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PhD thesis

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‘Planned and Purposeful’ or ‘Without Second Thought’? Formulaic Language and
Incident in Barbour’s *Brus*

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Abstract

The present study investigates formulae – fixed phrases used by an oral poet in composing narrative verse – in the Older Scots poem known as the *Brus*, composed (probably in writing) by John Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen, in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. This thesis examines the apparent discrepancy of an oral-derived technique used in a sophisticated poem composed in writing by an educated and literate author. Following the discussion of previous critical approaches to Barbour's *Brus*, the present study offers a summary of theories of the formula and formulaic composition relevant to the discussion, before providing examples of three types of formulae found in the *Brus*: formulae whose primary function is to preserve rhyme and metre in the poem, and which have minimal dependence upon their narrative context (*prosodic formulae* or *fillers*); formulae which set-up or provide transition between scenes, and which depend slightly more upon their narrative context (*discursive formulae*); and formulae which narrate the action of the poem's plot, and therefore depend greatly upon their narrative context (*historic formulae*). The thesis then examines recurring *incidents* such as scenes of individual combat and large-scale battles, identifying the formulaic phrases employed in their construction, as well as the cyclical arrangement of such *incidents* to impose a specific interpretation of the poem upon the reader or audience. Finally, the present study examines the influence of medieval rhetoric and Latin-derived 'literate' culture on Barbour's poem, uncovering a mixture of 'oral' and 'literate' modes of discourse which cooperate and complement each other in Barbour's highly purposeful work of historical fiction. More and more critics are aware of the mixture of 'oral' and 'literate' discourse in Middle English (see, for example, Coleman 1996); by contrast, this aspect of Older Scots literature is an understudied topic in an already understudied field. Additionally, no scholar has to my knowledge undertaken a study of the formula in any Older Scots text. The present thesis will hopefully make a valuable first step in both these areas.

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Robert Groves, Edinburgh, 2005

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Chapter One Introduction

1. In Principio

1. In 1983 A. J. Aitken published an account of the ‘Language of Older Scots Poetry’ as part of a festschrift for David Murison. It was based upon observations of the corpus of Older Scots verse Aitken made during his academic career and was meant to serve as a first step in a scholarly understanding of the language of that corpus, the choices available to its poets and the effects of the choices they made. By Aitken’s own admission, the article ‘falls far short of the fully detailed and meticulous account which must some day be presented by someone’ (1983: 18). Twenty years on, however, this ‘detailed and meticulous account’ has yet to appear; in the recently published twelfth volume of the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST), Caroline Macafee simply reiterates Aitken’s remarks under the heading ‘Language of Poetry’ (2002: cxxxiv-cxliii). It would seem that no scholar has found Aitken’s challenge inviting, or that the exact ways Scottish poets manipulated their language to create lasting art have held little or no academic interest in the intervening years.

2. Unfortunately, the present study is not the long-awaited (or long-unwanted) comprehensive account of Older Scots verse. Rather, it is an examination of one salient and fascinating feature of Early Scots poetry, which Aitken calls ‘the body of pervasive tags and formulae of different types, some generally distributed and other confined to particular modes’ (1983: 18), and which he was compelled to leave untreated in his article. As we shall see, formulae and formulaic language are found in pre-modern narrative poetry from as far back as Homeric Greek, and are present *en masse* in

medieval romance. Though Aitken views Barbour's *Brus* as an example of 'fairly plain vernacular language, unpoetic in vocabulary and unelaborate in syntax' (1983: 19), his recognition of formulaic language relates the *Brus* to the corpus of Middle English narrative poetry such as Arthurian romances, *Havelok the Dane* and *King Horn*. On the other hand, we shall see that Barbour's *Brus* is also a scholarly poem, composed by an author well-versed in the non-vernacular rhetorical traditions of his time.

3. Barbour's *Brus* has been read and studied for centuries. Its cultural significance has long been recognised: it is clearly an important poem. It survives in two manuscripts, each more than a century younger than the date of the poem's composition, the younger of which, MS E (National Library of Scotland, Advocates' 19.2.2), belonged to a powerful land-owning family. Less than a century after the youngest surviving manuscript was copied, the poem was printed by Henrie Charteris and has been reprinted various times since, and even translated into Augustan English. Less scholarly readers, it would seem, have no trouble understanding the *Brus* well enough to enjoy reading it or hearing it read. It is only the academics who cannot decide what to do with the poem, and yet few critics have attempted a stylistic examination of the poem. On the one hand, Barbour's historical subject matter has placed the work in the territory of historians, who generally praise or blame it on the grounds of historical accuracy. Literary critics, by contrast, have often merely accepted the poem as a romance, without delving into what (it is argued here) is the poem's stylistic multiplicity. There has been no study of the formula in Barbour's *Brus* of which I am aware, and examinations of rhetoric in the *Brus* seem to have failed to consider the poem's vernacular heritage.

4. Barbour's *Brus* is long (13,864 lines by Lois Ebin's count (1971-72: 218) and surprisingly complex; what I initially envisioned as a thorough study of the formula in all the Older Scots four-beat narrative poems – Barbour's *Brus*, the Scottish *Legends of the Saints*, Wyntoun's *Originall Cronikil of Scotland*, and the *Buik of Alexander* – has shrunk, due to limitations of time and space, to an introduction to formulaic language and incident in the *Brus* alone. In doing so, however, I hope at least to have established a methodology which can be applied to the remaining works in this corpus, and perhaps other under-studied narrative poems in other languages and traditions.

1.2 Barbour's *Brus*: Previous Critical Approaches

1. Barbour's *Brus* is a poem which has been viewed from many critical perspectives; and yet the problem of genre has often stood in the way of a full appreciation of its artistic merits. Few readers of the poem would find the plot or even Barbour's sympathies hard to understand; however, critical explication has been remarkably unsatisfactory. The *Brus* has gone through several printings, dating from the late sixteenth century onwards, and has been often described and anthologised. In the twentieth century, the most important critics of the *Brus* are probably Lois Ebin and R. James Goldstein, with Matthew P. McDiarmid and James A. C. Stevenson following close behind in their three-volume STS edition of the poem. My own survey of '*Brus* Criticism' is largely based on Ebin's overview in her 1969 Columbia University Ph.D. thesis, *John Barbour's Bruce: Poetry, History, and Propaganda*. At the outset, she identifies what she feels is the great difficulty in attempting a critical interpretation of the poem:

The narrative falls between the bounds of history and literature, fact and invention. It has been treated variously as history, chronicle, epic, romance, and biography, and resembles each of these forms, while in fact conforming to none of them. The significance of the poem eludes the conventional discussion of plot, theme, character, style, and neither the study of sources nor the examination of literary parallels has been effective in uncovering Barbour's meaning. (1-2).

In short, Ebin names genre as the insurmountable obstacle to understanding Barbour's *Brus*. Critics have been unable to determine the poem's genre (and, implicitly, have tried too hard to force it into only one genre), and a study of the poem's characteristics – or *features*, to use an Aristotelian term – have not yielded a solid conclusion. It may also be significant that the features Ebin names are literary ones: plot, themes, character, etc. Finally, Ebin suggests a new purpose in approaching the poem, namely, to 'uncover Barbour's meaning'. Critics before her, she suggests, have spent their time arguing about what *The Brus* is; Ebin's thesis, and her later article of the same name, deal with what the poem *means*. My thesis is primarily concerned with *how* the poem means.

2. Ebin assigns most criticism of the *Brus* to three categories: 'the historical study, the "appreciation," the literary critique or evaluation' (1969: 2).

Early work on the *Bruce* was confined almost exclusively to the historian. Writers from the time of Wyntoun and Fordun to the late 18th century treated the poem as a reliable account of the Scottish War of

Independence and the reign of Robert I[...]. Literary aspects of the work, even the obvious fact that the *Bruce* was poetry, either were not recognized or were entirely ignored. (Ebin 1969: 2)

This is reminiscent of Tolkien's complaint of *Beowulf* criticism. Tolkien felt that *Beowulfiana*, as he termed it, was weighted toward a view of the poem as history, and had neglected to view the poem as a poem. He named two 'defences' for this 'attitude':

firstly, if one is not concerned with poetry at all, but seeking information wherever it may be found; secondly, if the so-called poem contains in fact no poetry[...]. Of the second case it may be said that to rate a poem, a thing at the least in metrical form, as mainly of historical interest should *in a literary survey* be equivalent to saying that it has no literary merits, and little more need in such a survey then be said about it. But such a judgement on *Beowulf* is false. (Tolkien 1936: 6-7)

So is such a judgement on the *Brus*.

3. Of course, historical readings of Barbour's poem continue today, and rightly so for scholars who, as Tolkien put it, are 'not concerned with poetry at all, but [are] seeking information wherever it may be found'. But Ebin's impatience with the purely historical criticism of the *Brus* has a significance for literary critiques of the work: following the publication of Lord Hailes' *Annals of Scotland* in the late eighteenth century, the historical accuracy of Barbour's *Brus* was increasingly called into question.

4. Lord Hailes ‘attempt[ed] to verify [Barbour’s] account, and in certain cases, modifie[d] or revise[d] Barbour’s narrative’ (Ebin 1969: 5). This attention to accuracy created a controversy over the ‘suthfastnes’ of the *Brus* (which previous historians had always taken for granted). Critics on one side denounced Barbour as having no historical value; critics on the other side defended the poem’s historicity and factualness; and of course there were those who accepted certain scenes and incidents but not others (Ebin 1969: 5-9).

5. It may be out of this controversy over the poem’s historical accuracy that the second major direction in *Brus* criticism emerged.

While many historians attempted to defend the value of the *Bruce* as history, men of letters began to take an interest in the work and offered another suggestion. The *Bruce* was both chronicle and poetry and thus should not be expected to conform to exact historical standards. (Ebin 1969: 9)

‘It was a but a few steps from the idea that the *Bruce* was both chronicle and poetry’, Ebin continues, ‘to the idea that the *Bruce* was primarily literary. Throughout the 19th century, one finds a gradual shift of emphasis on *Bruce* criticism from the historical to the literary aspect of the work’ (1969: 10). Ebin terms this extremely literary approach the ‘appreciation’ (1969:2, 10), presumably because, rather than offering a disinterested and objective analysis of the poem’s literary value, it merely extols – at times, blindly – the poem as a work of literary genius. The literary appreciation of the *Brus* reached its

culmination at the end of the nineteenth century, with W. A. Craigie's article "Barbour and Blind Harry as Literature", published in the *Scottish Review* XXII, July 1893. Craigie 'argues that the historical and the literary criticism of the *Bruce* and the *Wallace*, and other similar works must be entirely separate' and asserts that the historian 'has no business interfering with the judgment of the literary critic' (Ebin 1969: 14).

6. Whatever the historical basis of the events narrated in Barbour's *Brus*, one certainly cannot ignore that it is a poem, and thus a literary artefact, an *intentional object*. Even in comparison with Barbour's nearest successor, Andrew of Wyntoun, it is obvious that the *Brus* is not merely a record of facts, but a vivid portrait meant to inspire and entertain, as well as inform and instruct. On the other hand, a literary analysis of a poem is of little use if it provides no analysis at all. Indeed, one feels that the nineteenth-century 'appreciation' of Barbour's *Brus* is as prejudiced as the historians who adamantly refuse to distrust Barbour's 'history'. Both types of 'criticism' abandon objectivity in the attempt to defend a work which lends status and authority to the critics' own perception of themselves and their cultural history. Ebin describes a representative 'appreciation' of the *Brus* with disdain, naming 'cliches [sic] which are repeated *ad infinitum* in Barbour criticism of this period' (1969: 13):

Barbour is hailed as the 'contemporary and in some respects the rival of Chaucer,' the father of Scottish poetry as Chaucer is the father of English poetry. His narrative is 'lively,' his style 'sincere,' his character portraits 'splendid.' The passages which [David] Irving selects for comment [in his *History of Scottish Poetry* of 1861] are the ones which are chosen

over and over again in the appreciations – the lines in praise of Freedom and the description of Bruce’s compassion for a poor launder-woman during the Irish campaign. His ideas and even the very phrases he uses are the common property of this criticism. (Ebin 1969: 13)

In short, the nineteenth-century literary appreciation is *formulaic* in the pejorative sense the term has (or perhaps had) outside the study of oral and oral-derived poetry. Thus Ebin concludes that ‘while the appreciation initially offered a useful alternative to the exclusively historical study, it soon became a sterile approach to the *Bruce*’ (1969: 13-14).

7. *Brus* criticism began in the twentieth century with ‘a controversy over the Barbour canon’ (Ebin 1969: 14). Ebin discusses this controversy only briefly, and I will be even briefer. The basic premise is that for a time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the name of John Barbour was so synonymous with the foundations of Older Scots literature, that he was supposed to be the author of the entire pre-Henryson canon, excepting of course Andrew of Wyntoun – and perhaps, if Wyntoun had not identified himself as the author of his chronicle, Barbour would briefly have been given credit for that work as well. The argument for Barbour’s authorship of the Scottish *Legends of the Saints* is so fragile as to rest upon the narrator identifying himself as a blind cleric, and one of the legends in the disparate collection commemorating the patron of Barbour’s church in Aberdeen. The case for Barbour’s authorship of the *Buik of Alexander* is, while not very much stronger, at least based on linguistic evidence.

8. *The Brus* and *Alexander* contain many strikingly similar incidents, motifs, phrases (almost exclusively formulaic), and even share some verbatim repetition. Therefore we can forgive George Neilson and Graeme Ritchie for suggesting that the two heroic poems in four-beat Older Scots verse had the same author, even though the latter survives only in an early printing and is dated by its colophon (the same evidence by which we date the *Brus*) at 1438, more than half a century after the earlier poem and more than forty years after Barbour's death in 1395). However, it is possible that this theory of common authorship might never have been advanced or indeed entertained if Milman Parry's work on formulae had existed in 1900, the date of the publication of Neilson's talk 'John Barbour: Poet and Translator'. The theory of formulaic composition offers an explanation for similarity of diction in poems which do not share a common author; certain metrically useful phrases become the common property of poets working in the same language and genre or tradition. The idea that Barbour composed the *Buik* is now generally dismissed, though a future study of formulaic language in the two poems would certainly be of some interest.

9. Neilson's major opponent during this transitional period of *Brus* criticism was J. T. T. Brown, who suggested the similarities between the two poems were the result of scribal interpolations (another resemblance between *Brus* and *Beowulf* criticism). Ebin sums up the rather humorous conclusion to this episode of *Brus* scholarship: 'Critics, however, soon exposed the weakness of both positions and Neilson and Brown tactfully refrained from further discussion of the *Bruce*' (1969: 18). But this controversy did bequeath at least one thing of value by opening a new direction in *Brus* criticism. Neilson and Brown

brought to light problems about the influence of French romance, the use of non-historical source material, the degree of emendation, stylistic and metrical peculiarities, all of which prompted critics to take a closer look at the poem. In the literary critiques and revaluations [sic] which followed, one finds an attempt at a more thorough and penetrating analysis than that provided by the 19th century appreciation. The poem is broken down into its various aspects or problems which are then considered in detail. (Ebin 1969: 18).

Thus, rather than simply extolling the poem's virtues, this new literary approach to the *Brus* seeks a critical understanding of the work, apparently for the first time in the poem's history.

10. Nevertheless, the genre-question still stands in the way. Janet Smith's *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (1934), for instance, is cited by Ebin as one of the first post-Neilson/Brown literary critiques of the *Brus*. 'Smith reconsiders the *Bruce* from the point of view of its literary sources and concludes rather hastily that the poem is a romance in the French manner' (Ebin 1969: 18). Conversely, Friedrich Brie, in his *Die Nationale Literatur Schottlands* (1937), 'provides a more comprehensive analysis' of the poem, but his underlying conviction is 'that the *Bruce* is an epic, similar to the Old German heroic songs, which combines written and oral source material to celebrate heroes of national concern' (Ebin 1969: 19). Smith's and Brie's followers, James Kinsley (ed. *Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey*, 1955) and Kurt Wittig (*The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, 1958), are also plagued by the question of genre.

Kinsley tries to view the *Brus* as a descendent of French romance but ‘has difficulty in making Barbour’s intractable work conform to the traditional form and is constantly forced to redefine the genre to fit the poem’ (Ebin 1969: 20). Wittig, like Brie, views the poem as ‘an epic rather than a romance,’ although ‘he finds that the work lacks “real epic development and continuity of action.” While Barbour is skilful in small pictures or episodes of intense action, he is clumsy in weaving together different threads of action’ (Ebin 1969: 21).

11. Once again, it is the genre-question which, having plagued *Brus* criticism almost from its inception, undoes the literary analysis in Ebin’s view. ‘Smith, Brie, Kinsley, and Wittig each divide the *Bruce* artificially into separate categories or topics for consideration. Focusing in turn on each topic, they ignore the ways in which the parts of the poem function together and they leave the reader with an atomized view of the *Bruce* rather than a meaningful analysis’ (1969: 21). The major flaw Ebin finds in *Brus* criticism is the ‘rigid either/or attitude’, viewing the *Brus* ‘either as history or as literature’ (1969: 22). As a history, Barbour is faulty at best and deliberately misleading at worst¹; as a work of literature, it fits neither into the mould of the *epic*, the *romance*, or the *chanson de geste*, but contains elements of each and is missing ingredients of all three. And yet, as we saw above, Ebin believes that the *Brus* is no more explicable to a critic than it was before the dispute in assigning it to distinct genres emerged.

12. Of course, if scholars cannot agree what sort of work Barbour’s *Brus* actually is, neither can they agree whether it is even very good. The poem’s ‘defects’ of genre have been mentioned above, and while the *Brus* seems to have pleased its original audience and several subsequent ones, it may well be that the kind of aesthetic pleasure

it has to offer is by now woefully out of date. The designation of 'Scots Chaucerian' and the insistence on viewing Barbour as Chaucer's contemporary – even referring to Barbour as the 'Father of Scots Literature' – has had as detrimental an effect on the appreciation of the *Brus* as Chaucer's perceived 'realism' has had on the appreciation of Middle English romance. Even admirers of the poem such as Kurt Wittig point out that Barbour was 'no great artist' and that his poem was 'very far from the poetic and verbal art of the French romances which he took as his model' (Wittig 1958: 16, 32).

13. So far we have seen confusion as to whether the *Brus* is meant to be an historical document, e.g. an *historia*, a *chronica*, etc, or a work of literature. We have seen confusion as to whether the *Brus* belongs to the genre of epic, romance, or *chanson de geste*. I have mentioned Barbour's – deliberate or otherwise – confusion of historical fact and his combination of the features of the major literary genres, and his omission of some of them. I have also mentioned Barbour's poetic skill being compared unfavourably to that of Chaucer or even of later Older Scots poems. Throughout these centuries of criticism, however, few critics indeed have suggested that Barbour perhaps did not intend to write a *Scotichronicon* or an *Aeneid*, a *Chanson de Roland* or *Havelok*, or a *Canterbury Tales*, or even a *Moral Fabillis*; it seems to have occurred to precious few critics that Barbour intended to write the *Brus*.

14. *Brus* criticism since Kurt Wittig is relatively sparse, though what little there has been is a welcome improvement on the earlier attempts Ebin finds so unsatisfactory. This is largely due to Ebin's own influential work, not only her Ph.D. thesis, but her more widely-read article of the same name, a crystallisation of the major argument of

her thesis. Indeed, it is largely to Ebin that I owe my own reading of the puzzle of the *Brus*.

15. Ebin insists, both in her critique of previous *Brus* scholarship and in her conclusion, that Barbour's poem must be viewed as history *and* literature, for it combines both, and this combination is integral to the poem's effect. 'Barbour', she writes, 'appears to be working within the *speculum* and exemplary history traditions'; he 'develops the history of the period to emphasize certain themes relevant to the time in which he is writing' and is 'concerned with the qualities essential to a king and subject, particularly with the virtue of loyalty as a bond between the ruler and his kingdom' (1969: 208). With this duality of the poem in mind, Ebin sees not a clumsy, indefinable attempt at an heroic poem, but 'a poem of considerable skill and resourcefulness, worthy of more serious attention than it has traditionally received' (1969: 209). Barbour's themes 'control the pace, structure, and emphasis of the narrative, and govern [his] specific modifications of history' (Ebin 1969: 208). This much is implied by the word 'propaganda' in her title. Barbour, she suggests, never meant to write a completely 'accurate' (in our modern sense of the word) history, any more than he intended to write a completely 'fictitious' work of fantasy. The story he told was indeed *suthfast*, or true, in that the values it professed were true. If the facts were amended or rearranged the better to reflect and communicate those values, then Barbour was not outside the accepted tradition of medieval historiography. He was not 'getting it wrong,' nor was he 'lying'; telling the precise truth about certain events to the betrayal of values such as loyalty and perseverance would have been more akin to lying in the Middle Ages. Of course, 'propaganda' has a pejorative, even Orwellian,

connotation to the modern ear. But this is not the ‘propaganda’ of Barbour’s *Brus*. For all his manipulation of events, Barbour’s poem is far less nationalistic and anti-English than Hary’s *Wallace* (Ebin 1969: 46; Goldstein 1993: 218, 221). Barbour’s purpose, according to Ebin, is to inspire Robert II to preserve his grandfather’s achievement and nurture the values the Bruce or any pre-modern hero invariably represents.

16. If Ebin calls for an end to the either/or view of Barbour’s *Brus*, than the other major title in recent *Brus* criticism, R. James Goldstein’s monograph *The Matter of Scotland* (1993), calls for more attention to Barbour’s specific context, the cultural milieu in which he was involved as he wrote his famous poem. Where Ebin writes of ‘propaganda’, Goldstein refers to Barbour’s ‘ideological project’ (1993: 133, 135, 150, 185. See also Goldstein 1986, 1987). He has no real disagreement with Ebin’s reading, but rather offers an expansion of it. Both critics see Barbour’s poem as advancing a certain ideology; but where Ebin accepts at face value Barbour’s theme of ‘the value of freedom and right for the Scottish people in their continuing struggle with England’ (1969: 208), Goldstein draws attention to the danger in assuming ‘freedom’ meant to Barbour and his audience what it means to us.

17. Ebin had found occasion to complain of an early bias towards reading the *Brus* as history. Goldstein, in turn, criticises the lack of historical perspective in recent *Brus* criticism:

Most recent critics have focused almost exclusively on “literary” aspects of the poem, drawing what may be broadly designated as a formalist approach. Thus, critics who have shown any interest in the ideology of

the text – in the work’s connection with larger historical processes – have tended to reduce ideology to a significant theme or idea, a simple matter of belief, whether of the poet and his audience or of the characters he portrays. The narrator so insistently presses home the meaning of the work that few readers have failed to identify its central themes[...]. But by restricting the object of study to the idea of freedom *in* the poem, he² privileges the autonomy of the literary work, an autonomy that is only a function of the critic’s act of exclusion. The isolation of the meaning of freedom in the text can teach us little about ‘what freedom meant’ to fourteenth-century Scots; it can only reveal patterns of signification specific to a particular work, whose connection with any larger historical pattern remains to be discovered. Only by reconsidering the work within the context of other historical processes, then, can we open the formal closure imposed by literary critics. Formalist interpretations, that is, ignore the ‘political unconsciousness’ of the cultural artifact. (1993: 151-52)

The core of Goldstein’s argument, and the most controversial leap from previous studies of the poem, is his literal reading of Barbour’s most famous passage, the Praise of Freedom: ‘A, fredome is a noble thing’ (I.225). ‘Past readers have neglected to consider the literal meaning of the word “noble” here, though the poet’s presentation of Edward’s violation of property rights gives us every reason to take Barbour at his word’ (Goldstein 1993: 163). Goldstein accuses previous critics of having ‘preferred to view

Barbour and his society as more “democratic” than the evidence suggests’ while, in his view, Barbour’s praise of freedom ‘makes no concession to the interests of unfree Scottish subjects’ (1993: 164). To support his assertion that ‘Barbour’s discussion of the miseries of servitude’ does not constitute ‘a criticism of the institution of servitude’ (1993: 164), Goldstein examines Barbour’s discussion in depth, and then turns to the reality of the poet’s own station in life.

Barbour speaks of personal servitude as something terribly unpleasant, to be sure, but never as something unnecessary[...]. Indeed, Barbour also speaks of *marriage* as a form of (male) servitude[...]. Yet no one would understand this conventional view of the woe that is in marriage as an attack on the divinely sanctioned *institution* of marriage. Serfdom, like wedlock, was simply a fact of everyday life in the Middle Ages. To put it rather bluntly, if Barbour was to study canon law at Oxford or Paris, write historical romances, compile royal genealogies, or have prayers said for his soul after his death, some one else had to be forced to plow the land, a fact attested by his participating in the excommunication of Aberdeen peasants for resisting payment of teinds. (Goldstein 1993: 164-65)

18. Not all subsequent critics have agreed with Goldstein’s view. Sergi Mainer, for example, feels that, although ‘Barbour, as an archdeacon and a poet at court, obviously profited from the institution of serfdom’, he was nevertheless ‘within his rights to praise the pre-eminence of freedom for everybody, no matter to which social

strata they belong. One thing need not necessarily exclude the other' (2004: 33). It is possible to detect the plausibility in both arguments. It is easy, in light of Goldstein's work, to interpret these lines of the *Brus*

Alas yat folk yat euer wes fre,
And in fredome wount for to be,
Throw yar gret myschance and foly
War tretyt yan sa wykkytly
Yat yar fays yar iugis war,
Quat wrechitnes may man have mar.
(I.219-24)³

as having referred to the upper-classes all along. After all, who else would have been the 'folk yat euer wes fre'? It seems foolish indeed to suppose that, if a feudal system existed in Scotland before and after the Wars of Independence, and if Barbour was part of that system, that he would criticise it in a poem almost certainly performed for the court. Such an assumption is frankly a reading of late modern values into a medieval poem, and akin to the very thing Goldstein criticises in the formalist approach. The medieval world-view differs from our own; therefore it should not surprise us that medieval people did things we would condemn, were they done in our time.

19. On the other hand, as Mainer points out, though the reign of Robert I did not alter the social order or provide more freedom and prosperity for the commoners and serfs of Scotland – did not, in other words, establish a modern democracy – commoners

did support Robert the Bruce and his cause, a fact which is recognised both in Barbour's poem and in our modern understanding of medieval Scottish history (see Kliman, 1973). Although under a Scottish king, Scottish serfs would still be serfs, Barbour has them being excessively abused and exploited under the English.

20. This leads into the contract that exists between a government and the governed in any political system at any time. Goldstein, Ebin, and Anne McKim all write about James Douglas' function in the poem as an exemplary loyal knight, but Goldstein points out that, before Douglas swears allegiance to the Bruce, he seeks a redressing of his family's ill treatment from Edward I (1993: 170-71). When the English king refuses to restore Douglas' inheritance, he pledges his service to the Bruce. At this point the two have entered into a traditional pact between lords/kings and their retainers, i.e. the retainer pledges loyal service in exchange for something of value, the rings and nights of merry-making in the mead-hall of the old Germanic world, or in Douglas' case, his hereditary fief. 'Douglas's exemplary function as a loyal vassal is thus contingent upon finding a lord who will grant him his heritage in return for his service' (Goldstein 1993: 171). A similar contract exists between a king and his subjects at large, albeit one of protection rather than monetary reward. Barbour suggests as much near the end of Book II, when the Bruce's army must live in the hills as outlaws:

He [the Bruce] durst nocht to ye planys ga

For all ye commownys went him fra

Yat for yar liffis war full fayn

To pas to ye Inglis pes agayn.

Sa fayris ay commounly,
 In commownys may nane affy
 Bot he yat may yar warand be.
 Sa fur yai yen with him, for he
 Yaim fra yar fais mycht nocht warand
 Yai turnyt to ye toyer hand,
 Bot threldome yat men gert yaim fele
 Gert yaim ay 3arne yat he fur wele.
 (499-510)

And who suffers this *threldome*? Not the displaced Scottish nobility described by Goldstein, but the *commownys*, the common people. They endure the harshness of English rule because they dare not throw in with the Bruce; he cannot offer them the protection required by their support of him. It is only later, when Bruce's campaign begins to succeed that he finds help from the lower classes.

21. Significant *Brus* criticism after Goldstein is exemplified by two recent Ph.D. theses, Sarah Tolmie's *Kingmaking: the Historiography of Bruce and Lancaster in Royal Biography, Ceremonial, and Document* (Cambridge, 1998) and Sergi Mainer Santander's *The Scottish Romance Tradition within the European Context (c. 1375 – c. 1550)* (University of Edinburgh, 2004).

22. Tolmie's study is a comparison of 'legitimizing documents' of two royal usurpers, namely Robert (the Bruce) I and Henry IV. Like Ebin, Tolmie sees a poem like Barbour's *Brus* as a kind of propaganda, though she is more concerned with the

Bruce-Stewart monarchy's need to view itself as the legitimate dynasty than with any concepts of freedom for all Scottish people or the restoration of the Scottish nobility's property rights. Mainer's thesis is also comparative, suggesting that '*The Bruce, The Wallace, Lancelot of the Laik, and Golagros and Gawane* belong to the same literary tradition' (Mainer Santander 2004: 8).

23. These two most recent lengthy examinations of the *Brus* are similar to the studies of Goldstein and Ebin in that they are concerned with *what* the poem means, rather than how it means. That Tolmie and Mainer compare the *Brus* with narratives so disparate in date, style, and genre suggests a concern with the semantic level of the text, rather than the stylistic level. Ebin, at least, examines the episode structure of the poem to demonstrate that it has a definite and intentional pattern, but does not look below this level to the recurring phrases. So far as I am aware, the last scholar to make a linguistic study of the *Brus* was George Head, whose University of Glasgow Ph.D. thesis, *Studies in the Language, Palaeography and Codicology of MS Edinburgh National Library of Scotland, Advocates'* 19.2.2 (1997), applied the prototype theory of categorisation (discussed later in chapter two) to the linguistic features of both poems in the Edinburgh Manuscript which contains Barbour's *Brus* and Hary's *Wallace*. Although it is a thorough and important study, Head's thesis is not much concerned with literary aspects of the text.

1.3 'Planned and Purposeful' or 'Without Second Thought': Paradox or Partnership?

1. As we shall see in the next chapter, the study of formulaic language in narrative poetry is part of the study of oral culture. The formula is considered a process

of composition without the aid of writing, what Parry and Lord would call ‘composition-in-performance’, which means that, though the ideas of the poem, the characters and events of the story, exist before the poet begins to recite or sing the tale, the actual lines and verses of the poem are composed extemporaneously before the audience, and each new performance yields a different ‘version’ of the poem⁴. Formulae, as we shall see, are pre-existing phrases which communicate those ideas which are common to the genre of narrative poetry and which fit readily into the metrical requirements of the traditional verse-form. In a primary oral setting – a culture or society which does not have a writing system, nor the idea that writing is possible – formulaic phrases are not used with the intention to evoke other poems or to make any intertextual reference. In fact, they are not used intentionally at all; because of the demands of composition-in-performance, a formulaic phrase is used ‘without second thought as the natural means of getting his idea into verse’ (Parry 1930: 80).

2. This seems to indicate a paradox in the *Brus*. We have already seen from Aitken’s article that formulae exist in Barbour’s poem; chapters two and three of the present thesis will, I trust, prove that beyond doubt. Barbour’s *Brus*, however, is not an orally-composed poem. Dating from 1375, it is a work of the late medieval period, and its composer was archdeacon of Aberdeen, an educated man who could read and write not only his own vernacular, but French and Latin as well. Disregarding the facts of Barbour’s biography, the character of his poem speaks for its refinement and careful, intentional composition directed towards a specific interpretation. Barbour’s *Brus* is not an extemporised, oral narrative composed during a single performance and ‘without second thought’, but rather, as Ebin has it, a ‘planned and purposeful narrative’ (1971-

72: 220). It should be clear, then, that formulae in Barbour's poem function somehow differently than in more 'typical' formulaic works: the formula has been repurposed.

3. To explore the use of formulae in this 'literate' text is the task of this thesis. Is the occurrence of formulae in an intentional, 'planned and purposeful' poem composed in writing a discrepancy, or can oral-derived techniques of composition work in partnership with methods derived from Latin-based, 'literate' models with which a medieval cleric such as Barbour would have been familiar? Chapter Two will outline the history of study of the formula, addressing topics of 'orality versus literacy' and the 'pre-verbal Gestalt', ending with the most practical definition of the formula that has yet been devised, based on prototype categorisation. I shall then distribute the formulae in Barbour's *Brus* into three categories, the Prosodic, the Discursive, and the Historic, based on their function within the text, providing examples of each, and making reference to formulaic studies of Middle English romance as well. In addition to individual phrases, certain types of event are inherently common in a poem about war, most notably forms of combat, either between a few isolated knights or large armies on a battlefield. Some of the incidents are so similar to each other, and employ such similar phrases, that the incidents themselves may be thought of as following a kind of formulaic grammar. Chapter Three will examine two types of recurring incident in detail: the Single Combat, in which Barbour single-handedly (or occasionally with one companion) fights three or more opponents, and the Battle, in which two armies meet on a field. I shall first outline and examine the minimal, essential components of these recurring scenes; afterward I shall demonstrate their arrangement into *cycles* which encourage a specific interpretation of the poem by means of repetition with variation.

Finally, Chapter Four will examine the non-formulaic, 'literate' (or 'scholastic') aspects of Barbour's *Brus*, specifically, Barbour's use of the rhetoric derived from classical models. After a review of the history of rhetoric as it relates to poetry, I shall demonstrate firstly that Barbour uses non-formulaic rhetorical passages (such as digressions, apostrophes, and other techniques of rhetorical 'amplification') to underline and make explicit the interpretation of important plot events which Barbour wishes to impose upon his audience, secondly, that these rhetorical components themselves participate in the very formulaic grammar of recurring incidents outlined in Chapter Three, and thirdly, that the rhetorical passages themselves often include recognisable formulaic phrases. (Oral-derived) formulaic language and (Latin-derived) rhetoric do not exist in opposition within Barbour's *Brus*, but rather in cooperation: they are successfully synthesised into one unified system.

4. As this thesis begins, then, the reader will notice a similarity between the formulaic language of Barbour's *Brus* and that of Middle English romances such as *Havelok the Dane*. The *Brus*, it would seem, is participating in, and developing, a tradition which it shares with medieval France and England. This fact in itself would likely be interesting enough for an article or conference paper. As my argument progresses, however, we shall see that the *Brus* is far more consciously 'literary' than the formulaic romances Laura Hibbard Loomis unfairly characterised as 'thoroughly conventionalized and pedestrian' (1942: 607). It does not begin with an exhortation such as 'Herkenet to me, gode men' (*Havelok*, line 1), but rather with a discourse on didactic narrative:

Storys to rede are delitabill
Suppos yat yai be nocht bot fabill,
Yan suld storys yat suthfast wer
And yai war said on gud maner
Hawe doubill plesance in heryng.
Ye fyrst plesance is ye carpyng,
And ye toyer ye suthfastnes
Yat schawys ye thing rycht as it wes,
(I.1-8)

The more traditional romance exhortation is left until lines 445-46, after more than four hundred lines of expository narrative:

Lordingis quha likis for till her,
Ye romanys now begynnys her

This deviation from the practice of Barbour's Middle English predecessors alone suggests a significant manipulation of previous narrative traditions, while the literary theory in the opening lines indicates a highly conscious (and self-conscious) work and posit a sophisticated, probably courtly audience. Despite the veneer of romance (which is sometimes still regarded as a 'popular' genre) and the poem's composition in the vernacular, Barbour has crafted a work which is, for all its gore and violence and predictable formulaic phrases, surprisingly intellectual. Close examination reveals

Barbour's *Brus* to be not so much a continuation of the medieval romance tradition – though it does borrow from that genre – but a carefully didactic, purposeful work which holds a special place in contemporary vernacular literature.

Chapter Two The Formula

2.1 Formulaic Language from Parry/Lord to John Ford

1. Although scholars had identified repetitions of phrases and themes in narrative poetry long before the 1930s, it is safe to say that modern studies of the formula and formulaic language began with the work of Milman Parry and his pupil, Albert Bates Lord. The pair are cited by Ruth Finnegan as having precipitated ‘discussion of the likely “oral composition” of such poems as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Biblical psalms, the *Chanson de Roland*, and *Beowulf*’ (1977: 6), and Walter J. Ong devotes nearly ten pages of his seminal *Orality and Literacy* to ‘Milman Parry’s discovery’ and its ‘consequent and related work’ (1982: 20-30). The formula is now a well-known concept in academia, finding its way into the scholarship of Scots literature via the study of ballads (see Andersen 1985). On the other hand, the formula is still largely the territory of linguists and students of ‘oral culture’; scholars of Scottish Literature in the more general sense do not necessarily have a strong background in formulaic studies. For this reason I offer a brief history of the concept of the formula from Parry/Lord to the most recent and applicable work, in order to highlight those aspects most relevant to this thesis and provide a broad contextualisation of my own views.

2.1.1 Parry and Lord

1. Milman Parry’s research into formulaic language and composition began with his thesis *L’Epithète traditionnelle dans Homère* (Paris, 1928), which analysed ‘formulaic epithets in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*’ (Lord 1960: 3). As Lord recounts:

There came a time in Homeric scholarship when it was not sufficient to speak of the 'repetitions' in Homer, of the 'stock epithets,' of the 'epic clichés' and 'stereotyped phrases.' Such terms were either too vague or too restricted. Precision was needed, and the work of Milman Parry was the culmination of that need. (1960: 30)

Parry crystallised his concept of the formula in two articles published in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*: 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I: Homer and the Homeric Style' (41 [1930]: 73-147) and 'II: The Homeric Language as the Language of an Oral Poetry' (43 [1932]: 1-50). In the first of these articles, Parry offered a definition of the formula that was subsequently used by Lord and many scholars since: 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea' (1930: 80). This can be called the Parry/Lord definition of the formula, and it has provided formulaic scholarship with an excellent starting point. Any critic of formulaic language in narrative verse, myself included, is indebted to their work.

2. Nevertheless, the Parry/Lord definition is only a starting point. It was formulated for the Homeric epics, and cannot simply be grafted onto the poetry of languages and traditions remote from Homer's Greece. If nothing else, there are linguistic issues to be resolved. Metre is an important aspect of the Parry/Lord definition, as the formula is 'employed under the same metrical conditions'; it follows,

then, that that formulae will function differently in Homeric Greek hexameter than in Older Scots four-beat couplets.

3. Also essential to the Parry/Lord theory is the concept of 'orality'. Finnegan and Ong both relate Parry and Lord's work to theories of oral composition (Finnegan 1977: 6; Ong 1982: 21). Lord writes that Parry's studies had convinced him that the Homeric epics 'must be oral compositions' (1960: 3); thus Parry titled his *HSCP* articles 'Studies in the Epic Technique of *Oral Verse-Making*' (my italics). Parry and Lord thus include the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the category of 'oral epic song', which Lord defines as

narrative poetry composed in a manner evolved over many generations
by singers of tales who did not know how to write; it consists of the
building of metrical lines and half lines by means of formulas and
formulaic expressions and of the building of songs by the use of themes.
(1960: 4)

Parry's successful fieldwork among the oral singers of the Yugoslavs, who relied heavily on formulaic expressions and themes, provided further evidence that formulae and formulaic composition originate from an oral setting.

4. All poets, oral or otherwise, face a difficult task: that of expressing ideas in rhythmically organised language.¹ 'In the case of the literary poem,' writes Lord, 'there is a gap between composition and reading or performance; in the case of the oral poem, this gap does not exist' (1960: 13). In other words, an educated, twentieth-century poet

has time to think, to mould and craft thought into competent verse, while an oral poet (Lord suggests) must compose extemporaneously. Furthermore (as evidenced by fieldwork among the Slavic singers), 'an oral poet has no idea of a fixed model text to serve as a guide. He has models enough, but they are not fixed, and he has no idea of memorizing them in a fixed form' (Lord 1960: 22). How, then, does a poet compose under such conditions? The work of Parry and Lord suggests this is done via an inherited vocabulary of formulae, which are essentially ready-made expressions of appropriate ideas in metered language. 'Other singers have met the same need, and over many generations there have been developed many phrases which express in the several rhythmic patterns the ideas most common in the poetry. These are the formulas of which Parry wrote' (Lord 1960: 22).

2.1.2 Orality and Literacy

1. In the Parry/Lord view, formulae evolved to enable the oral composition of poetry, which Lord called 'composition-in-performance'. Formulae are so integral to and indicative of this type of composition that the field based on Parry and Lord's research is called 'oral-formulaic theory' (Finnegan 1977: 53, 58). Parry and Lord, then, are not only the founders of the modern study of the formula, but important contributors to the study of oral culture (hence the prominent place and early presentation of their theory in Ong's book).

2. Right away this creates a complication for the study of formulae in Barbour's *Brus*. The literacy of late-fourteenth-century Scotland might not be what it is today, and aurality and reading aloud were still important means of transmitting a text in Barbour's

time (Coleman 1996: 1-2), but that does not mean that Barbour was an oral poet in Lord's terms. We know that Barbour became archdeacon of Aberdeen in August 1357, a position which would require some education. Matthew P. McDiarmid hypothesises that Barbour may have attained the degree of Master, but 'whether a degree was taken or not, the knowledge of canon law that an archdeacon needed required at least attendance at a university' (1985: 5). McDiarmid doubts that Barbour would have actually studied at Oxford or Cambridge (though he conducted three students to Oxford in 1357), and believes that 'in France [Barbour's] objective would be Paris', with a further possibility of studying civil law for a couple of years at the University of Orléans (1985: 5). Duncan thinks it possible that Barbour studied in England in 1357, though not definitely at Oxford (1997: 2). In any case, it is very likely, if not certain, that Barbour was literate in at least three languages: Latin of course, that being the language of the clergy, English (or Inglis, the name given to the vernacular of his poem², which we now call Scots), and probably French as well. The *Brus* survives in two manuscripts and several early printed editions, of which the oldest are Henrie Charteris' of 1571, and Andro Hart's of 1616. Some two to three hundred lines also survive in Wyntoun's *Cronykil*. These various texts of the poem resemble each other enough to establish Barbour's poem as a 'fixed version', and to dispel any foolhardy suggestion that Barbour composed the *Brus* orally. The *Brus*, then, being a work of literature composed in writing, and apparently containing formulae, problematises the definition of a formula as indicative of oral composition.

3. Of course, as the scholarship in oral-formulaic theory increased, controversies and contradictions inevitably increased with it, and there is little chance of resolving

them entirely. The Parry/Lord definition, for instance, leads to a 'realization that the repeated phrases were useful not, as some have supposed, merely to the audience if at all, but also and even more to the singer in the rapid composition of his tale' (Lord 1960: 30). Lord is perhaps refuting C. M. Bowra's belief that 'formulae come to be liked for their own sake as old friends, and the omission of them would leave the audience uneasy and unsatisfied, as if they had not had their proper poetical fare' (1952: 231). Even if formulae developed for the singer's benefit, rather than for that of the audience, an audience so accustomed to poetry in a formulaic tradition could hardly help but associate these phrases with the genre; formulae would, in the end, become identifying characteristics of the genre. A recurring phrase like 'on the morn, when it was day' could very likely have signalled to the audience (or, later, to the reader) that the genre of the poem was romance.³ Thus it is hard to disagree with Bowra, whatever authority Lord's views may have.

4. In addition, Ong points out that in the oral culture of Homeric Greece, 'not only the poets but the entire oral noetic world or thought world relied upon the formulaic constitution of thought' in order to preserve poetry, as well as any other ideas or information the culture did not wish to lose (1982: 23). Ong relates formulae to oral memory, to the preservation of knowledge in the absence of a writing system – which precludes the possibility of verbatim memorisation (Ong 1982: 57-58). Lord, on the other hand, denies that the formula is a mnemonic device. Also uncertain is the precise relationship between formulae and metre. Ong writes that, in Homer, 'Odysseus is *polymētis* (clever) not just because he is this kind of character but also because without the epithet *polymētis* he could not be readily worked into the meter' (1982: 58). This

view distances the formula from its meaning: certainly it should be appropriate to its context, but its primary function is metrical⁴. Lord has it the other way round, hypothesising that the epithet evolved from religious ritual, perhaps as the epiphany of a deity. Chanting names of gods with epithets which evoked an aspect of their conventional appearance (e.g. 'grey-eyed Athena') evolved into metered language, which eventually became poetry (1960: 65-67). Neither view can be proved, nor is either implausible. In fact, they do not necessarily contradict each other. The important thing to note is, there is no scholarly consensus on what qualifies as formulaic, or what the function (or functions), both metrical and semantic, of formulae actually are.

2.1.3 Nagler and the Preverbal Gestalt

1. Perhaps the most fundamental controversy in formulaic theory – one which cannot simply be circumvented, like that of orality v. literacy – is the uncertainty as to what a poet of a formulaic tradition actually 'memorises'. As we have seen, the Parry/Lord definition posits a 'given essential idea' as an essential part of the formula. Presumably, the ideas appropriate to a given genre of narrative verse were implied in the selection of that genre. Of course, there must have been a time when the genres were still developing into their familiar form (e.g. the Homeric epics). Additionally, genres are almost certainly developing at all times into new forms. This process of development must occasionally necessitate the introduction of new ideas and themes. This begs the question of how a tradition can evolve new formulae to accommodate these new themes. It is not enough to postulate the existence of formulae, identify, catalogue, and examine them. We must also seek for the means by which they are

created, and the means for creating new formulae. This line of questioning led to Michael Nagler's expansion of formulaic theory in his *Spontaneity and Tradition* (1974).

2. Nagler sought a definition of the formula which could include phrases which (he felt sure) were related, but which did not exhibit all the criteria established by the Parry/Lord theory. As I will argue below, Parry's definition is limited by its basis in a Classical or Aristotelian structuring of definitions and categories. Reformulating the definition based on prototype categorisation allows for 'fuzziness' and category overlap, and can enable scholars to discuss phrases which are not 'prototypically' formulaic, but have certain formulaic functions and participate in the system of formulaic composition, even if only peripherally.

3. Nagler begins his argument on somewhat confusing grounds, hypothesising a relationship between verbally dissimilar phrases on the basis of similar sound, rhythm (or metre), and a metaphorical similarity of meaning. Concrete examples make his discussion easier to follow. Nagler identifies two expressions which indeed sound very similar, one of which means '(amid the) flourishing populace', the other '(hidden in) rich fat' (1974: 5). Even rendered in English translation we may notice some basis for grouping these two phrases together. 'Hidden in' could easily be a metaphoric stand-in for 'amid the', 'among the', or simply 'in'. 'Flourishing' and 'rich' also have plausible semantic overlap; the latter could metaphorically denote the former, under a plea of 'poetic license'. The greatest dissimilarity is that between 'populace' and 'fat'. If we compare the original Greek, however, the similarity between the two phrases – *πίονι δήμῳ* and *πίονι δημῷ*, respectively – is clarified. The difference is essentially one of

pitch. Nagler argues that, '[w]hatever difference the pitch accent may have had in actual pronunciation during an epic performance, few scholars would deny that the overwhelming similarity in rhythm and phonetic sound among these phrases is "formulaic." Yet it is obvious that they do not express one "given essential idea"' (1974: 5). Indeed, as pitch accent markings 'are said to have been introduced, in the third century b.c. [sic], in order to help with the correct reading of Homer' (Wilding 1957: 17), these two phrases are likely differentiated solely on grounds of context and connotative meaning, rather than any concrete phonological perception of audience or speaker. The fact that Odysseus is more likely to burn a thighbone in 'rich fat' than 'amid the flourishing populace' causes the audience to understand the phrase one way and not the other, rather than the pitch accent the speaker gives to the word *δημος*.⁵

4. Nagler's obvious departure from the Parry/Lord definition is that he does not require a formula to express one 'given essential idea.' How far we follow Nagler on this line of reasoning depends on our own opinion of importance of the 'given essential idea' criterion and the strength of the connection between two such phrases as *πίονι δῆμῳ* and *πίονι δημῷ*. If we consider them as two instances or variations of the same formula, then we must sacrifice the 'given essential idea'. If, instead, we consider them merely two related formulae, or even two separate formulae built on the same syntactic and metrical pattern, then we are really not so far from Parry and Lord after all. As we shall see below, this controversy points to a duplicity of the formulae that has yet to be resolved. Once again, prototype categorisation will help reconcile this duplicity, though I believe scholars will have to accept that what we mean by 'formula' is comprised of, on the one hand, recurring meaning and, on the other, recurring rhythm (which implies

a recurring syntax). As these two aspects of the formula are distinct, though related, each aspect is liable to undergo a certain amount of acceptable variation, which can result in two very dissimilar instances of one formula.

5. Nagler feels that the exclusion of certain undoubtedly related phrases from the strict Parry/Lord definition of the formula is ‘an accident of present methodology’ (Nagler 1974: 11). As we shall see later in section 2.1.6., John Ford takes this disagreement as an opportunity to refine and adapt the definition. Nagler, however, dispenses with the formula, at least tentatively, ‘in favor of an entirely new concept’ in which ‘a group such as the *πίονι δῆμῳ* (*δημῶ*) phrases would be considered not a closed “system”[...] but an open-ended “family,” and each phrase would be considered an allomorph; a derivative not of any other phrase but of some preverbal, mental, but quite real entity underlying all such phrases at a more abstract level’ (1974: 11-12). This preverbal ‘Gestalt’, which Nagler names a *sphota*, may be a kind of foreshadowing of the prototype, although Nagler’s concept is based on transformational-generative grammar. We must also note that, in the absence of an ‘essential idea’, Nagler’s preverbal Gestalt can only be syntactical or metrical.

6. Whereas Parry and Lord had postulated the existence of formulae, which were, essentially, fixed phrases, Nagler hypothesises a preverbal Gestalt or *sphota*, and sacrifices the ‘essential idea’. The formula we read on the page or hear during a performance is never more than an ‘allomorph’ of this *sphota*. This is, by Nagler’s own admission, a somewhat vague and ‘mystical’ view of the formula, but Nagler reminds us that ‘one is committed to the existence of unknowns even if one assumes that the poet memorizes and reproduces a fixed formula. What form does the formula take when

not being consciously remembered?’ (1974: 14). Indeed, the nature of memory, oral or otherwise, is a debilitating unknown in such a field as formulaic theory, and it is not the purpose of this thesis to seek new evidence or theories of memory or verse production. Most, if not all, scholars would agree that the formula is real. To foreshadow the discussion of prototype categorisation, a different formulation is possible: the controversy is not over the prototype at the centre of the category ‘formulae’, but rather at its peripheries.

2.1.4 The Formula in English Poetry: the Rhythmical-Syntactical ‘Mould’

1. Lord concludes *The Singer of Tales* with remarks on the application oral-formulaic theory to ‘the Medieval Epic’ (1960: 198). Francis P. Magoun Jr., one of Lord’s colleagues at Harvard University, published the first study of formulae in Old English verse in his article ‘The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry’ (*Speculum* 28, 1953). In it he examined *Beowulf*, identifying and cataloguing formulae such as *on gear-dagum* (line 1b). Kennings such as *(ofer) hran-rade* (*Beowulf* 10a) are also ‘traditional and formulaic’ according to Magoun, perhaps even comparable to the Homeric epithets (1953: 452).

2. Tantamount to Magoun’s discovery that Old English poetry was formulaic is Larry D. Benson’s argument that this formulaic poetry was not necessarily oral. In his article, ‘The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry’ (*PMLA* 81, 1966), Benson agrees that formulaic theory is ‘[p]erhaps the most fruitful and exciting development in Old English studies in recent years’, but refutes the doctrine that

formulae are ‘proof that this poetry was itself orally composed’ (1966: 334). Benson refers to a

widespread assumption that there are only two kinds of composition, the traditional, oral way on the one hand, and the modern way with its emphasis on ‘originality’ on the other. But a poet can be traditional even in diction and phrasing without being oral, and some literary periods prefer tradition to ‘originality.’ The Anglo-Saxon period seems to have been such an age. (1966: 335n6)

This dichotomy of ‘oral’ and ‘literate’, envisioned as discrete, mutually exclusive categories with no overlap, was questioned by the scholar Joyce Coleman in her discussion of ‘aurality’ (reading texts aloud as a primary means of transmission), and is contradicted by the theory of prototype categorisation.⁶

3. Benson points out that ‘the whole doctrine of the oral composition of Old English poetry rests on its use of formulas’ – a dangerously circular line of reasoning – but ‘poems which we can be sure were not orally composed use formulas as frequently and sometimes more frequently than supposedly oral compositions’ (1966: 335). Alexandra Olsen also writes of Old English ‘formulaic poems whose similarity to Latin models makes their oral composition seem unlikely, especially the hagiography poems’ (1981: 1). ‘Orality’ and ‘literacy’ are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are categories which, while distinct and even antithetical at their respective centres, have considerable overlap and ‘fuzziness’ at their peripheries.

4. If an Old English poet can compose in writing using formulae, then it stands to reason a Middle English one can do it as well. This is indeed what Ronald A. Waldron reveals in his article 'Oral-Formulaic Technique and Middle English Alliterative Poetry' (*Speculum* 32, October 1957). Waldron accepts that 'there was some sort of continuity in the use of alliterative meter between the eleventh and the fourteenth century' and that 'the alliterative style, as it is found in the later Middle Ages,' is 'still essentially an oral style' (1957: 793, 794). In fact, he regards the genre of romance itself as a kind of oral art:

As far as the Middle Ages are concerned we know that writing was almost exclusively in the hands of the Church, and that the Church, in general, disapproved of secular romance. It is therefore natural to assume that romance, for instance, flourished for the most part as oral poetry, and only incidentally found its way into writing. (1957: 793)

Yet Waldron is not blind to the fact that these apparently oral-derived poems are preserved in writing and, especially in the cases of translations like the *Alexander* poems and the *Destruction of Troy*, are almost certainly the product of literate poets.

It would be rash to go on to say that this poetry itself must therefore be of oral origin. The most we can say is that it was written by poets who were familiar with a body of formulas which probably originated in a

tradition of oral composition and for readers who still retained a taste for the conventions of an oral style. (Waldron 1957: 800)

Thus Waldron avoids the mistaken assumption that the Middle English alliterative romances are transcriptions of oral performances, composed extemporaneously before an audience, though Waldron's article predates Benson's by nearly a decade.⁷

5. Waldron's paper is valuable for its discovery of formulaic language in Middle English (alliterative) verse, and for providing further evidence of the independence of formulaic language and oral composition. The results of Waldron's analysis of Middle English alliterative verse, moreover, are on the one hand comparable to Michael Nagler's studies of Homer, and on the other provide a link to Susan Wittig's important work on the Middle English accentual-syllabic romances. Waldron found that, unlike Anglo-Saxon formulae, the phrases recurring in the first half line of a Middle English alliterative poem 'are usually quite distinct from those of the second' (1957: 796). This, he suggests, is 'perhaps in part because of the standardization of *aaax* alliteration' (1957: 796).⁸ The *aaax* alliterative pattern, in which the first three beats (stressed syllables) of a line alliterate with each other, while the fourth does not, was more frequently varied in Anglo-Saxon poetry. When the pattern became more fixed in Middle English alliterative poetry, the first and second half-lines developed quite different prosodic requirements. Waldron provides several examples of phrases from the second half-lines of several Middle English alliterative poem, including *as þe worlde askes* (*Morte Arthure* 2187; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 530; *Death and Life* 5). This phrase, according to Waldron, can be varied as *þan hur kynde askyþ*

(*Alexander and Dindimus* 407), *as therre statte askys* (*Morte Arthure* 157), and *when þe tyde askes* (*Destruction of Troy* 7067). The suggested connection between these phrases is that they are all prepositional phrases ending with some form of the verb *ask*. Waldron continues, remarking that

this system is itself only part of a wider system of second half-lines ending in *askes*. Besides the formulas already quoted, in which the word *askes* means ‘demands’ or ‘requires,’ there are forty-eight half-lines ending in *askes* with the general meaning ‘asks’ or ‘requests’ [...], and fifteen examples with the meaning ‘ashes’. (1957: 797)

The varied meaning of the key-word *askes(b)* in these phrases resembles the connection Nagler perceived in the *πίονι δήμῳ* (*δημῶ*) formulae. These phrases differ in meaning, but sound similar and use the same or nearly the same words. Waldron, however, draws a further connection to phrases like

as þare astate wolde (*Destruction of Troy* 3251)

as his degre wold (*Destruction of Troy* 9963) (cf. 8893: *as his degre askes*)

as þe law wald (*Wars of Alexander* 1650)

as a kny3t suld (*Wars of Alexander* 100)

These phrases, Waldron writes, ‘are evidently also related and form a link between the system ending in *askes* and another larger group of second half-lines ending in *wolde* (*sholde*, *nolde*)’ (1957: 797).

6. In the first group of phrases – those which share the word *askes*(*b*) – Waldron argues for connection based on a shared syntactical and metrical pattern and – especially in the case of phrases where *askes* does not mean ‘ashes’ – shared lexis. That is, the phrases of the first group are related because they all form second half-line patterns of *ax* alliteration (following the *aa* alliteration of the first half-line), and end in the word *aske*(*b*). We notice in most of the phrases the recurrence not only of this identifying (or key-) word, but also of a monosyllabic conjunction or adverb (e.g. *as*, *þan*, *when*) followed by a noun phrase including a monosyllabic deictic (e.g. *þe*, *his*, *therre*); the verb *aske*(*b*) then completes the phrase. In the phrases where *askes* means ‘ashes’, the syntactic connection is looser, for the key-word is a noun. For example, in *Wars of Alexander* 4180, ‘And many costious costis · *consumes in-to askis*’ (my italics), the second half-line phrase consists of a verb, preposition, and ‘askis’ as the concluding noun. The meaning, and in some cases, the syntax, of these phrases can differ greatly, but the alliteration and the key-word remain constant.

7. Waldron presumably connects the second group of phrases, those with *wolde* as the key-word, to those with *askes* based on semantic correspondence. To be sure, *as his degre wold* and *as his degre askes* are syntactically identical, as are *as þe law wald* and *as þe worlde askes*, but whereas the recurring key-word is the primary connection between the first group of phrases, extending even to syntactically and semantically dissimilar phrases like *consumes in-to askis*, the connection between the present two

groups of phrases is the semantic overlap between *wolde* (meaning ‘would, requests’) and *askes*. An even looser semantic connection exists if we include phrases like *as a kny3t suld*. If we continue along this line, what is to stop us from including all phrases that end in a conjugated modal verb?

8. Waldron has essentially identified two types of correspondence, two types of repetition. The first, demonstrated by the *askes* group, is primarily metrical. Although many phrases correspond in syntax as well, the common denominator is ending on a key-word which is some variant of the grapheme <askes>, functioning either as a noun or a conjugated verb. Little or no semantic overlap is required. This is an example of ‘formulaic phrases fulfilling metrical, rather than stylistic or aesthetic requirements’ (Waldron 1957: 794). The metre of alliterative verse in Middle English, as Waldron noted above, is the standardised *aaax* pattern, where each letter represents a metrically accented word, the first three of which alliterate, while the fourth does not. Thus we can see that, though they do not scan alike in based on accentual-syllabic metre, both *as þe worlde askes* and *consumes in-to askis* are metrically identical according to the requirements of alliterative verse: they fulfil the metrical need of providing two strong-stresses, only the first of which alliterates with the stressed syllables of the preceding half-line. The second type of repetition, which connects the *askes* group to the *wolde* group, is semantic. Though these phrases, like those with *askes*, also provide the *ax* alliteration pattern, they do not contain the key-word. Rather than considering them a separate formulaic group, Waldron suggests they are related to the *askes* phrases based on the overlap of meaning. Indeed, the reader can see the connection between all these phrases, though the connections run along two different lines of enquiry, the related

considerations of metre and syntax on the one hand, and semantics or meaning on the other. This duplicity of formulaic language is, I believe, a cause for much controversy and apparent contradiction in formulaic theory, as I will discuss below.

9. Many of the examples cited by Waldron – in fact, all of them except those which use *askes* to mean ‘ashes’ – share not only the *ax* pattern necessary for the second half-line, but also a syntactic pattern of 1) monosyllabic, unstressed conjunction or adverb; 2) monosyllabic, unstressed deictic (e.g. article, possessive adjective, etc.); 3) stressed, possibly polysyllabic noun; and 4) conjugated verb, usually *askes(b)* or *wolde*, the subject of which is the preceding noun. All such phrases will scan the same or similarly even in accentual-syllabic verse, and the fact that such phrases were so readily adaptable to fulfilling the second half-line requirements of alliterative verse may suggest that these two apparently distinct metres can overlap in important ways. Alliterative verse, after all, consists of four strong stresses as does iambic tetrameter, and the isochronic tendency of English stress could possibly have caused a gradual move toward regularising both the strong and weak syllables of alliterative verse. And finally, as shown by fifteenth-century Scottish alliterative verse, as well as by the ‘wheels’ of the *Gawain*-poet’s stanzas, even rhyme came to invade alliterative poetry. Perhaps alliterative verse did not ever truly disappear, but was rather absorbed into accentual-syllabic verse.

10. In any case, Waldron’s article provides one last important feature of formulaic theory, which is the postulation of empty syntactic templates or ‘moulds’. We have seen how much syntactic similarity can be found among alliterative formulae, even though none is apparently required (considering the ‘ashes’ formulae). If that

pattern were capable of being memorised or internalised, poets could create suitable second half-line formulae that would bear some resemblance to the phrases we have already discussed, though they shared neither the word ‘askes(p)’ nor any verb whose meaning is, roughly, ‘requests’. That is almost exactly what Waldron proposes: ‘The grammatical or syntactical structure of a formulaic system is, naturally, always fairly constant. [These systems] consist of “empty” rhythmical-syntactical “moulds” ready to be filled with meaning’ (1957: 798n14). Of course, we have seen that the ‘ashes’ phrases do not exhibit the ‘consistent syntactical structure’ of the other phrases in the system, though they do meet the ‘metrical’ requirements of the verse form. Nevertheless, most of the phrases Waldron discusses have both metrical and syntactical patterns in common. This idea of empty ‘moulds’ was taken up by Susan Wittig in her thorough examination of Middle English accentual-syllabic verse, where consistent syntactical structures are far more important than in alliterative verse, due to the strict counting and arrangement of strong and weak syllables.

2.1.5 Susan Wittig: Accentual-Syllabic Verse and the Syntagmemic Template

1. Susan Wittig’s *Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances* is still probably the most significant major treatment of formulaic language and composition in Middle English poetry. Wittig examines the pre-Chaucerian, non-cyclical Middle English romances, only one of which, *William of Palerne*, is alliterative. As her target texts are almost exclusively accentual-syllabic romances, Wittig’s study is in many ways more applicable to Barbour’s *Brus* than Waldron’s. Middle English and Older Scots were very closely related (as are Present-Day English

and Scots); indeed, a particular similarity existed between Scots and Northern Middle English (nME). Whether the two languages arose as cognate dialects (or rather, *whenever* they did, for even if OSc indeed owes more to Old Norse than Old Northumbrian, it is still very closely related to Middle English), it seems undisputed that both tongues realised stress or metrical accents in the same or very similar ways. The accentual-syllabic verse tradition, too, seems to be continuous north and south of the border. Therefore, a study such as Wittig's comes as close to an examination of Pre-Literary Scots verse as can ever hope to be found.

2. Although Wittig refers to Waldron's article, she seems to draw more inspiration from Joseph Duggan's work on the *Chanson de Roland*, as the syllabic metre of Old French verse does have more in common metrically with her selected texts than ME alliterative verse. To begin, she cites Duggan's separation of formulae into two groups: 'those[...] which furnish essential actions of the plot and are usually appropriate only to certain *motifs* (what Parry and Lord call *themes*) or to repeated specific actions, and those formulas, substantival, adjectival, or adverbial, which can be used without restriction as to the narrative context' (Wittig 1978: 19). Wittig finds that formulae in the romances can be similarly divided, as they can be in Older Scots, which of course brings us back to Aitken's description of 'tags and formulae[...] some generally distributed and others confined to particular modes' (1983: 18), with which we began. While the term 'modes' can be ambiguous – it possibly refers to *genres* or classes of work – it can conceivably be synonymous with Wittig's *motifs*, or simply to 'scenes' and 'type-scenes.'

3. Wittig calls the first group *predicate formulas*, following Duggan's practice. These, she writes, 'are an important formal element of the romances because they are the medium through which most of the narrative action is conveyed. The presence of numerous predicate formulas implies a highly formalized, formulaic plot structure based on repeated action' (1978: 19). This last observation may not hold entirely true for the *Brus* and comparable OSc works: as we shall see later, the ME romances follow a conventional plot structure which is not present in the *Brus*, Wynthoun's *Cronykil*, or the Scottish *Legends of the Saints*, even though the *Brus* does exhibit what we could call predicate formulae. We may need to re-evaluate the relationship between this type of formula and plot composition, though evidence for such a re-evaluation would probably have to come from a comparative study, and is thus outside the scope of this thesis.

4. As we shall see below, Wittig identifies several examples of actions expressed with predicate formulae, including the introduction of speech, the report of a conversation, expression of grief, kneeling and thanksgiving, greeting, and christening a child (1978: 19-26). Of these stylised actions, kneeling and christening are not found in the *Brus*, while expressions of grief and thanksgiving are less elaborate than those of the Middle English poems, and are generally expressed in different formulae. In place of these, Barbour's *Brus* exhibits formulae for travelling, reporting previous action, the introduction of speech, and, especially, various forms of fighting, wounding, and killing, as well as planning/plotting, assembling or rallying troops, and issuing a war-cry.

5. Wittig discusses the second type of formula under the rubric '*Descriptive formulas*' (1978: 26), and notes they are the most useful and least understood element of composition in the romances:

The second category of formulas, those which can be used without reference to the narrative context, are those most often criticized in discussions of style in the Middle English romance. Their usefulness to the poet is beyond question, however, and their presence in the poetry of the formulaic tradition should raise interesting questions about narrative technique, characterization, and scene-setting (1978: 26).

Wittig does not give a comprehensive list of these formulae, which would indeed have been a monumental task, but rather provides a 'sampling of the formulas available to the composer of the romance' (1978: 28). At a glance she identifies '[n]ames, (often linked with an adjective to fill out the meter of the formula), common nouns, and noun-adjective couples' as 'very frequent in this group' (1978: 26), while '[p]urely adjectival phrases do not seem to be quite as common' (1978: 27).

Adverbial formulas of time, place, and manner are among the most-used phrases in all the poems. In spite of the fact that the narratives demonstrate a bewildering variety of scenes and setting, the artistic devices used for setting the stage are all very similar, so that the settings

themselves become part of a formalized chronology and landscape
(1978: 28).

‘In addition,’ she concludes, ‘there are the numerous minstrel tags, phrases which are directed by the minstrel to the audience’ (1978: 28). Many of her examples, though drawn exclusively from English romance, are found in the *Brus*, particularly the adverbial phrases and minstrel tags.⁹

6. Identifying these specific phrases, although it is an excellent starting point, can only take the study of formulae in medieval romance so far. Just as Nagler needed to establish a preverbal Gestalt to account for all the phrases he considered formulaic but which did not fit the strict Parry/Lord definition, so Wittig writes that ‘before we can undertake any further discussion of the implications of formulaic style, we need to view the whole issue in light of more recent studies of the formula as a kind of mental template in the mind of the poet, a pattern-making device which generates a series of derivative forms’ (1978: 29). Indeed, Wittig has Nagler’s work in mind when she addresses ‘the difficulty of determining the differences between formulaic correspondences and other kinds of verbal-metrical correspondences, many of which demonstrate an impressive degree of formulaic repetitions without being formulaic by the strict *ipsissima verba* requirement’ (1978: 29).

7. To widen the category of *formulae* so that it will include phrases that seem formulaic but do not exhibit all of Parry’s essential characteristics, Wittig proposes three approaches, the first of which is developed from an idea of Parry himself: ‘Parry[...] devised a system of alternate (rather than identical) choices made by the

poet, all of which fit the same metrical structure and mean approximately the same thing' (Wittig 1978: 30). Wittig provides the following examples from *Amis and Amiloun*:

1) {lowreand}

with {mornand} cheer

{reweli }

2) blithe }

glad } of mode

eger }

{as we say

{as we tell

{romaunce {as it is told

3) (al thus) in {boke {as (so) we rede

{gest {as ye may here

{rede we

{to rede it is gret rewthe

(1978: 30)

The substitutions in group 1) could all have the same scansion (if the medial <-e->'s are non-syllabic). The first two examples in group 2) also may be scanned the same, and

while the third option of this group appears to scan / x x / (*eger of mode*; as opposed to / x / : *blithe/glad of mode*), I would argue that this additional off-beat is an acceptable metrical variation (a pyrrhic substitution).

8. It is group 3) that provides the most optional substitutions, and the greatest possible variations in scansion, varying from *in gest rede we* at the shortest (four syllables, or five if final *-e* in *rede* is syllabic) to *al thus in romaunce to rede it is gret rewthe* (eleven to thirteen syllables, depending on pronunciation of final *-e*'s). Neither of these extremes would fit easily into the four-beat verse of *Amis and Amiloun*, and indeed, neither of these extreme options are found in the poem. Nevertheless there is ample material for varying this formula between three- and four-beats, that is, for use as the three-stress *cauda* in the stanzaic meter, or as the common four-stress line, when necessary (Wittig 1978: 30). Group 3) also allows variation at the end of the phrase, which is useful for rhyming. For instance, *in romaunce as we tell*, *in romaunce as we rede*, *in gest as it is told* all have similar or identical scansion and the same syllable count, and nearly identical meaning, but will fit into different rhyming environments, a freedom not provided by the first two groups. So we see the metrical usefulness of substitution formulae. As demonstrated by group 3), they do not necessarily all fit the same metrical structure – in fact, variation in the demands of the metre is probably what caused these substitution systems to develop – but all members of a given group do convey the same ‘essential idea’: ‘in a melancholy mood,’ ‘in a happy mood,’ and ‘as we read in romances,’ respectively.

9. Having extrapolated these substitution systems, Wittig then brings forth what I take to be her most valuable contribution to the study of formulaic language in accentual-syllabic verse: the concept of the *syntactical-metrical system*.

There are a number of verbal-metrical correspondences which do not fall even into the wider category of Parry's substitution system, and some other account must be made of them. These are the syntactical-metrical correspondences which do not depend on lexical repetition. In one sense, the test of syntactical correspondence is much more revealing than that of lexical correspondence, because the line structure is firm enough to maintain the pattern (both metrical and syntactical) while there is a great deal of variation permitted in the choice of terms which are seen to fill out the structure. It is the syntactical-metrical pattern here which is formulaic, and each individual occurrence is only a single manifestation of that basic pattern. (Wittig 1978: 32)

As an example, Wittig cites a number of lines from *Earl of Toulous*, viewing them as manifestations of the pattern '(he was a ADJECTIVE + NOUN and a ADJECTIVE)':

He was a bolde man and a stowt (16)

He was an hardy man and a stronge (31)

He was a fayre man and an hye (994)

(Wittig 1978: 32-33).

Other patterns are a ‘two-stress subject-object-verb arrangement introduced by another two-stress prepositional or adverbial phrase’, such as ‘At a brygge they hym met’ (*Toulous* 436), ‘Wyth harde strokes they hym besett’ (*Toulous* 440), or ‘Thorow the body he can hym bere’ (*Toulous* 773) (Wittig 1978: 33).

10. Wittig, like Nagler (and to a certain extent, Waldron), is willing to eschew the ‘given essential idea’ criterion, even insisting that the true formulaic element is the syntactical and metrical structure, rather than the meaning of the phrase. Instead, Wittig suggests that lexical correspondence is accidental. Among the examples Wittig provides, almost no two lines have the exact same meaning; in cases like those quoted above, the lines differ in meaning so much that many scholars, not to mention readers, would not have grouped them together. Nevertheless, the repetition of these syntactical and metrical patterns is obvious and intriguing. Wittig uses this data to suggest that ‘it is not verbatim lexical correspondence which constitutes formulaic language but syntactical and metrical correspondence (which may or may not involve verbal correspondence as well) (1978: 36). She likens this approach to Ronald Waldron’s rhythmical-syntactical ‘moulds’, and also cites Saussure and Nagler to justify her view that

the formulaic pattern[...] exists only in the state of the realized formula.

We can separate its form from its content only abstractly when we discuss pattern types, which are seen in the works only as individual, actual formulas. The form itself may be a kind of preverbal gestalt, as Michael Nagler has suggested, but it can only be defined in terms of its

manifested content. The lexical element, then, is what is known as the *manifestation* element of the formal pattern; the formula itself exists as the actualization of one of a fairly limited number of potential variant forms. (Wittig 1978: 36)

Like Nagler and Waldron before her, Wittig herself anticipates prototype categorisation, although the concept of a preverbal template suggests an internal, ‘deep-structure’ origin, while the prototype is based on experience and perception.

11. Wittig’s next step is to view the formula in the context of tagmemic grammar, which, she writes, ‘assumes that language is built by a series of grammatical hierarchies of *emic* units, units which have particular and distinctive significance within a given system’ (1978: 37-38). Viewed this way, one can take substitutions like those above as ‘variables’ which ‘belong to a paradigm or class, and any of which may be inserted into its proper position (or *slot*) in the formulaic pattern’ (Wittig 1978: 37). By ‘class’ she means word class, such as Noun (N), Verb (V), Adjective (Aj), or Adverb (Av); by ‘slot’ she means a ‘functional position in a syntagmatically ordered sequence of such positions’ (Wittig 1978: 38). For instance, in the first example from above, (*he was a Aj + N and a Aj*), there are four slots, two of which (*he was a*; *and a*) are fixed, and two of which (Adjective + Noun; Adjective) are variable, and can be filled by any word from the appropriate classes that would fit the narrative context. Wittig sums up her ‘syntagmemic’ view of the formula thus:

A slot pattern, regardless of its length or complexity, can be called a *syntagmeme*, which is an isolatable *emic* syntactical construction. The syntagmeme is an abstract unit; it is manifested on the level of the individual text by the *syntagm*, the individual formulaic expression. All languages are made up of syntagmemes[...]. What seems to set formulaic language apart from most other uses of language, however, is the small number of syntagmemes; that is, a few identical slot-pattern formations account for the identical, synonymous, and homologous surface structures in any given poem' (1978: 40).

12. The principal argument against Wittig's syntagmemic view of the formula, or any view that gives precedence to empty templates rather than meaning, is summed up by Flemming G. Andersen, whose *Commonplace and Creativity* (1985) examines the formula in Anglo-Scottish ballads. Like Nagler and Wittig, Andersen proposes amending the strict Parry/Lord definition of the formula. Andersen, however, wishes to treat three-, four-, or seven-stress phrases as variants of the same formula, or members of the same formulaic system, despite the fact that they do not occur under the same metrical conditions. By contrast, Andersen criticises Nagler's view of the formula, claiming that in absence of the 'essential idea' criterion, his approach is based upon 'a seemingly arbitrary similarity in form and sound' (1985: 23-24). The deep-structure approach to the formula adopted by Nagler and Wittig is derived from Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar. Andersen refutes Nagler's view of the formula, however, by quoting another of Chomsky's tenets, namely, that 'two sentences are

taken to be derived from the same deep structure if they are identical in content' (Andersen 1985: 21). That Andersen is trying to retain Parry's 'given essential idea' demonstrates that he reads 'content' as 'meaning'.

13. Scholars of formulaic theory in any language usually have little trouble demonstrating the relationships they perceive between various phrases, whether they conform to the Parry/Lord definition or not. Nevertheless, sacrificing one of the so-called 'hard Parryist' criteria can leave the door open too wide, allowing too many phrases to pass through, whose relationship to each other becomes too tenuous. According to Wittig, for instance, lines such as **with a swerd the king hym slew* and **In that countre they them met* could be manifestations of the same formula, for they have nearly identical syntactic and metrical values. But their meanings are so different that scholars would group them together until they had already learned to approach formulae according to structure and not meaning.

14. We can reconcile some of this discord by returning once again to Michael Nagler. Nagler actually takes as his point of departure from Parry an interpretation of phrases whose phonetic and syntactic similarity suggested to Parry a means of producing new formulae (Nagler 1974: 1); that is, two phrases of similar sound and similar syntax might have been developed, one from the other, by analogy.

Analogy, which was a factor of such importance in the formation of diction, tended always to lead it in the direction of a greater simplification in the expression of ideas. By excluding the new or original expression which could be rendered by a traditional formula, it

inclined the poets to express every new idea, wherever possible, by words resembling the words used to express some similar idea (Parry 1928: 74).

What this means for Middle English is that, if a poet already has such formulations as *At the brigge* and *they hym met*, he (or she) will not express killing with a significantly different syntactical and metrical construction, if he (or she) can use something like *With a swerdys dynt* and *he hym slew*.

15. Keeping this in mind, we can see not only that Wittig is right about the paucity of syntagmemes in the traditional language of romance, but that many of these syntagmemes may have given rise to new formulae (distinguished from the old ones by meaning), which may in turn contribute to this paucity. After all, the metrical environment remains the same, whether characters are meeting or slaying (or 'saving'); for as long as rapidity was a factor of composition, poets, singers, remanieurs, etc., would use a more or less fixed language that tended to reduce possible syntagmatic patterns to a minimum.

16. I agree with Wittig that these similar syntactical-metrical constructions are related, and that they are formulaic, even if they are attested only once in the entire corpus (they may have appeared again, if more works had survived the Middle Ages in written form). I must, however, follow Andersen in disbelieving that two identical syntactical-metrical patterns are equal if they mean vastly different things. Rather, I believe formulaic constructions that are related by a similarity in syntactical and metrical patterns are likely to be cognate, but are nonetheless decidedly different

formulae. As with cognate words in a given language family (for example, the Indo-European), two cognate formulae may actually be related via a now-vanished common ancestor, rather than one attested phrase being derived from another. This view of the two kinds of similarity between formulaic phrases is perhaps best expressed if we imagine formulae plotted on a graph. The syntactical-metrical patterns in their abstract expression are plotted along the horizontal axis; the various attested formulae are plotted along the vertical axis, with each different meaning qualifying as a new point.

2.1.6 John Ford and Prototype Categorisation

1. Wittig's study relied upon transformational-generative grammar; this thesis engages with a distinct linguistic paradigm, i.e. cognitive linguistics, which involves the notion of prototypes. Recently John Ford has examined formulaic expressions in *Amis and Amiloun* using the prototype theory of categorisation, which has the effect of simplifying our idea of how formulaic language operates in the mind of the poet. In his Ph.D. thesis *From Poésie to Poetry: Remaniement and Mediaeval Techniques of French-to-English Translation of Verse Romance* (Glasgow 2000), Ford suggests that 'prototype theory can be used to provide a new way of looking at a formula' (301). Like Wittig and Nagler, Ford was prompted to seek a new approach to the formula by his dissatisfaction with the narrowness of the Parry/Lord definition. Ford's approach was initially conceived without knowledge of Susan Wittig's work; instead, he cites Nagler as his point of departure:

Nagler suggests that formulae are ‘the actualisation of a central Gestalt[...] which is the real mental template underlying the production of all such phrases.’¹⁰ [...] There are some criteria which allow the identification of certain stylistic constructions as formulae, while dismissing other lexical selections as clichés, aphorisms, epigrams, or other turns of phrase. A formula can usually be identified simply by elements of its construction, even when these elements are not in strict accordance with rules of a proposed definition[...]. Unfortunately, many definitions are too narrow to include all formulae, but the extensive alteration required to permit inclusion of all possible variations could easily result in a definition so broad that it becomes ambiguous (2000: 305).

Ford constructions his definition of the formula with the help of the prototype theory of categorisation described in John R. Taylor’s monograph, *Linguistic Categorization* (1989). It is important to describe from the outset the methodology used to recognise and classify (or categorise) phrases which are or may be formulaic, as well as those which are not. This categorisation is a delicate matter because our outlook and expectations are informed by our late twentieth-/ early twenty-first-century experience; it is difficult to hypothesise how a fourteenth or fifteenth century audience (or poet) envisaged acceptable poetic language and style. George Head adopts the prototype-based theory in his examination of the Edinburgh manuscript of the *Brus* (National Library of Scotland, Advocates’ 19.2.2) ‘because of its inclusive nature and its ability to

deal with fuzziness' (1997: 34). Even more useful for the present study is that prototype theory 'allows for perception' (Head 1997: 35). For the task at hand is not merely to broaden our own understanding of the formula, but also our understanding of Barbour's understanding of these phrases and the language of poetry, and that of his audience.

2. The phrase 'linguistic categorisation' can refer to 'the process by which people, in using language, necessarily categorize the world around them' (Taylor 1989: vii). Even the simple act of naming is a process of categorisation. 'We make sense of the multitude of separate things and events which we encounter in our daily lives by seeing them as instances of types or categories. This strategy allows infinite variation to be simplified and irrelevant details to be ignored' (Fowler 1996: 25). John Taylor identifies three prominent approaches to categorisation:

- 1) the *nominalist*, in which 'sameness is merely a matter of linguistic convention'; category members have 'in reality nothing in common but a name'
- 2) the *realist*, in which 'categories[...] exist independently of language and its users'; words 'merely name these pre-existing categories'
- 3) the *conceptualist*, in which 'a word and the range of entities to which it may refer are mediated by a mental entity, i.e. a concept. It is in virtue of a speaker's knowledge of the meanings of the words[...] that he [sic] is able to categorize different entities' (1989: vii).

Of these three approaches, the first has been favoured by linguists since Saussure, who asserted the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. It is easy to see how the association of a given phonetic form with a given meaning is indeed arbitrary; /hænd/ (the English word *hand*) and /'mæn,os/ (the Spanish word *manos*, 'hand') are phonetically dissimilar, yet semantically the same. Yet this simple idea can be extended to the arbitrariness of the meaning itself: 'Saussure vigorously denied that there are any pre-existing meanings (such as "red", "orange", etc.), which are there, independent of language, waiting to be named' (Taylor 1989: 6). Indeed, continuing with the example of *hand*, where do we draw the exact boundaries between the hand of a human or a primate, a canine's paw, bat's wing, or a whale's fin? Certainly there is great difference between the first and last items of this list, but even in this simple example we notice increasing increments of difference which make a clear boundary hard to draw.

3. Taylor argues that '[r]eality is a diffuse continuum, and our categorisation of it is merely an artefact of culture and language' (1989: 6). A good illustration of this fact is the colour spectrum. We know that languages have a discrete list of basic colour terms; we also know that the colour spectrum is continuous, that there is no clear border between one colour and the next. This is reflected in the comparison of languages, which tend to categorise (thus causing speakers to perceive) the colour spectrum differently. Taylor points out that 'Welsh *glas* translates into English as *blue*, *green*, or even *grey*' (1989: 3). Russian distinguishes two colours where English has only *blue*; Latin does the same for *black*: *ater*, a dull, matte black, and *niger*, a glossy black. But Taylor then discusses Berlin and Kay's *Basic Color Terms* (1969), which suggests that the categorisation of colour may not be so arbitrary after all:

[...] [T]wo color samples might well be categorized as the same by speakers of one language, but as different by speakers of another. If, on the other hand, people are asked to select good examples of the basic color terms in their language, cross-language (and within-language) variability largely disappears. Although the range of colors that are designated by *red* (or its equivalent in other languages) might vary from person to person, there is remarkable unanimity on what constitutes a good red. (1989: 9)

Taylor calls these good examples of colors ‘focal references for basic color terms’ (1989: 6). ‘[W]hile it may be valid to talk of the color spectrum as a smooth continuum, it does not follow that perception of the spectrum is equally smooth. From a perceptual point of view, it certainly does make sense to speak of an optimum red[...] [i.e.] light of a wavelength which produces a maximum rate of firing in those cells which are responsive to light in the red region’ (Taylor 1989: 14). Optimum red, or ‘focal’ red, can be likened to the ‘prototype’ at the centre of the category ‘red’ (which overlaps with the categories of nearby colours in the spectrum, and with those of colour-terms in other languages which include ‘focal’ red).

4. To illustrate what I mean by the terms ‘category’, ‘definition’, and ‘overlap’, we must first distinguish between two theories of categorisation. The first is what might be called the ‘Classical Method’, dating back as it does to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, wherein he discusses the identification and definition of a thing based on isolating its

‘essence’ from its ‘accidents.’ John R. Taylor summarises Classical categorisation in this way:

To say that X is a Y, is to assign an entity X to the category Y. We do this by checking off the properties of X against the features which determine the essence of the category Y; our knowledge of this set of features characterizes our knowledge of the meaning of the word Y.
(1989: 23)

Simply put, a definition is a category, and a category is the sum of its essential features. To illustrate, let us consider the definition of the English word ‘man’: an adult human male. We construct the category of *man* based on these three ‘essential characteristics’: [+human], [+adult], and [+male]. The characteristics are essential because all three are required in order to be a member of the category *man*. If any one of these characteristics is missing or altered, the thing itself is altered and is no longer a man. (Consider, for instance, the following trios of essential characteristics, [+adult] [+canine] [+male], [+infant] [+human] [+male], and [+adult] [+human] [+female], which define *dog*, *baby*, and *woman* respectively.) Thus, only three characteristics make up the ‘essence’ of what it is (or is understood to be) a man. All other characteristics of an individual, specific man (e.g. brown hair, black skin, intelligent, illiterate, alive or dead) are accidents; their presence or absence can have no impact on the definition of the entity as a man. As Taylor himself admits, this is a simplification of the approach and leaves out many

subtleties both of Aristotle's discussion and the subsequent expansion and elaboration of this theory of categorisation, but this summary must suffice for our purposes.

5. Taylor's book is about both the use of language to categorise the perceptual world, and the categorisation of linguistic elements. He suggests that the important factor in categorisation – which is, after all, both an act of perception and definition – is not the features or essential characteristics, all of which must be present for recognition, but rather the identification of attributes possessed by a thing to be categorised. That is, the more attributes a thing possesses, the closer it is to the archetypal mental image of the category, the prototype. 'This process of measuring an individual item against a standard image of any given category is known as prototype theory' (Ford 2000: 307).

6. Taylor shows how a mental prototype of an object such as a tree is formed and amended based on an individual's experience and perception of trees. In this way, a mental template of a formula, or of the formulaic language of a genre, can be learned through experience of the works within the genre, and amended and modified with new experience. The difference between this and a generative view of the formula is subtle, but important: whereas a generative view postulates an internal, biological origin for formulaic language (and for language in general), a mental prototype has an external origin: it is the sum of shared attributes of all those things which experience has shown belong to the same category. 'Definitions [of the formula] such as Duggan's, Kay's, and Parry's', writes Ford, 'are valid for recognising only the most perfect examples which completely instantiate the prototype, but they dismiss perfectly acceptable forms which are clearly related but are further distanced from the prototype core' (307). For example, many formulae have been excluded because they are attested only once in a

given corpus. Since no pre-Modern corpus is complete (i.e. the surviving written works of any ancient language are known to be only a fraction of what once existed), a seemingly formulaic phrase – one that is structurally identical to an attested formula – which we find only once may also have occurred in poems which are now lost.

‘*Gup-bord*’ (war shield) and ‘*gup-bill*’ (war sword) both occur frequently in Old English poetry, and their formulaic quality is attested. By comparison, ‘*gup-helm*’ (war helmet) and ‘*gup-sweord*’ (war sword) are unique, but they were clearly formed in accordance with the same principles by which the former two formulaic expressions were generated. Furthermore, their absence elsewhere means only that no other examples of the constructions survived, not that they were never used in other works (Ford 2000: 305, n. 43).

7. With this in mind, Ford cleverly reworks Parry’s original definition to accommodate a view of the formula based on prototype theory. To my knowledge, he is the first scholar we have examined to do this; Nagler, Waldron, and Wittig have either ignored or simply eschewed the Parry/Lord definition upon recognising its limitations. Ford’s restatement of the Parry/Lord definition is ‘a group of words *or a single word* which is or *can be* regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given idea’ (Ford 2000: 308; emphasis in original). This new definition has four essential parts. Formulae

- 1) are made of words: '[t]he number of words is irrelevant so long as it composes a single unit of thought, and it does appear that this unit of thought must correspond to a phrase' (Ford 2000: 308).
- 2) have a particularly useful metrical structure: '[a] poet would have at his or her disposal a cache of constructions which he or she could employ in any metrical situation' (Ford 2000: 309); '[i]t is the intersection of this structural utility with semantic acceptability that renders a formula viable. This semantic acceptability comes from a formula's ability to express a given idea while remaining repeatable, essential elements which provide the key to separating a formula from the rest of the regular metre[...]' (Ford 2000: 311).
- 3) express a given idea: '[...] formulae have to be used in such a way that they not only fit the metrical structure, but also in a way that they make sense in the context supplied' (Ford 2000: 312).
- 4) are essentially repeatable: their meanings 'lack a "particularising force," which makes them useful for describing a variety of situations. This allows them to be repeatable, and thus formulaic' (Ford 2000: 312). A formula, then, 'always has the same basic meaning, but that meaning is not so specific that it can only be used in a very limited way[;] rather it can be applied to a number of discrete situations. In most instance[s] it could even be done without and the meaning of the passage concerned remains intact. It is this

aspect of a formula, having “little or no particularising force”[,] that makes it repeatable” (Ford 2000: 313).

8. We have seen that Ford’s approach improves upon Wittig’s by simplifying the transformational-generative definition of the formula to one based on prototype theory, and therefore based upon a poet, singer, or *remanieur*’s experience and perception of the poetic language. Ford also differentiates between formula based on their meaning (the ‘given idea’ they express), permitting ‘lexical alterations due to constraints of rhyme and/or metre, or structural alterations which arise out of the need for grammatical or metrical cohesion. In either case, a formula remains identifiable so long as it continues to express the same given idea and has the same *basic* structure’ (Ford 2000: 314; emphasis in original). Like Wittig, Ford hypothesises ‘mental templates’ which are expressed as abstractions of the more prototypical instantiations of a given formula, such as ‘{[prep] + *Seyn* + [proper name]}’, yielding phrases like ‘*bei Seyn Jhon*’ (2000: 316). Ford, though, imagines a poet would learn these templates via the experience of the instantiations (no poet, presumably, would think of a formulaic phrase in terms of its abstract expression), and would construct his or her understanding of the phrases as a prototype category, with the more common expressions near the centre and the variations nearer the peripheries in increasing levels of variation, complication or more specialised application. ‘The poet seems to rely on such mental templates in forming and implementing all the formulae, and it is at this level that variations are permitted in order to allow the poet to match a formula to whatever constrain[t]s of metre and grammar, as well as rhyme, assonance or alliteration are

present in the verse, *provided the constructions continue to impart the same basic meaning*' (Ford: 316; my emphasis).

2.1.7 The Duplicity of the Formula

1. Parry and Lord defined the formula as an intersection of meaning and metre, for a formula must be used to express a 'given essential idea' under 'the same metrical conditions'. Soon enough, however, scholars began to sacrifice one or both of these criteria. We have seen that Michael Nagler, as well as Ronald Waldron and Susan Wittig, are willing to group together phrases that differ in meaning, because they scan alike and/or share a metrical/syntactical structure. This is the view of the formula as a 'mould' or 'template', a memorised or otherwise internalised metrical and/or syntactical pattern whose constituents can be substituted (that is, varied) according to the poets' need, perhaps *ad infinitum*. On the other hand, Flemming G. Andersen preserves the 'given essential idea' but groups together phrases which differ syntactically and metrically, on the basis of semantic similarity. A similar view of the formula is suggested by Calvert Watkins in his study of Indo-European poetics, *How to Kill a Dragon* (1995). Early on he cites the Modern English formula *goods and chattels* and, to demonstrate its antiquity, traces it back first to fifteenth-century form *good(e)s and cattel(s)* – an obvious and logical step – and then to the 'Anglo-Latin legal phrase' *bonorum aliorum sive cattalorum* attested 'in the pre-Norman, 11th-century Laws of Edward the Confessor' (1995: 9). Ford, also, hypothesises the borrowing of formulae through direct translation (in his example, from Middle French or Anglo-Norman into Middle English), so the Latin phrase is a more plausible origin for the English phrase

than it might at first seem. Yet Watkins traces the formula back even further to a formula from the *Odyssey*, 2.75: *κειμήλιά τε πρόβασίν τε*, ‘where Telemachus complains of the suitors devouring his ‘riches which lie and riches which move’, the totality of his wealth’ (Watkins 1995: 9-10). This is the underlying meaning of the phrase, Watkins writes, ‘a two-part concept which makes reference to the totality of a single higher concept’ (1995: 9). *Goods and chattels, bonorum aliorum sive cattalorum*, and *κειμήλιά τε πρόβασίν τε* all mean ‘non-moveable and moveable wealth,’ which together designates ‘all wealth’ (Watkins 1995: 9).

In its semantics and as the expression of a cultural theme the formula *goods and chattels* goes all the way back to Indo-European, even if the particular verbal expression, the wording of the phrase itself, does not. Lexical renewal of one or more components of a formula does not affect its semantic integrity nor its historical continuity. We have a renewal of the *signifiant*, the “signifier”, while the *signifié*, the “thing signified”, remains intact. (Watkins 1995: 10).

To Watkins, it is the semantic idea that is formulaic, in some cases stretching back to Indo-European, uniting the narrative verse traditions of all the IE daughter languages, regardless of the verbal form it takes. Clearly, Watkins sacrifices the metrical criterion of the Parry/Lord definition, for Greek, Latin, and English all have different prosodic features and employ different metres in their poetry.

2. Of course, it may be argued that *goods and chattels* is not a valid case, for, though it is found in Homer, the Latin and English examples come from prose, from legal terminology. The phrase, however, forms what John Ford would call a ‘doublet’: two nouns conjoined by *and*, often synonymous or related in some way. Of the doublet formulae Ford catalogues in *Amis and Amiloun*, some, like 1.1.3 CARE AND POVERTY combine to designate the totality ‘bad times’; some, like 1.1.20 NIGHT AND DAY or 1.1.28 WELL AND WOE are antonyms which together designate, respectively, the totality of time (i.e. *ni3t & day* = ‘all the time’) and of circumstances (i.e. *in wele and woo* = ‘in all circumstances’) (Ford 2000 vol. 2: 4, 13, 14). The doublet listed as 1.1.16, LAND AND FEE, is nearly identical in meaning to *goods and chattels*, for it certainly refers to ‘non-moveable and moveable goods’ (Ford 2000 vol.2: 4).

3. Watkins’ focus on the semantic meaning of a formula at the expense of syntax, metre, or even the words themselves, is necessary for his study of what he calls ‘Indo-European poetics’. A large part of his book is concerned with

the ‘signature’ formula of the Indo-European dragon-slaying myth, the endlessly repeated, varied or invariant narration of the hero slaying the serpent. We will begin in the Rigveda, with the phonetically and syntactically marked phrase *áhann áhim* ‘he/you SLEW the SERPENT’[...]. [W]e will term this the BASIC FORMULA. As we shall see, it occurs in texts from the Vedas in India through Old and Middle Iranian holy books, Hittite myth, Greek epic and lyric, Celtic and Germanic epic and saga, down to Armenian oral folk epic of the last

century. This formula, typically with a reflex of the same Indo-European verb root **g^hhen-* (Vedic *han-*, Avestan *jan-*, Hittite *kuen-*, Greek *πεφν-/φον-*, Old Irish *gon-*, English *bane*), shapes the narration of ‘heroic’ killing or overcoming of adversaries over the Indo-European world for millennia. (1995: 10)

Thus Watkins’ study is inherently comparative; he is concerned with the transmission of a (in his mind) formulaic *idea* from the culture of the original speakers of Indo-European throughout the mythology and heroic literature of all Indo-European daughter languages (or as many as possible) even up to the present times. His very hypothesis, then, depends on giving precedence to the meaning of the phrase, and allowing extensive variation in the language, syntax, and metre/rhythm.

4. Nevertheless, it should be clear that, at least since Michael Nagler’s work, scholars of the formula have in effect been discussing two distinct though related entities, calling both of them ‘the formula’, and refusing to admit the difference. On the one hand, there is the repeated meaning; on the other, there is the repeated syntactical and metrical pattern. Before at last pressing on with the formula in Barbour’s *Brus*, I must first attempt to clear up this confusion.

2.1.7.1 The Semantic Formula, or Formulaic Meaning

1. Repeated or recurring ‘meanings’ are the easiest formulaic elements to identify. At the macroscopic level, these formulae lead to recurring plots and incidents – the *themes* of the Parry/Lord formula, the *motifemes* and *type-scenes* of Susan Wittig’s

study – though they can exist at the level of the simple phrase, such as the epithet. Formulaic meaning is perhaps easier to define at the macroscopic level of incident. We must recall that it was the Homeric epithet that first led Parry to recognise and define the formula, which was at the time thought of as saying the same thing in the same words. If another oral Greek poet gave familiar epithets to his characters, he would be employing the same formula, but if modern English novelists occasionally refer to a character as ‘clever Ulysses’ or ‘grey-eyed Athena’, they are most likely making a literary allusion. A non-Homeric oral tradition would presumably form its own epithets and small formulaic phrases, like the kennings of Old English poetry. On the other hand, recurring incidents, no matter how small, are often connected to trans- or inter-Indo-European verse tradition. We have seen that Calvert Watkins views the killing of the serpent (or monster, or adversary) that way. Alan Renoir, too, notes a ‘formulaic theme survival’ or the hero on the beach in *Beowulf*, which can be related to the Homeric epics. This, too, is potentially an allusion or a case of intertextuality, but the possibility of a formulaic origin or ‘genetic intertextuality’ (Watkins 1995: 10) cannot be dismissed outright.

2. Formulaic meaning is easiest to understand when we consider how many people can remember the plot (or at least many of the plot incidents) of their favourite novels, stories, and films, even after one reading or viewing, though they could never quote the text verbatim. The very practice of including *themes* or *type-scenes* in a formulaic study implies that the incidents of a narrative and their arrangement is formulaic, analogous to, if not a direct extension of, the formulaic grammar proposed by Lord in *The Singer of Tales*. But as I have suggested, formulaic meaning exists at the

smaller or lower levels of the simple phrase, for instance at the level of formulaic description. Odysseus, we know, is always clever; Nestor is always wise; Athena is ‘the grey-eyed goddess’. A knight of Middle English romance is *hende* or *doughty of dede*; a knight in Barbour’s *Brus* is apt to be *wys and wycht* or *rycht wycht and awerty*. Walter Ong relates such epithets and formulaic descriptions to the necessity of oral memorisation (1982: 69), though Lord denies that formulae arose as mnemonic device. Trying to determine whether oral-derived narrative verse is dominated by ‘heavy’ figures like heroes and monsters, complete with formulaic descriptions and epithets, because only such figures contained in such fixed phrases could be remembered or whether these figures and phrases became fixed because the culture chose to remember them is like trying to determine whether formulae arose to fill the needs metre or whether metre grew out of strings of formulae: these are chicken-or-egg questions, fascinating but ultimately unanswerable. What we know is that, wherever they came from, formulaic phrases, characters, and incidents exist, and that, language being inseparable from meaning, certain ‘meanings’ become preserved, even though their instantiations may vary. We have no trouble recognising or accepting Robert the Bruce, whether he is *worthy*, *wycht and wys*, *worthy*, *wys and wycht* or *wycht*, *wys*, and *rycht worthy*.

2.1.7.2 Formulaic Rhythm: the Real Mental Template

1. The second entity included in the formula is a more or less empty template or pattern, like the moulds described by Waldron or the syntactical-metrical patterns described by Wittig. John Ford’s definition requires at least one open-class word to

remain constant (2000: 320), but Wittig accepts patterns like [*he was a Aj + N and a Aj*], where only closed-class words remain constant: pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, and the verb *to be*.¹¹ Wittig must include the *syntactical* element in her template, because, in the absence of a fixed open-class noun, the metre of a given phrase may vary. We might consider these two phrases, both of which could be instantiations of this template:

**He was a wycht man and a starke*

**He was a worchipful laverd and a worthy*

The first example may be scanned *x \ x / / x x /* and can fit, more or less, into iambic tetrameter verse. The second scans *x \ x / x x / x x x / x* and could only satisfy the criteria of tetrameter verse in that it has four beats. If we fix even one of the adjectives, we could produce a patterns like [*he was a worthy N and Aj*]; [*he was a gud N and (a) Aj*], yielding

**He was a worthy man and wycht*

**He was a worthy knyght and wys*

**He was a gud knyght and hardy*

**He was a gud king and a wys*

All of these examples fit easily into four-beat accentual-syllabic verse.

2. I exclude the syntactical element from the template based on my view of the relationship of syntax to metre. I hold, for instance, that certain a poetic phrase can become fixed and repeated more or less verbatim by generations of poets working in the same genre and tradition; I hold also that the syntactic pattern of such a phrase can lead to the formation of new phrases based on analogy. That is, I accept the possibility of a phrase like *yat wes all full of chewalry*, a formulaic descriptive phrase, leading to something like *yat wes all full of trechery*, or at least that these two phrases might have a common ancestor. They express different ideas, however, and are comparable only in syntax and scansion. I hold that metrical conditions influence the production of formulaic phrases, and that metre implies syntax, based on the rules of syllable-stress in a given language. The student of poetry is often in danger of forgetting that syllables are always stressed (more or less) according to the same rules which apply to plain speech, rather than on their position in the line. 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day' is nothing like a perfect iambic pentameter line; the extensive departure from the expected iambic pattern especially in the first half of the line is part of the poetic effect.

3. Albert Lord reminds us that all poetry, or at least pre-Modern poetry, is born out of the contrasting needs of prosody and semantics. Though Lord's own study (i.e. *The Singer of Tales*) deals exclusively with the unlettered or oral poet, his formulation of the singer's task as 'one of fitting his thoughts and their expression into this fairly rigid form [i.e. metre]' can be applied to any metered poetic tradition (1960: 21). As Lord writes: '[t]he rigidity of form may vary from culture to culture[...], but the problem remains essentially the same – that of fitting thought to rhythmic pattern' (1960: 22). This is indeed the task of every poet worth his or her salt. Rhythm is an

inherent part of the production of speech; any given language will have an implied optimum rhythm, a recurring pattern of relatively accented and relatively unaccented syllables, that tends toward regularity. Rarely, if ever, is this regularity fully realised in plain speech; after all, language is primarily a tool of communication, not of aesthetic or artistic display, and the words we need to communicate on a regular basis seldom fit flawlessly into verse.

2.2 Formulae in the *Brus*

1. In my study of formulaic language in Barbour's *Brus*, I adopt John Ford's definition of the formula, as it best serves a study of formulaic language *and incident*. Because I am interested in repeated scenes and motifs, and the degree to which a plot structure is organised by implicit structural rules comparable to the grammar of a language, it is necessary to employ a definition of the formula that places sufficient emphasis on the *meaning* of a phrase. Therefore, I will primarily consider the relationships between phrases with semantic overlap, and accept varying degrees of metrical variation in the instantiations of a given formula. By contrast, a study of the *Brus* – or any poem evincing formulaic language – which concentrates on the metrical aspects of the formula would be justified in emphasising the relationships between metrical, and thus, syntactically similar phrases, with little or no consideration of semantic overlap. Such a study would indeed be valuable, elucidating for example the frequency of a given syntactic construction as the solution to a given metrical problem or condition. There is much we do not understand about the severity of metrical constraints in a given verse form, at a given stage in the development of a language and

the verse tradition. Are certain syntactic structures more likely to occur in narrative sections, and are they even confined to certain types of incident, perhaps due to the language's available vocabulary? Such questions are outside the scope of this study, though they are clearly important, and will hopefully be addressed in forthcoming research into metrics and formulaic poetry.

2. Although I employ Ford's definition of the formula, and categorise phrases based on prototype theory, my research still owes a great debt to Susan Wittig's study. One of the more important similarities between my view and hers is the division of formulae into categories according to their importance to the plot of the poem. A formulaic epithet, for example, must correspond to the character it describes; after several occurrences, however, it comes to provide no new information to the audience. By virtue of its fixity and invariable repetitions, it eventually becomes semantically subsumed into the proper name to which it applies, and achieves in the end an exclusively metrical function. We must keep hearing that Nestor is wise, Odysseus is clever, Achilles is furious, Athena is grey-eyed, because the metre demands it, and for no other reason. Other formulae, however, do provide new and/or essential information to the audience.

3. I have mentioned that Susan Wittig follows Joseph Duggan in dividing formulae into two basic categories, which Duggan called the *predicate* and *descriptive* categories. Predicate formulae must have an inherently stronger connection to or a greater dependency on their context within the narrative, for they are appropriate only to certain themes or motifs. Conversely, descriptive formulae cannot depend too much on their context if they can fit into almost any situation. After a given scene has ended, any

subsequent action can occur *on the morn, when it was day*, whether that action be a feast, a fight, or a conversation between two characters while riding through the countryside. To take an example from the *Brus*, the audience perhaps does not need to be reminded so many times that, during a high-speed chase across country or in water, the Bruce and his companions are ‘in hy’ (in a hurry).

4. Taking the dependency on meaning, or semantic relevance, as the primary attribute, I classify formulae in three categories, each of which overlap, as we would expect in light of prototype theory. The first category is that which has the weakest semantic relevance, and is inserted almost exclusively for metrical reasons, for example to provide a rhyming word or an extra iamb. I name this category *prosodic formulae* for its primarily metrical function. *In hy*, the most common formula in the *Brus*, is the best example of these. The redundancy of this phrase, and its ubiquity, have certainly perplexed or frustrated some readers (especially those who attempt to read the poem as something other than literature). Introducing his prose translation of the *Brus* for his 1997 Canongate edition, A. A. M. Duncan admits to having ‘sometimes omitted the cheville “in hy”, which, if taken literally, would have chivalric society in a lather of perpetual hurry’ (1997: 34).

5. Slightly more dependent on their context are *discursive formulae*, which Duggan called descriptive formulae. Wittig adopts Duggan’s classification of simple formulaic phrases, but when she turns to the larger patterns she calls ‘motifemes’, she divides them into those of the ‘*discours*’ and those of the ‘*histoire*’. These category names can be applied to the simpler formulaic phrases as well: a formula, a scene, a theme or motif belongs to the discursive category when it ‘is not a unit of plot’, which is

to say it ‘does not advance the narrative action’, but is ‘rather, one of the conventions of[...] romances which are structurally more important in the telling of the tale than of the tale itself[...] in the *discours* of the tale, not its *histoire*’ (Wittig 1978: 61; italics in original). This is as true of an epithet as of an exhortation or a scene-change. I adopt the term ‘discursive’ because it includes formulae other than the epithets and adjectival phrases implied by the word ‘descriptive’.

6. As Wittig writes, formulae in this category ‘can be used without reference to narrative context’ and include ‘[n]ames (often linked with an adjective to fill out the meter of the formula), common nouns, and noun-adjective couples’ (1978: 26). In the *Brus*, the most common formula corresponding to the epithet in function is the combination of a name with a relative clause, as in ‘How at ye *Brwys yat wes sa bauld*’ (II.196), with the relative clause occasionally occurring in the following line, as in ‘As wes king *Robert off Scotland / Yat hardy wes off hart and hand*’ (I.27-28), or even over three lines, as in ‘And callit till him *Schir Amer / Ye Wallang yat wes wys and wycht / And off his hand a worthy knyght*’ (II.200-02). More traditional, adjectival epithets also occur, such as ‘gud schyr Iames off Douglas’ (I.29) and ‘Robert ye Bruce ye douchty king’ (IV.597).

7. Wittig also mentions ‘adverbial formulas of time, place, and manner’ which are among the most common type of formulaic phrase. ‘In spite of the fact that the [Middle English romance] narratives demonstrate a bewildering variety of scenes and setting, the artistic devices used for setting the stage are all very similar, so that the settings themselves become part of a formalized chronology and landscape’ (Wittig 1978: 28). These adverbial phrases are what prompt me to adopt the term ‘discursive

formulae'. If Wittig considers a 'motifeme' of scene-changing such as '*now-we-leave-and-turn-to*' a 'motifeme of the *discours*' (1978: 61), why should we not apply the term to a single, scene-setting phrase such as 'upon a day', 'sone on the morne, when hyt was day', 'in that tyde' (Wittig 1978: 28), or any elaborate phrase beginning with *Quhen*?

8. Lastly are the *historic formulae*, Duggan's *predicate formulas*. As in the case of discursive formulae, I derive the term 'historic' from Wittig's category of 'motifemes of the *histoire*': motifemes that 'are part of the action and function as compositional units of the plot' (Wittig 1978: 62). As above, this motifeme category is obviously similar to the category *predicate formulas*, which 'are an important formal element of the romances because they are the medium through which most of the narrative action is conveyed' (Wittig 1978: 19). If an extended action (that is, an action that is described over several lines of verse) or an event such as a procession or a feast is an historic motifeme (Wittig 1978: 62), then certainly a simple action-phrase denoting speaking or riding is historic, even though the repeated element in each instance is only a line or a half-line such as "'Dame," he said' (Wittig 1978: 19).

9. There is considerable overlap in these categories, even to the point where, depending on its specific context, a formula from one category might behave as a member of another category. As Wittig points out, a formulaic phrase like 'sone on the morn' is a scene-setting adverbial of time, a descriptive or (in my terminology) discursive formula. It can stand alone in a line, as in 'Apon ye morne yai send to spy' (*Brus* XIV.467), where the second half of the line is filled with essential narrative information (formulaic in itself though it may be), but more often it is followed by another formula, essentially a prosodic 'filler', as in 'And on ye morn *for-owtyn mar*'

(XV.90) or ‘And on ye morn *quhen day wes lycht*’ (XIV.172). In the former example, the second half of the line is a common filler used to complete lines in nearly any context, so long as it involves some sort of action or event; the filler in the latter example, however, is restricted to the *on ye morn* formula, and indeed might be rightly considered an concomitant extension of it, so that *on ye morn, quhen day wes lycht* is a kind of variation or ‘alloform’ of *on ye morn* (or the reverse, that *on ye morn* is the simplified version of *on ye morn quhen day wes lycht*). Wittig cites *on the morn when it was day* as the prototypical form for the romances, and includes it as a descriptive formula because, though it provides an essential function of the *discours* of the narrative (setting the scene of the next action), its predictability and subsequent redundancy (the morning naturally signifies that it is day), provides no new essential plot information.

In ordinary language (in this sentence, for example) each word as it appears adds some new amount of information to the statement that is being made. In formulaic language the fact that the listener can predict from the phrase *sone on the morn* that the next phrase will be *when it was day* [or *when day was light*, or some other common complementary formula] is a function of decreased information. Because the second phrase is really unnecessary (the audience knows what it will be) and because the poet’s freedom of choice narrows sharply here, the second phrase adds no information to the statement. (Wittig 1978: 44)

Thus the predictable second half of this formula – which is not found in every instance of the formula – is rather like a filler, providing as little essential information as *in hy* or *forowtyn let*, which as we have seen can be used as a substitute for *quhen day wes lycht* or *when it was day*. The second half is used for metrical reasons only, to complete the metre and to supply the appropriate rhyming word. A discursive formula, it would seem, can contain a prosodic formula.

10. The same is true of historic formulae. Wittig lists the introduction of speech as ‘perhaps the most useful’ of the predicate or historic formulae, giving such examples as “‘Madame,” he said’, “‘Dame,” he said’, and “‘Lordynges,” he sayde’ (Wittig 1978: 19-20). More common in the *Brus* is *schyr he said*. In this example from Book IV, the minimum phrase is used, the line being completed with the answer to Edward I’s question:

Ye-quheyer he bad yai suld him say

Quhat toun wes yat yat he in lay.

‘Schyr,’ yai said, ‘Burch-in-ye-sand

(IV.201-03)

But often the phrase is followed by a variation of *sa God me save*, as in the following:

‘Schyr, said he, sa God me save’ (I.157)

‘Schyr, said he, sa our Lord me se’ (III.172)

In both instances, the actual content of the speech introduced, the new information, is delayed until the following line. *Sa God me save* is so common a complement to *schyr he said* that, as with *on ye morn*, the audience can probably predict its occurrence; it provides no new information. (Neither does the interjection *perfay*, equally common with formulae for introducing speech.) If we consider *sa God me save* as a separate formula used in conjunction with, or even restricted to, speech formulae, then it belongs in the prosodic category, merely completing metre and providing rhyme; if we view it as a part of *schyr he said* then it is still an historic formula.

11. On the other hand, even prosodic formulae have some semantic function, albeit minimal. *In hy* is so ubiquitous that its occurrence might seem unrestricted, but there are certainly places where it would be inappropriate. In Book I, when the narrator describes at a glance Edward I's annexation of Scotland, he characterises the occupation as

Sa hale yat bath castell & toune
 War in-till his possessioun
 Fra Weik anent Orknay
 To Mullyr snwk in Gallaway,
 (185-88)

Line 187 (the third line of this passage), seems to scan as iambic trimeter, having six syllables instead of the expected eight. Metrically, this would be an ideal place for a filler like *in hy*, which, deftly positioned, would provide an extra iamb, completing the

metre. Unfortunately, ‘*bath castell & toune war intill his possessioun in hy fra Weik anent Orknay’ makes little or no sense. Even less acceptable would be ‘*Fra Weik in hy anent Orknay,’ modifying as it does a preposition. *Forowtyn let* has an iambic variation, *but let*, which is also hardly appropriate to this line (‘*Fra Weik but let anent Orknay’?). The only filler that seems to fit would be *all hale*, a potentially iambic phrase synonymous with *halily*. It would seem redundant considering ‘Sa hale’ two lines above, although redundancy is characteristic of formulaic style, and anyway would be of little concern to a poet who later uses ‘Bot on ye morne in ye mornynge’ (XIV.165).¹²

12. Formulae with the strongest dependence on the meaning of the text still have redundant elements whose function is entirely prosodic and which provide no new or essential information, and formulae whose connection to meaning is most tenuous are still bound by some rules of narrative sense. Even exclamations like ‘weilawei’ or ‘alas’ must make sense when they occur. This overlap exists because every instance of a formula has a metrical and semantic function. Every formula is used because it fits both the metre and the meaning. Indeed, if all poetic language arose from the conflicting parameters of rhythm and meaning, we could expect no less. In this sense, it seems more reasonable to consider the terms *prosodic*, *discursive*, and *historic* as referring to the main function of a formula in a given instance; formulae assigned to these categories are simply more likely to function in one way or another. These three categories are therefore useful, but only if we keep their permeability and overlap – their ‘fuzziness’ – firmly in mind.

2.2.1 Prosodic Formulae

1. As we have seen, part of the function of any formula is to fit meaning readily into metered poetry; therefore, all formulae can be said to have a prosodic function. We might consider, for example, the following excerpts from the *Brus*:

‘Schyr,’ said he, ‘sa God me save

Ye kynryk 3harn I nocht to have

(I.157-58)

‘Schyr,’ said he, ‘sa our Lord me se,

To sauff 3our presence it [is] nocht swa

(III.172-73)

‘Schir,’ said yai, ‘quha sall with 3ow be.’

(VI.88)

The opening lines of the first two examples are practically identical formulae for introducing direct speech. They both contain a formal vocative (the word ‘Schyr’), followed by the nucleus of the speech formula ([Subj. *said*]), followed by a formulaic swear whose function is primarily prosodic; that is, the swear is not so much taken literally, but rather completes the metre of the line and rhymes with either the preceding or following line. In both cases, the narrative content of the direct speech does not begin until the second line of the passage (the second actually delays the narrative content

until the second half of the second line). The third excerpt begins with the same vocative ('Schir'), followed by a prototypical variant of the speech formula, but introduces the narrative content of the direct quotation in the same line: the question, 'who shall be with you [Bruce]?'. A similar case is

‘Schyr,’ yai said, ‘Burch-in-ye-sand
Men callis yis toun in-till yis land.’
(IV.203-4)

In these latter excerpts, Barbour does not need to use the formulaic oath *sa God me se/save* or any variant of it, being able, rather, to work in the information vital to the narrative immediately.

2. As we shall see below, the usage *Schyr he said* is itself a variant of the simple [Subj. + *said*] formula which usually introduces speech not only in the *Brus* but also in a host of Middle English romances. [*Sa* {god} *me* {V}] is an optional filler which is apparently restricted to use with the *said* formula. Its function is to complete a line beginning with *Schyr said he* (or one of its variants) if the poet cannot introduce the content of the character's direct speech, while still wishing to preserve the required rhyme and metre. Many simple formulae can be expanded from two syllables to one or two four-beat lines by combining with such *restricted fillers* (*fillers* whose occurrence is restricted to one group of formulae, such as the *said* group). These *restricted fillers* are not prototypical *prosodic formulae*; in fact, they need not be considered prosodic formulae at all. As I have argued above, prosodic formulae have so little reference to

and dependence on their specific narrative context, and provide so little information which advances the plot of the narrative, that translators are tempted to delete them. Rather, *restricted fillers* illustrate the permeability of the three categories I have defined, the overlap between them and the ‘fuzziness’ at their peripheral edges. This fuzziness is, of course, in keeping with the prototype theory of categorisation. It follows then, that not all readers will agree with my categorisation, at least on every instance. It is to be hoped, however, that most readers will understand my logic in creating these categories, and will acquiesce in most cases.

3. As I have mentioned above, *in hy* is perhaps the most prototypical of all prosodic formulae, and certainly the most common. Its minimum length is two syllables, an off-beat followed by a beat, or in classical terminology, an iamb:

x /

in hy

In its nuclear form, it can occur any time an action is being performed and the poet requires an extra iamb: ‘Yai skalyt throw ye toun *in hy* (V.93). It should be obvious that even this ubiquitous *filler* has some dependence on its narrative context: it must be used with a verb of action, and that action must be capable of being performed in a hurry. One cannot, for example, sleep ‘in a hurry’. In some cases *in hy* occurs where only an extra beat is required, but a concomitant off-beat will not greatly disrupt the rhythm: ‘A pennystane cast na he *in hy*’ (XIII.585). It most frequently occurs at the end of a line as a kind of prosodic afterthought, or to rhyme with a word ending in /i/ (often an adverb

in *-ly*, itself a prosodic formula). It is an adverbial phrase, however, and as such practically unrestricted in terms syntactical position, and can therefore occur anywhere in line: ‘*In hy* till Carlele went is he’ (VII.401); ‘And prayit yaim *in hy* to do’ (XX.205). The nuclear form can also be expanded to a length of as many as five syllables by the addition of adjectives (‘*In gret hy*, for yai herd tytyhing’ (VI.458); ‘Sped him *in all hy* sturdely’ (X.731); ‘And yai did swa *in full gret hy*’ (II.321)), as well as by extending the preposition (‘Bot sped yaim *in-till hy* to rid’ (III.238); ‘*In-to gret hy*, for he wald far’ (IX.224); ‘Ye hale rout *in-till full gret hy*’ (VI.111)). Sometimes the preposition is varied without altering the syllable-count: ‘*On hy* suld put 3ow to ye se’ (V.58); ‘Ye thrid *with full gret hy* with this’ (III.126).

4. Related in meaning and function to the *in hy* group is the polysyllabic adverb *deliverly*, which also denotes action performed in a hurry. In fact, any polysyllabic adverb ending in *-ly* is potentially a prosodic formula. I say ‘potentially’ because the most heavily weighted attribute in the category *prosodic formulae* is the exclusively metrical function. *In hy* and *deliuerly* in lines V.343 and IV.623, respectively, are about as near to instantiations of prototype prosodic formulae as one gets, for in both cases the hurry denoted by the fillers is already implied by the verb *spe(i)d*:

& sped him till ye kyrk *in hy*
‘Gud king speid 3ow *deliuerly*’

Thus an adverb in *-ly*, one of the *in hy* phrases, or any other potential filler, is most clearly a prosodic formula when the information it provides is redundant.

5. Many monosyllabic adverbs such as *full*, *rycht*, and even some occurrences of *all*, function as prosodic formulae when they add an extra (usually unstressed) syllable, usually by expanding the nuclear form of another formula, as we have seen with the *in hy* group, or in the following examples:

Yen suld yai *full* enforcely

Rycht ymyddys ye kyrk assaill

(V.323-24)

& held his way all him allane,¹³

(VII.235)

2.2.2 Discursive Formulae (1)

1. As I have argued, the function of a prosodic formula is primarily to supply syllables necessary to preserve the metre of a line of verse without disrupting the line's meaning (by rendering it semantically discordant to its narrative context). Phrases which supply little or no narrative information and make minimal reference to their narrative context fulfil this function most easily. Phrases in our next category, the *discursive formulae*, also provide little actual plot information, though they do frequently initiate scenes or provide transition between them. The reader is likely to perceive a category overlap, especially between the adverbial formulae of this class and the prosodic formulae which constituted the previous category. Indeed there is an overlap, just as there is between the *quhen*-clause formulae of the discursive class and certain historic formulae in the following category. Such overlaps, or fuzziness, the

reader will remember, are an aspect of prototype categorisation. All formulae, I would argue, are not discrete and independent entities, but instead exist in a diffuse continuum, and the categories I employ reflect this. There is no single point where the prosodic formulae end and the discursive formulae begin, nor where the discursive end and the historic begin. Fuzziness or overlap exists at the boundaries of each category, and the placement of peripheral or ‘fuzzy’ examples will inevitably depend on the individual scholar’s perception of the individual case.

2. Susan Wittig gives the name ‘descriptive formulas’ to those phrases ‘which can be used without reference to narrative context’ (1978: 26), which term she adopts from Joseph Duggan’s work on the *Chanson de Roland*. Because my own category includes many phrases which do not actually ‘describe’ characters or settings, but rather provide adverbial information or arrange scenes in an appropriate narrative pattern (see chapters Three and Four below) I prefer the term ‘discursive formulae’, which I derive from Wittig’s term for the analogous category of ‘motifemes’. I do not employ the term ‘motifeme’ and in fact consider some of Wittig’s motifemes to be formulae. A motifeme in Wittig’s study seems to differ from a formula in terms of length (i.e. it occupies at least one stanza) and in lexical variability (i.e. the meaning remains similar but the precise wording varies greatly). Barbour’s *Brus* does not employ stanzas. Also, as we have seen in Calvert Watkins’ study, two semantically identical phrases may be considered instantiations of one formula even though they have not a single word in common. These factors enable me to dispense with a medium-length unit of composition such as the motifeme. As I aim my study at scholars with a primarily literary expertise, dispensing with overtly scientific terminology is an attractive option.

Passages which correspond semantically without concomitant lexical correspondence, and which are longer than a few couplets, will be discussed in Chapter Four.

4. Whereas Wittig writes of 'descriptive formula' (1978: 26) and 'motifemes of the *discours*' (61), I will discuss 'discursive formulae'. I derive the term of course from Wittig's use of the French structuralist term, and therefore preface my discussion with Wittig's description: a discursive formula

is not a unit of plot, since it does not advance the narrative action; it is, rather, one of the conventions of the Middle English romances which are structurally more important in the telling of the tale than in the action of the tale itself – to use the terms of the French structuralists, in the *discours* of the tale, not its *histoire*. (61)

Discursive formulae, then, are formulae which do not advance the plot *per se*, but are part of the stylised and conventional language of narrative verse. These include many adjectives, combinations of adjectives, and adjectival phrases, as well as many adverbial formulae and phrases which introduce scenes or provide transition between them.

5. Wittig begins her discussion of what she calls 'Descriptive Formulas' (1978: 26) – my *discursive formulae* – with 'names (often linked with an adjective to fill out the meter of the formula), common nouns, and noun-adjective couples' (1978: 26). The use of such phrases as an introduction to discursive formulae seems logical considering the work of Parry and Lord; these name- and noun-adjective couples are analogous, if not identical, to Homeric epithets. Ford's first category of formulae is 'Doublets' (2000

vol. 2: 4), which include some of Wittig's 'descriptive formulas', such as *knights and squires* (Ford vol. 2: 13; Wittig: 26), *blood and bone* (Ford vol. 2: 13; Wittig: 26), and *fair and bright, little and much, less and more* (Ford vol. 2: 15; Wittig: 27). Furthermore, Wittig's examples *styff and strong* and *feyre and free* (27) are acceptable variations of Ford's examples *hard and strong* and *hende and free* (15), and Ford also notes an occurrence of 'stipe & strong' in *Amis and Amiloun* 1303 (16).

6. Some random sampling of passages from the *Brus* demonstrates that Barbour's own practice, while sharing some syntactic and metrical similarity with the Middle English poems, is not identical to them. Some of the earliest of the poem's descriptive formulae (by which I mean a discursive formula which describes a character or other noun in the poem) occur, as expected, in the prologue, when Barbour first introduces the subject matter and characters of his tale. Having suggested to the audience that 'old stories which one reads represent to them the deeds of stalwart folk that lived before, just as they in presence were' (I.17-20), Barbour continues by arguing:

And certis yai suld weill hawe prys

Yat in yar tyme war wycht and wys, (1)

[...]

As wes king Robert off Scotland

Yat hardy wes off hart and hand, (2)

And gud schyr Iames off Douglas

Yat in his tyme sa worthy was (3)

Yat off hys price & hys bounte

In ser landis renownyt wes he. (4)

(I.21-22, 27-32)

I have numbered those sections of the passage to which I will make special reference.

7. Considering examples 1, 2, and 3, we notice a pattern which can be described as [Subj. + *yat* + V(BE) + Adj. phrase]. Variation 1 demonstrates the monosyllabic subject pronoun with the dependent adjective clause occupying the following line (padded with the temporal adverb formula *in yar tyme*, to be discussed later). Variations 2 and 3 exhibit polysyllabic, proper name subjects, which are common enough. As the adjective clause, which constitutes the bulk of the formula, frequently appears on the following line, there is often no need to limit the length of the subject element; it is actually more useful to lengthen it so that it takes up as much of its line as possible.

8. In Variation 2, the simple adjective clause ‘Yat hardy wes’ is filled out with the alliterating prepositional phrase ‘off hart and hand’. This last element is in function a prosodic formula, though here it participates in an extended discursive formula.

9. Finally, the adjective clause of Variation 3 begins includes the initial element of another formulaic syntactic pattern. Barbour, or the narrator, does not tell us in line 30 that Douglas was merely worthy; rather we are told that he was ‘so worthy that he was renowned for his ‘price and bounte’ in many lands. I call this formulaic pattern the *sa(sic)/yat* result clause pattern, which can link nearly any adjective, adverb or verb phrase to further modification and description with a single syntactic pattern. Barbour merely writes that the noun was *sa* [adjective], the action was done *sa* [adverb], or there

was *sic* [noun], *yat* a certain, usually formulaic, result followed. Occurrences of this pattern are plentiful in the *Brus*. To give but a few as illustrative examples:

And he wes als sa will off wane

Yat he trowit in name sekyrly

(II.474-75)

And yai in schort tyme sa yaim sped

Yat at ye fyr arywyt yai

(V.28-29)

And sic wordis to yaim gan say

Yat yai all samyn held yar way

Till Turnbery

(V.211-13)

Yat sa strayt and sa narow was

Yat twasum samyn mycht nocht rid

(X.18-19)

Bonnok with yat deliuerly

Roucht till ye portar sic a rout

Yat blud and harnys bath come out

(X.236-38)

With sa gret felny yar yai faucht
And sic rowtis till oyer raucht
With stok with stane & with retrete
As ayer part gan oyer bet
Yat it wes hidwys for to se
(XV.47-51)

For a malice him tuk sa sar
Yat he on na wis mycht be yar
(XX.73-74)

In the above examples we see the *sa(sic)/yat* (or, for simplification, the *sa/yat* pattern) with adjectives, adverbs and nouns. Considerable variation is allowed in the result clause, though there are certain formulaic and conditioned clauses which we will discuss later. Also, note in the example from Book XV and in the first from Book X that more than one *sa* element can lead to a single *yat* result clause. The example from Book XV also shows that the initial *sa* element can be separated from its *yat* result clause by one or more lines of verse.

10. Returning to descriptive formulae, adjectives and adjective phrases applied to a given character in Barbour's *Brus* can be likened to Homeric epithets, as their metrical function is at least as important as any information they provide about the character. Barbour's 'epithets' differ from Homer's, however, in that they are not fixed

to an individual character. Whereas Odysseus is always clever, Nestor is always wise, Athena is always grey-eyed, any character in the *Brus*, on either side of the conflict, may be ‘wys and wycht’ or ‘hardy of hand’.

11. The usual collection of adjectives such as ‘worthy’ ‘hende’, ‘hardy’ and ‘stalwart’ are as common in Barbour’s *Brus* as in any formulaic medieval narrative about war. Phrases containing the combination of adjectives ‘wys and wycht’, however, are among the most important descriptive formulae in the *Brus*. We first come across the formula, in its common guise as part of an adjective phrase introduced by the relative pronoun, in Book I, when the narrator defines the poem’s subject as persons ‘Yat in yar tyme war wycht and wys’ (I.22). It occurs again in Book II, just before the Battle of Methven, when we first meet the highly-prized English knight Sir Amer de Valence,

[...]yat wes wys and wycht
And off his hand a worthy knyght
(II.201-02)

Later in the same scene, Sir Ingraham de Umfraville expresses his fear of the smaller Scottish army,

For yar ledar is wys and wycht
And off his hand a noble knyght
(II.263-64)

This formula, then, can be applied to knights on either side of the conflict, though it is never applied to an English king.

12. Though formulae are marked by their dependence not so much upon their specific meaning as on the metrical requirements of the verse,¹⁴ nevertheless a formula must make sense in the passage in which it occurs. The combination *wys and wycht* in particular says something about Barbour's definition of heroism, or at least knighthood. As Ebin writes, 'more than any single aspect of character, as Barbour repeatedly emphasizes, is Bruce's ideal combination or balance of virtues. He is not only valiant, but he is also prudent' (1971-72: 222). And yet, this combination of virtues, at least as expressed by the *wys and wycht* formula, is not exclusive to Bruce: even an English knight may have it.

13. The role of wisdom in war is actually introduced at the Battle of Methven. Bruce has gathered an army to challenge Sir Amer de Valence, but before Valence's knights ride out to meet them, Sir Inghram de Umfraville purposes a ruse: they will tell the Scots to rest the night in the woods nearby; then, when Bruce and his men have removed their armour and set up camp, the English knights¹⁵ will rush on them (II.260-300). The plan succeeds with devastating consequences for the Scots. Before rushing into the uneven battle, Bruce delivers a set-speech to his knights in which he denounces the English who

Schapis yaim to do with slycht

Yat at yai drede to do with mycht.

(II.327-28)

Soon after the battle, however, Bruce himself adopts the guerrilla-style tactics of combining *mycht* with *slycht*, and a pragmatic definition of knighthood is achieved via the formulaic rhyme-scheme: a *knycht* should be both *wys and wycht*, and when he cannot succeed through *mycht* he tries to work with *slycht*. We see Bruce and his knights adopting this creed in Book III, when Bruce, while comforting his men with the story of the recovery of Rome from Hannibal, concludes that

[...] men yat werryand war
Suld set yar etlyng euer-mar
To stand agayne yar fayis mycht
Wmquhile with strenth & quhile with slycht
(III.259-62)

and again in Book V, when James Douglas, during his invasion of Douglasdale,

[...] saw he mycht on nakyn wys
Werray his fa with ewyn mycht,
Yarfor he thocht to wyrk with slycht
(268-70).

14. Barbour also delineates characters by their actions, and these actions can even work in conjunction with descriptive formulae. We have seen, for instance, that Barbour uses the *wys and wycht* formula to describe Valence at the Battle of Methven.

Umfraville, on the other hand, is not *wys and wycht*; instead, he is ‘bath wys and awerty’ (II.213), and in Book V he is ‘sley & wis’ (V.515). By avoiding the *wycht and wys* formula in connection with Umfraville, Barbour is perhaps pointing to his role as an advisor, rather than a warrior. Indeed, Umfraville’s major contributions to the poem are not in the form of military action, but advice. Umfraville is a knight of Scottish nationality fighting on the English side. By using him to introduce the policy of *slycht* combined with *mycht*, Barbour provides a useful scapegoat for what could be seen as an ignoble, if highly successful policy on the part of the Scots (i.e. ‘the English side did it first’). Barbour later legitimises the *slycht and mycht* policy by having Umfraville briefly switch to the Scottish side (though it does not receive much attention in the poem), before abandoning Scotland after the execution of Sir David Brechin in Book XIX (73ff.). Umfraville later advises Edward III to make peace with Scotland (XIX.150), and before that, at Bannockburn, he suggests to Edward II a subtle battle strategy, which Edward rejects as cowardly (XII.460-72). Umfraville continually plays the adversary with a high opinion of the Scottish knights and their king and a subtle mind for clever strategy that legitimises Bruce’s own guerrilla tactics. Valence, on the other hand, uses both *mycht* and *slycht*, as befits his *wys and wycht* formula. His moral character is demonstrated by his refusal to execute the prisoners of war in Book II (460-65). Valence also shows his willingness to fight in Book VIII, when he challenges Bruce to open battle (131-40) which leads to the Battle of Loudoun. After Valence is defeated, he returns to England and courteously resigns his position as Warden, in recognition of his failure to defeat his foe by either *mycht* or *slycht* (VIII.361-65).

15. In the *Brus*, as in the romances of Wittig's study (and evidenced by Ford's study of *Amis and Amiloun*), 'adverbial phrases of place abound' (Wittig 1978: 28). Many of Wittig's examples – or acceptable variations thereof – are found in the *Brus*:

Wittig (1978: 28) Barbour's *Brus*

<i>in that land</i>	III.93 ('Twa breyir war <u>in yat land</u> '))
<i>on yche a side</i>	X.13 ('And men <u>on ilk sid</u> gadryt he')
<i>into the toure</i>	X.441 ('Yan <u>in ye tour</u> yai went in hy')
<i>in the halle</i>	X.449 ('Bot or yai wist rycht <u>in ye hall</u> '))
<i>in his cuntre</i>	IV.472 ('Yat ar cummyn <u>in yis countre</u> '))

The same is true of 'adverbial phrases of manner'

<i>with gret honour</i>	XX.608 (' <u>With gret worschyp</u> has gert bery')
<i>with gret pryde</i>	I.408 ('Ye king Eduuard <u>with mekill prid</u> '))
<i>withouten duelling</i>	III.488 ('And yen <u>for-owtyn mar duelling</u> '))
<i>fulle hastyly</i>	XV.384 ('And with yat word <u>full hastily</u> '))

as well as the 'numerous minstrel tags, phrases which are directed by the minstrel to the audience'.

16. A concordance of such phrases in the *Brus* would no doubt be a useful thing, though perhaps of limited interest. Such a concordance would prove that Barbour's

Brus does exhibit formulae of the kind observed previously in Middle English romance, which may already be considered proven not only by Aitken's statement (cited on p.1 above), but also with reference to the preceding examples. It is more useful and of greater interest at this point to demonstrate how Barbour's *Brus* differs from conventional understanding of formulaic texts. Before we press on with this, however, the remaining discursive formulae – which will be of some importance in the setting up and linking together of scenes – will be discussed, as will the historic formulae, which will lead us naturally into recurring scenes or *incidents* in the *Brus*.

2.2.3 Discursive Formulae (2): Adverbial Formulae of Time

1. As with the preceding formulae, both Wittig and Ford offer examples of common adverbial formulae of time. These formulae seem to be of special importance, for they are, as we shall see, commonly used to indicate the beginning of a new scene or episode. As with the adverbial formulae of place, there are many common prepositional phrases which take up only part of a line. Variants of Wittig's examples can all be found in the *Brus*:

Wittig (1978: 28) Barbour's *Brus*

<i>upon a nyght</i>	XV.456 (' <u>Apon a nycht</u> he tuk ye way')
<i>upon a day</i>	III.313 ('And to ye king <u>apon a day</u> ')
<i>that same time</i>	XII.2 ('And <u>in yat selff tyme</u> fell throw cais')
<i>in that time</i>	II.181 ('As <u>in yat tyme</u> wes ye maner')

in that tyde

IV.384 ('Schir Ihon ye Hastingis at yat tid')

The same is true of Ford's more copious examples:

Ford (2000 vol. 2: 17-18)

Barbour's *Brus*

EVERY DAY (TERMINAL)¹⁶

IX.159 ('And bykkyrryt yaim euerilk day')

EACH DAY (TERMINAL)

V.556 ('For to rys arly ilk day')

THAT DAY (TERMINAL)

VI.452 ('Yus ischyt Thyrwall yat day')

EACH NIGHT

XIV.492 ('Yat ilk nycht swa yat yai mycht be')

THAT NIGHT

IX.207 ('Yai logyit yaim all yar yat nycht')

all that day (terminal)

XVIII.66 ('Suld hald yar fayis all yat day')

all that night (terminal)

X.471 ('Throw-out ye castell all yat nycht')

BY THE TIME

VII.48 ('& he is weill fer be yis tid')

AFTER [DET] DAY

I.40 ('Lay desolat eftyr hys day')

Ford's examples 2.1.3, 2.2.3, 2.3.1, and 2.3.2 – THIS DAY (TERMINAL), THAT SELF DAY, ON A DAY (*initial*), and ON ONE DAY, respectively (Ford vol. 2:17-18) – do not occur as such in Barbour's *Brus*, though slightly less prototypical instances are certainly found: 'Yis day but mar baid fecht will I' (XVIII.52); 'And in yat selff tyme fell throw cais' (XII.2); 'Sa hapynnyt yat on a day' (VII.407); 'Ye Scottis-men a day Cokdaile' (XIX.281).

2. Adverbial formulae of time have a special significance, at least in Barbour's *Brus*. By far the most common of these phrases are those of the [(prep. +) deictic + TIME] pattern. The phrases such as *yat day/nycht* (*Brus* VII.320, XIII.263; II.449, XIX.737) can even be viewed as variants of the basic time formula, if we take the nuclear component 'TIME' to refer to any noun denoting a span of time, however short or long, definite or indefinite. The frequent occurrence of *yat day/nycht*, along with a few cases of *yat tyme/tid* (III.24), demonstrates that the preposition is a more or less peripheral component. Conversely, the simple or typical form of the phrase can be expanded by the addition of an adjective. We have already seen a case of *in yat selff tyme* (XII.2); there is also *yat ilk day* (IX.163), *yat ilk nycht* (I.512), and *on ye samyn day* (XIX.789). Combinations with other adjectives include *on ye thrid day* (III.407), *on a certane day* (IV.557), and *on ye toyer day* (XX.307); phrases with *nycht* and *tyme/tyd* show more restriction. One variant of particular importance, however, is the phrase *in schort tyme*, which occurs in the *Brus* both independently (II.287, IV.180), as well as participating in a larger pattern extending over several lines of verse:

Yan dang yai on sua hardyly
Yat in schort tyme men mycht se ly
Ye twa part dede or yen deand
(V.367-69)

Yai dang on yaim sa hardely
Yat in schort tyme men mycht se ly

At erd ane hunder and wele mar.

(VIII.337-39)

Yar men mycht se a gret melle,

For erle Thomas and his menye

Dang on yar fayis sa douchtely

Yat in schort tym men mycht se ly

Ane hunder yat all bloody war,

(XIV.63-67)

There are further repetitions of this formula, but as the pattern contains historic elements, a full discussion is left until the next section. Suffice it to say that we have an instance of three autonomous formulae combining several times in the same way to create a single formulaic component: the *nucleus* of a Battle scene. The phrase *yai dang on yaim* and its variants is a formulaic *action* commonly found in Battle and Combat scenes (or *incidents*); we have seen the autonomy of the time phrase *in schort tyme*; and, as the excerpt from Book XIV above demonstrates, the phrase *men mycht se* is an independent formula used to introduce a description of something (in all three cases above, the carnage of a battlefield). In these and other similar examples, all three are linked by the *sa/yat* result-clause pattern discussed above to create a familiar, practical and yet variable Battle scene component.

3. In her discussion of adverbial formulae of time, Susan Wittig writes that ‘the most frequent time phrases [...] are the whole-verse formulas’ (1978: 28). Some of these formulae are also found in the *Brus*, as shown below:

Sone on the morne when hyt was day

‘And on ye morn quhen it wes day’ (XIX.507)

On the morne, when hyt was day light

‘Bot on ye morn quhen day wes lycht’ (IV.165)

So it byfelle appon a day

‘Quhill yat it fell apoun a day’ (XVII.22)

Till on the morrow the day spronge

‘Rycht as ye day begouth to spryng’ (VII.326)

4. It is perhaps this group of formulae more than any other which marks Barbour’s *Brus* as an at least partially formulaic composition, leaving him vulnerable to accusations of redundancy and unoriginality. As Wittig herself writes,

In formulaic language the fact that the listener can predict from the phrase *sone on the morn* that the next phrase will be *when it was day* is a function of *decreased* information. Because the second phrase is really unnecessary (the audience knows what it will be) and because the poet’s freedom of choice narrows sharply here, the second phrase adds no information to the statement. (1978: 44)

We might consider also Chaucer's use of this formula in the highly satirical *Sir Thopas*. 'And so bifel upon a day' begins Sir Thopas's ride to seek his adventure (line 748), and it is just when Chaucer speaks the first half-line 'Til on a day' (line 918) that Bailey interrupts him, complaining of the author's 'lewednesse [unlearnedness]' (921) and 'drasty [worthless] speche' (923), damning the tale to the devil (924) and calling it doggerel (925). In Chaucer's England, then, copious formulaic language as a means of composition has apparently outlived its usefulness and is an object of fun. Barbour, though Chaucer's near contemporary, has no irony or scorn in his formulae. The technique is still useful to him; as we have seen with *in schort time*, and as we shall see later in chapters Three and Four, Barbour is capable of considerable variation and individuation within the admittedly restricted framework of formulaic composition.

5. More important to the present study, however, is the fact that these most typical of *time* formulae, at least in the *Brus*, actually participate in a larger group of phrases which I call the *quhen*-clauses. Any formulaic *time* phrase might introduce an episode, scene, or even an inter-scenic *action* (a single action performed by a character within a single scene). 'Sa hapynnyt yat on a day' (VII.407) begins the scene in which Bruce, while hunting in a wood, is attacked by three men. 'He duellyt yar quhill on a tid' (I.407) begins the scene in which James Douglas asks Edward I to restore to him his heritage. The full-line variants, however, introduce the word *quhen* into the syntax, functioning much as its Present-Day English equivalent *when* does. Occurrences identical to Wittig's examples are not so common in the *Brus* as the simpler *yat day/nycht* and *in yat tyme* formulae; consider, however, these semantically similar lines:

Quhen ye set day cummyn was (VII.213)

And quhen it ner drew to ye day (X.567)

And quhen ye day wes dawyn lycht (XIV.499)

These phrases, along with the more typical ones quoted earlier, all contain the word *quhen* with a subject and a predicator which is either a simplex preterite verb or a periphrastic past tense (preterite auxiliary – usually ‘wes’ or ‘was’ – and past participle). Combined with the following line, each case constitutes the basic pattern [*quhen* + Subj. + Predicator + clause]. This pattern would, of course, describe any Older Scots sentence beginning with a temporal adverb phrase with *quhen*. The limitations imposed by the metre and the subject matter of the poem, however, produce only a small number of possible instantiations of this pattern.

6. The restriction which marks these phrases is often manifest in the limitation of syllable-count; that is, in order that a formulaic *quhen*-clause may suit the greatest possible number of metrical requirements, each element in a given phrase is liable to contain as few syllables as possible. The word ‘quhen’ itself supplies the initial off-beat (these phrases tend to begin lines); the subject, too, can often be a monosyllabic pronoun, especially in *quhen*-clauses that link scenes or sub-scenes in the same episode. Consider, for example, the following:

Yan knokyt yai at his chamur yar

And quhen yai hard nane mak ansuar

{Yai brak ye dur}, bot yai fand nocht

Ye-quheyir ye chambre hale yai socht.

(II.59-62)

Quhen ye king saw ye endentur

He wes angry out of mesur,

And swour yat he suld wengeance ta

Off yat Brwys yat presumyt swa

Aganys him to brawle or rys

Or to conspyr on sic a wys.

(I.569-74)

In the first example, the *quhen*-clause is the simple ‘quhen yai hard’, in which each element is monosyllabic, with the antecedent ‘nane mak ansuer’ filling out the rest of the line, as well as providing vital plot information. The clause in brackets represents the *action* which results from the *quhen*-clause: when they (the ‘knights’ of Edward I) heard no answer to their knocking at Bruce’s chamber door, they broke the door down. The *quhen*-clause – including the resulting *action*, is part of a scene in Book II in which Edward I discovers that Bruce has escaped from his parliamentary inquest, whereupon he swears that Bruce ‘suld drawyn and hangit be’ (II.67). News of Bruce’s escape reaches the young James Douglas, who runs off to join the cause. The *quhen*-clause links the *action* of knocking at Bruce’s door and the discovery that he is missing.

7. In the second example, the subject is a two-syllable noun-phrase, though the other elements remain monosyllabic. Furthermore, the result is extended to five lines

with the coordinating conjunctions ‘and’ and ‘or’ and the prepositional adjective phrases in lines 572 and 573. This *quhen*-clause begins a new scene, in which Edward I reacts to John Comyn’s report that Bruce is willing to assume the Scottish throne and wage a war of independence against England. This narrative setting perhaps necessitates expanding the monosyllabic subject of the *quhen*-clause to a full noun-phrase, identifying the subject specifically. A *quhen*-clause which links two sub-scenes can more easily employ pronominal subjects, counting on the audience to recognise the antecedent. We can call the former the *specific quhen*-clause and the latter the *pronominal quhen*-clause.

8. The verb-phrase of the *quhen*-clause is variable as well. At its shortest length it is the simple preterite tense of a verb, the most common examples being *quhen he saw* (III.31; XIII.63) and *quhen he hard* (V.476; XIV.457), with *quhen he wyst* (III.6; XIII.481) being somewhat less common. Any of these and other *quhen*-clauses can be lengthened not only by a substituting longer, more specific noun-phrase (along with optional adjective phrases) for the simpler, pronominal subject, but also by using the periphrastic perfect tense in place of the preterite, as in ‘Quhen yai of Lorne has sene ye king’ (III.147) and ‘Quhen he has hard sua rais ye cry’ (XVI.413). From this model, *quhen*-clauses can be built on other verbs, including those with polysyllabic past participles, for example: ‘Quhen Roxburgh wonnyn was on yis wis’ (X.511).

9. Thus far we have examined *quhen*-clauses in which the dependent clause (that which contains the word *quhen*) has a length of one line or less, with the main clause generally introduced on the following line. Just as common, if not more so, are *quhen*-

clauses in which the dependent clause is longer than one line, due usually to the length of the subject of the *quhen*-clause. For example:

Quhen Thomas Randell on yis wis

Wes takyn as ik her dewys

(X.1-2)

& quhen yai off his cumpany

Saw how yai trawailit had in wayn

(VII.382-83)

Quhen ye Cliffurd as I sade ar

And all his rout rebutyt war

(XII.335-36)

In the first and third example, the predicate of the dependent clause is separated from its subject by metrical fillers ('on yis wis' and 'as I sade ar' respectively). In the second example, the subject is a monosyllabic pronoun, modified by the prepositional phrase 'off his cumpany', which simultaneously clarifies the subject as Valence's men (rather than just any men) and pushes the predicate of the dependent clause into the next line.

10. *Specific quhen*-clauses tend to begin large units of narrative, e.g. scenes and episodes. The first lines of the narrative proper of the *Brus* begin with such a phrase:

Qwhen Alexander ye king wes deid

Yat Scotland haid to steyr and leid,

Ye land vj 3er & mayr perfay

Lay desolat eftyr hys day

(I.36-40)

Excluding the fillers ('& mayr', 'perfay', 'eftyr hys day') and additional modification of the subject, we could paraphrase the above sentence so: 'When King Alexander was dead (or 'had died'), the country "lay desolate" (was kingless) for six years'. Another such *quhen*-clause begins the phase of the prologue which Duncan calls 'The miseries of English occupation' (1997: 55):

Quhen Schyr Edward ye mychty king

Had on yis wys done his likyng

Off Ihone ye Balleoll, yat swa sone

Was all defawtyt & wndone,

{ To Scotland went he } yan in hy

(I.179-83)

A paraphrase of this sentence, minus the extraneous modifiers and fillers, is 'when Edward I had had his way with John Balliol, he went to Scotland'. By contrast, the simple *quhen he heard* formula links the description of James Douglas to his sojourn in Paris after his father's imprisonment:

Hys name wes Iames of Douglas,
& quhen he herd his fader was
Put in presoune so fellounly,
And at his landis halyly
War gevyn to ye Clyffurd perfay
He wyst nocht quhat to do na say
(I.313-18)

The simpler, pronominal *quhen*-clauses, link smaller narrative units, while the longer, specific *quhen*-clauses begin larger units such as episodes and long scenes. This much is implied in their names, for a specific *quhen*-clause, with a specified, probably modified subject, includes an act of *naming*, which is required at the beginning of a scene or episode, when the relevant characters are first introduced, while a pronominal *quhen*-clause, with a simple pronoun as its subject, necessarily involves characters already mentioned, and it is therefore all but required to occur within a larger narrative unit.

11. The *quhen*-clause is also of special importance because it contains an action verb, like the *historic* formulae in the next section; but by subsuming them into a dependent clause employed to introduce scenes and *incidents* or link them together, these formulae effectively transform *historic* formulae into *discursive* formulae. Instead of being a vehicle exclusively for the narration of action in verse form, *quhen*-clauses are the means of linking actions together, arranging them into a chronological and cause-and-effect relationship. They are the half-way point between those formulae

which tell the tale (*historic* formulae), and those which constitute the telling of the tale (*discursive* formula). Though they contain action elements, they are part of the narrative structure, as well as the plot action. We have seen their relationship to the full-line time formulae, which, in their simpler [(prep. +) deictic + TIME]-form are related to any number of formulae of the pattern [prep. (+ deictic) + NOUN], a group which includes not only adverbial phrases of place and manner like *in yat land* or *with a will*, but also fillers like *on yis wys* and even the ubiquitous *in hy*. Before moving on to *historic* formulae, then, it is important to reflect once more on the overlap between formulaic phrases of all kinds. Formulae are not arranged in discrete categories, but rather in a diffuse and continuous spectrum.

2.3 Historic Formulae

1. Susan Wittig discusses what I call *historic* formulae under the heading ‘Predicate formulas’, a term she borrows from Joseph Duggan and which she calls ‘an important formal element of the romances because they are the medium through which most of the narrative action is conveyed. The presence of numerous predicate formulas implies a highly formalized, formulaic plot structure based on repeated actions’ (1978: 19). *Historic* formulae have a relationship to the plot structure of the *Brus*, too. For this reason, my discussion of them here will be relatively brief, with a more thorough examination in Chapter Three, which deals with the arrangement of recurring *actions* into cycles.

2. Wittig, by contrast, devotes more space to ‘predicate’ than to ‘descriptive formulas’. Many of her examples, however, have no close analogues in Barbour’s *Brus*.

This distinction may be primarily due to subject matter, though this difference itself implies deeper and more important deviations of tradition and technique which have yet to be thoroughly explored.¹⁷ Without such an exploration (which could be the subject of a thesis on its own) it may be argued here that, while much of Middle English romance deals with a solitary hero whose main knightly action involves jousting for the hand of a courtly lady, Barbour's *Brus* downplays all considerations of marriage or sexual relationships, focuses ultimately on battle between armies, and, as we shall see in the following chapters, even assumes an anti-individual, community-based attitude. Further, the *Brus* avoids lengthy dwelling on or expansion of expressions of grief, gratitude, or joy. Neither is the act of kneeling a frequent occurrence in the *Brus*, the most notable instance of which is not formulaic and repetitive, but a highly marked action before the Battle of Bannockburn:

Quhen yis wes said yat er said I
Ye Scottis-men comounaly
Knelyt all doune to God to pray
And a schort prayer yar maid yai
To God to help yaim in yat fycht,
And quhen ye Inglis king had sycht
Off yaim kneland he said in hy,
'3one folk knelis to ask mercy.'
Schyr Ingrahame said, '3e say suth now,
Yai ask mercy bot nane at 3ow,

For yar trespas to God yai cry.

(XII.477-87)

This is an act of prayer which underlines the running theme of divine assistance to the Scottish cause as well as Edward II's folly and underestimation of his foes at this crucial moment before the poem's climax.

3. One of the common *historic* formulae the *Brus* shares with its Middle English counterparts and predecessors is the basic formula for the introduction of speech. The simplest phrase of this group is *he/she/they said* (or *and said* if the speaker is also the subject of a clause in the preceding line), followed by a direct quotation.

He said, 'Me think Marthokys sone,

(III.67)

And he ye blast alsone gan knaw

And said, 'Sothly 3on is ye king

(IV.501-02)

'It likys 3ow to say swa,' said he,

(VI.657)

'We grant,' yai said, 'sen 3e will swa,'

(VII.145)

Scho said, 'All yat trawailand er
(VII.245)

As we can see, the formula can begin or end a line, or come in the middle, and the subject can either precede or follow the verb. Often, the basic *said* formula is paired with a formulaic exclamation whose function is purely prosodic; the phrase 'sen 3e will swa' in VII.145 is one of these.

He gave his assent sone yartill
And said, 'Sen 3e will it be swa'
(I.506-07)

And ye king yat angry wes
For he his men saw fle him fra
Said yen, 'Lordingis sen it is swa
(II.434-36)

The other common prosodic exclamation is 'Sa God me VERB', mentioned above.

'Schyr,' said he, 'sa God me save (I.157)
And said 'Swet son sa God help me (II.114)
'Schyr,' said he, 'sa our Lord me se (III.172)

‘A schyr,’ said he, ‘sa God me se (V.53)

Ye king said, ‘Sa our Lord me se (V.655)

‘3a schyr,’ said scho, ‘sa God me se.’ (VII.258)

Ye king said, ‘Sa our Lord me sayn (IX.24)

Schir Eduuard said, ‘Sa God me rede (XI. 53)

4. Even more common is the inclusion of a vocative noun before the actual content of the direct quotation begins. The reader will notice that many of the above examples begin with the ‘schyr’, ‘a schyr’, or even ‘3a schyr’. This is, in fact, the most common variant, though ‘Lordingis’ is also found. Of the examples cited by Susan Wittig, the following are found in the *Brus*:

“ <i>Dame,</i> ” <i>he said</i>	‘Dame,’ said ye king, ‘wald yow me wis (IV.478)
“ <i>Traytour,</i> ” <i>he said</i>	‘Tratour,’ he said, ‘yow has me sauld (V.612)
“ <i>Lord,</i> ” <i>he said</i>	And said, ‘Lordis we haiff na mycht (VI.543)
“ <i>Lordynges,</i> ” <i>he sayde</i>	And said, ‘Lordingis now may 3e se (II.325)
<i>And sayde “Felawe”</i>	& said, ‘Falowis 3e mon all thre, (VII.137)
“ <i>Certes,</i> ” <i>he seyed</i>	Ye king said, ‘Certis I can nocht se (V.237)
“ <i>Brother,</i> ” <i>he seyed</i>	‘Broyer,’ he said, ‘sen yow will sua (V.71)

5. The basic formula can also be modified by an adverb or adverb phrase, such as ‘And sythyn said yaim “Sekyrlly” (II.85), which contains an adverb and an indirect object for the verb ‘said’, and ‘Said to ye byschop, “Schyr 3e se’ (II.99), which contains

a prepositional phrase to indicate to whom the speaker is speaking. And finally, there are extended speech formulae which take up an entire line, leaving the beginning of the direct quotation to the following line: ‘And to Robert ye Brwys said he’ (I.153); ‘And to Schyr Ihon Cumyn said he’ (I.575); ‘And to schyr Robert Boid said he’ (IV.342). These examples include a prepositional phrase with a proper name, leaving the basic *said* formula until the end of the line. Another technique is to employ a periphrastic past tense with the dummy-verb *gan*: ‘Yen gan ye lord off Lorn say’ (III.169); ‘Yen till his meng3e gan he say’ (III.610).

6. Travelling is one of the most commonly occurring acts; any character can perform it at nearly any time, and some amount of travelling is required in order to accomplish almost any other significant action. Travelling can be either on foot or on horseback, singly, in small groups, or en masse. Characters travel to rendezvous with other characters; armies travel to and from the battlefield or castles; travelling is also necessary in escape and retreat scenes.

7. Many *travelling* formulae involve general verbs like some form of *ga* (to go), though the action can be made more specific. When travel on horseback is intended, a form of the verb *ride* can be used, usually prefaced with a formula for leaping onto the horse. For example, when Bruce and his clerk escape from the parliamentary inquest at the court of Edward I:

Ye lord ye Bruce but mar letting

Gert preuely bryng stedys twa,

He and ye clerk for-owtyn ma

Lap on for-owtyn persawyn,
And day and nycht but soiournyng
Yai raid quhill on ye fyften day
Cummyn till Louchmaban ar yai.
(II.12-18)

The underlined portions represent the core or nuclear components of this formula: [NAME + *lap on* + *and* (Subj.) *raid*]. The nuclear pattern can of course be modified by adverbs and adverbial formulae or – as in the present example – by doubling the subject. A shorter instance of this pattern occurs when Bruce rides to Dumfries to confront John Comyn:

Sa fell it in ye samyn tid
Yat at Drumfres rycht yar besid
Schir Ihone ye Cumyn soiornyng maid.
Ye Brus lap on and yidder raid
And thocht for-owtyn mar letting
For to qwyte hym his discoueryng.
(II.25-30)

Although the immediate context of this formula is as long as the previous example, the actual *lap on and raid* formula takes up only one line. The adverb *yidder* is so common

in this formula that it may be prudent to include it in the prototype schema: [NAME + *lap on* + *and (yidder) raid*].

8. The *raid* formula is repeated in the same scene without the *lap on* component: ‘Yidder he raid but langer let’ (II.31). Later, when James Douglas runs away from the Bishop of St Andrews to join Bruce’s army, we see the *lap on* formula without *raid*:

And syne for-owtyn langer stynt

Ye hors he sadylt hastely,

And lap on hym delyuerly

(II.140-42)

And again, at the Battle of Methven:

And yai did swa in full gret hy

And on yar hors lap hastily.

(II.321-22)

This demonstrates that the *lap on* and *raid* components are in fact independent formulae: [Subj. + *lap on* (+ HORSE)] and [Subj. (+ *yidder*) + *raid*]. But when they work in conjunction, they follow the pattern outlined for the *lap on and raid* formula. We have seen independent formulae forming part of a larger formulaic pattern with *in schort tyme*, which can occur separately or as a part of a formulaic description of a battlefield.

9. Most general *travelling* formulae involve some form of the verb *ga*. As usual, both preterite and periphrastic tenses can be used.

To Scotland went he yan in hy (I.183)

Bot fra his presence went in hy (I.439)

And went till England syn agayn (I.443)

He tuk his leve and hame is went (I.589)

Syn on ye morn to court he went (I.601)

And till England agayne is gane, (I.144)

And sone to Parys can he ga (I.330)

From these two groups of lines from Book I we can construct a basic pattern of [Subj. + *ga* (past tense) + adv./adv. phrase], that is, a subject and predicate which denotes ‘going’ in the past tense, almost invariably accompanied by at least one adverb or adverbial formula, often more than one. The destination (where the subject went) is indicated usually indicated by one of these adverbs or adverbial formulae. This basic pattern has variants such as [*to* + PLACE + Subj. (+ *is*) + *went*], [*to* + PLACE + Subj. + *is gane*], [*to* + PLACE + Subj. + *gan ga*]. Another common formula is the circumlocution *to take his/ye way*, usually with the destination indicated in the following line:

Ye Dowglas yen his way has taine

Rycht to ye hors as he him bad

(II.134-35)

All him alane ye way he tais

Towart ye towne off Louchmabane

(II.146-47)

Yet another variation is the simple *held ye way* ('Rycht to ye toune yai held yar way' (II.447)), *go ye way* ('Syn quhen ye duk his way wes gane' (II.547)), and *ride ye way* ('Yen to ye hill yai raid yar way' (II.571)). A final variation substitutes the word 'gat(e)' for 'way': 'Till schyr Amer his gate is tane' (VI.8); 'Ye king now takys his gate to ga' (VI.67); 'With yat yar gate all ar yai gane' (VI.551); 'Ilk man a syndry gate is gane' (VI.579); 'And samyn held yar [gate] yai twa' (VI.582). This is not a comprehensive list of *travelling* formulae, though it does give an overview of the more common and important phrases, as well as hopefully allowing the reader to identify unlisted variants and analogous phrases.

10. If travelling is a common action expressed in many diverse formulae, then killing and fighting are apt to be even more so. Having devoted nearly four pages to formulae for kneeling, thanksgiving, greeting and kissing, child christening, and the expression of grief (all of which seldom or never occur in the *Brus*), Susan Wittig brushes past the discussion of *historic* formulae used in Battle scenes, referring the reader to the sampling compiled by E. Kölbing in his edition of *Bevis of Hampton* (1978: 26). I, too, have consulted this list, and found that few of the formulae have

satisfactory analogues in Barbour's *Brus*. This difference is perhaps accidental. It may be due to some progression or evolution the genre of romance had undergone between the transcription of *Bevis* and the composition of the *Brus*. Alternatively, it may be due to a difference in subject matter, or perhaps because, as Wittig writes, battle scenes 'comprise such a large part of the action of the narrative, all of the poets developed a repertoire of formulas to describe these scenes' (1978: 26). In other words, the frequent occurrence of violence in these poems could have expedited the development of more diverse and personal variants on basic formulae, until one poet's battle repertoire hardly resembled another's except at the most abstract, structural level (where nearly all phrases, battle or otherwise, resemble each other). Less frequently occurring actions and phrases, by contrast, being repeated less frequently, would undergo fewer changes. Wittig calls for a 'complete discussion of the function of these small-scale units [i.e. action formulae]' (1978: 26); to this I would add that there is a need for a thorough examination of the evolution of such formulae on a comparative level. Are they all derived from a very small number of similar phrases, and subsequently multiplied by frequent repetition, by analogy, and by adaptation to increasingly diverse narrative environments, or do they have independent origin?

11. At least some of the more important actions, and the formulae which narrate them, might be discussed here. Though the *Brus* dwells less on formalised social ritual than do its Middle English predecessors, killing nevertheless tends to be graphically portrayed and described, often in very similar phrases, and paired with a descriptive element we shall call *carnage*, which may, for example, portray the gruesome effects of a savage or lethal blow. On the other hand, the *Brus* is a narrative which makes good

use of pace. Certain actions, like the killing of an opponent or a charge on the battlefield, occur again and again, yet these repetitions are not identical, but varied. At times the narrator describes them thoroughly, lingering on detail; at other times the action passes within a few lines, making way for some philosophical or ideological digression. For this reason, Barbour has need of a variety of *killing* formulae, from the smallest, most basic unit, to longer, interlocking patterns of action and description, lasting several lines.

12. The most basic *killing* formula has been foreshadowed by Calvert Watkins; it is, in a very real sense, the descendent of the basic heroic formula he/you SLEW the SERPENT (1995: 10). There are no serpents or monsters in Barbour's *Brus*; instead, the poem offers human opponents of potentially equal moral and physical status to the Bruce himself. Therefore, in place of Watkins' serpent-slaying formula, Barbour substitutes the simple phrase *he slew him*.

Sum yai ransownyt sum yai slew (II.469)

Yai slew yaim for-owtyn mercy (IV.419)

Bot he slew him deliuerly (X.434)

When the subject of 'slew' is also the subject of a clause or phrase in the preceding line, the formula can omit the pronoun, with a conjunction such as 'and' supplying the initial off-beat: 'And slew yaim sua dispitously' (XVI.640). The subject and object of 'slew' can also be expanded:

Modreyt his syster son him slew (I.557)

Ye king a few men off yaim slew (VII.610)

And slew off yaim dispitously (X.661)

And slew off yaim a full gret dele (XIII.81)

Yar slew schyr Eduuard with his hand

A knycht yat of all Irland

Wes callit best and of maist bounte

(XV.205-07)

The *slew* formula can also participate in a *sa/yat* pattern:

Yai with sa feloun will yaim soucht

Yat yai slew yaim euerilkan

(V.102-03)

And yai yaim chassyt fellounly

And slew yaim sua dispitously

Yat all ye feldis strowyt war

Off Inglis-men yat slane war yar

(XVI.639-42)

A specially modified variant of the *slew* formula, *and slew all yat yai mycht ourtak*, occurs six times in the *Brus* (IV.415; V.95; X.80; XIII.93; XIII.207; XVIII.325),

usually during surprise-attacks or chase scenes, with one occurrence of ‘And yai slew all yai mycht to-wyn’ (XV.221) and one of ‘Slew all yat euer yai mycht our-ta’ (XVI.645).

13. Somewhat less common in a simple SVO pattern is the verb *fell* (to ‘fell’) – ‘Bot he yat wreth him encrely | Fellyt hym with a suerdys dynt’ (II.138-39); ‘And with ane ax maid him sic gat | yat he ye fyrst fellyt to ground’ (XV.184-85) – and is often confined to indirect narration:

For 3one knyght throw his douchti deid
And thro his owtrageous manheid
Has fellyt in-till litill tid
Thre men off mekill prid
(III.161-64)

And said, ‘Our Lord mot lowyt be
Yat grauntyt 3ow mycht & powste
To fell ye felny & ye prid
Off yir thre in swa litill tid.’
(V.651-54)

(It should be noted that in the latter example, the *fell* formula is rendered in the infinitive mood.) There are numerous more complicated formulae for killing, most of

which invariably participate in a *sa/yat* result-clause pattern, but as discussion of these forms a great part of the following chapter, I will not discuss them here.

14. The final *historic* formula of importance I will discuss before moving on to Chapter Three is the *report*, a significant recurring sub-scenic narrative action in which one character reports to another on the events of the previous (or a previous) scene. The reaction to this news usually provides motivation for the events of the following scene, making the *report* an important device for linking scenes and arranging them in a chronological and causal order.

15. A *report* usually contains some form of the verb *tell* (to tell), and while the simple phrase can be contained within a single line, the immediate narrative context of the formula is so important that I shall discuss it here. The basic formula, as usual, requires a subject, the main verb (in this case ‘tald’ or ‘tauld’), and an object, usually ‘ye cas’. The *tauld* formula also requires an indirect object, someone to whom the case is told: ‘Yai tauld ye king yan hale ye cas’ (II.63). The *tauld* formula does not end here, however. The phrase ‘ye cas’ is very general, and though a careful reader could possibly be trusted to recall the specifics of ‘the case’ with minimal prompting, a live audience could not. For this reason, the *tauld* formula almost follows with at least a line or two specifying the details of ‘ye cas’. These lines usually begin with the formula (*and*) *how* (*yat*):

Yai tauld ye king yan hale ye cas

And how yat he eschapyt was.

(III.63-64)

The *reaction* to the news usually follows.

He wes off his eschap sary
And swour in ire full stalwartly
Yat he suld drawyn and hangit be.
(III.65-67)

16. Sometimes a *report* is contained in a *quhen*-clause, which, the reader will recall, has a similar linking function:

<u>And quhen to King Eduuard wes tauld</u>	(<i>tauld</i> formula within <i>q</i> -clause)
<u>How at ye Brwys yat wes sa bauld</u>	(<i>how</i> (y)at 1; Name w/ dscr.form.)
<u>Had brocht ye Cumyn till ending,</u>	
<u>& how he syne had maid him king,</u>	(<i>how</i> (yat) 2)
<u>Owt of his wyt he went weill ner,</u>	(<i>reaction</i>)

(II.195-99)

The present case links Edward's immediate *reaction* to its consequent action with parataxis, the coordinating conjunction 'and':

Owt of his wyt he went weill ner,
And callit till him Schir Amer
Ye Wallang yat wes wys and wycht

And off his hand a worthy knyght,
And bad him men off armys ta
& in hy till Scotland ga,
 And byrn and slay and rais dragoun,
And hycht all Fyfe in warysoun
 Till him yat mycht oyer ta or sla
 Robert ye Bruce yat wes his fa.
 (II.199-208)

The underlined ‘*and*’s represent each successive act of Edward I consequent to his *reaction* to the report of the death of Comyn and Bruce’s inauguration as King of Scotland. Line 209 informs us that ‘Schir Aymer did as he him bad’. The *report* and its *reaction*, then, lead directly to the Battle of Methven; we could even consider the first line of the Methven episode to be II.195, though the actual combat – the *nucleus* of a Battle scene – does not occur until II.351, as we shall see in the following chapter. Like the *quhen*-clause, the *tauld* formula and the *report* to which it belongs, is a kind of bridge between *discursive* and *historic* formulae, for it contains action elements, it narrates plot events, and yet is also used to structure the story, to arrange the events in a specific order, not only chronological, but more importantly, causal. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is Barbour who arranges the slaying of John Comyn, the enthroning of Robert I, and the disastrous Battle of Methven in a cause-and-effect relationship: Bruce’s defeat at Methven is part of his penance for the sin of shedding blood at the

altar. At this point we will leave our discussion of independent, isolated formulae, and examine the structure and arrangement of recurring incidents.

Chapter Three: Formulaic Incidents

3.1 What's the Connection? How Incidents are 'Formulaic'

1. Having charted thus far a progression from formulae of the *discours* or telling of the tale to formulae of the *histoire* or the events of the tale itself, and from short, prosodic formulae or 'fillers' to elaborate patterns of interlocking phrases extending over several lines of verse, our next logical step is to deal with the repeated incident. Such a discussion follows naturally, for if formulae are basically repeated phrases, and historic formulae (with which we ended the previous chapter) are formulae through which much or most of the narrative action is communicated, then a formulaic narrative most likely exhibits a large number of repeated plot incidents, the arrangement of which is itself likely to be formulaic.

2. Scholarship on the formula recognised such repeated incidents at an early stage: Parry and Lord both write about formulaic 'themes', to which Lord devotes a chapter of his *Singer of Tales* (1960: 68-98). Lord defines 'themes' as 'groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style of traditional song' (1960: 68). Susan Wittig calls these 'repeated ideas' *motifs* (1978: 19). In a sense, scholarly interest in these recurring incidents of formulaic epics predates that of the formulaic phrase proper, for scholars have long recognised and catalogued them under headings such as *themes*, *motifs*, *topoi*, or *commonplaces* (although we must remember that scholars noticed the 'Homeric' or 'Traditional Epithet', too, before Parry began to write of the 'formula').

3. As early as Parry and Lord, repeated phrases and repeated incidents were taken to be related, two parts of the same phenomenon. Lord writes that the singer of tales ‘absorbs the structures of these themes from his earliest days, just as he absorbs the rhythms and patterns of the formulas, since the two go hand in hand’ (1960: 69). Susan Wittig even seems to imply an incremental relationship between the two, structuring her study in progressively larger focal points, from the simple phrase to the whole-line formula, to what she calls ‘motifemes’ and ‘type-scenes’, ending with the structure of an entire work or genre. A key factor in all formulaic poetry is the limitation of available choices; this limitation is believed by many scholars to cause not only the repetition of phrases, but also of ideas, themes, or narrative incidents (however we term them). The structure of the present work reflects my own initial expectation of such a relationship between formula and incident. However, as discussed below, I now argue that formulae and repeated incidents as they occur in Barbour’s *Brus* function more independently than was previously considered possible; Barbour arranges the plot events of his narrative consciously in order to advance a specific interpretation of history, rather than according to a subconsciously perceived grammar of narrative.

4. As we have seen, studies of the formula, excluding that of John Ford, have often taken a structuralist and generative approach. Wittig’s *Stylistic and Narrative Structures* is an example of this, as is Michael Nagler’s *Spontaneity and Tradition*. Such an approach suggests an incremental development from smaller formulae to formulaic actions, scenes, episodes, and finally entire narratives. The limitation of choice in phrase creates a limitation of choice in action narrated, which creates a limitation in the possible content and structure of scenes, episodes, and narratives. This conception of

formulaic language suggest that the origin of the redundancy in oral poetry is the need for formulae as a tool of oral composition.

5. Walter Ong, on the other hand, would view the formulaic and redundant aspects of oral(-derived) narrative simply as one of the ‘psychodynamics of orality’: orality is ‘aggregative rather than analytic’, ‘redundant or “copious”’, and ‘conservative or traditionalist’ (1982: 38-42). Oral narratives, then, are loath to break apart elements which have traditionally been linked, whether at the level of language, scene, episode, or narrative. In an oral epic, each element of its construction becomes an essential feature whose presence is necessary in order for the poem to be complete; after all, any non-essential features would be expendable and eventually forgotten (what Ong calls the ‘homeostatic’ quality of oral-culture (1982: 46-49)).

6. But perhaps this relationship of elements actually originates in the highest level of language (i.e. semantics), moving downward, rather than at some subconscious pre-verbal level, moving upward to the level of meaning. Perhaps the limited number of *necessary* – as opposed to ‘possible’ – ideas (or themes, *topoi*, etc.) for use in an oral narrative created a need for only a limited number of phrases with which to communicate them. This fits in with Ong’s formulation of the ‘Noetic role of “heavy” figures’:

Oral memory works effectively with ‘heavy’ characters, persons whose deeds are monumental, memorable and commonly public. Thus the noetic economy of its nature generates outsize figures, that is, heroic figures, not for romantic reasons or reflectively didactic reasons but for

much more basic reasons: to organize experience in some sort of permanently memorable form. (Ong 1982: 69)

If the characters of a poem must be 'heavy' or memorable, then their deeds, and the deeds of their adversaries, will also be 'heavy'. If Achilles or Arthur – or even Robert Bruce as depicted by Barbour – were real people, they would certainly need to perform ordinary as well as extraordinary deeds. These actions, however, would not be the stuff of heroic narrative, and would have no place in such a poem, unless, by chance, some such incident led to an appropriately heroic conflict.¹

7. As mundane and 'realistic' deeds are not 'heavy' enough to be remembered in oral narrative, so the possible events and situations which can occur in heroic poetry become limited, just as the types of characters themselves do. The limitation of events or incidents in heroic poetry, combined with the limitations on syntax imposed by metre, create a relatively limited number of possible phrases, clauses, and sentences with which the poem can be narrated. In short, Ong's concept of 'heavy' characters and deeds suggests that oral poetry may be limited to a small number of repeated themes, motifs, and incidents because only those ideas were 'heavy' enough to be remembered without the use of writing (which can record even the most trivial information). Even Lord seems to agree when he writes 'I am sure that the essential idea of the formula is what is in the mind of the singer, almost as a reflex action in rapid composition, as he makes his song' (1960: 65). If it is the essential (semantic) idea which resides in the mind of the poet, then the paucity of formulaic phrases may be due to a paucity of required essential ideas in this kind of narrative.

3.2 Theory and Terminology

1. Because I view the incident as a large element of composition made of smaller elements, my hypothesis of its construction has much in common with Susan Wittig's. My terminology, however, differs. Where possible, I avoid overtly linguistic or structuralist terms such as *motifeme*, except when referring to Wittig's own study. Instead, I will employ more familiar words albeit with a denotation specific to my study.

2. By *action* I mean any one act, usually denoted by a single verb or verb phrase, performed by one character in the narrative, and thus conjugated, usually for the third-person singular or plural. Examples of *actions* include Bruce slaying an adversary: '[...] at ye fyrst strak he him slew' (III.144); and Bruce reading a romance to his men:

Ye king ye quhilis meryly

Red to yaim yat war him by

Romanys off worthi Ferambrace

(III.435-37).

We might note that an *action* need not be formulaic. In the first example, 'he him slew', is certainly a formula, probably an instance of Calvert Watkins' Indo-European epic formula, 'he/you SLEW the SERPENT' (1995: 10). The second example, 'ye king[...] red to yaim[...] romanys[...]', is neither a prototypical heroic formula, nor even a prototypical *action*. We can expect also that prototypical, formulaic *actions* will at times

appear in non-formulaic phrases, and that non-formulaic *actions* will appear in variations of familiar formulae.²

3. In the category of *action* I include also verbs which do not properly denote external, physical acts, but instead refer to internal, mental ‘acts’, such as thinking or planning, or even a state of being or becoming: ‘Yarfor he thocht to wyrk with slycht’ (V.270), ‘Yar thocht he with his sonnys twa | For to surprise ye king & sla’ (V.561-62); ‘Quhen ye king saw ye endentur | He was angry out of mesur,’ (I.569-70), ‘Yen wes he wondre will of wayn’ (VII.227), ‘Owt off his wyt he went weill ner,’ (II.199). The *thocht* phrases include more prototypical action-verbs, albeit in the infinitive mood. In such examples I consider the conjugated verb ‘thocht’ to be the *action* because the infinitives represent only potential or intended (future) action, in short, a plan. As we shall see below, a *plan* is a common component of certain repeated *incidents* in the *Brus*, and usually occurs in a phrase with ‘thocht’.

4. The receiving of information through senses, denoted by verbs meaning ‘to hear’ or ‘to see’ are also counted as *actions*, as are verbs of telling and their passive counterparts (i.e. verb phrases meaning ‘to be told’). These simple occurrences advance the plot by one step and, as they are manifest in a single verb phrase, are often depicted with a single formulaic phrase.

5. By *incident* I mean a group of *actions* and their complementary discursive material (that is, any discursive formulae which seem to be part of the structure of the *incident*, rather than occurring accidentally) which combine to form a complete scene. For example, Bruce slays the two Mac na Dorsair brothers and their fellow in Book III, lines 93-146. This incident includes, among other things, several occurrences of the

slaying action, as we shall see below. Any group of lines which does not contribute narrative action but rather is part of the *discours* (that is, the telling rather than the actual tale), I shall simply term a *passage*.

6. Incidents in the *Brus* are, as I shall demonstrate, generally arranged in *cycles*. A *cycle* is a series of incidents of the same type, distributed discontinuously over a large section of the text. For example, the *Brus* has a cycle of Single Combats beginning with the Mac na Dorsair brothers *incident* in Book III and ending with the Hunting *incident* in Book VII. Battles represent another repeated *incident* and are also arranged in cycles, one of which charts the changing fortunes of Bruce's campaign from its ill-favoured beginning in Book II (the Battle of Methven) to the poem's climax in Book XIII (Bannockburn), another of which ranges from Book XIV to Book XVIII and develops the character of Edward Bruce as an anti-type to his noble brother.³ Barbour uses cycles not only to narrate the incidents of his poem, but more importantly to arrange them in such a way as to encourage a specific interpretation of the incidents and of the poem as a whole. As we shall see, Barbour frequently augments the incidents with *commentary*, either from the narrator of the poem or from a character, which makes the intended reading explicit. *Commentaries*, though they participate in the formulaic construction of recurring *incidents* and often contain formulaic phrases, are frequently manifest in non-formulaic, rhetorical passages. The *commentary* element, which Wittig would probably term a *motifeme*, must be viewed as discursive, and is, I would argue, one of Barbour's most useful tools as a propagandist. As we shall see below in the discussion of *incident cycles*, Barbour's *Brus* is a very intentional, controlled poem with a clear sense of its own purpose.

7. As with the *commentary* element mentioned above, Wittig would likely characterise many of those items which I term *actions* as *motifemes*. Though I shall avoid this term, Wittig's description of the motifeme is a good place to begin examining the construction of recurring incidents. Wittig's first example is actually a group of non-narrative or discursive passages: the opening stanzas of eight Middle English verse romances. She writes:

Even a very quick reading of these passages reveals that all of the line groups have three common components: the poet prays God's blessing on the endeavor; the poet exhorts the audience to pay attention to the story; the poet provides a short synopsis of events in the tale or offers a formulaic sketch of the main character. (1978: 57)

Wittig names this pattern after the *exhortation* element because 'some poets omit or double one or another [element][...]. But while there is some variation among the poems, the exhortation is invariably included somewhere in the first stanza or group of lines' (1978: 57). She calls the exhortation the '*obligatory nucleus* of this particular pattern' and her remark that it is 'always filled' suggests that she herself does not recognise an opening without an exhortation as a member of this category (1978: 58). I, too, employ the term 'nucleus' when referring to a single *action* whose presence is required in a certain type of *incident*.

8. Wittig terms each of the three components, *prayer*, *exhortation*, and *synopsis*, a 'slot' (1978: 58) because they are 'elements in a functioning, synchronic system' and

are ‘unit[s] of structure rather than content’ (1978: 59). In other words, rather than speaking of an ‘exhortation motif’, Wittig identifies an ‘*exhortation* group’ or *motifeme* (1978: 57, 59), which consists of the *exhortation* slot (the pattern’s *obligatory nucleus*), which must be filled at least once, and two peripheral slots, *synopsis* and *prayer*, which may be filled any number of times or not filled at all.

9. *Motifemes*, which I call *incidents* when part of the plot action and *passages* when part of the *discours*, can themselves participate in larger patterns, such as the *cycles* referred to above. They may also be structurally interdependent with other *incidents* and *passages*, as Wittig points out in the case of the *procession* and *battle* scenes: the *procession* consists of three peripheral slots (*celebration*, *display of the trophy*, *naming of the participant*) with the *procession* itself as the obligatory nucleus); but the *procession* motifeme is itself part of a larger pattern of structured motifemes, all of which are peripheral to the *battle scene* motifeme. Wittig depicts the relationship as follows:

+ battle scene (composed of a number of motifemes)

± *procession*

± *presentation of the trophy to the lord*

± *disarming of the hero*

± *victory banquet*

(1978: 65)

The symbol <+> indicates that this element (the battle scene itself) is the obligatory nucleus of the pattern; the presence of any and all other elements is conditioned on the occurrence of this one element. The symbol <±> indicates that these elements are periphery and optional. They *may* occur after a battle scene, and at least one of them invariably will occur, but not all of them *need* occur after every battle scene.

3.3 Recurring Incidents in the *Brus*

1. A thorough examination of every type of recurring *incident* in Barbour's *Brus* is outwith the scope of this thesis. Instead I will discuss in detail two types of incident: the Single Combat and the Battle. These incidents are not only recurring but also arranged in *cycles*, which Barbour develops in order to provoke a specific interpretation of the poem on the part of his audience. In Chapter Four I will discuss discursive passages which augment the traditional, formulaic plot structure, and which make use of Latin-derived rhetorical skills and precepts.

3.3.1 The Single Combat

1. The cyclical arrangement of recurring incidents is one of the most significant features of Barbour's technique in composing the *Brus*. As the narrative progresses, a number of similar incidents occur again and again, with each repetition examining a different aspect of the incident type. This repetition with variation is a traditional technique of narrative construction, though in Barbour's hands it becomes a conscious, controlled manipulation of plot toward a specific, political and ideological purpose. The 'ideological project' of Barbour's *Brus* (to use James Goldstein's term (1993: 133)) has

been noted in most recent studies of the poem, though no scholar, to my knowledge, has demonstrated how thorough-going Barbour's technique actually is. Nearly every level of the text is selected and arranged the better to advance the author's intended reading. Firstly, however, we must examine the construction of a single incident. This, as we shall see, is necessary in order to identify less prototypical examples of the incident type.

2. Though Battles are the most common and expected type of recurring incident in a poem about war, the Single Combat is more prominent in the early stages of Barbour's *Brus*, the cycle reaching its end before the poem's climax at Bannockburn. Although I shall devote much space to the smaller components (the *actions* and concomitant discursive formulae and *passages*) of the Single Combat, one generally recognises a recurring incident first by means of macroscopic repetitions; that is, by the same or similar plot events occurring in more than one scene. I initially perceived the Single Combat incidents as a series of incidents in which Bruce single-handedly fights three attackers. Duncan's rubrics provide a useful catalogue of these incidents: 'The king kills the two Mac na Dorsair brothers and their fellow'⁴ (III.93-146); 'The traitor and his sons seek to kill the king but are killed'⁵ (V.523.658); 'Three men with a wether try to kill the king and kill his foster-brother'⁶ (VII.79-232); and 'The king goes hunting and is attacked by three men beside a wood'⁷ (VII.381-494). One immediately notices a variation in the penultimate example, where Bruce fights alongside his foster-brother, instead of alone. However, if we examine the Single Combat in Book V, that of the traitor and his two sons, we see that Bruce is here accompanied by a 'chamber page' (V.582), who only witnesses the combat without doing any fighting. Similarly, in the

first Single Combat in Book VII, Bruce's foster-brother does not fight; instead, he falls asleep when he is meant to keep watch against the three suspicious men. Though Bruce tries to waken him with a kick, he is too sleepy to defend himself from the three attackers, and is killed (VII.213-17). Thus we can amend the definition of a Single Combat to include incidents where Bruce is accompanied by another person, so long as his companion does not actually join the battle.

3. Further variation is discovered in the final Single Combat, the Hunting Incident. In this scene, Bruce is accompanied by a hunting dog, who proves not only loyal, but useful in the fight. Bruce kills the first assassin himself, with a stroke of his sword.

And quhen ye kingis hund has sene

Yai men assail3e his maister swa

He lap till ane & gan him ta

Rycht be ye nek full sturdyly

Till top our tale he gert him ly

(VII.458-62)

The dog assists in dispatching the third attacker in a similar way, so that Bruce says to his astonished men at the end of the incident

‘I slew bot ane forouten ma
God & my hund has slayn ye twa.’
(VII.491-92)

Thus Bruce can be assisted by one other character in a Single Combat, so long as he does most of the fighting himself.

4. Even this definition, however, is superficial. In a formulaic study of a narrative poem, it is necessary to seek essential attributes at deeper, more ‘structural’ levels of the text, i.e. single phrases or *actions*, and discursive formulae. In accordance with the schema I outlined above, I am looking for a single *action* to function as the *obligatory nucleus* of the incident; that action must certainly be the slaying of the opponent. In the four examples of Robert the Bruce v. three opponents, twelve opponents are slain, in ten ‘nuclear’ phrases:

Book III (the Mac na Dorsairs)

- 114 Bot he [Bruce] raucht till him sic a dynt
115 Yat arme and schuldyr flaw him fra.
- 137 Syne with ye suerd sic dynt hym gave
138 Yat he ye heid till ye harnys clave.
139 He rouschit doun off blud all rede
140 As he yat stound feld off dede.

141 And yen ye king in full gret hy
142 Strak at ye toyir wigorusly
143 Yat he efter his sterap drew
144 Yat at ye fyrst strak he him slew.

Book V (the Traitor and his sons)

625 He [Bruce] taisyt ye wyre & leit it fley,
626 & hyt ye fader in ye ey
627 Till it rycht in ye harnys ran
628 & he bakwart fell doun rycht yan.

633 Bot he yat had his sword on hycht
634 Roucht him sic rout in randoun rycht
635 Yat he ye hede till ye harnys claiff
636 And dede doune till ye erd him draiff.

641 Bot ye king yat him dred sum thing
642 Waytyt ye sper in ye cummyng
643 & with a wysk ye hed off strak,
644 And or ye toyer had toyme to tak
645 His suerd ye king sic swak him gaiff

646 Yat he ye hede till ye harnys claiff.

647 He ruschyt doun off blud all reid.

Book VII (Three men with a wether)

222 Bot nocht-for-yi on sic maner

223 He [Bruce] helpyt him in yat bargane

224 Yat yai thre tratowris he has slan

225 Throw Goddis grace & his manheid.

Book VII (the Hunting incident)

455 Ye king yaim met full hardyly

456 And smate ye fyrst sa wygorusly

457 Yat he fell dede doun on ye gren.

465 Or he yat fallyn wes mycht rys

466 He him assayllyt on sic wys

467 Yat he ye bak strak ewyn in twa.

476 And ye king yat was ner yneucht

477 In hys ryssing sik rowt him gaff

478 Yat stane-dede to ye erd he draff.

5. As can be seen from the underlined lines, the killing *action* in these incidents is usually spread over two lines or more of verse, most frequently in a specialised variation of the *sa/yat* construction. Notable variations are the third slaying of the Mac na Dorsair incident, which takes the simple form *he him slew*, (though there does seem to be place for an omitted ‘sa’ in line 142), the first slaying of the Traitor incident, which is with an arrow rather than a sword, and the Three Men with a Wether, where all three slayings are compressed into one component using a periphrastic variation of the *he him slew* formula (and again, an apparently ellided ‘sa’ in line 223 or 224). Though this last seems to follow the *sa/yat* construction, it does not include what Wittig might call the *carnage* element, which is an overt depiction of the gory details of death and battle.⁸ The *carnage* of a Single Combat incident most frequently seems to be manifest in brain damage – as evidenced by the repetition of *he ye heid till ye harnys clave* – and is often expanded by adding descriptions of the vanquished foe falling (or being driven) to the ground, usually red with blood. The anomalous Three Men with a Wether incident exhibits another *sa/yat* construction, albeit of Bruce’s foster-brother:

[...] or he [the foster-brother] got wp ane off yai

Yat com for to sla ye king

Gaiff hym a strak in his rysing

Swa yat he mycht help him no mar.

(VII.214-17)

This *action* differs from the other, more prototypical ones in that it depicts the death of a ‘good guy’ (vivid depictions of death are generally reserved for the opponents of the Bruce), ‘swa’ and ‘yat’ appear in the same line (which though not so uncommon for this grammatical construction in general use, is certainly anomalous for the *killing* in a Single Combat), and it does not contain the *carnage* element. I shall address the atypical nature of this Single Combat further when I discuss cyclicity below.

6. The killing action, then, is present in some form in each of the Single Combats examined so far, and is therefore a good candidate for the *obligatory nucleus* of the incident type. Or, to take a different view of the components of the incident, the killing is one of the most heavily weighted attributes, meaning that it is present in all the most prototypical examples of a Single Combat, and is therefore *perceived* (perhaps by poet and audience alike) as one of the most necessary parts of such a scene. Other components of the incident, however, may be as heavily, or nearly as heavily weighted, while others may be perceived as optional or (as Wittig would have it) peripheral.

7. If the number of participants in a Single Combat can vary, perhaps the same is true of opponents. So far we have identified four incidents in which Bruce fights three attackers. In Book VI, Bruce and his foster-brother kill five men (453-674), and earlier Bruce single-handedly defends a ford against more than two hundred Galwegians (VI.1-374). If these incidents are included, the number of Single Combats rises to six. Book II opens with the slaying of John Comyn, though as we shall see later, this incident is structurally more like a Battle. The Defence of the Ford certainly contains a *sa/yat*-patterned killing with resulting *carnage*, though ‘till’ is used instead of ‘yat’:

He smate ye fyrst swa wygorusly
With his sper yat rycht scharp schar
Till he doun till ye erd him bar.
(VI.138-40)

Similar *actions* occur when Bruce and his foster brother fight five men:

Ye king met yaim yat till him socht
And to ye fyrst sic rowt he roucht
Yat er and chek doune in ye hals
He schar & off ye schuldir als.
He ruschynt down all disyly.
(VI.627-31)

He met ye fyrst sa egrely
Yat with ye swerd yat scharply schar
Ye arme fra ye body he bar.
(VI.644-46)

These *incidents*, then, may also be counted as Single Combats.

8. Whereas Battles, as we shall see later, tend to involve previously introduced opponents who participate in more than one scene, Single Combats tend to involve newly introduced opponents who, as they are slain during the incident, do not reappear.

Using the Mac na Dorsair Incident as a model, we can construct a rudimentary plan for a Single Combat and modify it by comparison with other, similar incidents.

10. The two brothers themselves are introduced in line 93, with a descriptive formula – the familiar relative (*yat*) clause – extending the *introduction* to line 95; the third of the ‘cowyne’ is introduced in line 102, with a concomitant relative clause in the following line. The *plan* component, which announces the newly introduced opponents’ intention – in the case of a Single Combat, to kill Robert the Bruce – follows the initial *introduction*; they are in fact connected grammatically by a co-ordinating conjunction:

And yai had sworn iff yai mycht se
Ye Bruys quhar yai mycht him our-ta
Yat yai suld dey or yen hym sla.
(III.96-98)

The next component is *opportunity*, which is quite literally the opportunity to fulfill the *plan*. This component often begins with a *quhen*-clause:

Quhen yai ye king off gud renoune
Saw sua behind his mengne rid
And saw him torne sa mony tid,
Yai abaid till yat he was
Entryt in ane narow place
Betuix a louch-sid and a bra

Yat wes sa strait ik wndera

Yat he mycht nocht weill turn his sted.

(III.104-111)

Then follows the *attack*, a brief component in which the opponents, seizing the *opportunity* to fulfil their *plan*, literally attack the Bruce: ‘Yen with a will till him yai 3ede | And ane him by ye bridill hynt’ (III.112). At this point we have the three killings, discussed above. The incident then ends with a brief *summary* of the foregoing action: ‘On yis wis him delyuerit he | Off all yai felloun fayis thre’ (III.145-46).

11. We see that these components and the sequence in which they are arranged follow a more or less logical, ‘narrative’ order, a basically cause-and-effect relationship. This is in line with my view of the composition of the *Brus*, which departs from generative theories of deep-structures. I suggest Barbour could have perceived the plot of the *Brus* as a series of events which he selected, arranged, and interpreted according to accepted conventions of story-telling, rather than as an abstract pattern of grammatical ‘slots’ arranged largely at the sub-conscious level. I suggest Barbour knew that if Bruce was to fight three men single-handedly, the three men would have to be introduced (if they had not been already), their intention to kill Bruce would have to be made clear, the scene of the attack would have to be set, the attack would have to commence, and finally, Bruce would then kill all three opponents. The incident, then, could have originated at the ‘macroscopic’ level of plot, rather than from smallest unit upward; Barbour could have planned the *events* – the individual plot actions – of such a

scene before he began writing. Formulaic language is not an indication of the poet's mental processes, but rather a result of narrating action in verse.

12. We have, then, six components which make up our prospective Single Combat schema:

introduction – in which the opponents are introduced and described

plan – in which the opponents' intention to kill Bruce is announced

opportunity – in which the opportunity to fulfil the *plan* presents itself and the scene of the *attack* is set

attack – a brief *action* in which the opponents move to attack Bruce; usually manifest as a *go*-formula

killing – the nuclear *action* of the Single Combat incident, in which Bruce kills his opponents; usually filled multiple times

summary – a brief component in which the preceding *action* is summarised

Of these six components, the *introduction*, *opportunity*, and *summary* are discursive. The *introduction* is built of discursive formulae (the relative *yat*-clause, an adjectival formula). The *summary* redundantly recaps plot action the audience has just witnessed.

The *opportunity* sets the scene of the *attack*. It is to be expected that a complete incident must contain both discursive and historic material.

13. All Single Combats exhibit these six components in one form or another. However, these components are subject to variation. The Treacherous Kinsmen Incident in Book V, for example, is one of the longest of the Single Combats, and much of the length is accomplished simply by elaborating the basic components. The *Introduction*, for instance, begins similarly to that of the Mac na Dorsair Incident, though Barbour lengthens it by providing additional information for a further seventeen lines. We learn that Umfraville is lying low, seeking a way to kill the Bruce with ‘slycht’ (V.489),

Till ye gat speryng yat a man
Off Carrik, yat wes sley & wycht
& a man als off mekill mycht
As off ye men off yat cuntre,
Wes to ye king Robert mast preue
As he yat wes his sibman ner,
& quhen he wald for-owtyn danger
Mycht to ye kingis presence ga,
Ye-quheyer he & his sonnys twa
War wonnand still in ye cuntre
For yai wald nocht persaywit be
Yat yai war speciall to ye king.
Yai maid him mony tyme warnyng

Quhen yat yai his tynsaill mycht se,
For-yi in yaim affyt he.
His name can I nocht tell perfay,
Bok ik haiff herd syndry men say
Forsuth yat his ane e ves out,
Bot he sa sturdy wes and stout
Yat he wes ye maist dowsit man
Yat in Carrik lywynt yan.
(V.490-510)

Only the first four lines resemble the *Introduction* of the Mac na Dorsair brothers

Twa breyir war in yat land
Yat war ye hardiest off hand
Yat war in-till all yat cuntre
(III.93-95)

This pattern identifies an opponent (or opponents), adding adjectival relative (*yat*) clause formula, and closing with comparison to the other members of their group (in both cases, the men of their ‘cuntre’). We see a similar *introduction* in Bruce and his Foster-Brother versus Five Men:

[...] v off his cumpany

(Identification)

Yat war rycht wycht men & hardy

(Description w/ *yat*-clause)

And als off fute spediast war

Off all yat in yair rowt war

(Comparison to other group members)

(VI.591-94)

Another variation is to identify the opponents simply as armed men:

Yai saw on syd iij men cummand

[...] he saw fra ye woud cummand

Lik to lycht men & wauerand,

Thre men with bowys in yar hand

Swerdis yai had & axys als

Yat towart him come spedely

& ane off yaim apon his hals

(VII.415-17)

A mekill boundyn weyer bar.

(VII.111-15)

These two patterns can be thought of as alternate *nuclei* of the *introduction* component.

14. The *plan* is usually indicated by a phrase containing the word ‘thocht’; though in the Mac na Dorsair Incident, ‘sworn’ is used (III.96-98). In the Treacherous Kinsmen Incident, Umfraville’s plan to use ‘slycht’ to attack Bruce contains a ‘thocht’ formula:

Him thoct nocht speidfull for till far

Till assaile him in-to ye hycht,

Yarfor he thoct to wyrk with slycht

(V.486-88)

The first mention of the traitors' plan proper (V.515-22) does not, however use 'thocht'. It is only following the *opportunity* component, when the traitors discover that Bruce seeks privacy in the woods each morning 'his prewe nedys for to ma' (V.568), that their plan is modified with a 'thocht' formula: 'Yar thoct he with his sonnys twa | For to supprise ye king & sla' (V.561-62). In the Bruce and his Foster-Brother versus Five Men, the *plan* is replaced by an order from John of Lorn:

And quhen Ihon off Lorn saw
Ye hund sa hard eftre him draw
And folow strak efter yai twa
He knew ye king wes ane of ya,
And bad v off his cumpany
[...]
Ryn eftre him & him ourta
And lat him na wys pas yaim fra
(VI.587-91; 595-96)

All other *plans* contain some form of the 'thocht' phrase.

15. The *opportunity* component seems unrestricted regarding distinctive phrasing; it is basically a recurring *idea*, a semantic formula which can be expressed in whatever word the poet has available. In a 'pure' oral setting, such a component would

presumably be impossible, but Barbour's literacy apparently enables him to supply each opportunity to fulfil a *plan* in unique words. I find no evidence, however, that Barbour sought uniqueness or individuality in this component; rather, a suitable formulaic phrase may not have occurred to him. That this component is not marked by a *nuclear* recurring formulaic phrase may lead some readers to regard it as non-formulaic, though as we shall see with the *summary* below, recurring semantic components not expressed by immediately recognisable formulaic phrases are an important part of this type of incident.

16. The Mac na Dorsair Incident sets up an *attack* pattern based upon a simple *travel* formula: 'Yen with a will till him yai 3ede' (III.112). We see this pattern again in the Three Men with a Wether Incident:

In full gret hy yai rais wp yan
And drew yar suerdis hastily
& went towart ye king in hy
(VII.198-200)

and twice in the Hunting Incident:

In hy towart ye king yai 3eid
And bent yar bowys quhen yai war ner.
(VII.438-39)

With yat yar bowys away yai kest

And come on fast but langer frest.

(VII.453-54)

A repetition of the *attack* component in the Three Men with a Wether Incident even contains the key-word ‘3eid’ – ‘Till him yai 3eid a full gret pas’ (VII.203) – making this particular phrase a good candidate for the prototype of the *attack*. Another variation is to embed the *attack* within a phrase with ‘saw’, as in the Treacherous Kinsmen Incident:

& quhen he cummyn wes in ye schaw

He saw yai thre cum all on raw

Aganys him full sturdely

(V.591-93)

and the Defence of the Ford:

& swa stude he herknand

Till yat he saw cum at his hand

Ye hale rout in-till full gret hy

(VI.109-11)

We recall also that such a phrase occurs in the *introduction* of the Hunting Incident (VII.415-17). Both the *travel*-formula and *saw*-phrase versions of the *attack* occur in Bruce and his Foster-Brother versus Five Men:

& fra yai had herd ye bydding
Yai held yar way efter ye king
& folowyt him sa spedely
Yat yai him weill sone gan ourhy.
Ye king yat saw yaim cummand ner
Wes anoyit on gret maner
[...]
And ye fyve-sum in full gret hy
Come with gret schor & manassing.
Yen thre off yaim went to ye king,
& till his man ye toyer twa
With suerd in hand gan stoutly ga.
(VI.597-602; 622-26)

17. The brevity of the *summary* of the Mac na Dorsair Incident belies the importance of this final component. The two lines III.145-46 do not seem to necessitate any reaction to the incident (which would direct the audience's interpretation of it); this is precisely the function of all subsequent *summaries*, however. Even the brief *summary* of the Mac na Dorsair Incident leads to the praise of Mac Nachtan, a baron in Lorn's

army (III.153-68). Excluding Bruce and His Foster-Brother versus Five Men and Mac na Dorsair incidents, each *summary* proper is expressed either in a *report* or in the direct speech of a witness. These reports give Bruce or another character an opportunity to react to the great deed the audience has just witnessed. These *reactions* are themselves important linking passages, a variant of the *commentary* component. As the *summary* and *commentary* components are linked to form a vehicle for a proposed interpretation of the poem, both patterns will be discussed in Chapter Four.

3.3.2 Battles

1. We have seen that the common components of a Single Combat in the *Brus* follow the demands of *narrative*. We can expect, then, that some components used in Single Combats will also be used in other *incidents*, particularly those components which fulfil narrative necessities, such as the *introduction* of characters or the *plan* (which narrates intended action). An action sequence cannot begin without participants, and these participants must be introduced (or *named* if they are already established characters). Similarly, the participants' intended actions must usually be narrated before the main action of the *incident* begins. As we shall see, Battles introduce to us a new component I call *motive*, which naturally declares the motivation for a characters intended actions (his *plan*), and which can occur in Single Combats as well (for example, the Hunting Incident, Book VII, lines 428-39). Further, many incidents are likely to end with some kind of *commentary*, a component which will be explored in chapter four. This last component is, as we shall see, one of the most interesting of all Barbour's narrative tools, for it links *incidents* in a perceptible pattern and guides the

reader's (or audience's) interpretation of the *incident* and the poem as a whole. The *commentary* component in particular (contrasted with the more neutral *summary* component) provides evidence that Barbour arranged recurring *incidents* in cycles of interrelated meaning. Perhaps most significantly, the *commentary* component occupies a place in the structure of a formulaic *incident* which can be filled both by formulaic, oral-derived phrases *and* non-formulaic passages based upon scholastic, Latin-derived rhetoric. As we shall explore below and in the next chapter, this is in effect a non-formulaic, scholastic (what Ong might have called 'literate') component participating in a formulaic (what Ong would have called 'oral') pattern.

2. As with the Single Combat, I have chosen a relatively brief example of a Battle with which to begin our examination. A few caveats are necessary, however. Oral and oral-derived narrative poetry, in the European tradition at least, is weighted towards the Epic genre, and to a lesser extent the Romance; and the Epic and the Romance are poems about war and/or combat. The as it were canonical pillars of European oral narrative poetry are the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*, and the *Chanson de Roland*. The Battle, therefore (with its younger cousin, the Tournament), is one of the most prototypical *incidents* in formulaic narrative poetry, and perceived, probably by author and audience alike, as one of the most necessary. As such, it is the *incident* most frequently repeated, and most likely to be embellished, extended, or otherwise decorated (or amplified); at the same time, its core of obligatory components (its 'nucleus') is one of the most simple. Just as Calvert Watkins reduced the epic formula – along with much of early religious and mythological narrative – to the simple pattern 'he/you SLEW the SERPENT' (1995: 10), so the all-but-omnipresent Battle can probably be simplified to

a pair of basic components such as, in semantic and narratological terms, 1) two armies *meet* on a field of battle and 2) one of them *wins* (the *result* of the conflict).

3. Susan Wittig refers to what I call the Battle *incident* as the ‘*combat* motifeme’, which she considers as part of a larger action sequence:

the *combat* motifeme has several important components; the naming of the knights (necessary only if the general fight is a large one); their actual encounter; and the result of the encounter, all of which may require no more than four to six lines. (1978: 91)

This does not differ significantly from my pair of minimal, ‘nuclear’ Battle components, for the presence of *naming* is conditioned on the narrative environment specific to an individual Battle (i.e. the knights only need be named or introduced if they have not been already). The other two components, the encounter and its result, Wittig in fact collapses into a single, nuclear component, noting a characteristic syntactic pattern that links the charge with its outcome:

The formulaic pattern here is based on a subordinate clause used adverbially to show result:

bare so fast that... [Bevis 3491-92]

gaf...soche a clowte that... [Triamour 781-82]

sette his spere that... [Ipomedon 815-16]

he gan thronge...that... [Bevis 3493, 3497; Ipomedon 1116-18]

smote...that... [Guy (Cains) 583, 585]

This pattern is a common one in this motifeme (in fact, so far as I have been able to discover, this particular formula is limited to this motifeme).

(Wittig 1978: 92)

The reader may recognise the above as examples of the *sa/yat* result-clause formula, of which Barbour makes frequent use, and which is the basis for one of his most important and entertaining *killing* formulae (the *heid till harnys* group). Wittig views the *sa/yat* result-clause formula, when used in a Battle, as an exchange of blows:

In the *combat* motifeme, then, we have distinguished three components: the naming of the knights (an optional, peripheral element); the *challenge* (optional and peripheral); and the blows traded by the opponents (nuclear and obligatory). As we have seen, the nuclear component itself is made up of smaller formulaic elements: the breaking of the shield in two parts, the shattering of the spears, the cleaving of the armor, the cutting off of the right arm. The *challenge*, an optional component, may also be viewed as a separate motifeme when it is expanded in such a way as to become more functional. (1978: 97)

Of the components described by Wittig above, *naming* has already been discussed and the *challenge* is very infrequent in the *Brus*.

4. The short *incident* I have chosen in order to examine the structure of a Battle in Barbour's *Brus* is the skirmish against the Lord of Lorn in Book III, lines 1-60. The opponent is named in line 1; the syntax and rhyme scheme help connect the *naming* component to those of *motive* and *plan* in one legato movement.

<u>Ye lord off Lorne</u> wonnyt yar-by	(<i>naming/introduction</i>)
<u>Yat wes capitale ennemy</u>	(relative descriptive formula)
<u>To ye king for his emys sak</u>	(<i>motive</i>)
<u>Ihon Comyn, and thocht for to tak</u>	(<i>plan: thocht</i> formula)
<u>Wengeance apon cruel maner.</u>	(adverbial of manner filler)

(III.1-5)

Line 6 ('Quhen he ye king wyst wes sa ner') uses a *quhen*-clause formula to function as the *opportunity* component, and is followed by what will become a familiar *action* in Battles, the *assembling* of knights: 'He assemblyt his men in hy' (III.7). The rhyming line 'And had in-till his cumpany' (III.8) is, as we shall see, often used to signal a *list* of knights. This is another common Battle component, for a Battle as I define it always involves opposing armies rather than opposing individuals. *Naming* or *introduction* in Battles refers to the leader of the opposing army (who will normally survive the Battle); the *list* refers to notable knights in either army, any of whom may end up wounded or slain. In the Lorn skirmish, Barbour simply mentions 'barownys off Argyle alsua' (III.9) in place of a full *list* of individuals.

5. Barbour next mentions the size of Lorn's army, a detail commonly used to embellish Battles in the *Brus*, usually establishing an exaggerated discrepancy between the myriad English and the woefully-outnumbered Scots. Often Barbour gives us a precise number, as in: 'Bot yar fayis war may yen yai | By xvc as ik herd say' (II.229-30); here it suffices him to write simply that the Scots were 'all too few':

Yai war a thowsand weill or ma

And come for to suppris ye king

Yat weill wes war of yar cummyng.

Bot all to few he with him had

(III.10-13)

Nevertheless, there is sufficient semantic correspondence for us to hypothesise an *outnumbering* component (whose prototype includes a ratio of English knights to Scottish ones), attached to a *size of the army* component.

6. In line 12 Barbour tells us that Bruce was 'weill war' of the approaching army. This motif (as it were) of Bruce's *awareness* of imminent danger is another recurring detail used to embellish not only Battles but also Single Combats, though at this point I can only speculate as to its function. It is perhaps part of the poem's insistence upon realistic detail observed by Sergi Mainer (Mainer 2004: 110): it is more likely the Bruce would survive sudden attacks if he had been aware of the danger beforehand, and thus on his guard.

7. Though it is true that the minimum structural requirement for a Battle is an encounter between armies coupled with its result, we often find Battles in *Brus* are set up and expanded in similar ways. A common beginning is an assembling of knights using the *assembling* pattern [Subj. + *assemblit* + ARMY], where the ‘ARMY’ component can be filled by phrases such as ‘his ost’ or ‘his meng3e’, as in this passage from the Battle of Methven in Book II:

Ye King Robert wyst he wes yar	(<i>awareness</i> component)
And quhat-kyn chyftanys with him war	(<i>awareness</i> , continued)
<u>And assemblyt all his meng3e.</u>	(<i>assembling</i>)
(II.225-27)	

This component often leads to the *size of the army* component – which can include the *outnumbering* component – as well as a *list of knights*:

Ye-quheyer he had yar at yat ned
 Full feill yat war douchty off deid
 And barownys yat war bauld as bar
 Twa erlis alsua with him war,
 Off Leuynax and Atholl war yai.
 Eduuard ye Bruce wes yar alsua,
 Thomas Randell and Hew de le Hay

And Schyr Daud ye Berclay

(II.231-38)

For quhen ye tyme wes cummyn ner

He assemblit all his power, (assembling)

And but his awne chewalry

Yat wes sa gret it wes ferly

He had of mony ser countre (list of knights begins)

With him gud men of gret bounte.

Of Fraunce worthi chewalry

He had in-till his cumpany

Ye erle off Henaud als wes yar

And with him men yat worthi war,

Off Gascoyne and off Almanay

And off ye duche off Bretayngny

[...]

He had off fechtaris with hym yar

And hunder thowsand men & ma

(XI.83-94; 108-09)

The latter *list*, from the Bannockburn Episode, recalls the variant in the Skirmish with Lorn, which does not contain proper names, but rather names the knights' home country.

8. As is common in Battles, the nucleus of the Skirmish with Lorn in Book III is filled more than once. Note the *sa/yat* syntactic pattern Wittig observed in the Middle English romances:

Ye-quheyir he [Bruce] bauldly yaim abaid,	
And <u>weill ost at yar fryst metyng</u>	(<i>meeting</i> of armies)
<u>War layd at erd</u> but recoveryng.	(<i>result</i> of meeting) (<i>nucleus</i>)
Ye kingis folk full weill yaim bar	
<u>And slew and fellyt and woundyt sar,</u>	(<i>slaying, felling, wounding</i> phrases)
Bot <u>ye folk off ye toyer party</u>	(<i>nucleus</i>)
<u>Fawcht with axys sa fellyly,</u>	(‘Fawcht <i>sa</i> ‘fellyly’ /
For yai on fute war euer-ilkane,	
<u>Yat yai feile off yar hors has slayne,</u>	<i>yat</i> ‘yai...yar hors has slayne’)
<u>And till sum gaiff yai woundis wid.</u>	(<i>nucleus</i>)
(III.14-23)	

Barbour follows with a brief *list* of the wounded: ‘Iames off Dowglas wes hurt yat tyd | And als Schyr Gilbert de le Hay’ (III.24-25). This component frequently appears as a *list* of the Slain or Taken (‘tain’), and can end a Battle (cf. the Slaying of John Comyn, Book II, lines 25-48); in the present example, however, Barbour extends the Battle with the *war-cry* (‘ensen3e’) *action* and a further repetition of the nuclear component:

Ye king his men saw in affray

And his ensen3e can he cry (war-cry)
 And amang yaim rycht hardyly (adverbial filler w/ 'rycht')
He rad yat he yaim ruschyt all (sa/yat Battle charge [sa omitted],
And fele off yaim yar gert he fall. extended with 'and') (*nucleus*)
 (III.26-30)

Finally, a *quhen*-clause leads to a direct address to Bruce's knights, followed by a retreat:

Bot quhen he saw yai war sa feill (*quhen* (see) formula w/ object)
And saw yaim swa gret dyntis deill (additional *see* formula w/ object)
 He dred to tyne his folk, foryi
His men till him he gert rely (*rally*, an *action* common to Battles)
And said, 'Lordingis foly it war (*said* formula)
 [...]
Yen yai withdrew yaim halely (*retreat*, an *action* common to Battles)
 (III.31-35,45)

The Battle of Methven presents another instance of the *war-cry* follwed by a *rally*, a direct address and a *retreat*:

And ye king his enssen3e gan cry,
 Releyt his men yat war him by

[...]

Said yen, 'Lordings sen it is swa

[...]

To yis word yai assentyt all

And fra yaim walopyt owyr-mar.

(II.429-30; 436; 442-43)

But not all *war-cries* lead ultimately to *retreats*. An earlier occurrence in Methven presents a counter-example:

And quhen ye king his folk has sene

Begyn to faile, for propyr tene

Hys assen³he gan he cry

And in ye stour sa hardyly

He ruschyt yat all ye semble schuk.

(II.379-83)

This *war-cry* leads to Bruce's final attempt to lead his knights to victory, expressed in a repetition of the nuclear *sa/yat* component. This pattern occurs twice in Bannockburn, the first of which varies the *war-cry* component to apply generally to the Scottish knights (rather than any particular knight):

Yat mycht men her enseyn³eis cry

And Scottis-men cry hardely
'On yaim on yaim on yaim yai faile.'
With yat sa hard yai gan assaile
And slew all yat yai mycht ourta
(XIII.203-07)

Ye king Robert be yar relying
Saw yai war ner at discomfiting
And his ensen3e gan hely cry,
Yan with yaim off his cumpany
Hys fayis he pressyt sa fast yat yai
War in-till sa gret effray
Yat yai left place ay mar & mar,
(XIII.265-71)

3.3.2.1 Battle *Nuclei*

1. Whereas every Single Combat is included in what I call the Single Combat *cycle*, Battles, being the most numerous and prototypical type of *incident* in an heroic poem, seem to be arranged in more than one complete *cycle*. The first of these begins with the slaying of John Comyn and culminates with Bannockburn, and develops the fortunes of Bruce's military campaign from initial failure to its most powerful and symbolic victory. There are also *cycles* involving James Douglas' efforts to regain his ancestral lands, Bruce's post-Bannockburn exploits, and perhaps most importantly,

Edward Bruce's Irish Campaign, which develops him as an overzealous and imprudent counter-example to his brother's more well-rounded and effective leadership.

2. There is not space in this thesis to examine thoroughly all Battle *cycles*; instead, I will limit my focus to two prominent ones: 1) the pre-Bannockburn campaign, which coordinates with the Single Combat *cycle* to develop Bruce's ideal leadership qualities, as well as establishing a running 'repentance' motif which contrasts Bruce with his first nemesis, Edward I; and 2) the Edward Bruce *cycle*, which I discuss more briefly, and which develops Bruce's brother as a more subtle counter-example to his brother than the English monarchs.

3. Because the Slaying of John Comyn is so atypical of Battles, not only in the *Brus*, but in any medieval heroic poem, I will leave discussion of it until section 3.4 ('Cyclicality') below. Excluding this *incident*, the pre-Bannockburn Battle *cycle* consists of the Battle of Methven (II.195-470); the Skirmish with Lorn (III.1-92); the Attack of Sir Valence (VII.529-642); the Battle of Loudoun Hill (VIII.123-354); the Skirmishing at Slioch (IX.111-170); the Battle of Old Meldrum (IX.187-294); the Battle against John of Lorn (X.1-104); and Bannockburn (XI.69-XIII.754).

4. It can be easily seen that many of these Battles are longer than Single Combats (excepting the Treacherous Kinsman and Defence of the Ford *incidents*); Bannockburn in particular runs to nearly three complete 'Books' of the *Brus*, a total length of more than nineteen hundred lines.⁹ We must keep in mind that much of this length is devoted to peripheral material used to amplify, extend, or decorate the core *incident* in some way. The nuclear components of each Battle are apt to be quite brief, though they are usually filled many times. The principal action of Battle of Methven,

for example, contains at least ten repetitions of the *nucleus* and its variants. In the passage below I mark each repetition with ‘N’ followed by a number indicating which occurrence it is: e.g. N1 = first occurrence of the *nucleus*.

349 On ayir syd yus war yai yhar
And till assemble all redy war. (readiness)
Yai straucht yar speris on ayir syd
And swa ruydly gan samyn ryd
Yat speris al to-fruschy war
And feyle men dede and woundyt sar (N1)
355 Ye blud owt at yar byrnys brest, (carnage)
For ye best and ye worthiest
Yat wilfull war to wyn honour
Plungyt in ye stalwart stour
And rowtis ruyd about yaim dang. (N2)
360 Men mycht haiff seyn in-to yat thrang
Knychtis yat wycht and hardy war
Wndyr hors feyt defoulyt yar
Sum woundyt and sum all ded,
Ye gres woux off ye blud all rede. (carnage/ description of battlefield)
365 And yai yat held on hors in hy
Swappyt owt swerdis sturdyly
And swa fell strakys gave and tuk

- Yat all ye renk about yaim quouk. (N3)
- Ye Bruysis folk full hardely
- 370 Schawyt yar gret chewalry,
- And he him selff atour ye lave
- Sa hard and sa hewy dyntis gave
- Yat quhar he come yai maid him way. (N4)
- His folk yaim put in hard assay
- 375 To stynt yar fais mekill mycht
- Yat yen so fayr had off ye fycht
- Yat yai wan field ay mar & mar. (N5)
- Ye kingis small folk ner wencusyt ar
- And quhen ye king his folk has sene
- 380 Begyn to faile, for propyr tene
- Hys assen³he gan he cry (war-cry in *quhen*-clause)
- And in ye stour sa hardyly
- He ruschyt yat all ye semble schuk. (N6)
- He all till-hewyt yat he our-tuk (N7)
- 385 And dang on yaim quhill he mycht drey, (N8)
- [...]
- 389 And with yat word sa wilfully
- He dang on and sa hardely
- Yat quha had sene him in yat fycht (N9; post-speech
- 392 Suld hald him for a douchty knycht. and atypically leads into rhetorical

[...] praise)

401 And quhen Schyr Amer has sene
Ye small folk fle all bedene
And sa few abid to fycht
He releyt to him mony a knycht (rally in *quhen*-clause)

405 And in ye stour sa hardyly
He ruschyt with hys chewalry

407 Yat he ruschyt his fayis ilkane. (N10)
 [...]

414 And ye king him selff alsua
Wes set in-till full hard assay
Throw Schyr Philip ye Mowbray
Yat raid till him full hardyly
And hynt hys reng3e and syne gan cry,
 ‘Help help I have ye new-maid king.’

420 With yat come gyrdand in a lyng
Crystall off Seytoun quhen he swa
Saw ye king sesyt with his fa,
And to Philip sic rout he raucht
Yat yocht he wes off mekill maucht

425 He gert him galay disyly, (‘Zoom-in’ with Single Combat
And haid till erd gane fullyly nucleus)
 Ne war he hynt him by his sted,

- Yen off his hand ye brydill yhed.
- And ye king his enssen^{3e} gan cry, (war-cry)
- 430 Releyt his men yat war him by (rally)
- Yat war sa few yat yai na mycht
- Endur ye fors mar off ye fycht. (yat-clause adjective formulae)
- 433 Yai prikyt yen out off ye pres, (retreat 1)
- [...]
- 442 To yis word yai assentyt all
- 443 And fra yaim walopyt owyr-mar. (retreat 2)

5. The Battle of Methven being one of the longest of Battles in the *Brus*, it is not unexpected that even its nuclear components occupy many lines of verse. It will be noted that not all *nuclei* conform to the *sa/yat* pattern. N2 (II.356-59), for example, simply states that the knights ‘plunged into the battle and dealt rude blows around them’. A description of the carnage of the battlefield follows, but Barbour does not link these two adjacent passages in a *sa/yat* pattern. N7 (II.384) and N8 (II.385), also omit the result clauses. N5 (II.374-77), contains both ‘sa’ and ‘yat’, but its main clause simply states that Bruce’s knights ‘yaim put in hard assay | To stynt yar fais mekill mycht’ (II.374-75); the *sa/yat* formula actually applies to the ‘fais’, who are the object of the main verb.

6. Above I have listed not only the Battle *nuclei*, of which I count ten repetitions, but also a few important *actions* and discursive components which, unlike *naming/introduction*, *plan*, and *motive* (which are shared with other *incidents* such as

the Single Combat), seem to be exclusive to Battles. The first of these is *readiness*, a discursive component which literally describes two armies ready to meet each other on the battlefield, a kind of prelude to the main action. We also see the *carnage* element again, in one case manifest as a *description of the battlefield*, which begins with a variation of the *men mycht see* formula (II.360-64). Then we have the *war-cry action*, followed by the *rally* and *retreat*. Both of these are by nature exclusive to Battles; the *rally* is literally the rallying of knights around a leader, and the *retreat* literally a retreat of an army (or the surviving members thereof) from a defeat. The first occurrence of the *rally* (II.404) is the rallying of English knights around Valence; it leads to the ninth repetition of the nuclear component, in which Valence's army prepares to sweep Bruce and his knights from the field in final defeat. In the second occurrence (II.430), Bruce rallies his remaining knights so they may make their escape. Thus we can see that either the protagonist or the antagonist may rally troops, and that the *rally*, like the *war-cry*, does not necessarily preface a victorious blow for the Bruce and his men, though it does seem to link one *action* sequence to another.

7. The *retreat* is filled twice, but this is because the first occurrence (II.433) leads to another section of direct speech, in which Bruce, though angry at the defeat of his army (II.434-35), justifies their retreat, saying that 'vre rynnys agane ws' (II.437) and they should 'pas of yar [his foes'] daunger' until 'God ws send eft-sonys grace' (II.438-39); in short, they should run away that they might live to fight another day. Bruce's knights consent to this rede (II.442), and the second instance of the *retreat* follows (II.443).

8. The nuclear components of Battles are as variable as those of the Single Combats, or any other component of any *incident*. Indeed, it is the variability which gives the cyclical construction of repetition of variation its power and purpose. Nevertheless, nearly all Battles contain at least one fairly prototypical instance of the *sa/yat* pattern coupling the encounter of two armies with its result. In section 3.4 below I shall discuss the variations in recurring incidents; before pressing on, however, I will list familiar *nuclei* in the remaining Battles of the cycle to demonstrate their similarity.

9. Valence's Surprise Attack in Book VII, is one of the less prototypical Battles. Both the first and second repetitions of the *nucleus* depart from the familiar prototype. Nevertheless, we do find one instance where Bruce's knights '[...] met yar fayis wigorously | Yat all ye formast ruschyt war' (VII.604-05). It should be noted that 'sa' is omitted from the first line.

10. The Battle of Loudoun Hill in Book VIII is quite probably a stylistic rehearsal for Bannockburn: it is longer than most Battles, and embellished with poetic descriptions of the English army, etc. which do not occur outside these two *incidents*. Even if its connection to Bannockburn can be disputed, the importance of this particular Battle is at least demonstrated by the richness of its central action. Like Methven, heretofore the longest Battle in the poem, Loudoun Hill contains both *sa/yat nuclei* and simple Subject-Verb-Object variants, and generally alternates repetitions of the nuclear component with the discursive *description of the battlefield*:

And ye formest off his [Valence's] mengne
Enbrasyt with ye scheldis braid

And rycht sarraly togydder raid	
With heid stoupand and speris straucht	
Rycht to ye king yar wayis raucht,	(<i>attack</i>)
Yat met yaim with sa gret vigour	
Yat ye best and off maist valour	(N1;
War laid at erd at yar meting,	cf. Skirmish with Lorn, Book III)
Quhar men mycht her sic a breking	(<i>description of battlefield</i> including
Off speris yat to-fruschyt war	<i>breaking of spears</i>
And ye woundyt sa cry and rar	<i>cry of the wounded</i>
Yat it anoyus wes to her,	with <i>filler</i> for Result-clause)
For yai yat fyrst assemblyt wer	
Fwyngyt and faucht full sturdely.	(N2, w/o <i>sa/yat</i> result-clause)
Ye noyis begouth yen and ye cry.	(<i>description of battlefield</i>)
[...]	
Ye kingis men sa worthi war	
Yat with speris yat scharply schar	
Yai stekit men & stedis baith	
Till rede blud ran off woundis raith.	(N3)
Ye hors yat woundyt war gan fling	
And ruschyt yar folk in yar flynging	
Swa yat yai yat ye formast	
War skalyt in soppys her & yar.	(N4)
(VIII.294-308; 319-27)	

It is notable that in N4, the subject is the wounded horses, who fling their riders *so that* they are scattered ‘here and there’.

11. The Skirmishing at Slioch and the Battle of Old Meldrum vary so significantly from the prototype of a Battle that discussion of them is best left entirely until the next section. The Battle against John of Lorn in Book X, however, is more prototypical, albeit the repetitions of the *nucleus* consistently omit ‘sa’ or follow the simple SVO pattern without a result-clause:

And als apon ye toyer party
Come Iames of Dowglas & his rout
And schot apon ye yaim with a schout
And woundyt yaim with arowis fast
& with yar suerdis at ye last
Yai ruschyt amang yaim hardely
(X.66-71)

And yai a felloun chas gan ma
And slew all yat yai mycht ourta
(X.79-80)

Yai ruschyt apon yaim hardely

And discumfyt yaim wtrelly

(X.91-92)

12. The principal action of Bannockburn occurs over three ‘Books’ of the *Brus*: XI, XII, and XIII. Much of this space is taken up by the embellishment of peripheral components, but there is of course ample room for many repetitions of the *nuclei*, both the *sa/yat* result-clause and simple variations, as well as individual, Single-Combat-style encounters, when the action ‘zooms in’ to focus on two opponents amongst the larger armies. Several encounters are narrated, the first of which involves Thomas Randolph (the Earl of Moray) attacking an English advance party:

And yai met him sa sturdely

Yat he and hors wes borne doune

And slayne rycht yar for-owt ransoune

(XI.582-84)

And yai with speris woundis wyd

Gaff till ye hors yat come yaim ner,

And yai yat ridand on yaim wer

Yat doune war borne losyt ye lyvis

(XI.594-97)

Near the end of Book XII we find the familiar alternation of repetitions of the nuclear component with descriptions of the battlefield. In particular, the repetition of *yai met yaim* is notable:

And yai met yaim rycht hardely
Swa yat at yar assemble yar
Sic a fruschyng of speris war
Yat fer away men mycht it her.
At yat meting forowtyn wer
War stedis stekyt mony ane
And mony gud man borne doune & slayne
(XII.504-10)

And yai met yaim full sturdely
With speris yat wer scharp to scher
And axys yat weile groundyn wer
Quhar-with was roucht mony a rout.
Ye fechting wes yar sa fell and stout
Yat mony a worthi man & wicht
Throw fors wes fellyt in yat fycht
Yat had na mycht to rys agane.
(XII.520-527)

Bot yai met yaim sa sturdely
Yat mony of yaim till erd yai bar,
For mony a sted was stekyt yar
And mony gud man fellyt wnder fet
Yat had na hap to rys wp 3ete.
Yar mycht men se a hard bataill
And sum defend and assaile
And mony a reale romble rid
Be roucht yar apon ayer sid
Quhill throw ye byrnys bryst ye blud
Yat till erd doune stremand 3hude.
(XII.552-62)

At the beginning of Book XIII, Douglas' division attacks, and in place of the *yai met yaim* formula we find other variants of the nuclear component such as:

For with wappynys stalwart of stele
Yai dang apon with all yar mycht.
[...]
Ye bataill yar sa feloune was
And swa rycht gret spilling of blud
Yat on ye erd ye fousis stud.
(XIII.14-15; 18-20)

Yai faucht ilk ane sa egerly
Yat yai maid noyer noyis na cry
Bot dang on oyer at yar mycht
With wapnys yat war burnyst brycht.
Ye arowys als sua thyk yar flaw
Yat yai mycht say wele yat yaim saw
Yat yai a hidwys schour gan ma,
(XIII.37-43)

These are, of course, only a sampling of the occurrences of the nuclear Battle components in the Bannockburn episode; it is sufficient, however, to demonstrate the important patterns that unite nearly all Battles in the *Brus*. With this in mind, let us now examine the significant variations in these *incidents*.

3.4 Cyclicity

1. ‘Cyclicity’ is the term I use to indicate the arrangement of recurring *incidents* in *cycles*. As I have mentioned above, recurring *incidents* are not identical, nor is cyclicity a process of cloning events and repeating them ad infinitum. Cyclicity is, rather, repetition with variation. Just as in prosody and metrics, two similar events set up an expectation for the audience or reader: a pattern. Each subsequent repetition varies the pattern, frustrating the audience’s expectation and sharpening its focus, thus marking or highlighting the variations. These variations carry the central meaning of the

passage. When repetitions of *incident* are arranged in *cycles*, as they are in the *Brus*, each variation portrays another aspect of the *incident*. The complete cycle provokes an interpretation of the poem's events or characters in Barbour's audience. Apart from recognition of the similarity of events, two factors are of primary importance in assigning *incidents* to the same *cycle*: 1) the structure of the *incident*, and 2) whether the *incident* contributes to the meaning of the *cycle*. Structure will be discussed below; meaning will be discussed mainly in Chapter Four.

2. The structure of the *incident* refers to the *actions* and concomitant discursive material which make up the *incident*. Identifying the structure of scenes in which Bruce single-handedly defeats three men led to the inclusion of several *incidents* of Bruce fighting in a *cycle* I call Single Combat. Similarly, the structure of a Battle Scene is a major factor in excluding the killing of John Comyn from this *cycle*, even though it is an instance of Bruce fighting alone.

3. We have seen that a Single Combat invariably contains a modified variant of *naming* which I call the *introduction*, as it literally introduces characters who have not already been mentioned in the narrative. John Comyn's death does not contain an *introduction*, for it involves characters with whom we are already familiar. Rather than being an ostensibly self-contained and superfluous *incident*, the killing of John Comyn is in fact the culmination of a series of events set in motion when the story proper – the *romanys* referred to in I.446 – first began: Bruce's fictitious betrayal by Comyn to Edward I. Perhaps this is the reason the exposition of this *incident* is very brief:

Sa fell it in ye samyn tid
Yat at Drumfres rycht yar besid
Schir Ihone Cumyn soiornyng maid.

(II.25-27)

Immediately following these three lines (and rhyming with line 27) are Bruce's ride to meet Comyn and his intention to confront him about the betrayal:

Ye Brus lap on and yidder raid
And thocht for-owtyn mar letting
For to qwyte hym his discouryng.

(II.28-30)

Note that, though line 29 contains the familiar *thocht* formula, this is not a premeditated *plan*, but rather a spontaneous idea which I call *intention* to differentiate it from the *plan* component. Note also that all the *incidents* of the Single Combat *cycle* are basically surprise attacks: even when Bruce has foreknowledge that such an attack is imminent, as with the Treacherous Kinsmen in Book V, he does not know the exact time or place. Therefore all the planning is done by the opponent. In the Comyn *incident*, the *intention* and *attack* are Bruce's:

Yidder he raid but langer let
And with Schyr Ihone ye Cumyn met

In ye Freris at ye hye awter,
And schawyt him with lauchand cher
Ye endentur, syne with a knyff
Rycht in yat sted hym reft ye lyff.
(II.31-36)

4. The above passage also contains the two *nuclei*, the actual killing of John Comyn. We have seen only one of these two formulae before: line 32 has an instance of the *met* formula which can be used both for a Single Combat, as in ‘Ye king met yaim yat till him socht’ (VI.627), or a Battle, as in ‘And met yar fayis wighorusly | Yat all ye formast ruschytt war’ (VII.604-05). The second, in lines 35-36, is new to us. It occurs several times in *Havelok*, often in reference to the murder of Havelok’s sisters:

For at hise herte he saw a knif
For to reuen him hise lyf
(479-80)

For þe maydnes here lif
Refte he bopen, with a knif
(2222-23)

Hwan þu reftes with a knif

Hise sistres here lif

(2394-95)

It does not occur again in the *Brus*, however, until Book X, during the taking of Roxburgh Castle: ‘And stekyt him wpwart with a knyff | Quhill in his hand he left ye lyff’ (X.421-22). This *incident* forms part of a *cycle* of sacking castles, more or less confined to Book X, which is not discussed in this thesis. Furthermore, it can be seen that the lines in question do not present a very prototypical instance of the formula from II.35-36. Three more peripheral instances occur (XI.597-98; XII.581-82; XIII.23-24), all during Bannockburn, and all constituting descriptions of general slaughter on the battlefield, rather than a single killing of one character by another. A prototypical instance of the formula does not occur again until Book XV, during the Edward Bruce Battle *cycle*:

Schyr Eduuard yat wes ner him by

Reuersyt him and with a knyff

Rycht in yat place reft ye liff.

(XV.190-92)

This passage is part of a blow-by-blow account of one of the battles in Edward Bruce’s Irish campaign. The final such occurrence is in one of the Battles of the James Douglas *cycle*:

On him arestyt ye Douglas
And him reuersyt and with a knyff
Rycht in yat place reft him ye lyff.
(XVI.420-22)

We see, then, that this *reft ye lyf* formula, in the *Brus*, occurs exclusively in Battle scenes.

5. The John Comyn Incident does not contain the *sa/yat* nuclear component found in even the least prototypical Single Combat (the Three Men with a Wether). It does, however, include a brief *list of the slain* immediately following Comyn's death: 'Schyr Edmund Cumyn als wes slayn | And oyir mony of mekill mayn' (II.37-38). Duncan, in the notes to his edition of the *Brus*, calls Barbour's account of Comyn's death 'distorted' (1997: 78) and, referring specifically to this *list*, writes that 'Sir Edmund Comyn was laird of Kilbride, and was not present; John's uncle was Sir Robert Comyn. There do not seem to have been other deaths' (1997: 81). This strongly suggests that lines II.37-38 are fictional, and the fact that they are demonstrably formulaic in turn suggests that they are included for structural reasons. As the lines constitute a rhyming couplet, deleting them would not harm the poem's prosody. This is the only case of Bruce engaging combat on his own to include the *list* component, and its presence, along with the other evidence, suggests that Barbour perceived this *incident* as having some similarity to the Battle scenes; we are probably meant to understand the killing of John Comyn as the first Battle of Bruce's campaign.

6. Finally, we have also seen that Single Combats usually contain some sort of *summary*, either authorial or delivered by one of the characters. In place of this component, the John Comyn *incident* substitutes a *commentary*, more common to Battles: (II.43-48). The *commentary* component does occur in the most important Single Combat, the Defence of the Ford in Book VI: after Bruce's men find him and praise his deed (the *summary* component), Barbour interjects a rhetorical Praise of Valour (VI.327-74). As this component is primarily rhetorical, it will be discussed further in the next chapter; for now suffice it to say that Barbour links the death of John Comyn with the Battle of Methven, telling the audience that the murder in a church caused 'hard myscheiff' (II.45) to befall Bruce before he 'com to sic bounte' (II.48). Later Edward I sends Valence into Scotland to challenge Bruce after hearing news of Bruce's inauguration *and* Comyn's murder (II.195-98). As we shall see in Chapter Four, this does not follow historical fact, and is therefore likely to have been Barbour's deliberate arrangement of events to suit his proposed interpretation.

3.4.1 The Single Combat Cycle

1. The Single Combat *cycle* begins, then, with the Mac na Dorsair brothers, which, as we have seen, contains the six components of *introduction*, *plan*, *opportunity*, *attack*, *nucleus* (the *killing* formula, occurring three times), and *summary*, all within fifty-four lines of verse (III.93-146). The brevity of this *incident* reflects the fact that it was completely unexpected: Bruce is fleeing from defeat at the hands of John of Lorn when the attack occurs, and has little time to react. The *incident* is not even separated

from the preceding material by a paragraph indent, though it seems to have little to do with the rhetorical praising of Bruce's defence of his fleeing knights:

For ye king full chewalrusly
Defendyt all his cumpany
And wes set in full gret danger
And 3eit eschapyt haile and fer.
(III.89-92)

Few could deny that there is a prominent semantic break between the end of this passage and line 93 ('Twa breyir war in yat land'). However, John Ramsay – the scribe of MS Advocates' 19.2.2 (our only source for the first three Books of the *Brus*) – does not begin a new paragraph here; instead, this initial Single Combat follows immediately on the heels of Bruce's hasty retreat from the brief Skirmish with Lorn. The brevity of the *incident* and its visual connection to the previous lines give it a sense of hurry, a fast pace appropriate to this prototypical a surprise-attack.

2. The second Single Combat, the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident* at the end of Book V, is by contrast exceedingly long and drawn out. While the nuclear components take up only lines V.623-47 (25 lines) and end immediately thereafter with a variant of the *summary* component, the beginnings of the *incident* – in a purely narrative or plot sense – lie back as far as V.463. It is here that a paragraph indent in the E manuscript separates the new *incident* from Douglas's slighting of his ancestral castle. The opening couplet 'In-to Carrik lyis ye king | With a full symple gadrying' (V.463-64) draws the

audience's attention back to the Bruce. We learn that he dare not ride openly in the land, for fear of Sir Valence (V.471-74). When Valence hears of Bruce's raid on Turnberry Castle, he sends Umfraville to Ayr with a great army to assail him (V.476-84), but Umfraville being 'wys and awerty' (II.213),

[...] thocht nocht speidfull for till far
Till assaile him in-to ye hycht,
Yarfor he thocht to wyrk with slycht
(V.486-88).

As we have seen, Umfraville hears of a man of Carrick 'sley & wycht | & a man als off mekill mycht' (V.491-92) who, being a kinsman of the Bruce, can get near enough to slay him, and is willing to do so in exchange for forty pounds worth of land (V.494-97; 515-22). This effectively constitutes the *introduction* component, as well as *motive*, which component was introduced in Skirmish with Lorn in Book III.

3. Another paragraph indentation occurs at V.523, after which the traitor goes home to await 'opertunyte' (V.525), while Barbour interrupts the action with an apostrophe on Bruce's danger and a brief digression on the danger of betrayal by those one trusts (V.527-32). Although this *incident* is longer and more carefully developed than that of the Mac na Dorsair brothers, it is still shaping up to be a surprise-attack. That changes in line V.534:

He [the traitor] had fullfillyt his felony
Ne war ye king throw Goddis grace
Gat hale witting of his purchace,
And how and for how mekill land
He tuk his slauchter apon hand.
(V.534-38)

Semantically, this recalls the *awareness* component I discussed in the Battle scenes, though it does not employ the *wes weill war of* formula. In any case, Bruce now knows that his kinsman has betrayed him, and that he must be on his guard.

4. The traitor concocts his *plan* in lines V.549-62. Recall that the *plan* component in Book III lasted only three lines: 96-98. In Book V, Barbour actually describes the traitor pondering in search of a *plan*, a way to kill the Bruce. He recalls that Bruce is in the habit of wandering alone in the morning, away from the protection of his knights, to the ‘prewe’ (‘privy’; V.555-60). Only at this point does Barbour employ the familiar *thocht* formula, often used to denote the *plan* component: ‘Yar thocht he with his sonnys twa | For to surprise ye king & sla’ (V.561-62). Though it is preceded by much elaboration, this is in fact the *nucleus* of the *plan* component, signalling the traitor’s precise intention.

5. More digression on Bruce’s situation and habits follows. Although he has been warned that treachery is in the works, we learn that, en route to the privy, ‘to tresoun tuk he yen na heid’ (V.575). An element of surprise thus creeps back into the *incident*. This is not, however, a case like the Mac na Dorsair attack, for Bruce

[...] wes wont quhar-euer he 3eid
His swerd about his hals to ber
& yat awaillyt him gretli yer,
For had nocht God all thing weldand
Set help in-till his awine hand
He had bene dede withoutyn dreid.
(V.576-81)

Thus Barbour makes explicit that Bruce's triumph here is due not simply to his own strength or quick-thinking, but to preparedness, for even in the morning, when treason is the last thing on his mind, he still carries his sword.

6. The Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*, then, is greatly expanded and amplified; the pace is slower, developing motivation and intention more fully, and allowing time for Barbour to shift the focus explicitly from Bruce's inherent strength and courage, which are hard to overcome even with a sudden, unexpected attack, to his habit of preparedness, carrying his sword with him even to his morning 'prewe'. It is also significant that Barbour refers specifically to God, who 'set help in-till [Bruce's] awine hand'. Thus the credit for Bruce's readiness is shared between himself and divine assistance. This much is underlined in the *commentary* component, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

7. If the Treacherous Kinsman *incident* in Book V was an expanded, elaborated Single Combat, then the Defence of the Ford in Book VI is even more so. The

Treacherous Kinsman ends Book V; Book VI begins with an instance of the *commentary* component. As the *commentary* usually links one scene with the following scene, it may be more accurate to consider it as belonging truly to neither. Even so, the passage in question is a *commentary* on Bruce's deeds in the Treacherous Kinsmen Incident. In any case the beginning of the Defence of the Ford is ultimately at VI.25, when the *commentary* ends and the scene of Bruce dispersing his men throughout Carrick to 'to purches yar necessite | & als ye countre for to se' (VI.29-30) is set. Another *commentary* follows the narrative action of the Defence of the Ford, and if we include it as part of this *incident* (as I shall argue we can, in the next chapter), then the Single Combat ends at VI.374. This means that the Defence of the Ford is 130 to 154 lines longer than the Treacherous Kinsmen (depending on whether we place the ending of that *incident* at V.658 or VI.24).

8. The opponents in the Defence of Ford are an army of Galwegians, who are loyal to the English. They are introduced, along with their *plan*, soon after the scene is set, and Bruce's meagre company of sixty (VI.31) is described:

And <u>quhen ye Gallowais wyst</u> suthli	(<i>quhen</i> -clause introduces
<u>Yat he wes with sa few meng3e</u>	Galwegians and <i>opportunity</i>)
Yai maid a prewe assemble	
Off wele twa hunder men & ma	
& slewth-hundis with yaim gan ta,	
For <u>yai thocht him for to surpris</u>	(<i>plan</i> , w/ <i>thocht</i> formula)
<u>And giff he fled on ony wys</u>	

To follow him with ye hundis swa

Yat he suld nocht eschaip yaim fra.

(VI.32-40)

Lines 34-36, referring to the *assembly*, perhaps recalls this component of a Battle; in this *incident*, however, there is no accompanying *list* of illustrious knights. The Galwegians, in fact, are not necessarily of noble class. More importantly, Bruce fights them alone, rather than in an army. All of this excludes the incident from the Battle category.

9. The *plan* component is repeated, followed by what can be taken as an instance of *attack*; as in the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*, however, Bruce has apparently received warning of the imminent danger.

Yai schup yaim in ane ewynnyng

To suppris sodanly ye king

(*plan* component w/o *thocht*)

And till him held yai straucht yair way,

(*travel* formula as *attack*)

Bot he, yat had his wachis ay

On ilk sid, off yar cummyng

Lang or yai come had wyttering

(VI.41-46)

Once again, the Single Combat version of the *awareness* component is used to explain Bruce's victory at an attempted surprise-attack.

10. Having had instances of three basic components of a Single Combat, we are now awaiting the *nucleus*, a *killing*, preferably in a *sa/yat* result-clause pattern. The *attack* component is filled twice more, at lines 110-11 ('Till yat he saw cum at his hand | Ye hale rout in-till full gret hy') and 136-37 ('For off him litill dout yai had | & raid till him in full gret hy'), but the more important material is actually the deliberation Bruce takes in lines 112-127, wherein he decides that, as the ford is too narrow for more than one opponent to cross at a time (126), and as his armour will protect him from arrows (122-23), he can in fact take on two hundred men or more (131) with a reasonable possibility of success. This feat shows strength and courage, like the Mac na Dorsair *incident*, and preparedness, like the fight against the Treacherous Kinsmen, but introduces Bruce's ability of careful deliberation, weighing of facts and probabilities, what Lois Ebin calls his 'prudence' (1971-72: 222). This emphasis on courage combined with wisdom marks the Defence of the Ford as the most important *incident* of the Single Combat *cycle*, as well as the most explicit statement of this aspect of Bruce's character. As I shall discuss in Chapter Four, the combination of courage and wisdom is at least as important to Barbour's *Brus* as the theme of 'freedom'.

11. The fourth Single Combat returns somewhat to the pattern of the first. When Bruce and his foster-brother kill five men at the end of Book VI, the attack occurs in the middle of a chase: John of Lorn is pursuing Bruce with a tracker-dog who will not leave the king's scent (VI.501-03). The pursuit appears at first to be a Battle, as the *lists* of English and Scottish knights occur in lines VI.509-12 and VI.516-18, respectively. Bruce initially underestimates the size of the English host and appears willing to fight them (VI.522-525). When he sees the full extent of the army, he does not waste effort

engaging them, but rather proposes a retreat, such as we have seen in Methven and against Lorn in Book III. This is not a complete Battle, however, for there is no nuclear component: the armies have not met in combat, and no blows were dealt. Instead, Bruce divides his knights into three parts and flees (VI.551-52). The hound keeps to Bruce's division, however, and so the group is divided again into three (VI.564-67). When the dog still betrays which group Bruce is leading, he tells his men simply to scatter (VI.576-78). Bruce takes his way with only his foster-brother (VI.580-81).

12. At this point five men attack Bruce and his foster-brother, and within twenty-six lines (VI.627-52) they have all been killed, Bruce having dispatched four of the five (VI.650). The *summary* of this *incident*, like that of the Treacherous Kinsmen, takes the form of direct speech:

Tyll his falow yan gan he [Bruce] say,

‘Yow has helpyt weile perfay,’

‘It likys 3ow to say swa,’ said he,

‘Bot ye gret part to 3ow tuk 3e

Yat slew four off ye fyve 3ow ane.’

Ye king said, ‘As ye glew is gane

Better yan yow I mycht it do

For ik had mar layser yar-to,

For ye twa falowys yat delt with ye

Quhen yai saw me assailyt with iij

Off me rycht nakyn dowt yai had

For yai wend I sa stratly war stad,
And for-yi yat yai dred me noucht
Noy yaim fer owt ye mar I moucht.'
(VI.655-68)

This *incident*, then, does not introduce a wholly new aspect of Bruce's character; it does, however, expand the humility hinted at in the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*. Whereas in Book V Bruce responds to the praise of his chamber-page by diverting it to the three men he has just slain ('Yai had bene worthi men all thre | Had yai nocht bene full off tresoun' (V.656-57)), in the present example, Bruce begins by praising his foster-brother's inferior performance. When his brother responds that Bruce himself deserves the greater praise, Bruce refutes this with surprisingly plausible reasoning: namely that as Bruce was attacked with three men (which number we know he can defeat), his foster-brother's attackers paid no heed to him, thus allowing Bruce to kill one of them quickly and off-guard. The *incident* of Bruce and his foster-brother versus five men, then not only glorifies Bruce's ability to beat three or four attackers single-handedly (by demonstrating simultaneously that other men cannot even beat two), but also amplifies Bruce's humility, by having him refuse to take great praise for his own incredible feat.

13. Two more Single Combats remain in the *cycle*, the first of which, the Three Men with a Wether, is the least typical of them all. In the first place *introduction* of the three armed opponents creates a tension not seen in the other *incidents*. The men claim

to be seeking the Bruce so that they may join his cause; instead of announcing himself, however, Bruce cautiously conceals his identity.

Yai said Robert ye Bruys yai socht
For mete with him giff yat yai moucht
Yar duelling with him wauld yai ma.
Ye king said, 'Giff yat 3e will swa,
Haldys furth 3our way with me
& I sall ger 3ow sone him se.'

(VII.119-24)

The men are not fooled, however; they recognise Bruce, and their identity as adversaries as well as their *plan* follow immediately:

Yai persawyt be his speking
Yat he wes ye selwyn Robert king,
& chaungyt contenance & late
And held nocht in ye fyrst state,
For yai war fayis to ye king
And thocht to cum in-to sculking
And duell with him quhill yat yai saw
Yar poynt, & bring him yan off daw.

(*plan w/ thocht* formula)

(VII.125-32)

As has become usual, Bruce is aware of the danger; though he has not received advance warning of any treachery, he perceives the three men's true intent in their behaviour:

Bot ye king yat wes witty
Persawyt weill be yar hawing
Yat yai luffyt him na-thing
(VII.134-36)

This recalls Bruce's first sight of the Treacherous Kinsmen in Book V: 'Ye king persawt be yar affer | Yat all wes as men had him tauld' (V.610-11) and of the three opponents in the final Single Combat, later in Book VII:

[...] he saw fra ye woud command
Thre men with bowys in yar hand
And he yat persawyt in hy
Be yar affer and yar hawing
Yat yai luffyt him nakyn thing
(VII.415-20)

This last example seems to be a synthesis of the previous two acts of *recognition*.

14. Returning to the Three Men with a Wether, what follows is a tense, dangerous charade, with each party possibly aware of the other's suspicions, but nonetheless obligated to maintain the pretence in order to bide time. Many lines pass

before even the *opportunity* component appears. The five men share the slaughtered wether, though Bruce asks the three strangers to make their own fire and leave him and his foster-brother to eat alone (VII.158-62). After dining, Bruce is in need of sleep, and asks his foster-brother to stay awake and keep watch (VII.179-80). And so, more than fifty lines after the three men's *plan* has been established, *opportunity* finally knocks:

Quhen sic slep fell on his [Bruce's] man

Yat he mycht nocht hald wp his ey,

Bot fell in slep & rowtyt hey.

(VII.190-92)

As if the moment were not tense enough, Barbour delays the *attack* further by interjecting an apostrophe on Bruce's danger:

Now is ye king in gret perile

For slep he swa a litill quhile

He sall be ded for-owtyn dreid,

(VII.193-95)

The phrase 'for-owtyn dreid' is a variant of the usually prosodic formula *for-* or *with-owtyn NOUN*. Its usual forms are *for-owtyn let* (delay) and *for-owtyn dout* (doubt). In this instance, 'dreid' is indeed used as a synonym for 'doubt', but it cannot escape its more common denotation of 'dread'. The last time we saw this variant was in the

Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*, in a corresponding apostrophe on Bruce's imminent danger: 'He had bene dede withoutyn dreid' (V.581).

15. The *opportunity* component is repeated, followed directly by the *attack* and another repetition of the *plan*:

For ye iij tratouris tuk gud heid
Yat he [Bruce] on slep wes & his man. (*opportunity*)
In full gret hy yai rais wp yan
And drew yar suerdis hastily
& went towart ye king in hy (*attack*)
Quhen yat yai saw him sleip swa,
& slepand thocht yai wald him sla. (*plan*)
(VII.196-202)

In such dire circumstances, perhaps the only escape is a *deus ex machina*; and that is almost precisely what we have, especially if we read *machina* as referring to the structural machinery of a formulaic narrative.

Till him yai 3eid a full gret pas,
Bot in yat tym throu Goddis grace
Ye king wp blenkit hastily
And saw his man slepand him by

And saw cummand ye toyer thre.

(VII.203-07)

Now fully awake, Bruce can dispatch the three men easily, as we have seen him do thrice before now. In fact, as I have pointed out above, only one formula is used for all three killings:

Bot nocht-for-yi on sic maner

He helpyt him in yat bargane

Yat yai thre tratowris he has slan

Throw Goddis grace and his manheid.

(VII.222-25)

16. The *summary* of this *incident* does not follow immediately, so it may be difficult to place this scene in the *cycle* we have established so far. Up to this point I have suggested that each repetition of the Single Combat pattern either introduces or more fully develops an aspect of Bruce's character. The focus in the Three Men with a Wether, however, seems to be on Bruce's skin-of-the-teeth escape from death, which is twice attributed to 'Goddis grace' (VII.204; 225). Perhaps it is this very aspect of Bruce's character that the audience is meant to observe. Other such incidents, after all, have been at least partially attributed to divine assistance or influence. Near the end of the Defence of the Ford, for instance, Bruce reports to his newly arrived knights of the deeds he has just done:

[...] he tauld yaim all hale ye cas,
Howgate yat he assailyt was
& how yat God him helpyt swa
Yat he eschapyt hale yaim fra.
(VI.309-312)

It is almost certainly significant that in the very *incident* which praises Bruce's ideal combination of courage and wisdom – both of which are virtues found in humans – Bruce should give credit to God. Indeed, Book VI opens with a *commentary* in the form of Sir Valence *reaction* to the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*:

[...] 'Certis I may weill se
Yat it is all certante
Yat [ure] helpys hardy men
As be yis deid we may ken.
(VI.15-18)

In this way, the Single Combat of Book V is also at least partially attributed to 'ure', or fate, and God is depicted as the master of fate. For instance, in Book I Barbour reminds the audience that

[...] God yat is off maist poweste
Reserwyt till his maieste
For to knaw in his prescience
Off alkyn tyme ye mowence.
(I.131-34)

Later, James Douglas is described as a man who was always willing to ‘tak ye vre yat God wald send’ (I.312). The Scottish cause itself is depicted as a case of divine intervention in the address to the audience, after the prologue: though the Scots were ‘in gret distres’ (I.447), ‘our Lord sic grace yaim sent’ (I.450) that they eventually won ‘throw yar gret walour’ (I.451). A combination of valour and divine assistance, then, is vital to the Scots’ success from the beginning. It would appear that, having outlined Bruce’s strength and courage in a sudden, completely unexpected attack, his preparedness and foresight, his combination of courage and wisdom, and his humility, Barbour felt it also prudent to demonstrate the role of divine influence in his personal, as well as national success. After all, his initial failures and defeats are depicted as penance for the sin of killing John Comyn in a church (II.43-48).

17. After the significant variations we have observed in the previous Single Combats, the final *incident* in this *cycle* is somewhat anti-climactic. It so resembles the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident* that Duncan writes it off as a second version of the same attack (1997: 214, 278). Certainly it is plausible that these two passages, or even all four *incidents* of Bruce fighting three attackers (Mac na Dorsair brothers, Treacherous Kinsmen, Three Men with a Wether, and The Hunting Incident), have their origin in

one event; it is equally possible that no such incident ever occurred, and that all these passages are pure invention.¹⁰ What Duncan overlooks, however, is the structural variation in each *incident* and the thematic emphases this variation achieves.

18. The Hunting Incident begins as prototypically as can be imagined, with an analogue of one of the time formulae observed by Susan Wittig:

Sa hapynnyt yat on a day
He [Bruce] went till hunt for till assay
Quhat gamyn was in yat countre,
And swa hapnyt yat day yat he
By a woud-syd to sett is gane
With his twa hundys him allane.
(VII.407-12)

As usual, however, Bruce is prepared for all circumstances: ‘Bot he his suerd ay with him bar’ (VII.413), a detail which naturally recalls Bruce’s preparedness in the Treacherous Kinsmen Incident.

19. The three opponents are introduced in line 416; I have already quoted the *recognition* of these men as foes, which synthesises the two previous *recognitions*, in the Treacherous Kinsmen and Three Men with a Wether *incidents*. Once again Barbour interjects a present-tense rhetorical amplification of Bruce’s danger, this time in the form of a prayer:

God help ye king now for his mycht

For bot he now be wys & wucht

He sall be set in mekill pres.

(VII.423-25)

Motivation, plan, and opportunity are linked together as we learn the three men

[...] war his [Bruce's] fayis all wtrely

And wachyt him sa bysyly

To se quhen yai wengeance mycht tak

Off ye king for Ihon Comyn his sak (motivation)

Yat yai thocht yan yai layser had.

And sen he hym allane wes stad (opportunity)

In hy yai thocht yai suld him sla, (plan)

(VII.427-33)

20. We have seen that Bruce has his sword handy; unfortunately he seems to have forgot his armour, which leads to an interesting development after the *attack* component:

In hy towart ye king yai 3eid

And bent yar bowys quhen yai war ner,

And he yat dred on gret maner

Yar arowys, for he nakyd was,
In hy a speking to yaim mais
And said, '3ow aucht to schame perde
Sen ik am ane & 3e are thre
For to schute at me apon fer.
Bot had 3e hardyment to cum ner
And with 3our suerdis till assay,
Wyn me apon sic wys giff 3e may,
3e sall wele owte mar prisyt be.'

(VII.438-49)

This is convincing rhetoric, to be sure, though somewhat hypocritical coming from a man who, taking a bow and arrow from his chamber-page in Book V, 'taisyt ye wyre & leit it fley, | & hyt ye fader in ye ey' (V.625-26). Bruce's speech works, however, and the *attack* component is repeated after the foes' response: 'With yat yar bowys away yai kest | And come on fast but langer frest' (VII.453-54). With the odds thus evened out, Bruce makes quick work of these latest three opponents. I have already mentioned how he is aided in this *incident* by his dog. Again, Bruce's men praise him for his great deed, and again he responds with now characteristic humility:

[...] 'Perfay,' said he [Bruce]
'I slew bot ane forouten ma
God & my hund has slayn ye twa.

Yar tresoun combryt yaim perfay

For ryght wycht men all thre war yai.'

(VII.490-94)

21. Just as the *recognition* component of this *incident* combines the phrases of the two previous *recognitions*, so the thematic focus of this final Single Combat seems to review the emphases of the previous *incidents* in the *cycle*. We have Bruce armed with his sword as in the Treacherous Kinsmen scene. In convincing his attackers to cast away their bows and fight with swords we have him use 'slycht' (which is equated with wisdom in battle via the *wys and wycht* formula, discussed in chapter two), thus recalling the emphasis in the Defence of the Ford. We have him assisted in combat by another character as when he fought five men with his foster-brother (though in this case the companion is his hunting dog). As in the Treacherous Kinsmen Incident, Bruce praises his fallen enemies, identifying treason as their sole failing. And finally, Bruce humbly refuses credit and praise for his deed, as when he and his foster-brother killed five men, and ascribes part of his success to divine assistance, as in the Defence of the Ford and especially the Three Men with a Wether Incident.

22. The Single Combat *cycle*, then, uses successive variations of one type of *incident*, Bruce more or less single-handedly vanquishing several opponents, to emphasise in turn several virtuous aspects of his character. The *cycle* is not used only for characterisation, however. The construction of Bruce's character itself has a larger function, a greater significance in the poem as a whole. As Lois Ebin, among others, has noted, Barbour constructs Robert Bruce as an exemplary hero:

In the figure of Bruce, Barbour creates a model of the good king or ruler. As the narrative unfolds, Bruce exhibits by turn the many qualities essential to his position – strength and courage in battle, wisdom and prudence in the maintenance of the realm, generosity, courtesy, and compassion toward his subjects, and personal honour, integrity, and devoutness (1971-72: 222).

We have just seen that many of these qualities are expressed and developed in the progression of the Single Combat *cycle*. Barbour's *Brus*, then, would appear to be at least partially a didactic work, an exemplum of virtuous behaviour not so much for the lower classes, but for the king himself. Ebin especially feels that the *Brus* is 'closest in technique and effect not to the two related Scottish works[...] [Hary's *Wallace* and Wyntoun's *Cronykil*], but to a group of late medieval narratives which developed from the *speculum* tradition' (1969: 48-49). Specifically, she refers to the *speculum principis* ('king's' or 'prince's mirror') tradition, whereby a ruler is instructed in the proper method of governing (Ebin 1969: 49). Far from the praise of 'freedom' in the modern, democratic sense, Ebin would suggest that the duties of and behaviour appropriate to an ideal king constitute the major theme of Barbour's *Brus*.

3.4.2 More Cyclicity: the Battle scenes

1. Of course, Bruce's characterisation is not wholly contained within the Single Combat *cycle*, nor is this *cycle* wholly independent and self-contained. Rather, it interlocks with one of the principal Battle *cycles*, that depicting the rise of the Scottish campaign from initial defeat and humiliation to lasting victory at Bannockburn. It is significant that Barbour places the colophon after the Bannockburn episode has finished, at this same point identifying the reigning Scottish monarch (Robert II, grandson of the Bruce), and offering his prayer for the future of Scotland:

God graunt yat yai yat cummyn ar
Off his ofspring manteyme ye land
And hald ye folk weill to warand
And manteyme rycht and leawte
Als wele as in hys tyme did he.
(XIII.718-22)

It is likely, then, that with the end of this Battle, Barbour feels he has completed the positive characterisation of his hero, and firmly established his model for the duties and virtues appropriate to a good king. Book XIV begins Edward Bruce's Irish Campaign, which is the reverse of the previous Battle *cycle*, leading from initial success to Edward Bruce's needless death.

2. Battle is a far more common *incident* in the *Brus* than Single Combat. For this reason, though every Single Combat fits neatly into one thematically unified *cycle*, there are in fact several Battle *cycles*, sometimes overlapping or running concurrently,

establishing and underscoring different themes and even involving wholly different characters. James Douglas and Edward Bruce, for instance, have their own *Battle cycles*, which detail their own individual fortunes and establish their own individual characters. These individual *cycles* are not separate from the rest of the narrative, for indeed all characters in the *Brus* are characterised in contrast to each other. Whereas Robert Bruce is depicted as the ideal king, James Douglas is depicted as the ideal knight or vassal (McKim 1981: 167, 178-79). Edward Bruce, on the other hand, forms an anti-type, a contrast to his brother, possessing strength and courage in abundance but without any wisdom or prudence to temper it (Ebin 1971-72: 223). His own characterising *Battle cycle* is primarily manifest in the post-Bannockburn Irish Campaign, though it actually begins in the raid on the village near Turnberry Castle in Book V (61-122).

3. There is not sufficient space in the present study to examine all the *Battle cycles* in Barbour's *Brus*, though they are all certainly worthy of study, as are the other *cycles* of *incident* such as Raids or the Siege or Sacking of Castles. Of primary importance to us now is Bruce's initial *Battle cycle*, leading up to Bannockburn, for it continues development of themes we have already explored, and will thus lend a sense of unity to my study.

4. We have seen how Barbour links the slaying of John Comyn directly to the Battle of Methven through the Edward I's reaction to the news; Barbour specifically states that when Edward heard Bruce had 'brocht ye Cumyn till ending | & how he syne had maid him king' (II.196-97), he became furious and enlisted Sir Aymer de Valence

to travel to Scotland (II.199; 200—03). Duncan shows that this correlation is probably unhistorical:

Edward I reacted to the murder of Comyn moderately, ordering the suppression of ‘dispeace’, and (unspecifically) ‘some Scots’ who had risen against him. Edward had no expectation that Bruce would take the throne. Then on 5 April, clearly on receipt of the news of Robert’s inauguration, a flurry of orders against the rebellion of the earl of Carrick shows that Edward was indeed infuriated by it. (1997: 90)

As Edward I was demonstrably incensed by Bruce’s enthroning, why does Barbour need to add the murder of Comyn to the *report*? I have already suggested that this is a means of ascribing the Scottish defeat at Methven to Bruce’s transgression in killing Comyn on holy ground. Thus the progression of the Scottish campaign from disaster to victory is given a moral significance, as well as conforming to the established medieval convention of the Wheel of Fortune.

5. The Battle of Methven itself is significant in several ways. We have seen that the combination of courage and prudence or wisdom is one of the central themes of Barbour’s *Brus*, especially reflected in the Defence of the Ford. We have also seen that the role of wisdom (via strategy) in combat is introduced in the Battle of Methven, through Sir Ingraham Umfraville’s advice to Valence. Though Bruce, Douglas, and other knights on the Scottish side eventually embrace the combination of *mycht* and

slycht (e.g. III.259-62; V.268-70), Bruce's initial reaction to Umfraville's tactics is one of dismay, as shown by his address to his men directly before the battle:

[...] 'Lordingis now may 3e se
Yat 3one folk all throw sutelte
Schapis yaim to do with slycht
Yat at yai drede to do with mycht.
(II.325-28)

Barbour's introduction of subtle battle strategies into warfare through a knight on the English side suggests that his own audience would also have initially rejected such tactics, and may not have tolerated such behaviour from the poem's heroes. That this was indeed the case is further demonstrated by the refusal of certain Scottish knights to adopt the guerrilla tactics *slycht* strategy, especially Edward Bruce and Thomas Randolph. We shall discuss Edward Bruce's personal failing in the next chapter. Thomas Randolph is so dismayed by Bruce's use of *slycht* that he upbraids the king at the end of Book IX:

[...] '3e chasty me, bot 3e
Aucht bettre chastyt for to be,
For sene 3e werrayit ye king
Off Ingland, in playne fechtung
3e suld pres to deren3he rycht

And nocht with cowardy na with slycht.'

(747-52)

Randolph later converts back to the Scottish cause, however, and embraces the combination of *mycht* and *slycht*. Sergi Mainer points out that Barbour uses Randolph's complaint to address the implication of cowardice, just as he uses the strategies of Umfraville (2004: 98). When Randolph later accepts Bruce's guerrilla tactics, the audience, presumably should as well.

6. The Battle of Methven is, like the *incident* of the Treacherous kinsmen, rather long and drawn out. We have seen above that the nuclear component occurs many times. In addition, much room is taken up by Umfraville's speech to Valence, (lines 259-300). By contrast, the Battle with the Lord of Lorn at the beginning of Book III is very short, lasting no more than sixty lines (III.1-60).¹¹ This brief skirmish, like the Battle of Methven, is a defeat for the Bruce and his army, and once again, after giving his battle-cry and rushing his foes one last time (III.27-30), he must rally his men and call for a retreat. He does this much more willingly than at the Battle of Methven, however. In Book II, Bruce's knights begin to flee before Bruce himself has given up the fight, whereupon he grows angry, and issues a brief address to his men:

Yai [Bruce's knights] prikyt yen out off ye pres,

And ye king yat angry wes

For he his men saw fle him fra

Said yen, 'Lordingis sen it is swa

Yat vre rynnys agane ws her,
Gud is we pas of yar daunger
Till God ws send eft-sonys grace.
And 3yet may fall giff yai will chace
Quyt yaim corn-but sum dele we sall.'
(II.437-41)

Bruce's argument for a tactical retreat is sound, but he is none the less disappointed to see his knights flee from the fight. One could argue that there is a discrepancy here between the words of Bruce's speech and his description in lines 438-39. A comparison with the *retreat* in Book III, however, resolves this discrepancy somewhat:

Ye king his men saw in affray
And his ensen3e can he cry (*war-cry*)
And amang yaim rycht hardyly
He rad yat he yaim ruschyt all
And fele of yaim yar gert he fall. (final occurrence of *nucleus*)
Bot quhen he saw yai war sa feill
And saw yaim swa gret dyntis deill
He dred to tyne his folk, foryi
His men till him he gan rely
(III.26-34)

This time it is a realistic appraisal of the battle situation and the fear of losing his knights in a hopeless cause, rather than anger at their flight, which directly precedes the *rally* and *retreat*. Bruce here delivers another address to his men, though it is longer than that of the Battle of Methven:

[...] 'Lordingis foly it war
Tyll ws for till assemblill mar,
For yai fele off our hors has slayn,
And giff yhe fecht with yaim agayn
We sall tyne off our small meng3e
And our selff sall in perill be.
Yarfor me thynk maist awenand
To withdraw ws ws defendand
Till we cum owt off yar daunger
For owr strenth at our hand is ner.'

(III.35-44)

Though the address at Methven showed a firm grasp of the necessity of retreat, and a willingness to do so (in contrast to Bruce's apparent anger at his fleeing knights), the above passage elaborates this idea even more fully, uncomplicated by anger or shame. Furthermore, Barbour follows the *retreat* with an authorial *commentary* which serves to alter the focus of the situation so much that the flight becomes heroic (III.45-60), which we will discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter. It would seem, then, that the

tactical retreat is another behaviour atypical of the romance genre, which Barbour must introduce gradually before his audience can accept it, like the combination of *mycht* and *slycht*. That the Skirmish with the Lord of Lorn leads directly to the Mac na Dorsair *incident* shows how closely Barbour intertwines the development of the Scottish cause, the battle tactics which avail them, and Bruce's own character as an ideal warrior-king.

7. At this point the Battle *incidents* proper cease until Book VII. All subsequent action sequences are either not Battles, or do not involve Bruce directly (James Douglas, for instance, stars in a series of raids on his ancestral lands in Books V and VI). The next Battle in this *cycle* under discussion is Valence's Surprise Attack, which introduces a new tactic into Bruce's strategic repertoire.

8. The scene is set with a paragraph indentation in line VII.495, summarising the final *incident* of the Single Combat *cycle* and placing Bruce in Glen Trool. The principal adversary of the *incident* is named at line 505, with *opportunity* and *plan* components following close behind:

In all yat tyme <u>schyr Aymery</u>	(<i>naming</i>)
With nobill men in cumpany	
Lay in Carlele hys poynt to se,	
And <u>quhen he hard</u> ye certante	
<u>Yat in Glentrewle wes ye king</u>	
<u>& went till hunt & till playing,</u>	(<i>opportunity</i> in <i>quhen (he hard)</i> -clause)
<u>He thocht</u> with hys chewalry	
<u>To cum apon him sodanly</u>	

And fra Carlele on nychtis ryd

And in cowert on dayis bid, (plan 1 with *thocht* formula)

And swagate with syc tranonting

He thoct he suld suppris ye king. (plan 2 with *thocht* formula)

(VII.505-16)

Other familiar Battle components follow, such as the *assembling* of men (VII.517-19) and the *march* to the battlefield (VII.520-24); there is even a present-tense apostrophe on Bruce's danger in lines 525-28.

9. The normal development of a Battle, however, is interrupted by Valence's new *plan* to send a woman to Bruce's camp to spy on them and return to tell Valence of Bruce's strength (VII.529-52). The plot fails when Bruce perceives the woman's treachery with a familiar *recognition* formula:

He [Bruce] beheld hyr mar encrely,

& be hyr contenance him thoct

Yat for gud cummyn wes scho nocht

(VII.562-64)

The spy-woman then reveals the details of Valence's imminent attack, leading to *arming* for battle (VII.572-73), *assembling* (VII.574), the stating of how many knights are in Bruce's army (VII.575), the display of the banner (VII.577), and finally, the ordering of the knights 'in gud aray' (VII.578). The *attack* follows in line 583, with

Bruce himself dealing the first blow of the Battle, taking a bow and arrow out of a man's hand, firing it into Valence's army:

And hyt ye formast in ye hals
Till thropill and wesand 3eid in ij
And he doun till ye erd gan ga.
(VII.590-92)

This *killing* recalls not only the basic *sa/yat* pattern of a single blow plus resulting *carnage* we often find in Single Combats, but more specifically the first slaying of the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*. In both, Bruce takes a bow and arrow from another character and deals the first blow of the fight; and the phrase denoting the actual blow is strikingly similar:

He taisyt ye wyr & leit it fley,
& hyt ye fader in ye ey
Till it rycht in ye harnys ran
& he bakwart fell doun rycht yan
(V.625-28)

10. Bruce also deals the second blow of the Battle, which more closely resembles the familiar charging or rushing in a *sa/yat* pattern with grisly, sanguine

effect. In this instance, however, the result-clause describes only a heartening of Bruce's knights:

He [Bruce] swappyt swiftly out his suord (drawing of the sword)
And on yaim ran sa hardely
Yat all yai off his cumpany (*sa/yat* Battle *nucleus* with atypical
Tuk hardyment off his gud deid, result clause)
For sum yat fryst yar wayis 3eid
Agayne come to ye fycht in hy
And met yar fayis wigosly (*sa/yat* Battle *nucleus*, omitting *sa*)
Yat all ye formast ruschyt war,
(VII.598-605)

As can be seen in the above passage, the result-clause of the second *nucleus* leads directly to the third repetition, which, as it uses the *yai met yaim* formula and contains a result-clause with *yat* (though *sa* is omitted), is practically a textbook example of the prototype nuclear component of a Battle; only the *carnage* element is missing.

11. The result clause of the second (and thus far most prototypical) *nucleus* leads to the most significant development in the entire Battle.

And quhen yai yat war hendermar
Saw yat ye formast left ye sted (*quhen[saw]*-clause)
Yai tornyt sone ye bak & fled

And owt off ye wod yaim withrew. (*retreat*)

(VII.606-09)

The return to the fight of Bruce's (apparently) originally frightened knights causes a general *retreat* on the English side, introduced by a *quhen yai saw* formula, in order to assign a causal relationship: the sight of the vanguard discomfited in a rush causes the rear-guard to flee without fighting; thus Bruce's knights prevail without having to fight the every English knight in the army. Barbour drives this point home by explicitly stating

It discomfortyt yaim [the English] all sua

Yat ye king with his mengne was

All armyt to defend yat place

Yat yai wend throw yar tranonting

Till haiff wonnyn for-owtyn fechtin

(VII.612-16)

and

Yai [the English] war yat tyme sa foully schent ('shamed')

Yat xv C men & ma

With a few mengne war rebotyt swa

Yat yai withdrew yaim schamfully
(VII.622-25)

This Battle represents the opposite of the previously developed tactic of *mycht* combined with *slycht*. It is Valence who attempts to use *slycht*, sending a spy ahead of the attack to gain valuable information. This plan backfires and instead gives Bruce warning of the approach of Valence and his knights. Conversely, Bruce's army wins the day not through tricks or clever strategy, but rather through courage and determination. They were outnumbered at least three to one (VII. 575; 623), yet despite these odds, Bruce simply charged in and frightened Valence's army into retreat. Courage, rather than *slycht*, was the victor here.

12. The Battle of Loudoun Hill emphasises this theme. Like the poem's climax at Bannockburn, Loudoun Hill is an expanded Battle scene, including rhetorical flourishes and other non-formulaic elements to be discussed in the next chapter. It begins with Valence sending Bruce a direct challenge to battle:

He [Valence] send him [Bruce] word & said giff he
Durst him in-to ye planys se
He suld ye x day of May
Cum wndyr Lowdoun hill away,
& giff yat he wald meyt him yar
He said his worschip suld be mar,
& mar be turnyt in nobillay,

To wyn him in ye playne away
With hard dintis in ewyn fechtig
Yen to do fer mar with skulking.
(VIII.131-40)

Though Valence, in the previous Battle, had resorted to the strategy of *slycht*, and though he embraced it in the Battle of Methven at Umfraville's suggestion, his challenge in Book VIII is a call to abandon guerrilla tactics and meet his army 'in ye planys' with 'hard dintis in ewyn fechtig' instead of 'skulking'. It is an anti-*slycht* speech, inherently condescending and carrying an implicit accusation of cowardice. It is no surprise, then, that Bruce 'had dispyt apon gret maner | That schyr Aymer spak sa heyly' (VIII.142-43). He answers the messenger 'irusly' ('angrily', VIII.144), accepting the challenge to meet Valence in Battle at Loudoun Hill.

13. As with all passages of the *Brus* with a literary origin, Duncan doubts the historicity of this challenge and reduces his discussion of it to a conflation of two battles:

Valence's challenge is most improbable and should be regarded as Barbour's chivalric embellishment on information that Bruce knew the battle-site in advance and prepared it. It looks as though Barbour has brought Edirford and Loudoun together because they were fought within a few miles of each other. (1997: 296).

Duncan's opinion that Valence's challenge probably did not occur is undoubtedly sound, yet the scene is more than mere 'chivalric embellishment'. It is analogous to the opening scene of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which is roughly contemporary to Barbour's *Brus*. Two Roman senators have entered Arthur's court and haughtily demand that he pay tribute to Rome, threatening that if he should refuse, he will be captured and caged like a beast (107). Arthur's ensuing rage terrifies the senators; they cower before his visage and beg for mercy before the king even has a chance to reply:

The kynge blyschit one the beryne with his brode eghne,
That fulle brymly for breth brynte as the gledys;
Kest colours as kynge with crouelle lates,
Luked as a lyone, and on his lyppe bytes!
The Romaines for radnesse ruschte to the erthe,
ffore ferdnesse of hys face, as they fey were;
Cowchide as kenetez be-fore ye kynge seluyne,
Be-cause of his contenance confusede theme semede!
(116-23)

Arthur reacts to their new humility with scorn:

Then carpys the conquerour crewelle wordez,--
“Haa! crauaunde knyghte! a cowarde the semez!
Thare [is] some segge in this sale, and he ware sare greuede,

Thow durste noghte for alle Lumberdye luke one hym ones.”

(132-35)

As we have seen, Bruce, too, is angered by the haughty words and condescension of a messenger, and answers him in anger, though the scene is far less elaborate or embellished in Barbour’s work. Nevertheless, the similarity of the two scenes suggests a ‘challenge’ *trope* or *theme*, either formulaic or rhetorical, may have been the source of Barbour’s passage. His intention in using it, then, could have been more than ‘embellishment’.

14. In her article ‘*Wyrchipe: The Clash of Oral-Heroic and Literate-Ricardian Ideals in the Alliterative Morte Arthure*’ (1994), Donna Lynne Rondolone refers to Arthur’s response as a demonstration of ‘heroic anger’, part of the ‘oral-heroic ethos’ (1994: 222). This ‘heroic anger, ‘like that of Achilles or Beowulf,[...] is what has prospered him and his knights: through heroic wrath Arthur has created his kingdom and has successfully protected it from the Romans’ first assault’ (Rondolone 1994: 221-22). This anger, however, makes him a problematic hero, who takes his military campaigns too far, and dies in a state of unrepentant sin. This is not the case with the Bruce of Barbour’s poem, who sins at the beginning of the poem (the murder of Comyn) and subsequently endures great hardship and personal development (Mainer 2004: 191) to die in a state of Christian repentance:

And I thank God yat has me sent

Space in yis lyve me to repent,

For throwch me and my werraying
Off blud has bene rycht gret spilling
Quhar mony sakles men war slayn,
Yarfor yis seknes and yis payn
I tak in thank for my trespas.
(XX.175-81)

This death scene not only contrasts Arthur's, but also that of Edward I, whose death is the result of misleading by evil spirits (IV.219-37) and whose dying words order gruesome execution to the prisoners of war taken at Kildrummy (IV.312-22), and also of Edward Bruce after refusing to wait for reinforcements before fighting against a larger army, whose death Barbour calls 'syne and gret pite' (XVIII.177). We have already seen that Barbour is not only a virtuous and justified king, in contrast to Edward I, but also tempers his courage – and his 'heroic wrath' – with wisdom and prudence, in contrast to Edward Bruce, and the Arthur of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Perhaps for this reason Bruce's response to the challenge of Valence is less elaborated than Arthur's.

15. After the wrath of Bruce's reply has passed, he concentrates his wisdom and intelligence on preparing his army and the battlefield to ensure his own victory, a return of the *slycht* motif. The scene is also embellished with a description of Valence's host, both of which will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four. Regarding the basic components of the Battle of Loudoun Hill, however, it is essentially a repeat of the result of Valence's attack in Book VII. The theme of a smaller but more courageous

force defeating a larger force by frightening the vanguard so much that the rearguard flee without fighting – essentially discomfiting the army through fear – is emphasised by Bruce’s address to his knights before the battle:

Ga we mete yaim sa hardily
Yat ye stowtest of yar meng3e
Off our meting abaysit be,
For gyff ye formast egrely
Be met 3e sall se sodanly
Ye henmaist sall abaysit be.
(VIII.240-45)

This is precisely what occurred in the last Battle, and the plausibility of this tactic is rendered all the more convincing by clothing it in the *sa/yat* pattern which we have so frequently seen in the nuclear components of Battles; though this pattern is by no means exclusive to Battles, the fact that Bruce uses the familiar ‘mete yaim sa hardily | Yat[...] Battle phrase in his speech makes him appear to ‘pre-visualise’ the actual fighting, and the victory of the Scottish knights.

16. The usual nuclear components follow when the fighting begins; unlike the previous Battle, Loudoun hill is noticeably gory, containing the familiar components of ‘speris yat to-fruschy war’ (303), the cry of the wounded (304), and ‘rede blud’ running from ‘woundis raith’ (322). The success of Bruce’s *slycht*-less strategy is first realised in lines 323-26:

Ye hors yat woundyt war gan fling
And ruschyt yar folk in yar flynging
Swa yat yai yat ye formast war
War skalyt in soppys her & yar.

The vanguard, then, have suffered great damage and begin to flee. Two more repetitions of the alternating *nucleus-carnage* pattern lead to precisely the result Bruce predicted in lines 243-45:

Ye remanand sa fleyit war
Yat yai begouth yaim to withdraw,
And quhen yai off ye rerward saw
Yar waward be sa discumfyt
Yai fled for-owtyn mar respyt.

(VIII.340-44)

As in Book VII, the *retreat* is introduced in a *quhen*-clause, in order to impose a causal relationship. Just as Bruce predicted, when the vanguard were scattered, the rearguard fled without fighting.

17. The next significant Battle is actually Bannockburn. In between this monumental conflict and the Battle of Loudoun Hill, however, are two rather brief and very atypical Battles which are worth mentioning. Both of these *incidents* take place in Book IX, while Bruce is ill. The first of these conflicts Duncan calls ‘The skirmishing at

Slioch' (1997: 325). Bruce and his men are lying low at Slioch, awaiting the king's recovery. The Earl of Buchan, however, learns where they are and rides in to attack Bruce while he is at a disadvantage. Many familiar Battle components follow, including the *assembling* (IX.116), the *list* of knights (IX.119-22), the *march* to the battlefield (IX.123-27), even a mention of the ratio by which Bruce's knights are outnumbered: 'And nocht-foryi yar fayis war | Ay twa for ane yat yai war yar' (IX.135-36). These components, however, never lead to a Battle *nucleus*, or at least not to a prototypical one. The armies, in the end, never meet on the battlefield; the fighting is done through archery alone:

Yar archeris furth to yaim yai send
To bykkyr yaim & men off mayne,
And yai send archeris yaim agayne
Yat bykkyrryt yaim sa sturdely
Till yai off ye erlis party
In-till yar battaill drywyn war.
(IX.152-57)

The semantic elements of acts of violence with a result of some kind are present, though the lines do not quite add up to the familiar phrases and patterns we have dealt with so far. Even more unusual is the Battle's conclusion. The two armies are at an impasse, for neither can truly defeat the other. Therefore Bruce's knights lay him in a litter and bear him slowly and with dignity through the ranks of their foes, who are touched by this act

and let the Scots pass to safety and give up fighting (IX.171-86). The next atypical Battle is that of Old Meldrum, which is significant in that Bruce, apparently not yet recovered, leaves his sick-bed to lead his army, saying ‘Yar bost has maid me haile & fer’ (IX.232). Again we find familiar Battle components like the *march* (IX.243-44), *arming* and *ordering* of knights (IX.248-49), and the *charge* (IX.252). The nuclear components, however, do not involve any actual violence; instead, Old Meldrum is a Battle composed entirely of *retreats*:

Retreat 1

Bot quhen yai saw ye nobill king
Cum stoutly on for-owtyn fen³eing
A litill on bridill yai yaim withrew,
(IX.255-57)

Retreat 2

And ye king yat rycht weill knew
Yat yai war all discumfit ner
Pressyt on yaim with his baner
And yai withdrew yaim mar & mar.
(IX.258-61)

Retreat 3

And quhen ye small folk yai had yar

Saw yar lordis withdraw yaim swa

Yai turnyt ye bak all & to-ga

And fled all scalyt her & yar.

(IX.262-65)

Retreat 4

Ye lordis yat 3yet to-gydder war

Saw yat yar small folk war fleand

And saw ye king stoutly cummand,

Yai war ilkane abaysit swa

Yat yai ye bak gave and to-ga,

A litill stound samyn held yai

And syne ilk man has tane his way.

(IX.266-72)

It would seem that the strategy of simply charging into battle courageously and defeating the larger army through fear, as practiced in the Valence's Surprise Attack in Book VII and the Battle of Loudoun Hill in Book VIII is now so successful that Bruce's knights do not actually need to land a single blow. Though it is possible that Barbour's omission of the nuclear component is a radical form of emphasis, I suggest that for the audience to accept this *incident* the *nucleus* must be so established as to be almost superfluous: one perceives it in its proper place among other Battle components even when it is not present. In a similar way the human ear learns to perceive the major third

even when only the root and fifth are played. Furthermore, that the nuclear component can be absent is in line with prototype categorisation, which does not tend to posit any ‘essential features’ which *must* be present in all category members, preferring instead a number of more or less heavily weighted attributes. The *nucleus* may be the most heavily-weighted attribute in an *incident*, but can be omitted if other, sufficiently important components are present in great number.

3.4.3 Bannockburn

1. The Battle of Bannockburn is the most important *incident*, event, and episode in the entire poem. It involves all three principal Scottish knights, Robert and Edward Bruce and James Douglas, as well as Edward II. Valence and Umfraville also have important parts to play. It is the climax of the poem, the culmination of the upward surge of the Scottish campaign thus far, and the lasting victory remembered today even by those who have never read Barbour’s poem.

2. Bannockburn is actually an intersection of two Battle *cycles*: it is simultaneously the final, climactic *incident* of the *cycle* we have been examining and an early *incident* of the *cycle* developing the character of Edward Bruce as an imprudent, overly-courageous contrast to his wiser and more temperate brother. Lois Ebin estimates that ‘over 2,000 lines are reserved for the episodes relating to the Battle of Bannockburn’ with ‘more than 1,500 of these lines[...] devoted to the action of the two days of battle’ (1971-72: 218). Obviously we cannot examine all these lines in detail, and many of them involve non-formulaic embellishment and amplification.

3. Bannockburn may be said to begin in Book XI, though its immediate root is at the end of Book X. A list of places taken by Edward Bruce begins at X.793, ending with the siege he set on Stirling Castle. Sir Phillip Mowbray, warden of the castle, offers to surrender the castle a year from the coming Midsummer if it has not been rescued by force by then (X.826-29). Edward Bruce's agreement to these terms are criticised twice: once by Edward II and his army, after hearing the news from Mowbray (XI.11-20), and once by Robert the Bruce himself (XI.33-52). Long sections of preparation for battle and rhetorical descriptions of the English host follow, as well as long descriptions of the size and arrangement of both the English and Scottish armies, and finally, the famous digging of pits by the roadside, the final preparations for the English advance, and Bruce's false report of the size of Edward II's army. The actual fighting does not begin until XI.580, when a knight of the English side, Sir William Daincourt, attacks the army of Thomas Randolph, now Earl of Moray, fighting for the Scottish cause. Moray's small army slays him quickly (XI.582-84), but are soon hemmed in by the English and James Douglas proposes to help him (XI.641-47).

4. We do not see the end of Moray's combat yet, however, for Barbour breaks away and narrates Bruce's own defeat of Henry de Bohun. This *incident* acts like a reprise of the Single Combat, for it introduces a new character who attacks the king alone, intending to kill him with a *thocht* formula: 'He thoct yat he suld weill lychtly | Wyn him and haf him at his will' (XII.46-47). The *killing*, also, resembles that of a Single Combat:

And he [Bruce] yat in his sterapys stud
With ye ax yat wes hard & gud
With sua gret mayne raucht him a dynt
Yat noyer hat na helm mycht stynt
Ye hewy dusche yat he him gave
Yat ner ye heid till ye harnys clave.
Ye hand-ax schaft fruschit in twa,
And he doune to ye erd gan ga.
All flatlynys for him faillyt mycht.
(XII.51-59)

Some of the familiar Single Combat elements are present in this scene, though the *killing* itself is significantly longer than the Single Combat *nuclei* we have seen so far; in addition, Bruce only ‘nearly’ cleaved Sir Henry’s head to the brains, a significant semantic variation on the more prototypical pattern. Finally, this is not an isolated *incident*, but part of the Battle of Bannockburn; as Barbour reminds us in the next line, ‘Yis wes ye fryst strak off ye fycht’ (XII.60) – presumably indicating that Moray’s skirmish takes place slightly later than Bruce’s, or that it is somehow peripheral to the main battle. The immediate result of Bruce’s fight is that the English retreat for the time being. This enheartens the Scottish knights, who chase the English and slay some of them (XII.62-86).

5. The greatest deviation from the established Single Combat pattern, however, is the *reaction* of Bruce’s men:

Ye lordis off his cumpany
Blamyt him as yai durst gretumly
Yat he him put in auentur
To mete sa styth a knyght and sture
In sic poynt as he yan wes sene,
For yai said weill it mycht haiff bene
Cause off yar tynsaill euerilkan.
(XII.89-95)

Instead of praising Bruce for his great feat – which, after all led to the retreat of the English battalion – his men upbraid him for needlessly risking his life. In place of the *humility* component, Bruce merely refused to respond to their criticism:

Ye king ansuer has maid yaim nane
Bot menyt his handax schaft yat sua
Was with ye strak brokyn in twa.
(XII.96-98)

Barbour is again exploring concepts of courage and wisdom. According to the complaint of his knights, Bruce had acted with the rashness and recklessness we might expect of Edward Bruce. However, the same can also be said of the three attacks on larger armies Bruce has led in Books VII, VIII, and IX respectively; each of these were

nonetheless as successful as the king's fight with Henry de Bohun. Perhaps, having already developed Bruce's wisdom and prudence, Barbour must now reinforce his courage, lest he become a true coward, or a character incapable of valiant action, like Umfraville. This scene also warrants comparison with the killing of John Comyn, as both are instances of Bruce spontaneously attacking an opponent without due reflection on the consequences. However, whereas Comyn's death signalled a process of repentance through hardship and a painstaking development of Bruce's character as the ideal warrior-king, at Bannockburn both processes are complete: the audience is acquainted with Bruce's many virtues, and his initial transgression is sufficiently redeemed, allowing the Scots a series of victories of which Bannockburn is the culmination.

6. Immediately after the killing of de Bohun, we return to Douglas's assistance of Moray (XII.105ff.). Douglas, however, sees Moray's army performing well enough, and leaves them to win honour on their own (XII.114-29). We then witness the successful conclusion of Moray's Battle (XII.130-70), followed by a series of extended direct addresses by Bruce to his knights and preparations for another day of fighting, which take us up to XII.447. It is at this point that Barbour sets up a contrast with the Battle of Methven, with which the Scottish misfortune began in earnest. The reader will recall that in at Methven, Umfraville advised Valence to trick the Scots into going off to camp and removing their armour, a ploy which turned out to be very successful. Just so, on the morning of the second day of Bannockburn, Umfraville advises Edward II on another subtle strategy. His advice to Valence in Book II began with the phrase 'Schir giff yat 3e will trow to me' (II.260); in Book XII he says

Bot and 3e will trow my consaill ('if')

3e sall discomfy yaim lychtly.

(XII.460-61)

Umfraville advises Edward to feign a retreat, which will trick the Scots into breaking ranks and rushing in to chase them. Once they are scattered, the English can then turn about and rush the Scots who, being out of array, will make for easier prey (XII.462-73). Unlike Valence, however, Edward rejects Umfraville's advice:

'I will nocht,' said ye king, 'perfay

Do sa, for yar sall na man say

Yat I sall eschew ye bataill

Na withdraw me for sic rangaile.'

(XII.473-76)

His words recall the response of the three men who attacked Bruce in the Hunting Incident in Book VII

'Perfay,' quod ane yan off ye thre,

'Sall na man say we dred ye swa

Yat we with arowys sall ye sla.'

(VII.450-52)

and, more importantly, Edward Bruce's last words before rushing needlessly to his own death

Sall na man say quhill I may drey

Yat strenth of men sall ger me fley.

(XVIII.53-54)

We have uncovered another formulaic phrase here: the *sall na man say* formula, which apparently heralds death or defeat to those who speak it. It is imperative to note that each of these three examples involves characters who act rashly to avoid the appearance of cowardice, in two cases ignoring advice which would have altered their fate, and in one case succumbing to a taunting ploy to give up advantage in combat. By inserting this phrase into the Battle of Bannockburn, Barbour not only makes this the polar opposite of the Battle of Methven, but, as with the culmination of the Single Combat *cycle*, creates in this Battle a balance of courage and wisdom: the outnumbered Scots demonstrate courage in fighting on against the odds, and wisdom in tactics like the digging of pots in the battlefield. Also, Bruce himself makes a courageous, though possibly foolhardy charge at Sir Henry de Bohun, while a clever battle strategy which could have availed Edward II is rejected in favour of a proud and probably foolhardy direct advance. The two themes are brought together in this climax of Bruce's Battle *cycle* and of the poem itself, marking the point at which the Wheel of Fortune has brought the Scots to their highest point.

7. Bannockburn is the mid-point of Barbour's narrative. As I have mentioned above, the action of this episode alternates concepts of courage and wisdom. Nevertheless, as the killing of Henry de Bohun suggests, Bruce's own character development is now complete: Barbour no longer needs to qualify or comment upon his actions. His knights find Bruce's attack on de Bohun rash, but the attack was successful, and Bruce does not respond to their criticism. Instead, major commentary about wisdom in warfare is deflected to other characters, especially Edward II, whose rejection of Umfraville's prudent advice provides a counter-example to Valence in the Battle of Methven. This is not to say that Bruce is now above the Wheel of Fortune: indeed, Barbour's narrative will continue until Bruce's own death (and beyond, to Douglas's worthy end in Spain), where, as we shall see in the next chapter, the Scottish King becomes an anti-type to Edward I. From Bannockburn forward, however, the development of other characters – especially Edward Bruce – will dominate the narrative.

8. Thus far I have outlined the ways in which Barbour weaves together recurring *incidents* and meaningful variation in order to advance an interpretation of the events of Bruce's War of Independence and of the character of Bruce himself. I have focused mainly on passages whose similarity of phrase and meaning invite discussion of formulaic composition, and hopefully I have demonstrated the cyclical arrangement of these *incidents* convincingly enough. Barbour did not, however, advance his interpretation of his narrative solely through this cyclical arrangement, nor did he trust his audience to perceive his emphases through the structure of the *incidents* and *cycles* alone. At key points in the narrative, Barbour interjects non-formulaic commentary,

often based on Latin-derived rhetorical techniques with which his education as a cleric would certainly have made him familiar. These rhetorical passages are the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Four
Non-Formulaic *Brus*:
Barbour as Rhetorician

4.1 Another Side of the *Brus*

1. In chapter one I discussed the problem of the genre of the *Brus* with reference to the problem of traditional interpretations of the poem, i.e. either strictly as history (in the modern sense), as romance, as epic, or as any other single genre, without consideration of the rich variety of narrative types from which the poem draws. Investigation of the background (or backgrounds) of the genre and tradition of Barbour's poem leads naturally to the broader discussion of the rhetorical training he would have received.

2. Barbour, as a cleric, would undoubtedly have possessed a high level of education; we could surmise this even if we did not have testimony of his studies at Oxford and Paris (McDiarmid and Stevenson 1985: 5-6). And even if we chose to see an illiterate or semi-literate minstrel behind every medieval romance beginning with 'Harkenet to me, gode men', it is impossible to suppose one such lies behind the *Brus*. Barbour's status as archdeacon of Aberdeen alone contradicts this, even if he assumed an unlearned persona in narrating his poem, which he does not.

3. In previous chapters I have discussed Barbour's arrangement of plot events in such an order as to promote a specific interpretation of the poem, and I have hinted that medieval rhetoric and rhetorical passages aid and underscore this arrangement, working in conjunction with oral-derived, formulaic language. Barbour's rhetorical background is made apparent in the proem of the *Brus* (I.1-36), just as his grasp of the technique of oral narrative shows in his use of the *exhortation* 'motifeme' later (I.445-76). In the examination of *historic* formulae and recurring *incidents*, I outlined a structure of the

Brus consisting of cycles of repeated incidents, each following a basic structural pattern and employing a relatively limited stock of formulaic phrases, though some incidents are elaborated and expanded using non-formulaic digressions. The formulaic represents the oral or vernacular tradition in which the *Brus* participates: a tradition of heroic poetry in overlapping genres like epic, romance, and *chanson de geste*. In the following chapter, I will investigate the literate (that is, scholastic or Latin-derived) models from which Barbour could have drawn in undertaking his important task.

4. As mentioned in chapter two, the terms ‘orality’ and ‘literacy’, are still part of a volatile polemic in contemporary scholarship. Even the classic study of orality, Walter J. Ong’s *Orality and Literacy*, has been called into question by scholars such as Joyce Coleman, and in place of two discrete categories of opposing mind-sets, we now tend to think of orality and literacy as points on a continuous spectrum, overlapping at their peripheries as do any prototype categories. Medieval rhetoric is by no means a stable ground either. Few rhetorical manuals specialising in verse survive from before the fourteenth century (Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria Nova* being a famous exception), and those that do simply cannot satisfactorily account for all of Barbour’s narrative technique or arrangement. We shall even find that referring to treatises such as Geoffrey’s *Poetria Nova* as ‘rhetoric’ is something of a misnomer. With these necessary caveats borne in mind, it will be suggested here that Barbour employed knowledge from both the vernacular and scholastic spheres to create his ‘planned and purposeful’ – and indeed, learned – poem, which speaks not only to the educated classes, but to the Scottish nation at large, and in their mother tongue at that.¹

4.2 *The Brus* as a Scholarly Poem

1. More than a century ago T. F. Henderson, in his *Scottish Vernacular Literature* (1898), called Barbour's *Brus* 'an original venture in literature – the first poetical effort in Scotland to break away from the wonders of the old romances' (46). He goes on to assert that '[l]ike Chaucer, Barbour had no poetic predecessor worthy of the name.[...] Barbour is virtually the father of Scottish literature, just as Chaucer is the father of English literature' (46). Henderson was no doubt a great admirer of Barbour's poem, or at least took great rhetorical pains to appear so, but in our era his comments are apt to seem a bit overzealous. A critic can now accommodate the idea of traditionalism in 'great literature' more easily than some of our foregoers, who seemed to require some form of 'originality' or 'innovation' in a literary work before they could consider it great. Since Lord's *Singer of Tales*, however (if not much earlier), the existence of originality within a highly traditional framework has been an acceptable notion to scholars of ancient and medieval literature, especially to those whose studies take them into oral culture and formulaic language.

2. In a sense, it is the common problem of every study of Barbour's *Brus* that the poem has no immediate relatives, either older or younger, who bear enough resemblance to establish comfortable genre-classification. Then again, if Barbour truly had no predecessors, as Henderson suggests, he could never have set pen to parchment or composed a single line of verse. In calling Barbour the 'father of Scottish literature', Henderson reiterates the corresponding title once given to Chaucer (even while attempting to remove Barbour from Chaucer's company). Derek Brewer, however, is able to avoid calling Chaucer the Father of English Poetry/Literature and, with as much

respect for the author of the *Canterbury Tales* as any critic has, he reminds us that '[a]ll poets need a prepared language and an accepted tradition to begin to write in, or they could not begin at all; a poet's stock-in-trade is words, not "life" or "feelings" or "ideas"' (1984: 8). Jeremy Smith makes a similar point regarding the Older Scots poets:

Although poets may be inspired by that unfashionable faculty, genius, their idiom derives from the language around them.[...] Older Scots poets wrote as they wrote because they wrote when and where they wrote. If they had written in another time, at another place, they would have written differently about different things. (2003: 198)

Literature of any kind (even purely oral) is an art of language, and language is the material the poets uses to create art. But language implies a community, and community implies an ideology, and ideology suggests a tradition. If language is the poet's paint, tradition is the canvas.

3. We can assume, then, not only that Barbour's *Brus* was not created *ex nihilo*, but that it *could not have been*. Indeed, even if the *Brus* was 'an effort to break away from the wonders of the old romances', as Henderson claims (46), Barbour must at least have had a romance tradition to work against, which would provide a kind of negative predecessor. Furthermore, if Barbour had had 'no predecessor worthy of the name', where did he find his poem's rhetorical opening, the digressions like the famous Praise of Freedom and his comparisons from Classical and Celtic mythology? We begin to see that it is not the absence of predecessors which plagues *Brus*-criticism, but rather the

plethora of them. Far from positing no traditions from which to draw material and technique, we should say rather that there is simply no single poem so similar to the *Brus* as to provide an unambiguous analogue, a model for (or even an imitation of) Barbour's work. The Middle English romances, as Susan Wittig demonstrates, have considerable structural and stylistic similarity even when they do not, as the Arthurian romances do, share the same well of material (1978: 5, 179). Against this similarity, Barbour's *Brus* seems to stand alone: its resemblance to *romans* is foiled by its resemblance to *historia*; its resemblance to *chronica* is foiled by its vivid narrative style, recalling the epic and *chansons de geste* genres. The seemingly obvious connection to make is with Hary's *Wallace*, but that work is so different from Barbour's that at times any resemblance seems an accident of subject matter.² But though there is no single medieval work resembling Barbour's *Brus*, within the whole of medieval literature – both in Latin and in the French and English vernaculars – there are models enough to inspire every aspect of Barbour's poem; as an educated cleric, Barbour would certainly have had access to a wide range of literature.

4.2.1 Rhetoric in Poetry

1. What has rhetoric to do with poetry, especially formulaic, oral-derived poetry? Given the authoritative and prescriptive rules we associate with it, to say nothing of its perceived residence in literate, Latin-derived, rather than oral culture, rhetoric would seem to be the antithesis of formulaic poetry. The word *rhetoric*, however, comes from the Greek *tekhné rhetoriké*, the 'art of the speaker' or of 'public speaking'. Its roots, then, are in an oral tradition, even if by the Middle Ages that

tradition had long been analysed, written down, and transformed, as oral culture in Ancient Greece and Rome gave way to literacy. The same might have befallen formulaic composition-in-performance if the circumstances had been right: if certain oral cultures had developed their own writing systems, proceeded to analyse their methods of verse-composition, and developed handbooks full of prescriptive rules describing, for example, which formulae are appropriate to which scenes, etc. Perhaps this analysis and transcription of the formulaic method is finally occurring with the work of Parry, Lord, and their many followers, as well as studies like the present one. Rather than viewing the terms *formulaic* and *rhetorical* as antithetical, we may do better to consider formulaic composition a kind of ‘vernacular rhetoric’.

2. Brewer suggests that a student of medieval poetry is perhaps in a better position to understand and accept the connection between rhetoric and poetry than one of Modern verse, but he also reminds us that all poetry is rhetorical in some sense:

A medieval poet was particularly dependent on a formed verbal tradition; he needed it to help himself, and also to fulfil that other essential demand of the rhetoric of poetry, to communicate with the audience. No poet could stand up in his pulpit before the audience, as medieval poets did, if he was not prepared to use a poetic language with which his audience was reasonably familiar, and which it could be expected to understand and even to like. Such concepts of a recognisable, indeed conventional, style, appropriate to both subject-matter and audience, consciously chosen with the desire to communicate interest and pleasure, are remote

from most modern theories of poetry. They are the concepts of medieval rhetoric. Before condemning them we should realise that some sort of rhetoric is the basis of any poetry. (Brewer 1984: 8)

Brewer seems to assert the very concept of ‘vernacular rhetoric’ I suggested above; for although Chaucer especially is known to have been well-versed in Latin rhetorical manuals (to the extent of naming the rhetorician Geoffrey of Vinsauf), Brewer here writes of a ‘formed verbal tradition’ which a poet could use ‘in his pulpit’ to communicate with a listening audience, presumably in a vernacular like Middle English. Brewer is, after all, writing about Chaucer, and ‘Chaucer’s language *was* Middle English[...]’; he ‘inherited a particular English style, which he enriched by his borrowings from French and Italian and Latin’ (1984: 8). As long as poetry was at least delivered orally – as it was in the time of Chaucer and Barbour (Coleman 1996: xiii) – a poet would have to communicate directly with an audience, in a medium (the *spoken* word) which was by its nature ephemeral and (to use Ong’s term) *evanescent*, allowing little or no opportunity for leisurely consideration of the material and the way it was presented. The formulaic vocabulary of English (and Scots) narrative poetry was a legitimating feature, conferring authority and authenticity upon the work; it was an identifying feature, helping the audience recognise the generic context and participate properly in the experience of hearing the poem read aloud. Thus the arrangement of words into recognisable, even predictable formulaic expressions was as important for communicating with the intended audience as the language itself. Whether we call it ‘traditional’ or ‘(oral-)formulaic’, this vernacular rhetoric was indeed a set of rules an

author who wished to communicate was obliged to follow to some extent, whether composing with or without writing. Therefore a scene in Barbour's *Brus* must begin *on ye morn, quhen day wes lycht*; Robert the Bruce, James Douglas, and even their principal English opponents must be *wys and wycht*, or *hardy off hart & hand*. Therefore, in battle scenes, two battalions invariably charge each other until their *speris al to-fruschit war*; and *ye grass woux off ye blud al red*; therefore so many speeches and dialogues begin with *sa God me sawe*; and almost every action is performed *in hy* or *forowtyn let*.

3. But the poem we know as *The Brus* was not composed only by John Barbour, Older Scots vernacular poet, but also by John Barbour, archdeacon of Aberdeen, educated at Oxford and Paris *inter alia*. Barbour's training in the scholastic rhetoric of medieval Latin shows itself in the poem's rhetorical opening and in digressions such as those in praise of Freedom or Valour or on the dangers of treason and the folly of prophecy, and also in the less visible aspects of the poem such as the use of classical rhetorical concepts *inventio* and *dispositio*. Barbour the Scots romancer or 'singer of tales' gives the poem much of its appearance, but Barbour the medieval rhetorician 'discovered' the subject-matter and the approach to it, and 'arranged' it to suit his purpose.

4. Other critics of Barbour's *Brus*, including Ebin, have noted the rhetorical nature of the poem. Bernice Kliman even concluded from her study of rhetoric and the *Brus* that Barbour "invented" an original arrangement of events, a misinterpretation similar to Henderson's nearly a century earlier. Just as no precise analogue for the *Brus* exists in the genres of epic, romance, or *chanson de geste*, so no single surviving

rhetorical manual can decode Barbour's arrangement of events in his poem. But, as I stated above, we should not assume Barbour had no predecessors just because the variety of sources and traditions are not conveniently contained in one predecessor whose example Barbour followed and possibly expanded. The absence of one succinct and easily referenced source of Barbour's poetic style does not imply that there were no traditional tools with which to build his great poem, for, to reiterate Brewer's point, without such traditions, Barbour could not even have begun to compose, regardless of how much further his own contribution developed that tradition.

4.2.2 Rhetoric in the Middle Ages

1. Ruth Morse includes a discussion of medieval rhetorical training early on in her *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*. Although she apologises to those readers for whom such a discussion would be a review, it is nonetheless a first practical step to understanding the cultural *milieu* that could be brought to bear on the work of an author of Barbour's background.

2. Rhetoric was one of the seven liberal arts; along with grammar and dialectic it formed the *Trivium* (Lewis 1964: 186). But medieval scholars inherited this syllabus from antiquity, and often studied it without regard to the way it had changed its application in the centuries since Aristotle:

Medieval writers could refer to rhetoric, to rhetorical texts, to writers on rhetoric without ever defining what they meant. They continued to converse with what they took to be Antiquity's Rhetoric as a standard, a

syllabus, or a discipline, without ever restricting the subject to a specific course of study (Morse 1991: 16).

C. S. Lewis writes that 'Dialectic is concerned with proving', and is an art of disputation, of argument (1964: 189). For the other two of the *Trivium*, more pertinent to poetry, Lewis offers the following summary: 'Everything that we should now call criticism belonged either to Grammar or to Rhetoric. The Grammarian explained a poet's metre and allusions: the Rhetorician dealt with structure and style' (1964: 190). Earlier he suggests that Grammar 'included all that is required for "making up" a "set book": syntax, etymology, prosody, and the explanation of allusions' (1964: 187). Considering our contemporary meaning of rhetoric as 'bombast, words without content'³ (Morse 1991: 16) and the more ancient derivation of rhetoric from the art of public speaking, it must be hard to imagine what this subject could really have to do with literature. 'Rhetoricians had trained the governing citizens of Athens' writes Morse (1991: 16), and Cicero, the great orator of Ancient Rome, brings to mind the technique of forensic speech, the art of persuasion in a judicial setting. Given grammar's more obvious connection to aesthetic applications of language, how did rhetoric come to be associated with literature in the first place?

3. The answer appears to be twofold. On the one hand, practical, especially forensic applications of rhetoric were restricted or eliminated in late antiquity when democratic and republican forms of government gave way to imperialism and autocracy; on the other hand, the close connection between grammar and rhetoric eventually led to confusion between the two originally autonomous subjects, so that

medieval writers referring to rhetoric may have actually meant something closer to grammar.

4. Rhetoric, as I have stated above, is at least etymologically derived from ancient Greek, though it was transmitted to the European Middle Ages in Latin, the language of Ancient Rome. For our purposes, we will begin the history of rhetoric in Europe with Aristotle, who is, as J. J. Murphy writes in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, author of ‘the oldest extant textbook on the subject’ (Murphy 1974: 4). Murphy believes that ‘[a]ny study of the development of Western theories of communication must begin with the first impulses toward laying down precepts[...]for future discourse’ (1974: 3). Rhetoric is therefore (unsurprisingly) inherently preceptive. Aristotle, however, takes a ‘consistently philosophical approach to the problems of communication[...]. He is more concerned with the principles of art than with its technique, and to this end he keeps his discussions at a high level of abstraction’ (Murphy 1974: 7).

5. Aristotle wrote not only the oldest rhetorical treatise, but also the oldest work of what we would call literary criticism, and his famous *Poetics*, when viewed in contrast with Plato’s *Republic*, describes a controversy the echoes of which were to have a major impact on rhetoric in the Middle Ages:

Aristotle based his judgment of poetry upon aesthetic grounds alone; he censured and praised with an eye to the artistic character of a work, and not to its ethical teaching. By so doing he gave substance to a theory that was directly opposed to the prevailing Greek conception, according to which the poet was an inspired teacher whose song held in solution a

code of morals. It was the ethical idea alone which had been recognized by Plato, who, when he reasoned that the influence of poetry was hurtful, considered that he took away from it its only excuse for existence; he thought of it as a vehicle for the transmission of morality, but not as an artistic product which accomplished its object by arousing pleasure through its exquisite form. (Myers 1901: 10)

Thus Aristotle's emphasis is not only philosophical, but also aesthetic, and while his view of rhetoric concerns 'the principles of art' rather than 'technique', his view of poetry is primarily concerned with aesthetics and technique, touching the moral or ethical concerns not at all. This debate over technique versus meaning will resurface as a major dilemma for the Church Fathers in the early Christian Era.

6. Rome inherited the learning of Greece, though it seems her rhetoricians had little in common with Aristotle:

Roman rhetoric has such a distinctively homogenous flavor, and is so traditionally associated with the name of Cicero that it seems fair to describe the works of Cicero, Quintilian, and the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as partaking of a common tradition which could properly be called "Ciceronian." (Murphy 1974: 8).

All the rhetorical treatises of this Roman, Ciceronian tradition 'make efficiency – that is, the procuring of results – the main criterion of good speech' and 'all are practical

rather than philosophical,' and 'represent a departure from the Peripatetic tradition represented most fully by Aristotle' (Murphy 1974: 9).

7. In the days of the Roman republic, public speaking was a useful, even vital part of public life.

The ancient teachers of Rhetoric addressed their precepts to orators in an age when public speaking was an indispensable skill for every public man – even for a general in the field – and for every private man if he got involved in litigation. Rhetoric was then not so much the loveliest [...] as the most practical of the arts (Lewis 1964: 190).

But whenever any initially practical art or skill becomes obsolete, when the situations which enabled or necessitated its use cease to exist, one can expect that skill, if it survives at all, to become a mere ornamental display of form and style with no purpose beyond the display itself. Such a change occurred when the practical function of rhetorical training was removed. 'Education increasingly stressed the techniques of good speaking and writing [*ars rhetorica*] until, with the end of participatory democracy in Greece, and, similarly, the end of the Roman Republic, those techniques were divorced from the political life that had once been their reason for being' (Morse 1991: 18). In other words, with the shift away from democracy, the governed no longer had any role in government; public life was closed to the non-ruling classes, who ceased to have any practical use for deliberative or forensic speech. 'Indeed, the less the declamations were grounded in the possibilities of real action, the more extravagant the

speakers became: when the subject was imaginary, with no consequences dependent on its outcome, method and style became all' (Morse 1991: 19).

8. This environment in which the aesthetics of discourse outweighed its meaning and purpose led to the 'Second Sophistic' period.

Historians of rhetoric commonly apply the term "Second Sophistic" to that period (approximately a.d. 50 to 400) which is characterized by exaggerated interest in oratorical declamation. The practice of *declamatio*, or discourse upon a stated theme, was common in schools as early as Cicero, but the political events of the first Christian centuries made it increasingly difficult for speakers to apply their intensive schooling to public affairs. The schools, however, continued to train Romans in verbal facility, but since forensic oratory was restricted more and more to legal specialists, and deliberative oratory was forbidden by the autocratic Caesars, the energies of Roman speakers turned to the elaborate development of epideictic or demonstrative oratory. Schoolroom exercises became public speeches, and the necessity of entertaining audiences placed a premium upon methods of amplification. (Murphy 1974: 35-6)

Political changes decreased public participation in government and what had once been called *res publicae* (public affairs), but the educational system remained unchanged. Students were still trained in rhetoric, but with no possibility of producing results, there

remained no purpose for public speaking other than impressing the audience with gratuitous eloquence. The aesthetics of speaking became an end in itself, and poetry is the most aesthetic form of discourse.

9. At the same time, seeds of confusion between the practical province of rhetoric and the literary one of grammar were already at work in the Ciceronian tradition of ancient Rome. Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* 'proposes a complete system for the education of the ideal orator, based upon both grammatical and rhetorical training', thus establishing 'a close connection between *grammatica* and *rhetorica*' (Murphy 1974: 22), though it is clear that he himself regards them as separate fields (Murphy 1974: 24). Later Donatus, whose treatises on grammar were so common that his very name came to mean 'primer' (Lewis 1964: 188), 'lays the groundwork for the confusion of rhetoric and grammar by including *scemata* [sic] and *tropi* in his *Ars grammatici*' (Murphy 1974: 42). Horace is famous for his *Ars poetica*, which might only be considered a work of grammar (in the sense of literary criticism, like Aristotle's *Poetics*) but for a curious anomaly, or development. While it is 'difficult to see how a reader could learn to construct a play or write a poem merely by reading the *Ars poetica*' (Murphy 1974: 31), its 'comments are not merely judgments about the merit of previously completed works[...]. They extend into the future. The *Ars poetica* thus becomes a prescriptive or preceptive document' (Murphy 1974: 32). In other words, Horace takes literature and commentary on literature – properly the field of grammar – and attempts to create precepts for creating future works – hitherto the province of rhetoric.

10. This preceptive attitude so characteristic of rhetoric thus invades the world of literary criticism. Murphy identifies six Latin works on writing poetry ‘which can only be called preceptive’: Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars Versificatoria*; Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria Nova* and *Documentum de Modo et Arte Dictandi et Versificandi*; Gervase of Melkley’s *Ars Versificaria*; John of Garland’s *De Arte Prosayca, Metrica, et Rithmica*; and Eberhard the German’s *Laborintus* (Murphy 1974: 135).

Each one attempts to provide advice for a writer wishing to compose verse in the future. To the extent that each work distills the precepts born of experience and observation and transmits these as injunctions for discovery, order, plan, and wording, then to that extent each of the six shares in the essence of that preceptive spirit which has always characterized rhetoric. (Murphy 1974: 135)

That is, each of these works, being preceptive, participates in the tradition of rhetoric and rhetorical treatises. ‘Yet at the same time it is clear that all the authors were teachers of the *ars grammatica*, not the *ars rhetorica*. All looked to the production of written materials rather than the oral *oratio* which had been characteristic of ancient rhetoric’ (Murphy 1974: 135-36). And grammar, as it included literature, naturally brought with it examinations of poetry.

The *ars grammatica* included not only correctness in speaking or writing (*ars recte loquendi*) but also the further study of what we would today

call literature (*enarratio poetarum*), or the analysis and interpretation of existing literary works[...]. When Donatus and then Priscian recorded the standard rules for the Latin language, they quite naturally included examples from[...] “literature,” for instance, Virgil’s *Aeneid*. (Murphy 1974: 136-37)

11. We have seen a confusion between the overlapping magisteria of grammar and rhetoric, so that the prescriptive attitude of rhetorical manuals can be applied to works of grammar, what we would now call literary criticism. We have also seen a fading of the practical applications of public speaking so that the only aim of rhetorical training is aesthetic. Now we see that the famous medieval rhetoricians dealing with poetry are more properly grammarians with a preceptive approach to their subject, following Horace. Finally, we can see a preceptive attitude toward metrics evidenced in Great Britain as early as the eighth century. Bede, who is possibly the earliest English rhetorician – judging by his *Liber de schematibus et tropis* – presents in his *De Arte Metrica* a ‘distillation of the standard grammatical lore on that particular subject, abstracted from its usual surroundings in an *ars grammatica* and broken into two separate parts’ (Murphy 1974: 77, 79). Thus we can see all the steps from rhetoric being entirely separate from literature to such a confusion of their respective domains that the one can be confused for the other.

12. Aristotle had treated rhetoric and poetry separately (Abrams 1999: 268). And yet we have seen that all functions of the modern discipline of criticism are encompassed by grammar or rhetoric. ‘By the Middle Ages [Rhetoric] has become

literary. Its precepts are addressed quite as much to poets as to advocates. There is no antithesis, indeed no distinction, between Rhetoric and Poetry' (Lewis 1964: 190-91). This may not at first be unexpected to a modern critic, used to viewing a work of art as a product of a particular world-view and thus arguing for – persuading the audience to accept – that world-view. We can perhaps attribute a similar awareness to educated authors in the Middle Ages. In any case, the application of rhetoric to poetry is implied in the third class of oratory, the Epideictic: “display rhetoric,” used on appropriate, usually ceremonial, occasions to enlarge upon the praiseworthiness (or sometimes, the blameworthiness) of a person or group of persons’, of which the *ode* is a poetic example (Abrams 1999: 269). Another consideration is that, in the absence of a context for the practical uses of rhetoric, where the majority of citizens or subjects have no direct participation in judicial or administrative affairs, art – though perhaps once only a minor application – becomes the primary use of rhetorical training.

4.2.3 The Limitations of Rhetorical Training

1. Bernice Kliman’s 1977 article ‘John Barbour and Rhetorical Tradition’ (*Annuaire Mediaevale* 18) suggests that Barbour ‘adopt[ed] what he could from rhetorical theory and practice’, but as this could only take him so far, he was forced to ‘devise his own new stylistic formulations’ which ‘succeed[ed] admirably well in his purpose of writing a true story[...]’ (135). Like Henderson, Kliman suggests, in effect, that Barbour innovated a new way of writing narrative verse, whether romance, history, biography, or the combination we observe in *Brus*. This is a bold assertion, considering the high degree of conventionality not only in romance, but in all categories of narrative

in the Middle Ages. Kliman most likely adopts this view because, structurally, the *Brus* hardly resembles any previously existing narrative poem in Britain or elsewhere in Europe. Having no precursor in medieval romance or *artes rhetorici*, Kliman supposes the structure and arrangement of the *Brus* must be the result of Barbour's own ingenuity.

2. Kliman understands that the surviving medieval rhetorical manuals are an imperfect guide to the poetic conventions of the Middle Ages, but she is mistaken about the relationship they propose between form and content: '[t]he limitations of the medieval rhetorics are apparent in their topics, for they are not concerned, or concerned to a very small degree, with genre, structure, or the ordering and selection of material, effect, and the welding of meaning and language' (Kliman 1977: 107-08). Although she mentions the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, her main source is Geoffrey of Vinsauf, whom she accuses of treating only 'arrangement[...], methods of amplification and[...] abbreviation[...], and most fully[...] ornaments of style' (108). Margaret F. Nims dispels the misconception that medieval rhetoricians place form and style above content in the introduction to her translation of the *Poetria Nova*:

The emphasis on verbal expression in the *artes [rhetorici]* does not necessarily imply, on the part of their authors, subordination of content to style. Early in his treatise Geoffrey states that *Poetria*, as an art of words, is the handmaiden of *Materia*[...]. *Inventio* (in its broad sense, the finding of the material), was an area of discourse common to poetry

and prose, and therefore special treatment in a handbook on poetics was not seen to be necessary. (1967: 10)

Even Geoffrey's own words speak against Kliman's reading: 'To ensure greater success for the work, let the discriminating mind, as a prelude to action, defer the operation of hand and tongue, and ponder long on the subject matter' (ll. 51-55). Only after the poet has selected and arranged the *Materia* properly should 'poetic art come forward to clothe the matter with words. Since poetry comes to serve, however, let it make due preparation for attendance upon its mistress[...] ' (ll. 61-63).

3. Such a statement certainly demonstrates that content was far from irrelevant to Vinsauf. While the bulk of his treatise does focus on arrangement and ornaments of language, prompting Kliman's accusation of a limited concern for material, this is not indicative of Vinsauf's attitude to poetry. Nims writes, 'assuming that poetics was a part of rhetoric, Geoffrey of Vinsauf organized his treatise on the model of the rhetorical manuals, considering invention briefly and then devoting more extensive treatment to arrangement[...], [etc.]' (1967: 9).

4. Neither were other medieval rhetoricians unconcerned with meaning and content. In his overview of the subject, Peter Dronke writes that

[...] at the heart of the mediaeval rhetorical tradition, in some of its central contexts, there existed a profoundly functional approach to artistic expression, a refusal to see the problem of style divorced from

that of meaning, an unequivocal condemnation of verbal ornament and display for their own sakes (317-18).

The phrase, 'some of its central contexts', is vague, but the applicability of rhetoric to poetry is clear from Dronke's own reading of Vinsauf. According to Dronke, Geoffrey's new insights into rhetoric stem from his 'insistence on the organic nature of a work of art, on the need for every aspect of the work to be functional, to bear an intrinsic relation to the whole' (327). Far from subordinating meaning to style, 'for Geoffrey, the all-important thing is not the means but the end: not the tools of expression but what the artist is trying to convey' (328). But it is not the place of the rhetorician to teach one how to select or discover (invent) a topic; in fact, presumably one would not be interested in writing a poem if one did not already have a topic in mind. It is the task of the rhetorical manual to teach you how to clothe your content in words that fit. Kliman seems to contrast Barbour's literary practice with the teaching of medieval rhetoric, writing that he resorts to rhetorical principles only 'when it suits him. He never decorates for the sake of decoration, but constantly makes rhetoric subservient to the demands of his narrative' (120). Yet this approach does not separate Barbour from the practice of medieval rhetoric; rather it shows how apt a pupil of rhetoric he was. His poem is firmly in line with contemporary teaching, even that of Geoffrey of Vinsauf.

4.2.4 Literary Conventions: a Way of Learning to Write

1. Nevertheless, Kliman is correct in pointing out that rhetorical manuals such as Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* do not teach arrangement in depth. Indeed, they could hardly

be expected to, since every topic, every tale – even the remarkably similar Middle English romances – will have different plot elements, which in turn will have to be fitted to an arrangement best suited to the subject's dignity and the author's purpose. In this respect, Geoffrey's advice about openings and about amplification and abbreviation *is* his advice about arrangement: a poet must select from the available material about a certain subject and decide which details, incidents, *et cetera*, to emphasise, which to abbreviate, and which to leave out all together, as well as what similar, plausible incidents to import from other sources, and how to arrange all of this so that the interpretation the author wishes to advance is best communicated.

2. We have seen, particularly in the discussions of Lord's *The Singer of Tales*, how an unlettered 'singer' learned to sing songs by listening to the songs of other singers. It is this possibility of learning by example that Kliman overlooks when she supposes that Barbour innovated the structure of the *Brus*. She assumes he read widely on rhetoric, which he may well have, but she fails to consider what reading of narrative poetry, especially contemporary historical writing, he may have done. As Ruth Morse writes in *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*:

Medieval writers did not suddenly create their historical methods out of nothing; they inherited a large and ever-growing body of 'historical' narratives whose conventional patterns and styles suggested a range of meanings. The omission of part of a narrative which ought to have been included, the turning of historical events to recognizable narrative patterns, the insistence that agents did or said things which accorded with

ideas about their status, or reign, or character – all these possibilities could be manipulated in order to convey complex impressions of the past and its relevance to the present (1991: 2).

In other words, a medieval author, having ‘invented’ (in the sense of ‘discovered’ or ‘found’, rather than ‘created *ex nihilo*’) suitable material, would arrange that material in a manner which best served the author’s own purposes. The specific arrangement, emphasis, and abbreviation of the source material depends on the author’s attitude to the subject, and the interpretation he (or, less frequently, she) wishes to persuade the audience to accept.

3. Morse describes how medieval readers learned rhetoric via ancient texts, and eventually used rhetoric as a means of understanding these texts. Rhetoric became an interpretative process. ‘Models of reading,’ she writes, ‘became models of writing’ (1991: 17). The *Brus* is not fiction, not even historical fiction in the way a modern reader would understand the term; but whereas Kliman assumes that, as we have no ‘recipe for the *Brus*’ to provide a model, Barbour must have improvised, I suggest that, whether he read Vinsauf or some other rhetorical manual, Barbour could easily have learned to write history by reading history, learned to write romance and/or epic by reading them (or hearing them read or recited), just as he learned the details of the Wars of Independence by reading or hearing them. Learning the craft of writing a scholastic work in the Middle Ages need not be so different from learning to sing a traditional tale: you use your ears and learn from your predecessors.

4.3 Pattern v. Plot in Medieval Literature

1. The relevance of medieval rhetoric to the present study is the same as the relevance of formulaic theory: both are tools for understanding Barbour's poem. The aspect of the *Brus* which perplexes Kliman is the aspect this thesis must now address: the arrangement of incidents into a *plot*. We are not so fortunate as Susan Wittig to have found in our study a recurring pattern of incidents, which are themselves built of recurring formulaic descriptions and actions, communicated with recurring formulaic phrases. Instead of a structure unified by a kind of grammar of formulae, the *Brus* offers a series of events which conforms neither to strict historical accuracy nor to a traditional romance plot. A comprehensive account or list of Barbour's possible sources and intentions in writing his poem would amount only to speculation, and in any case is well outside the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, it is possible to show that Barbour's arrangement of incidents, like the incidents themselves, was at once historical and mythological, traditional and innovative, formulaic and original. A work such as *The Brus* demonstrates that these categories are not in fact exclusive; rather, they overlap in interesting and important ways, at times seeming more like reflections than antitheses. For what is a 'new' work (especially in the Middle Ages) but a reworking of older, traditional material (romantic and/or historical)? To demonstrate this I shall begin by discussing medieval approaches to plot structuring.

2. In the thirteenth century, St Bonaventure identified four ways of making a book (*modus faciendi librum*). They were: as a scribe (*scriptor*), who 'writes others' words, adding nothing and changing nothing'; as a compiler (*compiler*), who 'writes others' words, putting together passages which are not his own'; as a commentator

(*ipsum verbum*), who ‘writes both others’ words and his own, but with the others’ words in prime place and his own added only for purposes of clarification’; and finally, as an author (*auctor*), who ‘writes both his own words and others’, but with his own in prime place and others’ added only for purposes of confirmation’ (Burrow, 1982: 29-30). This not only puts into perspective Kliman’s protestation at Barbour being a ‘mere compiler’ – for *compiler* is a perfectly respectable *modus faciendi librum* – but more importantly reminds us that, in the Middle Ages, even an *auctor*, the most ‘original’ of these four types of book-maker, wrote ‘both his own words and others’. No medieval writer created entirely new, previously unknown material. Where vernacular works have tradition, so scholastic works have precedent, antiquity, and authority. All works must have their sources. As A. J. Minnis writes, ‘To be old was to be good; the best writers were the most ancient’ (1984: 9).

3. Before moving on to Barbour’s arrangement of his source material, it is important to understand medieval attitudes to such structures, to that which we would call a *plot*. In *Form and Style in Early English Literature* (1971), Pamela Gradon usefully distinguishes ‘plot’ from ‘pattern’, the former being ‘the presentation of the action in such a way that each event is related to every other event[...] by explicit or implicit motivation, and by space and time relationships, so that the action appears “necessary” and comprehensible’, and the latter being ‘the presentation of an action in such a way that the events within the frame bear a thematic relationship to each other and not a space-time relationship’ (1971: 94).

4. Gradon illustrates her concept of a *pattern* with the structure of *Beowulf*. Indeed, the *plot* – or lack thereof – has proven to be an aspect of the poem very

confusing to modern readers. A recent performance of *Beowulf* as a play in the Arches Theatre in Glasgow ended the action after Beowulf had killed Grendel's Mother, suggesting the dragon episode might one day be performed as a 'sequel'. This is probably how many of today's readers interpret the two seemingly disparate episodes, whose only real connection seems to be the protagonist. Oddly enough, the Arches play included the Scyld Scefing prologue, which, not even featuring the poem's central hero, must prove even more confusing; so much so that I expect many modern readers simply reject the prologue, and move on to the main action.

5. Nor has the poem been misunderstood only by late twentieth-/early twenty-first century readers. One of the most well-known lectures ever delivered on *Beowulf*, Professor Tolkien's 'The Monsters and the Critics' (1936), ventures the opinion

that *Beowulfiana* is, while rich in many departments, specially poor in one. It is poor in criticism, criticism that is directed to the understanding of a poem as a poem[...]. *Beowulf* has been used as a quarry of fact and fancy far more assiduously than it has been studied as a work of art.

(Tolkien 1936: 5)

He then sums up previous *Beowulf* criticism rather quaintly with an allegory in which the poem's 'fairy-godmother Historia' and her accompaniment of 'excellent ladies', Philologia, Mythologia, Archaeologia, and Laographia, rebuke the 'child's name-sake', Poesis.

“*The Beowulf*”, they said, “is hardly an affair of yours, and not in any case a protégé that you could be proud of. It is an historical document. Only as such does it interest the superior culture of to-day.” (Tolkien 1936: 6)

If the poem is not ‘a protégé Poesis could be proud of’, it is because, as a narrative poem, it is hardly comprehensible: its plot is practically non-existent; its parts seem independent, and do not add up to a unified whole. ‘Nearly all the censure,’ Tolkien continues, ‘and most of the praise, that has been bestowed upon *The Beowulf* [sic] has been due either to the belief that it was something that it was *not*[...] or to disappointment at the discovery that it was itself and not something that the scholar would have liked better[...]

 (1936: 7). These unfounded expectations of the genre of *Beowulf* include not only a ‘historical document’ but a modern narrative, a unified, mimetic plot. Gradon links her concept of ‘plot’ to ‘imitation’ or mimesis, ‘[f]or it is an aspect of verisimilitude that the actions played out before us should be credible and that the actors should inhabit a world which has the dimensions of the world of our senses; or if it be incredible, that the writer should make it credible by the use of sense data of a familiar kind’ (1971: 94). If this sense data includes our experience of motivation, of cause and effect, of how events plausibly relate to each other, then *Beowulf*’s detractors do not merely find the monsters and dragons ‘incredible’ (that is, unbelievable, imaginary), but also insist that, if they did exist, they would behave differently. There would be an observable cause-and-effect relationship – what Gradon calls a space-time relationship – between the fantastic events of the poem.

6. Tolkien suggests readers should dismiss from the mind ‘the notion that *Beowulf* is a “narrative poem”, that it tells a tale or *intends* to tell a tale sequentially. The poem “lacks a steady advance”[...]. But the poem was not meant to advance, steadily or unsteadily’ (1936: 28). Tolkien reads the poem as an extended treatment of a traditional Anglo-Saxon elegiac theme (‘that man, each man and all men, and all their works shall die’ [1936: 23]), and views its underlying pattern as ‘essentially a balance, a opposition of ends and beginnings’ (1936: 28). Another reading of *Beowulf* views it as a juxtaposition of types and anti-types, what Gradon calls exemplary characters, who represent instances of traits the culture values or rejects. As T. A. Shippey, one of Tolkien’s greatest admirers, observes, the use of the terms ‘opposition’ and ‘contrast’ ‘makes the poem seem ‘static’[...]. Yet most readers of *Beowulf* take from it an impression of intricacy; accordingly a more popular artistic analogue has been suggested by John Leyerle in 1967, interweaving or “interlace”’ (Shippey 1978: 28).

7. In the first place, Leyerle equates the monsters Grendel and his mother with internecine strife, a justified fear for the early Germanic tribes.

Beowulf and his Geats visit Hroðgar and his Danes in Heorot to assist in defending the hall against an *eotan*, Grendel[...]. Unferð issues an insulting challenge to which Beowulf makes a wounding reply, stating that Unferð had killed his own brothers. This deed associates him with Cain, the archetypal fratricide, and Cain’s descendent, Grendel[...]. At the victory celebration the scop recites a lay about the visit of Hræf and his Half-Danes to Finn and his Frisians in Finnesburh. They fall to

quarrelling and slaughter each other[...]. Quite possibly the Half-Danes go to Finnesburh to help the Frisians hold their hall against monsters[...]. After the lay Wealpeow makes two moving pleas for good faith and firm friendship in Heorot, especially between the Geats and the Danes[...]. The Queen might well be concerned lest insults between Dane and Geat be renewed and lead to fighting (Leyerle 1991: 154)

Leyerle's hypothesis about Finn's hall under attack by *eotenas* may be questionable, but even so, we see a pairing of monsters with traditional Germanic fears. Unferth is indeed likened to Cain on the very night before Beowulf slays the monster. Whether Hræf's visit to Finn in any way resembles Beowulf's mission to Heorot, Wealtheow's plea and her status as a *freoðuwebbe* (peace-weaver, a royal daughter married to the king of a rival tribe to establish peaceful relations) contrast with the disaster of kin- and friend-killing at Finnsburgh. As Leyerle aptly observes, '[i]n *Beowulf* monsters are closely associated with the slaying of friends and kinsmen. They function in part as an outward objectification and sign of society beset by internecine slaughter between friend and kin' (1991: 154). As familial, tribal, and other social bonds – often expressed as loyalty – are of such importance in ancient Germanic culture, so betrayal of those bonds, the killing of one's friend, one's kin, one's host or lord, is a great fear, personified, it would seem, in the figure of Grendel.

8. Grendel also embodies the anti-type of a guest:

A guest should go to the hall with friendly intent and be given food and entertainment of poetry by his host. Grendel inverts this order. He visits Heorot in rage, angered by the scop's song of creation, and makes food of his unwilling hosts[...]. He is an *eoten*, or 'eater,' and swallows up the society he visits almost as if he were an allegorical figure for internecine strife (Leyerle 1991: 155).

Beowulf, by contrast, is an ideal guest. He comes to Heorot with the friendly intention of aiding Hrothgar in his hour of need. He is given food and entertainment – though he suffers the insults of Unferth, which as we have seen has its own symbolic part to play – and of course he single-handedly destroys the anti-guest, Grendel. We can even see Grendel as an anti-warrior. He has superhuman strength, and yet he attacks unarmed men in a drunken sleep, hardly a fair contest. When Beowulf confronts Grendel, he eschews weapons, for Grendel uses none. Beowulf is willing to make concessions to his enemy that Grendel does not.⁴ Or as Jane Chance writes, 'Grendel is introduced as a mock "hall-retainer"[...] who envies the men of Heorot their joy of community; he subsequently attacks the hall in a raid that is described through the parodic hall ceremonies of feasting, ale-drinking, gift-receiving, and singing' (1991: 252).

9. The victory celebration after Grendel's demise, before the attack of Grendel's mother, prefigures this monster's role as an anti-Queen. 'Another theme of the poem is that of women as the bond of kinship. The women often become the bond themselves by marrying into another tribe, like Wealþeow, Hildeburh, and Freawaru' (Leyerle 1991: 155). This is, as I have mentioned, the role of the *freoðuwebbe*, 'knitting up her

kinsmen rather than refusing all ties. In general the women are *cynna gemyndig*, “intent on kinship,” as the poet says of Wealþeow[...]. They preserve the tie of kin or revenge it when given cause’ (Leyerle 1991: 155). It is easy to see Grendel’s mother as an inversion of the peace-weaver. Then again, her vengeance for the death of her son might seem justified if Germanic women are meant to ‘revenge when given cause.’ Jane Chance, however, focuses her reading of Grendel’s mother on the peace-maker and mother aspects.

[T]he female monster’s adventures are framed by descriptions of other women for ironic contrasts. The role of the mother highlights the first half of the middle section with the *scop*’s mention of Hildeburh (1071ff) and the entrance of Wealtheow, both of whom preface the first appearance of Grendel’s dam (1258) in her role as avenging mother. Then the introduction of Hygd, Thryth, and Freawara after the female monster’s death (1590) stresses the role of queen as peace-weaver and cup-passer to preface Beowulf’s final narration of the female monster’s downfall (2143). (Chance 1991: 255).

Although the attack of Grendel’s mother may be a just exercise of a woman’s right to vengeance, she did not sow peace with the Danes, nor pass the cup of friendship from her son to Hrothgar.

10. Finally, there is the episode of the dragon, which many readers may consider only loosely connected to the first half the poem. In fact, it completes the trio

of contrasts which thematically binds the action of *Beowulf* into a unified narrative. We have seen characters typify roles of guest and anti-guest (and simultaneously, thane and anti-thane), and queen and anti-queen. To complete the set the poem needs a king and his counterpart, and it is natural that the narrative move forward to Beowulf's kingship. As Leyerle writes,

Another tie that binds society is treasure[...]. [It] enables a hero to win fame in gaining treasure for his lord and his lord to win fame dispensing it as a *beaga brytta*, a 'dispenser of treasure,' from the *gifstol*, 'gift throne.' The gift and receipt of treasure are a tie between a lord and his retainer, an outward sign of the agreement between them. The strength and security of heroic society depend on the symbolic circulation of treasure[...]. The monsters are outside this society; for them treasure is an object to be hoarded under ground. (1991: 155).

Chance echoes this reading: 'The dragon is introduced as a mock 'gold-king' or *hordweard*[...], who avariciously guards his barrow or 'ring-hall'[...] and attacks Beowulf's kingdom after he discovers the loss of a single cup' (1991: 255). Leyerle's focus on internecine warfare, Chance's reading of Grendel's mother as an anti-type of the peace-weaver, and the reading of the dragon as an anti-king by both scholars demonstrates *Beowulf*'s structure of pairing examples of the virtues upon which ancient Germanic society is built with examples of the dangers which could tear it apart:

The envy of the hall-retainer and the avarice of the evil gold-king antithesize the Germanic *comitatus* ideal first enunciated by Tacitus' *Germania* and pervading heroic and elegiac Anglo-Saxon literature; the *comitatus*' well-being depended upon the retainer's valor in battle and loyalty to his lord, and the lord's protection and treasure-giving in return. (Chance 1991: 255)

Considering the fratricidal and inter-tribal warfare that Grendel represents, one can also see the necessity of the *freoðuwebbe*, and thus the importance of the contrast of Wealtheow and Grendel's mother.

11. *Beowulf* is taken to be part of a larger heroic tradition; there are likely to be many episodes and incidents associated with him, some of which are alluded to in the version of the poem preserved in MS. Cotton Vitellius A XV. We might consider these and other episodes, now lost, the traditional material from which the *Beowulf* poet selected the events that make up the narrative we know. The relationships between characters and incidents explicated above shows one possible (or probable) intention of such an arrangement. Consider also Tolkien's view of *Beowulf* as 'a balance, an opposition of ends and beginnings'. This elucidates not only why Beowulf himself must be the exemplary king to contrast the dragon, but why the dragon must be Beowulf's own demise, given Tolkien's reading of the poem as a narrative on the elegiac theme of death as the inescapable end of all great men and their works. Gradon's reading echoes this view. Earlier I suggested a misreading or misunderstanding of the Scyld Scefing prologue as extraneous to the poem's main action. Gradon, however, reads the prologue

as an intentional and sophisticated introduction to the poem's elegiac theme. 'The fundamental pattern of the poem can be seen in the Scyld prologue[...]. The *dramatis persona* is an heroic king. There are brought together into a pattern of exemplary action, the arrival, the rise to fame, and the death of the hero. All the rest of the poem is a development of, and a comment on, this schema' (Gradon 1971: 128). The structure of *Beowulf* is remarkably unified and complete, for Beowulf's own death, a 'comment on' the traditional, even mythological end of the heroic pattern, reverses the meaning of Scyld Scefing's passing. 'Beowulf's life presents us with a mirror image of the life of Scyld. For Scyld's death presaged the rise to glory of his people, whereas that of Beowulf presaged the downfall of his nation' (Gradon 1971: 130). Thus *Beowulf* presents us with a complete picture of the rise and fall of a hero, as well as a society. The action is framed by the deaths of two heroes, the first foreshadowing a nation's rise, the second sounding the death knell of a once proud people. Considering the dragon's symbolic function as avarice and a subversion of kingly virtue, the poem becomes almost allegorical, a warning against vices that will threaten the social fabric. Gradon, however, insists the poem is not an allegory; '[n]evertheless the interest is centred, not in the actors as individuals, but as representative types' (1971: 129). She continues:

If this sounds fanciful or oversophisticated, it must be remembered that both themes and actions are conventional. No Anglo-Saxon poet would have to sit down to work out their significance to combine them into a meaningful pattern. They would surely come to him as naturally as the leaves on the tree. All the poet has told us is three traditional types of

story three times over, varying them at each stage of the telling. This is the technique of fairy tales the world over. (1971: 130)

Gradon's comment is based on her subscription to the oral-traditional and formulaic background of Anglo-Saxon literature. While this is certainly the origin of *Beowulf*, it has also been transformed by the Latin education of the scribes of MS. Cotton Vitellius A XV, who may or may not have arranged the narrative of the preserved version of the tale. As Jackson J. Campbell has written,

the study of vernacular literature in England cannot be separated from the study of the total learned culture, which was by definition a form of Latin Christian culture. There was constant influence between Latin and vernacular literature extending throughout the period we call Anglo-Saxon, and there are few works indeed which do not evince some coloration from a well-developed Latin culture. (1978: 174)

The themes and actions of *Beowulf* are indeed traditional and conventional, and any one performance of all or part of that heroic cycle may have produced a similarly structured plot. However, the *Beowulf* we have is a very sophisticated structure, and very likely resulted from Latin scholastic learning applied to traditional vernacular material. Ernest Gallo, for instance identifies the technique of stating the poem's major theme or themes in the beginning and then restating them, with subsequent modification and refinement, throughout the rest of the poem – the very thing Gradon observes in the Scyld Scefing

prologue and the other episodes of *Beowulf* – as a function of rhetorical amplification, Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *morae* or delays.

If the poem has lucidly made its essential statement at the very beginning, then the precise task of the poet must be to restate the theme, refine upon it, and draw from it all of its implications and meanings. We should consider how fond medieval poets are of such restatement, how they go round about a single point as though to draw all possible meanings from it (1978: 81).

In the case of *Beowulf*, the theme of a hero's worthy life but inevitable death is repeated in the prologue and the main body of the poem itself (albeit with opposite emphasis in the poem's conclusion). The theme of opposing exemplary characters is repeated not only in the three major conflicts, but also, as we have seen, in the smaller scenes framing Beowulf's battles with monsters.

12. Gradon also illustrates a combination of *plot* and *pattern* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Unlike *Beowulf* however, *Gawain* is a work of Middle English, a type of romance, and part of the Arthurian tradition. It has not suffered as much from the plundering of historians and other non-literary scholars, nor does its plot create such confusion among modern readers, for all its events seem related to each other in a more familiar way. Nevertheless, Gradon finds that *Gawain* and *Beowulf* both have 'a repetitive structure', that the *Gawain*-poet too 'repeats themes and episodes', though

she asks '[w]hy then is the structure of *Beowulf* obscure to a modern reader, while that of *Gawain* is lucidly clear?' (1971: 132).

13. The first reason is that the events of *Gawain* are 'causally connected' with each other,

while the *Beowulf* poet's plot elements are complete narratives in themselves, and the pattern is in a sense self-sufficient at each stage, with its own rise and fall. There are thus no necessary narrative links between the parts. Whereas the death of Scyld does not cause the ravages of Grendel and all that follow therefrom, nor the slaying of Grendel and Grendel's mother necessitate Beowulf's return and his death, the *Gawain* poet has given us a plot in which the events are necessitated by the actions of the characters within the story. In *Beowulf*, all we appear to have is a loose chronological sequence and the connections are all thematic. In *Gawain* on the other hand, the Events all spring from the initial challenge (Gradon 1971: 132).

This is certainly true. Then again, some causal connection – plotting, as Gradon might call it – does creep into *Beowulf*. Scyld's death may not cause Grendel's attack, but the poet does feel compelled to give Grendel some motivation rather than simply introducing him as a 'bad guy.' Grendel becomes the descendant of Cain, a damnation of Biblical significance, as well as a connection to internecine strife, and he attacks Heorot after being enraged by a scop's poem on the Judeo-Christian creation story.

Grendel's mother's attack is even more causally connected to the previous event (the slaying of Grendel), and even the dragon rampage is immediately motivated by the theft of the cup. If one cup seems a frivolous reason to invade a kingdom, we must remember that the dragon represents greed, hoarding, the opposite of a generous king who bestows his treasure freely on the warriors who serve him. In this way thematic and cause/effect connections are combined.

4.4 Rhetoric in the *Brus*

1. In his Yale Ph.D. thesis, *The Literary Background of Barbour's 'Bruce'* (1947), David Coldwell divides the narrative of Barbour's *Brus* into five sections (we might call them 'movements'): Oppression and Revolt; Scottish Gains; Bannockburn; the Invasion of Ireland; and 'The Last Phases' (1947: 27-116). By contrast, I have discussed the *Brus* in terms of *cycles* of recurring *incidents*, arguing that the combination of certain specific components of *historic* and *discursive* formulae constituted an *incident* and that several similar *incidents*, each one emphasising a different theme, topic, or aspect of character, constituted a *cycle*. In the previous chapter, I restricted my discussion of these *incidents* and *cycles* to formulaic components and narrative action. I now turn my attention to the rhetorical, Latin-derived, 'literary' techniques Barbour used to highlight and emphasise the interpretation of the poem he wished to convey. This is a new phase of my thesis, one that makes a significant departure from the formulaic studies I have cited in the previous three chapters. For example, whereas Susan Wittig perceives a formulaic structure in the Middle English romances, a morphological homogeneity similar to that uncovered in

Vladimir Propp's study of folktales, the plot of the *Brus* is not immediately similar to any narrative of its time or before. The plot structure indeed seems drawn from the historical events of Bruce's campaign – the perceived or received history of the Scottish Wars of Independence contemporary to Barbour – and these are manipulated for specific and controlled effects by Barbour's own ideological purpose. This is actually one of the most recognised characteristics of the poem, thanks largely to the work of Lois Ebin and her successors such as R. James Goldstein.

2. Knowledge of Latin-derived medieval rhetoric is an indication of participation in what we may call 'learned' culture. This term is not meant to disparage oral-derived learning in the vernacular; rather, it reflects the medieval use of the Latin adjectives 'literatus' and 'illiteratus'. *Literati* were not those who could read and write, but those who could read and write *in Latin*.

3. 'Learned' culture is indicated in the very opening of Barbour's *Brus*, which is a brief discourse on the theory of the value of narrative poetry, and a break from the common practice of more traditional romances, which usually begin with an address to an audience. Susan Wittig, in *Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances*, discusses the structure of conventional romance openings, an example of which is the beginning of *Havelok the Dane*:

Herknet to me, gode men,
Wiues, maydnes, and alle men,
Of a tale þat ich you wile telle,
Wo so it wile here, and þer-to duelle.

Þe tale is of haelok i-maked;
 Wil he was litel he yede ful naked:
 Haelok was a ful god gome,
 He was ful god in eueri trome,
 He was þe wicteste man at nede,
 Þat þurte riden on ani stede.
 Þat ye mowen nou y-here,
 And þe tale ye mowen y-lere.
 At the beginning of vre tale,
 Fil me a cuppe of ful god ale;
 And [y] wile drinken her y spelle,
 Þat crist vs shilde alle fro helle!
 Krist late vs heuere so for to do,
 Þat we moten comen him to,
 And wit[e] þat it mote ben so!
Benedicamus domino!
 Here y schal biginnen a rym,
 Krist us yeue wel god fyn!
 (1-22)

Such an opening, she argues, consists of three components, termed *prayer* ('the poet prays God's blessing on the endeavor'), *exhortation* ('the poet exhorts the audience to

pay attention to the story'), and *synopsis* ('the poet provides a short synopsis of events in the tale or offers a formulaic sketch of the main character') (1978: 57).

4. Conventional openings ME literature have also been recognised by Judith M. Davidoff. Although her monograph, *Beginning Well*, focuses only on the last of these, she identifies six conventional ways a Middle English poem might begin:

1. a direct plunge into the material
 2. a statement of the content of the poem
 3. a prayer
 4. an explanation of the existence of the present work, i.e. how it came to be written
 5. a reason to listen to it
 6. a framing fiction
- (25-26).

Opening (2) is recognisable as Wittig's *synopsis* element; opening (3) is also described by Wittig. The *exhortation* might be contained in either opening (4) or (5). (We might also identify opening (1) as Geoffrey of Vinsauf's natural beginning.) Later Davidoff remarks that 'ordinarily a poet used only one of the six opening modes; however it is not unusual to find them combined, especially prayer (3) with one of the others' (28). This suggests that Davidoff would identify *prayer* as the nucleus of Wittig's opening slot motif. This is understandable considering Davidoff has not identified *exhortation* as one of her opening modes, but rather divides it into two distinct

techniques. However, she does quote the fourteenth-century English romance *Otuel* as an example of openings (2) and (5) (synopsis and a reason to listen), where Wittig would certainly identify the *exhortation* motifeme:

Herkneþ boþe 3inge & olde,
þat willen heren of batailles bolde,
& 3e wolde a while duelle,
Of bolde batailles ich wole 3ou telle,
þat was sumtime bitwene
Cristine men & sarrazins kene.
(1-6)

Even these six lines bear sufficient similarity to the opening of *Havelok* to group them together. Most notably line 1 of *Havelok* ('Herknet to me, gode men') resembles the first line of *Otuel*; lines 3 and 4 of *Havelok* ('Of a tale þat ich you wile telle, | Wo-so it wile here and þer-to duelle') also bear considerable resemblance to lines 3 and 4 of *Otuel*. Davidoff's book does not refer to Wittig's, possibly because Wittig does not discuss framing fictions, which is the focus of Davidoff's study. The difference in approach to these openings is quite simply a matter of individual opinion. Whether we call it *exhortation* or a combination of opening modes (2), (3), and (5), we still recognise that the first twenty-six lines of *Havelok* constitute a conventional opening in medieval Literature; following Wittig we understand this convention as characteristic of ME romance specifically.

5. Though certain of Davidoff's openings – e.g. (2), (3), and (5) – can describe the beginning of Barbour's *Brus*, it nonetheless seems quite a departure from Wittig's *exhortation* motifeme:

Storys to rede ar delitabill
Suppos yat yai be nocht bot fabill,
Yan suld storys yat suthfast wer
And yai war said on gud maner
Hawe doubill plesance in heryng.
Ye fyrst plesance is ye carpyng,
And ye toyer ye suthfastnes
Yat schawys ye thing rycht as it wes,
And suth thingis yat ar likand
Till mannys heryng ar plesand.

(I.1-10)

This prologue essentially posits a kind of 'teach-and-delight' theory of the value of historical narrative. Any story, Barbour suggests, is pleasant to hear, but true stories give double pleasure, the first being the telling of the tale (which would be pleasurable anyway), and the second being the knowledge that the tale is true. Barbour continues:

For auld storys yat men redys
Representis to yaim ye dedys

Of stalwart folk yat lywyt ar
Rycht as yai yan in presence war.
And certis yai suld weill hawe prys
Yat in yar tyme war wycht and wys,
And led yar lyff in gret trawaill,
And oft in hard stour off bataill
Wan gret price off chewalry
And war woydyt off cowardy,
(I.17-26)

This certainly qualifies as ‘a reason to listen’ to the story, Davidoff’s opening (5). The *synopsis* and *prayer* components (Davidoff’s openings (2) and (3)) appear in Barbour’s initial description of the poem’s heroes:

As wes king Robert off Scotland
Yat hardy wes off hart and hand,
And gud schyr Iames off Douglas
Yat in his tyme sa worthy was
Yat off hys price & hys bounte
In ser landis renownyt wes he.
(I.27-32)

and in the closing lines of the proem:

Now God gyff grace yat I may swa

Tret it and bryng it till endyng

Yat I say nocht bot suthfast thing.

(I.34-36)

Lines 37 through 444 of Book I consist mostly of narrative action, all of which Barbour seems to have considered vital background information but ultimately outside the frame of the history of Robert the Bruce and his war. As well as famously conflating Robert I with his synonymous grandfather, this ‘prequel’ (as it were) even introduces the character James of Douglas – the only other character to be mentioned in the initial thirty-six lines – and his cause for grievance against Edward I.

6. Ironically, the second ‘prologue,’ lines 445 through 476, fits more closely with Wittig’s *exhortation* motifeme (i.e., a typical romance prologue) as well as combining several of Davidoff’s openings. We have already discussed the call to attention which might be satisfied by the first couplet:

Lordingis quha likis for till her,

Ye romanys now begynnys her

(445-446)

Another *synopsis* follows immediately:

Off men yat war in gret distres
 And assayit full gret hardynes
 Or yai mycht cum till yar entent.
 Bot syne our Lord sic grace yaim sent
 Yat yai syne throw yar gret walour
 Come till gret hycht & till honour,
 Margre yar fayis euerilkane
 Yat war sa fele yat [ay] till ane
 Off yaim yai war weill a thowsand,
 Bot quhar God helpys quhat may withstand.
 (447-456).

This synopsis does not name its characters (which would be redundant, considering lines I.27-32), but it does provide more detail as to the nature of their deeds, specifically, that they fought ‘in great distress’ against nearly insurmountable odds, aided only by the grace of God and their ‘hardiness’ and ‘valour.’ We also notice that this synopsis ends with a proverb, which Bernice Kliman traces to medieval rhetorical guides, most notably the *Poetria Nova* of Geoffrey of Vinsauf.

7. Indeed, although so far this second prologue appears much more ‘formulaic’ than Barbour’s initial opening, it does seem to be indebted to medieval rhetorical manuals, and thus a written, scholarly tradition. For example, after the proverb in line 456, Barbour reiterates the plight of his heroes and their divine sponsorship by way of ‘amplification’; that is, he repeats and elaborates on information already given, a

process which occupies lines 457 through 464. At this point Barbour employs yet another common rhetorical technique of amplification: the comparison, in this case, to the Biblical story of the Maccabees (464-476). It is in this comparison, incidentally, that Barbour initially tells his audience the outcome of the struggle (which they, of course, would have known already). Consider lines 472 through 475:

Yai [the Maccabees] wrocht sua throw yar wasselage
Yat with few folk yai had wictory
Off mychty kingis, as sayis ye story,
And delyueryt yar land all fre,

This passage refers literally to the object of comparison, the Biblical Maccabees. However, since it is established in line 465 that the struggling Scots are a similar case, it is deducible that they, too, are successful in ‘delivering their land all free.’

8. Though the components of a traditional romance opening are all present between the two prologues of the *Brus*, including the belated appearance of Susan Wittig’s *exhortation* motifeme at line 445, it is significant that the actual opening lines of Barbour’s poem discuss a kind of literary theory, hint at the poem’s didactic or exemplary value, and though they do not name the poet, speak of the ensuing work in terms of a personal and original ‘literary’ endeavour. For all the theories of vernacular romance as a ‘popular’ (in the sense ‘of the people’, the non-noble classes), Barbour’s opening lines point to a learned, intellectual author, and just as importantly, a learned, intellectual *audience*. This is entirely in keeping with Lois Ebin’s emphasis on the

speculum principis tradition, mentioned in chapter three. Barbour apparently had connections to the Scottish court, and Robert II may have encouraged, if not actually commissioned, the composition of the *Brus* (McDiarmid and Stevenson 1985: 7, 10; Duncan 1997: 3). Adding to the statement of purpose and value in the two prologues, Barbour further explicates his goal in composing the *Brus* at the end of the colophon, following the climactic Battle of Bannockburn:

God graunt yat yai yat cummyn ar
Off his offspring manteyme ye land
And hald ye folk weill to warand
And manteyme rycht and leawte
Als wele as in hys tyme did he.
(XIII.717-22)

That the offspring of Robert the Bruce – i.e. Robert Stewart, king of Scotland in 1375 – should maintain the land and preserve justice and loyalty as well as Bruce himself did (at least in this poem), is Barbour's primary message to his royal audience. There may, of course, be other messages intended for a non-royal audience, but the didacticism of the *speculum* tradition is nonetheless an important aspect of the *Brus*.

9. The learned aspect of Barbour's *Brus* continues throughout the poem, working alongside and even in cooperation with the oral-derived, formulaic aspects. As we have seen, the repetition with successive variation of *incidents* is an old technique, appearing even in oral or oral-derived texts like the *Iliad* and *Beowulf*; this repetition

communicated complex ideas to a sophisticated audience, even if the incidents themselves were arranged paratactically in a thematic pattern, rather than presented in a causal relationship with one another via a structured plot. In my discussion of two *cycles* of repeated *incident* in the *Brus*, I have attempted to demonstrate how the repetition of Single Combats and Battles develops the character of Robert the Bruce as a happy medium between cowardice and foolhardiness. Barbour was not content, however, to convey his message through the arrangement of *incidents* alone; at crucial points in his plot, he underlines the intended interpretation with a rhetorical digression.

10. *The Brus* is nearly as full of rhetorical digressions and interjections as it is of formulae. Not all of these will be listed here, but some of the more important ones are: the ‘Dangers of Treason’⁵ (I.515-60); the ‘Digression on the siege of Thebes’⁶ prefaced with a praise of love (II.523-52); the ‘Reflection on Weeping’⁷ (III.513-34); the ‘Discourse on Prophecy’⁸ (IV.668-775); the ‘Reflection on Leadership’⁹ (IX.63-100); and the ‘Reflections on the Kings’ Failure and Success’¹⁰ (XIII.636-83). Also there are any number of reactions to an event which Barbour employs to control or influence the audience’s interpretation of that incident. Often these reactions take the form of a set speech by one of the characters in the poem, but they can also be delivered by the narrator, as in the address to the Scots who have chosen Edward I as arbiter in the succession of the Scottish crown (I.91-134) or the exclamations during the Battle of Bannockburn (e.g. XIII.164-224). These reactions are more likely to employ formulaic language than the longer digressions and exempla, for which reason I consider them structural elements in certain type-scenes such as Personal Combats and Battles. Nevertheless, they serve the same or a similar purpose as the longer digressions,

suggesting the close interweaving of vernacular and rhetorical techniques in Barbour's poem.

11. The most famous rhetorical digression in the *Brus* is also the poem's most famous passage, so well-known in fact that it has become a kind of metonymic stand-in for the poem as a whole: the epideictic Praise of Freedom in Book I, lines 225 through 274 (prefaced, though it is not generally remembered, by the equally rhetorical lament *Alas yat folk yat euer wes fre*, lines 221 through 224). As this passage falls outside the narrative proper, I will defy critical precedent by giving it little attention. I will point out, however, that of all the critiques, praises, and studies of Barbour's *Brus* which have noted the importance of the Praise of Freedom, few have given equal attention to its sibling passage, the Comment on Valour in Book VI, lines 327 through 374. Duncan has nothing to say about the passage, though he begins the preface to his edition of the poem with an anecdote concerning the Praise of Freedom: 'When I was a schoolboy in 1940-44, the blackboard in our History classroom at George Heriot's School carried a permanent text which an imaginative teacher[...] asked us to memorise.[...] The fifteen lines of poetry began: "A! Fredome is a noble thing"' (1997: vii). It is this passage, then, which provided Duncan's first encounter with Barbour's poem and, implicitly, the initial inspiration to pursue his distinguished career as a historian. The famous opening line, *A fredome is a noble thing* can be read, carved in stone, in Lady Stair's Close, en route to the Writer's Museum in Edinburgh, and the first two couplets of the passage were inscribed, among many other famous Scottish quotations, on the fence surrounding the construction site of the Scottish Parliament until its completion in late 2004. Ebin says of the Praise of Freedom that 'in rhetorical and emotionally charged

language, Barbour celebrates the virtue of freedom and emphasizes its value over all other things'; it is the centrepiece of the prologue, which 'represents the causes of the conflict between Scotland and England in terms of the ideals of freedom and right, first demonstrating their importance by repeated example and then reiterating the themes explicitly in a dramatic celebration of freedom by the narrator' (1969: 84, 86). Yet this oft-quoted, oft-cited passage occurs before the principal action of the poem begins.

12. After the slaying of John Comyn, which initiates the military conflict between Scotland and England, the narrative presents us with a series of defeats and humiliations for the newly crowned Robert I and his small army. It is not until Book V that the tide begins to turn in his favour, signalled rhetorically by the opening lines:

Thys wes in ver, quhen wynter tid
With his blastis hidwys to bid
Was ourdrywyn, and byrdis smale
As turturis and ye nyctyngale
Begouth rycht sariely to syng
And for to mak in yar singyng
Swete notis and sownys ser
And melodys plesand to her,
And ye treis begouth to ma
Burgeans and brycht blomys alsua
To wyn ye helyng off yar hewid
Yat wykkyt wynter had yaim rewid,

And all gressys beguth to spryng.

(1-13).

Duncan identifies this as the ‘conventional poetic account of spring, used, as often in romances, to mark an abrupt change of action’ (1997: 190). Book V then presents a series of successes for the Bruce, often against expectation, culminating in his single-handed defeat of three assassins (the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*). Book VI then depicts Bruce’s defence of a ford, again single-handedly, against two hundred men of Galloway. This incident, the most important one of the Personal Combat *cycle*, takes up just over half of Book VI, ending at line 374 with the close of the Comment on Valour.

13. Though Ebin does not identify the different types of incident, she is aware of actions developing different themes. For instance, she characterises what I call the Battle cycle as ‘a struggle increasingly successful for the Scots which builds in magnitude and intensity to the Battle of Bannockburn and the final treaty of peace’ (1969: 69-70). She is also aware of certain incidents, which I term Personal Combats, used in the delineation of Bruce’s character, specifically as an ideal king: ‘More than any single aspect of character, as Barbour repeatedly emphasizes, is Bruce’s ideal combination or balance of virtues. He is not only valiant, but he is also prudent’ (Ebin 1971-72: 222). Ebin interprets the Defence of the Ford as an instance of Barbour developing ‘an entire episode as a short exemplum’ (1969: 33), and furthermore rightly includes the Comment on Valour as the end of the episode, the explicit and rhetorical statement of the idea the episode has demonstrated, just as the Praise of Freedom is the

explicit statement of the theme of the prologue. It is part of Barbour's style that he both shows and tells the audience what he means.

14. But though Ebin seems aware of the significance of the Defence at the Ford and the Comment on Valour – at least as significant as the Praise of Freedom – not even she has explicitly cited the verbal correspondence between these two passages. So begins the famous Praise of Freedom:

A, fredome is a noble thing,
Fredome mays man to haiff liking,
(I.225-26).

And so begins the Comment on Valour:

A, quhat worschip is prisit thing,
For it mays men till haiff loving
(VI.327-28).

What reader – or listener – could fail to be struck by the similarity of these two opening couplets? And yet, I would argue that this is *not* an instance of formulaic repetition. Of the approximately 13,864 lines of the *Brus*, only these two passages begin with this construction (though the use of *quhat* draws a connection between the Comment of Valour and the Reflections on the Kings' Failure and Success near the end of Bannockburn). Of course, only two repetitions are generally deemed necessary to prove

a phrase is formulaic, but these passages are rhetorical and ‘literary’; furthermore they are imperative to an understanding of the meaning of the poem. These passages are in fact ‘keys’ to the *Brus*; that they are instances of ‘repetition without second thought’ is unlikely, nor do they seem to be required by some kind of vernacular traditions, as many of the battle-scene formulae are. I take these nearly identical phrases as intentional – or, as Ebin has it, *planned and purposeful* – repetition: refrain, rather than formula. Barbour is using this construction to underscore these passages for the benefit of his audience’s understanding.

15. Some of the rhetorical passages in Barbour are named under Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s methods of ‘amplification’, treated in chapter III of his *Poetria Nova* (Nims: 24-40). For example, the Praise of Freedom, the Comment on Valour, and the Reflections on the Kings’ Failure and Success are all examples of digression (Nims: 35-36), while Book I, lines 91-134, constitute an extended apostrophe. Other techniques not named in Vinsauf, but employed by Barbour to similar purposes of amplifying and thus lengthening an *incident*, as well as emphasising the interpretation he wishes to impose upon the audience, are the prayer to God to preserve a character in danger (which can be considered a kind of apostrophe) and the simple statement of authorial opinion concerning a specific *incident*, a component I have dubbed *commentary*. At times, however, this function is fulfilled by a formulaic component, such as the *reaction* of a character to an *incident*, communicated in a set speech which is invariably introduced by a formulaic *speech* formula.

4.4.1 Rhetorical Emphasis of the Narrative Structure in the *Brus*

1. I have argued in chapter three that Barbour treats the *reaction* of Edward I to both the coronation of Bruce as King Robert I of Scotland *and* the killing of John Comyn to portray the ill-fated Battle of Methven (and subsequent Scottish defeats) as the result of Bruce's bloodshed on holy ground. In case this connection should prove too subtle for a listening audience, Barbour also provides an explicit statement of this interpretation at the end of the Comyn *incident*:

He mysdyd yar gretly but wer
Yat gave na gyrrh to ye awter,
Yarfor sa hard myscheiff him fell
Yat ik herd neuer in romanys tell
Off man sa hard frayit as wes he
Yat efterwart com to sic bounte.
(II.43-48)

Though this *commentary* component is not prototypically formulaic, it does participate in the formulaic construction of Battle *incidents*, and contains prosodic fillers such as 'but wer' (II.43) and the longer *discursive* formula found in lines 46-48, the *ik herd neuer* formula, wherein a character (or, in this case, the narrator) claims never to have heard of such an occurrence, event, situation, etc. in any previous tale. I have called this pattern a formula because of the recurring phrase 'ik herd neuer' or some acceptable

variant thereof, though it also counts as the rhetorical ornament of style known as ‘hyperbole’ (Nims: 52-53).

2. The Battle of Methven passes without rhetorical *commentary*, although, as I pointed out in chapter three, it begins the process of portraying *slycht* and retreat as acceptable battle tactics, and demonstrates Bruce’s attitude toward both these with set-speeches. The Skirmish with the Lord of Lorn at the beginning of Book III, on the other hand, not only contains a rhetorical *commentary*, but leads directly into the first *incident* of the Single Combat *cycle*, which is itself heavy with *commentary*.

3. The Skirmish with Lorn is the second instance of Bruce’s army being forced into a tactical retreat. To speed the audience’s acceptance of this tactic, and downplay accusations of cowardice, Barbour actually trebles the *commentary* component. The first repetition is the simple statement of his suggested interpretation:

Yen yai [the Scots] withdrew yaim halely,

Bot yat was nocht full cowardly,

For samyn in-till a sop held yai

And ye king him abandounyt ay

To defend behind his meng3e,

[...]

Sa weile defendyt he his men

Yat quha-sa-euer had seyne him yen

Prowe sa worthely wasselage

And turn sa oft-sythis ye wisage

He suld say he awcht weill to be

A king of a gret reawte.

(III.45-49, 55-60).

Barbour begins by refuting an implied accusation of cowardice and ends by suggesting any witness to the retreat would have acknowledged Bruce as a king of great royalty. We might note that, as the *commentary* for the killing of John Comyn contained the *ik herd neuer* formula, this *commentary* on Bruce's retreat ends with the *quha had seen* formula. The second repetition is filled by Lorn's *reaction* to the retreat, who compares the retreating Bruce to Goll mac Morna (III.67-70); in the third repetition the narrator amends the comparison, suggesting Gadifer of Laris is more fitting (III.71-87). Thus the valiant figure Bruce makes even whilst fleeing from defeat is underlined three times in succession; by the end of the third repetition the members of a listening audience have probably placed the defeat – last mentioned almost fifty lines ago – to the back of their minds, concentrating instead on the comparison of Bruce and Gadifer.

4. As we have seen above, the Comment on Valour underlines Bruce's ideal combination of courage and prudence. Bruce's prudence or wisdom in battle is emphasised in the Defence of the Ford *incident* first when he first sees that the ford is so narrow

Yat twa men mycht nocht samyn thring

Na on na maner pres yaim swa

Yat yai to-gidder mycht [land ta].

(VI.82-84)

Only at this point does he send his two companions away to rest (VI.85-87). Bruce's prudence reappears when he sees the army of Galwegians advancing on the other side of the ford:

Yen he wmbethocht him hastily

Giff he held towart his men^{3e}

Yat or he mycht reparyt be

Yai suld be passit ye furd ilkan,

And yen behuffyt him ches ane

Off yir twa, oyer to fley or dey.

(VI.112-17)

He considers running for aid, but decides it is too likely that the stronger army will have passed the ford before he can get help, which could lead to a defeat like the Skirmish with Lorn in Book III. Also, 'his hart yat wes stout & hey' counsels him to stay and fight (VI.118-21). This is not imprudent, however; Bruce knows his chances of success are reasonable,

Sen he wes warnyst of armyng

Yat he yar arowys thurth nocht dreid,

And gyff he war off gret manheid

He mycht stunay yaim euerilkane
Sen yai ne mycht cum bot and & ane,
(VI.122-26)

Although Barbour reminds us once again of what ‘strang wtrageous curage’ (VI.128) Bruce must have ‘to fecht with twa hunder & ma’ (VI.131), he has already set this scene up as an instance of Bruce’s intelligent appraisal of the situation and his careful and accurate weighing of the odds: in other words, of Bruce’s prudence and wisdom as a military tactician.

5. This aspect of Bruce’s character is emphasised once again when Barbour interrupts the *incident* to compare Bruce’s feat with that of Tydeus of Thebes (VI.181-286). A comparison is another of Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s methods of amplification (Nims: 25); as Barbour employs it here, it does not merely lengthen the episode, but serves to advance his proposed interpretation of the Defence of the Ford and the role of prudence in battle. At the end of the story of Tydeus, the narrator addresses the reader specifically:

3e yat yis redys, cheys yhe
Quheyer yar mar suld prysit be
Ye king [Bruce], yat with awisement
Wndertuk sic hardyment
As for to stynt him ane but fer
Ye folk yat twa hunder wer,

Or Thedeus, yat suddanly
For yai had raysyt on him ye cry
Throw hardyment yat he had tane
Wane [fyfty] men all him allane.
(VI.271-80)

The point of contrast Barbour emphasises is that Bruce did his deed ‘with awisement’ (‘deliberation’), while Tydeus was attacked ‘suddanly’. At the end of the passage, the narrator once again asks for a choice: ‘Now demys quheyer mar lowing | Suld Thedeus haiff or ye king’ (VI.285-86). Although it would seem the choice is in the reader’s (or audience’s) hands, Barbour actually seems to answer his own question with the Comment of Valour: ‘worschip’ (‘valour’) ‘mays men till haiff loving’ (VI.328), and ‘worschip’ is ‘hardyment yat mellyt is | With wyt’ (VI.358-59).

Yis nobile king yat we off red
Mellyt all tyme with wit manheid,
Yat may men by yis melle se.
His wyt schawyt him ye strait entre
Off ye furd & ye wschyng alsua
Yat as him thocht war hard to ta
Apon a man yat war worthy,
Yarfor his hardyment hastily
Thocht it mycht be weill wndertan

Sen at anys mycht assail bot ane.

(VI.361-70)

As an example of true ‘worschip’, then, Bruce would seem to be the more praiseworthy.

6. Bruce was able to deliberate – to fight ‘with awisement’ (VI.273) – in the Defence of the Ford, because he knew of the Galwegians’ advance before they arrived, and had time to formulate a plan. In the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident* in Book V, we saw that Bruce was aware of a plot against him, and took his sword with him even to the privy. On the other hand, we have seen Bruce fight well in a proper surprise attack, just as did Tydeus of Thebes. In the Mac na Dorsair *incident* in Book III Bruce dispatches three attackers whilst fleeing from defeat at the hand of the Lord of Lorn. As in the Battle of Methven, none of the enemy knights dare pursue the fleeing Scots for fear of Robert Bruce, who defends the rearguard (II.444-54; III.61-64; 147-52). At this point, one of Lorn’s knights delivers a *commentary* on Bruce’s defeat of the Mac na Dorsair brothers and their fellow:

Yar wes a baroune Maknauchtan

Yat in his hart gret kep has tane

To ye kingis chewalry

And prisyt him in hert gretly,

And to ye lord off Lorne said he,

‘Sekyrly now may 3e se

Be tane ye starkest pundelan

Yat ewyr 3our lyff-tyme 3e saw tane,
 For 3one knyght throw his douchti deid
 And thro his owtrageous manheid
 Has fellyt in-till litill tyd
 Thre men of mekill prid,
 And stonayit all our meng3e swa
 Yat eftyr him dar na man ga,
 And tournys sa mony tyme his stede
 Yat semys off ws he had na drede.'

(III.153-68)

This *reaction* serves once again to shift attention from Bruce's defeat to his courageous and manly performance in defence of his fleeing knights; it also states explicitly that Bruce's fight against the Mac na Dorsair brothers and their fellow was a 'douchti deid' accomplished 'thro his [Bruce's] owtrageous manheid' and emphasises the speed with which Bruce won the fight (III.163). If the shame of defeat by Lorn was sufficiently downplayed before the Mac na Dorsair *incident*, by now all memory of it must be driven from memory. And yet Mac Nachtan goes on to say

'[...] sekyrly in all my tyme
 Ik hard neuer in sang na ryme
 Tell off a man yat swa smertly

Eschewyt swa gret chewalry.’

(III.177-80)

This is, of course, an instance of the *ik hard neuer* formula, as well as an example of the rhetorical amplification method hyperbole. Thus Latin-derived rhetoric and oral-derived formulaic factors can be at play within the same passage.

7. Not every *incident* or event in the *Brus* has a concomitant *reaction* or *commentary*, though, of the two types of *incident* examined in this thesis, the Single Combat is accompanied by commentary more frequently, probably because this kind of *incident* is less common than the Battle. (Providing a *commentary* for every Battle in the *Brus*, even given the variety of forms *commentary* may assume, would be a taxing effort indeed.) We have seen that the *summary* is a commonly occurring component of the Single Combat. As Battles tend not to include a *summary*, we may ask whether summarising the *incident* is a kind of closure, or whether it is meant to attach the main plot action of the *incident* to the *commentary* which will guide the audience’s interpretation of it.

8. Of the six Single Combats we have examined in this thesis, at least five are accompanied by some form of *commentary*. We have seen Mac Nachtan’s *reaction* to the Mac na Dorsair *incident* in Book III; we have also seen Valence’s *reaction* to the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*, wherein he proclaims that ‘ure helpys hardy men | As by yis deid we may ken’ (VI.17-18). Later in the speech, Valence suggests that Bruce’s courage allowed him to see his advantage in battle, which Barbour will later ascribe to ‘wyt’ in the Comment on Valour:

War he [Bruce] nocht owtrageous hardy

He had nocht wnabasytly

Sa smertly sene his awantage.

(VI.19-21)

And we have also discussed the all-important Comment on Valour itself.

9. The *incident* of Bruce and his Foster-Brother versus Five Men also contains a *reaction*, though it is separated from the Single Combat proper by two versions of Bruce and foster-brother's escape from the tracker-dog. Like that of the Treacherous Kinsmen *incident*, this *reaction* occurs when a *report* is made to Valence:

He tauld schyr Aymer all ye cas,

How yat ye king eschapyt was

And how yat he his v men slew

And syne to ye wode him drew.

(VII.93-96)

We see that the plot action of the Single Combat is summarised once again, along with the escape from the tracker-dog; Valence is reacting to both these events, just as Edward I reacted both to the killing of Comyn and the coronation of Bruce as king in Book II (195-199).

Quhen schyr Aymer herd yis, in hy
He sanyt him for ye ferly
& said, 'He is gretly to prys,
For I knaw nane yat liffand is
Yat at myscheyff gan help him swa.
I trow he suld be hard to sla
& he war bodyn ewynly.'
(VII.97-103)

This *reaction* is brief, merely commenting on Bruce's ability to defend himself in a pinch. Combined with the expansion of the humility motif at the end of the Single Combat proper, we now see that the *incident* of Bruce and his Foster-Brother versus Five Men reiterates two important aspects of the hero's character: his courage and hardiness when attacked suddenly, and his humbleness when praised for his deeds.

10. Only the final *incident* of the Single Combat *cycle* does not seem to have any extended *commentary* besides the *summary* provided by Bruce's men after these latest three assailants have met their fate (VII.486-90). A secure example of *commentary* for the *incident* of the Three Men with a Wether is also hard to locate. After Bruce has killed the men, he simply wanders off until he comes upon a woman willing to give her two sons into his service (VI.264-66). While they all dine together, a band of men approach who turn out to be James Douglas, Edward Bruce, and about one hundred fifty of Bruce's knights (VI.270-84). A *report* follows:

Yai war ioyfull of yar meting
 & askyt how yat he eschapyt was,
 And he [Bruce] yaim tauld all hale ye cas.
 How ye v men him pressyt fast,
 & how he throw ye water past,
 & how he met ye thewis thre
 & how he slepand slane suld be
 Quhen he waknyt throw Goddis grace,
 & how his foster brodyr was
 Slayne he tauld yaim all haly.
 Yan lowyt yai God commounly
 Yat yar lord wes eschapyt swa
 (VII.286-97)

This *report* ends with Bruce's men praising God, which commonly accompanies a *summary* in a Single Combat. Compare the above passage with the similar ones in Books V and VI:

With yat his boy come fast rynnand	Yan speryt yai at him off his state
And said, 'Our Lord mot lowyt be	& he tauld yaim all hale ye cas,
Yat grauntyt 3ow mycht & powste	Howgate yat he assailyt was
To fell ye felny & ye prid	& how yat God him helpyt swa

Off yir thre in swa litill tid.'

(V.650-54)

Yat he eschapyt hale yaim fra.

Yan lukyt yai how fele war ded,

& yai fand lyand in yat sted

Fourtene yat war slayne with his hand.

Yan lovyt yai God fast all-weildand

Yat yai yar lord fand hale & fer

(VI.308-1)

11. It is clear that these are three occurrences of the same basic pattern. Unlike the passages from Books V and VI, however, the *summary* in Book VII does not immediately follow from the Single Combat, nor does it lead directly into some form of *commentary*. Instead, Bruce and his men decide to raid an enemy village (VII.299-355). Only at this point do we find a *reaction*, again from Valence:

& quhen schyr Aymer herd say

How yat ye king yar men had slayn

& how yai turnyt war agayn

He said, 'Now may we clerly se

Yat nobill hart quhar-euer it be

It is hard till ourcum throw maystri,

For quhar ane hart is rycht worthy

Agayne stoutnes it is ay stoute,

Na as I trow yar may na dowte

Ger it all-owt discumfyt be
 Quhill body lewand is & fre,
 As be yis melle may be sene.
 We wend Robert ye Bruce had bene
 Swa discomfyt yat be gud skill
 He suld noyter haiff haid hart ne will
 Swilk iuperty till wndreta,
 For he put wes at wndre swa
 Yat he wes left all him allane
 & all his folk war fra hym gayn,
 & he sagat fortrawaillyt
 To put yaim off yat him assaylit
 Yat he suld haiff 3arnyt resting
 Yis nycht atour all oyer thing.
 Bot his hart fillyt is off bounte
 Swa yat it wencusyt may nocht be.'
 (VII.356-80)

This seems to be a *reaction* to the raid on the village, and indeed begins so, though at the end it seems to refer to Bruce's recent Single Combat, in which he had fought so hard against the men who assailed him that this night he should have wanted rest above all else (VII.375-78). This could be another reference to Bruce and his Foster-Brother versus Five Men, but consider also that Valence specifically states that Bruce was left

alone (VII.373-74). In any case, this reaction seems mainly to reiterate Bruce's quality of courage, as well as briefly referencing the theme of freedom in line 366. It would seem that, even as aspects of prudence and divine assistance are depicted in Bruce's deeds, Barbour must still find a space to remind us that Bruce is at all time courageous (even when raiding a village and killing people in their sleep).

12. That the *commentary* component so frequently occurs in a Single Combat suggests that it may be attached to the formulaic grammar of this type of incident. Indeed we find a possible variant of it even in an *incident* which is not part of the Single Combat cycle examined so far. The scene in which Douglas takes Bishop Lamberton's horse and runs off to join Bruce's campaign in Book II is an example of a Single Combat, though not part of the cycle I described in chapter three. Nevertheless the important components are all present. First there is the *naming* of Douglas (II.134-35), followed by the *introduction* of his opponent, the stableman (136-37). The *nucleus* follows immediately in lines 138-39:

Bot he yat wreth him encrely
 Fellyt hym with a suerdys dynt,

This particular *killing* formula is not the most frequently occurring one in the *Brut*; however, *fellyt* can be pronounced as a monosyllable, *he fellyt him* is an acceptable variation of *he slew him*.

13. Duncan writes of the Douglas incident in Book II: 'Barbour passes by Douglas's ruthless killing of the stableman doing his duty without comment' (1997:

86n139). This is not entirely true, at least from a structural point of view. *Commentary* is one of the most frequently occurring peripheral components in a Single Combat, so much so that we should perhaps consider it obligatory. After Douglas ‘fells’ the stableman (which he did on the direction of the bishop [II.123-24]), he escapes using the familiar *lap on* formula:

And syne for-owtyn langer stynt

Ye hors he sadylt hastely,

And lap on hym delyuerly

And passyt furth but leve-taking.

(II.140-43).

The incident is then closed by the narrator's short prayer for Douglas's safe-conduct:

Der God yat is off hevyn king

Sawff hym and scheld him fra his fayis.

(II.144-45).

This prayer is not a comment on the morality of Douglas's action, nor an address to the audience to rate the valour with which this deed was performed, nor even an exclamation to the effect that whosoever had witnessed this deed would certainly praise the doer as a worthy knight, any of which are likely to occur after a Single Combat, either supplied by the narrator or delivered as a set speech from one of the characters.

However, as I have suggested above, a prayer is a form of address to a person, persons, or entity not physically present in the narrative context, and thus can be viewed as a kind of apostrophe. This prayer, then, does fill the *commentary* function by being a rhetorical method of amplification, even though it does not make the prototypical statement of the author's proposed interpretation of the *incident*. We may also argue that, as the narrator does not condemn Douglas' actions (as he did Bruce's when he killed John Comyn), but rather prays for his safety, there is an implicit judgement that Douglas' deed was necessary, justified by circumstance. In any case, it would seem that some form of non-narrative, rhetorical interjection frequently either ends an incident or bridges the gap between one incident and the next, demonstrating that Barbour either chose not or was not able (due to some formulaic or rhetorical law or precept) to end a scene without making some personal reaction to it, or placing that reaction in the mouth of a character. That the audience is not invited to judge Douglas's character at this point demonstrates that this incident itself is rather peripheral, and is probably not meant to be exemplary. This in turn shows us that, even when constructing a minor incident for his poem, Barbour still chose to or had to obey the rules of formulaic composition.

14. As to the historicity of this incident, Duncan merely relates it to the similar case of the earl of Atholl seizing 'the horses of the earl of Buchan in mid-March 1306, to inhibit pursuit when taking the countess of Buchan to Scone for the inauguration [of Robert I]' (1997: 86n139). Presumably we are to take this note as meaning there is no historical source for Douglas's deed, apart from Barbour's *Brus* itself. Coldwell can provide little more than speculation. Writing that it is 'difficult to discover[...] to what extent he [Bishop Lamberton] encouraged Douglas to take up arms with Bruce: when

such rôles are played, they seldom appear in public records' (1947: 30). The incident is not entirely implausible, for 'Barbour's account is in accordance with what is known of Lamberton's character (Coldwell 1947: 30), but Coldwell admits that 'there appears to be no way of [...] verifying Barbour's careful story' (1947: 38). Of course, even if Lamberton did encourage Douglas to sneak away to join the Bruce, the incident may not have occurred as it does in the *Brus*. Even if Douglas did steal the horse, he may not have actually killed the stableman. That this incident structurally and stylistically resembles other Personal Combats in Barbour's poem – including those infamously unlikely ones wherein the Bruce single-handedly fights three assassins – suggests that such acts of violence themselves may simply have been a part of the vocabulary of formulae Barbour inherited from previous traditions of heroic narrative.

4.4.2 The Rhetoric of Characterisation in the *Brus*

1. Though Battles are not as invariably accompanied by *commentary* as Single Combats, Barbour nevertheless uses the *commentary*-component to direct the interpretation of the poem at crucial places in the plot. We have seen how he elucidates the concepts of freedom and the combination of courage and prudence with the twin passages, the Praise of Freedom and the Comment on Valour (in the prologue and the Defence of the Ford, respectively). We have also seen that he uses the Reflections on the Kings' Failure and Success at the end of the Bannockburn episode explicitly to refer to the common medieval concept of the Wheel of Fortune. Other rhetorical digressions describe those traits of characters who are meant to contrast with the virtues which make Robert the Bruce an ideal and exemplary king.

2. Ebin has described Barbour's presentation of Bruce as an ideal king. She goes on to write that Bruce is contrasted with 'the Edwards of England whom Barbour presents as types of the tyrant or unjust ruler' (1971-72: 223). There are three Edwards against whom Bruce wages war, but of all these, the character of Edward I is most fully developed. It is this Edward whose conquests are listed in the apostrophe to the Scots in Book I, lines 91-134. It is this Edward who is depicted as planning 'slely' to 'fynd ye gate' through which he can add Scotland to his own kingdom (I.150-52). It is this Edward who offers the throne of Scotland to Bruce's grandfather in exchange for obedience to the crown of England (I.153-56). It is this Edward who occupies Scotland after the death of Balliol, disenfranchising the Scottish nobility (I.179-218), and who imprisons and executes Douglas' father, and gives his hereditary lands to Clifford (I.281-87).

3. In Book IV, at the death of Edward I, the English monarch is contrasted with Bruce in two notable ways, both of which have to do with faith and morality. While riding to Scotland with his army of knights, Edward I falls ill (IV.191), and is brought to a small town which he learns is called 'Burch-in-ye-sand' (IV.203). Upon hearing the name of the town, Edward laments with unusual certainty that his death is near (IV.205-14). At this point we learn that Edward kept

A spyryt yat him ansuer maid

Off thingis yat he wald inquer.

Bot he fulyt forowtyn wer

Yat gaiff throuth till yat creatur,

For feyndys ar off sic natur
Yat yai to mankind has inwy
For yai wate weill and witterly
Yat yai yat weill ar liffand her
Sall wyn ye sege quharoff yai wer
Tumblyt throuch yar mekill prid.
Quhar-throw oft-tymys will betid
Yat quhen feyndys distren3eit ar
For till aper and mak answar
Throw force off coniuracioun,
Yat yai sa fals ar and feloun
Yat yai mak ay yar ansuering
Into dowbill wnderstanding
To dissaiiff yaim yat will yaim trow.
(IV.220-37)

This passage itself qualifies as a digression, and it would seem Edward I is himself a victim of such deceit: he had apparently been told he would not die until he reached the ‘Burgh in the Sand’, which he interpreted as ‘the Burgh of Jerusalem’ (IV.207-09). Barbour follows this digression with an example from a medieval Latin chronicle (Duncan: 162), telling how Count Ferrand of Flanders was himself deceived in such a way by Satan (IV.238-306), before summing up once more the case of Edward I:

At Ierusalem trowyt he
Grawyn in ye burch to be,
Ye-quhethyr at Burch-in-to-sand
He swelt rycht in his awn land.
(IV.308-11)

4. At the end of Book IV, Bruce is contrasted with Edward I, for whereas Edward ‘cowyt certante | Off yat at nane may certan be’ (IV.217-18), and was accordingly betrayed to his death by an evil spirit, Bruce demonstrates a Christian doubt of prophecy. While lying low on Arran, a woman sympathetic to his cause predicts Bruce’s ultimate victory:

[...] ‘Takis gud kep till my saw,
For or 3e pas I sall 3ow schaw
Off 3our fortoun a gret party,
Bot our all specially
A wittering her I sall 3ow ma
Quhat end yat 3our purpos sall ta,
(IV.638-43)

Unlike Edward’s prophecy, Bruce’s comes from a human being, rather than a spirit; and unlike Edward, Bruce does not ask for knowledge of his future. Instead, he

Thankit hyr in mekill thing,
For scho confort him sumdeill,
Ye-quheyir he trowyt nocht full weill
Hyr spek, for he had gret ferly
How scho suld wyt it sekyrly,
As it wes wounderfull perfay
How ony mannys science may
Knew thingis yat ar to cum
(IV.669-76)

This passage is part of what Duncan calls the ‘Discourse on Prophecy’ (1997: 183), which runs from line 668 until the end of Book IV at line 775. Though much of the ‘Discourse’ is a digression probably meant to extend (or ‘amplify’) the episode by explicating the doctrine of scepticism regarding predictions of the future, it also reiterates the concept that God alone is master of fate and the future (IV.675-81), and demonstrates that Bruce upholds this scepticism, in accordance with Christian doctrine. Whatever hardships he may endure, whatever doubts may trouble him, he will not turn to necromancy for comfort.

5. The second contrast between Bruce and Edward I is delineated by their respective behaviour on their death-beds. After the digression on Edward’s betrayal by his familiar spirit, English knights come to Edward with news of the surrender of the castle at Kildrummy and ask him what to do with the prisoners (IV.312-20); ‘Yan lukyt

he [Edward] angryly yaim to | And said grynnd, ‘Hyngis & drawys’ (IV.321-22). The narrator then inserts a *commentary* on this act:

Yat wes wonder off sik sawis,
Yat he yat to ye ded wes ner
Suld ansuer apon sic maner
For-owtyn menyng and mercy.
How mycht he traist on Hym to cry
Yat suthfastly demys all thing
To haiff mercy, for his cryng,
Off him yat throw his felony
In-to sic poynt had na mercy.
(IV.323-31)

Edward I dies not only unrepentant, but uses his dying breath to order the painful execution of prisoners. Barbour, speaking as cleric, as well as *auctor* and *commentator*, calls the English king’s hope of salvation into doubt, for he that grants no mercy can expect none. Bruce, by contrast, uses the time left to him on his death-bed to demonstrate his humility and penitence:

[...] ‘Lordingis swa is it gayn
With me yat yar is nocht bot ane,
Yat is ye dede with-owtyn drede

Yat ilk man mon thole off nede.
And I thank God yat has me sent
Space in yis lyve me to repent,
For throwch me and my werraying
Off blud has bene rycht gret spilling
Quhar mony sakles men war slayn,
Yarfor yis seknes and yis payn
I tak in thank for my trespas.¹¹
(XX.171-81)

6. In chapter three I pointed out certain techniques Barbour used to delineate the character of Edward Bruce. As Ebin points out, whereas Robert Bruce is simultaneously valiant and prudent, Edward is ‘daring in battle, often to an extreme’ and ‘possesses the courage and strength of a warrior without the corresponding prudence and wisdom essential to a king’ (1971-72: 223). The criticism of the excessive courage and daring is introduced in the Comment on Valour:

I wald till hardyment heyld haly
With-yi away war [ye] foly,
For hardyment with foly is wice
(VI.355-57)

We see one of several criticisms of Edward Bruce in Book XVI:

Couth he [Edward Bruce] haf gouernyt him throw skill
 And folowyt nocht to fast his will
 Bot with mesur haf led his dede
 It wes weill lik withoutyn drede
 Yat he mycht haiff conquest weill
 Ye land of Irland ilka-dele,
 Bot his owtrageous sucquedry ('arrogance')
 And will yat wes mar yan hardy
 Off purpos lettyt him perfay,
 [As] ik her-eftir sall 3ow say.
 (XVI.325-34)

This digression on Edward Bruce's character explicitly accuses him of veering too far in the extreme of 'worschip', which is foolhardiness: Edward Bruce did not conduct his deeds with 'mesur' (327), his will was 'more than hardy' (332). In Anglo-Saxon times, his character would have been called *ofermod*.

7. The end of this digression promises to depict further the failings of Edward Bruce. Though his exploits are interrupted by a return of attention to Douglas and Robert Bruce, when we pick up Edward's thread again in Book XVIII, he promptly meets his untimely death. While marching toward Dundalk with two thousand men, he encounters Richard Clare's army of twenty thousand (XVIII.17). Three of Edward's knights, Sir John Stewart, Soulis, and Sir Philip Mowbray, advise him not to fight (XVIII.31-48). We have seen in Chapter Three Edward Bruce's determination to fight

anyway, expressed with the *sall na man say* formula, signals his needless death through folly. Following his demise, the narrator delivers a *commentary* on Edward's actions which Duncan calls 'A Verdict on Edward Bruce' (1997: 675):

On yis wis war yai noble men
For wilfulness all lesyt yen,
And yat wes syne and gret pite
For had yar owtrageous bounte
Bene led with wyt and with mesur,
Bot gif ye mar mysawentur
[Be] fallyn yaim, it suld rycht hard thing
Be to lede yaim till owtraying,
Bot gret owtrageous surquedry
Gert yaim all [deir] yar worschip by.
(XVIII.175-84)

Instead of an admirable epic defeat in a fight against odds, Edward's death is portrayed in a negative light, as 'sin and great pity'; and this goes not only for his own death but also that of all the others who lost their lives fighting under such unjustifiable circumstances. We see the phrase 'owtrageous surquedry' repeated from the passage in Book XVI. Also familiar is the phrase 'owtrageous bounte', which is often applied to Robert Bruce, but is here used ironically, for Edward has it without 'wit and measure'.

4.5 Barbour as Vernacular *Auctor*

1. Both the rhetorical and formulaic aspects of the *Brus* are more complex and pervasive than it has been possible to demonstrate in this short space. I hope, nonetheless, to have shown that both are at work in Barbour's poem, complementing each other or participating in the same system, for rhetorical, Latin-derived (non-formulaic) components participate in the structure of formulaic scenes, and long rhetorical passages still make use of formulaic phrases. For Barbour, at least, oral-derived formulaic language and Latin-derived rhetorical methods were not antitheses, but rather two compatible ways of doing the same thing, or perhaps more than that: indistinguishable methods of composition in the vernacular.

2. As James Goldstein observes, '[t]he prologue [of the *Brus*][...] establish[es] the poet as a writer of *historia*, as an *auctor* who will recover an instructive past while clothing his story in pleasing language; this was, after all, the historian's proper function (*utilitas*) in the Middle Ages' (1993: 138). We have seen that an *auctor* writes both original words and borrows others', or as A. J. Minnis puts it, 'The *auctor* contributes most, the *scriptor* contributes nothing, of his own.[...] [T]he *auctor* writes *de suo* but draws on the statements of other men to support his own views' (1984: 94-95). Barbour often provides his own commentary, as we have seen, though he also imports comparisons and analogous episodes from external literature (e.g. the story of Tydeus of Thebes in VI.181-286 or the example of Count Ferrand of Flanders and misguidance through prophecy in IV.238-306), which may be considered drawing on the statements of other men to support his own views.

3. Ruth Morse observes that '[f]or a text to acquire a commentary became a mark of seriousness' (1991: 24). This, along with Barbour's deliberate didactic intentions, observed by Lois Ebin (1971-72: 237), can account for the need to punctuate the plot events of the *Brus* with such rhetorical digressions, apostrophes, and overt comparisons. As we have seen from the initial prologue and the colophon of the *Brus*, Barbour had more in mind in composing his poem than mere entertainment. Though the *Brus* often assumes the guise of romance, its purpose is grave and serious; intra-narrative commentary not only assists in communicating that purpose – the interpretation of his poem and its plot events which Barbour wishes his audience to develop – but also lends the work a degree of gravitas.

4. Of course, Morse, and especially Minnis, are drawing on the Latin tradition, rather than the vernacular. The 'commentary' to which Morse refers are marginalia supplied by another author; the 'mark of seriousness' comes not only from the comments themselves, but from the fact that an astute reader or *commentator* considered the work worthy of explication and preservation. Barbour's commentary, on the other hand, is a part of the poem itself, a discursive component which helps create meaning and, rhetorical and Latin-derived though it be, a participant in the poem's grammar of narrative which includes formulaic language and incident. We return then to my observation that formulaic composition itself may be a kind of 'vernacular rhetoric'. Barbour seems to regard them as of equal status, as variations on a theme, and easily synthesises the two into a single system of composition and narration.

Chapter Five Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Study

1. As I remarked in Chapter One, what was initially conceived as a thorough study of the formula in all the four-beat narrative poems of the Older Scots corpus has by necessity been trimmed down to an introduction to the formula in Barbour's *Brus*. At the beginning of this project I had not considered the possibility that the *Brus*, as formulaic poem – or at least, a poem which employed metrical formulae – could present such a departure from the Middle English formulaic romances of familiar studies such as Susan Wittig's or Ronald Waldron's. In this respect, I too was initially guilty of taking an either/or approach to Barbour's work, assuming the poem to be either formulaic, and therefore practically identical to, say, *Havelok the Dane*, or non-formulaic, and therefore completely different from any formulaic poem. Early on I found this approach impossible to maintain, and from that point the union of formulaic and non-formulaic language and techniques of composition in Barbour's *Brus* has been the underlying theme of this thesis.

2. Much space in this work has been devoted to review, either of previous critical approaches to the *Brus*, the history of scholarship on the formula, or the history of rhetoric as it pertains to poetry. All three areas, however, are rather specialised, and somewhat exclusive of each other: even in the field of medieval Scottish literature, Barbour's *Brus* is hardly the favourite text, and studies of the formula and formulaic language are still largely the territory of oral culture, which hardly has anything to do with Scottish literature, while the history of rhetoric I have presented was largely drawn from scholarship in Classical and Medieval Latin. I felt it necessary, therefore, to provide background knowledge in all three areas, so that readers from any of these three fields may be on an equal footing. Nevertheless, this

thesis is primarily a study in the field of Scottish literature, albeit focused on literary stylistics, a kind of linguistic approach to literary criticism. I have not attempted to argue a new theory of *what* the *Brus* means, but have sought more thoroughly to explicate *how* it means.

3. We have seen that formulae and formulaic language occur in Barbour's *Brus*; indeed, many phrases like *in yat tyme*, and *on ye morn quhen it wes day* are shared with Middle English romances. In addition, certain discursive elements like the *exhortation* motifeme (to use Susan Wittig's term), as well as historic phrases and actions (e.g. formulae for introducing speech or recurring acts of killing) are nearly identical to their Middle English counterparts. The plot events of Barbour's *Brus*, however, are largely drawn from Scottish history, and their arrangement is intentionally geared toward a specific interpretation, an intentional, didactic purpose of the author, rather than being merely an extension of sub-conscious formulaic grammar that unites Middle English romances from the microscopic level of the single phrase to the macroscopic levels of episode and narrative construction, and eventually, the formulaic composition of an entire narrative tradition. Instead of this unified, formulaic grammar controlling the text from the ground up, the *Brus* is unified by Barbour's purpose in composing it, and the values of leadership, loyalty, and freedom he wished to communicate to his audience, which included King Robert II. To this end he arranged plot events in such a way as to promote his intended interpretation, delineated the poem's themes and ideas, as well as the character traits of the Bruce himself, through *cycles* of recurring *incidents*, repetition with successive variation. Finally, he highlighted or reinforced his message with rhetorical digressions, comparisons, and apostrophes at key points in the narrative. Such rhetorical passages participate in an identifiably formulaic system of scene-

composition, and at times exhibit formulaic phrases themselves, either prosodic fillers, or longer discursive patterns such as the *ik herd neuer* formula, which further demonstrate the unification of formulaic and rhetorical components in one poem.

4. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, I have only discussed two types of *incident* in this thesis, and only two *cycles*. The most obvious suggestion for further study, therefore, is to continue examining Barbour's *Brus* along the lines and according to the methodology proposed by this thesis. There are, I believe, comparable *cycles* of *incident* involving James Douglas, Edward Bruce, and (though briefer) other characters such as Thomas Randolph. There are also other types of *incident* I have not examined, such as raiding small villages (e.g. V.61-122; VII.300-80) and besieging and sacking castles (largely present in Book X). Other fruitful areas of study include applying this methodology (or a modified version thereof) to the four-beat narrative poems of Older Scots I have not had time to examine in this thesis; I have already remarked that such a study of the *Buik of Alexander* would possibly yield an interesting addition to the evidence for and against Barbour's authorship of that poem. Another work of Older Scots in dire need of further study is the Scottish *Legends of the Saints*. Wyntoun's *Cronykil* would constitute a more difficult study, due to its length, its technique of *chronica* (rather than *historia*), which lists events with sparse elaboration rather than portraying the figures and deeds of the past 'rycht as yai yan in presence war' (I.20), and perhaps most importantly because of the acknowledged influence of Barbour's *Brus*, which would suggest intentional borrowing of formulaic phrases in deliberate imitation of Barbour, rather than participation in a linguistic tradition. Finally, it may be profitable to conduct such a study of Middle English narrative poems outside the romance genre, e.g. the *Cursor Mundi*.

5. Returning to the central point of this thesis, I conclude that Barbour has synthesised methods of composition and arrangement from both a vernacular, formulaic tradition and a rhetorical tradition inherited from Ancient Rome and communicated through the written and scholastic medium of medieval Latin. This conclusion shows not only that these two seemingly disparate traditions can cooperate in a single text, but more importantly that both were living traditions to author and audience. We might recall Laura Loomis' harsh criticism of the formulae in the romances of the Auchinleck Manuscript as a "patter" of well-worn clichés, the same stereotyped formulas of expression, the same stock phrases, the same stock rimes, which Chaucer was to parody in such masterly fashion in *Sir Thopas*' (1942: 608). Chaucer does indeed seem to parody excessively formulaic composition, though he himself does not dispense with formulae entirely. Perhaps the difference between Chaucer and Barbour is like the difference Michael Nagler observes between Cervantes and Homer:

[...] for Cervantes, these conventions [of formulaic language] were assuredly complete in themselves, something handed down to him from the literary past (in fact, largely from areas outside his own language), something he had learned from a relatively small number of finished examples and perhaps from secondary sources as well, something outside himself which he could treat with ironic distance and yet could not manipulate very much without risking loss of intelligibility. But the 'tradition' in which Homer composed was not like that: for him it was a still-living stream which operated at a deeper level of consciousness[...]. [I]t was essentially an inheritance

of habits, tendencies, and techniques rather than of completed entities. (1974: xxii-xxiii)

It may not be true that the formulaic composition was as 'living' a language for Barbour as it was for Homer, nor that it was as dead for Chaucer as it was for Cervantes; nevertheless the fact that Barbour could employ formulaic language without irony or satire, and incorporate Latin-derived rhetoric in the same poem without discord, shows that both were sufficiently living and sufficiently internalised to be used for composition: both formed part of Barbour's own 'inheritance of habits, tendencies, and techniques'. The poem, like its author, is at once vernacular and Latinate. Following from the argument of this thesis, it will be useful in the near future to see if this synthesis is found in other authors and works before and after Barbour.

Notes

Notes to Chapter One

1. Apart from apparently confusing Robert I with his grandfather and namesake in Book I, Barbour also

places battles in the wrong year, describes a pact between the Bruce and John Comyn that never existed, and likely narrates Douglas' sackings of his family castle in the wrong order.

See *The Bruce* by John Barbour, edited by A. A. M. Duncan, Canongate, 1997, for further details.

2. In this case, the critic is specifically Hans Utz, author of "If Freedom Fail...: 'Freedom' in John Barbour's *Bruce*" (*English Studies* 50 (1969): 151-65).
3. All quotations from the *Brus* are based upon McDiarmid and Stevenson's Scottish Text Society edition. I have, however, silently accepted the editors' textual emendations, so that any text within quotations appearing within square brackets ('[]') has been supplied by me. In addition, where McDiarmid and Stevenson use the character 'yogh', I employ the Arabic numeral '3'. Finally, I have silently altered the punctuation of certain passages so that they conform to the syntax of the text of my thesis. No quotations are taken from Skeat's editions (EETS or STS), nor from Duncan's Canongate Edition. Instead, I have used Duncan's edition for its historical notes, treating it as a study of Barbour's *Brus* (hence its appearance in the Bibliography under 'Secondary Sources').
4. I place the word 'version' in quotation marks to indicate that a primary-oral poet and audience would not consider differing performances of the same story to be different 'versions'; they would in fact consider each performance to be the same poem, regardless of empirical differences in wording, length, etc. What Walter Ong calls 'primary orality', there are no 'fixed versions' of tales (Ong 1982: 57).

Notes to Chapter Two

1. 'Oral' is meant in the sense of 'being a member of a society which has not developed a writing system'.
2. Cf. *Brus* IV.252-55: 'Yis wes ye spek he maid perfay / And is in Inglis tounge to say, / "Ye king sall fall in ye fechtung / And sall faile honour off erding"'.

3. Chaucer's use of certain common formulae in *Sir Thopas* presumably signals to his own audience that the romance genre is being satirised. See chapter three, adverbial formulae of time.
4. Later, I shall assign formulae into three groups, according to the degree to which their metrical function supersedes their semantic function (i.e. how much more important their scansion is than the plot information they provide). The epithet, a descriptive formula, belongs to the middle group (*discursive* formulae), which have a strong metrical function, but not quite divorced from its contextual meaning.
5. Both readings are actually possible. Odysseus could burn a thighbone in rich fat, or amid a flourishing populace, i.e., in public. If context allows both readings, the precise understanding of the line could be up to the listener (see *Odyssey* 17.241). It may be asked if this means that certain formulae develop 'accidentally', but according to Lord, all formulae, like all poetry, was probably an accidental discovery.
6. See Coleman 1996 for a complete discussion of aurality and a review of previous critical attitudes toward 'orality' and 'literacy'.
7. Benson had, however, presented his findings on the literary character of OE formulaic poetry to the MLA as early as 1964 (Benson 1966: 334n1).
8. Instead of a rhyme-scheme, alliterative poems have a pattern of alliteration. The *aaax* pattern denotes three stressed syllables alliterating on the same sound while the fourth begins with some other sound (its variability denoted by 'x').
9. See Nicolaisen 1989 for a different view of Barbour's 'minstrel tags.'
10. Nagler 1974: 270
11. However, in its function as a stand-alone, state-of-being verb, *to be* can be included in the open class. The synonymous verb, *exist*, for instance, is of romance origin, and linguistic borrowing is generally restricted to the open-class.
12. Besides which any discussion of what choices Barbour had available is entirely hypothetical. No source of the *Brus* suggests an alternative reading of the line (though Wyntoun's version, 'Fra Weik anentis Orknay', yields eight syllables if you pronounce the <n> in 'Orknay' as one syllable). Rather, the point of this example is to show what Barbour could *not* have chosen.
13. Cf. also '& syne his way tuk *him allane*' (VII.231) and 'And saw Ledhous stand *him allane*'

(X.430).

14. Cf. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Routledge, 1982, p. 21.
15. Goldstein (1993) demonstrates that the terms 'Inglis' and 'Scottis' in Barbour's *Brus* often refer not to actual nationality but rather to allegiance. Thus Umfraville, though of Scottish birth, is English in that he serves Edward I and II through part of the poem (193-94).
16. The use of capital, lower-case, and italicised letters is derived from Ford's original catalogue of 'Mental Templates'; the usage is designed to distinguish major from minor categories. (Ford 2000 vol. 2). However, this distinction is not essential to my argument in my thesis.
17. Sergi Mainer's Ph.D. thesis (Edinburgh 2004), however, makes a good introduction, and greatly improves upon previous scholarship on *Brus*'s relationship to the prototypical medieval English and European romance tradition.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. For example, Barbour has Bruce attacked by three assassins while on his way to the toilet in Book V. See below.
2. That is, a new non-traditional (non-formulaic) *action* can be depicted by a new formulaic phrase, constructed on the pattern of a previously existing formula. For example, in hagiographic poems, *slaying* formulae can be replaced by *praying*, *preaching*, and *converting* formulae.
3. The development of the character of Edward Bruce as excessively courageous actually begins in Book V (61-122), though it could be argued that his behaviour only becomes truly problematic, and truly contrasted with the character of Robert Bruce, after Bannockburn.
4. 1997: 117
5. 1997: 217
6. 1997: 263
7. 1997: 277
8. Wittig actually defines *carnage* as a component of the *description of the battlefield* motifeme, occurring whenever 'the poets focus attention on pieces of bodies or quantities of blood or dead horses and dead enemies' (1978: 69-70). As we see from the above examples, *carnage* is also an important component of Single Combats in the *Brus*.
9. Ebin writes that 'over 2,000 lines are reserved for the episodes relating to the Battle of

Bannockburn' (1971-72: 218).

10. This term could be taken as meaning either fiction originally devised by Barbour *or* traditional thematic material 'discovered' rhetorically by Barbour and incorporated into his history of Robert Bruce.

11. Unless one counts the *commentary* by Lorn as part of the Battle, in which case it lasts until line 92.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. This is, in itself, a controversial statement, ignoring the stronger similarity between Early Scots and Northern Middle English, as well as the Gaelic speakers who would have existed in the Highlands during Barbour's time. I should also mention Goldstein's reading of the *Brus*, which re-asserts that Barbour directed his poem more or less at the upper classes, and that his apparently democratic praise of freedom is in fact our own interpolation. Nevertheless, Barbour's poem is indisputably vernacular, and therefore presumably intended for an audience larger than those who were educated with French or Latin.

2. Cf. Goldstein 1993: 218, 250, 257, 268.

3. This is also one of the meanings of 'sophistry'.

4. Of course, Beowulf will also achieve greater fame for fighting Grendel without weapons, a fact which should not be overlooked when considering a hero who is 'lof-geornost' (most eager for praise).

5. Title from Duncan 1997: 71

6. Title from McDiarmid and Stevenson 1985: 53

7. Duncan 1997: 135

8. Duncan 1997: 183

9. Duncan 1997: 321

10. Duncan 1997: 513

11. Bruce also asks that his heart be taken into war against Saracens (XX.182-85), but though this particular request is distasteful and bigoted to a modern audience, it is the unfortunate truth that a medieval one would see no conflict between these two parts of Bruce's speech here. They would not interpret Bruce's last request as violent or racist.

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