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Recreation and William Alexander's *Doomes-day* (1637)

Doomes-day is the major literary work of William Alexander, first Earl of Stirling (1577–1640). Alexander was a Scottish poet-politician who followed James VI and I to London in 1603, and during the 1620s was active in colonising Nova Scotia. *Doomes-day* is his major work in that it was almost certainly written to be Alexander's most serious and lasting poetic achievement, and there is evidence that his contemporaries, including William Drummond, thought so too. However, the few critics to have commented upon (or even read) *Doomes-day* have only found it to be 'major' in a purely quantitative sense. David Atkinson has done the sums: the poem's distinction is 'to be considered one of the longest metrical compositions ever attempted in the English language; for those interested, it has 11, 128 lines divided into 1, 391 eight-line stanzas'.¹ The question of how far the two senses of 'major' are related—in other words, how significant it is that Alexander's most important work is also by far his longest—has never been answered, and probably never asked.

The question is worth pursuing for at least two reasons. First, *Doomes-day* is a prominent example of a neglected poetic mode which we could provisionally describe as early modern hexaemeral poetry. Alexander's contemporaries compared his poem with Guillaume de Saluste, Sieur Du Bartas's *Semaines* (1578 and 1584), and that comparison can help us interpret *Doomes-day*. Alexander also follows poetic principles outlined by Du Bartas's most famous champion, James VI and I. These connections help make sense of Alexander's achievement in *Doomes-day*, and in turn shed light on a cluster of other loosely 'Bartasian' poems written in the first two decades of the seventeenth century. The other reason for examining *Doomes-day* in terms of its length is that *Doomes-day*'s compositional strategy reflects where it was almost certainly written: Alexander's Scottish estate at Menstrie, near Stirling. Writing *Doomes-day* seems to have been a literary pastime for Alexander; indeed, it was published in a volume entitled *Recreations with the Muses* (1637). The poem emerges as 'recreational' in two senses: it reconstructs knowledge like a hexaemeral poem in order to piece

together a monumental apocalyptic vision, and it is consciously otiose. This study's central concern is to reconcile these superficially contradictory aspects of *Doomes-day*, and in doing so to indicate how the poem might inform our understanding of seventeenth-century divine poetry more widely, particularly in relation to Du Bartas's influence. The first section offers an introduction to Alexander's poem which assumes no prior knowledge from the reader. It quickly establishes that the 1637, twelve-section (or 'Hour') version is more authoritative than the 1614, four-Hour version, and suggests that the apocalypse motif functions as a framing device for its semi-encyclopedic content. This is followed by an account of the poem's literary context, with particular regard to Du Bartas, other English writers, and Menstrie. The third section focuses on how we might read and interpret Alexander's poem in light of this information, while the final section makes the case for further research into *Doomes-day*, especially in context of seventeenth-century Scottish literature and its continental influences.

DOOMES-DAY'S PUBLICATION

Doomes-day is divided into twelve cantos or 'Hours'. In light of our knowledge of early modern reading practices, it is unlikely that contemporary readers would have worked straight through the poem. It may well have been read in non-serial fashion. The poem's length is nevertheless important to its design; indeed, *Doomes-day* seems to relate the earth's destruction in real-time. The twelve-Hour division is also evidence of Du Bartas's influence, in that it provides an organising framework for the poem's dense factual information, just as the *Semaines*' seven-Day division does. It is important to clarify at the outset, however, that *Doomes-day* is a twelve-Hour poem, before providing a synopsis of the whole work and introducing relevant contextual information.

The collected edition of Alexander's works, *Recreations with the Muses*, was entered into the Stationers' Register in January 1637. The earliest printed version of the twelve-Hour *Doomes-day* is in that volume. It is the second item, preceded by Alexander's quartet of Senecan dramas, the *Monarchieke Tragedies*, and followed by his *Paraenesis to Prince Henry* (both of which were first published in 1604) and the beginning of a biblical epic, *Jonathan*.² Omitted is the sonnet sequence *Aurora* (also 1604), which even on initial publication was described on its titlepage as 'the first fancies of the author's youth'. This can be taken

as evidence that Alexander no longer found such Petrarchan eloquence relevant to his poetic concerns by 1637. *Doomes-day* occupies the most space in the volume, and, alongside the *Monarchieke Tragedies*, must be taken as Alexander's most representative literary endeavour. L.E. Kastner and H.B. Charlton's 1929 Scottish Text Society edition remains the most readily available printed edition today.³

The importance of the 1637 edition needs to be asserted because there exists an earlier, four-Hour *Doomes-day* (1614). There is minor critical confusion about how much Alexander ultimately wanted to write, but it is clear that this earlier edition was incomplete.⁴ Alexander describes it as an 'imperfect piece' in the dedicatory letter: 'This for the present is but [like unripe fruits] an imperfect piece wrested from a mind many ways distracted, & involved in doubtfull designes, the successe of some whereof, I hope hereafter hauing purchased me fame from the World [. . .] alwayes I purpose when my mind is more calme to end this Worke.'⁵ Alexander's decision to publish a truncated, four-Hour version may be connected to his appointment as Master of Requests earlier in the same year. Alexander was involved in three expeditions to Nova Scotia in the 1620s and was made Secretary of State for Scotland in 1626. His burgeoning political career seems to have affected his literary output: between 1614 and 1634 Alexander's only published literary works are a revised edition of the *Monarchieke Tragedies* (London, 1616) and *Supplement to a Defect in the Third Book of 'Arcadia'* (Dublin, 1621). His other publications were all connected with public life: these are the prose tract *An Encouragement to Colonies* (London, 1624), *The Mapp and Description of New England* (London, 1630), and his contribution towards *The Psalmes of King David, Translated by King James* (Oxford, 1631). After Alexander was made Earl of Stirling in 1633, two more literary works appear: an unfinished critical essay, *Anacrisis* ('enquiry'), in or around 1634, and *Recreations* three years later.

Doomes-day may have undergone revision around 1637, but the poem was substantially complete by 1620. According to Thomas McGrail, *Doomes-day* was probably finished at Menstrie in the summer of 1617, when Alexander remained in Scotland after a royal visit.⁶ It was surely complete by 8 April 1620, when Alexander informed Drummond in a letter that 'I love the Muses as well as ever I did, but can seldom have the occasion to frequent them. All my words are written over in one Book ready for the Press, but I want leisure to print them'.⁷ One reading of this quotation is that Alexander lacked the time and space that Menstrie afforded to devote to literary pursuits. Certainly, it is only

after Alexander was made Earl in 1633 that his thoughts return to Menstrie and literary diversions, as *Anacrisis* attests in its opening lines (quoted below). It was presumably around this time that Alexander initiated the process of publishing *Recreations*.

The four Hours of the 1614 edition are reproduced as the first four Hours in 1637. Only in the later edition is it obvious that these sections make up the opening third of a much larger work. The narrative, in so far as there is one, can be summarised thus: the First Hour gives a rapid account of God's universal might and Christian history from Eden to the Reformation, then, after listing various signs of the End in the Second Hour, the Third and Fourth describe an apocalyptic transformation of the earth. The Fifth to Ninth Hours list historical figures assembled to receive judgment, proceeding at a rate of one individual per stanza. A great court convenes in the Tenth Hour, with the elect ascending to heaven and the damned descending to hell. The Eleventh describes the punishment of the damned and contrasts their situation with that in heaven, while the final Hour exults in the renewal of the earth, and ponders the nature of immortal heavenly existence. A more useful summary, perhaps, is one that considers the topics which Alexander covers. This is because *Doomes-day's* apocalyptic narrative serves as the organising motif for a semi-encyclopedic account of contemporary world and natural history. Its intellectual ambition and scope are strongly linked to its diverse subject-matter. The poem's main catalogues are:

Hour	Catalogues
1 (119 stanzas)	Synopsis of Christian history, Eden to the Reformation (stanzas 44–119)
2 (108)	Earthquakes (57–64), plagues (68–75), famines (76–83)
3 (120)	Birds (27–40), land (54–67) and water-based (68–99) creatures including a section on rivers (74–87); symbols of earthly wealth (103–120)
4 (117)	Victims of naval (46–73) and land battles (74–93)
5 (110)	Famous pagans (16–100), including a section on pagan rituals (39–45)

6 (115)	Idolaters (4–22), Jewish history (23–35), ancient monarchs (40–45), Greeks (46–57) and Romans (58–77), post-antiquity figures including Muslims (77–86), famous women (87–97), sorcerers (98–104), assassins and traitors (105–115)
7 (115)	Individual sins and perpetrators (2–21), Biblical sinners (22–42), later villains (43–72), Old Testament monarchs (73–80), heretical Church leaders (81–100), petty criminals (106–115)
8 (120)	Characters from Genesis (2–42), Exodus (43–53), Numbers, Joshua and Judges (54–72), and more widely through Kings and Chronicles (73–120)
9 (114)	Characters from the Gospels (4–24), Church Fathers and early ecclesiastical history (40–78), emperors (79–97), the Reformation (98–114)
10 (112)	Those who led the damned astray (76–104)
11 (114)	Senses and their power to beguile men (26–52)
12 (113)	Restored natural features (8–19), members of the heavenly host (50–71)

The importance of these catalogues is related to *Doomes-day's* length, and ultimately its governing purpose too. In *Doomes-day* the apocalypse is only a framing device that allows Alexander to fill stanzas with information culled from different fields. Alexander advocates such an approach in *Anacrisis*. The second paragraph outlines his guiding aesthetic principles:

Language is but the Apparel of Poesy, which may give Beauty, but not Strength: And when I censure any Poet, I first dissolve the general Contexture of his Work in several Pieces, to see what Sinews it hath, and to mark what will remain behind, when that external Gorgeousness, consisting in the Choice or Placing of Words, as if it would bribe the Ear to corrupt the Judgment, is first removed, or at least only marshalled in its own Degree. I value Language as a Conduit, the Variety thereof to several Shapes, and adorned Truth or witty Inventions that which it should deliver. I compare a Poem to a Garden, the disposing of the Parts of the one to the several Walks of the other; The Decorum kept in Descriptions, and representing of Persons,

to the Proportions and Distances to be observed in such Things as are planted therein, and the Variety of Invention to the Diversity of Flowers thereof; whereof Three Sorts do chiefly please me: A grave Sentence, by which the Judgment may be bettered; a witty Conceit, which doth harmoniously delight the Spirits; and a generous Rapture expressing Magnanimity, whereby the Mind may be inflamed for great Things. All the rest, for the most Part, is but a naked Narration or gross Staff to uphold the general Frame, yet the more apt, if well contrived and eloquently delivered, to angle vulgar Readers, who perchance can scarce conceive the other.⁸

Alexander's suspicion of formal niceties—'Apparel', 'external Gorgeousness', 'general Contexture', 'Conduit', and particularly 'naked Narration or gross Staff'—is balanced out by his respect for 'Sinews', 'variety of invention' and substance in general. This all suggests that *Doomes-day's* bulk is integral to its appeal: its mass of information matters most, even if most of its details are commonplace.

These sentiments are worth comparison with those expressed by James VI in *Basilikon Doron* (1599). James wrote there that: 'the chiefe commendation of a Poeme is, that when the verse shall bee shaken sundrie in prose, it shall bee found so riche in quicke inuentions, and poeticke flowers, and in faire and pertinent comparisons; as it shall retaine the lustre of a Poeme, although in prose'.⁹ James's contention is that good poetry should be 'riche' with prosaic matter, to the extent that issues of balance, eloquence and control are of secondary importance. The poet who exemplified a preference for matter (*res*) over eloquence (*verba*) above all for James was Du Bartas. The only modern poet cited in *Basilikon Doron* is the Frenchman: 'Du Bartas saith, *Leur esprit s'en fuit au bout des doigts*'.¹⁰ This quotation is followed in the 1603 edition by an exhortation to read his works: '[. . .] saith Du Bartas, whose workes, as they are all most worthie to bee read by any Prince, or other good Christian; so would I especially wish you to bee well versed in them.'¹¹ Alexander was in personal contact with James: as late as 1616, he is recorded as having discussed poetry with the king at Newmarket.¹² Having moved to London with James in 1603, Alexander was also in contact with English literary circles. Before looking closely at the poem, it is worth examining the four contexts introduced—Du Bartas, James, London and Menstrie—in more detail.

LITERARY AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

William Drummond compared Alexander with Du Bartas in the title of a poem that survives in the Hawthornden Manuscripts: 'Sur les poetiques de Guillaume

Alexandre, Sieur De Menstre'.¹³ This flattering association with Guillaume De Saluste, Sieur Du Bartas reinforces Drummond and Alexander's shared literary interests. In the poem, Alexander is praised as the 'astre des escossais' (line 1), akin to such classical figures as Pindar, Terpander and Apollo. Another comparison was made after Alexander presented Drummond with a manuscript copy of the first four Hours around 1614. This copy, now in Edinburgh University Library, contains the first two stanzas of the Fifth Hour (which remained unpublished until 1637), presumably to indicate that Alexander had more material available. Drummond may have seen more of the poem besides, since he wrote in a subsequent letter to a friend that: 'This much I wil say, and perchance not with out raison dar say, if the heavens prolong his dayes to end his Day, he hath done more in One day, then Tasso did in his lyff, and Bartas in his Tuo Weekes: thocht the one and the other be most praise worthie.'¹⁴

These comparisons between Alexander and Du Bartas hint that far from being a weakness, *Doomes-day's* length was regarded as a particular strength by contemporary readers. Du Bartas was best known for his hexaemeral epic poems, the *Semaines: La Sepmaine* published in 1578, and its unfinished sequel *La Seconde Semaine* (1584). Both were available in Josuah Sylvester's English translation, *Devine Weekes and Workes*, from 1605 onwards. Each section of these long poems is a Day (or *Jour*) within a divine week, just as Alexander's Hours belong within his Great Day. Du Bartas already had a close association with Scotland and its court, having visited James VI as an envoy in the mid-1580s and begun a correspondence that led to translations of each other's poetry. By invoking Du Bartas to describe Alexander, then, Drummond implicitly alludes to the royal support the Scottish poet could hope to receive. The comparisons establish *Doomes-day* as a potentially prestigious work that could gain favour in the establishment.

Aside from its twelve-Hour structure, there is some evidence of Du Bartas's direct influence on *Doomes-day*. This is at its clearest in Alexander's Third Hour, which offers a catalogue of animals very similar in form and content to Du Bartas's Sixth Day. As if to acknowledge the connection, Alexander imitates Du Bartas's trademark technique of doubling the initial syllable of adjectives (Sylvester translates these examples and adds his own): Alexander invents the words 'flot-flotting' (Hour 3, stanza 68, line 4), 'pop-popling' (3.69.4) and 'jar-jarring' (3.83.5). There are very few other examples of this technique in the poem, which suggests that the imitation is specific to this section which has the strongest continuity with Du Bartas in terms of subject matter. This moment of specific imitation aside, *Doomes-day* has general similarities with the *Semaines*

in its methods of rhetorical accumulation and amplification, as my next section shows in more detail. Susan Snyder has gone further and claimed that *Doomes-day* responds directly to Du Bartas's work: 'Alexander looks at the divine design from the other end of time, the Seventh Day in Du Bartas's unfulfilled plan for the Second Week.'¹⁵ Alexander's retelling of Christian history at the start of *Doomes-day* does seem to rehearse everything Du Bartas had included in the parts of the Second Week he wrote before he died. An attempt to complete another's work would not be unprecedented either: Alexander wrote a completion to another unfinished work, Sidney's *Arcadia*; this was probably composed between 1613 and 1616, though not published until 1621.¹⁶ Yet there is nothing to suggest that Alexander was consciously writing a conclusion to Du Bartas's poem, particularly given the loose structure of the whole work, and the focus on natural history in the Third Hour, which Du Bartas had already covered at length in the Sixth Day. *Doomes-day* 'recreates' commonplace knowledge of the sort found in Du Bartas's work, and its apocalyptic narrative is in a sense a second Creation (a 'Recreation'); however, this does not necessarily make the work a completion of Du Bartas's poems. All the same, the connection with Du Bartas is instructive for comprehending Alexander's achievement in *Doomes-day*: both authors approach poetry as a medium to draw on the collected wisdom of past ages and writers.

As Drummond's comparison indicates, Alexander's claims for *Doomes-day*'s importance partly rested on the endurance required to produce it. Alexander's efforts were noticed by an English literary sphere which included figures like Samuel Daniel, Fulke Greville, Michael Drayton and John Davies of Hereford. As a gentleman of Prince Henry's bed-chamber, Alexander may have associated in person with these writers, each of whom were attached in varying degrees with the Sidney Circle.¹⁷ At least two of these writers, Drayton and Davies of Hereford, commended Alexander's learned approach, and it is notable that both wrote long, factual poems too, namely Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612) and Davies of Hereford's *Microcosmos* (1603) among others. Davies of Hereford remarked on Alexander's erudition in the epigram 'To my worthily-beloued Mr. William Alexander of Menstrie' in *The Scourge of Folly* (1610). The epigram presumably refers to the *Monarchieke Tragedies*, but it is still worth noting the praise for Alexander's great learning, and perhaps also his intimacy with James: 'I know thee not, but know I should do ill | Not to take knowledge of what is in thee, | When thou hast publisht it with so great skill; | Which makes thee ore thy Monarches soueraigne bee: | For they

being happy prou'd vnhappy men | Whome thou hast made most happy with thy pen' (ll.5–10).¹⁸ Alexander was friends with Drayton, and acted as an intermediary between the English poet and Drummond. Alexander probably had a hand in Drayton's request, made in a letter of 9 November 1618, that Drummond should approach Andro Hart with a view to publishing *Poly-Olbion*.¹⁹ Drayton was struggling to have the poem published, and it may be that Alexander's frustration about lacking time to send *Doomes-day* for publication in 1620 may disguise his own difficulties in finding a printer willing to publish such a long work: the commercial potential of both works was presumably doubtful. Drayton's friendliness towards Alexander is revealed in his verse letter to Henry Reynolds (1627). The final line makes an association of Alexander's name and his estate:

My *Alexander*, to whom in his right,
 I want extreamely, yet in speaking thus
 I doe but shew the love, that was twixt us,
 And not his numbers which were brave and hie,
 So like his mind, was his cleare Poesie.
 And my deare *Drummond* to whom much I owe
 For his much love, and proud I was to know,
 His poesie, for which two worthie men,
 I *Menstry* still shall love, and *Hauthorne-den*.²⁰

Though Alexander was in touch with this London literary circle, the biographical evidence mentioned above suggests that Menstrie was more likely the locus of his poetic vocation: not only do Alexander's literary publications coincide with quiet periods in his political career, but Alexander explicitly evokes his literary pursuits at Menstrie at the start of *Anacrisis*. The relevant passage reflects on the phrase 'recreate myself with the Muses', which was incorporated into the title of *Recreations with the Muses* a few years later. The opening of *Anacrisis* stresses the pleasure of literary endeavours:

After a great Travel both of Body and of Mind, which (since not voluntary but imposed upon me) was the more painful, by retiring for a Time where I was born [. . .] being curious, as the most dainty Kind of Pleasure for such as are capable of their Delicacies, to recreate myself with the Muses,—I may justly say recreate, since they create new Spirits [. . .] I conversed with some of the

Modern as well as with the Ancients, kindling my Fire at those Fires which do still burn out of the Ashes of ancient Authors, to whom I find them no way inferior [. . .] (p. 181)

Menstrie is depicted here as a retreat from society where Alexander had the chance to peruse great works of literature. We do not have information about Alexander's library, and it would be rash to suggest that it was of comparable size to Drummond's, which consisted of over a thousand books in various languages.²¹ Alexander nonetheless associates literary writing with his volumes of 'ancient authors' at Menstrie, and *Doomes-day* testifies to a close acquaintance with classical sources like Pliny and Plutarch.

Alexander's pun on 'recreate' ('enjoy myself' and 'create anew') offers, I suggest, an insight into the spirit in which *Doomes-day* was written. The poem appears to be one written to put the poet's spare time and literary encounters to serious, profitable use. Perhaps Alexander shared the attitude, traditionally attributed to English 'Spenserian' poets like Michael Drayton and William Browne, that poets should aspire to the Virgilian pastoral ideal and write only when sequestered from society. Drummond was living the model poet's life, excluded from the city, while Alexander's time was divided among a literary life at Menstrie and political endeavours in London. Such a dichotomy may have been partly rhetorical, but it may also have had a basis in Alexander's actual movements. If nothing else, it provides an insight into Alexander's conception of what writing poetry was. It encourages us to think that the poem was a work of leisurely contemplation and reading, and intentionally avoided political and social commentary.

Equally, the poem has a solemn, thunderous aspect too, and not just in its theme. James was a potential audience for the poem, and Alexander doubtless sought royal approval, if not financial assistance, from his publication. Yet James had criticised the harsh style of Alexander's earlier poetry in an unflattering sonnet. James Craigie, writing about this sonnet, finds a direct connection between *Doomes-day*'s 'eccentricities of style', which James picks up on, and Du Bartas's influence.²² According to Craigie the sonnet can be dated between 1607 and 1614 from an indirect reference to Alexander's mining rights in the title of the Denmilne MSS version, 'The Complainte of the Muses to Alexander vpon him selfe, for his ingratitude towardses them, by hurting them with his hard hammerd wordes, fitter to be vsed vpon his mineralles'. Add MS 24195, which includes James's revisions, renames it 'A Sonett: on Sr William Alexanders

harshe vearse after the Inglish e fasone'. The patriotism of the Additional MS title is borne out in the sonnet: James writes that 'wee bath'd you in Castalia's fountaine cleare' (line 4), but that 'your neighbours haue conspir'd to spill | That art which did the Laurel crowne obtaine' (5), and finally that 'Our songs are filld with smoothlie flowing fire' (14). James criticises the grand style and heavy diction of Alexander's verse as a departure from the more sonorous and fluent style of true Scottish poetry. Picking up on a raven reference in the sonnet, Michael Spiller suggests Alexander's verse is 'corvine', in that it can 'disjointedly mimic human words, but not human sentences'.²³ By dating the sonnet to 1607 or later it is more natural to suppose that this criticism is directed not against the lighter Sidneian or metaphysical styling characteristic of the earlier, melodious *Aurora*, but against the rugged, heavily imitative style Alexander was developing for *Doomes-day*. The implication is that Alexander's works have been excessively anglicised, even if his compositional strategy was more wide-ranging.

This sonnet raises an apparent contradiction between the so-called 'recreational' tone of Alexander's poetry and its weighty, dense style. This tension is carried through into *Doomes-day*, which could be approached equally as a work of apocalyptic moralising or as a playful collection of well-chosen examples from other works. In order to unravel this potential contradiction, we need to consider Du Bartas's influence in more detail. Like Du Bartas, Alexander blends together material from different sources to create a mosaic image of the world. Alexander's approach is particularly eclectic, accumulative, and book-based; all characteristics that match his description of 'recreation' in *Anacrisis*, and which by extension argue that Menstrie (as an ideal, as much as a place) influenced the poem's composition. Both Du Bartas's presence and method encouraged openness to continental influence: thus the 'internationalist localism' that John Kerrigan has found in Drummond's work is also seen in Alexander.²⁴ *Doomes-day*'s length is explicable in terms of its 'recreational' style, both in embracing the variety and diversity of existing knowledge, and creating a sincere, learned work of divine poetry in Du Bartas's style.

READING *DOOMES-DAY*

As noted above, there is insufficient bibliographic evidence to state with any certainty exactly how *Recreations with the Muses* was approached by its first

readers, though the page layout does offer a few clues. *Doomes-day* begins with a separate title-page, but it never appears to have been published separately. The poem is made easier to navigate by the running titles indicating the Hour (which are absent from the Scottish Text Society edition). Each stanza is numbered, which makes it fairly easy to locate an individual stanza, even though the work contains no indexes, marginalia or list of contents. The divisions between Hours are perhaps most striking, because they encourage each section to be treated as a discrete poem. Each Hour is separated from the next by a decorative border (except for the Third), the size of which depends on the space available on the page. An identical title heading is reprinted at the top of each hour: ‘Doomes-day. Or, The great Day of the Lords Iudgement’, with ‘The [n]th Hour’ below. Despite the overarching apocalyptic narrative, the poem in a sense begins again with each Hour. This is consistent with an emphasis on the poem’s subject-matter over narrative. It supports the assumption that the poem is simply too large to sustain narrative interest. Non-serial reading may not make *Doomes-day* much more digestible taken whole, but it provides a plausible model for how contemporary readers could have made the most of the text.

This mode of reading correlates well with Alexander’s method, particularly in his use of sources. *Doomes-day* can be approached as Alexander’s attempt to recall and collate the knowledge available to him. Most of the time it is difficult to give specific sources because the material is so commonplace; the main exception is that Alexander’s phrasing occasionally indicates he had the Geneva Bible in front of him, particularly in the Eighth and Ninth Hours. There are inevitably references to the Book of Revelation, but Alexander’s method is typically imprecise. In particular, Alexander does not attempt a rigorous historicist exegesis of Revelation, though he would surely have known an influential text like John Napier’s *Plaine Discouery of the Whole Revelation of Saint John* (1593), which was reprinted in Edinburgh and London in 1611.²⁵ Kastner and Charlton note only seventeen direct references to Revelation in the entire work: these are found in the Second Hour (28.1, 46.2, 66.5, and 107.1), the Third Hour (14.3, 43.5, and 78.8), the Seventh Hour (84.4 and 93.2), and the Twelfth Hour (18.2; 28.6 and 8; 29.1, 3, 5, and 7; and 30.1). Where Napier’s interpretations are based on a subtle arithmetical framework, Alexander only ever borrows individual images for local colour:

As leaves from trees, the stars from heaven doe shake,
 Darke clouds of smoake, exhausting those of Raine,
 The Moone all turnes to bloud, the Sunne growes blacke,
 Which (whil'st prodigious formes they doe retaine): [. . .]
 (3.14.1–4)

And I behelde when he had opened the sixt seale, and lo, ther was a
 great earthquake, & the sunne was as blacke as sackcloth of heere, and
 the moone was like blood (Revelation 6.12)²⁶

From Gods wine-presse of wrath shall flowes a floode,
 Which shall with blood their horses bridles staine;
 None may abide, nor yet can flie his sight,
 When arm'd with vengeance God doth thundring fight.
 (2.66.5–8)

And the wine presse was trodden without the citie, and blood came
 out of the wine press, even vnto the horse bridles, by the space of a
 thousand and six hundreth furlongs (Revelation 14.20)

Alexander does not invoke Biblical authority to make prophetic statements; rather, he appears to insert striking images almost from memory. It does not mitigate the religious sincerity of the work to suggest that Alexander's apocalypse is not reliant on the textual authority of Scripture alone.

Doomes-day is internally consistent if understood as a series of dissociated sections held within a framing apocalyptic narrative. This is more easily appreciated if we consider *Doomes-day* the purest English-language example of a work that followed Bartasian principles. Like Du Bartas, Alexander is not a visionary poet who conveys personal experiences and opinions through a literary medium. Neither poet is prophetic. *Doomes-day* and the *Semaines* are non-narrative works that contain the multiple perspectives of all the past authors and writings drawn upon: these are essentially collaborative poems, the meaning of which is located in the poem's substance (or 'Sinews', as Alexander named it), rather than an attractive narrative. They honour the organising principle provided by God and his earthly representative, James. So it makes sense to follow the recommendation in *Anacrisis* to treat the narrative as a device 'to angle vulgar Readers, who perchance can scarce conceive' the real meaning of

the poem. Alexander's primary commitment is to humanist learning; his poem reprises a lifetime's conversation with significant writers. It belongs on the page and is unsuited for oral delivery, both due to its length and style. As an act of re-presentation rather than representation, then, *Doomes-day* is a work of poetic making in the purest sense; in this light, it is positively a virtue that Alexander's material is familiar and unoriginal. The apocalyptic theme provides the necessary transhistorical breadth for an encyclopedic project in Du Bartas's style: the apocalypse was a good fit for a poetic voice that was, as Drayton put it, 'brave and hie'.

All this compression does not mean that the poem is in any sense complete. The poem's speaker notes on occasion how staggeringly vast his topic is, and regularly calls for divine assistance. These appeals are partly conventional, but are consistent with the poem's self-consciously limited reach. For example, the assembly section is voluminous (460 stanzas), but not exhaustive: 'O what strange sight! what monstrous meeting now? | [. . .] Whil'st I do looke about, below, on high, | Still clouds of people do confine mine eye' (5.1.1, 7–8). When attention is turned to the godly in the Ninth Hour, the poet concedes that 'each one deserves (respecting worth) | An Epicke Poeme, grac'd by all the Arts' (9.39.3–4), and he acknowledges elsewhere that there is only space to describe the most famous characters: 'Yet some most eminent may be exprest, | To make the world conjecture of the rest' (6.3.7–8); 'With those else nam'd here stands a number more, | Well knowne to God, though not to fame, nor mee' (8.120.1–2). The earlier books express sheer amazement at the scale of the task ahead: e.g. 'Whil'st silent wondering makes a setled eye, | What huge amazement hath o'rewhelm'd my minde?' (1.5.3–4); 'My haire are bended up, swolne are mine eyes, | My tongue in silence minds amazement tyes' (3.41.7–8). The poet's sense of inadequacy is compounded as he is called upon to describe hell and the renewal of the earth: 'What height of words were able to dilate | The severall torments that are us'd below' (11.53.1–2); 'Th'ears have not heard, nor th'eyes have never seen | The joyes of heaven, more great then can be thought' (12.1.1–2, after 1 Cor. 2:9). Contributing to this impression are introductory and concluding stanzas of Hours that frequently invoke God's aid or express mental fatigue.

This anxiety is reflected in Alexander's style. Twelve consecutive stanzas on different land animals in the Third Hour (stanzas 54–67), for example, are accumulative, interchangeable, and bear a mostly spurious relation to the general scenario: they could be extracted and read separately. These habits allow more

details to be included, and relieve the fear of incompleteness. A stanza on sheep is not primarily about the apocalyptic demise of ovine creatures. Only after six lines of discontinuous description does Alexander mention the apocalyptic scenario:

The mildest beasts importing greatest gaine,
Which others crimes made altars onely touch,
By whom they cloth, and feed, not crying slaine,
The Christians image onely true when such,
Their growing snowes which arts fraile colours staine,
Were wrong'd, when fain'd of gold, since worth more much:
But precious things the owners harmes oft breede,
The fleeces flames the bodies doe succede.
(3.58.1–8)

Each line in this stanza reads like a separate clause, and many of these have their own verbs. The poem as a whole offers relatively few instances of enjambement or of sense flowing through the stanza. Narrative fluency is sacrificed in favour of an accretion of details which offers, in this case, a brief cultural history of sheep. It does not matter that the information is commonplace because the stanza aims to be comprehensive but concise, like a stub article in an encyclopedia.

Likewise in the following stanza, for example, which removes conjunctions (asyndeton) and places clauses of similar form and length in parallel (isocolon) to describe Christ's ministry within line four:

Those wonders then which sacred writs record,
Did some convert, a multitude amaze,
What did not Gods owne word doe by a word?
Lame ranne, Deafe heard, Dumb spake, Divels fled, dead raise,
Of servants servant, whil'st of Lords the Lord,
Did seeke but his owne paine, mans good, Gods praise.
To marry heaven with earth whil'st he began,
God without Mother, without Father man.
(1.96.1–8)

This single-line synopsis of Christ's life has an attractive audacity. It clearly appealed to one contemporary reader too: the stanza was selected by Joseph Wodroephe

as one of four that follow his French translation of the First Hour (within a French textbook). Wodroephe offers a valuable, though brief, piece of commentary on the extracts chosen: ‘they [these stanzas] are remarkable and worthie (with many other that I have past over) to insert in any Mans Memory, who so euer be that feares God’.²⁷ At the top of his translation, Wodroephe states that Alexander’s ability to fit so much into a decasyllabic line is difficult to replicate in French, even with two more syllables per line: he finds Alexander’s ‘Style so excellent and so high, and also some what harsh to agree with the French Verse, because that our English Tongue (and chiefly by that extraordinary Poët) can affoorde more Se[n]se and Mater with ten of its Sillables, then euer I haue been able to construe with twelve, and thirtene of the French.’²⁸ The stanza above is a memorable display of Alexander’s ability to compress his material.

DOOMES-DAY IN CRITICISM

There has been little critical comment on Alexander since the seventeenth century. In terms of poetic influence, only the title of William Mure’s *Doomesday* (1628) takes Alexander on board. It seems futile to chase similarities with *Paradise Lost*.²⁹ The preface to a 1720 publication of *Doomes-day*’s first two books is enthusiastic (‘its own worth will sufficiently recommend it to all impartial Judges’) and makes a promise, which was not kept, to publish the remainder at a later date: ‘if the Publick are pleased with this performance, I shall take care to give them the Remainder of this Nobleman’s Writings in a correct Edition.’³⁰ Since that time, criticism on Alexander’s *magnum opus* has been less charitable. However, the very qualities that have been thought most objectionable in *Doomes-day* are in fact essential to what Alexander hoped to achieve. Kastner and Charlton, for example, make the following accusations against Alexander:

The general material of the poem is inert; it does not of itself fall into such lines as would unmistakably suggest to the poet the pattern of an organic structure. Of architecture, therefore, there is none beyond a simple framework, and into it Alexander packs the heavy mass of his opinions on sin and his tedious exhortations to take the orthodox way for circumventing the everlasting bonfire. Even narrative appears but episodically, and the poem is less the telling of a story than the marshalling of a procession.³¹

These observations are fairly astute; the error is an assumption that *Doomes-day* is deficient because it ‘packs’ in details and does not manifest a complex structural unity. They observe that Alexander is stylistically ‘a disciple of Du Bartas’, but complain about Alexander’s ‘awkward inversions’ that work towards ‘securing impressiveness by a compactness which is merely phonetic, and in no wise substantial’—e.g. ‘Seale, viall, Trumpet, seaventh, opens, powres, sounds’ (2.107.1) and ‘Loe, painted, false, or stolne, face, minde, attires’ (7.12.5)—though these flourishes make an important contribution to Alexander’s project.³² Michael Spiller’s negative judgment on *Doomes-day* shows that little changed in the seventy years after Kastner and Charlton. Again, his description of Alexander’s style is compatible with its Bartasian purpose: ‘with such large bounds to stray in, Alexander has no motive for conciseness, and nothing can be said without qualification, reflection, parentheses, parallels and generalization.’³³ Twenty years later the only advance is John Kerrigan’s solitary epithet, that *Doomes-day* is an ‘encyclopedic epic’, which at least points readers towards a fair reading of Alexander’s great work, one which recognises its compositional methods as essential to what it achieves.³⁴

Doomes-day should be approached as one poem within a cluster of other non-canonical works that can contribute greatly to a historicised understanding of seventeenth-century poetry. Alexander hints that poets should not be considered in isolation during *Anacrisis*: ‘I condemn their Opinions, who, as they would include all Perfection in one, do prefer someone with whom they sympathize, or whom they have most practised to all others. There is none singular in all, and yet all are singular in some things’ (p.182). *Doomes-day* has numerous counterparts in English, each of which uses Du Bartas for particular ends: *Devine Weekes and Workes* and *Microcosmos* sought to gain from James’s admiration for Du Bartas, while *Poly-Olbion* has broader national and chorographical interests. Phineas Fletcher’s *The Purple Island* (1633, written c.1610) has numerous superficial similarities to *Doomes-day*: it is divided into twelve sections, roughly half as long as *Doomes-day*’s hours, and, after cantos dense with information, builds towards an apocalyptic struggle in the final canto. These texts have not received the critical attention due to them either. These poems are not lyrical or narrative works, and this makes their appeal to general readers limited; nonetheless, they offer an insight into a seventeenth-century poetic form that replaces single narratives with massive and polyphonic structures of knowledge, of which Du Bartas’s poetry provides the seminal example. Rather than ‘Bartasian’, we could loosely call these poems ‘hexaemeral’ in order

to emphasise the structural common-ground of this Christian descriptive writing, which has the six days of creation as its ultimate precursor. By this definition, *Doomes-day* is truly the ultimate example of a seventeenth-century hexaemeral poem: both the latest and greatest example of this putative mode, one which has suffered the same critical neglect as Du Bartas's works.

I have hinted at the possibility that Alexander's poetic agenda was well-matched with Menstrie, which represents an intellectual and geographical space where Alexander was at leisure to contemplate and reprise his wealth of book-learned knowledge. It is useful, I have suggested, to approach *Doomes-day* as being a work of 'recreation' in the two senses Alexander refers to the word: the product of leisurely endeavour, and a refreshing opportunity to 'create new Spirits'. The playful rediscovery of old material becomes part of a serious, apocalypse-themed poetic creation. This would explain why Alexander's major work had to be voluminous, whilst also being associated with leisure.

Doomes-day may not be a poem for today's general readers to plough through, but it still merits serious attention as being representative of a popular seventeenth-century poetic mode. For specialists, further research on Alexander would improve our understanding in numerous areas. It would be well worth examining how continental Alexander's literary outlook is, and how that compares with Drummond's: in other words, whether it is right to consider these Scottish writers as being unusually open to European literature, more so than their English equivalents. *Doomes-day*'s sources should be examined at greater length for the insight they offer into Alexander's influences and his methods in *Doomes-day*. This could be usefully compared with the more didactic *Monarchieke Tragedies*. Another issue unanswered here is how far Alexander's method is influenced by commonplacing and cento poems, and has affinities to a later prose work like Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). This study has drawn out various strands of Alexander's great poem, and has showed how they bind together to offer a productive and sympathetic reading of the poem. Further study should shed light on Alexander's dynamic work as a literary diversion that was keenly aware of contemporary developments in British and European literature.

Notes

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- ¹ David W. Atkinson, 'More than One Voice: The Poetic Accomplishment of William Alexander', in *Older Scots Literature*, ed. by Sally Mapstone (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), pp.584–94 (586).
- ² The *Monarchieke Tragedies* have attracted more critical attention than *Doomes-day* has: see Sally Mapstone, 'Drunkenness and Ambition in Early Seventeenth-century Scottish literature', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 35/36 (2007): 131–55, and T. Howard Hill, 'Sir William Alexander: The Failure of Tragedy and the Tragedy of Failure', in *The European Sun: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature, University of Strathclyde 1993*, ed. by Graham D. Caie (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001), pp.475–86.
- ³ *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling*, ed. by L.E. Kastner and H.B. Charlton, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Printed for the Scottish Text Society, 1921–29). All line references to *Doomes-day* are taken from the 1637 text, and are supplied in the body of the text. I have used Kastner and Charlton's commentary to identify Alexander's references to other sources.
- ⁴ The erroneous claim that Alexander wrote twenty-four Hours is made in both David Reid, 'Alexander, William, first earl of Stirling (1577–1640)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, 2006) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/335>, last accessed 21 January 2010], and Robert D. Beckett, 'Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 121, ed. by M. Thomas Hester (Detroit and London: Gale Research Inc., 1992), pp. 3–9 (p.8).
- ⁵ *Doomes-day, or, the Great Day of the Lords Iudgement* (Edinburgh, 1614), *2^v. The first pair of square brackets is original.
- ⁶ Thomas McGrail, *Sir William Alexander, First Earl of Stirling: A Biographical Study* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1940), p.71.

- ⁷ *Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed. by Bishop Sage and Thomas Ruddiman (Edinburgh, 1711), p.151.
- ⁸ *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, 1: 1605–1650*, ed. by J.E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908; repr. 1957), pp.181–89. Future references are cited in the body of the text.
- ⁹ King James VI and I, *Political Writings*, ed. by Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.55.
- ¹⁰ ‘their spirit flies from their fingertips’. *Ibid.*, p.58.
- ¹¹ The 1599 and 1603 texts are printed on facing pages in *The Basilicon Doron of King James VI*, ed. by James Craigie, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood & Sons Ltd, 1944), I, pp.198–99 (199).
- ¹² *Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden* (1711), p.149.
- ¹³ *Poetical Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed. by L.E. Kastner, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1913), II, p.278. The poem was first printed in a 1912 article by L.E. Kastner, where it precedes Drummond’s transcription of a Du Bartas sonnet (in praise of Maitland of Ledington), though Kastner does not connect the two poems. See ‘Some Unpublished Poems of Drummond from the Hawthornden MSS’, *Modern Language Review*, 7 (1912), 300–14 (307–8).
- ¹⁴ McGrail, p.194. Kastner suggests that Drummond is quoting a tribute paid by Ronsard to Du Bartas, recorded by Simon Goulart (*Poetical Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*, I, 1, p.xxi).
- ¹⁵ *The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume de Saluste, Sieur du Bartas Translated by Josuah Sylvester*, ed. by Susan Snyder, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), I, p.81.
- ¹⁶ See A. G. D. Wiles’s two articles, ‘The Date of Publication and Composition of Sir William Alexander’s Supplement to Sidney’s “Arcadia”’, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 50 (1956): 387–92 (391–92), and ‘Sir William Alexander’s Continuation of the Revised Version of Sir Philip Sidney’s “Arcadia”’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 3 (1966): 221–29.
- ¹⁷ Gary F. Waller, ‘Sir William Alexander and Renaissance Court Culture’, *Aevum*, 51 (1977): 505–15 (511).
- ¹⁸ John Davies of Hereford, *Complete Works*, ed. by Alexander B. Grosart (1878), 2 vols (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), II, p.31.
- ¹⁹ Bernard H. Newdigate, *Michael Drayton and his Circle* (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1941), pp.161, 177.
- ²⁰ *Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. by William Hebel, 4 vols (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1932), III, pp.226–31 (ll.166–74).

- ²¹ See *The Library of Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed. by R.H. MacDonald (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971).
- ²² *Poems of James VI of Scotland*, ed. by James Craigie, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1958), II, pp. 114–15, 237.
- ²³ Michael Spiller, ‘The Scottish Court and the Scottish Sonnet at the Union of the Crowns’, in *The Rose and the Thistle: Essays on the Culture of Late Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, ed. by Sally Mapstone and Juliette Wood (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), pp.101–15 (113).
- ²⁴ John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History and Politics, 1603–1707* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.168.
- ²⁵ George Molland, ‘Napier, John, of Merchiston (1550–1617)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19758>, last accessed 21 January 2010]. For more on contemporary apocalyptic interpretation, see Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism and the English Reformation* (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978); Katharine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- ²⁶ Quotations are taken from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 edition* (Peasbody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007).
- ²⁷ John Wodroephe, *The Spared Houres of a Souldier in his Travels: or, The true Marrowe of the French Tongue* (Dort: N. Vincentz, 1623), 2O2^r.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2M4^r.
- ²⁹ See Stella Revard, ‘Milton’s Eve and the Evah of Sir William Alexander’s “Doomes-day”’, *Papers on Language & Literature*, 3 (1967): 181–86.
- ³⁰ William Alexander, *Doom’s day: or, The Last Judgment, a Poem*, ed. by A. Johnstoun (London, 1720), A4^{r-v}.
- ³¹ *Poetical Works of William Alexander*, II, p.xix.
- ³² *Ibid.*, II, p.xxi.
- ³³ Michael Spiller, ‘Poetry after the Union 1603–1660’, in *The History of Scottish Literature*, I: *Origins to 1660*, ed. by R.D.S. Jack (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), pp. 141–62 (145).
- ³⁴ Kerrigan, p.149.

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