SOME EDITIONS OF *THE BRUCE*. A COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT[1]

The Bruce by John Barbour has been traditionally regarded as the landmark of Scottish literature. Several editions of the work have been made since the earliest printed version of the late 16th or the first years of the 17th century. Such editions are based on, at least, two different manuscripts. In what follows, it is our intention to make a review of the most representative printed versions of *The Bruce* in the course of time and their use of the extant manuscripts.

The literary type to which the poem can be ascribed is that of romance, one of the most widespread and popular genres in medieval Western Europe.

The Bruce contains about 13550 lines in octosyllabic rimed couplets composed after the French metrical tradition, whilst by its theme it can be classified as belonging to the so-called 'matter of Britain'. As usually happens with romances of this kind, real historical events appear mixed with fiction. Although there are various opinions as to the degree of fidelity to historical events, it could be maintained that *The Bruce* deals basically with real persons and real situations. The poem recounts the life and deeds of Robert Bruce (1274-1329), nationalist hero of Scotland who would later become the first Stuart king. One of the best known episodes of his life is that dealing with the battle of Bannockburn (1314).

As regards the author,[1] his exact date of birth is not known,[2] though it can be affirmed that he was Archdeacon of Aberdeen in the times of Chaucer.

In Pinkerton's words, "our author is not only the first poet, but also the earliest historian of Scotland" (1790: x).

The dialect is usually considered to be Northern English. Barbour himself tells us that he is writing in *Inglis* in the following lines:

> This wys the spek he maid, persay;
>
> And is in Inglis toung to say.
>
> (Book IV, 252-253)

Nevertheless, this question has raised much discussion. From a linguistic point of view, we could safely maintain that the language spoken North of the Tweed before the 15th century does not differ substantially from that spoken in Northern England. In view of this, Barbour's language can be characterized as Northern English, though some scholars define it as early Scots, a definition which Smiths (1902: xiii) considers more political than philological.[3]

The date of composition of the poem is provided by the author in Book XIII, lines 699-704:

> And in the tyme off the compiling
>
> Off this buk, this ROBERT wes KING.
>
> And off hys kynryk passyt wes
>
> FIVE yer; and wes the yer of grace
>
> A THOUSAND, THRE HUNDRE, SEUENTY

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[1] Mackenzie is of the opinion that the name *Barbour* is plebeian (meaning 'barber'). It contains a Norman French ending which has led some scholars to think that he was of Norman origin. However, an older form of the name, *Barber(e)*, seems to have been fairly common in some areas of Scotland.

[2] The estimation is that he was born ca. 1320.

[3] This debate can be exemplified by the positions supported by Kay (1986: 39) and Templeton (1973: 5). The former affirms that there is little evidence to speak of Scots as different from English until the 15th century; by contrast, Templeton maintains the label 'Early Scots', though recognising that it is almost indistinguishable from Northern English at that time.

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AND FYVE; and off hys eld SEXTY.

The poem is extant in two different manuscripts, MS G. 23 in the Library of St. John's College, Cambridge (known as MS C), written in 1487 and the manuscript in the Advocate's Library at Edinburgh (known as MS E), completed in 1489. Though both texts are very similar, some passages are missing in either one or the other. Thus, MS C lacks the lines corresponding to the three first books and part of book IV (lines 1 to 56) according to a later division of the text by Pinkerton.

MS C contains also two poems of the same hand, the second of which is by Lydgate and has been turned into Lowland Scots. In MS E, written in 1488, *The Bruce* appears side by side with *The Wallace*.

Most scholars attribute both MSS to the same scribe. The earliest manuscript (C) was completed on August 18, 1487 by one John de R., Chaplain. In its turn, at the end of MS E we are informed that the copy was *raptim scriptus* by John Ramsay at the request of Simon Lochmalony, a Fife vicar. The coincidence between the initials of both names gives grounds for believing that one and the same person wrote both copies. This is the opinion held by W.W. Skeat (1884: lxviii) and Douglas (1964).

By contrast, Mackenzie believes that the manuscripts need "but a slight examination to show that they are from different hands" (1904: ix). Differences in the spelling and in personal names constitute the evidence on which Mackenzie grounds his belief that "there is thus not the faintest reason for supposing but one scribe to have been at work" (1904: x).

At any rate, it is difficult to ascertain this since, as Agutter (1987: 75) puts it,

> Older Scots seems to have had a more or less standardized orthography, in the sense that, according to our present understanding, few texts give orthographic clues about the provenance of author or scribe.

Concerning the earliest printed versions of the poem, Mackenzie mentions a late 16th century copy (ca. 1571) of which no traces are left. The first extant edition is that by Andro Hart (1616), known as H. It is based upon MS E but with a modernised language. Its most outstanding peculiarity is the fact that it contains 45 new lines not found in either MSS C or E. These lines are usually taken as an interpolation also appearing in a later edition by the same author (1620).

A series of modernised versions appeared from 1620 onwards until John Pinkerton's rendering of 1790. The latter will constitute a model for many of the subsequent editions of the poem. The same as Hart's, it is based upon MS E though with an important difference, namely, that Pinkerton did not use a modernisation but decided to give the reader "the very language and ortho-graphy of it's *(sic)* author" (1790: vii). To this purpose he used a transcript made for him directly from MS E. As a matter of fact, he himself regards his version "the first genuine edition published from a MS dated 1489" (in the ti-tle) and adds notes and a small glossary to it.

Another worthnoting innovation is his division of the poem into twenty books, which he justifies as considering it easier for the reader to handle. The poem was not originally divided in such a way, but into sections of different length up to about 200 lines, separated by a space in which a large capital let-ter was inserted. In this respect, the only difference between MSS C and E is that the former exhibits one single column per page whereas the latter shows two. At any rate, Pinkerton's division has been followed by many other edi-tors who also adopt his numbering of the lines.

Nonetheless, Pinkerton's rendition is considered not utterly reliable by Skeat who accuses him of occasionally misreading and misprinting words which are clearly written in the MS (1884: lxxxiii).

As opposed to this, Jamieson's edition (1820) is considered a much more careful one both by Skeat (1884) and by Mackenzie (1909).[1] In spite of this,

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[1] A second edition by Jamieson appeared in 1869 sharing many of the characteristics of the first one.

many misprints are found, a fact which can be easily explained on the grounds that the MS does not make a clear distinction between ‹u › and ‹n ›, ‹c › and ‹ t › and ‹ s › and ‹ f ›. Though also based on MS E, this version differs from Pinkerton's in its division of the 13,550 lines which he redistributes into fourteen books instead of twenty. He also adds a dictionary containing many of the words used in *The Bruce*. However, this word-list presents the problem of referring to the former division in twenty books instead to his own fourteen-fold one.

Between Jamieson's two editions, Cosmo Innes edited another one in 1856. This is the first time that an editor uses readings from MS C, though it is considered "clearly the older and the better of the two extant MSS" (Skeat, 1884: lxxi). Innes follows no previous edition and not even one single MS but a collation of both C and E.[1]

As far as spelling is concerned, he uses his own modernisation of the original orthography of the poem. Contrary to Pinkerton's and Jamieson's editions, this one is not divided into books but in cantos (150 paragraphs following the divisions of the manuscripts).

Finally, W.W. Skeat is the last of the editors of *The Bruce* that we will be considering here. He is responsible for two editions of the poem: one in the *Early English Text Society* and another in the *Scottish Text Society* (1884), the latter being based upon the former, as he himself affirms in his preface.

To judge from his use of all the available material (both MSS and editions), Skeat shows his intention to provide the reader with a wide range of information and a complete version of the poem. He uses basically MS C, but when this seems deficient to him, he resorts to MS E or even to Hart's edition. For the sake of accuracy, he even selects some 280 lines from Wyntoun's *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, finished about 1420, which, though present in MS E (absent in C), appear here in a better form.

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[1] Notwithstanding this, he seems to prefer MS C.

Concerning spelling, Skeat's version is characterised by a mixture of modernisations (‹ th › instead of 'thorn') together with retention of original graphemes such as 'yogh'.

Most subsequent editions of *The Bruce* have been mainly based upon Skeat's due to its precision and comprehensiveness, as acknowledged by Mackenzie (1909).

As an illustration of the differences between the above mentioned renditions, some extracts of the poem have been analysed. The first four books of the poem have been disregarded since they are not present in MS C. Among the remaining, we have selected Book XX because it contains some of the interpolated lines attributed to Hart. It should be noted that our corpus corresponds to Book XX in Pinkerton's and Skeat's editions, but to Book XIV (lines 587-1210) in Jamieson's and to paragraphs CXLV-CL in Innes's (p. 466 of his own edition).[1]

The editions used for our analysis are, on the one hand, that made by Skeat for the *Scottish Text Society* (1884) because of its use of MS C and for the interpolations attributed to Hart (1616), and on the other, the one by Pinkerton (1790) because it refers to MS E.

In what follows, some of the most outstanding differences between these two editions are commented.

1) It is a feature typical of Scots that the graphemes ‹ y › and ‹ i › are used to represent both /i/ and /i: /. This means that these graphemes are interchangeable mainly in the vicinity of minims (above all ‹m, n, u›). The scribe working in MS C seems to be much more regular than that of MS E in this respect (Mackenzie, 1909: 512). An alternative use of both ‹ y › and ‹ i › can be observed in examples like the following: *mycht* (line 3), *payit* (line 26), *king* (line 41), *hym* (line 31).

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[1] Skeat is of the opinion that the omission of lines 44-49 in Book XX in MS C and in some editions is not intentional but an unconscious gap on the part of the scribe or editor due to the coincidence in the line-endings: line 44 ends with *ser* and the same word appears in line 50.

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However, differences in the distribution of ‹ y › and ‹ i › can be also appreciated in a look at the first lines of the poem in the two manuscripts: lines 3, 28 and 32 show *kyng* (in C) and *king* (in E); line 4 shows *ficht* (in C) and *fycht* (in E); *his* (C) and *hys* (in E) appear in lines 3 and 6; line 2 contains *reparit* in C and *reparyt* in E.

2) ‹ u ›, ‹ v › and ‹ w › occur indiscriminately in MSS C and E to represent both vocalic and consonantal sounds; MS C seems to prefer ‹ v › and ‹ u › and MS E ‹ w ›:

	MS C	MS E
line 15	*cheuelry*	*chewalry*
line 29	*throu*	*throw*
line 40	*valour*	*walour*
line 43	*sevin*	*sewyn*
line 53*t*	*housand*	*thowsand*

Nevertheless, some coincidences such as *tour*[1] (line 39), *syluir* in C and *siluer* in E (line 54), *awn(e)* (line 21) indicate that different spellings cannot be described as characteristic of one or the other MS, but as mere tendencies of the scribe at work.

3) The use of diacritic ‹ y › or ‹ i › to signal long vowels is a feature typical of Northern Middle English that can also be found in *The Bruce*, as in *mair* (line 245). Sometimes, length is also shown by adding a final ‹ e › which is not pronounced, as in *queyne* (line 110) and some differences can be observed in the two editions following the different MSS.[2] But again, this is not a generalised use since in some cases one MS shows diacritic ‹ y › or ‹ i › and the other does not: *sone* (E, line 1) and *soyne* (C, line 1).

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[1] This word appears spelt *towre* in H.

[2] MS C shows *bare* while E shows *bar* (line 18).

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4) The ‹ h › of some words of Latin origin seems to have been silent, to judge from the fact that it was sometimes dropped out as in *ost* (E, lines 5, 6 and 19 vs. *host*, C).

5) Metathesis of /r/ is also characteristic of Northern Middle English. Thus, for example, in line 6, E shows *there* while C shows *thre*.

6) Sometimes a different spelling of the preposition *of* can be observed. According to Mackenzie (1909: ix) *of* is typically found in Southern Middle English, whereas *off* is more often used in the North (lines 13, 23, 31).

7) Final ‹ve › appears sometimes as final ‹f ›, probably representing a devoicing of /v/ to /f/, as in *gave* (E) vs. *gaf* (C) (line 25), *five* (E) vs. *fiff* (C) (line 38).

8) Skeat's edition of the poem preserves the grapheme 'yogh' whereas Pinkerton seems to prefer ‹y › to represent the palatal phoneme /j/. 'Yogh' had almost disappeared in ME usage, but it underwent a revival later on in Scots where it was fixed by printers as ‹ z ›. A few instances of this usage are: E *young/ying* vs. C *¥oung* (line 31, 41), E *yer* vs. C *¥e(i)r* (line 38, 43).

9) Some differences can be appreciated in the use of the graphemes ‹ s ›, ‹ ß › and ‹ ¥ › to represent indiscriminately the phonemes /s/ and /z/. For instance, MS E uses *caithis* whereas *scatheß* is found in MS C. In his turn, Hart uses the digraph ‹ss › instead of ‹ß ›: *scathess*. However, MS E seems to prefer ‹ ¥ › and ‹ s › while MS C more often resorts to ‹ ß ›.

10) Although the most obvious differences between the MSS under consideration are those related to spelling, some others deserve attention as well. Concerning lexicon, a couple of examples drawn from the first lines of the poem show us that MS C contains typically Scandinavian forms, whereas their Southern English equivalents are recorded in MS E as well as in Hart's edition. Thus, in line 12, MS C exhibits *at* instead of *that* (in E and H). Similarly, MS C makes use of the preposition *till* in line 32, while *to* is found in the same line in MS E and in the edition by Hart.[1]

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[1] Also *mon* (C) vs. *sall* (H), line 170, *can* (C) vs. *gan* (E), lines 144 and 354, and *I* (C) vs. *Ik* / *Ic* / *I* (E).

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As shown above, the differences that can be detected in the various renderings of the poem are not essential and may be due to some tendencies of the scribes already found in the MSS. Of course, in our analysis, some editors have proved to be far more careful than others in their work. In this sense, Skeat seems to be a more conscious and, thus, reliable editor than Pinkerton.

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