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DU BARTAS’ PATTERN FOR ENGLISH SCRIPTURAL POETS

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# Pattern, Patron, Paternalism

Du Bartas’ reputation in France declined in the early seventeenth century. Michel Magnien has identified the year 1610 as a turning point, citing Ronsard’s critique of Du Bartas’ stylistic faults as quoted in Pierre de Deimier’s *L’Academie de l’Art pöetique* (Paris: 1610), e.g.: ‘Ronsard appercevant que cest Autheur [Du Bartas] metaphorisoit et s’obscurcissoit par trop en quelques endroicts […] disoit par fois à ses amis, Que [Jean Edouard] Du Monin et Du Bartas luy avoye*n*t gasté la Poësie’ (Ronsard, perceiving that this author [Du Bartas] used metaphors and concealed his meaning too much in places, […] sometimes told his friends that [Jean Eduoard] Du Monin and Du Bartas had ruined poetry for him).[[1]](#footnote-1) Magnien also shows that positive estimations and stylistic imitations continued throughout the century, even as other writers like Charles Sorel also criticized Du Bartas and looked back at his œuvre as belonging to an earlier generation.[[2]](#footnote-2) The *Semaines* had remained popular during Henri IV’s reign, as both Protestant and Catholic poets revised the poems in the changed political and cultural circumstances after the King’s conversion to Catholicism in 1594.[[3]](#footnote-3) Michel Quillian composed an alternative version called *La Derniere Semaine, ou consommation du monde* (1596), a stylistically similar poem that re-aligns the poem’s theology: its dedication to Henri IV is followed by a notice from doctors in the Paris theology faculty asserting that the poem contains nothing that goes against the Roman Catholic faith.[[4]](#footnote-4) *La Semaine, ou creation du monde, du Sieur Christofle de Gamon, contre celle du Sieur du Bartas* (1609) is a revisionist interpretation of *La Sepmaine*,updating its scientific knowledge though still essentially paying tribute to Du Bartas.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This adversarial dynamic is absent from Du Bartas’ seventeenth-century reception in Scotland and England – no poet from the British Isles ever wrote a rival version of the *Semaines*. The most direct attempt at emulation is William Alexander’s *Doomes-day* (1637), a vast stanzaic poem about the end of the world divided into twelve Hours that catalogues all the creatures that will be killed, and who will be summoned at the Last Judgement.[[6]](#footnote-6) When, decades later, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Lucy Hutchinson’s *Meditations on the Creation* (1679, also known as *Order and Disorder*) transformed Du Bartas’ poetic models, these works presented new interpretative methods for versifying Genesis without overtly competing with, or even acknowledging, the poet whose assumptions were being discarded. This was not because Du Bartas had been forgotten: his poems were still being cited in the second half of the century and, as this essay confirms, remained a valuable precedent for scriptural poets.[[7]](#footnote-7) Following on from partial English translations by James VI, Philip Sidney (now lost) and others, Josuah Sylvester’s translation of Du Bartas’ works, *Devine Weekes* (1605 *et seq.*) made the whole poems available in English and inspired other writers to compose new poems on the same template for more than half a century to come.[[8]](#footnote-8)

James VI and I’s intimate association with the Huguenot poet was the primary reason that Du Bartas’ poetry was treated as an authoritative model for scriptural poetry so long after his French reputation began to wane. James and Du Bartas knew each other during their lifetimes, the French poet even sending James a presentation copy of the *Suites* to the *Seconde Semaine* (probably around the time of his visit to Scotland in 1587) that was dedicated to the Scottish King and contained poetry that would not be printed until the beginning of the seventeenth century. That manuscript contained a text of “Les Peres” over eight hundred lines longer than any printed version, and an edition of this additional text is offered elsewhere in this volume.[[9]](#footnote-9) The publication of *Devine Weekes* reinvigorated this connection. Sylvester, having already presented a manuscript copy of his translation of “Les Colonies” to the new King in 1604, composed fifteen pages of dedicatory materials for the monarch. These included verses in French, Italian and English to James, and a “Corona Dedicatoria” of pillar-shaped poems with a concluding inscription that simply reads: ‘your majesties | Most loyall Subject and Humble Servaunt | josuah sylvester’.[[10]](#footnote-10) The existing references to James VI in “La Vocation”, “Les Trophees” and “La Magnificence” are supplemented in Sylvester’s translation with new interpolations and dedicatory verses aimed at the English nobility, including one in “The Third Day” that pays tribute to Queen Elizabeth and prays for the longevity of the Stuart line: ‘*Long-happy Monarke may King* iames *persist,* | *And after him, His;* Still the same *in Christ*’ (i.iii.661-662; *Devine Weekes* uses italics to denote the translator’s interpolations).

This link did more than increase visibility of Du Bartas’ poetry and prolong its relevance in British cultural life. *Devine Weekes* became a literary embodiment of the Calvinist consensus that offered an exemplary model for instructive and morally edifying poetry that did not deviate from established scriptural truth about the nature of the world. This model was progressive and energizing in updating the Genesis narrative in light of new knowledge, and (more broadly) encouraging readers to turn to natural philosophical, theological and historical works to deepen their understanding of how everything around us, including ourselves, has a place in God’s divine plan – not that we are able to recognize it fully. On the other hand, this model was deadening in advocating compositional structures that fortified existing narratives that magnified the total coherence of theological, scriptural, historical, moral, political and social structures as a unified explanation of how to see the world and seek to know God. Du Bartas’ poetry offered a method for poets to discover a voice within the Stuart regime’s existing cultural frame.

There was, therefore, a political element to how any poet worked with the example provided by *Devine Weekes*, poems which were printed six more times until 1641 with the same laudatory verses to James. Numerous minor English poets writing shortly after James’s English accession also composed works that possessed explicit royalist elements while versifying new areas of natural or moral philosophy in ways compatible with Scripture; some, including John Davies of Hereford and Nicholas Breton, even borrowed a seven-day or -section structure.[[11]](#footnote-11) William Barret’s manuscript verse chronicle *The Sacred Warr* is an example of a long historical poem that narrated the history of Christian-Muslim relations (in Barret’s case, drawing on William, Archbishop of Tyre’s twelfth-century *Historia Hierosolymitana*).[[12]](#footnote-12) Because of their non-fictional basis, historical poems like Barret’s and Alexander’s cohered well with the incontrovertible truth of biblical narrative structures. And, as *Devine Weekes* had done, these historical poems possessed the structural versatility for poets to offer socio-political reflections on contemporary applications of the narratives described. Structural flexibility did not necessarily entail greater moral imagination, however; Barret’s poem, for instance, is predictably hostile towards Islam.

In addition to histories, Du Bartas’ poetry also inspired verse meditations. Francis Quarles’ scriptural versifications, beginning with *Feast of Wormes* (1621) were a response to the problem that Du Bartas’ historical poetry did not provide direction about how it should be read for spiritual benefit. Quarles combined his retelling of the Book of Jonah (called a ‘History’) with ‘meditations’ that reflected on the moral significance of what was being described. Such a method complemented treatises on devotional practice like Joseph Hall’s *Arte of Meditation* (1606) and Daniel Featley’s *Ancilla pietatis* (1626) that instructed readers in discovering moral and divine truths through meditating on the natural world or Scripture, or reading or imitating a literary surrogate like *Devine Weekes.*[[13]](#footnote-13)

*Devine Weekes*’ English and Scottish legacy is strongest in non-lyric religious narrative verse, both histories and meditations. Sarah Rosswrites that ‘[b]iblical verse paraphrase is little discussed today and is frequently ill defined, but it was enormously popular, deriving its impetus in very large part from the writings of the French Protestant Guillaume de Saluste Du Bartas’.[[14]](#footnote-14) His example, mediated through Sylvester, offered an easily replicable method for composing scriptural poems with new forms, genres and topics. It was especially valuable for poets who lacked cultural authority, such as Edward Browne, servant to the Lord Mayor James Campbell and author of a sequence of highly derivative *Sacred Poems* (1639) that gives lengthy extracts from Sylvester’s translation, or Lady Anne Southwell, author of a sequence of poems that reflect on the Decalogue through reference to biblical stories and examples drawn from life. For Kate Narveson this was a progressive movement because it gave lay readers greater control over the narratives that they read: ‘it was not simply the spread of Scripture literacy, but the application of that literacy in writing that created the conditions whereby ordinary layfolk, both men and women, gained a new form of influence’.[[15]](#footnote-15) Du Bartas’ example opened routes into creative composition, showing authors how to versify new areas of knowledge and reflect on their moral application in light of scriptural narratives.

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*Devine Weekes* became a pattern for seventeenth-century scriptural verse in English. In its earliest sense of ‘a model, example, or copy’ (*OED n* I), the term ‘pattern’ captures *Devine Weekes*’ appeal as an authoritative template for composing scriptural verse. ‘Pattern’ was a variant form of ‘patron’ in the early modern period, and both are cognate with the Latin word *pater*.[[16]](#footnote-16) ‘Pattern’ is used several times in Sylvester’s prefatory verses in connection with the patron-client relationship that Sylvester hoped to establish (though he never would receive patronage from James, he did enter the royal household in Prince Henry’s service). Sylvester plays on the verbal similarity in an obelisk-shaped concrete poem at the start of the Second Week that is addressed ‘To the most Royal Pattern and Patron of Learning and Religion, the High and Mighty Prince, James’, and the same phrase ‘pattern and patron’ is later used to pay tribute to Anthony Bacon and Prince Henry.[[17]](#footnote-17) Sylvester also uses ‘pattern’ once in his translation to refer to his divine patron: ‘Of man[’]s resembla*n*ce to his first Patern, which is God’ (marginal note).[[18]](#footnote-18) In this way, the term ‘pattern’ usefully calls attention to the ambivalent quality to Du Bartas’ influence in that seventeenth-century English poets gained the freedom to write new kinds of scriptural poetry by attaching themselves to poems that had thrived because of James VI and I’s sponsorship. ‘Pattern’ resonates with a hierarchical model of Christian humanist imitation that directed poets towards the best available models for scriptural verse, which are those most heavily dependent on Scripture. Du Bartas’ literary-theological principles urged poets to take God as their sole pattern, and Du Bartas’ verse served as one of the greatest of the lesser (i.e. non-scriptural) examples of how to pursue that path. The Stuart connection with Du Bartas made the poems emblems of centralized monarchical power, in effect a symbolic realization of James VI’s young explorations with the idea of conjoined sacred and secular authority in his *Essays of a Prentise* (1584).

This use of ‘pattern’ to denote a patronal and paternalistic model for constructing reality corresponds well with what postmodern critics following Jean-François Lyotard have called grand or master narratives (*grands récits*), a concept that Bill Readings summarizes as follows:

Briefly, a ‘grand narrative’ claims to be the story that can reveal the meaning of all stories, be it the weakness or the progress of mankind. Its metanarrative status comes from the fact that it talks about the many narratives of culture so as to reveal the singular truth inherent in them. The implicit epistemological claim of a metanarrative is to put an end to narration by revealing the meaning of narratives.[[19]](#footnote-19)

This description applies well to the socio-political relationship between English and Scottish imitators of Du Bartas and the poem they imitated, reminding us that James VI and I affected how poets responded in the British Isles at least as much as Henri IV did for French responses. In this reading, *Devine Weekes* is a metanarrative that consolidated the ultimate authority of Scripture through coalescence with other natural philosophical, historical and non-fictional discourses. It helped scriptural poetry to explain the past, present and future of humankind, and legitimized monarchical control over the creation and interpretation of knowledge. The poem confined and coerced individuals to compose imitative works that replicated authorized forms of knowledge and scriptural engagement. The methods were new, but the literary system and narrative of Christian redemption were intact.

English imitations of Du Bartas are in effect pre-modern equivalents to ‘little narratives’ (*petits récits*), a term Lyotard uses to describe local, provisional discourses that challenge the ‘grand narrative’ in the centre. Though they are hardly counter-narratives, poems like Edward Cooke’s *Bartas Junior* and Sylvester’s *Little Bartas* (a translation of Pierre Duval’s *Psaume de la Puissance*) attest that poets did use imagery of scale to describe a deferential relationship to Du Bartas. In these cases and others, *Devine Weekes*’ narrative allowed poets to demonstrate their fealty to that intellectual system, and to invest mental labour in its reinforcement and expansion. The aesthetic, as well as the political, consequences of this system were arguably severe, leading to poems that were derivative, repetitive, free of spontaneous inspiration and only hold appeal within that intellectual system – and such, understandably, has been the low estimation of most poems written in English after Du Bartas.

And yet, while such poems possessed essentially restrictive structures of knowledge that extended the Stuart monarchy’s ideological control, they also taught domestic poets how to write independently. For better or worse, ‘Bartasian’ poetry instilled scriptural truths in its authors and readers more thoroughly, helping writers to fashion those truths in vivid and arresting ways that followed established practices of reading, interpretation and composition. This essay concentrates on two poets who are simultaneously innovative and deferential in how they adapt Sylvester’s example to compose original poetry.Both are writing after the last edition of *Devine Weekes* was printed in 1641, at a time when Du Bartas’ example had been thoroughly absorbed into English literary culture and his presence is most obvious at a deeper structural level rather than in direct allusions. Both poets are women, which made biblical paraphrase an obvious and pious way to extend their devotional practice through exploring and departing from Du Bartas’ example: as Femke Molekamp observes, ‘[t]he association of devotional reading with prayer and meditation is one which was identified with particular frequency with women’.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Anne Bradstreet’s and Mary Roper’s poetry are valuable documents for learning more about how such poets read as they wrote, selecting and rearranging material from the books available to them to compose original works on a familiar framework for devotional ends. Their poems are vehicles for self-education through which they could find new forms of expressiveness in adhering to and departing from Du Bartas’ precedent. A literary appreciation of both is enhanced by observing the traces of independent engagement with Du Bartas as an inherited literary model. Adrienne Rich is right that Bradstreet’s long poems *Quaternions* and *Four Monarchies* (both first printed in *The Tenth Muse* in 1650)‘read like a commonplace book put into iambic couplets, the historical, scientific journal of a young woman with a taste for study’.[[21]](#footnote-21) This judgment encapsulates why the poems have held limited interest to students of early American poetry, but it also directs attention to the poem’s appeal for witnessing how someone like Bradstreet read and studied. Mary Roper’s *Sacred Historie* (1669-1670) is, like Sylvester’s *Devine Weekes*, anopenly royalist verse account of the Creation.[[22]](#footnote-22) The poem, which survives in a manuscript copy with a dedication to Queen Catherine of Braganza (wife of Charles II), enfolds expressions of political sentiment into her biblical paraphrase and use of a set of engraved illustrations of Genesis. Both poets’ use of Du Bartas is tangled up in other patriarchal relationships that inspired their writing: Bradstreet was following her father’s example, and Roper writes in honour of the restored monarch, Charles II. Du Bartas may not have offered much creative emancipation, but his poems did help enfranchise Bradstreet and Roper as writers, insofar as they provided resources to engage with biblical and political history with creativity and independence.

# Reading Bradstreet Reading

Although Anne Bradstreet is celebrated as the first poet from the North American colonies to have her works printed, her writing is essentially European in its preoccupations: the title alone of her first collection, *The Tenth Muse* (1650), according to Gillian Wright, ‘locates Bradstreet and her poems firmly within a European, classical frame of reference, which is then immediately complicated by the translocation of the tenth muse to the New World’.[[23]](#footnote-23) In particular, Bradstreet and her male associates reflect European, and specifically English, poetic tastes by making a series of allusions to Du Bartas in the book’s front-matter. Several times, such as in the second stanza of the Prologue,the poet tells us that her private reading of Du Bartas was an inspiration, though she did not hope to emulate his works:

But when my wond’ring eyes and envious heart  
Great Bartas’ sugared lines do but read o’er,  
Fool I do grudge the Muses did not part  
’Twixt him and me that overfluent store;  
A Bartas can do what a Bartas will  
But simple I according to my skill.[[24]](#footnote-24)

‘Overfluent’ is a new word (this is its first cited use in the *Oxford English Dictionary*) that contrasts Du Bartas’ superabundant copiousness with the aridity of the speaker’s own writing – and the poet rejects the possibility of run-off from one to other. The early elegy ‘In Honour of Du Bartas, 1641’ describes the similarly rapt, pious concentration with which she read *Devine Weekes*: ‘A thousand thousand times my senseless senses | Moveless stand charmed by thy sweet influences’ (p. 193, ll. 46-47). The elegy draws on her recent re-reading of the poems (‘My dazzled sight of late reviewed thy lines’ (p. 192, l. 8)) to praise the vast sum of knowledge in Du Bartas’ poetry:

Thus weak brained I, reading thy lofty style,  
Thy profound learning, viewing other while,  
Thy art in natural philosophy,  
Thy saint-like mind in grave divinity,  
Thy piercing skill in high astronomy,  
And curious insight in anatomy,  
Thy physic, music, and state policy,  
Valour in war, in peace good husbandry. (p. 193, ll. 36-44)

The subjects mentioned here are all dealt with in the *Semaines*, or the speaker could also have *Judit* or the principles of *L’Uranie* in mind. In this elegy Bradstreet reads Du Bartas as a poet of enduring fame who is too great to be emulated:

Thy sacred works are not for imitation,  
But monuments to future admiration.  
Thus Bartas’ fame shall last while stars do stand,  
And whilst there’s air, or fire, or sea, or land. (p. 194, ll. 78-81).

Such imagery places Bradstreet’s poetry within a suitably pious, learned and established mode of verse composition, at the same time underscoring her inferiority to Du Bartas. Her praise is expressed with modesty and deference, explicitly denying that she might ever compete with Du Bartas.

Any reading of Bradstreet’s debts to Du Bartas is coloured by how we interpret these and other references; some critics, such as Patricia Pender, have detected an ironic denial of exactly what does happen in her poems, while others argue that the speaker’s sentiments are purely conventional.[[25]](#footnote-25) Wright convincingly defends the latter view, observing that naming Du Bartas as a ‘poetic role model is one point of similarity’ between Bradstreet’s prologue and the other prefatory materials to *The Tenth Muse*, although those verses reveal the ‘differing views of Bradstreet and her commenders as to how well they think she follows the Frenchman’s example’.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The introductory verse by Nathaniel Ward relates how Minerva and Mercury presented Apollo with a copy of Du Bartas’ and Bradstreet’s poetry and that, having put his spectacles on and inspected both, he could not decide which was best. In response, the two gods ‘both ’gan laugh, and said it was no mar’l | The Auth’ress was a right Du Bartas girl’ (p. 4, ll. 11-12). These lines, playful in their elisions, present Bradstreet’s poetry as highly derivative, contrary to the claims in her own poetry that she did not seek to imitate him. The lines are condescending and also riddling, for in both editions the epithet ‘Du Bartas girl’ is the best clue so far about the author’s identity: the title-page in 1650 gives the author as a ‘Gentlewoman in those parts’ (specified as New England in 1678), and John Woodbridge’s epistle to the reader, the only item before this poem, emphasizes that the author is female but offers no clues about her identity. Part of the joke seems to be that the names ‘Bradstreet’ and ‘Bartas’ share many letters in common; and the punchline comes pages later in the anonymous anagrammatic verse that concludes the prefatory verses, filling half a page in the 1650 text (A8v):

*Anna Bradestreate*.

Deer Neat *An Bartas*.

So *Bartas* like thy fine spun Poems been,  
That *Bartas* name will prove an Epicene.

The comparison with Du Bartas contains and restricts Bradstreet’s poetry: she is ‘neat’, her poems are ‘fine spun’, implying ‘excessively subtle or refined’ (*OED*, ‘fine-spun, *adj*.’), and her authorial identity serves only to reveal a feminine aspect in a superior male poet. Like the phrase ‘right *Du Bartas* girl’, these associations tell us as much about how to present a female poet from England’s North American colonies to her prospective readers as it does about Bradstreet’s poetic preferences.

Bradstreet’s interest in Du Bartas is just one way that her personal background and sense of an idealized Elizabethan England informed her poetry. Bradstreet’s three elegies, to Du Bartas, Sidney and Elizabeth, are among her earliest works, dating from the periods of relative stability in Ipswich and, sometime after 1640, Andover: the Sidney elegy was written in 1638, the one to Du Bartas in 1641 and the third, to Elizabeth, in 1643 according to *The Tenth Muse*.[[27]](#footnote-27) Catherine Gray argues that they evoke a neo-Elizabethan discourse that reclaimed the agendas of international Protestantism and parliamentarianism in seventeenth-century Massachusetts: invoking their three ‘ghosts’ (to use Gray’s term), along with Walter Raleigh (in Bradstreet’s use of his *History of the World* as source), created ‘an ideologically specific community in large part through the retroactive reconstruction of a series of militant Elizabethan heroes’.[[28]](#footnote-28) Together these reference points cast back to the literature of the 1590s in order to assist the poet in producing new utterances. In addition, Bradstreet considered herself a Sidney: there was a family tradition that claimed a shared heritage with Sidney as Thomas Dudley, her father and an administrator of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was said to have descended from John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, whose eldest daughter Mary was Philip Sidney’s mother.[[29]](#footnote-29) The text of the Sidney elegy printed in 1650 is usually read as alluding to that claim: ‘Let then, none dis-allow of these my straines, | Which have the self-same blood yet in my veines’ (1650, N8v. Cf. p. 190, ll. 42-43: ‘selfe-same’ is revised to ‘English’ in 1678).

Du Bartas must also have brought Bradstreet’s upbringing and cultural Englishness to mind. While living at Sempringham she may have encountered the physician Thomas Lodge, whose commentary on the *Semaines* was first printed in 1621.[[30]](#footnote-30) More significantly, though, Bradstreet regarded her father as a keen reader and perhaps also imitator of Du Bartas in her dedicatory poem for the first two quaternions, which is also dated to this earliest period of her writing, 30 March 1642, in *The Tenth Muse*. The dedicatory poem tells us both that Dudley knew Du Bartas well enough that he would have been able to detect sections derived from it, and also that Dudley wrote a poem ‘On the four parts of the world’ (not known to survive) whose Bartasian theme might well have been matched with a style inspired by Du Bartas’. This poem provides valuable indications about Bradstreet’s likely poetic practice when it implies that her father’s poem was the immediate inspiration for her first *Quaternions*, and she explicitly denies imitating Du Bartas because she ‘feared you’ld judge Du Bartas was my friend. | I honour him, but dare not wear his wealth’ (ll. 38-39).

These are still conventional expressions of modesty, but they present a model of imitation in which Bradstreet uses Du Bartas’ inspiring example to write a continuation of her father’s poem. The two poems from the *Quaternions* that are being presented to her father are ‘The Four Elements’ and ‘Of the Four Humours in Man’s Constitution’, and these are a good place to begin evaluating actual debts to Du Bartas in Bradstreet’s poetry, even though the connection, as Wright recognizes, is ‘not as strong as is sometimes suggested’.[[31]](#footnote-31) For Wright the poem to Dudley reveals how Bradstreet

was working within domestic circumstances which facilitated, stimulated and authorised, but also to some extent predefined, her own poetic activities. Dudley’s ‘four sisters’ poem made possible and legitimated *a certain kind of poem* in response.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The emphasis on Dudley as Bradstreet’s key influence is surely right. Bradstreet’s poem suggests that Dudley composed a poem in which the four ‘parts of the world’ – Africa, America, Asia and Europe – are ‘four Sisters’ (p. 13, l. 5) who argue with each other: ‘Yours did contest for wealth, for arts, for age’ (p. 14, l. 28). This topic might be of special interest to a colonizer, and is also suitable for a continuation of the *Semaines*, since the closest Du Bartas comes to treating the topic is “The Colonies”, which is structured around the dispersal of Noah’s sons across the world. It is also tempting to think that Bradstreet borrowed ideas from Sylvester’s translation of Jean Bertaut’s *Panarete*, another poem structured as a four-way debate.[[33]](#footnote-33) In these ways, Bradstreet’s literary persona in the *Tenth Muse* acknowledges the paternalistic forces that exerted pressure on her writing style.

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Bradstreet’s poetic borrowings from Du Bartas are not nearly as self-conscious or deliberate as all of these prefatory allusions are. At most Du Bartas provided a structural precedent, particularly in the opening poem ‘The Four Elements’, which is closest to the style and subject-matter of Du Bartas.[[34]](#footnote-34)In the first two *Quaternions* Bradstreet devises a poetic arrangement based on fours that is true to the world-view expressed in the *Semaines*. The four elements correspond with the compass points in her poem, as Du Bartas had noted that they do in the Second Day at a section with the following marginal annotation in Sylvester’s translation:

Of the Winds, whereof there are foure principall[,] compared to the foure Seasons, the foure Complexions, the foure Elements, and the foure Ages of man: and assigned to the foure Corners of the World: And called East, West, North and South’ (1621, E4v; see also a note on the ‘foure-fould Consort in the humors, seasons, and elements’ in “The Columnes”, 2E1v).

For Du Bartas the description of the winds is transferable to the continents: for example, the south wind is ‘That, which dries-up wild *Affrick* with his wing, | Resembles Aire, Bloud, Youth, and lively Spring’ (i.ii.613-614). The key difference from Du Bartas’ elemental scheme is the gender of Bradstreet’s speakers. Where the Elements in Du Bartas’ Second Day are ‘twin-twins (two Sons, two Daughters) | To wit, the Fire, the Aire, the Earth, and Waters’ (i.ii.53-54), in ‘The Four Elements’ the quartet is female, as the choice of pronoun in the fifth line (p. 18) establishes (‘in due order each her turn should speak’). The four humours are also personated as being ‘eldest daughter to each element’ (p. 33, l. 8), though Choler states that she and her mother are temporarily transgender:

We both once masculines, the world doth know,  
Now feminines awhile; for love we owe  
Unto your sisterhood, which makes us render  
Our noble selves in a less noble gender. (p. 34, ll. 36-39)

Turning Fire, Air, Choler and Blood into women creates consistency with Dudley’s four sisters (the four corners of the world were traditionally represented as women), and justifies lending the poet’s voice to female speakers. In this regard Bradstreet is very much a ‘Du Bartas girl’, writing verse on the same topics and recalling Sylvester’s style, but in a voice coded as feminine. The ‘Four Ages of Man’, by contrast, are each ‘son’ (p. 51, l. 5) to one of the elements and humours; otherwise, the Four Ages would have been describing female experience, which was presumably unacceptable. The final quartet, the seasons, are all female. These various adaptations suggest how Bradstreet might ‘honour’ Du Bartas by generating new poetic structures that are wholly congruent with the *Semaines* and extend it productively into new areas – and also why the poems might be praised and dismissed as Du Bartas speaking in a woman’s voice.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The poetry at the beginning of ‘The Four Elements’ is unusually reminiscent of Du Bartas. As in the Second Day, the poet gives details about what effect the elements’ contest has on the weather and uses Sylvester-like onomatopoeia to evoke meteorological violence:

All would be chief, and all scorned to be under,  
Whence issued winds and rains, lightning and thunder;  
The quaking earth did groan, the sky looked black,  
The fire, the forced air, in sunder crack   
[….] The rumbling, hissing, puffing was so great  
The world’s confusion it did seem to threat’ (p. 18, ll. 9-12, 19-20)

Structural aspects of the first speech, spoken by Fire, are also Bartasian in being organized around the usefulness of fire to those in different professions and its effects in the world; for example, the poet uses structural parallelism to mark changes of topic: ‘Ye martialists […]’ (p. 19, l. 35), ‘Ye husband-men […]’ (l. 44) and ‘Ye cooks […]’ (l. 50). The insertion of four lines on the Great Fire of London in the 1678 text (p. 21, ll. 118-121; cf. 1650, B4v) shows that Bradstreet’s poetic structures were flexible enough to accommodate new material about recent events. In a passage about constellations, Fire herself is aware that there is far more to her topic than she can relate:

Their magnitude, and height, should I recount  
My story to a volume would amount;  
Out of a multitude these few I touch,   
Your wisdom out of little gather much. (p. 20, ll. 92-93).

This first speech provides a model for the three that follow. Earth’s speech replies to Fire’s, and at one point, breaking off from a passage about fire’s dependence on earth in all seasons, adds: ‘I should here make a short, yet true narration, | But that thy method is my imitation’ (p. 24, l. 222).

There are already significant differences from Du Bartas, though. Fire declares at the outset that she will not make her case through the definitions of ‘learned Grecians’ (p. 18, l. 30) but by the applications that ‘skilled mechanics’ (l. 31) and ‘[a]ll sort of artists’ (p. 19, l. 33) find for her; that is, she will not just rehearse scholarly arguments, but will argue from fire’s ubiquity in ordinary life. So we instead receive images that are too specific, too domestic and too closely drawn from everyday life to have come from the *Semaines*. There are fleeting traces of a different and more personal sensibility from earlier English-language imitations. Fire reminds us that she is needed to make tools like ‘hoes’ and ‘mattocks’ (p. 19, l. 45), and kitchenware:

Ye cooks, your kitchen implements I frame  
Your spits, pots, jacks, what else I need not name  
Your daily food I wholesome make, I warm   
Your shrinking limbs, which winter’s cold doth harm (p. 19, ll. 50-53).

A few lines later, Fire announces that she wishes to address higher matters, specifically whether the sun really is made of fire.

But let me leave these things, my flame aspires  
To match on high with the celestial fires;  
The sun an orb of fire was held of old,  
Our sages new another tale have told (p. 19, ll. 60-63).

Moving between earthly and heavenly matters, she occupies the same ‘middle Region’ (i.i.146-147) as Sylvester’s speaker. The speaker also balances new observations with an older understanding of nature. As well as taking a few lines to talk about fire’s correspondences with choler, summer and middle age, there are casual allusions to Pliny and Caligula (p. 21, ll. 105 and 129), and other details that were probably taken from books, such as the reference to Pyrausta (given the epithet ‘*Flame-bred-Flie*’ in Sylvester (ii.iv.2.350)) and to how the Greek hero Bellerophon was killed when attempting to ride Pegasus in a list of constellations (p. 20, ll. 73 and 81). Her speech is anxiously miscellaneous in the sources of information it draws on, which ranges from book learning found in (and perhaps taken from) Du Bartas to observations of the kind more associated with her shorter poetry.

In this early poem Du Bartas supplies Bradstreet with a model for composing long verse paragraphs; as Zach Hutchins suggests, the *Semaines* provided a paradigm for studying and contemplating texts that was consistent with New England puritan ideas about an individual’s spiritual development, and allowed Bradstreet to be ‘both courageously original and faithfully devout’.[[36]](#footnote-36) The next poem, ‘Of the Four Humours’, also shifts between commonplace knowledge about the humours’ characteristics taken from Helkiah Crooke’s *Mikrokosmographia* (1615) and moments of vivid imagery (such as ‘warm blue conduits of my [i.e. Blood’s] venial rills’ (p. 40, l.256)), unusual vocabulary (‘diffluent’ (p. 44, l. 396), another innovative ‘–fluent’ word, one which Bradstreet could have spotted in Sylvester’s *Tobacco Battered*) and passionate declamations like ‘O good, O bad, O true, O traitorous eyes | What wonderments within your balls there lies!’ (p. 49, ll. 563-564). The final two Quaternions similarly combine different types of information, whilst remaining distant from the *Semaines*;even though the poet claims that she struggled to write more about the four Seasons (‘My subject’s bare, my brain is bad, | Or better lines you should have had’, p. 72, ll. 257-258) she does not start taking material from ‘The Fourth Day’ about the seasons or months. The correspondence with Sylvester’s and Du Bartas’ example remains weak in the two final Quaternions, ‘Of the Four Ages’ and ‘The Four Seasons’, that she subsequently wrote.

Bradstreet’s next poems were another original expansion on a Bartasian framework. *The* *Four Monarchies* is a development of the method of the earlier poems, less and less dependent on the specifics of Du Bartas’ style though continuous with them. The poems are a verse account of the Assyrian, Persian, Greek and Roman monarchies compatible with the Book of Daniel. The *Quaternions* are to the *Four Monarchies* what *La Sepmaine* is to *La Seconde Semaine*: the first poem natural philosophical, the second world historical. In Susan Wiseman’s reading, ‘aesthetic concerns are clearly subordinate to an understanding of history past and present’ in the poem and so Bradstreet by implication must also have the Fifth Monarchy in mind, though there is no textual evidence that Bradstreet wrote in response to Fifth Monarchist or any other political agenda.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The sixteenth-century historian Johannes Sleidanus’ *The Key of Historie. Or, A most methodicall adbridgement of the foure chiefe monarchies* (1627 in English translation; first translated in 1563, and printed again in English and Latin throughout the seventeenth century) was a close precedent in print. Bradstreet’s main source, however, was Raleigh’s *History of the World* (1614), and her skill and creativity are particularly evident in how she brings together, truncates and edits his work (though the lack of a critical edition of Bradstreet’s verse that records all the correspondences means that her methods are poorly understood). Bradstreet does not appear to have consulted *Devine Weekes* when writing the numerous sections that cover a similar topic to ones covered in *La Seconde Semaine*. The narrative voice is no longer gendered male or female: it is mostly as impersonal as Raleigh’s, broken up with occasional interjections and, at the end, the author’s apologies. This impersonal voice is one reason that some later readers have deemed the poem a failure, but it throws emphasis onto its factual accuracy; almost all the events, place-names and numbers could have a footnote referring back to Raleigh.

The proximity of verse paragraphs to paragraphs in Raleigh varies, particularly in the first of the four monarchies, which is devoted to the Assyrian Empire: her account of Sardanapalus’ reign, for example, is an extremely close rendering in places, down to items of diction like ‘palliardizing’ (p. 78, l. 186); elsewhere, Bradstreet synthesizes different sections, such as in this four-verse summary of the Babylonian monarch Merodach Baladan’s reign:

All yield to him, but Nineveh kept free,  
Until his grandchild made her bow the knee.  
Ambassadors to Hezekiah sent,  
His health congratulates with compliment. (p. 85, ll. 398-401)

This passage combines details from Chapter 28 (of the second book of the first part) about Merodach and his grandson Nabopolassar with an incident taken from three chapters earlier about how Merodach’s envoys were welcomed when they came to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from illness (though Bradstreet does not mention that the visit was used to gather intelligence, cf. 2 Kings 20: 12-13 and Isaiah 39:1-2).[[38]](#footnote-38) The account of the Persian monarchy follows the sequence of Raleigh’s prose more closely than the Assyrian does. The final two monarchies, the last 2,000 lines, are even more linear, skipping over sections more rapidly towards the end but still turning back to details from earlier sections where needed. The poet’s skills are those of an editor, shaping material into a cleaner narrative illustrated using with illuminating details.

Bradstreet’s *Quaternions* and *Four Monarchies* began as poems written for her father, and are most like Du Bartas in how they versify knowledge for the poet’s spiritual education. Some of the more personal poems that were first printed at the back of *Several Poems* (1678) were also written in this earlier period, such as “Upon a Fit of Sickness” (p. 222), dated 1632. One difference in these lyrics is that most are addressed to her husband Simon, and none to her father. These poems contain one of the few instances that a direct borrowing from Du Bartas looks likely when, in ‘Another [to her husband]’ (‘As loving hind…’, p. 229), the poet alludes to the ‘the loving mullet’ that, once deprived of its partner, follows it to shore and dies there.[[39]](#footnote-39) The similarity reminds us that Bradstreet had fully absorbed images and ideas found in Du Bartas’ poetry that she could on draw throughout her writing career, even – perhaps especially – in poems that were less like the *Semaines*. Its appearance here reminds us that most of Bradstreet’s poetry really does not ‘wear his wealth’ either in taking his poetry’s information, or in seeking to emulate the grandeur of his epic style. ‘Contemplations’ can be read as Bradstreet’s most complete synthesis of conventional imagery and observations from life such as are already found in ‘The Four Elements’: in ‘Contemplations’, for example, the opening stanza establishes the poem’s setting as autumnal, as the speaker tells us both about how ‘Phoebus wanted but one hour to bed’ (p. 204, l. 2), and that the leaves and fruits were ‘Of green, of red, of yellow, mixed hue’ (l. 7). The tone of voice and diction can recall Du Bartas, such as when the speaker suddenly breaks off into an exclamation:

My great Creator I would magnify,  
That nature had thus decked liberally;  
But Ah, and Ah, again, my imbecility! (p. 206, ll. 55-57)

The speaker can describe a nightingale in conventional terms as Du Bartas might have done, as ‘[t]he sweet-tongued Philomel perched o’er my head’ (p. 212, l. 179), and then directly compare her experience with the bird’s: ‘Thy clothes ne’er wear, thy meat is everywhere, | Thy bed a bough, thy drink the water clear’ (ll. 188-189).

Du Bartas was a valuable early model for Bradstreet but not the constrictive influence that the prefatory verses might make him out to be. Understanding how Bradstreet departed from Du Bartas but kept his grand, conventional and pious verse in mind can build on work in the early 2000s that, as the editors of special issue on Bradstreet in the North American journal *Women’s Studies* write, ‘began the painstaking work of reading the *entire* output of our first poet through more capacious critical lenses’.[[40]](#footnote-40) Bradstreet’s poetry is not just a throw-back to Elizabethan verse, but a creative transformation of the model that Du Bartas offered that drew on her reading and observations. The prefatory materials to *The Tenth Muse* present Du Bartas as a major poet in the European tradition who overshadows Bradstreet’s poetry. The poems that follow largely continue in the same pious mode, yet Bradstreet mediates his pattern rather than merely copy it out. She strikes out to versify new sections of scriptural history. Writing conscious of her father’s example Bradstreet branches off from the older poet’s work in the *Quaternions* by following a new numerological template based on the number four that her own poems established, which included writing for female voices and drawing on a range of sources. Du Bartas offered Bradstreet a means to discover her poetic voice, and over time she worked out an independent literary identity that, despite being linked so heavily to her early model, had broken free from it. Bradstreet’s imitations of Du Bartas take a coordinated distance from their source, a process that the poet was happier calling ‘honouring’ than ‘imitating’. Bradstreet’s poems process the male-dominated influences and texts around her to devise a personal method for composing original scriptural poetry.

# An Illustrated History

*The Sacred Historie* has tentatively been attributed to ‘Mary Roper?’ based on evidence from the sole surviving manuscript copy at the University of Leeds: in the opening prayer, the poet mentions that she shares her name with Christ’s mother, and an inscription on the first opening indicates that the manuscript belonged to Elizabeth Roper in 1692.[[41]](#footnote-41) ‘Mary Roper’ as poet has never been identified with a specific member of the Roper family, even though a strong candidate exists. The eighth of the nine children of Sir Thomas Rooper, Viscount Baltinglas was called Mary, and her younger sister was named Elizabeth.[[42]](#footnote-42) Mary became the second wife of the clergyman and historian Thomas Fuller, who was made chaplain-extraordinary to Charles II shortly before dying in 1661.[[43]](#footnote-43) This marital connection could have given his wife an opening to present her manuscript work to Queen Catherine of Braganza in 1669 (though, given that the manuscript passed to Elizabeth Roper, it may never have left the family). The author of the manuscript’s commendatory letter “To the Queenes Most Excellent Majestie” was probably a widow, as she mentions the parable of the widow’s mite (as she does in the verse “Prayer”) and the author’s present “Meaneness and Povertie” (n.p.). Mary Roper/Fuller, who died in 1679 in Middlesex, could have written the work towards the end of her life, as the poem was apparently written between 10 March 1669 and 4 June 1670, dates supplied at either end of the work.[[44]](#footnote-44) The one possible incongruity between the biographies of the poem’s author and Mary Roper is that the author appears to commemorate her father’s recent death in a six-line verse (which includes the phrase ‘Death Also Layes My Father Downe to Sleepe’, p. 201) but Mary’s fatherdied in February 1637/38.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Mary Fuller was almost an exact contemporary of Anne Bradstreet, and was also descended from the English nobility and married to a minister. ‘Mary Roper’ (the term which I will continue to use to designate the author of *Sacred Historie* without assuming that the speculative link with Thomas Fuller’s second wife is correct) makes no reference to Du Bartas in her poetry. Nonetheless, Sarah Ross, comparing Roper’s scriptural meditations on GenesiswithHutchinson’s, writes that both poets’ ‘adherence to the framework of the meditation bespeaks the persistence of a rhetorically modest mode of religious writing adopted by women since its cultural authorization in the examples of Du Bartas and Quarles’.[[46]](#footnote-46) Whereas Hutchinson’s rhetorical modesty requires an almost exclusive use of Scripture as literary source, Roper and Bradstreet both incorporate material from other non-fictional sources into their narrative as a means to investigate and personalize their verse. The full title of Roper’s work gives no indication that it is poetry:

The Sacred Historie  
Conteined in the First Boocke of Moses Called Genesis   
Conteining Gods Wonderfull Works Of Creation   
Mans Shamefull fall   
The first Fratricide   
The Deluge   
The Building of Babel   
The Destruction of Sodome   
The Life and Death of those foure Renowned Patriarchs and Fathers of The Church  
Abraham   
Isaac   
Jacob   
Joseph   
March 10 1669

Roper’s introductory “Prayer” calls this work an offering to God of her intellectual energy and ‘My Small Part of time’ (p. 156, l. 25):

My Mornings Excercise [*sic*] to thee I Give   
 My Noones Repose to Him by whom I Live  
My Evenings Pleasure Shall Attend on thee  
 What Entertainement Like thy Word Can bee (p. 156, ll. 19-22)

Her devotional cycle bears comparison with the course of prayer outlined in John Colet’s *Dayly Devotions*, which were printed, with an introduction by Thomas Fuller, in 1673. That work’s subtitle, “The Christian’s Morning and Evening Sacrifice”, brings to mind the references in “Prayer” that the work is ‘this Sacrifice Offred By Mee | Unto thy Majestie’ (p. 155, ll. 2-3).

Her dedicatory text to Queen Catherine adds that her history is a set of meditations that brought holy joy:

With these Meditations God was Pleased to Quiet and still my Soule and not onely to take away the Perturbations of my minde but to raise my Soule and fill it with Joy and Comfort.

These Refreshings. Afterwards at my Spare howres drew me to a Delightfull Contemplation of Gods Noble Works and his Gracious Dealings with the Patriarchs in the first Booke of Moses, Which Sacred Historie I humbly Present to your Sacred hands. (p. 2)

With the words ‘Sacred hands’, the author attributes a sacral quality to the Queen, assimilating the divine subject matter and her royal dedicatee. This blending of heavenly and earthly majesty is continued in the first section of the main poem, “The Royall Element of Fire”. This interest in the four elements for understanding the world’s creation is, as we have already seen, a Bartasian topos. Fire is an instrument of God that has been made ‘Mans Servant’ (p. 156, l. 14) but can also be ‘Mans Enemie’ (l. 18). Biblical allusions and marginal cross-references to Revelation and 2 Thessalonians identify fire’s role within a providential history that looks ahead to the Last Judgement.[[47]](#footnote-47) The diction of temporal power is used to describe other elements too, as, for example, the poet explains that: ‘The Elements Chiefe seate it is the sea | That is this Empires Principalitie’ (p. 6). This quartet of poems on the elements recalls Bradstreet’s *Quaternions*, but with a difference: where Bradstreet loans a structure, Roper absorbs the intellectual scheme of how a divine monarchy has always held dominion over the earth. Royalist diction is woven into the verse throughout the collection, as when, for example, Nimrod is said to have been the first to ‘that did Aspire | Vnto a Kingdome and himselfe Attyre |With Royaltie’ (p. 38).

This vein is supported in her use of a set of engravings of a sequence of forty images depicting episodes from the Book of Genesis that are pasted into the manuscript text. The plates are known as *Illustrations to the Book of Genesis* (c. 1635, STC 22634.5), though the first plate only has empty panels without text. The plates were made by William Slatyer and Jacob van Langeren (who composed Latin prefatory verses that are not found in the Roper manuscript) based on Matthæus Merian’s *Icones Biblicae* (1625), which are themselves based on earlier precedents.[[48]](#footnote-48) The final eight plates have been attributed to Wenceslaus Hollar.[[49]](#footnote-49) Peter McCullough speculates that Slatyer and van Langeren’s plates might have been published by the Laudian printer William Badger on 24 January 1637/8.[[50]](#footnote-50) The Latin poems commending Charles on the second plate mean there is no doubt about the royalist character of the engravings. These plates are almost certainly the item ‘Forty Plats of the History of *Gennises*’ that appeared in the catalogue of the London printseller Peter Stent in 1662 and 1673.[[51]](#footnote-51) Stent specialized in selling engraved plates depicting maps, diagrams and portraits and other images that served utilitarian purposes. These plates were being supplied again, as G. E. Bentley, Jr. observes, at the beginning of a period when, ‘[f]or about seventy years from 1659, ambitious booksellers who had no right to publish the King James translation of the Bible nonetheless profited from its popularity by issuing suites of Bible-prints which the purchasers could bind with Bibles, even with Bibles purchased from the bookseller who sold them the prints’.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Indeed, several of the surviving copies are found pasted into Bible editions from 1649, 1651 and 1660.[[53]](#footnote-53) The third and final known state of the plates is found in the Brotherton manuscript, which is consistent with the author’s likely purchase of them in the 1660s.[[54]](#footnote-54) The main difference from earlier states is that the plates have been numbered from one to forty; there is, however, some mis-numbering where the original engraver mistook the roman numerals for 3 and 8. Roper, like the owners of the copies in the 1649 and 1660 Bibles held at the British Library, follows the correct sequence of the biblical narrative rather than the mis-numbered plates: in all three copies Plate 24 (which illustrated Genesis 18 and 19) is placed between Plates 29 and 30 so that the images about Abraham’s prayer for Sodom (Gen. 19) follow his encounter with the three angels (Gen. 18). Likewise, the plate depicting Jacob’s ladder and his first meeting with Rachel (Plate 34, Chapter 28 mis-numbered XXIII) is correctly positioned after the plate in which Jacob misleads his father by pretending to be Esau (35).[[55]](#footnote-55) Though the fifth and fourth plates (depicting the fifth and sixth, and third and fourth days of creation) are placed in the wrong order on Page 9 in the Brotherton manuscript, we nonetheless see that Roper positioned the plates attentive to where they belonged in the correct narrative sequence.

Attitudes towards and access to religious imagery probably divided along confessional lines more clearly than any other area of English religious culture did at this time. Interpretation of the second commandment (‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image’) was crucial. Els Stronks cites the example of Zacharias Heyns’ Dutch translation (1616) of Du Bartas’ *La Sepmaine*,which acquired abstract depictions of God the Father (not unlike those in the *Illustrations to Genesis*) in the second edition of 1621; even that concession was apparently insufficient, however, as no further illustrated Bibles or biblical poems would be printed until 1637.[[56]](#footnote-56) The *Illustrations to Genesis* were High Church additions to the Bible consistent with the ecclesiastical outlook of their dedicatee, Charles I. The *Semaines*, similarly, had sought to present the scriptural narrative in a fresh way that presented the truths of God in a more accessible and comprehensible way: back in 1580 Gabriel Harvey annotated his copy of *The Images of the Old Testament* (1549), which includes engravings by Hans Holbein, with the remark that: ‘Sallust, du bartas, the only brave Poet in this sacred vein’.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Roper takes ownership of the plates’ royalist function by including three other Stuart engraved portraits in the manuscript. There are two oval engravings (the source of which is unknown) that show the famous episode of Charles II hiding in the Boscobel Oak with the caption ‘Worster Citty ye Battell’, and an image of Charles on the throne with the four cardinal virtues. The accompanying lines are: ‘Loe heere y*ou*r noble Peeres | prepar’d doe stand | to live and dye | at y*ou*r Com*m*and || And heere y*ou*r people doe | with willing vowes | offer both hands and harts | to adorne y*ou*r Browes’ (p. 158).[[58]](#footnote-58) These might possibly also be engravings that Peter Stent sold, though they are of a lower quality to the image of ‘Charles II in the Royal Oak’ listed in his 1662 catalogue.[[59]](#footnote-59) The third image is William Marshall’s engraving of Charles the Martyr from *Eikon Basilike* (also found in a Folger volume containing the *Illustrations*).[[60]](#footnote-60) These moments bring the royalist subtext to the surface, coming at points in which the poet digresses from the biblical narrative to comment on contemporary politics. Joseph’s narrative is broken up by a series of poems with headings that directly turn to contemporary matters as an extension of Roper’s biblical exegesis. First is a poem called “May 29 1669” (MS pp. 157-60), which is ‘[t]his Day which we in Memorie Doe Keepe’ (p. 162, l. 1), that begins with a comparison between the persecution suffered by Joseph and Charles, and alludes to the Boscobel oak episode depicted in the accompanying engraving (‘A Spreading Hollow oake God Did Provide’, l. 20; see also l. 24). The meditation considers God’s ultimate mercy in preserving the royal line:

T’was God Preserv’d Our Soveraigne Night and Day   
Secret Nor Open traitors Could Not Him, Slay  
And When Gods time Was Come Brought him Againe   
A Glorious King Amongst Us to Remaine. (p. 163, ll. 41-44)

Contemporary reflections re-appear later in the Joseph story in a series of five poems on the regicide including “Our King’s Sorrowings and Sufferings” (MS pp. 187-189), “England Misery” (MS pp. 189-90) and “England’s Sad Lamentation” (MS pp. 190-193) that use the biblical narrative as the base-line for a horrified re-imagining of 1649 that moves between present and past tense, e.g.:

Our King is Dead Laws and Religeons Gone  
Tyrants Oppresse us Our Miserys Unknowe

Egyptian Darkenesse Hath us Over Spread   
 Dying Religion Hides Her Fainting Head  
 To Liberty of Goodnesse wee were Dead (p. 165, ll. 1-5)

The poem uses scriptural narrative as a basis for political reflection, in a way that is more focused on specific dates and events than Du Bartas of Sylvester were in the *Weekes*. Roper’s verse brings out the royalist aspect of Sylvester’s poetics in her devotional exercises dedicated to a Queen. She inserts moralizing reflections, such as a meditation on love and chastity inspired by Joseph’s resistance to Potiphar’s wife that draws on 1 John 48 (as noted in the margin beside the fifth line below):

Love is the Strongest Passion of the Heart  
 And if Well Placed Beares A Gracefull Part  
To God and Man it is A Pleasing thing  
 Over Mens Passions Love must be the King  
(God is Love) it was mans Pride once made Him Die  
 Because He’d make Himselfe Like the Most High  
(God Made Him so) if Man His Loue Had Shown  
 And Kept His Gods Commands He had it Known  
Yet God showres Downe His Love we shall it Finde  
 If He sees Us to Charitie Inclined (p. 142)

Like Bradstreet, Roper is able to blend in imagery and details taken from other sources. She refers to Thomas Lodge’s translation of *The Famous and Memorable Works of Josephus* (1602), which was reprinted throughout the seventeenth century, in a marginal reference ‘Josephus 689’ (p. 65, see also p. 41) that directs the reader back to the section of Lodge’s translation about Sodom’s punishment:

sometime both fertil and rich: now all burnt, being (as it is reported) for the impiety of the Inhabitants consumed with lightning and thunder. To be short, one may here behold as it were the sign and reliques of that fire, that by Gods appointment destroyed the place: for one may yet see as it were the fashion and tokens of five Cities, and trees and fruits springing up in the ashes[[61]](#footnote-61)

Roper’s verse follows the passage closely:

The Signes and Reliques then of Sodoms Fire  
By Gods Appointment in that Place Appeare  
Trees Spring up in the Ashes which doe Beare  
All Kinde of Fruits which to the Eye are Rare (p. 159, ll. 51-54)

As with Bradstreet, Du Bartas’ pattern guided how Roper quoted and incorporated images and details from ancillary texts. This is done in a way that is coordinated within a larger patriarchal structure; in Roper’s case, of the Stuart monarchy. Her text, written in a plain style and grounded on biblical exegesis, is presented as a devotional exercise, but is ambitious in seeking support from the monarch. *Sacred Historie* is conservative in the poet’s willingness to follow Du Bartas’ pattern but lively in its response to the poet’s personal and political circumstances.

# Conclusion

Du Bartas’ innovations in scriptural narrative poetry had been absorbed into English devotional culture in a wide range of divine prose and poetic writing that shared his sense of poetry’s divine purpose. Devotional verse occasionally made manifest its shared methods and spiritual outlook through specific borrowings. Hester Pulter’s fifty-three emblem poems, which were probably composed in the mid-1650s at her family’s estate at Broadfield, Hertfordshire, once again show (as had Quarles and Roper) how compatible Du Bartas’ verse was with pro-royalist emblematic literature.[[62]](#footnote-62) Pulter’s verse displays a sensitivity towards nature that closely resembles Du Bartas’ in detecting traces of divine symbolism that point to models for human conduct. Pulter’s poetry exemplifies the way that Du Bartas’ eclecticism had been naturalized in English divine verse.[[63]](#footnote-63) This coherence between the sacred and secular comes into focus in Pulter’s tenth emblem, which meditates on parental love and is specifically inspired by details from Lodge’s translation of Simon Goulart’s commentary:

Some birds there be, sure they no love do lack,  
Who bear their sprightly young ones on their back,  
But of all beasts the cunning canibal  
In kindness to her young excels them all.  
For she a wallet hath beneath her breast;  
When they’re pursued in that her young do rest.  
As the sea fox all fishes doth outgo  
In subtlety, so doth her love o’erflow; (10.1-8)[[64]](#footnote-64)

The manuscript has marginal references to three passages in the commentary. A note beside ‘birds’ in the first line directs the reader to Goulart on how the female bird of paradise lays her eggs in a hollow in the male bird’s back, ‘which by this meanes are kept as it were in a Box’.[[65]](#footnote-65) A note on ‘canibal’, with a mis-written page reference (the relevant folio in the 1621 edition of the commentary is not ‘165’ but ‘265’), explains that the ‘canibal’ is a marsupial that carries its young in a ‘bagge made of skinne’ (2M1r) on her belly where they can hide. A third note contains a reference to storks that is not picked up in the poem; however, an anecdote about the sea-fox, which goes on to explain that the mother swallows her young when threatened, does have a counterpart in Goulart (2F3r-v). A parallel example of vipers swallowing their young may also grow from a passage in the commentary about young vipers gnawing their way out of their mother’s belly (2L2v). Other marginal notes direct the reader to Pliny and Plutarch, and evoke (as Pulter often does) local observations corroborating these stories; we learn that a ‘canibal’ was apparently brought to Baldock Fair in 1653. In these ways, Pulter’s emblems show how *Devine Weekes* might casually influence a poet who was composing moralizing verse that drew on her reading and lived experience. Sylvester’s and Du Bartas’ poetic structures, which by this point had been part of English literary for almost half a century, gave writers a way to discover new forms of expression to describe their situation, informed by the social and political forces that were acting on them.

The close Stuart association with the poems’ and translation’s inception came to harm their reputation, and it is fitting that the final edition of *Devine Weekes* was printed just a year before the English Civil War began. One reason for the dramatic collapse of Du Bartas’ reputation in Scotland and England is that his poetry was usually accompanied with an implicit or explicit link to James I or his successors. While Du Bartas’ influence was by no means restricted to royalists, the poems did uphold the intellectual foundations of the Stuart monarchy. In English translation his poems regulated creative freedom, encouraging poets to expand upon a rigid framework that tied them to scriptural precedents and discouraged original interpretation. Decades later, Bradstreet’s and Roper’s poems show how the authoritative patterns of thought represented in Du Bartas’ poetry had started to become part of the nation’s past.

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