

11-15-2014

# Archibald Pitcairne's *The Phanaticks*, ed. John MacQueen

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### Recommended Citation

Pittock, Murray (2014) "Archibald Pitcairne's *The Phanaticks*, ed. John MacQueen," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 40: Iss. 1, 227–228.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol40/iss1/19>

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# Archibald Pitcairne's *The Phanaticks*, ed. John MacQueen

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Murray Pittock, "Archibald Pitcairne's *The Phanaticks*, ed. John MacQueen" [review], *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 40 (2014): 227-228; (c) *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 2014

## REVIEWS

### A NEW PITCAIRNE EDITION

Archibald Pitcairne, *The Phanaticks*, edited by John MacQueen. Scottish Text Society, 5th series, no. 10. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer/Scottish Text Society, 2012. Pp. lxxii +247. £35. (ISBN 978-1-89797-635-7).

Dr Archibald Pitcairne (1652-1713), doctor and Jacobite, is one of the key figures of what might be termed the first age of Enlightenment, deriving from the reinvigoration of Edinburgh as a royal capital after 1660 and the creation of a new tranche of Scottish institutions. Born in the capital, Pitcairne was professor of medicine at Edinburgh (1685) and Leiden (1692), a mentor to both Allan Ramsay (whose poetry he influenced) and Thomas Ruddiman, and an innovative thinker and scholar with a marked distaste for Presbyterian fanaticism. His library became part of that of the Russian Academy of Science. His Jacobitism (he was arrested and imprisoned in the Tolbooth in 1700) and the fact he largely wrote in Latin have served to marginalize him in Scottish literary history. Following his and Winifred MacQueen's outstanding edition of Pitcairne's poetry, published in 2009, John MacQueen has produced a companion edition of Pitcairne's 1691 play, *The Assembly*, which is here rechristened *The Phanaticks*. The reasoning for this title-change is given on pp. xiii-xiv, but does not strike the reviewer as compelling, whatever challenges can be made to *The Assembly* as a title.

The play has strong textual provenance: there are three MSS in the National Library of Scotland, the Wellcome Library and Glasgow University Library. The initial printed text, *The Assembly*, appeared in 1722, and MacQueen charts with his customary acuity and precision the relation of this and subsequent printed texts to the MSS, suggesting that Professor David Gregorie (an "ornament to his country" in Newton's

words, who left the Edinburgh mathematics chair for the Savilian astronomy chair at Oxford, possibly as a religious refugee) and Sir Bertram Stott were collaborators in the play. MacQueen's feel for the literary and cultural world of late seventeenth century Edinburgh is nothing short of magnificent. Occasionally a wider perspective might be called for: Pitcairne's poem on the 1692 General Assembly is described as "hudibrastic" without perhaps contextualizing *Hudibras* and popular British anti-Presbyterian literature sufficiently. Scottish Presbyterian exceptionalism may tempt us to view the Kirk in isolation, but many contemporaries saw anti-Anglican nonconformity as a British phenomenon, the Scottish variant of which simply happened to be peculiarly entrenched.

The play itself might not benefit from a revival, but it is an interesting historical document, full of the normal accusations of Presbyterian hypocrisy ("Kirk discipline he seemeinglie doth prize,/Useing in privat VENUS exercize") together with an imaginary at least in part derived from Restoration Comedy, perhaps most closely Wycherley. There is also some credible cant-ridden dialogue.

MacQueen's edition is a deep and true piece of scholarship, far from the fashionable pathways of scholarly anaphora. It shows us the world of the losing side in late seventeenth century Scotland: its intellectual force, its sophistication, its cosmopolitanism, its distaste for Holy Willies. Some of that outlook survived the Jacobite cause, as did aspects of the intellectual world of late seventeenth century Edinburgh, which perhaps served to make the cultural revivalism of Ramsay and the success of the Enlightenment possible.

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