

10-1-1966

## Of the Day Estivall: A Textual Note

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### Recommended Citation

Lindsay, David W. (2013) "Of the Day Estivall: A Textual Note," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, 104–106.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol4/iss2/6>

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STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

fellow,<sup>15</sup> a gentleman who has distinguished himself in literature in this country, and whose amiable manners and varied information acquired in the course of extensive travels in Europe will, I think, recommend him to your good graces.

With kindest remembrances to Mrs Lockhart,  
I am my dear Lockhart

Yours very truly  
WASHINGTON IRVING

BEN HARRIS McCLARY

TENNESSEE WESLEYAN COLLEGE

*Of the Day Estivall: A Textual Note*

Alexander Hume's *Of the Day Estivall* has been generally recognized by critics and anthologists as one of the finest Scottish poems of the later sixteenth century. It is one of the few poems of this period in which Presbyterianism can be seen to have acted not as an inhibiting and repressive force but as a cleanser of the perceptive powers and a stimulus to the creative imagination. The emotional energy generated by Hume's Puritanical reaction against mythological fancies and aureate conventionality is permitted to operate on the realities of the poet's day-to-day experience because of his confident belief that description of Nature is praise of God; and the hammered rhythms of metrical psalmody communicate his vigorous response to the life and variety of his subject matter. Most readers are rightly dissuaded from close linguistic analysis by the over-all impression of clear and confident assertion; but the standard text of the poem, that edited by Alexander Lawson for the Scottish Text Society in 1902, deserves re-examination.

The first question that raises itself is that of stanza division. Lawson noted that the MS version was in eight-line stanzas, but he ac-

<sup>15</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was still a young teacher whose reputation as a poet was yet to be realized. He apparently presented this letter to Lockhart at his house in London on 2 June. See *The Diary of Clara Crowinshield: A European Tour with Longfellow, 1835-1836*, ed. Andrew Hilen (Seattle, Wash., 1956), p. 14.

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

cepted without discussion the division into four-line stanzas suggested by the rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme, however, is not conclusive—Marvell, for example, frequently uses an eight-line stanza rhyming *aabbccdd*—and an examination of the 58 stanzas of Lawson's text strongly suggests that the poet thought of them in pairs. Of the 29 possible pairs, at least 17 are clearly linked by the development of a single idea; and in some cases—stanzas 1–2, 7–8 and 27–28, for instance—there is a syntactic continuity as well. In a poem that depends so much on the accumulation of details, one would not expect such instances to be common; and I can find only one comparable link between the second stanza of a pair and the first stanza of the next. The MS division, therefore, seems at least as plausible as that of the printed editions.

The second question is that of punctuation. Lawson's unwillingness to modernize the punctuation of his source is understandable; but there are many points in his text where the punctuation seems inept not only by modern but also by sixteenth-century standards. Particularly confusing are the mid-line commas in lines 81, 156, and 211; the colons after lines 114, 134, and 138; and the full stops after lines 4, 12, 22, 28, and 108; and in some of these cases the erroneous punctuation has suggested misinterpretations of the sense.

The actual words of Lawson's text raise fewer problems; but there are two questionable readings that deserve to be noticed. The phrase "Quhilk Sunne" in line 13 is unnatural, since the rising of the sun is not described until lines 33–36; it seems likely that "Sunne" is a misreading for "sune." And in line 55 Lawson's emendation of "phanis" for "thains" is unnecessary, since the OED shows the word "thane," meaning "pennant," to have been used in Scotland at this time with reference to metallic objects.

The most serious deficiency of the S.T.S. text, however, is the improbability of some of its stated or assumed interpretations. Lines 63–64, for example, read:

Clear are the highest hils and plaine,  
The vapors takes the vails.

In the absence of any note on the word "vails," one assumes that Lawson took it to mean "valleys"; but it is hard to reconcile this interpretation either with one's observation of morning mists or with the unclouded atmosphere of the succeeding stanzas. It seems more likely that the mists are disappearing altogether and that the word is used as in the phrase "I took my vale of him." The OED assumes a dissyllabic

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pronunciation in this sense; but the analogy with "vails," meaning "parting gifts," renders this assumption doubtful. Lines 155-156 raise similar problems:

Halks prunyeis on the sunnie brais,  
And wedders back, and side.

It is clear from Lawson's note that he believes some of these hawks to be at rest on the hillside and others to have attached themselves to the backs and flanks of gelded rams. One gets a simpler image, however, if one takes "wedders" as the Scots form of the hawking term "weather," meaning "expose to the beneficial influence of the air." Lines 161-162 are more difficult:

The dow with whisling wings sa blew,  
The winds can fast collect.

Here again Lawson offers no explanation; but if one takes the words "whisling" and "winds" in their modern senses, a number of problems arise. Even if one disregards Hume's earlier statements about the stillness of the foliage in the midday calm, it is hard to see how a dove can "collect" the winds; and one wonders whether "whisling" and "blew" are appropriate epithets for the wings of a dove in flight. I can make sense of these lines only by assuming that "whisling" is from the verb "wissel" or "whissle," meaning "change," and refers to the way in which the dove's feathers change from one shade of blue to another in the sunlight, and that "winds" is related to "winn," meaning "winnow," and to the Old English "windung," meaning "a piece of chaff." On such an interpretation, at any rate, one finds in these lines the simplicity and clarity of statement that are characteristic of the poem as a whole. A simpler instance of the same kind occurs in lines 211-212:

The bels, and circles on the weills,  
Throw lowpping of the trouts.

Lawson rightly interprets "weills" as "pools"; but it is equally important to see that "bels" in this context means "bubbles."

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