Drunkenness and Ambition in Early Seventeenth-Century Scottish Literature

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Among the voluminous papers of William Drummond of Hawthornden, not, however with the majority of them in the National Library of Scotland, but in a manuscript identified about thirty years ago and presently in Dundee University Library,¹ is a small and succinct record kept by the author of significant events and moments in his life; it is entitled “MEMORIALLS.” One aspect of this record puzzled Drummond’s bibliographer and editor, R. H. MacDonald. This was Drummond’s idiosyncratic use of the term “fatall.” Drummond first employs this in the “Memorialls” to describe something that happened when he was twenty-five: “Tuesday the 21 of August [sic] 1610 about Noone by the Death of my father began to be fatall to mee the 25 of my age” (Poems, p. 193). Subsequent entries adduce other episodes of fatality with various incidental detail: “The 5 of August 1604 the 19 of my age² was fatall to mee by the Bonfires: (Poems, p. 193). The 28 of Februarye 1631 was fatall to mee by

¹See Robert H. MacDonald, The Library of Drummond of Hawthornden (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 9, 11-12; and William Drummond of Hawthornden: Poems and Prose, ed. Robert H. MacDonald, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 6 (Edinburgh and London, 1976), pp. 193-5, 200. The MS was previously in the Brechin Diocesan Library; its shelf-mark is now Brechin MS 2/2/4. The MS is neither foliated nor paginated. I am very grateful to John Bagnall of Dundee University Library for providing me with digital scans of the first section of the MS, in which the “Memorialls” occurs. Henceforth Library, Poems, and ASLS.

²Obviously, the record in the “Memorialls” is not strictly chronological.
miscarrying of a horse over coalepits" (*Poems*, p. 194). MacDonald concludes that fatal has for Drummond the general sense of "disastrous," a definition that receives some slim support from one entry in the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*.

This being so, however, MacDonald necessarily finds it "mysterious" that Drummond should write that "The 9 of Januarye 1631 was fatall, but happy."  

Some light can be shed on this oxymoronic situation by consulting the "Booke of Memorandums," produced for the period 1657-9 by Drummond’s oldest legitimate son William, which survives now in the National Library of Scotland, and was actually edited as long ago as 1941 by Henry Meikle for the Scottish History Society. R. H. MacDonald apparently did not consult it. Like memorandum books, “fatality” ran in the Drummond family. William junior uses it a lot. It is notable that a fair number of these episodes of “fatality” are connected to reading, though it is certainly not just that activity which precipitates this response in William junior:

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[1657, 4 January, Sunday] I stayed at hom from church and red the Cyprian Grove,7
    fatall....
[4 February] Wedensday: solitarie, but yet fatall: lay in my bed all day....
[28 February] Setterday: solitarie; red Ovid’s Ars Amandi; there after twise
    fatall....
[8 May] Fryday: began first to ride that book which is so much estim’d of,
    Arcadia, out of a curiositie, becawse eueryon was perswaded that it cowld not
    be but I had red it before twentye times; fatall twice....
[2 June] Tusday; thrise fatall; solitarie; Sir William Murray visit me in the
    after noon.
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3 *Library*, p. 11; *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, fatall, adj. 1b (henceforth *DOST*). Cf. *Oxford English Dictionary*, fatal, a, for a range of senses more obviously involving the “fateful” or doomed (from Latin, *fatalis*).

4 *Poems*, p. 194; *Library*, p. 11.


6 This is one of his father’s prose works, an extended and finally visionary set of reflections on death; it was published, as the Cypresse Grove, appended to his Flowres of Sion, in 1623 and 1630. See *The Poetical Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed. L. E. Kastner, Scottish Text Society, Second Series, 3-4 (Edinburgh and London, 1913). I, lxxii-lxxviii; II, 67-104.
In the light of these entries, and the fact that William junior elsewhere in his memorial book describes himself as drinking copiously, Meikle concludes that what fatal actually means to William junior is "mortally drunk" (Meikle, p. 45). This seems plausible, though the excessive practice of other forms of indulgence may also be implied by the term. It may be possible to transfer this usage back to his father too, for though William senior does also deploy it to refer to times of more straightforwardly dangerous injury (though if it would be understandable for his horse to have "miscarried" because Drummond was drunk), there are several occasions including the, to MacDonald, mysterious, "fattall but happy," where it would make perfect sense.

This personal idiom of drunkenness among a family with literary interests in post-1603 Scotland contrasts with the situation in the decades before the movement of the king and court to London where a drink problem was one of the running jokes amongst the group of poets loosely associated around James VI, particularly in the 1580s. In a sonnet dating from this decade, "O michte sunne of semele the faire" James works through the devastating powers of Bacchus before wryly juxtaposing his effects on two different Alexanders:

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...the greit Alexander craued
thy mercy oft, our maister poet nou
is uarrd by thee, we smaller then sall leue it
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Alexander the Great, himself a famous wine-bibber, is contrasted with Alexander Montgomerie, here as elsewhere identified affectionately by James as his “maister poet.” But for the purposes of the humor the public world of “king Alexander,” as he had been featured in two Scottish works of the fifteenth century, both of which were in circulation in the late sixteenth, is subordinated to the coterie world of master Alexander. Of course, this is in part a public world too, as is made clear in the other witnesses to the topos of the drunk Montgomerie—in several of Montgomerie’s own sonnets and those of his associates, and in Patrick Hume of Polwarth’s part of their *Flying*. Polwarth, for instance, memorably comments on Montgomerie’s “nois weill lit in bacchus blude about.” Indeed, without wishing to invoke the discredited “Castalian band,” I think that references combining Montgomerie and Bacchus are a kind of in-joke in this group of poems, the full splendid details of which now elude us. But the context here is of the essentially shared private joke about a particular individual within a small circle of people who were reading these materials in manuscript. None of the poems which I’ve men-

10The Poems of King James VI of Scotland, ed. James Craigie, Scottish Text Society, Third Series, 22, 26 (Edinburgh and London, 1955-8), II, 115; the quotation is from the Oxford Bodley 165 MS text, with punctuation added. Henceforth James VI.


12James VI, II, 120-27, “Ane Admonition to the Maister Poete.”


tioned in relation to Montgomery's drink problem was printed, as far as we can tell, until the seventeenth century.

A couple of decades later, however, King James is based in London, and the poets around him and their worldviews have changed. This is well evinced in the writings of another Scottish Alexander, William Alexander. The "argument" to his The Tragedie of Julius Caesar, the fourth of his Monarchicke Tragedies, published in 1607, describes Caesar as one "so drunken with a delight of soueraigntie," and it is this form of intoxication, with the desire to be made king, that is seen to lead to Caesar's inevitable if regrettable assassination. Drunkenness is metaphorical and public here. It is recurrent in The Monarchicke Tragedies as a way of conjuring forth transient or overweening desire. In the opening of Croesus the philosopher Solon berates those "Whose mindes are drunk with momentary Ioyes"; and its concluding Chorus uses the image of vines bursting with grapes being destroyed in a thunderstorm, "All Bacchus hopes fall downe and perish" similarly to inveigh against investing in transient pleasures. In the social destruction envisaged at the end of The Alexandrean Tragedy Philastras speaks of the sons of Cassander, "when being drunk with bloud, to death shall bleede." "Drunk with bloud" is an image Alexander favors in fact; he uses it also in Croesus in describing events during the final days of the distressed, crazed and fallen monarch. To be

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16 1607 edition, sig. P3r. The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander Earl of Stirling, ed. L. E. Kastner and H. B. Charlton, Scottish Text Society, Second Series, 11, 24 (Edinburgh and London, 1921-9), I, 344. Henceforth Kastner and Charlton. I have separately consulted copies in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, of the 1603 Edinburgh (Waldegrave) edition of The Tragedie of Darius, the 1604 London editions of Darius and The Tragedie of Croesus, which in this copy (Malone 239) are bound with the 1607 editions of The Alexandrean Tragedie and The Tragedie of Julius Caesar, the 1616 edition of The Monarchicke Tragedies and the 1637 edition of Recreations with the Muses. In what follows, quotation is where possible from the earliest edition available to me, but with a view to the convenience of readers and in order to indicate line numbers, quotation has also been referenced from Kastner and Charlton. (In their edition the plays are numbered by lines, so these are cited here rather than Act and scene.) Kastner and Charlton take the 1637 edition as their copy-text, but provide a parallel text edition of the 1603 Darius, and cite substantive variants from the earlier editions.

17 This reading is introduced in the 1616 edition, sig. B1r. Kastner and Charlton, I, 14 (I. 26).


20 1604 edition, sig. L4r ("drunke with blood"); Kastner and Charlton, I, 100 (I. 2640).
mortal drunk in *The Monarchicke Tragedies* is to bring about mass civil destruction, a deeply socialized metaphor.

As with Alexander Montgomerie, the potential for Alexandrian comparisons was not missed by Sir William Alexander's contemporaries. The two commendatory sonnets to *Darius* (Edinburgh, 1603) by the Scoto-Irish poet Walter Quin and by the Scot John Murray make plays on the "Alexander" topos. The concluding couplet of Murray's states, "So Darius ghost *seemes glad for to be sol Triumphht on twise by Alexanders two" (the *Darius* is mostly about Alexander the Great's noble conquest of Darius). The military triumphs of Alexander the Great vie for historical significance with the literary triumphs, in print, of course—unlike many of Montgomerie's writings—of William Alexander. Two different forms of public Alexandrian "greatness" are set together. This topos reaches its pithy peak in one of the *Epigrammata* published by Arthur Johnston in 1632 and reprinted in his *Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum* of 1637, with the title *Comes Sterlini:*

Confer Alexandros; Macedo victricibus armis
Magnus erat, Scotus carmine; major uter?22

("Compare Alexanders; The Macedonian was great by conquests in arms, the Scot in song; which is the greater?"

We should remark on the emphasis on William Alexander's Scottishness here. When Alexander is attended to in histories of Scottish literature it is rarely without some charge of going native after his move to England and advancement in the household and government of James I. His subsequent political career as Master of Requests and Secretary of State for Scotland (and from 1633 as Earl of Stirling) included episodes such as his dubious association with the administration of copper coinage in Scotland (in which he was seen to attempt to exploit a personal monopoly), his eventually ruinous association with the projected colonization of Nova Scotia, and his involvement in the recasting of the Scots psalter, which rendered him far from popular in his native land.23

21 Sig. A4; cf. Kastner and Charlton, I, ccv (Murray), ccvi (Quin). Both of these sonnets were incorporated in the 1604, 1607, and 1616 editions; Murray's sonnet survives into the 1637 edition, but not Quin's.


23 For example (in an otherwise valuable essay), T. Howard-Hill, "His hopes for wealth from royal patents, his colonial speculations, and indeed, his dynastic ambitions, came to nothing," in "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
Contemporary epitaphs about him of a far less flattering nature than the one in the *Delitiae* also survive. A vernacular one in circulation shortly after his death in 1640 sums him up thus:

Hier layes a fermer and a millar  
A poet and a psalme book spillar  
A purchessour by hooke and crooke,  
A forger of the service booke,  
A coppersmithe, quho did much evil,  
A friend to bishopes and the devill  
A waine ambitious flattering thing,  
Late secretary for a kinge;  
Soun tragedies in verse he pen'd,  
At last he made a tragicke end.24

The contempt here registers itself not only in relation to Alexander but in the way in which this discernibly Scots expressed and spelt poem makes no identification of James I as “our king,” but rather as “a kinge” extending the sense of exclusion from Alexander to his former master.

The linguistic evidence of Alexander increasing writing out Scotticisms in successive editions of his verse tragedy *Darius* is frequently cited in support of Alexander’s own progressive alienation from Scotland and Scottish concerns.25 I would argue, by contrast, that a continuing ideologically Scottish element in Alexander’s writing makes it a cultural marker of how Scots in England saw...

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25The revisions are discussed in Kastner and Charlton, I, cxciv-cc, and II, xi-xii. For an extension of these views, see Bill Findlay, “Beginnings to 1700,” in *A History of Scottish Theatre*, ed. Bill Findlay (Edinburgh, 1998): “This preference for English over Scots, and his association of English with ‘elegance and perfection,’ led to the progressive eradication of Scots from Alexander’s work in a way which mirrors his ambitious eye for the main chance once in London and his political hostility towards Scotland,” p. 52. Henceforth Findlay.
themselves in the first generation following the Union of the Crowns. Although he espoused a public, English-expressed rhetoric, Scottish concerns find their way into what is now thought of as some of Alexander’s most English writing, *The Monarchicke Tragedies*. In contrast to the view that “Alexander is part of the increasingly English focus of Scottish literature” in this period, I will be arguing that his plays retain a markedly Scottish focus.

*The Monarchicke Tragedies* consist of four Senecan verse dramas, very much written to be read rather than performed, devoted successively (in the order in which they first all appeared together in print in 1607), to Croesus, Darius, Alexander, and Julius Caesar. Alexander published *The Tragedie of Darius* first in 1603 in Edinburgh with Robert Waldegrave and it was written before he joined the court in London; the title *Monarchick* (sic) *Tragedies* was first used in 1604 when he published in London a revised version (linguistic and metrical) of *Darius*, along with *The Tragedie of Croesus*; sometimes bound in these works were his sonnet sequence *Aurora* and his advisory poem to Prince Henry, *A Paraenesis*. The title was employed again in 1607 when he republished *Darius, Croesus*, together now with *The Alexandrean Tragedy* and *The Tragedie of Julius Caesar*; some copies of this edition again had *Aurora* and *A Paraenesis* bound with them. Alexander’s growing status at court is indicated on the title-pages of these plays, where he is now described as “Gentleman of the Princes privie Chamber.” They were all published again with revisions (primarily metrical but also linguistic) in another edition of 1616, and were once more revised in the same directions and included with other works in his *Recreations with the Muses* of 1637. As I’ve indicated, it is commonly argued, and is most extensively demonstrated by Alexander’s Scottish Text Society editors Kastner and Charlton, that Alexander anglicized his project ever more every time he went back to it. The ideological levels behind this linguistic agenda have, however, received little interrogation.

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27 Kastner and Charlton, II, xxxiv-xxxvi.

28 Kastner and Charlton, II, xxv-xxvii.

29 Kastner and Charlton, I, cxciv-cxcvii; II, xxix-xxxiii.

30 Kastner and Charlton, I, cxcvii; II, xxxiv-xxxviii.

31 Kastner and Charlton, I, cxcvi-cxcix; II, xlv-xlvi.

32 Kastner and Charlton, I, cc; II, xlvii-xlix.
The content of these works has also received relatively little discussion. Sarah Carpenter observes that "they are all loosely related to the topic of monarchy," which a brief inspection of their titles might convey, but she does also indicate they present "extended reflective monologues on the issues of mortality and decay, betrayal and trust" (Carpenter, p. 209). That depoliticizes them a bit; their more recurrent emphasis is on the destructive powers of ambition and the failures of ambitious monarchical designs. Bill Findlay slightly more accurately characterizes "the futility of world ambition" (Findlay, p. 54) as the dominating theme of the tragedies, and notes the origins of their monarchical concerns in the Senecan dramas flourishing on the continent and in England and Scotland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But despite also noting the monarchical focus of these plays, their dedication to James I, and their possible application to prince Henry, Findlay does nothing with the thematic emphases, ideological purchases, or possible reception in royal circles of these works, preferring to concentrate on reiterating the received paradigm in which Alexander's eventual business failures and bankruptcy are seen to provide a neat parallel to the perceived failings (now) of his Senecan dramas. Alexander gets morally politicized here into a little fable of what can happen if you deny your national heritage. T. Howard-Hill argues for a reappraisal of the continental and English cultural valence of Senecan tragedy as a backdrop to Alexander's project, and sees the motivation for his stylistic and metrical revisions to his work as primarily "artistic," (Howard-Hill, p. 485); in a different way, this denudes these works of their political and ideological currency.

However, The Monarchicke Tragedies can and should be read as fascinating late excurses into a genre which had a distinguished Scots tradition, that of the literature of advice to princes. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries advisory ideas had circulated in Scottish texts either as freestanding advisory works, such as Gilbert Hay's Buke of Governaunce of Princes but more commonly inserted within a wide variety of genres, including the drama in David Lyndsay's Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis and Buchanan's Baptistes. Lyndsay's poetic advisory pieces and Buchanan's dramas had also indeed on occasion fused advice to princes writing with fall of princes writing, a con-

33 The same is true of A Paraenesis; regrettably space does not permit discussion of this fascinating work.

junction which reaches its fullest realization in Alexander's *Monarchicke Tragedies*.

Some advice to princes features have remarkable sticking power in Scottish literature from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, the most obvious being their persistently royalist and often Stewart-oriented character, but there are equally currents of debate and controversy working through advisory discourse over this period, which reach critical and explosive mass, at certain junctures, and construct themselves in precise opposition to a Stewart-endorsed position. Two key and related areas here inherited, of course, from continental contexts, are the merits of hereditary or elective monarchy, and the issue of in what circumstances a king could ever be deposed. Both are effectively launched in extended analysis in Scotland in John Ireland's *Meroure of Wyssdome* of c. 1490, and receive serious political inflection as the sixteenth century goes on, in the writings of John Mair but most decisively in Buchanan's *De iure Regni apud Scotos* (1579) and *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (1582). In these works Buchanan suggests that the old system of elective monarchy in Scotland was removed by a tyrant king and argues that there are certainly circumstances in which a monarch might be rightly deposed by his—or her (when he wrote Buchanan very much had Mary Queen of Scots in mind)—people.35

James himself famously responded to these attacks in *The Trew Lawe of Free Monarchies* (1598) and the *Basilikon Doron* (1601). James accepts that kings are accountable—but to whom is the crucial issue. The man who had had George Buchanan as his tutor puts it thus: "by remitting them to God (who is their only ordinary judge) I remit them to the sorest and sharpest Schoolemaister that can be devised for them."36 And *The Trew Lawe* demonstrates that there were kings in Scotland before any estates or parliaments were thought of, "And so it follows of necessitie, that the Kinges were the authors and makers of the lawes, and not the lawes of the Kings" (Craigie, p. 70.) This was not the end of the argument, but it was a position that James sought to sustain in theory and in practice in Scotland and, following the Union of the Crowns, sought to continue in England.

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It was against this ideological backdrop that William Alexander composed a series of four plays that persistently interrogate situations of monarchical instability, fallibility, and destruction. All four plays deal with the failure or demise of their eponymous protagonists. In *Croesus* that King's willful pursuit of his own convictions leads to the death of his beloved son; and the distressed monarch's attempts to assuage the pain by conquest of Persia—"Ile conquer more, or lose the thing I haue,"—leads to his defeat against the king Cyrus, capture, and expected burning at the stake. The play concludes with his reflections on his loss of state and the Chorus's comments on this and the fate of the Lydian kingdom. Interwoven into this is the theme of Croesus' refusal to accept the guidance of the Greek philosopher Solon, who urges on him the value of despising the world and appreciating transience, which Croesus determinedly shuns, encouraged in this by the alternative philosophy of Aesop, who takes a more pragmatic line on monarchy, asserting the value of flattery both for oneself and for a monarch's *amour propre*. Croesus is certainly representative of humanity's willfulness here; but the play is as much about monarchy's potential fallibility and waywardness.

Alexander's principal source for Croesus was Herodotus's *Histories,* but he also used Plutarch's life of Solon—Plutarch was indeed a recurrent source for several of his tragedies. For *Darius* he was highly reliant on John Brende's translation (first published in 1553) of Quintus Curtius' *Gesta Alexandri Magni.* Darius takes the success of the Persian monarchy, previously seen coming to dominance in *Croesus,* as its starting point, to examine its effects on king Darius, "*Fortune as it were, setting him forward to confusion.*" Darius challenges the might of the Macedonians, "*ascribing to himselfe the title of the King of Kings,*" and this brings him into a series of successively more devastating defeats by Alexander. Eventually, however, he is betrayed by the treachery of two of the Bactrians, a people allied with his, who decide to entrap him and deliver him up to Alexander. On realizing that Alexander will spurn such a base action, they attack Darius and leave him for dead. But he is, of

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38 Probably in translation; Drummond of Hawthornden, for example had an Italian version: *Library,* p. 218. King James when James VI had it in French: G. F. Warner, "*The Library of James VI,*" in *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society,* I, SHS, First Series, 15 (Edinburgh, 1893), xxxiv.


40 1603 edition, sig. A4²; Kastner and Charlton, I, 114 (l. 4).

41 1603 edition, sig. A4²; Kastner and Charlton, I, 114 (l. 16).
course, sufficiently alive to deliver a remorseful speech. They play is indeed as much about Alexander’s ambition as about Darius’s failure, and it holds these elements in quite a tense and interesting balance. While Alexander’s magnanimity is frequently contrasted with Darius’s, notably in his genteel treatment of Darius’s wife, the play also makes much of his massive ambition—a characteristic which in Darius is frequently castigated (by the Chorus) as dangerous and corrupting. Alexander’s terrific confidence is much expressed:

No, I will raigne, and I will raigne alone:
From this desseigne my fancie neuyer wanders,
For as the heau’ns can hold no Sunne but one,
The earth cannot containe two Alexanders;\(^{42}\)

And this inevitably invites comparison with the revelation that confronts Darius:

To thinke I was, and am not now a King.
No man with me in all accomplish’d ioyes,
That satisfie the soule, could once compare:
No man may matche me now in sad annoyes,
And all the miseries that breede dispaire.\(^{43}\)

And these conclusions are reinforced by the Chorus to the final act of the play, which darkly deliberates on how “Ambition Princes undermynes.”\(^{44}\) This tension in the presentation of Alexander was well established in the medieval and Renaissance Alexandrian tradition, but it achieves a peculiarly unresolved character in Darius because it is the Darius episode that the play is excerpting, and he is its ostensible subject.

As I have already suggested, works concerned with king Alexander had a particular resonance in Renaissance Scotland. The name had its own nationalistic associations. Andrew of Wyntoun’s Orygynale Chronicle (c. 1420) records and recalls the song sung after the calamitous accidental death of Alexander III in 1286, “Qwhen Alexander our kinge was dede,/ That Scotland lede in lauche and lei Away was sons of alle and bred,/ Off wyne and wax, of gamyn and gle.”\(^{45}\) And it was that death that was seen to have set off the train


\(^{45}\) The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun, Vol. V, ed. F. J. Amours, Scottish Text Society, First Series, 56 (Edinburgh and London, 1907), 145 (VII, x, II. 3621-4). This song
of events leading to the Great Cause and the wars of independence. In the fifteenth century two massive Alexander romances were composed in Scotland, both based on recensions from the complex French and Latin traditions of Alexander the Great stories. Both, as we have noted, continued to circulate in either printed or manuscript form into the sixteenth and indeed seventeenth centuries. The later of them *The Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour* (c. 1460-99), which works with both the French *Roman d'Alexandre* and Latin *Historia de Proeliiis* as sources, intensely reinscribes its extended Alexander narratives within the developing discursive topoi of the advice to princes genre. Inset into its accounts of the increasing dominion of Alexander are episodes and sections which show the educability of the monarch or offer advisory reflections on the practice of monarchy. In comparison to many other medieval Alexanders, this one is considerably recuperated by being perceived as a virtuous pagan, acting as a "wand of God" in a civilizing campaign towards the barbaric peoples he encounters on his conquests. But even this Alexander may be seen as susceptible to various kinds of criticism, albeit generally obliquely expressed, for his conquering ambition as he heads toward his inevitable death.\(^{46}\) In the early 1580s the Scots poet John Stewart of Baldyneis inserts references to both Alexander the Great and to the Scots King Alexander III within fifty lines of each other in canto 11 of his *Roland Furious* (an abridged translation of Ariosto's *Ariosto Furioso*), suggesting a felt consonance between these two examples of falls of princes.\(^{47}\)

That William Alexander should have been sufficiently attracted to Alexander the Great to make this story dominant in two of *The Monarchicke Tragedies* may have something to do with his consciousness of a pre-history of Alexandrian writing in Scotland. His biographer Thomas McGrail was keen enough to see the influence of advisory writings by Bellenden and Lindsay on Alexander's *Paraenesis* (McGrail, pp. 30-32); there has been much less attempt to consider the influence of the Scottish native tradition on Alexander's dramas of kingship. But there is some important, newly identified contextualizing evidence here that shows us that part of his Alexandrean materials could be felt to have a Scottish character.

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The Bannatyne Manuscript, arguably the most important MS repository of Older Scots verse, is made up of two essentially discrete though sometimes overlapping compilations, now known as the Draft and the Main Manuscript, both copied around 1565-8.48 However, both the Draft and the Main Manuscript have items added later to them, sometimes in what is probably Bannatyne's hand, sometimes in what clearly isn't. Our concern is with seven items in this category, which appear on page 54 of the Draft MS, in a gathering probably added to this compilation at some stage after most of the poems in it had been copied, and parts of which are written in a hand that is very like Bannatyne's, and which is most probably his (Bannatyne, p. xvi). These items, commonly referred to by editors as "moral tags," six of which are couplets, and one of which has four lines, all have headings, ranging from "Of conquerouris" for the first to "of men" for the last, and after the last is the attribution "finis quod william alexander of menstry." The editors of the Bannatyne facsimile, Fox and Ringler, take it that the colophon is probably intended to refer to all seven items, which do appear to be presented together, but they express doubt about the attribution: "These commonplaces are unlike [Alexander's] other prolix works, but they have been accepted by his editors" (Bannatyne, p. xx). And indeed the STS editors simply include them as an Alexander item without, however, any further commentary on how they might or might not relate to Alexander's other works, only noting that they "appear only in Scots, without anglicisation by later revision."49 Kastner and Charlton thus appear to perceive them as separate writings in Scots by Alexander which have no connection with other works by him. But they do. They actually are excerpted quotations from Darius; the six couplet items being from speeches by the Chorus at the end of acts I, II, and III, and the quatrain from Darius's final speech at the end of Act IV.50

The version of Alexander's Darius composed in Scotland and printed in Edinburgh of 1603 was the most overtly Scottish, subsequent editions exhibiting successively more Anglicization. It is unequivocally the edition of 1603 which these quotations most closely resemble, and they are very close to it in vocabulary. In orthography and morphology, however, they are much more Scots that the 1603 edition. Thus the final 1637 version of the penultimate Bannatyne "Alexander" couplet reads in that edition:

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49 Kastner and Charlton, II, xii, 546, 644.

50 Kastner and Charlton, I, 145 (ll. 535-6); 129 (ll. 231-2); 197 (ll. 1579-82); 128 (ll. 217-18); 173 (ll. 1097-8); 175 (ll. 1137-8); 174 (ll. 1117-18); all in the 1603 edition.
Worlds glory is but like a flowre,
Which both is bloom'd, and blasted in an houre.

The 1603 version had read:

We may compare th'earths glory to a flowre,
That flourisheth & faideth in an houre.

The Bannatyne text reads:

We may compair the erthis glory to a floure,
That flourishe and faideth in an hour.\footnote{Kastner and Charlton, I, 175; II, 546; 1603 edition sig. F2'; 1637 edition, p. 87.}

The Bannatyne version is obviously much closer in diction to the 1603 account, which by 1637 has replaced “earth” with “world” and the more medieval-sounding alliterative “flourisheth and faideth” with something more dramatic, and which obviously is anglicized in its spelling. But the spelling of Bannatyne’s version is considerably more Scottish (cf. its forms of compair, erthis, and flourische) to perhaps make one wonder whether it was this printed text or a manuscript text that Bannatyne was working from—remembering that Alexander wrote Darius in Scotland.

One other example focuses this further. It is the longest, the four-line extract from Darius’s closing speech:

\textit{Bannatyne}:

\begin{verbatim}
 a comparison betuix heich and law estaitis
 The bramble growis althocht it be obscure
 Quhillis michty cederis feilis the [michty] busteous windis
 And myld plebeian spreitis may leif secure,
 Quhylis michty tempestis toss Imperiall myndis
\end{verbatim}

\textit{1603}

The Bramble growes, although it be obscure;
While mightie Cedars feele the blustering windes:
And milde Plebeian spirites may liue secure,
While mightie tempests tosse imperiall mindes.

\textit{1637}

The Bramble grows, although it be obscure
Whil’st loftie Cedars feel the blust’ring windes,
And milde Plebian souls may live secure,
While mighty tempests tosse Imperiall mindes.\(^52\)

Again it is clear that the 1637 version is revising out Scotticisms or going for grander-sounding effects. It prefers "loftie" cedars to mighty ones and replaces mild Plebeian spirits with mild Plebian souls. But comparison of the 1603 and Bannatyne versions reveals other things. Again Bannatyne's orthography and morphology are markedly more Scottish, as in, for example, his spelling of "spreitis," but in addition to this there is an interesting variation in the second line. Instead of "busteous" winds Bannatyne originally wrote "michty," and had to correct this, inserting "busteous" above it. This was probably eyeskip or a form of dittography—he had just written "michty" earlier in the line and so repeated it, but apparently noticed immediately enough to make the correction. But why did he write "busteous"? The 1603 printed version has "blustering," which the 1637 text indeed retains. "Busteous," a Scots spelling of ME "boistous," was a word with which Bannatyne would have been very familiar. His texts of poems by Henryson and Dunbar both contain it,\(^53\) and it is used by other sixteenth-century Scottish poets such as Douglas and Stewart of Baldynneis,\(^54\) more commonly in fact than "blustering," which is found in Scots but much less often than "busteous."\(^55\) Thus Bannatyne replaced Alexander's (to him) less familiar "blustering" with a word close to it in meaning and in sound, and with which he was more familiar.

There are two principal ways of interpreting the evidence of Bannatyne's variations from the earliest printed version of Alexander's *Darius*: either that Bannatyne was using an earlier, more Scottishly phrased and probably MS version of Alexander's play from which he selected these excerpts, or that he selected them from the 1603 edition and occasionally edited their phrasing, as we know from a good many other instances in the Bannatyne MSS was often his wont.\(^56\)

\(^52\)Kastner and Charlton, I, 197; II, 546 (with addition to indicate Bannatyne's emendation). 1603 edition, sig. H1; 1637 edition, p. 96.


\(^54\)DO\(ST\), bustuous, a.

\(^55\)DO\(ST\), bluster, v; blusterand, ppl. a.

I favor the latter hypothesis, but these Alexander extracts also tell us more valuable things about Bannatyne and about the reception of Alexander. Firstly, if they are in Bannatyne's hand and are accepted as based on the 1603 edition, they are datable to between 1603 when that edition came out in Edinburgh and 1607 when Bannatyne died. This would suggest that, though he compiled his main MS when he was still a young man (in his early twenties), he went on reading and responding to literary texts until close to his death at the start of the seventeenth century. We tend very much to think of the Bannatyne MS as a repository of Scottish gentry taste during the culturally complex years of the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots and the Scottish Reformation; we may need to think on about it as registering continuities of taste which spread beyond that generation into the next century. The way in which Bannatyne selects and presents his extracts in the early seventeenth century is still very like what he was doing with the extracts he selected for his main MS from William Baldwin's *Treatise of Morall Philosophye*, which was published in London in 1567.\(^{57}\)

Bannatyne seems to be reading *Darius* in a similar way, looking for moral *sententiae* and indeed devising appropriate headings for them. Alternatively, of course, he is copying from someone else's ready-made version of this, but given what we know of his own earlier practice, it seems as likely that the excerpting is his own. What I would also like to suggest, however, is that Bannatyne sees Alexander at this juncture essentially as a Scottish author. Whereas he makes excerpts from Baldwin without attribution, he assigns these moral statements firmly and accurately to Alexander. And we should note that he refers to him, also accurately, as "William Alexander of Menstrie."\(^{58}\) This is another reason to think that he is using the 1603 print, as the title-page of that edition describes *Darius* as "By Wiliam Alexander of Menstrie." We tend always to refer to Alexander as Sir William, but he was not in fact knighted until c. 1609. Bannatyne is responding to him thus as a writer who has published a work in Scots and in Scotland just after the Union of the Crowns and has not yet attained any of his later dubious notoriety.

The passages that Bannatyne extracts from *Darius* chime in fact with many of the features that characterize literature dealing with kingship in Scotland in the middle ages and Renaissance. They bespeak a pragmatism in rela-

\(^{57}\)Bannatyne p. xi; Sally Mapstone, "Introduction: Older Scots and the Sixteenth Century" in *Older Scots Literature*, pp. 175-88 (177).

\(^{58}\)Kastner and Charlton, II, 546.
tion to monarchy that accepts and values its necessity but does not over-elevate its "imperiall" state. Bannatyne’s first two extracts show this well:

of conquerouris
thay quho to conquer all the erth presume
a littill airth schall thame at last consume

of kingis.
Mo Kingis in chalmeris fall by flatterreris charmis
Than in the feild by the aduersareis armis

The last one runs:

off man
Quhat are we bot a puff of braith
Quho live assur’d of nothing bot of deth

Yet while these verses emphasize the worldly transience of both monarchs and men they also suggest that kings are more vulnerable to dramatic dislodging than "mild plebians" might be. Bannatyne would have had ample occasion to witness this in his own lifetime, in the reigns of Mary, and the regencies of Moray and Morton.

The Alexandrean Tragedy continues Alexander’s Alexander theme, but the tragedy is now Alexander’s, and the play indeed opens after he has died. The sources again include Quintin Curtius and Plutarch. The drunkenness topos is well in evidence here in “The Argument” that Alexander (the author) supplies to the play:

When Alexander the Great, after all his Conquests (shining with the glory of innumerable victories) was returned backe to Babylon, where the Ambassadours of the whole worlde did attend his comming, as one that was destined to domineere over all: there being admired by the Grecians, adored by the Barbarians, and as it were drunken with the delights of an extraordinary prosperitie, hee suffered himself to be transported with an inundation of pleasure; till sitting at one of his feasts by the

59 This despite the attempts of several Scottish monarchs to assert such a thing. See Roger A. Mason, “This Realms of Scotland is an Empire? Imperial Ideas and Iconography in Late Medieval Scotland,” in Church, Chronicle and Learning in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 109-22.

60 Kastner and Charlton, II, 546.

61 McGrail, p. 36; Kastner and Charlton, I, 466-74.
Indeed the play makes use of a topos well established from antiquity onwards that Alexander was addicted to wine. The Ghost of Alexander, who opens the play, alludes to this directly, "Whilst I triumph'd, (to wrath and wine as slave)," which is a virtually straight lift from a derivative of the *Historia de Proeliiis*, quite possibly one of the sources for this play, which states "Fuit itaque Alexander victor omnium, sed ira et vino victus" (Carey, p. 282). The results of Alexander's overweening ambition are the play's concern as it develops what lay in tension in the *Darius* into fully realized catastrophe in *The Alexandrean Tragedy*.

Following Alexander's death a free-for-all develops amongst his commanders and progeny over who should succeed him as ruler, and the play follows through a series of frenzied debates about claims to kingship and devastating accounts of the effects of the acrimony between his erstwhile supporters. In the scene immediately following that featuring Alexander's Ghost, his noble followers enter into a full-scale debate on how the next monarch to succeed him should be appointed, the situation being one of a minority. Indeed, the biblical injunction, much quoted in Scottish advice to princes literature is even cited here as "Wo to that soyle whose soueraigne is a child," and the followers contemplate forms of kingship which move between election and heredity, those key debating points of the tradition (*Scotland's Stories*, p. 325). The play also finds time to include a scene in which Aristotle, Alexander's former councilor, and a favored figure in the advisory tradition, reflects pretty negatively on the staying power of sovereignty.

Unlike with Croesus and Darius, the realization of the futility of his ambition—a word endlessly stressed in this play—confronts the remorseful Alexander after his death rather than just before it. Ideologically crucially, however, what he sees with regret is that he could have made a success of his kingship had he been content with "a quiet state," in which he could have "left my scepter to my sonne and dyed": "Then farre sequestred from Bellonaes rage,/ I had the true delites of nature tryed,/ And ag'd with honor, honor'd in

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63 1607 edition, sig. B3; Kastner and Charlton, I, 241 (l. 183).

my age.” It would be a mistake to think that any of Alexander’s dramas are essentially anti-kinship or indeed essentially negative about it. What they are is powerfully, even neurotically, negative about excesses of monarchic ambition.

This emphasis upon ambition might bring another play, contemporary with Alexander’s, to mind. That play is one much concerned with, as its chief protagonist terms it, “Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself,/ And falls on the other.” There are some striking and not previously noted correspondences between *The Alexandrean Tragedy* and *Macbeth*. The question of which way the debt might go is not straightforward. *Macbeth* is often argued, on mostly circumstantial evidence, to have a likely original dating of 1606, but the earliest surviving text is now the First Folio edition of 1623. If Alexander had seen *Macbeth* in 1606, it could have influenced what he did with and in *The Alexandrean Tragedy* which was printed in 1607. If *Macbeth* is later than *The Alexandrean Tragedy*, it could, like John Webster’s *White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, show the influence of *The Alexandrean Tragedy*.

The parallels between *The Alexandrean Tragedy* and *Macbeth* arguably start at the level of verbal recollection. Alexander’s play is not only awash with references to ambition, it is awash with references to blood, more so than any of his other tragedies, even though they certainly feature it—and blood, of course, is a central and complex image and metaphor in *Macbeth*—

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67 See A. R. Braunmuller (ed.), *Macbeth* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 9, “Nothing stronger than hypothesis and circumstantial evidence join *Macbeth* with either James’s accession or Christian’s visit.” This was the visit to London by Christian IV, King of Denmark and Norway, James’s brother-in-law, from 17 July to 11 August 1606.
68 Brooke, pp. 49-66.
70 E. g. Kastner and Charlton, I, 241 (l. 194), 242 (l. 210), 247 (l. 404), 271 (l. 1157), 297 (l. 1988) 302 (l. 2190), 310 (l. 2349)
"It will have blood they say; blood will have blood." And there are moments of greater verbal closeness, especially towards the conclusion of The Alexandrean Tragedy. In its last scene a messenger describes how the evil Cassander, finally the most corrupted of Alexander's contending douzepeers, "Hath to the Scepter swim'd through seas of blood." The combination of aquatic and blood imagery here must bring to mind the culminating statement by Macbeth in a scene oozing with blood references (III. iv), "I am in blood/ Stepped in so far that should I wade no more,/ Returning were as tedious as go o'er." And the concluding Chorus to The Alexandrean Tragedy inveighs against "vaine man who toyl' st to double toyles." This, however, is the reading of the 1616 edition; the 1607 version had "vaine man, that toyles t'abound in toiles." "Double, double toil and trouble" may well be being echoed here, not least because "double toyle" did not, as far as I can tell, have a proverbial character in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These usages by Shakespeare and by Alexander are closer to each other than to any other works. The fact that Alexander revised his text in 1616 to include what looks like a recollection of a Shakespearean locution would suggest that the original debt was from Shakespeare to Alexander, and that Alexander built on it in his later verbal revisions.

One of the most striking aspects of The Alexandrean Tragedy is that it opens with an appearance by the Ghost of Alexander—a device William Alexander deploys nowhere else in The Monarchicke Tragedies, and which appears to be very much his invention—it does not have precedent in the sources he otherwise can be shown to have used for this play. He could, of course, have been recalling earlier Scottish advice to princes works which adopt a similar strategy, notable Lyndsay's The Tragedie of the Cardinal (Beaton), but one also wonders if ghostliness was in his mind because of its effectiveness in a more recent and dramatic context. True, Banquo's ghost in Macbeth is famously silent, and Alexander's ghost is a garrulous one, but in both plays

71 Brooke, III, iv, l. 125.


74 1616 edition, sig. O4"; that this is the case is not apparent from Kastner and Charlton's edition.


76 IV, I, l. 10: Brooke, p. 168.

ghostliness is used to focus on the theme of failed kingship; as the contemplation of Banquo unmans Macbeth and disturbs his majesty, so the contemplation of his unquiet ghostly self prompts Alexander to confront the failures of his kingly career.

It is indeed possible to see Macbeth significantly informing The Alexandrean Tragedy at further thematic and ideological levels. Neither play features a king seen ruling successfully. Macbeth has a good king, Duncan, who is killed, his tyrannical murderer, and his largely untried and (as I have argued elsewhere) ambiguously presented successor, Malcolm.78 The Alexandrean Tragedy features a king who only sees the error of his ways after his demise, along with a host of contenders to his throne who have inherited the worst contagions of his ambitiousness. And yet both plays retain an essential investment in kingship, correctly adjusted and used. The significance of this can more easily be understood by referring briefly to the last of Alexander’s Monarchicke Tragedies, his Tragedy of Julius Caesar—which incidentally cannot be demonstrated to show any indebtedness to Shakespeare’s earlier Julius Caesar.79 Alexander’s play focuses on Caesar’s desire to be king, and the way in which this alienates his erstwhile supporters who identify in this wish a dangerous ambition which must be forestalled. And yet Alexander’s presentation of Caesar shows him an admirable figure in many ways, notably in that as he declares:

I not affect the title of a King  
For love of glory, or desire of gaine,  
Nor for respect of any priuate thing,  
But that the state may by my travels gaine...  
So soveraigne match’d with a gallant mind,  
Breeds reverence in ones owne, fear in his foes.80

The play’s complexity lies in the fact that Caesar’s aspirations to a crown are both estimable in their socialized premise but unachievable in this king-resistant context that Rome is shown to be.

Alexander’s Monarchicke Tragedies seem to me to arise out of a political and ideological context that is both Scottish and English. He inherits the Scottish penchant for including advisory ideas within a wider generic context, but


79 Its main sources are again Plutarch, along with Robert Garnier’s Cornelie and Marc Muret’s Julius Caesar; McGrail, p. 38; Kastner and Charlton, I, clxxxviii-cxc, and 474.

he is very alert to the English context in which they are being received. Revealing light on quite where he was coming from on this is shed by inspecting a couple of poems appended to the 1604 and 1607 London editions of *The Monarchicke Tragedies* but thereafter quietly dropped from subsequent editions. Both are poems clearly composed in the recent aftermath of James's translation to England and when Alexander's own permanent removal to England was far from a confirmed thing. The second of them is an odd and intriguing poem the ostensible subject of which is "Some verses written shortly thereafter [James had come to England] by reason of an inundation of Douen, a water neere unto the Authors house, whereupon his Maiestie was sometimes wont to Hawke."\(^{81}\) Alexander localizes himself very much as a Scotsman here struggling against forces of nature the unleashing of which is associated with "this orphan boundes,"\(^{82}\) the state of Scotland without its fatherly protector James. Scots now "in a corner of the world obscure/ ...rest ungrac'd without the boundes of fame," living "like th' Antipodes depriu'd of light" whilst "our Sunne shines in another part" (ll. 31-34). Some of Alexander's soon to be despised ambition is evident in the way the poem concludes with the hope that he and his Muse would be removed from their dolefulness if that Phoebus would once shine on him.

In other words, the poem jealously admires the image of James appropriating another realm. But the poem that accompanies it "Some verses written to his Maiestie by the Authour at the time of his Maiesties first entrie into England"\(^{83}\) makes it explicitly clear that this appropriation must not be associated with conquest. Unlike the "Potentates of former times" who "stain[d] their conquests with a thousand crimes," James comes as one "whom peace highlie raises," and the relationship between him and his people is defined in these interestingly convoluted terms: "And never conquerour gain'd so great a thing./ As those wise subiects gaining such a King."\(^{84}\) The conquering image is detached from application to a monarch and retooled and reapplied to his subjects. The only way in which the idea of conquest can be entertained in relation to James is found in Alexander's better-known poem "To his Sacred Majesty," attached to all editions of *The Monarchicke Tragedies* from the 1604 one onwards,\(^{85}\) where Alexander indeed encourages the king to consider under-

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\(^{81}\) 1607 edition, sig. L2\(^{\uparrow}\)v; bound with *Julius Caesar*.

\(^{82}\) For a text see, Kastner and Charlton, II, 537-8 (l. 25).

\(^{83}\) 1607 edition, sig. L1\(^{\downarrow}\)v; bound with *Julius Caesar*.


\(^{85}\) Kastner and Charlton, I, 3-6. The 1603 edition has a shorter and more rudimentary version with only three stanzas.
taking a Christian crusade against the Turk—something bruited in other works at various junctures in the course of his reign. That is conquest, but in a li-
censed and very different context.

So in these dedicatory pieces Alexander denies the direct relevance of his
negative monarchical exemplars to the king to whom these plays are dedicated.
Nonetheless, Alexander’s plays as insistently, as I have argued, disclose how
monarchs can destroy themselves from within by an ambition that encourages
them to disregard wise counsel—both from their own minds and from their
well-intentioned counselors. If, as I read it, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, far from
being the “complimentary” play towards James that it has been said to be
(Carpenter, p. 210), expresses anxieties about kingly ambition in the context of
the still relatively unknown quantity James’s arrival in London, the influences
of that play on Alexander’s writing shows an alertness on Alexander’s part to
the circulation of those anxieties. This may indeed be part of his process of
Englishing himself ideologically as well as linguistically, but it was founded
on observation of James in Scotland and an acquaintance with the long-running
advisory debate in its literature.

William Alexander and William Drummond were close friends for much
of their lives. They corresponded with regularity, and they read each other’s
works. Drummond’s copy of the 1607 edition of *The Monarchieke Tragedies*
is much annotated by Drummond, with marginalia principally dealing with its
sources. 86 A sonnet also survives penned by Drummond on the subject of *The
Monarchicke Tragedies*. In a loose application to the four dramas it sees world
history in terms of the four monarchies or empires of Assyria, Persia, Greece
and Rome which had successively proceeded into the “west world,” across, as
Drummond puts it, “That great and fatall period of all things.” 87 He is not, I
think using fatal in the family sense of mortally drunk here, but rather in a
sense of the necessary order to things in which the mortal destruction of these
realms and empires was inevitable. The sestet develops this, presenting the
earth as now throwing herself “(great Monarch) in thy armes,/ Here shall she
staye, fates haue ordained so/ Nor has she where nor further for to goe” (Kast-
nner, I, 229, l. 12-13). There is a deliberate ambiguity here, the “great mon-
arch” is on one level Christ, the realm of Christianity having succeeded all
others, but it is also possible to read the “great monarch” as James, apotheosis
of the Protestant kingly vision. And from this point of view Drummond’s vi-

86 *Library*, pp. 13, 24, 1876; Drummond also owned the 1616 edition (now lost). The
1607 edition is in the NLS (MS. 1692).

87 Kastner, I, 229, ll. 7-8. R. H. MacDonald is “doubtful” about Kastner’s attribution of
this poem to Drummond. His arguments against this attribution are, though, less convincing
than those against other Kastner attributions. See “Amendments to L. E. Kastner’s Edition of
sion endorses Alexander’s view of James as a powerful antidote to the doomed empires or monarchies of the world’s earlier history—and yet one in which a certain stasis is also conceived. However, this sonnet was not printed in any of the published editions of Alexander’s works, though another poem by Drummond did appear in commendation of the Edinburgh edition of his *Doomesday* (Kastner, II, 161), and it seems only to have had MS circulation in Scotland. One wonders if Drummond’s sentiments were not totally to Alexander’s liking. Alexander does not wish, as I’ve suggested, an absolute stasis of monarchic ambition for James. Directed ambition, after all, was something which, as Alexander’s own career would show, he thought much about. In this series of plays all produced in the early years of James’s English reign, a series of tensions in the thought-world of Scots in the king’s entourage are played out and not entirely resolved. That Alexander kept these plays in print throughout James’s reign and beyond it into that of Charles I may say something about his own ambitions; it also, I’d claim, suggests that he continued to see—not without reasons—their ongoing advisory application. 88

88Earlier versions of some short sections of material in this essay have previously been published in my “Scotland’s Stories” (see note 10 above), and in the Introduction to the second part of my (ed.), *Older Scots Literature* (see note 23 above).