



The Brus, Book One, Lines 225-274

The following translation largely follows the version rendered by A.A.M. Duncan (*The Bruce*, Canongate, 1997) but with some variation intended to represent more modern turns of phrase. In the Duncan translation the original words *thrall* and *thralldom* were retained but here we have translated them as bondman (one who is unfree to do as he likes) and enslavement. In Scots, to *thirl* is to hold in bondage or servitude, while a *thirl* (noun) is one who is bound in servitude. To be *thirlt* is to be bound to something or tied to a thing or idea while *thirlage* is the state of bondage or subjection.

Ah! Freedom is a noble thing  
Freedom gives a man pleasure  
Freedom gives a man all comfort  
He who lives free lives at ease  
A noble heart cannot have ease  
Or anything else that pleases him  
If freedom fails, for free decision  
Is longed for above all other things  
No, he that has always lived free  
Cannot well know the properties  
The anger, no, the wretched fate  
That is coupled with enslavement  
Unless he had experienced it  
Then he would know it perfectly  
And would think freedom is more prized  
Than all the gold in the world  
And so opposites always are  
Revealing things about the other  
He who is enslaved has nothing  
And all that he has  
Actually belongs to his lord, whoever that is  
And he does not even have as much  
As free will to leave or go and do  
That which his hart inclines him to  
Clarks might question this  
As they do in academic debates:  
If a man orders his bondman to do a thing  
And the bondman's wife then comes to him  
And asks for her due  
Should he set aside his lord's work  
And first pay his wife  
And then carry out his lord's work  
Or neglect his duty to his wife

And do what his lord commanded?  
I leave the answer to those  
Who are more distinguished than me  
But since they make such comparison  
Between the duties of marriage  
And the lord's command to his bondman  
You can easily see, without being told  
How hard a thing enslavement can be  
For men who are wise can see  
That marriage is the hardest bond  
That a man can take on himself  
And enslavement is worse than death  
For while a bondman lives his life  
It afflicts him, body and bones  
But death afflicts him only once  
So, in summary, no one can appreciate  
The condition of a bondman