

# ***Be*: usage and form. An Early Scots and Early Middle Scots Poetic Investigation**

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## **1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

### **1.1 Setting frame: research goals and material**

The aim of this article is to present the reader with the salient points of an attempt towards a better definition and understanding of the Older Scots [OSc] verb *be* both from a syntactical and a morphological point of view. The material that has been used to carry out the research comprises John Barbour's (c.1320-1395) *Brus* as well as the whole poetic works of William Dunbar (c.1460-c.1520). I am fully aware that there is some latitude as to the birth and death dates of these poets; this is why I clarify from the outset that I am following Bitterling (1970: 21) for Barbour and Bawcutt (1998: 1 and 1998: 3) for Dunbar. The poet Gavin Douglas (c. 1474-1522) will also be mentioned briefly in what follows and in this case my reference is Coldwell (1964: 1 and 1964: 17). For the sake of exactitude, I have to say that Coldwell identifies the birth date of Douglas as '[...] probably 1474 or 1475 [...]'. I will stick to the first date throughout.

### **1.2 Genesis of paper and of corpus ACOS (1375-1513)**

Turning now to the data, these have been extracted from a self-made corpus named an *Aberdeen Corpus of Older Scots* [ACOS] which spans over nearly two hundred years of OSc poetry, ranging from Early Scots up to Early Middle Scots. If not exhaustive of all the poetic work produced within the period, it still may be regarded as a substantial step towards the completion of a comprehensive poetic database for OSc which is still lacking at the time of writing. Gavin Douglas is not included in the present analysis but it is

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Robert Millar, for all his good advice. My thanks also go to Dr Mercedes Durham who has introduced me to AntConc and to Prof Laurence Anthony, AntConc's designer, for providing the tool freely. I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Dr Keith Williamson who made me welcome at his Edinburgh office to talk about corpus and Older Scots matters.

still worth mentioning that his work constitutes part of the original corpus, thus bringing the number of word tokens up to 351,028 or, more modestly, 30,782 word types. The genesis of the corpus itself finds its roots in the need to create an adequate tool for a three year doctoral thesis entitled *The Legacy of Old Norse Verbs in Older Scots*, the aim of which is to consider the Norse verbal imprint onto the OSc language from a morphological and semantic point of view. The morphological wing maps out how Norse verbs have been integrated into the OSc system; an aspect in turn completed by a semantic classification, which completes the semantic categorisations proposed by Aitken in his unpublished paper of 1954. Working against Aitken's backdrop, the semantic side, by focusing on verbs only, tries to explore other fruitful ways to interpret the semantic legacy. Etymology plays a crucial part in the work. It is constantly used in the morphological side of the argument but it is also *the* starting point, the selection criterion which enables the distinguishing of Norse verbs from the other sources. It is the resource that helps the historical linguist with the challenge of how to winnow the Norse and the native. However, the first task at hand is not, as tempting as it is, to get to the etymological endeavours. Rather, what is needed is a database that can be searched through easily and which can maintain the link to the source texts. The entirety of the *Brus* was taken from the Spalding edition (1856) followed by the work of William Dunbar as presented in Bawcutt (1998) and the work of Gavin Douglas as found in Bawcutt (2003) and Colwell (1964), even though 'only' the following texts were analysed in the thesis: *Ane Ballat of the Passioun*, *Blyth Aberdeane*, *thow beriall of all tounis* and *In May as that Aurora did vpspring* and the *Eneados*. Once the database was compiled in a .txt format, the corpus was improved by the addition of AntConc. 3.2.1w, the free concordance programme designed by Laurence Anthony (2007). Before considering the assets of the corpus and before defining its place in relationship with the other corpora within our discipline (section 1.3), I would like to say a few words on the editions chosen to build up the database, starting with the Spalding edition of Barbour, before turning to the work of Dunbar and then Douglas. The Spalding edition of Barbour is not well known – I know of no reviews or comments on it – and this status has prompted me to describe the edition in some detail. The same has not been done for the editions used for Dunbar and Douglas, which researchers will be well familiar with.

The Scottish Text Society [STS] edition of the *Brus* published in three volumes by McDiarmid and Stevenson is a well-known, perhaps even the best-known, edition of the text of Barbour. Yet, there exists another

edition published in 1856 by the now dissolved Spalding Club. This one-volume edition, 'forgotten' by the STS editors, consists of a collation of both the Cambridge MS and the Edinburgh MS. The editor was discreet and we have had to peruse the preface signed by a 'C Innes' to identify who he was. The plot is untangled when Innes uses a revealing 'I' and no further doubt remains when this 'I' refers to editorial choices and other comments (cf. notably p.xxxi). We learn more about the identity of the editor and his motivations by going back to the page immediately following the title page where a complete list of the officers of the Spalding Club is broken down. The full name 'Cosmo Innes', whose profession was noted as 'advocate', stood in the Council of the Spalding Club during the year 1856. As far as his motivations were concerned, these were various: Innes (1856: xv) strove to render as best he could '[...] a text as the scribe of 1487-9 would have made, if he had felt the propriety of an [sic] uniform spelling'. Spelling and consistency appear again as a chief factor for a new edition of the *Brus* (1856: xxxi) but they are not the only motivations. The editor also had a genuine admiration for Barbour's epic and wanted to restore '[...] a fine national poem to its former popularity, which editions like Dr. Jamieson's would render for ever hopeless' (p.xv). This statement delivers two additional pieces of information; first that his intent was clearly to make the work better known and second that he felt Jamieson's edition was not fit for this purpose. This comment, as we will see below, is actually to be mitigated. Innes disseminated the information on his editorial approach both in the preface and in the first section of what we would now call the 'notes', which he divided into two sections, one called *Various Readings, &c.* (pp.491-511) and the other called *notes* (pp.513-524). The first section relates mostly to editorial comments, e.g. MSS divergences, while the second consists more of actual notes to the texts. The preface encapsulates the editorial philosophy. Like many others (Skeat 1966: lxi and Mackenzie 1909: v - both references from Bitterling 1970: 24), Innes thought the Cambridge MS was the better of the two but, whereas with the first two editors the age of the Cambridge MS is the decisive part of the argument, Innes (1856: xiv) adopts a more nuanced position: '[...] [the Cambridge MS] affords on the whole, perhaps, the best reading, and has been written with greater care; but each of them serves to correct errors and supply omissions of the other.' One thing is very clear indeed: that he could use this MS (xiii). However, when it comes to the Edinburgh MS the information is much hazier and I was unable to determine whether Innes consulted it or not. One element is for sure; that he used the various editions of it and

notably the Jamieson's one, which was based on the Edinburgh MS. After the preface, more substantial information is to be found in the *Various Readings, &c.*, in which we can read that the beginning of the poem (up to p.76, as indicated in the edition on p.491) was actually pieced together by using a series of references, which the editor ranks as being first the Edinburgh MS, second Hart's edition (1616 and 1620) and third Freebairn's (1715 or 1716). Here again lingers some uncertainty as to which edition of Hart the editor used. He mentioned both on p.xii but does not make his editorial choice explicit. All things considered, I would finally add that the Spalding edition is a book in a still remarkable condition which holds well and safe in the hand.

For the second poet, William Dunbar, it is Bawcutt's edition of 1998 that served as the foundations and this edition has reached a state-of-the-art status amongst Dunbarian scholars. Thus, Mapstone (2001: 1) praises the work, describing it as 'the most important publishing event in the editing of Older Scots literature' since 1981 and of '[...] the culmination of scholarship which Bawcutt's edition represents [...]' (2001: 2). The value of this edition resides in its critical turn of mind, which is explicitly laid down by the editor herself (p.11) and also in its exhaustiveness – Mapstone (2001: 1) speaks of a 'complete edition' and Edwards (2001: 65) alludes to the differences to Kinsley by referring back to pages 374-375 of Kinsley's edition (1979). There are also a number of differences in comparison with former editions like the alphabetical ordering of Dunbar's poems, thus breaking away from the tradition of classifying Dunbar's work thematically. Conlee (2004) also mentions this point and introduces a critical reflection by weighing the advantages and disadvantages of such an editorial choice. Bawcutt leads us to the third and last poet, Gavin Douglas. The entire corpus database dealing with Douglas is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the shorter poems of Douglas like *The Palice of Honour*, *Conscience* and *King Hart* (for discussion on the poems, I invite the reader to consult Bawcutt 2003). Specialists in OSc literature will no doubt remember that Bawcutt already edited these poems in an earlier STS edition (1966). A comprehensive comparison and insights into the added value of this second edition are available in a review of the second edition made by Martin (2005: 274-276). As regards the second part of the database, i.e. the *Eneados*, I have turned to Coldwell's STS edition in four volumes which is the reference for OSc scholars.

### **1.3 ACOS: Links with other corpora and reference systems**

Without counting ACOS, there are to date five historical corpora in the field of OSc. It should also be noted that the *Tagged Edinburgh-Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots* (E/HCOS, 1450-1650) has not been included in the list, as the project is currently incomplete. We can list the actual corpora we have as follows: the *Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots* (HCOS, 1450-1700), the *Corpus of Scottish Correspondence* (CSC, 1400-1730), the *Corpus of Early Scottish Women's Writing* (CESWW, 1500-1800), the *Edinburgh Corpus of Older Scots* (ECOS, 1380-1500) and the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (DSL, 1200-1976), the material of which can actually be traced as far back as 1124 (see the links L1 and L2 in bibliography).

In order to place ACOS in relation to these existing corpora, I have selected two criteria which define this new corpus: language-type and time-frame. The language-type criterion shows immediately that none of the cited corpora deals with poetry. The first of the three corpora provided by Anneli Meurman-Solin, for instance, is a study drawing on Scottish prose material in a variationist approach (Meurman-Solin 1993: 36). For her second corpus, CSC, she decided to focus only on the epistolary material while the third database concentrates on letters written by a lady's hand. CSC and CESWW are part of the academic endeavour that marks the work of Meurman-Solin which aims to map out idiolectal variation according to a set of variables (available under the link L3, see bibliography). This work is refined by a gender analysis of this variation, which forms the basis for Meurman-Solin's article in *Scottish Language* (Meurman-Solin 2001: 20-45). The final lines of this article (Meurman-Solin 2001: 45) show what her pursuit is, i.e. the depiction of a language constrained under the pressures of '[...] convergence and divergence over time and space between idiolectal grammars'. The corpus designed by Keith Williamson both diverges from and converges to HCOS. Its database was still only made up of legal and administrative documents in 2011. This fact not only dissociates this corpus from ACOS but brings it closer to HCOS, the database of which is also partly constituted of prose legal documents (Meurman-Solin 2001: footnote 2). ECOS was designed to underpin a *Linguistic Atlas of Older Scots* [LAOS] and therefore ultimately also to show variation over time and space (see link L4 in bibliography). Of course, both corpora also diverged on another level, namely time (see previous paragraph). This topic leads us to our second criterion, which simultaneously prompts the need to set clear markers for ACOS. In fact, the ACOS period of investigation can be neatly pinned down as 1375-1513, which the reader will recognise as being the

dates of composition of Barbour's *Brus* and of Douglas's *Eneados*, as given by the *Edinburgh Companion to Scots* for Barbour (2003: 8) and the *Mainstream Companion to Scottish Literature* (1993: 103) for Douglas. The conjugation of both the time and the language-type criteria are sufficient to define ACOS in terms of its specificity. DSL has been voluntarily omitted in the discussion so far. The reason for this is that its nature is intrinsically different from the other databases, including ACOS. There is no doubt as to the corpus nature of DSL and it does fit into the definition proposed by Lindquist of what a corpus means (2009: 3). The difference is of course that it has been laid out following a dictionary format.

Setting ACOS into context has to do with characterising the corpus in an external way – I have applied some of its characteristics to other databases to pinpoint its place. Now, I am going to use some further typical features to present the structure of ACOS briefly, thus driving the discussion internally. The first major point about this corpus is that it has been designed so as to allow perfect traceability with the source texts; by source texts I mean the editions that were used to enter the poems into an adequate file format. I have already briefly touched upon this under section 1.2 in stating that I wanted to make it possible for researchers or OSc *amateurs* to go back to the texts, should they wish to. In order to achieve this, the original layout of the poems within the editions has been rigorously replicated. Thanks to AntConc, the user is able to browse through all the texts or to select the few he or she desires to view. It is important that this navigation is sustained by a transparent system of referencing. A reference to Barbour's *Brus* is presented as follows: [B 159:28]. Typically, it stands in square brackets, starting with the initial of the author's surname followed by the page number and the line number, these two elements being separated by a colon. The same system is applied to Dunbar and Douglas, albeit with slight alterations. Thus, for Dunbar we have [WD 69 – 229:1] which is to be read 'William Dunbar poem 69 according to Bawcutt's classification – page 229:line one'. The adaptation of the system was made according to the natural need to adapt to the authors and to their work. Dunbar has written several poems, and Barbour has not; hence the numbers and the initial letter of Dunbar's first and last names have been added in order to keep him distinct from Douglas. The corresponding 'number-titles' for Dunbar have also been included in the appendix at section 8. Another slight alteration was made to the letter yogh, which had to be dealt with and was replaced in their texts by <#>. Finally, it should be stressed that the poetic material involved provides various examples of diverse usages of OSc as a literary

medium, which is an encouraging stimulus for further research. The remainder of this paper focuses entirely on *be*.

## **2 Why *be*?**

*Be* is the most complex verb of OSc. No other verb can match the diversity of its forms and few verbs are as flexible and as semantically and syntactically indispensable. This verb has drawn little attention to date although it is mentioned in other pieces of academic research such as Meurman-Solin's *Variation and Change in Early Scottish Prose* (1993) as well as Macafee (1992/1993 and 2002). Meurman-Solin's intention is to show the variations that Scots was undergoing under the diverging pressures imposed on the language by the processes of Anglicisation and Scotisation. Subsequently, her aim is not to go into too much detail about the verb *be* and this comes through clearly when looking at the pages dealing with the verb.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this, she focuses on 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> prose material and so is working both outside the period we are dealing with here and on a different language type. Macafee's approach is not at all the same as Meurman-Solin's in that she is not interested in registers but rather in providing an overview of the OSc language. This enables her to give some notes as regards usage and formal characteristics of *be*.<sup>3</sup> However, 'A Short Grammar of Older Scots' is what it is: a concise overview of the language. Any such work in any language involves limitations since what is short is not based on the same approach as a single-item oriented analysis. Further mention of the verb *be* is made in King's article (1997). As with Macafee, King provides a useful overview of the forms of the verb in question. Most recently, Smith (2012: 47) provides some comments on the verb *be*, including a third table comprehending the forms. Smith follows Macafee when giving an overview of the Scots grammar. His five page version, however, is shorter in comparison to what was published in 1992/1993. Formal characteristics, as the table suggests, are spoken of but the other aspects of *be* are not alluded to. Beyond the observation that *be* is not placed at the centre of their work, none of the three researchers cited above commented upon the usage of the verb by Dunbar and Barbour.

From a syntactic viewpoint, Moessner (1997) talks of the verb *be* in a study '[...] includ[ing] prose and verse texts from the very beginning up to 1700' (1997: 112). When considering her database, for which a detailed

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<sup>2</sup> References to the *ad hoc* pages can be found from the index on page 327.

<sup>3</sup> Section 8.7, p. 23: notes on auxiliary function; Section 8.8, p.23-24: idem; Section 8.12, p.28: formal characteristics

breakdown is available at the end of her paper, we notice that Dunbar is left out of her scope of interest. The explanation for this is probably to be found at the beginning of the article, where she writes that her focus is primarily on the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a period which for her is linguistically the most interesting (Moessner 1997: 112). She does deal with the verb *be*, and even though it is not explicitly made central to her argument, her description of it is substantial. However, the fact that Dunbar was not brought into consideration raises a thorny problem for it impedes any attempt at reconstructing a broader and fuller picture of how *be* ‘behaved’ and varied to OSc speakers and in our case to poets. This syntactic aspect, as we can read in Moessner, is counterbalanced by a book which explicitly strives, at least as regards the forms, for exhaustiveness. This work, entitled *The Verb ‘To Be’ in Middle English: A Survey of the Forms*, was written by Forsström (1948) and is referred to by Bitterling (1970: 68) as a ‘complete survey’ or, as it stands in the German text, an ‘ausführliche Untersuchung’. This study does not include Dunbar; nevertheless it does analyse *be* in Barbour’s *Brus*, which is part of a larger section entitled ‘Northern Texts’, setting the text of the poem in greater perspective. Such a methodological choice naturally reminds us of the similarities shared by OSc and northern English in medieval times (Templeton 1975 and Mackay 1975), but also has the advantage of establishing a link between the varieties, uniting them through the analysis of one feature, indeed *be*. The interest of this work is that it sets the formal characteristics of *be* within a broader Middle English context and also simultaneously calls back the evidence that Scots and northern English bore out many resemblances in the medieval period (Forsström 1948: 228 and Templeton 1975: 5 and Mackay 1975: 20) even though resemblances is no synonym for perfect similarity (Forsström 1948: 13). The value of Forsström’s work still makes it a book deserving our full attention today.

The next main section of this article is the analysis itself. The first objective is to describe the main syntactical patterns found with the verb *be* with our two poets. Then will come an insight into the emerging semi-modal construction with *abell/abill*. After dealing with the syntactical aspect, the focus will turn towards the morphological description of the verb providing the readers with a complete table of the forms and at the same time casting a critical eye over the other possibly misleading tables within the discipline. In each sentence, the verb *be* is highlighted thus.



### 3 Syntactic environment and usage

We can identify four main syntactic constructions, in which the verb *be* turns up. These are followed by examples:

#### 1. *be* + Noun Phrase [NP]

- (1) Now am I a wedow, iwise, and weill am at ese [WD 3 – 52:414]
- (2) For I am he. Say yhe suythly? [B 159:28]

#### 2. *be* + Adjective Phrase [AdjPhr]

- (3) And wis men sais he is happy [B 7:85]
- (4) For our the laif thy bewty is renowd. [WD 52 – 167:154]
- (5) To thar king that was sa worthy [B 6:50]

#### 3. *be* + Adverb Phrase [AdvPhr]

- (6) For fele sis quhen thou art away [B 70:19]
- (7) And was up in the strinthis then [B 145:63]

#### 4. *be* + Prepositional Phrase [PrepPhr]

- (8) I will bid quhill I am in aynd [B 148:175]
- (9) Into this realme thow war worth mony ane pound [WD 75 – 242:75]
- (10) All straucht to Lyntounle war gane [B 376:13]
- (11) To him that is of kingis king. [WD 58 – 182:28]

If we start from NP down to the PrepPhr and describe what sort of patterns these sentences represent, we notice that the NP structure can be complex as with *a wedow* (1) or be reduced to one single unit as in (2) with the personal pronoun in the nominative *he*. Whatever the length, i.e. the complexity of the NP, its role when coming after *be* is always a Predicative Complement [PCL, cf. Huddleston and Pullum 2005: 23 for the terminology]. The term ‘PCL’ can conveniently be applied to the next construction, where *be* is followed by an AdjPhr. If both (3) and (4) with respectively *happy* and *renowd* are unequivocally PCL, a possible question may arise as to how to consider *renowd*. The polyvalent nature of the adjective ending with a dental suffix after *be* is well-known in linguistics (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik 1985: 413) and by using this point of view, it is possible to tread on firmer ground – *renownd* is indeed an adjective, more precisely a

participial adjective, used here as a predicative. The complexity of the PCL varies in the texts as it can be one single adjective long (3) or be expanded often via an adverb pre-modifying the head, which is exactly what we observe in (5) where the adverb *sa* modifies the head of the AdjPhr.

The next category, that of AdvPhr, is far less elaborate than the two previously mentioned. Considering (6) with *away*, we realise fully what this means as *be* can only be followed by one adverb acting as a place adverbial. There is a good reason why only two examples from the *Brus* have been supplied. Oddly enough, Dunbar's poetry does not contain any such construction while Barbour has not only *away* but also *up* as is shown in (7). This may not appear to be a huge difference but that is still more than in Dunbar. The next and final set of examples are concerned with the PrepPhr, which stands in sharp contrast with the AdvPhr as it turns out to be a very productive category. This high productivity is actually a key piece of evidence, not only suggestively pointing to what was feasible or not in the language but also indicating how frequent these constructions were. As a matter of fact, the syntactic environment of *be* + AdvPhr seems to have been fairly rigid, which is an antipodal observation to *be* + PrepPhr. These fall into two main categories: the set phrases such as *in aynd* (8) and the others. The 'others' (9) and (10) encompass adverbials while (11) exhibits an *of*-phrase in the terms of Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002: 82). I understand that some syntacticians may regard (5) and (10) in a different way, thinking right from the outset about first an ascriptive and second a locative (Miller 2002: 31), but this mode of thinking, fruitful as it is, revolves around the clause level whereas I am working on the phrasal level.

#### **4 Example of semi-modality: *be-form* + *abell/abill* + (*for*) *to-inf***

(12) My hyd to offer I ***am*** abell [WD 66 – 220:29]

(13) Quhill thou ***art*** abill baith in mynde and tounge [WD 41 – 138:66]

(14) Thow ***art*** not abill remissoun for to get [WD 41 – 136:20]

Our second investigation focus is more restrained than that in section 3. Here only one syntactic construction will be analysed: semi-modality. The description of the semi-modal structure is not considered by Moessner, it appears once and in a totally different context (see Moessner 1997: 145). The semi-modal pattern in the sentence she uses is there because it is part of

the sentence rather than because of its nature. Indeed, her interest was in a subject clause and the way such a clause could be taken up by a pronoun. Furthermore, it should be noted that she uses prose material to illustrate this point. The scholar of OSc may wonder whether reference of this construction is made in some works of reference, hoping that, as with Forsström, allusions will be made to OSc material. Surprisingly, neither Mustanoja (1960) nor Visser (1963) seemed to be particularly interested in the semi-modal character of what we now know in standard modern English as *be + able + to*. ‘Not particularly interested’ should not be understood as ‘not interested at all’ for we do find touches upon our subject, but these are touches only, as in Mustanoja (1960: 599) and Visser (1963: 501). Back to our sentences, we can say that these spark off at least two noteworthy comments. The first comment is encapsulated in (12) for it shows *abell* as an adjective, alone. This is to be put into context with (13) and (14) where both sentences blatantly display that *able* is followed by the *nota infinitiva* ‘to’, preposed in (13) due to poetic license. Having *be* plus an adjective on one side, and two fully-fledged semi-modal patterns on the other, gives the illusion of holding every single element for an equation that would explain the emergence of the semi-modal construction in question. Illusive it is, as we do not possess all the elements to map out the complete transition and, in particular, the competition that must have been existed with *may*, the Middle English and OSc modal meaning ‘can’. Yet, all the instances given here do reveal some information as to how the structure came into being, evolving from the single adjective denoting a (particularly good) ability to do something to a synonym of present-day English *can* (see DOST under *abill*, to be completed by Bawcutt 1998: 518 for a convincing semantic expansion of the adjective – I would go as far as suggesting ‘gifted’ – and also OED, *able* on hints at competition with the traditional modals). In terms of structure, there was a definite degree of flexibility with the possibility of having *for to* instead of *to* as can be seen in (14). Perhaps one of the most noticeable feature comes from another angle, *viz.* that of distribution. Dunbarian specialists will not fail to point out that he alone of the two uses *abill*, something that may come as a surprise when knowing that the *Brus* is much larger (89 130 word tokens) than his later counterpart’s entire work (44 109 tokens). Perhaps Dunbar’s fame for varied registers could partly account for this, but I would doubt it. It seems to be more plausible simply to posit that the construction was not *en vogue* in Barbour’s time, or perhaps around but not in Barbour’s particular idiolect. Finally, the information presented here can be completed by adding that Dunbar writes the adjective

alone five times in the whole of his work versus three times as part of the semi-modal construction. The next section, section 5, will deal with the forms of the verb *be*.

## 5 Forms

Infinitive : *to be*

<b>Tense and Mood</b>	<b>Person and Number</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Tense and Mood</b>	<b>Person and Number</b>	<b>Form</b>
<b>Present Indicative</b>	1 sg	am	<b>Preterite Indicative</b>	1 sg	was ~ wes
	2 sg	art		2 sg	was ~ wes
	3 sg	is		3 sg	was ~ wes
	1 pl	ar(e ~ *er		1 pl	war ~ wer
	2 pl	ar(e ~ er		2 pl	*war ~ *wer
	3 pl	ar(e ~ er		3 pl	war ~ wer
<b>Present Subjunctive</b>	1 sg	be	<b>Past Subjunctive</b>	1 sg	war ~ wer
	2 sg	be		2 sg	war
	3 sg	be		3 sg	war ~ wer
	1 pl	be		1 pl	war
	2 pl	be		2 pl	war
	3 pl	be		3 pl	war ~ wer
<b>Imperative</b>	singular	be			
	plural	beis ~ be			
<b>Present Participle</b>	N/A		<b>Past Participle</b>	N/A	bene/been ~ bein/beyn

**Table 1 – Forms of verb *to be***

Table 1 summarises *all* the forms of *be* recorded with both Barbour and Dunbar. The asterisks mark items that do not appear in the texts, but which have been re-constructed. The postulated forms have been inferred only when there was enough information from the texts themselves (cf. *er* and *war~ wer*). By contrast, the present participle has been voluntarily omitted for it does not ‘exist’ in the texts we are dealing with even though Gavin Douglas inserts it into his poems. The last point upon which I would like to draw attention is < ( >, turning up in *ar(e*, and which means that the final vowel is accessory.

The best way to use Table 1 within the context of this paper is to cross-read it with further observations taken from the texts so as to highlight two points of analysis that are stages towards a gradual and full understanding of *be*. These will deal with the use of the plural form *ar* and the Northern Present Tense Rule [NPTR]. Starting with the indicative present plural, we note the existence of a distinction between *ar(e* and *er*. Barbour favours the form *ar* by far and only uses the variant *are* three times in the whole of the *Brus*. Dunbar follows the same trend, employing *ar* as a rule, the spelling variant *are* cropping up only once. Yet, Barbour’s usage differs in that he regularly turns to *er*, which is an alternative form for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> ppl directly descended from Old Norse (Samuels 1985: 274). This characteristic of Barbour’s poetry is stressed in my doctoral work but this is not the first time it has been brought up, as Forsström alludes to it in different places in his book (notably 1948: 193 and 219-220). However, by observing the position it occupies in the line, as in the thesis, we can say that this form was less lively than *ar* because in reality it is essentially a poetic form available to the poet whenever he needed it. Within the writing of Barbour, the *er* form was also confined to being specifically used as an auxiliary only with present participles as, for instance [B 159:13] and [B 474:74] demonstrate. It is, after all, quite interesting to see that Dunbar did not use this form even once, a fact which can be interpreted in many ways – is it for instance an individual choice or is it symptomatic of an increasing sense of difference from the speech employed south of the border? It is also possible, by following the same procedure, to pinpoint precisely what the pronunciation must have been, for it rhymes notably with *her* [B 159:14], singling out /e:/ and thus at the same time matching up with Aitken (2002: 74).

Another area which draws our attention is the NPTR. We know from our reading of Macafee (1992/1993: 28), King (1997: 179) and also Smith (2012: 47) that the verb *be* is subject to this rule and that the forms vary

substantially whether an adjacent pronoun precedes the verb or not. When no personal pronoun is in the immediate vicinity of the verb, we should have one of the three following forms: *is*, *be* for the first person singular and *is*, *be* or *beis* for the rest. The problem with these tables is that they are highly suggestive that the rule was applicable on a regular basis. The evidence from the texts seems to run counter to that and suggests rather that the rule offered the writer an additional set of forms but that the latter was in no way constrained by these. The only case where there is some regularity in the rule is with *beis* because the subject is not a personal pronoun as in [B 260:36]. However, the language changed and this clearly comes through in the writing of Dunbar who uses *beis* only as a plural of ‘bee’ [WD 65 – 207:217] and [WD 78B – 256:82]. The rule also appears to be very fragile in the preterite. Barbour sticks to *I was* [B 239:48] but Dunbar happily jumps from *I wes* to *I was* [WD 77 – 249:45] and [WD 22 – 98:17].

## **6 Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates to readers a concrete application of ACOS by focusing on one single verb item, the verb *be*. The analysis is an ongoing comparison between Barbour and Dunbar so that the different usages and forms of the verb can be better understood.

The introduction laid out in three points has first set out to define the aims of the paper and the material involved. Subsequently, it described how this paper came into being and presented ACOS, the new corpus which has helped realise this study. Besides showing that a poetic corpus for Early Scots and Early Middle Scots was needed in the field of OSc, the inside of the corpus has also been detailed and discussed, focusing first on the various editions that were used to compile the database and then moving on to the system of reference and its philosophy. The final part of the introduction set the corpus in relation with the other historical corpora in the discipline and provided an update on some aspects of some of these.

The analysis itself on *be* starts with a review of the works that have been carried out so far on this topic in OSc, which has shown that *be* in OSc has always been treated as part of greater works. The focus was then turned on some syntactical patterns of the verb, comparing for the first time usages between Barbour and Dunbar. This methodology has proven very useful when lingering on the semi-auxiliary construction since it has enabled an inference of how the pattern actually built itself up. The final part concerns morphological notes on the verb, providing a complete survey of the forms recorded with special interest in the present indicative plural forms as well

as the NPTR. The focus has always been on how the language evolved from one author's language to the other's, which has brought to light the fact that the NPTR was not as rigid a system as was previously suggested.

The present paper is a concrete application from ACOS and should be highlighted as such. It continues what has been initiated in the doctoral research but on a different level. Just as the corpus enabled me to bring the texts of these authors together so that they could meet on the common ground that was the Norse verbal legacy, here the texts of Barbour and Dunbar are brought together once again but on the common ground of the fundamental verb *be*, the worth of which is detailed under section 2. The focus and methodology have changed since we embarked on the syntactical and morphological quest of this one native-derived verb, and not on an endeavour enshrined in etymology, morphology and semantics.

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## Appendices

Poem titles (Bawcutt 1998)

3	The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo
22	I thocht lang quhill sum lord come hame
26	In to thir dirk and drublie dayis
29	Lucina schyning in silence of the nycht
31	Man, sen thy lyf is ay in weir
41	The Maner of Passyng to Confessioun
52	Quhen Merche wes with variand windis past
58	Rorate, celi, desuper
65	The Flyting
66	Schir, lat it neuer in toune be tald
75	This hinder nycht, halff sleiping as I lay
77	How Dunbar wes Desyrd to be ane Freir
78B	This nycht in my sleip I wes agast

Gloss (in ascending order)

Barbour's lines

[B 6:50]	To thar king that was sa worthy
[B 7:85]	And wis men sais he is happy
[B 70:19]	For fele sis / <i>seize</i> / quhen thou art away
[B 145:63]	And was up in the strinthis / <i>fortress, power</i> / then
[B 148:175]	I will bid / <i>stay</i> / quhill I am in aynd / <i>in breath</i> /
[B 159:13]	Scho said, 'All that travaland er
[B 159:14]	For sak of ane ar welcum her.'
[B 159:28]	For I am he. Say yhe suthly / <i>truly</i> /?
[B 239:48]	And I was sumdele / <i>somewhat</i> / volageous,
[B 260:36]	The horsmen alwis cummerit / <i>hindered from free movement</i> / beis,
[B 376:13]	All straucht / <i>straight</i> / to Lyntounle war gane
[B 474:74]	And, sen yhe all assentit er,

Dunbar's lines

[WD 3 – 52: 414]	Now am I a wedow, iwise / <i>indeed</i> /, and weill am at ese
[WD 22 – 98:17]	#ett in a pairt I was agast,
[WD 26 – 109:16]	I am assayit on euerie syde
[WD 29 – 115:33]	And Merleyn at the mwne / <i>moon</i> /sall him be bydand / <i>awaiting</i> /
[WD 31 – 118:14]	That for thy gude quhen thow art gone
[WD 41 – 136:20]	Thow art not abill remissoun for to get
[WD 41 – 138:66]	Quhill thou art abill baith in mynde and toung
[WD 52 – 167:154]	For our the laif /among the rest [= the people]/ thy bewty is renowd. /renowned/
[WD 58 – 182: 28]	To him that <i>is</i> of kingis king.
[WD 65 – 207:217]	Off Edinburgh the boyis as beis owt thrawis,
[WD 66 – 220: 29]	My hyd /head/ to offer I am abell
[WD 75 – 242:75]	Into this realme thow war /were/ worth mony ane pound
[WD 77 – 249:45]	I wes ay reddy all men to begyle.'
[WD 78B – 256:82]	Solistand wer as beis thik,