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**ANONYMITY WITH INTENT?  
“WE LORDIS HES CHOSIN A CHIFTANE MERVELLUS”**

*Janet Hadley Williams*

Among late-medieval Scottish poems there are many that can be classified as either “moral,” “religious,” or somewhere between the two. These works are impersonal, their timeless themes derived from scripture, liturgy, proverb, or those called “wyis philosapheris.” Hortatory in tone, they advise on good conduct—to “serue thy god meikly and the world besely”—or ponder the immense topic of earthly mutability.<sup>1</sup> Author names, often unnoted, or uncertain, seem unimportant.<sup>2</sup> Their audience, sinful humankind, is all-inclusive.

Such “ballatis of wisdome and moralitie” form the second part of George Bannatyne’s manuscript miscellany. Some are by known writers, including Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, and Walter Kennedy. Many more, like “We lordis hes chosin a chiftane mervellus,” are anonymous.<sup>3</sup> A few appear to sharpen the generalized counsel that is expected of this

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<sup>1</sup> See “Serue thy god meikly” and “Walking allone among thir levis grene,” Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. MS 1.1.6 (Bannatyne), fols 74<sup>r</sup> and 53<sup>v</sup>–55<sup>t</sup>; or, for ease of reference, II, pp. 181 and 132–36 in *The Bannatyne Manuscript writtin in tyme of pest, 1568*, ed. W. Tod Ritchie, 4 vols, Scottish Text Society, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ser. 22–23 and 26; 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. 5 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1928–34) [hereinafter B], to which there is free online access at the National Library of Scotland. Cf. the refrain, “To fle all vyce and follow vertew fair,” in “Moving in mynd of mony diuerss thing,” fol. 71<sup>r</sup>, B, II, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> The extant versions of “Musing allone this hinder nicht,” for example, are attributed to “Dumbar” in the Bannatyne MS, fols 63<sup>v</sup>–64<sup>r</sup> (B, II: 156–57); to “Stewarte” in Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys Library, MS 2553, pp. 313–14 (*The Maitland Folio Manuscript*, ed. W. A. Craigie, 2 vols, STS, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ser. 7 and 20 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1919–27) [hereinafter MF], I: 372–74); and anonymous in the Maitland Folio’s second copy, pp. 168–70 (MF, I: 191–93).

<sup>3</sup> Bannatyne MS, fols 78<sup>v</sup>–79<sup>r</sup> (B, II: 197–99). A fresh edition of “We lordis hes chosin a chiftane mervellus” is forthcoming in the collection of poems by William Stewart, John Bellenden, and contemporaries being prepared for the Scottish Text Society.

type. These poems address individuals, and thereby might constrain the possible date of composition. One, a study of the seven deadly sins, exhorts, “Be rychtuus [richteous], regent, and wele exerce thy cure.”<sup>4</sup> Another denounces “Ȝe lordis, þat hes þe king in steir.”<sup>5</sup> Yet “regent” can allude to anyone who governs; “lordis,” too, is a broad term for various types of superior. Without more detail, their use cannot identify a specific time, or the particular actors in it.

Other poems among Bannatyne’s group are more surely topical. “Iesu chryst þat deit on tre” has a deftly-employed refrain, “Allace our king is nocht of eild,” referring to the time before a king reached “perfect age,” or legal competence, at fourteen.<sup>6</sup> That detail alone does not establish a date of composition, because Scotland had several minority periods, but when it is coupled with two further allusions, to “regentis in this realme / Ane or ma and sindre diuers” (33–34), and to the “feild... / Quhair did our wirthy prince decese” (43–44), we know the poem was probably composed during James V’s minority (1513–1526/28), when the battle of Flodden Field was fresh in mind; and after several regents (the dowager queen Margaret; James Hamilton, earl of Arran; Archibald Douglas, earl of Angus), had all failed to bring stability to the country. Nonetheless, the poem’s specificity is limited by its collective voice, albeit one that is focused in the cries of “pure” and “leill” men. The appeals to “Iesu chryst” to “send ws thy grace” (2) speak for the whole community.

The word “lordis,” in the first line of “We lordis hes chosin a chiftane mervellus,” seems to place this poem, too, with those cited briefly above. So does its refrain, “In lak of iustice this realme is schent, allace.” It recalls others among the moral poems: “Within this land was nevir hard nor sene,” for instance, or “That all is loist for laik of steidfastnes.”<sup>7</sup> The eight-line verse-form (*ababbcbC*<sup>5</sup>) for the five stanzas of “We lordis” is, similarly, undistinguishing; it is the one much favoured by Dunbar for his didactic verse, and by several other unknown authors of moral “ballatis.”

Read again, “We lordis,” written long before the existence of computer animating techniques, begins to morph. It leaves behind the general counsel characteristic of the moral or religious “ballat.” Its fictional speaker does not admonish a regent or lord, appeal to God, or guide humanity in general. He *is* a lord. His words, “We lordis hes chosin a

<sup>4</sup> “Be rychtuus,” Bannatyne MS, fols 86<sup>v</sup>–87<sup>v</sup> (B, II: 224).

<sup>5</sup> “Suppois I war in court most he,” Bannatyne MS, fol. 89<sup>r-v</sup> (B, II: 233–34).

<sup>6</sup> “Iesu chryst,” Bannatyne MS, fol. 93<sup>r-v</sup> (B, II: 245–47).

<sup>7</sup> Dunbar, “Devorit with dreme,” Bannatyne MS, fols 60<sup>r</sup>–61<sup>r</sup> (B, II: 147–50); *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, 2 vols (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1998), I: 71–74; “Sum tyme this warld so steidfast was and stabill,” Bannatyne MS, fol. 67<sup>r</sup> (B, II: 164–65).

chiftane mervellus,” might be the opening of a panegyric. They are assertive, rallying; spoken to others who are equals, and as if they are gathered to sum up a position—that they have made a good choice. Here, unlike those earlier-quoted examples, “lordis” has a particular application, “lords of council”—the full name of the council appointed to serve the monarch from August 1513.<sup>8</sup> That this is the sense intended is confirmed by the word, “chosin.” It was the lords of council who, on 26 August 1514, unanimously agreed, with the consent of the queen and Angus her spouse, to send for the duke of Albany, as Scotland’s heir presumptive, for “the governing and defending” of the realm.<sup>9</sup> John Stuart, duke of Albany (1482–1526), was the son of James III’s younger, exiled brother, Alexander, and Anne de la Tour. By May 1515, Albany had arrived in Scotland, and Parliament confirmed his position in July.

That dual emphasis, where defending is set beside governing, is reflected in another word in the poem’s opening line, “chiftane.” In French as in Scots, “chiftane” had the sense, “military commander,” as William Dunbar had known when he employed it in his eulogy to Barnard Stewart, distinguished French commander —“Welcum, our Scottish chiftane most dughti” (177).<sup>10</sup> “Chiftane,” especially coupled with the adjective, “mervellus”—it, too, a French word<sup>11</sup>—is also apt for the now-identified “gouernour” in “We lordis,” the duke of Albany.<sup>12</sup> Albany, like Barnard

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<sup>8</sup> *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs 1501–1554* [ADCP], ed. R. K. Hannay (Edinburgh: H. M. General Register House, 1932), 22 September 1513, viii–x, 1–2. Hannay notes (ix), however, “the remarkable elasticity which characterises [the use of the word] ‘council’ in Scotland.”

<sup>9</sup> *ADCP*, 19, 20–21. They directed him to request the king of France to supply all promised munitions and receive their delivery. For further on French aid to Scotland, see *Flodden Papers*, ed. Marguerite Wood, Scottish History Society, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. 20 (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1933), 98–99. On the rhetoric of “choice,” see Amy Blakeway, *Regency in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 31; and on munitions costs, 223–26.

<sup>10</sup> See *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* [DOST], ed. W. A. Craigie, A. J. Aitken, et al. (Chicago, Aberdeen and Oxford: Chicago University Press, Aberdeen University Press, and Oxford University Press, 1937–2002), *chiftane*, *n.*; *OED*, *chieftain*, *n.*; and Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l’Ancienne Langue Française...du IX au XV siècles*, ed. Frédéric Godefroy, 10 vols (Paris: F. Vieweg; E. Bouillon, 1880–97), *Chevetaigne*. On Barnard Stewart, see *Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt, II: 407–08; *The Works of Walter Quin*, ed. John Flood (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 146–206.

<sup>11</sup> See Godefroy, *Merveilles*, and following entries; and *OED*, *marvellous*, *adj.*, *adv.*, and *n.* and preliminary notes, “Origin” and “Etymology.”

<sup>12</sup> The same term is used of Albany in late 1523 by Skelton, *Howe the Douty Duke of Albany*, in *John Skelton: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Scattergood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 359–72, line 48.

Stewart, was born in France. He had served the French king in several military campaigns by the time of James IV's death at Flodden.<sup>13</sup> His military expertise proved as important as his administrative efficiency during his first visit to Scotland as governor.<sup>14</sup>

In line two of "We lordis," the lord-of-council spokesman takes a surprising turn. Our "chiftane mervellus," he says, "left hes ws in grit perplexite." These are words familiar from the general complaint, comparable, for instance, to Dunbar's cry "I knaw not... / Quha is my freind, quha is my fo";<sup>15</sup> here, however, they are quickly augmented and particularized, to leave no doubt that it is the absence of their "chiftane" that has caused the unease. The negatives, "nocht...nor...nor," emphasize lack of presence:

And him absentis, with wylis cautelus,  
 Zeiris and dayis mo than two or thre  
 And nocht intendis the land nor peple se  
 Faltis to correct, nor vicis for to chace (3–6).

Among other specifics revealed is the poem's composition date. Having left for France on 8 June 1517, it would be later 1519 when Albany had been absent for "Zeiris and dayis mo than two or thre."

Within Scotland, opinion on Albany's presence and absence varied. Scottish-born James Hamilton, first earl of Arran, next in line to the throne after Albany, had challenged the latter's legitimacy.<sup>16</sup> Others, including the Earl of Angus and Margaret Tudor, Lord Home, and Lord Drummond, had looked to their own interests, or across the border, favouring England as protector in want of an adult king of Scots.<sup>17</sup> Though Scotland was in dire need of strong leadership, a song of these times, remembered years later in *The Complaynt of Scotland*, expressed a popular anti-French view about

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<sup>13</sup> See Elizabeth Bonner, "Stewart [Stuart], John, second duke of Albany," *ODNB*, 2004, revd. 2006: <https://doi-org.virtual.anu.edu.au/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/26488>.

<sup>14</sup> Bryony Coombs, "John Stuart, Duke of Albany and his contribution to military science in Scotland and Italy, 1514–36: from Dunbar to Rome," *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland [PSAS]*, 148 (2018): 231–66; Ken Emond, *The Minority of James V: Scotland and Europe, 1513–1528* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2019), 66.

<sup>15</sup> Bannatyne MS, fols. 84<sup>r</sup>–85<sup>r</sup> (B, II, pp. 215–17); *Poems of Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt, I: 171–73.

<sup>16</sup> Emond, *The Minority*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> See Emond, *The Minority*, 22–27 (Margaret and Angus); 28–29 (Home); and *ADCP*, 50–51 (Drummond).

Albany and his deputy Antoine D'Arcy, Seigneur de la Bastie: "God sen the duc hed byddin in France and delaubaute hed neuyr cum hame."<sup>18</sup>

Outside the country, there was opposition on two fronts to Albany's return. In England, as Lord Dacre succinctly put it to Wolsey, "if Albany can be kept out of Scotland, it will go to ruin for lack of justice."<sup>19</sup> France, hitherto willing to assist its Scottish ally, now preferred, because of its continental involvements, to placate England, and thus wished to prevent Albany's return.<sup>20</sup>

The political instability allowed to flourish in Albany's absence is behind the tactic the author of "We lordis' employs at the end of the first stanza. Albany is directly addressed, but his physical distance is emphasized by the method of communication now pointedly adopted. As the lords of council had done several times in real life, the fictional lords send "Our lord gouernor" a "sedull" (7, a written letter) to set down the evidence of the country's disarray, and name its cause, the governor's absence, with an "allace" (8) marking the lords' regret to speak of it.<sup>21</sup>

The next four stanzas of the letter employ many elements of petition and complaint. The recipient is carefully addressed, "To the, our lord and gyd" (15), and a message, "Approch in tyme" (22) is conveyed. Grievances are sweeping: "Couatyce ringis into the spirituall state" (25); "Grit wer and wandrecht hes bene ws amang" (33). Yet in "We lordis" these comments on troubled times have particular causes. What spiritual leaders covet (for instance, "banifice [ecclesiastical livings] the quhilk ar now vacand," 26), results from the great loss of life at Flodden. Regret at "wer and wandrecht" is less the perennial expression, "things are getting worse," and more a note of the civil strife that has occurred, Albany is told, "Sen thy departing" (34).

There is tension, and a sense of immediacy, as the letter switches back and forth between the lords' point of view—"We 3arne [yearn]" (19); "we ar all solitair" (37)—and direct address to Albany—"thow hes refusit / Till cum" (19–20); "Addres the sone, fulfill thy will and band" (31). A pattern of oppositions, again familiar from complaint, emerges: Scot is against

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<sup>18</sup> "Would God that the duke had stayed in France and de la Bauté had never come to Scotland!": *The Complaynt of Scotland* (c. 1550), ed. A. M. Stewart, STS, 4<sup>th</sup> Ser. 11 (Edinburgh: The Scottish Text Society, 1979), 51.

<sup>19</sup> *Letters & Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, III, pt. i, ed. J. S. Brewer (London, HMSO, 1867), no. 396 (26 July 1519).

<sup>20</sup> *The Letters of James V*, collected and calendared by Robert Kerr Hannay; ed. Denis Hay (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1954) [*James V Letters*], 32–34, "Instructions to de Bordaulex," 3 Nov. 1516, especially point 6 (p. 33).

<sup>21</sup> For earlier instances, see e.g. *ADCP*, Dunfermline, 18 September 1514, 20.

Scot, and “lauboris ay for vperis distructioun” (9–10);<sup>22</sup> enmity on one side of the border is, on the other, “plesour to our auld innamy” (11);<sup>23</sup> the governor has “prudent wit,” yet abuses it (17); “leigis leill” pay dearly (these words describing lords of council, not the nameless “pure” and “leill” of “Iesu crist”), but their loyalty is devalued (23); when the governor does not rule, “Couatyce,” cardinal sin personified, reigns instead (25).

By all of these specific small details, the fictional lord-of-council is set apart from the timeless world of the allegorical persona or unknown moralizing narrator.<sup>24</sup> He is one of an inner circle, his authority implicit. Present circumstances inform his concern for the continuing cohesion of council, for the security of the governor’s position, and for that of the nation itself in a time of crisis.<sup>25</sup> Yet he also writes on behalf of his fellows; more than one signatory is implied by the letter’s use of “we.”<sup>26</sup> Thus he is any one of those lords of council, or all of them, and as such is both identified, and protected from identification.

The poet and the fictional lord are so closely aligned that early editors believed the opening reference, “We lordis,” proved that the cleric, William Dunbar, could not have written the poem.<sup>27</sup> (In doing so they forgot that churchmen were prominent among the lords of council.)<sup>28</sup> But the date of the last known record of that poet, dated 14 May 1513, is also

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<sup>22</sup> See further, Roger Mason, “Kingship, Nobility and Anglo-Scottish Union: John Mair’s *History of Greater Britain* (1521),” *Innes Review*, 41.2 (1990): 182–222 (202–203).

<sup>23</sup> The murder in September 1517 of Albany’s deputy, Antoine d’Arcy, by members of the Home family is evidence of the state of turmoil; see Emond, *The Minority*, 84–87.

<sup>24</sup> See further Roderick Lyall, “Complaint, Satire and Invective in Middle Scots Literature,” *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408–1929*, ed. Norman Macdougall (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983), 44–64 (55–60).

<sup>25</sup> When Albany summonsed the Homes for treason in August 1515, it was noted that the family had been forewarned by “certane evill disposit persouns” who had sent word of “all sacretis done heir be my lord governour and lords of consale that thai get wit of,” *ADCP*, 22 August 1515, 55.

<sup>26</sup> See further Marcy L. North, *The Anonymous Renaissance: Cultures of Discretion in Tudor-Stuart England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 3–4.

<sup>27</sup> See *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; rpt. 1970), 231, poem 92; see also Denton Fox, “The Chronology of William Dunbar,” *Philological Quarterly* 39 (1960): 413–25 (422); *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 375; and *Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. Bawcutt, I: 31; II: 481.

<sup>28</sup> Unlike Dunbar, however, those churchmen held high rank; see *ADCP*, 6–7: “James archibishop of Glasgw, chancellor, William bischop of Abirdene, Andro bischop of Cathnes, James bischop of Dunblane, Edward bischop of Orknay.”

important.<sup>29</sup> Dunbar might, or might not have been alive to be a contender. Whoever was the poet, he does not reveal his name by pun or acrostic. His identity is surely concealed in the selective use of traditional method and matter, and by a careful balance of praise and blame.

There are many instances of the poet's skill in juxtaposing positive and negative. Albany, "chiftane mervellus" (1) is "cautelus" (3), that is, wise, like Solon, John Rolland's "Iurist cautelous."<sup>30</sup> He has "prudent wit" (17), "freindschip" (22), "liegis leill" (22), and respect: only the governor's "bidding" (29), face to face with those who wish to resist him, will quell them. Less positively, Albany has caused "perplexite" (2)—a state of troubled indecision about how to act; and, by the linking of "wylis" (3), with the complimentary adjective "cautelus," it is hinted that he might be deceitful, like Henryson's fox, "craftie and cawtelows,"<sup>31</sup> his absence condoning England's "grit plesour" (11) in Scotland's civil unrest. Continuing wilful absence, Albany is cautioned, might cost him the lords' "freindschip" (22).

The unknown poet is ever alert to the international boundaries he is crossing. Just as, at the opening of the poem, the use and implications of "chiftane mervellus" in both Scots and French were understood, so the employment of "tardation" at the end ("Thy tardatioun caussis ws to think lang," 35) is also charged. This French word with the sense, "delay," is rare in a Scottish literary context. The use in "We lordis" is *DOST*'s only citation. But the word could be understood instantly by Albany.<sup>32</sup> The result is a cleverly pragmatic message of support about to be withdrawn and a warning that is firm, if reluctantly given: Albany is under threat from within and without, unless he returns.

Who were the first readers of "We lordis?" Was this anonymous poem written for a coterie within, or beyond, the reduced Scottish court of the early minority?<sup>33</sup> A letter with several signatories implies a few first readers who are closely aligned to the author; likewise, this poem possibly circulated initially between those in a small group wishing to send the governor an urgent if guarded message. Logically, then, the hoped-for reader-recipient was Albany? Such a suggestion seems greatly hindered by

<sup>29</sup> *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland [TA]*, IV, ed. James Balfour Paul (Edinburgh: H M. General Register House, 1902), 442.

<sup>30</sup> John Rolland, *Ane Treatise callit The Court of Venus*, ed. Walter Gregor, Scottish Text Society, 1<sup>st</sup> Ser. 3 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1884), Buik II, line 17.

<sup>31</sup> *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), *Fables*, 402.

<sup>32</sup> See Godefroy, *Tardation*.

<sup>33</sup> On the issue, see H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 158–60.



the fact of Albany's French birth; he spoke French, spent his early years at the French court, and signed himself "Jehan [Jean]," not John.<sup>34</sup>

Counteracting that is the fact of Albany's explicit association with the translation into French of historical and poetic works, some of which can be linked, by either content or language, to Scotland. Scholars have long been aware of one with great relevance to Albany as governor, the "Chronique d'Écosse."<sup>35</sup> Derived from the Latin chronicle, *Liber Pluscardenis*, it was translated into French, with a grandly illuminated genealogy of the Scottish kings. Albany was patron-commissioner and dedicatee of this manuscript.<sup>36</sup> Its translator and copyist was his scholar-servant, Bremond Domat, who had completed the work by mid-1519.<sup>37</sup>

A poem written to Albany in Scots is of even more interest. In eight-line stanzas with a refrain emphasizing Scotland's pleasure in the arrival of this "wise and good [saige et bon]" governor, the *Ballade* "for the coming of the Duke of Albany to Scotland" was composed by an unknown Scottish poet about 1515. When it was translated into French as "Ballade faicte pour la venue du duc dalbanie en Escoce,"<sup>38</sup> the words, "translatée Descocoit en francoys selon la lettre" ("in close accord with the original") were appended. Only the French translation has survived. It, too, is the scribal work if not also the translation of Domat for Albany.<sup>39</sup>

Was "We lordis" another poem in Scots sent to Albany in France? Although the two countries were in frequent contact, no journey explicitly for the purpose is known. A possible courier was Albany's secretary and agent, Master Walter ["Gaultier"] Malynne.<sup>40</sup> On Albany's behalf, Malynne interacted with the lords of council; negotiated with Henry VIII and Wolsey in England; and travelled to France at least twice after the

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, *ADCP*, 2 June, 1517, p. 93, and 13 June 1517, 94.

<sup>35</sup> Bibliothèque de Sainte-Geneviève MS 936, formerly O. f. in-fol. 2; Francisque-Michel, *Les Écossaises en France, Les Français en Écosse*, 2 vols (London: Trübner and Co., 1862), I: 341–43.

<sup>36</sup> Bryony Coombs, "The Artistic Patronage of John Stuart, Duke of Albany 1518–19: The 'Discovery' of the Artist and Author Bremond Dormat," *PSAS*, 144 (2014): 277–309 (296–99).

<sup>37</sup> Coombs, "The Artistic Patronage," 282.

<sup>38</sup> Formerly in the library of Anne of Brittany (1477–1514), it is now Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 20055, fols 73<sup>v</sup>–74<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> See also *The Thrissil, the Rois and the Flour-de-lys*, ed. Helena M. Shire (Cambridge: The Ninth of May, 1962), 10–11, 26–27.

<sup>40</sup> *TA V*, ed. James Balfour Paul (Edinburgh: H. M. General Register House, 1903), p. 74; Mark Dilworth, "Walter Malin diplomatic agent and monastic reformer," *Innes Review*, 51.2 (2000): 147–65.

governor had left Scotland.<sup>41</sup> Another, perhaps more compelling possibility is the journey of John, second Lord Fleming, a lord of council trusted by Albany.<sup>42</sup> In April-May 1520 the Scottish lords instructed Fleming to deliver an ultimatum to Albany that he must return by midsummer or “lose his right in the crown.”<sup>43</sup>

How did George Bannatyne acquire the poem for inclusion in his miscellany forty-five years later? The prominence that Bannatyne gave to the work of his relative, the poet John Bellenden, is evidence of the great value he placed on his family connections, and encourages speculation.<sup>44</sup> The Douglas kinship of Bellenden’s mother, Marion Douglas, nurse to James V, and affiliation of his father Patrick Bellenden, steward to Margaret Tudor, must have both assisted and strained relationships during the several factional shifts of the minority years.<sup>45</sup> The same difficulty continued, it appears, in the life of their son. At just the time when the lords of council were in deliberation, August 1515, Bellenden became royal household clerk of expenses, although his post was cut short in August 1522 when Albany returned.<sup>46</sup> Whether or not Bellenden did obtain a copy of “We lordis,” it was possible for him to do so, and for Bannatyne to acquire it through that means.

Poetic classifications such as those mentioned at the beginning of this essay greatly assist our efforts to understand and contextualize early writing. By connections of content, theme, or style, they can show where a poem might best be placed and assessed. Classifications can also reveal more clearly what is different. “We lordis,” for its moralizing matter,

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<sup>41</sup> *ADCP*, 5 December 1516, 72–73; 24 September 1517, 102–03; *TA V*: 68, 95, 114, 160; *TA V*: 149–50 (late September 1517); 160 (July 1518).

<sup>42</sup> See *ADCP*, 23 October 1515, 60; 2 June 1517, 93.

<sup>43</sup> *James V Letters*, 76–77. Several letters from Francis I to the Scottish Estates, of late 1520 (80, 81–82), refer to Fleming’s communications, and reveal how much depended on international political will. Albany had returned by December 1521.

<sup>44</sup> For the Bellenden poems copied by Bannatyne: *The Benner of Peetie*, Bannatyne MS, Draft, fols 1<sup>r</sup>–3<sup>v</sup> (B, II: 3–5); *The proheme of the croniculis*, fols 4<sup>r</sup>–8<sup>v</sup> (B, II: 9–20); *The second prologue or proheme of the History of the Cronicles of Scotland*, fols 366<sup>v</sup>–367<sup>v</sup>, 370<sup>r</sup> (B, IV: 313–16). See also Theo van Heijnsbergen, “The Interaction between Literature and History in Queen Mary’s Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Manuscript and its Prosopographical Context,” in *The Renaissance in Scotland: Studies ... Offered to John Durkan*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, Michael Lynch, and Ian B. Cowan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 183–225 (191–98).

<sup>45</sup> Nicola Royan, “Bellenden [Bannatyne], John (c. 1495–1548),” *ODNB*, 2004, rev. 2006: <https://doi-org.virtual.anu.edu.au/10.1093/ref:odnb/2045>.

<sup>46</sup> See Royan, “Bellenden,” *ODNB*. In *The proheme of the croniculis* (see note 44), Bellenden tells how he was “clerk of [the] comptis” (31), “Quhill [until] hie invy me frome ... service kest / Be thame that had the court in gouerning” (34–35).

stanza form, and its many elements of complaint and petition, fits well into Bannatyne's group of "ballatis of wisdome and moralite." For its skilled revelation of date, addressee, and specifics on Scotland's position in the later minority, however, and its subtle suppression of the identity of its spokesman, it is more than just "another moral ballat." The greater specificity that has been linked with the later works of David Lyndsay, Robert Sempill, and the satirical broadsides of the 1560s and '70s has its origins in earlier writing such as the anonymous "We lordis" of 1519. Though not openly satiric, it is politically aware, especially of the connections between local and international matters. It is urgently, but not stridently, concerned with a particular "here and now," and adroit in its use of literary conventions to convey to a known person a pointed, time-driven message.

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