

REHABILITATING GEORGE BUCHANAN

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Introduction

In the early eighteenth century George Buchanan was still the subject of much admiration, controversy and scholarship. Thomas Ruddiman (1674-1757) collected together all the works he could find and published an edition that he hoped would be the last word in scholarship.¹ He was promptly criticised on all sides and a bitter row ensued.² This was partly because he sought to update Buchanan's history by bringing it into line with new internationally accepted norms of historiography.³

Samuel Johnson, an Englishman not well disposed to the Scots, uniformly gave liberal praise to George Buchanan, as a writer saying that he was the only man of genius his country ever produced.⁴ Even at the end of the century when George Chalmers published a life of Ruddiman with new anecdotes about Buchanan he was still a major figure.⁵ His icon in a catholic France by the 18th century was damaged by his heresy and by his treatment of Mary queen of Scots 'his benefactress' and his seditious maxims. But he was generally represented as a man whose talents had made him worthy of a universal esteem.⁶

In 1906 there were considerable celebrations for the 400th anniversary of Buchanan's birth. In 1982 there was some celebration of the 400 anniversary of his death. I. D. McFarlane biography was published in 1981 for this quarter-centenary.⁷ P. J. Ford and WS Watts produced *George Buchanan, Prince of Poets* Aberdeen 1982 and John Durkan produced a

¹ Thomas Ruddiman (ed.), *George Buchanan Opera Omnia*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Freebairn, 1715).

² A collection entitled *Ruddiman's Tracts* brings many of these together.

³ Douglas Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman: A Study in Scottish Scholarship of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), *passim* but especially p. 12, 62.

⁴ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, edited by R. W. Chapman and revised by J. D. Fleeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), Ch 37.

⁵ George Chalmers *Life of Ruddiman to Which are Subjoined New Anecdotes of Buchanan* (London John Stockdale, 1794).

⁶ M. Crevier *Histoire de l'Universite a Paris* (Paris: Desanit and Saillant, 1761), Vol 5, p. 233.

⁷ I. D. McFarlane, *Buchanan* (London: Duckworth, 1981).

piece on education and the laying of new foundations in Humanism⁸ In 2006, however, there was remarkably little notice taken of the 500th anniversary of his birth. Beyond an exhibition at St Andrews by Roger Mason and a revamped exhibition of books at Glasgow University originally put together by John Durkan in 1982 there was an interesting Lansdowne lecture by Jamie Reid Baxter a history research fellow of the university of Glasgow for the Franco-Scottish Society of Scotland⁹, festivities in Killearn the place of his birth and two books written by local Killearn people.¹⁰

Buchanan, over the last hundred years, has become one of the vilified figures of Scottish history and it is important to try to understand why. Why have we developed an image of him as a physical and mental bully, a nasty minded anti-monarchical Calvinist? Why have those interested in education presented him, wrongly I would suggest, as an educationalist already outdated at the end of his life and why has he served as a template for the debate over renaissance humanism and the difficulties of marrying the pedagogical issues involved in the culture of the classroom with political issues of freedom and authority, creativity and tradition, nature and custom?¹¹ Some-one like Rebecca Bushnell thinks that James reacted violently to teachings that had been imposed on him with violence although the evidence for the violence is a single recorded instance of exasperation. She claims that Buchanan's schoolroom "was a place for oppositional thinking and politics at the same time that it was meant to fashion a king" the evidence for which is at best indirect.¹² Only the dwindling band of scholars of Renaissance Latin literature particularly in France, still find him worthy of study and respect.¹³

⁸ John Durkan, 'Education: The Laying of Fresh Foundations' in John MacQuarrie (ed.), *Renaissance Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

⁹ Jamie Reid Baxter, *George Buchanan: Scotland's Renaissance Man* (Stirling: Smith Art Gallery and Museum Publication, 2006).

¹⁰ Catherine Organ, *George Buchanan: A Forgotten Scot* (Local History Society, 2006). She is a local councilor in Killearn.

¹¹ Rebecca W Bushnell 'James, Buchanan and Neo-Classical Thought' in Roger Mason (ed.), *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹² Rebecca W. Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 63-65, 69-71.

¹³ Grahame Castor and Terence Cave (eds), *Neo-Latin and the Vernacular in Renaissance France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Dorothy Gabe Coleman, *The Gallo-Roman Muse: Aspects of Roman Literary Tradition*

Rehabilitating George Buchanan

I would conclude that loss of respect for him in English speaking countries is because our present culture has rejected the things he stood for, the things that were important in the culture of his time, and for the most part we have therefore lost interest in the people who with some labour established them. The modern educational structure of the Renaissance with its emphasis on classical scholarship that still survived in 1906 has gone and with it any widespread appreciation of the Latin language and poetry that it fostered. With it too has largely gone the religious devotion to the Bible and the code it inculcated.

The image projected is of an ageing pedant who was not uniformly kind to his last pupil, James VI and I, and who turned viciously against James's mother, Mary Queen of Scots. Even Jenny Wormald presents him as a 'harsh mentor' to James and speaks of James's 'bleak childhood'.¹⁴ But is this true? His other famous pupils, like Michel Montaigne, do not describe him as harsh. I propose briefly to re-examine his contribution to the educational and literary history of his time and especially to his European role that the Scots largely ignore. It is an irony that his international importance is neglected in our present age that sees globalism as the new and exciting development. In part this is because one thing that is seen as critical today is the supposedly inexorable dominance of the English — or at least the American — language. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular is to be seen as significant because it is a Tyndale or a Coverdale translating into English and promoting, it is argued, the understanding of the Scriptures,¹⁵ not a Buchanan forming his translation and all his writing in elegant and austere Latin. This is to misunderstand the historical importance of the work on the Scriptures done by others, including Buchanan, in other languages. In part it may also be because our society is dominated by money-grubbing capitalism and this was one of the things that Buchanan (and many of his fellows) regarded as highly undesirable.

in Sixteenth-Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Raymond Lebègue, *George Buchanan: sa vie, son oeuvre, son influence en France et au Portugal* (Coimbra, 1931); Raymond Lebègue, *La Tragédie française de la Renaissance* (Brussels, 1954); Donald Stone, *French Humanist Tragedy* (Manchester: MUP, 1974).

¹⁴ Jenny Wormald, 'Tis true I am a Cradle King' in Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (eds), *The reign of James VI* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp 244-245.

¹⁵ The publications are endless, for a recent one see James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Rehabilitating George Buchanan

Buchanan himself, I suspect, would not be surprised at his own fall from grace. In the 1540s he wrote to his pupils at the college of Guyenne

Man's laboured work Death levels low,
Power fails, pomp disappears,
The rocks asunder cleft must bow
To all devouring years

The poet's art alone can rise
Above fate's stern decree
Alone Oblivion despise
And Hell's dread mastery.¹⁶

The dispersal of relics and the shadows of time that obscured the memory of things past and left little more than fragments ready to fall into dust were indeed part of the expectations of all in the Renaissance.¹⁷

Buchanan's Career

To understand Buchanan we need briefly to recap his life and to recognize that except for about four years in the 1530s he spent all his adult life on the Continent until he returned to Scotland in Mary Queen of Scots wake in about 1561. We tend to take at face value Buchanan's presentation of his time in Europe as being an exile but this may be misleading. Mentally, he was more French than Scottish. Indeed, lines from the poem he wrote in 1552 after leaving Portugal and England make no mention of the land of his birth He described himself as a French patriot and speak only of returning, if necessity pressed, to Portugal.

...you, blessed France,
All hail, Sweet nursing mother of the finer arts...
Welcoming the world as guest, while with the world
your own
Riches in turn you ungreedily share...
If with a patriot's love I do not love and cherish you
as long as I live,
Oh then I will not refuse
To see again the starving deserts of Portugal

¹⁶ Translation taken from Vernon Hall, *Life of Julius Caesar Scaliger* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1950), p. 131.

¹⁷ Alfred de Bougy, *Histoire de la Bibliotheque Sainte-Genevieve* (Paris: Comptois des Imprimeurs-Unis, 1847), p. 2.

And its farmlands so productive of penury¹⁸

It seems clear that Paris was the physical focus of his life until 1561 although his circle of humanist friends was what gave him his identity. In Paris he was at the centre of critical developments in religion, literature and education. At St Barbe he would have taught St Ignatius Loyola and his small group of friends, later he would have known John Calvin as well as Cop and many other humanists who sought reform inside the existing Church structure.

He was not committed to a particular college at the university although Saint Barbe with its links to Portugal was important in his early career and probably the place in which his interest in educational theory was nurtured. The system at the university while it expected that a new master would serve as a 'regent' at a college for two or three years did not encourage such a position to become permanent and it was a normal next step for those who could not afford the costs of the many years of further study for a doctorate in law or theology, a position in which Buchanan undoubtedly found himself, to find a patron. In 1531 Buchanan therefore became tutor to a Scot, Gilbert Kennedy, 3rd Earl of Cassilis "a youth of promising talents and excellent disposition," as he wrote when he dedicated to Cassilis in 1533 his first published work, (printed by Robert Stephens) a translation of Linacre's rudiments of Latin grammar, When he returned with Cassilis to Scotland he was introduced at court and obtained an even more prestigious tutorship, to James V's bastard son by Elizabeth Shaw, another James. This brought him a room in Holyrood palace and he evidently in his spare time started to write court poetry of an anti-clerical bias, *Somnium* and *Franciscanus*, a pastime that did not mark him out from others at the court except in the skill and grace of his Latin. *Somnium*, indeed, was a version of Dunbar's earlier Scottish poem.. There were three orders of Franciscans in Scotland the Observant Franciscans, the conventual and the third order. The Observant Franciscans had been introduced into Scotland by Mary of Gueldres and continued to be patronised by the royal family, James IV wrote to Julius II how he had completed and furnished for them house after house and an Observant friar was the king's confessor so it isn't clear why (according to the traditional story) they were suddenly in disfavour at court or why the king should press Buchanan to write against them. The attack was centred on the power given them by the confessional to direct the innocence and ignorant multitudes to do things that suited the order's

¹⁸ From the parallel text, Paul J. McGinnis and Arthur H. Williamson (ed.), *George Buchanan: The Political Poetry* (Edinburgh: Scottish Historical Society, 1995).

political ends, a dangerous claim in the circumstances. Anti-clerical satires were common at the time. As well as the well-known work by David Lindsay, Alexander Cunningham wrote a poem lampooning Thomas Douchtie, the hermit who founded the chapel of our Lady of Loretto at Musselburg in 1533 and John Keillor a friar executed in 1539 wrote a play comparing the clergy to Christ's persecutors. Accusations of Luxury, hypocrisy immorality and malversion were put forward by others as well as Buchanan. Lindsay, for some reason had immunity but the others were attacked and imprisoned in 1539. The problems raised by the Franciscanus did not deter Buchanan from writing satires on the clergy. At Guyenne he wrote one on the Dominicans and another on the Antonines.

He escaped from Scotland and made his way to London but soon returned to Paris and accepted the invitation of André de Gouveia, principal of the newly founded College of Guyenne to go to Bordeaux as professor of Latin and teacher of the First class. He wrote several of his best works, especially the two dramas, *Jephthes* and *Baptistes* for the pupils at the school to perform in public.¹⁹ With possible threats of further clerical process, and critically ill, he left Bordeaux going first to the house of Montaigne's father and later to the house of Scalinger before he returned to Paris and was appointed regent in the college of Cardinal Lemoine, headed by his old friend John Gelida., where he taught some members and associates of the future Pléiade (Jodelle, Belleau, La Péruse, Grévin) Here he claimed to have lived on 'most familiar terms' with John Erskine prior of Inchmaholme and brother of the lady 'who had caused all my trouble, with William Cranstoun' and with David Painter now archbishop of Glasgow and Scottish ambassador to the French court. This is more significant than it appears. Erskine was one of the anti-English party and so on good terms with Beaton (who was dead in 1546) and was one of Mary Queen of Scots' preceptors and guardians who had wafted her to France in 1547 but he may have introduced Buchanan at the French court. His poetry made him immediately acceptable. Henri Estrenne said that Buchanan 'united in himself Virgil, Ovid, Horace and Catullus' This was the time when Buchanan became friendly with other notable figures, Cardinal Jean du

¹⁹ P. Sharratt and P. G. Walsh (eds), *George Buchanan, Tragedies* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983); There is a critical edition by Steven Berkowitz, *A Critical Edition of George Buchanan's Baptistes and of its Anonymous Seventeenth-Century Translation Tyrannicall-Government Anatomized* (New York: Garland, 1992). The Latin text of several editions and the 1643 English translation, *Tyrannicall-government anatomized* are available on EEBO (Early English Books Online, STC3939 and Wing B5298).

Bellay and Charles de Marillac archbishop of Vienne and Theodore Beza, not yet more than a poet. He seems to have been under the patronage of various members of the house of Guise including Jean of Lorraine (1498-1550) third son of René and brother of Claude first duke of Guise and met the young Charles cardinal of Lorraine Claude's second son. One can list a large number of his Parisian friends at Paris, where he was a leading figure among the humanists who were just then effecting a revolution in the teaching of the classics. In his defence to the Inquisition²⁰ he claimed to have been at the royal court where the cardinal of Lorraine and other like the chancellor of France were his patrons and he lived in the house of Lazare de Boeuf for several months. At this time he met members of the group of French poets like Ronsard who called themselves the Pleiade and clearly influenced their development.²¹

In 1547, at Gouveia's invitation, he went to lecture in the newly established College of Arts at the Portuguese University of Coimbra and there, in 1549, he was arrested by the Portuguese Inquisition. Sentenced in June 1551 to abjure his errors, he was imprisoned in the monastery of São Bento in Lisbon where he began to translate the *Psalms* into Latin verse. Released in February 1552 he sailed for England but soon made his way back to Paris where in 1553 he was appointed regent in the College of Boncourt. By this time he was a much respected author and frequented many of the hotels of the literary aristocracy of the day and participated in the life of the court, producing masques and court ceremonial poetry.

In 1554-5 he accepted the office of tutor to the son of the Maréchal de Brissac, Timoleon. He probably stayed at the French court as Timoleon was part of the future Charles IX's entourage but he might have traveled in Italy with De Brissac, the most famed French general of the age, whose entourage was praised as regal and like a court. In 1559 Buchanan was taking priestly orders so that he could accept a benefice²² but after the death of Francis I he followed Mary Queen of Scots back to Scotland and became

²⁰ Published in *Arch. Hist. Portugal* vol 4 the originals are in the Archive national da Torre do Tombo *Inquisicao de Lisboa* A translation and commentary is provided in James M Aitken, *The Trial of George Buchanan before the Lisbon Inquisition* (Edinburgh and London: Owen Boyd, 1939), see p. 104.

²¹ W. Waterschoot, 'Marot or Ronsard? New French Poetics among Dutch Rhetoricians in the Second Half of the 16th Century' in J. Koopmans et al (ed.), *Rhetoric-Rhetoriques-Rederijkers* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1995), pp. 141-156.

²² Elizabeth Bonner, 'George Buchanan: Subject of the King of France and Priest of the Catholic Church?' *Innes Review* (in press)

a member of the new Presbyterian Church. For several years he remained a member of her Court. In 1563 Mary made him 'parcioner' of Crossraguel. The first edition of his version of the Psalms was dedicated to her, he read Latin authors with her and supervised the masques she put on for entertainment. When James was born he wrote a *Genethliacon* in praise of the birth. His educational stature was respected. Parliament sent him to inspect universities and in 1566-7 although a layman, he was moderator of the church.

His breach with Mary after her marriage to Bothwell and his subsequent vitriolic attack on her has never been satisfactorily explained but Buchanan was close to the earl of Moray even though it may have been Moray's mother that had caused him trouble over the writing of *Franciscanus*. After Moray's death he was said never to have smiled again. In 1570 he became privy seal, a member of the king's council and the king's tutor. It may have been a bitter sweet appointment as he remembered the promising young men he had earlier tutored, Cassilis, James Stewart, Timeleon de Brissac — all dead.

His role as Privy Seal brought him into the inner circle of Scottish government and must have brought him a small income. In 1578 he resigned the position in favour of his nephew, and retreated to Edinburgh as he said as one dead from the society of the living, but James is supposed to have visited him on his deathbed. Whether Buchanan truly said that he was 'going to a place where there are not many kings' may be doubted but fitted the picture people wanted of a man of sharp but fair tongue. He wrote his most controversial works in this time although he delayed publishing them so that some lamented that he lost all this time and wrote nothing but others said that he was not idle. He died after a further period of illness early in 1582.

Buchanan's Character

Since it is assessments of his character that have been most critical in recent years, it is the logical place to start a reassessment. He was a man who provoked strong reactions. His enemies described him as the demon of lies, one of those who sacrifice all friendship, faith and honour for the pleasure of cutting words.²³ The sharpness of his epigrams made him enemies.

²³

Ernest Gaullieur, *Histoire du College de Guyenne d'apres un grand nombre de documents inedits* (Paris: Sandoz and Fischbacher, 1874), p. 142.

Rehabilitating George Buchanan

His friends, on the other hand, praised his serious nature, and said he never did anything against his principles in literature and philosophy. A saying attributed to Major in his early days spoke of his being endowed with an ardent temperament, but at the same time susceptible to taking whatever direction his friends suggested and of an inquiring character that could never suffer an absurdity.²⁴ Most of the short biographies of Buchanan in various European languages are favourable.²⁵

He clearly had loyal friends as well as enemies and they wrote to him in what for the time were affectionate terms. Latin is a language in which individual words had many layers of meaning. For his friends to address him as a man *magni ingenii* meant that they saw him as a man of strong character and disposition wise and thoughtful inventive and a genius²⁶ They described him as a man to whom things they found difficult came easily and Molvinus in 1572 also spoke of him as a man who treated him as a most beloved son (with all the New Testament vibrations of that) and our light and life. Others spoke of him as upright and worthy. Some even spoke of his *Suavitas*, his agreeableness.²⁷ Going a bit overboard, one even spoke of him as *Buchananus trismegistus* —thrice greatest, an epithet of Mercury —for his erudition, his foresight (prudential) and his authority²⁸. He clearly had many good friends who addressed him as their great and unique friend and sent him poems of praise or addressed him with adjectives usually reserved for monarchs such as “*serenissime*”²⁹. What his relations with women were is harder to gauge but Deborah Shuger sees him as interested in father-daughter relations and as sympathetic to women.³⁰ Certainly in Coimbra he wrote a cycle of poems addressed to a prostitute called Leonora and a straight love poem to a lady called Neacoa but they may be fictional people.³¹

²⁴ Antonio Jose Teixeira, *Documentos para a Historia dos Jesuitas em Portugal* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1899), Vol. III, p. 621-622.

²⁵ Teixeira, *Documentos*, pp. 620-626 is remarkably good. Probably based on the *Life* but with some additions

²⁶ Bodleian Library, Smith MS 77 p27. The Smith manuscripts are copies of documents kept by many different people. Most but not all are in Ruddiman’s collected works.

²⁷ Bodleian Library Smith MS 77 p28.

²⁸ Bodleian Library Smith MS 77 p34.

²⁹ National Library of Scotland Advocates MS 15.1.6 129.

³⁰ Debora Kuller Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 136-141.

³¹ Alan J Steele, *George Buchanan: Scotsman and Europe* (Greyfriars Lectures, 1992), p. 13.

In return, Buchanan spoke of some with affection. In the mid 1540s when he was having one of his periodic long bouts of illness he wrote a poem, entitled *Ad Ptolemaeum Luxium Tastaem et Jacobum Taevium cum articulari morbo laboravit* addressed to the friends who had helped him and describing what they had done for him. Writing to Theodore Beza from Scotland in the 1570s he said that he was sending him 'his most beloved son' (Hieronymi Grolotini) and asking Beza in turn to treat him as a son a relationship acknowledged by the voyager 'although unworthy'.³² These friendships were not tinged with envy. Robert Britannus (a native of Arras) and a colleague at Guyenne, was a friend of Buchanan's and was not jealous of Buchanan's superior poetic gifts the two men exchanged letters and poems.³³ Peter Young regularly wrote of Buchanan as 'my most caring (and careful) father'.³⁴ On one occasion James wrote a letter to Buchanan who was away, 'My father, when you are here nothing could be more gratifying or beneficial, your absence is the saddest and most unpleasant thing that can be' and urging him to get the business over quickly so that he can return.³⁵

To us he had his cruel side. He was present in 1570 when John Moon after being tortured made a confession to Buchanan and Duncan Nairn sheriff deputy of Stirling.³⁶ This was not the only occasion of this sort and sets him in the harsher culture of his age that saw severity as an appropriate characteristic of the mentor.

Buchanan and Humanism³⁷

The humanist ideal, as Britannus wrote was to rise on your own merit, through difficult ways to arrive at virtue.³⁸ The humanist was also seen as a person widely skilled and informed and of impeccable moral character. This would have been pressed on him from his earliest schooling. His first teacher, John Major was already discussing a topic that would later exercise Buchanan's mind, the moral and legal questions arising from the discovery of the New World in 1510. He claimed that the natives had political and property rights that could not be invaded, at least not without compensation..³⁹ Although he was mainly admired for his Latinity,

³² Bodleian Library Smith MS 77p153.

³³ Ernest Gaullieur, *Histoire du College de Guyenne d'apres un grand nombre de documents inedits* (Paris: Sandoz and Fischbacher, 1874).

³⁴ Bodleian Library Smith MS 77 p155.

³⁵ Bodleian Library Smith MS 74 p169 My translation of James's Latin. *Calendar State Papers Scotland* III p384.

³⁷ D. F. S. Thomson, 'George Buchanan: The Humanist in the Sixteenth-Century World' *Phoenix*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Winter, 1950), pp. 77-94.

³⁸ Gaullieur, *Histoire du College de Guyenne*.

³⁹ Teixeira Documentos, pp. 622.

Buchanan as a humanist was bound to develop ideas on the best form of the state. He was close to many of the critical events of the first half of the 16th century especially with regard to the New World. Living in Paris, Bordeaux and Portugal he would have known what was happening in Brazil and elsewhere because the priests sent back accounts of their mission that were promptly published.

It is impossible to write of humanism without taking into account their ideas of the state. And so although this article is primarily concerned with his literary and educational role his political views must be briefly defined.⁴⁰ Buchanan's late political work against which James VI was said to have reacted so violently have classified him as a monomarch, that is some-one who resisted the idea of absolute monarch⁴¹ but had he quite changed his views on the role of the king? In his *Genethliacon*, a poem written to celebrate the birth of James VI (1566) he had written of the prince as setting an example to all his people and of ruler and ruled as working to the same end, as well as stressing the importance of early training in religion, virtue and justice, moderation and chastity.⁴² Was this Buchanan's ideal? Was it, indeed, why he agreed to take on once again the task he had fulfilled since his twenties, educating a young man?

He certainly strove to fulfil the ideal of the humanist as a well rounded scholar, writing on many things from the spheres to botany Lesley B Cormack for instance in an article on botany writes of his interest in

⁴⁰ For example Robert Britannus published a book entitled *Roberti Britannii de optimo statu reipublicae liber. Huic adjuncta est versibus scripta Gul. Langei Bellaij deploratio Parisies*. 1543.

⁴¹ This puts Buchanan in the same camp as Calvinists like Theodore Beza in his *De jure Magistratum* (1574), the protestant Francois Hotman, *Francogallia* (1573), and Philippe du Plessis-Mornay *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (1579), see J. P. Sommerville 'Absolutism and royalism', in J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 347-373; Paul Kleber Monod, *The Power of Kings: Monarchy and Religion in Europe 1589-1715* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁴² See in Paul J. McGinnis and Arthur H. Williamson (ed. and trans.), *George Buchanan: The Political Poetry* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society Lothian Print, 1995), Vol. II, pp. 340-343 and their comments on pp. 430-431 and 446.

Scotland's natural history⁴³ and others have written on his interest in the ancient British past⁴⁴

Buchanan as a Latinist

One of the common practices of scholars in every country of Western Europe was the production of versified translations of the *Psalms* and in this Buchanan was acknowledged to be outstanding. His Latin versions were used in schools (both catholic and protestant) across Europe for centuries partly because as well as their religious use, they employ so many Latin verse forms.⁴⁵ and as school texts they embedded their political ideas in the minds of readers who probably knew them by heart. Today, comparatively few people are sufficiently familiar with the psalms to recognise the subtle modifications Buchanan has made. A quick comparison of two psalms in an English translation of his Latin and in the King James version may show how the emphasis is all. Psalm One reads⁴⁶.

Buchanan version

Happy is he whom from the straight path
The corrupt influence of ungodly men has not
deflected.

Who has not held to a course of error or,
Sitting in their pestiferous chair
Given to scoffers a favourable ear
But seeks the path to a better life and in his mind'
Ponders on God's laws both night and day.
He shall be like a tree that hath been planted
On the brink of a well-watered bank
Which the Dog-Star's violent heat scorches not
Nor the winter blasts. But liberally blessed the farmer

⁴³ Robert Tittler and Norman Jones (eds), *A Companion to Tudor Britain* (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 522.

⁴⁴ E. J. Cowan and R. J. Finlay (eds), *Scottish History and the Power of the Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), *passim*.

⁴⁵ These are demonstrated in Appendix two of Ruddiman's edition.

⁴⁶ His Latin reads *Felix ille animi, quem non de tramite recto/ Impia sacrilegae flexit contagio turbae:/ Non iter erroris tenuit, sessorve cathedrae/ Pestiferae, facilem dedit irrisoribus aurem:/ 2. Sed vitae rimatur iter melioris, et altâ/ Mente Dei leges noctesque diesque revolvit./ 3. Ille, velut riguae quae margine consita ripae est/ Arbor, erit: quam non violento Sirius aestu/ Exurit, non torret hiems; sed prodiga laeto/ Proventu beat agricolam: nec, flore caduco/ Arridens, blandâ dominum spe lactat inanem.*

Rehabilitating George Buchanan

With a plentiful increase, nor with a fading blossom's
smiles
Flatters with pleasant hope its disappointed owner.⁴⁷

King James version

Blessed is the man
Who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
Or stand in the way of sinners
Or sit in the seat of mockers
But his delight is in the law of the Lord
And on his law he meditates day and night
And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of
waters,
that bringeth forth his fruit in his season;
his leaf also shall not wither and whatsoever he doeth
shall prosper.

Buchanan's version does two things that are absent from the Authorised version. It makes the subject active in determining his behaviour and adds 'of his path in life'. The description of the tree sets it in an overtly paradisaical garden.⁴⁸ When one considers that this was written when he was in detention in the monastery of São Bento in Lisbon after his brush with the Inquisition it makes it likely that it reflects his own attitude towards personal religious practice.⁴⁹ Even more significant of the way in which his Latin paraphrases of psalms reveal his ideas is his version of Psalm 72⁵⁰, which underlines his attitude to the proper role that rulers should play

Buchanan version(translated)

1. O God, grant to thy king to execute judgment
after the pattern of thy righteousness, and grant to the
son

⁴⁷ Jamie Reid Baxter's translation.

⁴⁸ Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995).

⁴⁹ Philip Ford, 'George Buchanan's Court poetry and the Pleiade', *French Studies* vol. XXXIV, no. 2 (1980), pp. 137-152.

⁵⁰ 1. Da tuae Regi, Deus, aequitatis/ Ius ad exemplum dare, filioque/ Regis, ut legum patriae ad salutem/ Flectat habenas./ 2. Ut regat iustus populum institutus/ Pauperum questus facili tuorum/ Aure cognoscat, dirimatque lites/ Legibus aequis./ 3. Pace laetentur iuga montiumque/ Horridi saltus: genitrix quietis/ Aequitas colles amet, asperosque/ Ruris alumnos./ 4. Ius suum det pauperibus, potentum/ Curet ut ne vi tenues premantur./ Destruat quisquis miseros dolosis/ Litibus urget.

Rehabilitating George Buchanan

of the king, that to the safety of his country he may manage the laws' reins.

2. That he may govern the people by just decrees,
and thy poor people's complaints with a favourable ear may hear,

and determine disputes by impartial laws

3. In peace let the tops of the mountains and the gloomy forests rejoice: let the mother of quiet, fairness, love the hills and the hardy natives of the country

4. Their right let him give to the poor, ensuring that by the violence of the powerful the weak be not oppressed,

let him destroy whosoever oppresses the wretched with treacherous lawsuits.

King James version

Give the king thy judgments, O God

And thy righteousness unto the king's son

He shall judge thy people with righteousness

And thy poor with judgment

The mountains shall bring peace to the people,

And the little hills by righteousness

He shall judge the poor of the people,

He shall save the children of the needy

And shall break in pieces the oppressor.

Here what one notices is the concrete examples as against the abstract., the reference to treacherous lawsuits, the use of justice rather than judgment and the reference to impartial laws. Much of his religious verse is in this vein and at the end of the 16th century his religious poetry was said to speak with the now-silenced voice of a world before the massacre of St Bartholomew, where there had been real hope that Protestant and Catholic would somehow be able to coexist.

Ideas on Education

As ideas about education are primarily developed in relation to the upbringing the individual has experienced it is necessary to consider the University of Paris as it was in Buchanan's time. It had four Faculties, Theology, Canon Law, Medicine and Arts. The MA was a prerequisite for study for a higher degree in one of the first three but many years – generally fifteen — were needed for completion of a doctorate. Students did not formally matriculate but were taken on by a master who prepared them for

the examinations. This took about three and a half years. The student registered with one of the four nations —France, Picardy, Normandy and Germany and paid it a fee according to his means. By 1500 the nations were not doing most of the teaching; that was the employment of the forty odd secular colleges. Mendicant Friars, excluded from these had their own schools in their convents.⁵¹ The first exam gave the baccalaureate the second the licence of teaching and after a time the masters. The master then became a regent for at least another one and a half years.⁵² Many of the scholars were not in one of the colleges but attended classes as they chose at different places. Theology was taught at a number of colleges including the college de Montaigu⁵³ where Major taught but the Sorbonne and the college de Navarre were the most prestigious.

Humanist of varying backgrounds had started to attempt to modify the rigid teaching formulas that were embedded in this structure forty years before Buchanan was born. Scholars began to reject the medieval form of exercises that were purely grammatical in favour of attempting to recreate the world in which the authors lived. That required a whole new mode of exposition and a whole lot of new books. St Barbe where Buchanan was first employed, was a ‘top’ college in which the new humanist plan for teaching was being developed initially by Mathurin Cordier (b 1469) whose works Buchanan used. Cordier was praised for his love of children and his ability to make himself understood by them. He wrote several books to teach children Latin and Christian faith at the same time and when necessary used the vernacular. To ensure he was understood, he recognized the need for games and rest and avoided corporal punishment where possible. His principal work, *Les Colloques*, in which children were presented in circumstances where they would recognize themselves as lazy, railing, cheating and the like was used down to the 19th century. The poem on education that Buchanan wrote about the miseries of the teacher, which is often taken literally as his attitude to the work, in which he deplore the inattention, indifference and ill-will of his pupils — one is sleeping, one has paid a friend to reply in his place, another has lost his stocking, another is looking at his foot that has poked through his shoe, this one is feigning illness, that one is writing to his parents, is in fact a turning into sharp verse the stories of Cordier’s *Colloques* Buchanan was deeply involved in these

⁵¹ Gray C Boyce, *The English, and German Nation* (Bruges: St Catherine Press, 1927); Madeleine Toulouse, *La Nation anglais-allemande* (Paris: Recueil Cirey, 1939).

⁵² James K Farge *Orthodox and Reform in Early reformation France: the Faculty of Theology of Paris 1500-1543* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), pp. 11-15.

⁵³ Marcel Godet, *La Congregation de Montaigu* (Paris: H. Champion, 1912).

contemporary changes to educational methods that were gathering momentum in the colleges at which he taught.

At the college of Guyenne Buchanan helped Gouveia modify even the St Barbe curriculum to improve its humanist content.⁵⁴ The medieval dispute was eliminated. The private teachers of the better-off pupils were not allowed to teach from books other than those prescribed for the classes, or to give separate homework or to use the rod. All the professors were given the right to attend the classes of others and to offer corrections. The philosophy course was reduced from three years to two; much of the teaching of logic was eliminated and the courses were opened to outside auditors. Mathematics and Greek were taught in a one hour lesson between the mid-day class and the evening one. In the junior classes continuous examination was introduced so that progress could be monitored. Purpose built classrooms with benches and in some cases a semi-circular arrangement were constructed. The practice was for a few lines to be dictated for all to learn the by heart and then for one to recite a phrase, the next to paraphrase it in Latin and third to translate it into French and so on with the master adding a commentary and finally asking questions designed to clarify the intention of the author. Then the pupil had to write themes or Latin verse on a topic given by the master and these were publicly corrected. On Saturday the pupils themselves were the judges – each class examining the work done in the previous week by the class below. In the very junior classes (12th and 11th) pupils were, if necessary, taught to read by their seniors by the A Ab Ac Ad method. In the seventh sixth and fifth classes the students studied grammar and read Cicero with a play or two of Terence or a letter by Ovid and in fourth more Cicero plus longer Latin themes and in third they were required to write Latin verses, in the second to study Latin history and Virgil and in first Horace and the art of oratory.

When Buchanan was asked to provide ordinances for the Colleges of St Andrews he followed the humanist pattern that he had helped establish at St Barbe, Guyenne and Coimbra. The lowest class did elementary Latin and read Terence. The method the teacher is to follow – dictating the words and the letters and the pronunciation and then an interpretation in Scottes corresponding to the Latin. Checking the work was done by a ‘nomenclator’ that is a pupil in a higher grade who has to check the written material, show the regent any faults and would be penalized himself if he missed things — an early form of the ‘pupil teacher’ system more familiar to us. and then to

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Marcel Bataillon, *Etudes sur le Portugal au temps de l'humanisme* (Acta Universitatis Conimbricensis, 1952), p 116.

Rehabilitating George Buchanan

hear the ‘bairns’ against the next lesson and to ensure that it was written without any fault. They were also constrained to speak Latin and to write some composition according to their capacity. In fifth class they were to read Terence, and the easier epistles of Cicero and in fourth Terence, Cicero and Ovid, in third the epistles of Cicero and Ovid and learn the syllabary and first meet with rhetoric and some of the book of Linacre’s grammar (that is Greek in Buchanan’s own version presumably) in 2nd and 1st Cicero’ rhetoric, and orations Virgil, Horace, Ovid and some of Homer and Hesiod. The pupils engaged in debates and were awarded ‘bonnettes’ for prizes. He goes on to the college of philosophy and the college of divinity.⁵⁵

Historians of education often assume that educators before the present time were ignorant of psychology and the pattern of children’s mental development but Buchanan expressed his views on such things.

‘How weak is youth of its own nature! How apt to be roused by insults, set aflame by ambition, fired by opposition! How deceived by the snares of the crafty, how incited by the advice and opinions of the learned! How often swept on in headlong rush by the fury of their passions! How beset by the ambushes of the Devil! How corrupted by evil communications! How much a slave to pleasure’... thus Buchanan writing to the Inquisition about his own youth.⁵⁶

As a teacher he claimed to “readily accept kindly reproof [from his pupils] if ever I have made a mistake in exposition or if afterwards on any topic anything which could be better said crops up I lay aside vanity and reveal my error”⁵⁷ We can in fact learn a good deal about Buchanan’s practice, which shows some striking similarities to modern ideas, from the essays of another of his famous pupils, Montaigne, who described Buchanan as ‘that great Scotch poet’ in ‘Of The Education Of Children’

I was above six years of age before I understood either French or Perigordin, any more than Arabic; and without art, book, grammar, or precept, whipping, or the expense of a tear, I had, by that time, learned

⁵⁵ National Library Scotland Advocates MS15.1.6 2.

⁵⁶ James M. Aitken, *The Trial of George Buchanan Before the Lisbon Inquisition*, trans. and commentary (Edinburgh and London: Oliver Boyd, 1939), p 21.

⁵⁷ Aitken, *The Trial of George Buchanan*, p. 33.

Rehabilitating George Buchanan

to speak as pure Latin as my master himself, for I had no means of mixing it up with any other. If, for example, they were to give me a theme after the college fashion, they gave it to others in French, but to me they were to give it in bad Latin, to turn it into that which was good” He also reported that Buchanan, when he was tutor to Timeleon de Brissac, was about to write a treatise of education, “the example of which he intended to take from mine.

Thomas Randolph in 1579 wrote to Young about Buchanan’s teaching methods saying that Buchanan was a better teacher than Aristotle who taught Alexander the Great. He also spoke of Buchanan’s ‘pretty and fine devise to make him (Randolph’s son) read before he know or handle his book...how he will prove learned hereafter I know not but ...(he) already passed many in learning and iudgement and ended ‘in this shall your fame remayne immortell’⁵⁸. At the very end of his life Buchanan was visited by friends who as Melville records found him teaching his servant to read by the a b ab e b eb and so on method. Robert Britannus, his colleague at Guyenne wrote an elegy for Buchanan with which we may appropriately end:

Raised to her zenith, poetry no more
Beyond thee tries on daring wing to soar
Bounds to her Empire, Rome in Scotland found
And Scotland too her eloquence shall bound

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National Library Scotland Advocate MS 15.1.1628.