

Archibald Pitcairn. *The Phanaticks*.

Ed. John MacQueen. The Scottish Text Society Fifth Series 10. Woodbridge: Scottish Text Society, 2012. lxxxii + 248 pp. \$60. ISBN: 978-1-89797-635-7.

This play, freshly restored to the fullest possible textual amplitude and annotated with a necessarily long historical explication (144 pages of commentary to a mere seventy-three pages of text), represents an important part of Scottish literary history. *The Phanaticks* (or, in its more usual title, *The Assembly*), is a key text from the circle

of Archibald Pitcairne, in the 1690s and early 1700s a strident opposition to the Whiggish Presbyterian culture of early modern Scotland. The Edinburgh group around Pitcairne was usually Tory, Episcopalian (sometimes Catholic), and Jacobitical. It advanced the cause of Scoto-Latinity and valued theater, literature, and folk-culture, all as constituent parts of a healthy, rounded cultural outlook, throwing satire through these media against (as Pitcairne and his colleagues saw it) the governing Puritanism of Scotland, especially metropolitan Edinburgh. It was through the Pitcairne grouping that the way was paved for the Scots “vernacular revival” of the eighteenth century that culminated in the achievement of Robert Burns, the purveyor often of riotous, anti-Calvinist satire. John MacQueen, in his introduction, highlights the fact that *The Phanaticks* as a piece of satirical drama belongs in the context of a cross-border, Stuart-loyal mentality and has strong literary roots in Jacobean theater, especially the Puritan-bashing plays of Ben Jonson as well as English Restoration drama. Pitcairne’s work then is both a crucial text in the Scottish literary tradition while also pointing to the complex (or perhaps simple) reality of a British canon.

John MacQueen builds a more complete iteration of the text by accessing a fuller set of manuscripts than were available to Terence Tobin in his version of the play published as recently as 1972, or, indeed, than were utilized by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century print versions. MacQueen’s extensive notes also brilliantly illuminate the often difficult-to-access cultural world of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Scotland. Additionally, his expansive explication makes a path-breaking case for the play’s authorship being shared, to some extent, among Pitcairne, David Gregorie, and Bertram Stott.

Along with the text itself and authorial attribution, the most radically new thing about this edition is the title, *The Phanaticks*. Here the editor is boldly refusing a textual history that dates back to 1722, when the first published edition is entitled *The Assembly*. MacQueen is correct to say that this title lacks (absolute) authority, since Pitcairne died in 1713 and there is, indeed, no manuscript rendering of *The Assembly* in his hand. There are three manuscripts, with possibly the earliest text (perhaps late seventeenth century and with emendations, at least, in Pitcairne’s hand) lacking now — and perhaps never having — any title page. The other two (both probably early eighteenth century and in unknown hands) feature, in one case, the title *The Assembly Or Scotch Reformation* and, in the other, a possibly missing title page prior to a certainly missing set of lines opening the prologue. MacQueen derives his title from the first lines of the epilogue:

Our play is done. The Circumstance, the plott  
Our authors out of meer design forgot,  
For the phanaticks, quham we represent,  
Have no fixt plot nor regular intent.

The editor says that *The Phanaticks* “fits the play under all aspects.” This is not an unreasonable proposition and it could be that the lines above are a kind of eponymous, self-reflexive witticism, but we do not know for certain that they are. As part of his argument for dispensing with the customary title of Pitcairne’s drama,

MacQueen comments on the absence of any appearance of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in the play. However, “the assembly” of Calvinist fanatics is noted on a number of occasions in the text, as a kind of subspecies, clearly, of the larger, more formalized Assembly of the Kirk. We also have a situation where the early eighteenth-century manuscript that specifies *The Assembly* as title (and which conceivably might even be in the hand of Stott) also advertises itself as “corrected and enlarged by the authors.” In the intimate ideological circle(s) through which all three manuscripts have been familiarly generated (one can reasonably postulate), this latter piece of evidence is too easily overlooked by MacQueen; it provides, indeed, potential authority to “The Assembly.” The case for the title of *The Phanaticks* rests on intelligent inference but is all too partial. MacQueen also dispenses, one might say, with the “tradition” of the “The Assembly” as title that finds its way into the first print version of 1722 without any of Pitcairne’s surviving circle seemingly objecting to an error or a fabrication. This is my one big reservation with regards to an excellent edition.

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