

## **David Lyndsay and George Buchanan: contrasts in reforming theatre**

Sarah Carpenter

University of Edinburgh

Scotland is notoriously short of surviving early play texts. Pre-Reformation and sixteenth-century evidence suggests a thriving theatrical culture at all levels of society, but scripts for drama are frustratingly thin on the ground. (Mills 1927; Carpenter 2011) This makes the work of Sir David Lyndsay and George Buchanan all the more precious. These writers both composed plays which were performed to acclaim in the 1540s and 1550s, and their plays were influential not only in production, but in print publication later in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Because their texts survive, Lyndsay and Buchanan are now particularly key figures in early Scottish drama. Their plays are strikingly different in subject matter, genre and tone; but this very difference attests to the rich and varied theatrical possibilities and achievements of their time.

For a long time, received opinion has tended to assume that the lack of early Scottish drama was primarily an effect of the Reformation of 1560 and the hostility of the new reformed Kirk to all things theatrical. (Brown 2011) Opposition to the established Roman Catholic Church had focused not only on doctrine but on the ritualised performance of worship: the Latin liturgy, the vestments, incense, bells and processions came to be seen as a kind of play-acting, inhibiting religious sincerity. Suspicion also fell on the ceremonial celebration of church festivals and the popular

drama sometimes associated with them, which was denounced as superstitious. As throughout Europe, Reformation thinking came to be typified by a resistance to the association of religion with the theatrical, and an emphasis on plainness and sincerity that could sometimes lead to wider anxieties about performance.<sup>1</sup> Such thinking has been assumed to lead to a blanket condemnation of dramatic activity that reinforced the Scottish Kirk's hostility to all forms of theatre.

More recently, however, valuable work both on drama and performance and also on the culture of the early Reformed Kirk itself has shown us that the picture is very much more complicated than this straightforward causal argument implies. John McGavin has demonstrated how richly a theatrical imagination pervaded the culture of sixteenth-century Scotland, inflecting the interaction of classes and communities in both formal and informal ways. (McGavin 2007) Equally, Margo Todd has recovered evidence of the highly theatricalised culture of the early Kirk, whose own reformed ritual practice drew the congregations into community spectacle and participation in the performance of their faith. (Todd 2002) Despite the insights generated by this new research, it remains true that religious hostility to certain forms of dramatic activity gradually intensified after 1560. (Carpenter 2011, pp. 19-21) The pageantry and play associated with religious festivals and seasonal celebrations, as well as public and, at the end of the century, especially commercial drama, became increasing objects of attack. But it is significant, if not ironic, that the playwrights Lyndsay and Buchanan are both figures who were, at least in the decades following 1560, powerfully associated with the movement towards the Reformation. In their very different ways, they both demonstrate how vitally the early phases of Reformation thinking in

Scotland, as elsewhere in Europe, engaged with theatre as an instrument not just of entertainment, but of education, intellectual debate and political inspiration. (Norland 1995, pp. 128-160)

As our two best-known early playwrights – both also writers of distinction in other fields and important political and cultural figures – Lyndsay and Buchanan are almost inevitably paired. There are indeed many similarities between them. They were both theatrically active in the mid-sixteenth century, and both used drama not simply to entertain but to intervene in the new currents of reformist thinking. For both of them playwriting was a secondary aspect of busy professional lives: Lyndsay was a courtier, herald and diplomat throughout the reign of James V and Mary Queen of Scots' minority, and a productive poet. (Edington 1995) Buchanan, spending much of his early adult life in France, was an internationally respected scholar, teacher and political theorist. (McFarlane 1981) Each of them was intimately concerned in the childhood education of a Stewart king. Lyndsay was appointed 'ischar to the Prince', the future James V, apparently from his birth in April 1512. (*LHTA* 4, p. 441) In later poetry he reflects in affectionate and intimate terms on his role as companion, playmate, and entertainer of the young king, as well as writing for him a variety of poems of advice.<sup>1</sup> Buchanan was more formally appointed as tutor to the young James VI, by all accounts a strict taskmaster who was remembered by the king in his maturity with fear as well as admiration. (Hadley Williams 1996, pp 201-26) Their writings demonstrate that both men had broader interests in education and in kingship, interests presumably stimulated by their role in princely training.<sup>2</sup> After their deaths, both were respected as sage and much-read political and religious writers, especially

admired by post-Reformation Protestants. However, the differences between the two, both as dramatists and as political and religious thinkers, seem at least as strong and as striking as their similarities. This is particularly evident in the texts of their surviving full-length plays, which certainly pull in very different directions, using contrasting modes and styles, addressing different audiences and generally revealing rather different purposes and values. These manifest differences are testimony not just to the individual writers' preoccupations and preferences; they also show the vitality and flexibility open to Scots drama in the mid-sixteenth century, and the different ways in which theatre could engage with Reformation thinking.

Although Lyndsay was some twenty years the older, he and Buchanan were contemporaries whose adult lives overlapped for some thirty years between around 1525 and 1555. But they coincided at the Scottish court for a very brief period of their working lives. Lyndsay (c1486-1555) spent most of his career attached to the royal court, eventually taking the role of senior herald, the Lord Lyon, King of Arms. Buchanan (1506-1582), although he grew up in Scotland, spent most of his early adult life in France; he did not return home permanently until the early 1560s, after Lyndsay's death. But he spent a few crucial years in Scotland between 1535 and 1539, years in which he seems to have been moving in the same circles as Lyndsay. During this time both writers were separately associated with writings critical of the Roman Catholic Church. Buchanan's poems *Somnium* and *Franciscanus* attacked the Franciscan friars and monastic corruption, while Lyndsay's early poems, *The Complaynt*, *The Dreame* and *The Testament of the Papyngo* similarly outspokenly criticised clerical behaviour. Lyndsay is also generally assumed to be the author of an

interlude, often seen as a precursor of *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, performed at Linlithgow at the beginning of 1540, which explicitly challenged the oppression and corruption of the church. Intriguingly, both writers were asserted at the time to enjoy ambivalent patronage from James V for these works. An eyewitness of Lyndsay's interlude reported it was performed 'by the Kings pleasour, he being prevey therunto', while Buchanan claimed that James had privately encouraged him to write the *Franciscanus*.<sup>3</sup> Although the king did not in fact follow his uncle Henry VIII towards Reformation, these anecdotes suggest a climate of royal flirtation with reforming ideas in the later 1530s, in which both writers were involved. We have no indication, however, that the two men engaged directly with each other. Lyndsay makes no mention of Buchanan in any surviving writing. Many years later, in his *History of Scotland*, Buchanan implies that he did have some personal acquaintance with the older man. He cites him admiringly as his authority for an anecdote about James IV on the eve of Flodden, calling Lyndsay 'a Man of approved Worth and Honesty, (and a great Scholar too); for in the whole course of his Life, he abhorred Lying; and if I had not received this Story from him as a certain Truth, I had omitted it as a Romance of the Vulgar.' (Buchanan 1690, 13: p. 21) This is the only evidence of direct communication or friendship between the two; but they cannot have avoided being aware of each other's work and reputation.

In spite of these various links and shared context, Lyndsay and Buchanan are distinctively different writers. Their literary standing and reputations suggest widely differing aims and readership. Lyndsay was always recognised and prized as an especially Scots writer; although interested in European political affairs and culture,

he directly addressed himself to the people and contemporary problems of Scotland. Henry Charteris, the first Scottish publisher of Lyndsay's collected *Works*, invoked vivid recollections of an admirably remembered local writer. In his preface to the 1568 volume he modestly declines to write about Lyndsay's life because: 'the memorie of him is bot as yit recent, and not out of the hartis of mony yit levand'. (Lyndsay 1568, + ii<sup>r</sup>) Charteris goes on to attack editions of Lyndsay's work printed elsewhere 'For thai haif gane about to bring thame to the southerne language, alterand the vers and colouris thairof, in sic placis as thai culd admit na alteratioun: quhairfoir the native grace, and first mynd of the wryter, is oftentimes pervertit [...] Lat Lyndesay now as he war yit on lyif, / Pas furth to lycht, with al his sentence hye'.<sup>4</sup> Charteris clearly saw Lyndsay's Scottish identity as a crucial aspect of the value of his works. Buchanan, on the other hand, who began his writing career in France and wrote primarily in Latin, had an international reputation as a humanist scholar. His literary works were published, circulated and admired right across Europe. They were rarely designed for a primarily Scottish readership, and attitudes to his writing in his homeland seem to have been somewhat ambivalent. According, to Sir James Melville who knew Buchanan as an old man, he was seen in his native Scotland as 'a man of notable qualities for his learnyng and knowledge in Latin poesie, mekle maid accompt of in other contrees'. (Melville 1827, p. 262) While Melville also acknowledges that he was 'of gud religion for a poet', there is an underlying sense that Buchanan was respected more for his international standing than for his appeal to his countrymen.

Charteris's and Melville's remarks bring into focus one crucial feature of the two playwrights' contrasting literary circulation, and one which has powerful

implications for their major play texts: while Lyndsay wrote in energetic and colourful colloquial Scots, Buchanan employed the elegant and expressive humanist and European *lingua franca* of Latin. For each of them this was not just a literary choice, but a strongly held political and emotional one. Lyndsay valued and vehemently urged the use of the native language. Writing in Scots himself, he also argued for other important writings – religious, legal, and literary – to be translated into the vernacular. He aimed to avoid intellectual and religious exclusion and elitism, and to empower ordinary individuals, as he argued in an important passage in his last great work *Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour*:

Thocht every commoun may nocht be one clerk,  
 Nor hes no leid except thare tounge maternall,  
 Quhy suld of God the marvellous hevinly werk  
 Be hid frome thame? I think it nocht fraternall. (Dialog 551-5)

He questions the historic authority ascribed to Latin and Greek, pointing out that they were only the vernaculars of their own day. After all, ‘Had Sanct Jerome bene borne in tyll Argyle, / In to Irische tounge his bukis had done compyle’ (627-8). It is the responsibility of rulers, he argues, to ensure that the social and religious framework of society is accessible to all:

I wald sum prince of gret discretioun  
 In vulgare language planelye gart translait  
 The neidfull lawis of this regioun.

Than wald thare nocht be half so gret debait

Amang us peple of the law estait....

Bot lat us haif the bukis necessare

To common weill and our salvatioun,

Justlye translatit in our tounge vulgare. (*Dialog*, 650-54, 678-80)

Lyndsay thus has a sharply defined readership in mind: he presents his work to the nation of Scotland, in every social class. Direct address to reader and audience is a particular characteristic of his writing. While his early poems are often addressed personally to the king or to fellow courtiers, this passage of the *Dialog*, titled 'Ane Exclamatioun to the Redar', claims that: 'to colyearis, cairtaris and to cukis, / To Jok and Thome my ryme sall be diractit' (549-50). His use of the vernacular is a deliberate political and educational choice.

Buchanan, on the other hand, was addressing an international, highly educated community; he was sharing ideas and modes of thinking developed from classical writers, through the intellectual debates of contemporary Europe. This is plain in his earlier literary writings, plays and poems; but it is also apparent even when in later life he seems most concerned with the politics and affairs of Scotland. His *History of Scotland* and the *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (On the Powers of the Crown in Scotland) are both framed in terms of European debate, to an international audience.<sup>5</sup> For him, Latin was the medium of civilisation through which sophisticated ideas

could be expanded, developed and eloquently expressed. He remarks in the opening of his great *History of Scotland*, that he was pleased that:

the old Scottish language doth by degrees decay ... I joyfully perceive those barbarous Sounds, by little and little, to vanish away, and, in their place, the sweetness of Latin Words to succeed: And in this Transmigration of Languages, if one must needs yield to another, Good-now, of the Two, let us pass from Rusticity and Barbarism, to Culture and Humanity; and, by our Choice and Judgement, let us put off that uncouthness which accrued to us by the Infelicity of our Birth.

(Book 1, p. 6)

Buchanan is probably talking here about Gaelic rather than Scots, but the principle of preferring Latin to the vernacular, and his value for Latin as an index of higher civilisation, is very clear. When these two dramatists comment on the language they use, therefore, they are also revealing important and deeply held views about their audiences, about the role and purpose of literature, and even about their subject matter.

The relationship between the two as dramatists is naturally complex. Both were engaged in varying modes of dramatic performance across several decades, and a variety of theatrical forms and audiences. This paper does not have the scope to explore the range and richness of their full dramatic composition, but will focus on what can be revealed by a direct comparison of their full-length, scripted plays. When

we come to look at these, we find the two playwrights' different approaches, priorities and convictions vividly performed.

Lyndsay's most famous dramatic work, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, was a large-scale political allegory performed on the Castle Hill at Cupar in 1552 and on the town playfield in Edinburgh in 1554. (Lindsay 1931, 4: pp. 139-43) Memorable in its own day, its revival by Tyrone Guthrie in the second Edinburgh Festival of 1948 and subsequent periodic performances have established it as an iconic drama of Scottish political and national identity. No text survives from Lyndsay's lifetime, but extended extracts from what appear to be the Cupar version were copied into the Bannatyne manuscript in 1568, and a full text of what seems to have been the Edinburgh version was printed by Robert Charteris in 1602. The play is the culmination of a career in which theatrical activity of various kinds played an important role. Apart from the 1540 interlude, Lyndsay is known to be the author or organiser of a variety of pageantry, ceremonial and display for which no texts survive.<sup>6</sup> In his early years at court he was also an actor: almost the first reliable reference to him in the royal Treasurer's Accounts concerns the payment for a blue and yellow 'playcoat' for his part in a play performed before James IV and his court in 1511. (*LHTA*, 4: p. 313)

Buchanan's key dramatic works come from much earlier in his career and are modelled on Greek classical drama. He translated two tragedies of Euripides from Greek to Latin: *Medea* and *Alcestis*. He also wrote two original Latin tragedies, in Euripidean form and style but on biblical subjects: *Baptistes*, on John the Baptist, and *Jephthes*, the story of Jephtha's sacrifice of his daughter from the book of Judges. All

four of these were probably written in Bordeaux in the early 1540s, just after his stay in Scotland, being composed for performance by the pupils at the Collège de Guyenne where Buchanan was teaching during these years. Like Lyndsay, he had some involvement in theatrical show beyond his major plays although in Buchanan's case this was primarily with scripts and not, as far as we know, with wider aspects of staging and production. He was, for example, the author of a variety of Latin verses for masks and disguisings at the courts of both Henri II in France, and Mary Queen of Scots in Scotland in the 1560s.<sup>7</sup>

While both men were writers of richness and sophistication within their chosen literary forms, in comparing their major plays it is not so much the scripts as the broader theatrical aspects of their plays that are most revealing. In different ways, both of them show how the currents of pre-Reformation thinking at the time might be examined and communicated not only in writing but in performance. This exploration of the plays will therefore focus not so much on the texts, but on the theatrical dimensions of audiences and of staging both of which shape the medium of performance on which drama depends.

By comparing the audiences for which Lyndsay and Buchanan wrote we can learn a great deal not only about the first productions and the reception of their plays, but about their purposes in composing them. The *Thrie Estaitis* was played outdoors, in public spaces, to widely mixed audiences. The proclamation for the Cupar production, enlivened by a bawdy farce, issued a general summons the week before the performance to all 'Richt famous pepill' to 'get up richt airly' and 'cum see our

play’; (Lyndsay 1989, p. 273) while the Edinburgh audience apparently included spectators from all social classes, the play being performed to: ‘the Quene Regent and ane greit part of the Nobilitie, with ane exceding greit nowmer of pepill’. (Lyndsay 1568, +2<sup>v</sup>) That Edinburgh audience has especially important political implications. The *Thrie Estaitis* is a ‘state of the nation’ play which addresses issues of direct contemporary political and religious significance to the realm of Scotland – in particular the reform of perceived abuses in the Roman Catholic Church. It also, however, questions the role of the nobility, of public education, and of the monarch’s relationship with parliament. It does this in direct, spectacular, often very comic and accessible form. The performance at the Greenside in Edinburgh, which was attended by a crowd ranging from nobles to ordinary townspeople, was financially supported by the burgh council, and staged before the staunchly Roman Catholic Mary of Guise. Significantly, she patronised this civic performance barely three months after she was invested as Regent for her young daughter Mary Stuart in April 1554.<sup>8</sup> It is a striking tribute to the vibrancy with which Lyndsay’s theatre was openly permitted to address such immediate and contested issues to an audience which ranged right across the political and power spectrum, drawing them all into the political debate.

Buchanan’s first audiences were quite different. He records that he initially wrote his tragedies, ‘in obedience to the custom of the school which required a play every year’. (Buchanan 1939, p. xxi) Humanist scholars and reformers endorsed school performance of plays, especially in Latin, as a useful educational tool: it promoted moral and intellectual understanding, a confident public presence, and language learning. The German reformer Melanchthon argued that:

the reading of tragedies is thoroughly beneficial to young people, both for preparing their minds for the many responsibilities of life and the control of immoderate desires, and for giving training in eloquence. For there is a splendour of words and of gesture entering the eyes in order to affect the mind.

(McFarlane 1981, p. 200)

In writing his plays for his own pupils, Buchanan ensured that his first audiences were also his first actors: the students both performing and watching learned by participation. They experienced not only the ideas the plays raised and the language they used, but the principles of debate and of public engagement. Buchanan's plays certainly seem to have 'affected the minds' of his pupils at a high level. One of his most famous students, the writer Michel de Montaigne, never forgot the experience of performing in Buchanan's tragedies. In his youth, said Montaigne:

I had an assured countenance and a suppleness of voice and gesture ...: [before the age of twelve] I played the chief characters in the Latin tragedies of Buchanan ... which were put on in our Collège de Guyenne with dignity. (de Montaigne 2004, p. 198)

Buchanan aimed by his plays to extend civilised and cultured engagement with important moral and political ideas and debates, within a protected academic and educational environment. Once they were published,<sup>9</sup> his tragedies circulated in literary and scholarly circles across Europe. Buchanan had built on humanist interest in ancient Greek drama, extending its subject matter into biblical material and its language into accessible eloquent Latin. The results were greatly admired, the

Elizabethan poet Sir Philip Sidney claiming that ‘the tragedies of Buchanan do justly bring forth a divine admiration’. (Sidney 1947, p. 48) Their fame spread through reading rather than performance, and it is indicative of the way in which they were valued that Buchanan’s work was especially prized for its faithfulness to classical models. Another English writer, Frances Meres, praised his *Jephtes* as ‘amongst all moderne Tragedies [...] able to abide the touch of Aristotle’s precepts and Euripides example’. (McFarlane 1981, p. 201)

The two playwrights addressed their different audiences through strikingly contrasting styles of staging. The *Thrie Estaitis* is very substantial: the Edinburgh performance was said to last from nine in the morning until seven in the evening, making it an all-day, enveloping performance experience. Since it is an allegorical drama, many of the characters represent personified ideas rather than human individuals; but the stage action has a vivid concrete immediacy that rejects any idea of intellectual abstraction. In the first half of the play, the young and inexperienced King Humanitie is encouraged into a passionate affair with the Lady Sensuality that visibly distracts him from his kingly responsibilities. While the king retires with his lady to his bedchamber, his rule is taken over by three allegorical vices, Falsehood, Flattery and Deceit. They enrich themselves as the realm sinks into disorder, until finally Divine Correction is sent from God to call on the king to reform government and right the wrongs of the nation. The second half then moves to the public sphere of Scotland, and consequently to the immediate and present life of the audience. The king calls a Parliament of the Three Estates – the Clergy, Nobility and Burgesses. John the Commonweal, a down-to-earth figure who represents the wellbeing of the

nation, emerges from the audience to complain with fierce colloquial intensity to the parliament about the misgovernment of Scotland. The vices are eventually hanged, and the corrupt Clergy are exposed.

In presenting this action, the *Thrie Estaitis* moves dynamically between allegory and realism, between often very outspoken or physical humour and impassioned seriousness. Lyndsay's vernacular Scots is fluid and expressive, shifting easily between registers: he can express angry compassion for the poor and powerless, bawdy humour with arse-kissing and sexual farce, quick-moving satirical wordplay, and the heightened formal rhetoric of Parliament and preacher. Yet, many of the play's points are made through staging rather than through the speeches of the characters. Lyndsay exploits, for example, special costume and choreographic effects to convey moral and political ideas economically and vividly. The vices who deceive the King comically disguise themselves in church vestments, reinforcing their transformation by ceremonially baptising each other with new names – Falsehood, Flattery and Deceit become Sapience, Devotion and Discretion (while making humorous play of forgetting their new titles). The action is not only an engaging routine, but visually stages the King's naivety in his failure to recognise their dangerous moral nature. The Three Estates themselves open the second half of the play with a spectacularly comic entrance, demonstrating their comprehensive and institutional incompetence before anything is said by ceremonially processing to the parliament backwards. Later, when the Parliament finally acknowledges the strength of the case mounted by John the Commonweal, the Estates' acceptance of the central political importance of the common good and national well-being in their proceedings

is similarly demonstrated through action: 'Heir sal thay claith Johne the Commonweil gorgeouslie and set him doun amang them in the Parliament' (l. 3802). When, finally, the corrupt clergy are finally exposed, their Church vestments are torn off, dramatically revealing that underneath they are wearing the costumes of Fools. Charteris records this comic moment as especially morally striking: 'they denudit of their upmaist garmentis, thay war fund bot verray fulis, hypocrites, flatteraris, & nouchtie persones'. (Lyndsay 1568, p. +iiv) Many crucial ideas of the play are thus conveyed through visual, as much as verbal devices; the words act to confirm and reinforce the idea already so vividly embodied by the gesture. Lyndsay similarly introduces song, music and spectacle to animate the stage action, and intensifies the engagement of the spectators through extensive direct address. This tends to blur any sustained separation between stage and audience, emphatically including the spectators in the play's theatrical analysis of the state of Scotland.

Buchanan's plays are theatrically less mixed and varied, relying not so much on spectacle and not at all on comedy. Following the model of Euripides, Buchanan creates relatively short and tightly focused, but emotionally and rhetorically intense and sustained theatrical experiences. As Montaigne suggested, they aim at a level of 'dignity', a constantly maintained seriousness of tone which Philip Sidney in his analysis of tragedy refers to as 'well-raised admiration' (47). Sidney contrasts this with the more mixed theatrical styles of the London theatre of his own day which he dismisses as 'mongrel tragicomedy' which 'thrust[s] in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters' (46) – a description which sounds much closer to Lyndsay's mixed style. The focus of Buchanan's plays is verbal rather than

visual: it is speech that establishes both the emotional and the moral impact of the drama. This is well illustrated in *Jephthes*, a play which dramatises the terrible dilemma faced by the Old Testament Jephtha.<sup>10</sup> In return for victory in battle against the Ammonites, he rashly promises to sacrifice to God the first living thing he meets when he returns home, which painfully turns out to be his only daughter, Iphis. Torn between fulfilling his vow to God and his paternal love and responsibility, he finally chooses to complete the sacrifice. The emotional and moral tension of this central situation is not theatrically lightened or varied by any secondary actions or changes of tone. There is also very little physical or visual action on stage. The play moves between eloquent monologues expressing heightened emotions of gratitude, foreboding or anguish; philosophical reflections on the enormity of the ethical and religious challenges posed by the situation; and sharply pointed one-line stychomythic exchanges that encapsulate and intensify the agonising dilemmas. Both actors and audiences are absorbed into contemplation of the profound, inescapable choice. The moral dilemma is not simplified or even, in the end, finally resolved: although the young girl chooses to accept death, the competing arguments about what Jephtha should have done remain with the audience.

It is not surprising that Buchanan's reputation as a dramatist spread throughout Europe largely by reading rather than performance. *Jephthes*, like his other plays, conveys its ideas and emotional effects by its words, and while these are no doubt enhanced by expressive and eloquent declamation, they are accessible to readers in a way that Lyndsay's action and visual effects are not. Buchanan's original plays, *Jephthes* and *Baptistes*, were each published several times during the sixteenth

century, with editions appearing in Paris, Graz, London, Edinburgh, Frankfurt and Strasburg. (McFarlane 1981, p. 499) His appeal to educated European readers was demonstrably widespread and long lasting.

It is clear, in summary, that Lyndsay and Buchanan both offered audiences potentially compelling theatrical experiences: but they are radically different ones. These plays engage different senses, different moods, offer subjects and actions of very different kinds. They cast their audiences in different roles, inviting markedly different kinds of response. But in spite of these contrasts in dramaturgical practice, the two playwrights shared in the political and religious concerns of their own day and both used the theatre to contribute to the debates and the thinking that led up to the Reformation. At first glance the subject matter of their plays might seem as contrasting as their styles. Lyndsay focuses his allegory directly on contemporary abuses and contemporary institutions: the workings of the royal court, the Church and the Parliament. Buchanan chooses biblical stories, far distant in time and place, exploring the dilemmas confronting individuals. Yet in these contrasting actions we can see shared concerns and responses to similar issues. Buchanan's play *Baptistes*, for example, presents John the Baptist as a reformer, unjustly threatened by a corrupt religious establishment and tyrannical ruler. That central situation is not so unlike the oppression of John the Commonweal by the Estates in Lyndsay's *Thrie Estaitis*. Both playwrights support ideas of reform, although their application varies. Lyndsay openly engages with the situation in Scotland and the contemporary reality of his audience, while Buchanan uses his biblical narrative as a universal emblem that might be applicable to any age or land. In his prologue he enigmatically invites the audience

to draw topical parallels, pointing out that the centuries-old story presents *quod recenti memoria viget* ('what is fresh in recent memory' l. 46). But the wide range of suggested contemporary interpretations of John the Baptist and Herod makes it clear that Buchanan is more concerned with the principle than any specific individual or country.<sup>11</sup>

Within a broad support for church reform, the two writers touch jointly on more specific concerns. Lyndsay attacks the investment of the Roman Catholic Church in ritual and ceremonial at the expense of teaching and preaching, criticising the Spirituality who only 'mummil matins and hald your clayis cleine' (2946). In Buchanan's play, the Pharisees who oppose the Baptist are similarly linked to 'ancient rites' which they believe John to be attacking. Lyndsay raises a surprising sympathy for his worldly Prioress, when her nun's gown is finally pulled off to reveal a seductive 'kirtill of silk under hir habite' (3682). She laments her family 'That me compellit to be ane nun, / And wald nocht let me marie' (3688-9). Buchanan records that he too wrote a play, though it no longer exists, which 'denounced fathers who drove their reluctant children into the cloister without thought as to whether they were suited to that way of life'. (McFarlane 1981, p. 117) The two men share the Protestant suspicion of monastic life.

But the similarity between Lyndsay and Buchanan does not only consist of some shared reformist subject matter. In their different ways, the playwrights both use theatre pedagogically, to engage audiences in the principles of Reformation thinking. Lyndsay's urge is to involve audiences directly, in their own language, in questions of

current religious and political practice. By his dramatising of outspoken challenges to those in authority, by the presentation of parliamentary government, and by the unifying figure of John the Commonweal, the spectators are invited by the play to take responsibility for their own role both as Christians and as citizens. (Carpenter 2011a online) This kind of emphasis on individual engagement and responsibility, and on education, is a central feature of much reformed thinking. Buchanan also aimed to engage his audiences in such new ideas. His plays move beyond any unquestioned acceptance of Church authority or religious mystery. He exposed his students, and later his readers, to the forms and methods of classical literature, to moral and rational debate. Through involvement in drama, and especially in its words rather than its spectacle, he encouraged them to take a rational approach to emotion and to encounter challenging intellectual questions about power and its exercise, and about moral responsibility. This echoes reformist ideas about the importance of the word, reasoned discussion and argument, over the emotive mystery of the image. In spite of the common assumption that the Scottish Reformation was inimical to drama, it is clear that neither Lyndsay nor Buchanan saw theatre itself as detrimental to the new reformist tendencies. On the contrary, they both clearly found the stage a dynamic and powerful way to involve audiences in the new ideas and new ways of thinking. Both seem to have seen theatre not as offering superstitious ritual or mindless spectacle, but as empowering its spectators to think and to act in the new debates of their day.

---

Endnotes.

<sup>1</sup> For Reformation thinking on drama, see Howard B. Norland 1995, pp. 128-48.

<sup>2</sup> See eg David Lyndsay, 'The Dreime', 'Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour' in Selected Poems, ed. Janet Hadley Williams (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary

Studies, 2000); Buchanan, *A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots : A Critical Edition and Translation of George Buchanan's De Jure Regni Apud Scotos Dialogus*, ed. Roger A. Mason, and Martin S. Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> See Greg Walker, *Medieval Drama: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 538; I.D. McFarlane, 'George Buchanan's Franciscanus: the History of a poem', *Journal of European Studies*, IV (1974) 126-39.

<sup>4</sup> *Warkis*, Ai<sup>v</sup>, Aii<sup>v</sup>. For Charteris's commitment to Scottish writing and culture see Joseph Marshall, 'Henry Charteris', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5176>.

<sup>5</sup> See, eg, the Introduction to Buchanan's *Dialogue on the Law of kingship among the Scots*, ed Roger Mason and Martin S. Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> For the range of Lyndsay's theatrical experience see Sarah Carpenter, 'Towards a Reformed Theatre: David Lyndsay and Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis' in *Yearbook of English Studies*, 43 (2013), 195–214.

<sup>7</sup> For translations of Buchanan's dramatic verse see Philip Ford and W. S. Watt, *George Buchanan, Prince of Poets* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Records suggest a sudden increase in public drama in the months following Mary's assumption of the regency: see Mill, *Mediaeval Plays*, 180-83.

<sup>9</sup> Of Buchanan's two original plays, *Jephthes* was first published in 1554, *Baptistes* in 1577, both with at least two further editions during the sixteenth century.

<sup>10</sup> The story is taken from Judges 11, 30-40. See *George Buchanan: Tragedies*, ed. and trans. Peter Sharratt and P. G. Walsh (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Interpretations of John the Baptist and Herod range from Berquin and François Ier, Patrick Hamilton and James V, to Buchanan's own rather surprising suggestion of Thomas More and Henry VIII. See McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 382ff.

## References.

*Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, 12 vols. (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1877) [*LHTA*] 4: 441

BROWN, I. 2011. Introduction. In: BROWN, I. ed. *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp. 1-5.

BUCHANAN, G. 2004. *A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots : A Critical Edition and Translation of George Buchanan's De Jure Regni Apud Scotos Dialogus*. MASON, R. A. and SMITH, M. S. eds. Aldershot: Ashgate.

BUCHANAN, G. 1690. *The History of Scotland*. Book 13. London: Edward Jones, for Awncsham Churchil.

---

BUCHANAN, G. 1983. *Tragedies*. SHARRATT, P. and WALSH, P. G. eds. and trans. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

BUCHANAN, G. 1939. Vita. MACRAE AITKEN, J. Translated in: *The Trial of George Buchanan: Before the Lisbon Inquisition*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, p. xxi.

CARPENTER, S. 2011a. Monarch, State and People: dramatised ideologies in the 1550s. In: *Theta 9 Ideologies in Debate: Spectacle and Representation in Tudor England* (<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/publications/Theta9/>).

CARPENTER, S. 2011b. Scottish Drama until 1650. In: BROWN, I., ed. *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp. 6-21.

CARPENTER, S. 2013. Towards a Reformed Theatre: David Lyndsay and *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. In: *Yearbook of English Studies*, 43, pp. 195–214.

EDINGTON, C. 1995. *Court and Culture in Renaissance Scotland: Sir David Lindsay of the Mount*. East Linton: Tuckwell Press.

FORD, P. and WATT, W. S. 1982. *George Buchanan, Prince of Poets*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

LHTA. 1877. Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House. 4: p. 313.

LINDSAY, D. 1931. *The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, 1490-1555*. HAMER, D. ed. Edinburgh: Blackwood. vol.4, pp. 139-43.

LYNDSAY, D. 1989. *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. LYALL, R. ed. Edinburgh: Canongate, Appendix II.1, 271, 273.

LYNDSAY, D. 2000. The Dreame, Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour. In: *Selected Poems*. Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies.

- 
- LYNDSAY, D. 1568. *The Warkis of the Famous and Vorthie Knicht Schir David Lyndesay of the Mont*. Edinburgh: Henrie Charteris.
- McFARLANE, I. D. 1981. *Buchanan*. London: Duckworth.
- McFARLANE, I. D. 1974. George Buchanan's *Franciscanus*: the History of a poem. *Journal of European Studies*, IV, pp. 126-39.
- McGAVIN, J. 2007. *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*. Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- MARSHALL, J. Henry Charteris. [online] In: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5176>.
- MELVILLE, J. 1827. *Memoirs of His Own Life*. Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club.
- MILL, A. J. 1927. *Mediaeval Plays in Scotland*, Edinburgh.
- MONTAIGNE, M de. 2004. On Educating Children. In: *The Essays: a Selection*, SCREECH, M. A. trans. London: Penguin.
- NORLAND, H. B. 1995. *Drama in early Tudor Britain, 1485-1558*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- SIDNEY, P. 1947. An Apology for Poetry. In: *English Critical Essays*. JONES, E. D. ed. London: Oxford University Press.
- TODD, M. 2002. *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- WALKER, G. 2000. *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- WILLIAMS, J. Hadley. 1996. Sir David Lyndsay and the Making of King James V. In: WILLIAMS, J. Hadley, ed. *Stewart Style 1513-1542: Essays on the Court of James V*. East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996.