figures and contains the final and totally chaotic powers of communal violence as they are occasionally revealed in periods of sacrificial crisis. The truly unsettling feature of Bruce's story is not so much his own personal action, dramatic though it is, as the gaps and contingencies that make such action necessary. The situation in which the Scots find themselves in Barbour's poem (or rather fail to find themselves, as heroes and villains interchange in separate episodes and people display varying levels of commitment to the Bruce cause that has become the arbiter of the difference between Scottishness and Englishness) is itself monstrous: one absent and dethroned king (John Balliol), one present but inimically foreign king (Edward I), a failed legal arbitration determining the identity of the king (the Great Cause, the inquest that was the final source of Barbour's telescoped genealogical arguments at the beginning), failed baronial oligarchy in lieu of the king, regional and factional resentments rising. This hydra-headed vision of the monarchical state is appalling and it is less the case that Bruce and his partisans take advantage of it than that he logically forms the answer to the question that the text, and the community it represents, continuously poses: where is the king who can free us from this violence? The fact that he does so through violence of his own is to be expected, as the society surrounding him has reached a near-terminal state of disorder in which competitive acts of violence are the main social currency. The value of the king's violence is that it is highly symbolizable, easily placed into the category of the sacred and made legible by the application of ritual categories like sacrilege; because sense can be made of the king's violence, narrative imposed upon it, it supersedes the random and mimetic violence of the community in crisis and begins to draw it out like a magnet. In an atmosphere of civil conflict in which every person's hand is potentially turned against another in a web so wide as to have no boundaries, the violent trajectory of the king as he makes his universal claim to rule crystallizes people's allegiances, placing them incrementally together in larger groups, each contending, yet gradually aggregating even through the processes of conflict. He does not stop the violence but re-orders it from centrifugal to centripetal, so that people eventually cease fighting about him and find themselves fighting for him. Finally, if he is sufficiently

able to capture the public imagination and to enforce his rule, he becomes the sovereign repository of violence in its fully symbolized form, the fount of justice in whose name criminals and perpetrators of violence are punished on behalf of the community.

Over the course of Barbour's poem, Robert Bruce moves through his narrative of inauguration from his initiating sacrilege, through several stages of ritual humiliation, to a point at which his humanity is reassembled and his royalty confirmed. He recovers from his bewilderment and outlawry and progressively regains - until he comes to embody - the law. His army is assembled through repeated episodes of oathtaking and the rehearsal of the legal obligations of vassalage; the theatre of royal judgement culminates in the Soules treason trial in 1320; the text concludes with a peace treaty, an instrument of international law through which Bruce's royal authority is recognized beyond his borders. In this atmosphere of human order it is possible both to designate a legal heir in his son David II and arrange for his marriage (20.65-111) and coronation service (20.119-140)³⁰ and to pay due attention to the king's death and funeral rites (20.155-309).³¹ Barbour's preoccupation with the treatment of the king's body reveals the typical anxieties of a medieval Christian about the preservation of the flesh for resurrection, but his extended portrayal of Bruce's deathbed, mourning and testamentary request to have his heart removed and taken on crusade additionally grants to the king final and full recognition of his human status in a text that has occasionally placed that status in question. Providing the full treatment of a good Christian death - a period of conscious penitential suffering before the end to ensure expiation and allow time for extreme unction - additionally allows the king to make a final statement about his own violence:

And I thank God that has me sent
 Space in this lyve me to repent,
 For throuch me and my werraying
 Off blud has been rycht gret spilling
 Quhar mony sakles men war slayn
 Tharfor this seknes and this payn
 I tak in thank for my trespas. (20.175-81)

This would be the conventional piety of any medieval warrior, yet its explicit inclusion here reminds us of the king's fundamental nature as a personification of violence. He does not die worrying about abstractions like rights or legitimacy, and does not express the final economy of his deathbed suffering as

concerning payback for usurpation, but for human killings - the deaths of men unshriven, deprived of the definitive and saving ceremony, who therefore die like animals. Even the king's phrasing, '*through* me and my werraying' [*italics mine*] is suggestive of the extent to which he has acted as a channel and then a repository of the communal violence ensuing from sacrificial crisis.

Yet even after his ceremonious death and burial, the curious concluding story of Douglas taking the king's heart enclosed in its casket on crusade in Spain, hurling himself suicidally into the fray (20.310-495), shows a certain reluctance to abandon the physical person of Bruce in whom so much royal magic has resided: his persona weirdly continues to operate, melded to the body of the lieutenant who has acted as his substitute throughout the text, on the final proving ground of European royal performance, the belated but continuing war against Islam. In this strange coda to his life, Bruce's final act from beyond the grave is doubly conclusive in closing off the two principal mimetic rivalries that had shaped his royal career: he destroys Douglas, his double, and makes his terminal insult to the memory of Edward I, subject of a vain prophecy that he would die in Jerusalem (4.199-335), in bringing his own body that much closer to the holy city and the project of its recovery. There is more *silwane* present even in a fragment of Bruce than in any other man, and after the heart of Bruce has had its final paroxysm of violence, destroying its bearer, exceeding its rival, killing the infidel, it is returned to Scotland to be buried at Melrose abbey, and there it reposes at the text's end, in consecrated ground in its silver casket, the buried violence at the heart of the wars of independence.

Notes

¹ *The Bruce* is a poem of 13,600 lines, in Middle Scots octosyllabic couplets, describing the rise to kingship of Robert Bruce during the latter phase of the wars of independence. Bruce usurped the throne in 1306, spent several years as a fugitive, gradually accumulated a following and won a spectacular victory against the invading army of Edward II in 1314 at Bannockburn. He managed to consolidate his rule of Scotland and see it recognized both by the papacy in 1324 and by England in the treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton in 1328, and died in June of 1329. The poem was written a generation later, c.1375, by John Barbour (b. 1325-35, ob. 1395), archdeacon of Aberdeen.

² It would, however, be senseless to deny the presence of these familiar elements; Barbour, a priest, uses Christian kingship theory and relies on Christian religious metaphors. The importance of the Easter liturgy to the Douglas larder episode, discussed below, is a case in point.

³ Barbour was the recipient of two annuities from a Bruce dynast, King Robert II (Stewart) and was evidently a client of Stewart dating from before his kingship. During the reign of King David II, Robert Bruce's son and a longtime captive in England, Barbour was several times absent from the kingdom, studying in France, during the 1360s; he may have attended the universities of Paris or Orleans but there is no evidence that he took a degree. He likely returned to Scotland in 1371, when his patron Robert Stewart, son of Bruce's daughter Marjorie, ascended the throne upon David II's childless death. He was intermittently at the Scottish royal court from 1372 to the death of Robert II in 1390, and it is virtually certain that he wrote *The Bruce* for him as an act of dynastic propaganda. He appears to have also composed a lost genealogical work on the Stewarts called *The Stewartis Oryginalle*. For a fuller treatment of Barbour's life, see *John Barbour: The Bruce*, ed. and trans. A.A.M. Duncan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), pp. 2-4. All references to Barbour throughout are from Duncan's edition. For suggestions that Barbour also wrote in the service of David II (Bruce), see Michael Penman, *David II: 1329-71* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2004), p. 273. For a recent biography of Barbour's most likely patron, see Stephen Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings: Robert II and Robert III 1371-1406* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996).

⁴ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Robert Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977), p. 92. Citations of Girard throughout are to this text.

⁵ Scholarship of this type is exemplified in R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) or Eugene Vance, *Merveulous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1986).

⁶ Duncan summarizes some of these in his introduction to the sources

and analogues of the poem 8-14; see also Anne McKim, 'The Bruce: A Study of John Barbour's Heroic Ideal' (Doctoral Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1980).

⁷ See William Cotton, 'Teaching the Motifs of Chivalric Biography,' in Howell Chickering and Thomas H. Seiler (eds.), *The Study of Chivalry: Resources and Approaches* (Kalamazoo: Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages, 1988), Sumner Ferris, 'Chronicle, Chivalric Biography, Family Tradition in Fourteenth-Century England,' in L.D. Benson and John Leyerle (eds.), *Chivalric Literature: Essays on the Relations between Literature and Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

⁸ It is primarily considered in terms of this genre in McKim, 'Ideal King.'

⁹ For the genre, see Marlene Kadar (ed.), *Essays on Life-Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

¹⁰ Duncan, in his responsible and inclusive survey of Barbour's sources, confirmed and conjectural, provides so many potential genre identifications for the poem that it is impossible to bring any single one into focus; he tacitly admits this problem by organizing his treatment of Barbour's sources under the headings of the principal historical characters (King Robert, Douglas, Moray and so on, see pp. 14-32). This is itself giving primacy to the function of Barbour's poem as historical record, and specifically as a species of chivalric historiography of the type that understands historical events as driven by the actions, personalities and class preoccupations of the baronial rank. The effect of Duncan's explanatory decision is to split Barbour's book into a series of strands following each hero.

¹¹ For the poem as Brucean ideology, see R. James Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland: Historical Narrative in Medieval Scotland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

¹² For a comparative study of *The Bruce* and the Lancastrian sources, see Sarah Tolmie, 'Kingmaking: The Historiography of Bruce and Lancaster in Royal Biography, Ceremonial and Document' (Doctoral Diss., University of Cambridge, 1999). Where this thesis uses the generic term 'royal biography' I have used 'narrative of inauguration,' which implies a more fully Girardian status for the usurping king, linking him explicitly to the condition of sacrificial crisis.

¹³ These are classic studies of this topic: Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: sacred monarchy and scrofula in England and France*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) and Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

¹⁴ For some discussion of inaugural rites as well as the principle of structural amnesia found in oral kinglisting, see Laura Bohannon, 'A Genealogical Charter,' *Africa* 22 (1952), pp. 301-16; J.S. Boston,

'Oral Tradition and the History of Ingala,' *Journal of African History* 10 (1969), pp. 29-43; David P. Henige, 'Oral Tradition and Chronology,' *Journal of African History* 13 (1971), pp. 371-89.

¹⁵ For *parousia*, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, 'The 'King's Advent' and the Enigmatic Panels in the Doors of Santa Sabina,' *Art Bulletin* 26 (1944), pp. 207-31 and *Laudes Regiae: A Study in Acclamation and Mediaeval Ruler Worship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

¹⁶ Another recent paradigm that has been used to explain the nature of the violence along the Anglo-Scottish border for the whole premodern period is the so called 'frontier thesis' advanced by Frederick Jackson Turner (in *The Frontier in American History*, 1922); this has led to a re-examination of the border area as a distinct culture, a border society. See for example, the essays in Robert Bartlett and Angus Mackay (eds.), *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). This is to impose a quasi-anthropological meaning on the violence of events like the wars of independence, yet simultaneously to divorce them from the mythology of the crown and of forms of self-understanding that are predicated on royal rule. The unhelpfulness of the divorce so introduced is discussed in Alastair J. Macdonald, *Border Bloodshed: Scotland and England at War 1369-1403* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), especially in the chapters 'Causes of War' (pp. 161-196) and 'War and Border Societies' (pp. 196-242). Here he suggests that the 'non-rational' motivations of war, including border raiding, are imbricated in wider monarchical and patriotic strategies of creating identity.

¹⁷ For this motif, see R. Howard Bloch, 'Wasteland and Round Table,' *New Literary History* 11 (1980), pp. 255-76.

¹⁸ Barbour highlights the metaphoricity of this *thrillage* by rapidly getting distracted into an antifeminist clerical aside about the thralldom of marriage (1.249-68), the humour of which is lame and the relevance questionable; the situation of the people somehow defies accurate representation.

¹⁹ Whether Barbour meant this word to have a precise legal force is hard to determine; the word also has some broader currency in the romance genre, in which it comprehends any betrayal of a feudal superior (treason against one's lord) as well as the king. Barbour's discursus on *tresoun* 1.515-60 names dukes, barons, princes and kings as subjects of treason, and cites the fall of Troy and the fates of Alexander, Caesar and Arthur. Duncan translates the word both as 'treachery' and as 'treason.' For its legal meanings, see H.L. Macqueen, 'Girth: Society and the Law of Sanctuary in Scotland,' in John W. Cairns and Olivia F. Robinson (eds.), *Critical Studies in Ancient Law, Comparative Law and Legal History* (Oxford: Hart, 2001), pp. 333-52.

²⁰ Barbour emphasizes the wrong done specifically to the altar, the most sacred point within a church, the one at which the miracle of

transubstantiation occurs, that ultimately sacred Christian act that contains the binaries of blood and wine, bread and flesh.

²¹ Christians do not practice literal animal sacrifice on their altars - indeed, transubstantiation enacts a human sacrifice, and a cannibalistic one at that, more ritually boundary-shattering than anything imaginable - but the persistent metaphor of Christ as the lamb of God, sacrificed in the ritual of the mass, keeps the literal beast-killing propitiations of Old Testament Jews and pagans central to the meaning of an altar.

²² McKim, 'Ideal King', p. 121.

²³ See Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

²⁴ The king-in-disguise motif is found, for example, in the Charlemagne romances, in the tale of Ralph the Collier, for which see Alan Lupack (ed.), *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990). Barbour cites the Charlemagne romance of Fierabras at 3.435-62.

²⁵ The term is used, for example, in G.W.S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005). For a study of Douglas, see Sonja Våthjunker, 'A Study of the Career of Sir James Douglas - the Historical Record Versus Barbour's *Bruce*' (Doctoral Diss., University of Aberdeen, 1992).

²⁶ⁱ This epithet's primary meaning is most likely that Douglas had dark hair or a dark complexion. Barbour describes him as dark in colouring, like Hector of Troy, at 1.395-7. Yet it is also clear in the text that it had accrued a secondary and metaphorical meaning demonizing Douglas; he is a figure used to frighten English children, feared as a devil in hell at 15.553-62.

²⁷ For this church and its relations to the Douglas family, see M. Markus, 'St Bride's, Douglas - A Family Mausoleum,' *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 134 (2004), pp. 403-21.

²⁸ Another would be the near-sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, for whom the ram caught in the thorn bush was a sacrificial substitute; this Old Testament event was allegorically interpreted as prefiguring Easter.

²⁹ Bruce himself was attentive to the kingmaking power of the Palm Sunday liturgy; he attended a Palm Sunday mass after his inauguration in 1306. See Michael Penman, 'The Religion of Robert I c.1306 - c.1329' [forthcoming], p. 1.

³⁰ These are portrayed in Barbour as occurring simultaneously, likely in imitation of the Capetian model of crowning the heir during the lifetime of the king, although in fact the events occurred five years apart; see Penman, *David II*, pp. 45-46.

³¹ Barbour dwells more on the several ceremonies that close his text (marriage/coronation/deathbed repentance/funeral) than on the king's illness, which other (largely English) sources called leprosy. The fact that he includes a specific cause for his sickness, excessive cold during his campaigning, suggests that he had heard this allegation and sought

to disprove it. The same claim was made by critics of Henry IV during his long final illness, as is covered in Peter McNiven, 'The Problem of Henry IV's Health,' *English Historical Review* 100 (1985). Leprosy was a symbolic disease in the period, widely associated with divine punishment, for which see Saul Nathaniel Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) and Luke Demaitre, 'The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy by Fourteenth-Century Physicians,' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59 (1985), pp. 327-44.