

THE REFORMATION, PRINT, AND TRANSLATION. THEIR IMPACT UPON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ITS POLITICAL CULTURE

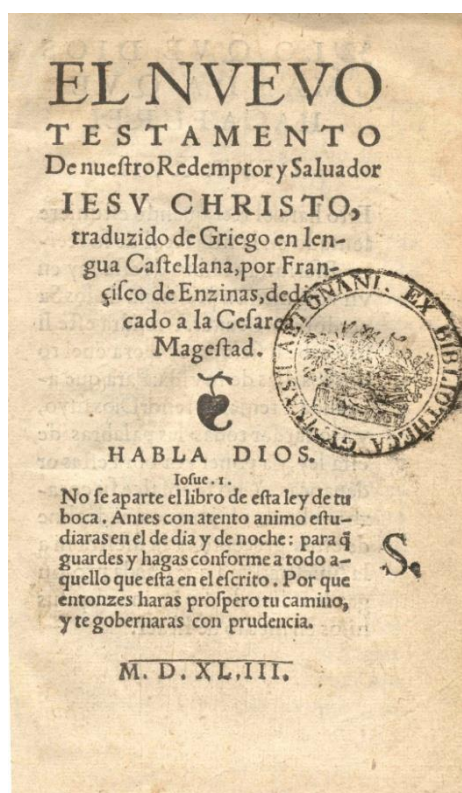
Introduction

The past holds more similarities to our own times than we frequently imagine. The following article (text number [1], adapted from, *The Economist*, Dec 17th 2011) illustrates the parallelisms between the impact that the invention of print and early modern social networks had on the onset and spread of the Reformation, and the influence that current internet-based, and mobile-phone social networks has had in the so-called Arab Spring revolutions of 2011 in countries like Algiers, Libia or Egypt.

Note that one of the reasons why the Reformation was a success lay in the fact that from an early stage Luther chose to use not Latin (which not a lot of people could read) but German, which more of his compatriots could understand. And it is equally significant that Luther used a variety of German devoid of regional uses (German was fragmented in this period into several different dialects), so that the largest possible percentage of readers could understand the texts he printed. In other words, he used a common variety of German that could be accessible to the largest possible audience.

Several centuries later, political radicals like Tom Paine were emphasising the need to speak in plain language, so that government would not appear as something mysterious that could be managed by just a few: the effort to popularize the Word of God (by translating the Bible into the different vernaculars, and by speaking to the common people in the kind of language that they used in their daily affairs) during the Reformation has a parallelism in Thomas Paine's insistence that government should not be shrouded in obscure language and ritual, but become accesible and transparent to the common population, since they had a right to have their own say in it.

So, what has all this to do with translation, you are probably wondering? The task of finding a common language that everyone can understand (for the Word of God, for theology, or for political ideas) is to a large extent the responsibility of translators, and / or authors who can carry out the required transfer / translation of discursive features and contents from the original sources into the common pool of the target language. The result is a textual artefact, a set of discursive practices, that can be understood and appropriated by the largest possible audience, with a view to providing salvation by facilitating access to the Word of God as a source of grace (in the case of religious ideas), or by facilitating common and popular knowledge on how government works in order to avoid injustice and exploitation (in the case of political ideas).



Francisco de Encinas's translation of the Gospel into Spanish, Antwerp, 1543

Under this reading, during the Reformation, the most conservative section of the Catholic church refused to open up the mysteries contained in the coffers of Latin volumes, so that their *riches* could be distributed and shared by all the faithful. This ruling elite did so because they wanted to monopolize the knowledge and the doctrines contained in these Latin volumes. Only highly educated scholars could read, understand, and interpret Latin. This is why translations of Scripture were banished. The following text, which dates from 1548, illustrates the attitude of orthodox Catholicism about the translation of Scripture, and the role played by Erasmus and his followers in it:

Nosotros no robamos la Escritura a los fieles, sino que no queremos que hombres carnales y sin preparación la devoren cruda so pretexto de alimentarse de ella. ¡Que oigan a los Prelados, a los Profetas y a los Doctores de la Iglesia! Que aprendan de ellos lo que les es necesario. La Sagrada Escritura es la luz, en esto estamos de acuerdo. Pero una luz que no es comprendida por todos, que debe mostrarse progresivamente. Es propiedad de toda la Iglesia, y no del primer particular que llegue. En esto se engañó grandemente Erasmo, y con él todos los que lo han seguido en este punto.

[Martín Pérez de Ayala, *De divinis traditionibus* (Colonia, 1548), fo. 24v; citado por Bataillon, *Erasmus y España* (México, 1950), II, 148]

In the case of humanism and the political tradition that originated among radical Protestants—which then evolved into the political thought of authors like Thomas Paine—the equivalent ideal established the principle that education would set individuals free, by providing easy access to knowledge formulated in plain language, devoid of the mysteries of government (which were only a ruse used by the ruling elite to deceive and exploit the majority of the population).

Within this frame of mind, a translator that facilitated popular access to previously forbidden knowledge could have the aura of a liberator. In fact, during the Reformation, many translators suffered persecution, and not a few of them were executed. Fray Luis de León in Spain was thrown in jail for (among other reasons) translating the *Song of Solomon* into Spanish. The Spanish Protestant Francisco de Enzinas, who produced the first translation of the Gospel into Spanish, had to spend most of his life in European exile. William Tyndale, the first translator of the Gospel into modern English was executed in the Netherlands for rendering the Bible into English. And these are just a few examples.



The execution of William Tyndale, outside Vilvorde Castle, in the Netherlands, October 1536.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE 16TH CENTURY

HOW LUTHER WENT VIRAL FIVE CENTURIES BEFORE FACEBOOK AND THE ARAB SPRING. SOCIAL MEDIA HELPED BRING ABOUT THE REFORMATION

TASK. Read text number [1] and answer the following questions:

1. Which publishing technologies and social networks were used, respectively, by Luther in the 16th century and by the participants in the Arab Spring of the 21st century?
2. What prompted Martin Luther's public denunciation of certain Church practices? What sort of links can we establish between Luther's denunciation in the early sixteenth century and the discontent of certain sections of society with other church practices in the fifteenth century, as described in unit 3?
3. What, according to the text, "*is regarded by many as the true starting point of the Reformation*", and why?
4. Which were the advantages of pamphlets when it came to distributing information and opinion, as opposed to manuscripts, or printed volumes?
5. Describe and comment the conclusions to the article.

[1]

IT IS a familiar-sounding tale: after decades of simmering discontent a new form of media gives opponents of an authoritarian regime a way to express their views, register their solidarity and co-ordinate their actions. The protesters' message spreads virally through social networks, making it impossible to suppress and highlighting the extent of public support for revolution. The combination of improved publishing technology and social networks is a catalyst for social change where previous efforts had failed.

That's what happened in the Arab spring. It's also what happened during the Reformation, nearly 500 years ago, when Martin Luther and his allies took the new media of their day—pamphlets, ballads and woodcuts—and circulated them through social networks to promote their message of religious reform.

Scholars have long debated the relative importance of printed media, oral transmission and images in rallying popular support for the Reformation. Some have championed the central role of printing, a relatively new technology at the time. Opponents of this view emphasise the importance of preaching and other forms of oral transmission. More recently historians have highlighted the role of media as a means of social signalling and co-ordinating public opinion in the Reformation.

Now the internet offers a new perspective on this long-running debate, namely that the important factor was not the printing press itself (which had been around since the 1450s), but the wider system of media sharing along social networks—what is called "social media" today. Luther, like the Arab revolutionaries, grasped the dynamics of this new media environment very quickly, and saw how it could spread his message.

[...]

The start of the Reformation is usually dated to Luther's nailing of his "95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" to the church door in Wittenberg on October 31st 1517. The "95 Theses" were propositions written in Latin that he wished to discuss, in the academic custom of the day, in an open debate at the university. Luther, then an obscure theologian and minister, was outraged by the behaviour of Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar who was selling indulgences to raise money to fund the pet project of his boss, Pope Leo X: the reconstruction of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. Hand over your money, went Tetzel's sales pitch, and you can ensure that your dead relatives are not stuck in purgatory. This crude commercialisation of the doctrine of indulgences, encapsulated in Tetzel's slogan—"As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, so the soul from purgatory springs"—was, to Luther, "the pious defrauding of the faithful" and a glaring symptom of the need for broad reform. Pinning a list of propositions to the church door, which doubled as the university notice board, was a standard way to announce a public debate.

Although they were written in Latin, the “95 Theses” caused an immediate stir, first within academic circles in Wittenberg and then farther afield. In December 1517 printed editions of the theses, in the form of pamphlets and broadsheets, appeared simultaneously in Leipzig, Nuremberg and Basel, paid for by Luther’s friends to whom he had sent copies. German translations, which could be read by a wider public than Latin-speaking academics and clergy, soon followed and quickly spread throughout the German-speaking lands. Luther’s friend Friedrich Myconius later wrote that “hardly 14 days had passed when these propositions were known throughout Germany and within four weeks almost all of Christendom was familiar with them.”

For the publication later that month [i.e. March 1518] of his “Sermon on Indulgences and Grace”, he switched to German [from Latin], avoiding regional vocabulary to ensure that his words were intelligible from the Rhineland to Saxony. The pamphlet, an instant hit, is regarded by many as the true starting point of the Reformation.



Martin Luther

The media environment that Luther had shown himself so adept at managing had much in common with today’s online ecosystem of blogs, social networks and discussion threads. It was a decentralised system whose participants took care of distribution, deciding collectively which messages to amplify through sharing and recommendation. Modern media theorists refer to participants in such systems as a “networked public”, rather than an “audience”, since they do more than just consume information. Luther would pass the text of a new pamphlet to a friendly printer (no money changed hands) and then wait for it to ripple through the network of printing centres across Germany.

Unlike larger books, which took weeks or months to produce, a pamphlet could be printed in a day or two. Copies of the initial edition, which cost about the same as a chicken, would first spread throughout the town where it was printed. Luther’s sympathisers recommended it to their friends. Booksellers promoted it and itinerant colporteurs hawked it.

Travelling merchants, traders and preachers would then carry copies to other towns, and if they sparked sufficient interest, local printers would quickly produce their own editions, in batches of 1,000 or so, in the hope of cashing in on the buzz. A popular pamphlet would thus spread quickly without its author’s involvement. [...] Of the 6,000 different pamphlets that were published in German-speaking lands between 1520 and 1526, some 1,700 were editions of a few dozen works by Luther. In all, some 6m-7m pamphlets were printed in the first decade of the Reformation, more than a quarter of them Luther’s.

[...]

Being able to follow and discuss such back-and-forth exchanges of views, in which each author quoted his opponent’s words in order to dispute them, gave people a thrilling and unprecedented sense of participation in a vast, distributed debate. Arguments in their own social circles about the merits of Luther’s views could be seen as part of a far wider discourse, both spoken and printed. Many pamphlets called upon the reader to discuss their contents with others and read them aloud to the illiterate. People read and discussed pamphlets at home with their families, in groups with their friends, and in inns and taverns. Luther’s pamphlets were read out at spinning bees in Saxony and in bakeries in Tyrol. In some cases entire guilds of weavers or leatherworkers in particular towns declared themselves supporters of the Reformation, indicating that Luther’s ideas were being propagated in the workplace. One observer remarked in 1523 that better sermons could be heard in the inns of Ulm than in its churches, and in Basel in 1524 there

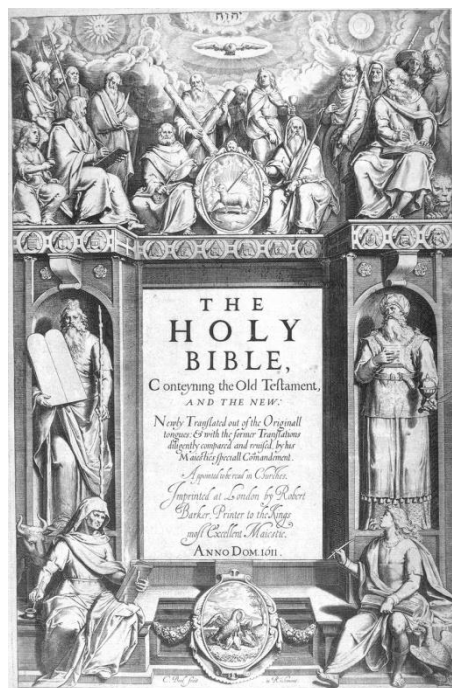
were complaints about people preaching from books and pamphlets in the town's taverns. Contributors to the debate ranged from the English king Henry VIII, whose treatise attacking Luther (co-written with Thomas More) earned him the title "Defender of the Faith" from the pope, to Hans Sachs, a shoemaker from Nuremberg who wrote a series of hugely popular songs in support of Luther.

[...]

Modern society tends to regard itself as somehow better than previous ones, and technological advance reinforces that sense of superiority. But history teaches us that there is nothing new under the sun. Robert Darnton, an historian at Harvard University, who has studied information-sharing networks in pre-revolutionary France, argues that "the marvels of communication technology in the present have produced a false consciousness about the past—even a sense that communication has no history, or had nothing of importance to consider before the days of television and the internet." Social media are not unprecedented: rather, they are the continuation of a long tradition. Modern digital networks may be able to do it more quickly, but even 500 years ago the sharing of media could play a supporting role in precipitating a revolution. Today's social-media systems do not just connect us to each other: they also link us to the past.

THE BIBLE, TRANSLATION AND ANGLO-AMERICAN CULTURE. THE KING JAMES VERSION

In the previous text, we have read how Luther gained a much larger audience, and stirred controversy with his pamphlets, by using German to spread his ideas. He also used a common variety of German to translate the Bible. In doing so, he contributed with his translation to the creation of a common language, which avoided the peculiarities of the different regional dialects. This contributed first to a common sense of purpose for all German Protestants, but it also contributed to create a sense of common linguistic and cultural community. In England, Protestants also produced several translations of the Bible. One of the most influential was the so-called King James Version (KJV) or King James Bible (KJB), produced in 1611. The style used in this English translation proved very influential first in England, and then in the British Empire. The following text explores the extremely prolific linguistic and cultural legacy of this translation.



The first edition of the King James Version, 1611

TASK. Read text number [2] and answer the following questions:

1. Why is the KJV (i.e. the King James Version) described in the text as a “cultural artefact”? How have certain volumes been used by certain United States presidents? Why do you think they used these particular copies, and not other?
2. The text refers to the idea that “*Protestants had championed the idea of the priesthood of all believers*”. Where does this idea come from? Take a look at unit 3 and justify your answer.
3. What is “presbyterianism”, and why did King James I reject it? Do you think there might be political reasons for his rejection?
4. How does the text describe “dissenters” and “nonconformists”?
5. Why does the text claim that the Church of England gained a “*reputation for breadth and inclusivity*”? What role did the KJV play in in this process? How do you think all of this influenced Anglo-American culture?

[2]

“On 20 January 2009 Barack Obama took the presidential oath of office on a copy of the King James Version of the Bible published by Oxford University Press in 1583; it was the same Bible that had been used by Abraham Lincoln in 1861. Similarly, a series of twentieth-century presidents (Warren Harding, Dwigth Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter, and George Bush Senior) chose to take their oath on the copy of the KJV published in London in 1767; it was the same Bible that had been used by George Washington in 1789. These two Bibles... are artefacts that represent turning points in American history. They have become part of American history, just as the KJV is part of America’s religious culture. This version of the Bible is similarly honoured in the United Kingdom. In 1953 (the coronation year), for example, Queen Elizabeth commanded that a copy of the KJV be given to every child born in Britain that year.

The King James Version of the Bible, which is known in the United Kingdom as the Authorized Version, is the most celebrated book in the English-speaking world. ... Protestant Christianity places a high value on [this] translation, and it is passages from this translation rather than the original that Protestants have committed to memory. Why should this be so?

The answer lies in an emphasis on understanding the meaning of the words rather than committing the original words to heart. In the century before 1611, at the time of the Reformation, Protestants had championed the idea of the priesthood of all believers. This led to a resistance to 'implicit faith', which is faith subordinated to the doctrine of the Church, in favour of 'explicit faith', in which faith derives from the individual believer's understanding of the Bible under the guidance of the Spirit. The resurgence of this doctrine in the late sixteenth century, together with the ability of print to make books available to an increasingly literate public, led to translations of the Bible into all of Europe's vernacular languages. In the case of English, it was the KJV that eventually triumphed.

[...]

The reasons for the universal respect for this version vary enormously. Some admire its resonant prose, which sometimes has the rhythms of poetry... Others travel beyond admiration to reverence, especially if they believe that, as the translators asked in their prayers, God guided the translation.

[...]



King James I

In addition to this printing history, the KJV also has a political, ecclesiastical, and cultural history, for in the course of its long life it has been championed by various confessional groups, as well as by those whose interest is its literary style and influence. The monarch whose name it bears was an active participant in debates about the structure of organized Christianity in the post-Reformation period. He firmly rejected the presbyterianism practised by many of his Scottish subjects, opting instead for the episcopally led Church of England and expressing that preference with admirable succinctness: 'No bishop, no king'. This was a sharp rebuke to England's hotter Protestants, the puritans who rejected bishops as a relic of popery. Some puritans also initially mistrusted the KJV, though it duly came to be central to the lives and witness of their evangelical heirs throughout the English-speaking world.

When the KJV was published in 1611, all English Protestants were members of the national church. In the late seventeenth century, groups such as Baptists, Congregationalists, and Quakers asserted their independence from the established Church, thereby initiating the dissenting tradition¹. Over the following centuries, dissenters were identified as nonconformists and came to identify themselves as free churches. In the eighteenth century, the Methodist movement initiated by John and Charles Wesley provided a model for other popular revivalist movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some evangelicals remained within the Church of England, finding outlets for their energies among the newly urbanized populations of industrial towns and cities or in missionary work throughout Britain's expanding empire. No less zealous and, indeed, no less devoted to biblical scholarship were the high churchmen of the Oxford Movement in the mid-nineteenth century, some of whom converted to the Church of Rome while others remained ritually minded Anglicans. Thus the Church of England attained its reputation for breadth and inclusivity, with the KJV of the Bible as one of the bonds holding together the increasing diversity of religious practice not just within the Church of England but also throughout what emerged as the worldwide Anglican communion. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century this cohesion has weakened as the inclusive character of the Church of England has been assaulted from one side by secularizing influences and from the other by internal tensions between Anglo-Catholics and evangelicals.

¹For more information on the dissenting tradition see unit 5.

There is a parallel tradition in the United States, where the impact of the KJV extends well beyond the Episcopal Church, which is one province of the Anglican communion, for many of the non-episcopal Protestant denominations have been and continue to be thoroughly Bible centred, and the KJV has a large following among evangelicals.”

(Gordon Campbell, Bible. The Story of the King James Version. 1611-2011. Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 1-5)

PHILOLOGY, ERASMUS AND TYNDALE'S NEW TESTAMENT

As mentioned above, the KJV was not the first translation of the Bible into English. The scholars that worked under the influence of Wyclif (see unit 3) in the 14th and 15th centuries had already translated part of the Bible into Middle English. And in the early 16th century a new school of Bible translators grew under the combined influence of Luther's plan to popularize the word of God and make it available for the common believer, on the one hand, and on the other the new techniques for textual and linguistic analysis developed by philology. One of the main aims of philology in the 15th and 16th centuries was to recover those texts that had been lost during the Middle Ages (in particular, Latin and Greek texts from classical antiquity), and to produce new versions, free from the textual corruption accumulated over the course of their manuscript transmission during the Middle Ages. These techniques could be used to authenticate texts, and to identify later additions, and even counterfeits. Applying the principles of philological analysis to the texts of the Bible was a revolutionary approach which, hand in hand with the new translations of scripture into the different vernaculars, had a tremendous social, political, and religious impact. The following text talks about William Tyndale, the first translator of the Gospel into early modern English.



Erasmus, by Hans Holbein

TASK. Read text number [3] and answer the following questions.

1. Look for information of Erasmus, and describe in a short paragraph his relevance in this period. Why do you think the Erasmus scholarship (that many of you enjoy now) is named after this Dutch scholar?
2. What do you think Tyndale meant when he proclaimed that he would “*defy the Pope and all his laws*” and that “*I will cause a boy that driveth the plough, shall know more of the Scripture...*”?
3. What did Tyndale's edition of the New Testament look like? Which were their physical features? How do you think this may have influenced their distribution and influence?
4. Which are, according to the text, some of the most relevant features of Tyndale's translation?

[3]

“William Tyndale is rightly known as ‘the father of the English Bible’. The Dutch scholar Erasmus produced an edition of the Greek New Testament, which he published in 1516 together with his translation into Latin, which was the international language of Europe. Tyndale, who was an excellent linguist (he knew Greek, Latin, Hebrew, German, Spanish, and French), decided to translate Erasmus’s Greek text into English. He resolved, in the teeth of bitter opposition, to ‘defy the Pope and all his laws’ and proclaimed ringingly that, ‘if God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost’. On being refused permission to print his New Testament in English, Tyndale left for Germany, where his Lutheran sympathies made him welcome in Reformation circles. In 1525



William Tyndale, proudly showing off his greatest achievement, the first translation of the Gospel into modern English

he began to print the New Testament in the Catholic city of Cologne, but, when the printing house was raided by the authorities, Tyndale fled [...].

Tyndale sought refuge in Worms, where there was a strong Lutheran presence, and in 1526 published his New Testament... It was a pocket-sized book, and was quickly smuggled into England, where it was sold cheaply. By October the book had been banned as a 'pestiferous and most pernicious poison dispersed throughout all our dioceses of London in great numbers'. [...] The banning order did not work, and soon an Antwerp printer was publishing large numbers of copies of Tyndale's Bible, albeit in an unreliable text. Bishop Tunstall visited Antwerp and arranged for a British merchant to buy the entire printer's stock of Tyndale's bibles, which he promptly burnt. The first edition seems to have consisted of about 3,000 copies, but now only two complete copies survive [...]

Eventually Tyndale would also be burnt, but the language of his New Testament lives on, preserved by the King James Version [...] Tyndale set the linguistic style for New Testament translations for centuries to come, in that the studied simplicity of his language, which was designed to make the New Testament accessible to ploughboys, has become established as the dominant idiom of subsequent translations."

(Gordon Campbell, Bible. The Story of the King James Version. 1611-2011. Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 10-13)

TRANSLATION, RELIGION AND POLITICS

GEORGE BUCHANAN VS JAMES I: REPUBLICANISM VS MONARCHICAL ABSOLUTISM

In the text on the King James Bible, the author talked about the fact that James I “rejected the presbyterianism practised by many of his Scottish subjects”. *Presbyterianism* here refers to a Calvinist branch of protestantism, which rejected the authority of bishops (and other church hierarchies) on the grounds that such offices did not exist among primitive Christians. One of the aims of the Reformation was to end with what reformers considered the corruption of the Catholic church by returning to the original simplicity and purity of early Christians, led exclusively not by the Church hierarchy, but by the Word of God, i.e. the Bible.

See the following definition: “Presbyterianism, system of church polity, occupying a middle position between episcopacy and congregationalism. Its organization is administered by *representative* courts, composed of clerical and lay presbyters of equal status, divided, according to their functions, into ministers and ruling elders. Such polity may be found throughout the history of the Christian church, but its modern movement is primarily attributed to the doctrine of Calvin. *In its simple form of worship, the Bible is considered the sole rule of faith and conduct, the two sacraments being baptism and the Lord's Supper.*”² In the early Church, a presbyter was the administrator, and leader of a local congregation.



George Buchanan in 1581

There are important parallelisms between certain types of Protestant doctrines and the political ideas that circulated at the time. One of the most important debates was about the legitimacy of monarchs. Radical Protestants thought that an “ungodly monarch” (i.e. one who was not a Protestant) was illegitimate, and could thus be deposed by the people: this is the position defended by George Buchanan (1506 - 1582). On the other hand, James I defended the theory that monarchs were appointed by God, and could only answer before God as the only judge, and that rebellion against a monarch (even if this monarch was a despot) amounted to a rebellion against the will of God.

As you can see, there are important parallelisms between Buchanan’s anti-absolutist ideas and those ancient English traditions that established that the power of the monarch had to be controlled by the barons (the aristocracy) and other representative bodies like parliament; and above all the idea that the king was not above the law (see units 2 and 3 in particular). We shall see that some of the ideas expressed by Buchanan are echoed, 200 years later, and in a more secular tone, by political thinkers like Thomas Paine. As the following text describes, the political thought of George Buchanan (who was also an expert Latinist, educated in the philological tradition described above) also had an important influence upon the American Declaration of Independence (Thomas Paine, although born in England, also played a very important role in the process of American Independence; see units 5 and 6).

²The *Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature*. James D. Hart. Oxford University Press, 1986. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universidad de Granada. 2 January 2012
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t53.e1613>>

TASK. Read text [4] and answer the following questions:

1. Which was the thesis that Buchanan developed, and which became a “central doctrine of Presbyterian and Puritan political theory”, according to the text?
2. Which differences does Buchanan establish between society and government?
3. What, according to the text, makes a king really powerful? Why?
4. What parallelism does the text establish between Buchanan’s political ideas and those of the 18th century and the American Declaration of Independence?
5. Which other individuals were influenced by Buchanan? Do you know who they are? Try to identify them and say something about their relevance.

[4]

On Buchanan’s De Jure Regni apud Scotos (1579) and James I’s The Trew Law of Free Monarchies (1598)

“*Buchanan attempted, in the De Jure, to deal with the fundamental question at stake in the Controversy* [i.e. the controversy following the forced abdication of Mary Queen of Scots, the mother of James I, who was forced to abdicate in favour of her son after a rebellion]. *That question was: had the people of Scotland the right to call their rulers to account for their public*



Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland between 1542 and 1567, and mother of James I. Her deposition prompted James Buchanan to compose his volume on the law that regulated the monarchy in Scotland

acts? Buchanan develops the thesis, which became the central doctrine of Presbyterian and Puritan political theory — both in Great Britain and in America — that no person in a state is above the law which the people, through their representatives, enact.” (Arrowood, p. 4)

“*[According to Buchanan] Men are, by nature, made for society and the shared life, and governments are set up as providing the setting most favourable to the life conformable to the laws of nature. Men desire governments as the means of securing benefits and the maintenance of justice, which are essential to the development and maintenance of civilized society, for which they are formed³. [...] While society is natural, government is created as a people vest authority, by a contract, in a ruler or rulers. Since no man is perfect, rulers are not trusted with absolute power, to be exercised at their discretion; people safeguard their interests by defining, in the laws, the scope and limits of the powers of their government. A government, to employ the phrase of the constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, is, properly, "of laws and not of men." A tyrant is one who, no matter how he has come to power, is not bound by the law. Buchanan goes to great length to show the evil results of tyrannical rule — results even more disastrous for rulers than for the people.*

Laws are made by the people, acting through their responsible representatives, and are to be interpreted by legal experts, the bench and bar. Lawyers, he maintained, serve, as they argue cases, to check each other, and the executive serves as some limitation upon judges: absolute power concentrated in the hands of the magistrate, on the other hand, is invariably abused. It is no limitation of the power, dignity, or liberty of kings to rule in accordance with the laws. The power to do wrong is no source of strength to kings; while, on the other hand, it is by virtue of the laws that a king is powerful, for the laws place behind him the united strength of his people.

[...]

³Contrast this with Tom Paine: “Great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of government. It has its origin in the principles of society and the natural constitution of man. It existed prior to government, and would exist if the formality of government was abolished” (Tom Paine, *The Rights of Man*, Chapter I, “Of society and civilization”, in Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick, eds. *The Thomas Paine Reader*, London: Penguin, 1987, p. 266).

A ruler who, instead of maintaining justice and protecting his people against their foes, attacks the liberties and institutions of his own country is to be counted as a public enemy, and is to be called to account for his violations of laws. [...] Buchanan asserts, unequivocally, that any person who thus puts himself outside the law, obedience to which is the condition of membership in civilized society, becomes, by this act, a public enemy; so that citizens have not only the right but the duty to levy war against him. He is no less an enemy of the people and their country than is the foreign invader.

The basis of Buchanan's position is as follows: Kings do not exercise authority by divine or other inherent right, but are created kings by election at the hands of their people, and on condition of maintaining the laws. This contract does not create society, which is necessary for the maintenance of an ameliorated, stable, and civilized society. Failure on the part of a subject to obey the laws deprives him of their protections; and failure on the part of the ruler to maintain and observe them places him, likewise, outside the protection of the laws. Should the king violate his coronation oath, he abrogates the contract between himself and his subjects; so that his people revert, as respects their obedience, to the state they were in before — that is, free of obligation to obey him. The severance of the bond between a ruler and his people does not affect, in the least, the character of the people as a nation; nothing is affected save the relation between the people and the man to whom they once entrusted powers which they now resume. It will be clear at once that this is precisely the line of argument of the American Declaration of Independence, and that Dugald Stewart's claim that Buchanan's political theory bears a particularly close resemblance "to the political philosophy of the eighteenth century" is fully justified.

It is important to keep in mind that although Buchanan holds that kings who do not maintain the laws may be resisted, even with force, he does not say that this course should be resorted to in every case. He maintains, instead, that armed resistance to tyrants is a desperate remedy to which resort should be had only in desperate cases. [...]

The problem of government which took precedence over every other in the mind of the devout man of the sixteenth century was this: Does the law of God permit a subject ever to disobey his rulers? Catholic and Protestant, alike, read Romans xiii. 1, 2, and found there the explicit command that Christians submit themselves to authority, and the explicit warning of divine wrath if they resisted "the higher powers." Maitland advanced just this objection to Buchanan's position: We are commanded to obey our rulers and to pray for them. How can we then, if we fear God, dare to call them to account for their deeds and take up arms against them? Buchanan meets this question with an assertion of his readiness to accept the Scripture as the guide in such matters, but he interprets the Scripture in the light of reason and with the apparatus and arguments of historical criticism." (Arrowood, pp. 5-6)

"Buchanan's De Jure Regni apud Scotos exercised a great deal of influence upon the development of democratic nationalism in Great Britain and North America. This influence was due in part to the intrinsic value of the work itself, and in part to the fact that its author was the sixteenth century political philosopher of Scottish Presbyterianism and of English Puritanism.

[...] Milton, in his Defense of the People of England, says to those who question the legality and justice of limited and responsible government: "For Scotland I refer you to Buchanan." That he should say this is not at all surprising, for Milton's debt to the Scottish humanist is so great and so obvious that Dryden, in the "Letter to the Whigs" which he prefaces to The Medal, charges that the Defense is "manifestly... stolen" from Buchanan's De Jure Regni apud Scotos. [...]

In the light of the influence exercised by the book, it is not surprising that Mr. Harold Laski has said, "... it is possible that Buchanan's famous dialogue was the most influential, political essay of the sixteenth century."

[...] Milton, Sidney, and Coke had familiarized the people of Great Britain and the British colonists in North America with the principles of Buchanan's political philosophy, and the

Declaration of Rights, which epitomized those principles, was then about to be enacted into law.”

Source: C.F. Arrowood, trans., ed. and introd. The Powers of the Crown in Scotland. Being a translation with notes and an introductory essay of George Buchanan's De Jure Regni Apud Scotos. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1949. (The book can be downloaded at: <http://www.contra-mundum.org/books/jure/jure.html>)

The following are a series of excerpts from a treatise composed by King James I, in defence of the divine power of monarchs, and in response to radical puritans like George Buchanan—who was James's tutor when the king was a child in his native Scotland. Note that both Buchanan and James I use the Bible to legitimise their claims. The last paragraph emphasises the rule of the monarch as resulting from a compact (an agreement). This agreement stems from the Law of Nature, and in order to explain the natural principles that legitimise the power of a monarch over his people, James compares the king to a father and to the head in a body. In the patriarchal family, the authority of the father goes undisputed (as the power of the king is never disputed by his subjects: he is only accountable to God, who appointed him in the first place), and if society is compared to a body (the so-called body politic), if the rest of the body decides to rebel against the head (i.e. the king), and depose him, society as a whole suffers a mortal blow, as does the body if the head is severed from it. For James I (and for many other medieval and early modern political thinkers) “the law of nature” equals the law of God, and therefore, those natural principles described by James I are divine—since, according to this doctrine, Nature was created by God and consequently it worked by following God's providence, or God's laws.

TASK. Read text number [5] and answer the following questions:

1. According to King James, what is the nature, and which are the duties, of kings?
2. What is the nature of the contract between the monarch and his subjects according to James? Can this contract be broken? Who can decide whether the contract has been broken?
3. How do Buchanan and James disagree on the nature of this contract?

[5]

King James I, (1566-1625). *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* or *The Reciproock and mutual duetie betwixt a free King, and his naturall Subjects* (Edinburgh, 1598)

“Kings are called Gods by the propheticall King David, because they sit upon God's Throne in the earth, and have the count of their administration to give unto him. Their office is, To minister Justice and Judgement to the people, as the same David saith: To advance the good, and punish the evill, as he likewise saith: To establish good Lawes to his people, and to procure obedience to the same, as divers good Kings of Judah did: To decide all controversies that can arise among them, as Salomon did: To be the Minister of God for the weale of them that doe well, and as the minister of God, to take vengeance upon them that doe evill, as S. Paul saith. And finally, As a good Pastour, to goe out and in before his people as is said in the first of Samuel: That through the Princes prosperitie, the peoples peace may be procured, as Jeremie saith”

“And the agreement of the Law of nature in this our ground with the Lawes and constitutions of God, and man, already alledged, will by two similitudes easily appeare. The King towards his people is rightly compared to a father of children, and to a head of a body composed of divers members: for as fathers, the good Princes, and Magistrates of the people of God acknowledged themselves to their subjects...

The proper office of a King towards his Subjects, agrees very wel with the office of the head towards the body, and all members thereof: For from the head, being the seat of Judgement,

proceedeth the care and foresight of guiding, and preventing all evill that may come to the body or any part thereof."

In the following paragraph, James is arguing against the arguments presented by Buchanan and his followers: i.e. that the people and the monarch have an agreement, and that in those cases when the king does not honour the terms of the agreement, then they have the right to depose him. James accepts that there is a contract between the monarch and his subjects, but when the king does not do his job properly, only God can be judge, and execute sentence. The subjects of a king can never decide (i.e. judge) and of course, they can never intervene by rebelling and deposing the monarch (which in James I's opinion is against the law of Nature, i.e. against the law of God). In an absolute monarchy the law emanates from God, and through the King, descends upon the rest of the population (as opposed to a traditional limited monarchy, or a constitutional monarchy).

"And the last objection is grounded upon the mutuall paction and adstipulation (as they call it) betwixt the King and his people, at the time of his coronation: For there, say they, there is a mutuall paction, and contract bound up, and sworne betwixt the king, and the people: Whereupon it followeth, that if the one part of the contract or the Indent bee broken upon the Kings side, the people are no longer bound to keepe their part of it, but are thereby freed of their oath: For (say they) a contract betwixt two parties, of all Law frees the one partie, if the other breake unto him.

As to this contract alleged made at the coronation of a King, although I deny any such contract to bee made then, especially containing such a clause irritant as they alledge; yet I confesse, that a king at his coronation, or at the entry to his kingdome, willingly promiseth to his people, to discharge honorably and trewly the office given him by God over them: But presuming that thereafter he breake his promise unto them never so inexcusable; the question is, who should bee judge of the breake, giving unto them, this contract were made unto them never so sicker, according to their alleageance...

Now in this contract (I say) betwixt the king and his People, God is doubtless the only Judge, both because to him onely the king must make count of his administration (as is oft said before) as likewise by the oath in the coronation, God is made judge and revenger of the breakers: For in his presence, as only judge of oaths, all oaths ought to be made. Then since God is the onely Judge betwixt the two parties contractors, the cognition and revenge must onely appertaine to him: It followes therefore of necessitie, that God must first give sentence upon the King that breaketh, before the people can thinke themselves freed of their oath. What justice then is it, that the partie shall be both judge and partie, usurping upon himselfe the office of God, may by this argument easily appeare."

James I, Buchanan, and other puritan republicans all agreed that God was the source of the law, and the source of political legitimacy, and that government was founded upon a contract, which compelled subjects to obey their ruler, and compelled the monarch to be fair and benevolent, and rule for the common good. As mentioned above, James thought that only God could be the judge of the king, and that consequently only God had the right to punish the monarch. Buchanan and other republicans thought, as James did, that the law emanated from God, but they thought that there was a compact between the monarch and the rest of society, and that (in extreme cases) when the monarch did not comply with his part of the contract, his subjects had the right to rebel and depose him. Buchanan's thinking can be summarized thus:

"Kings do not exercise authority by divine or other inherent right, but are created kings by election at the hands of their people, and on condition of maintaining the laws. This contract does not create society, which is necessary for the maintenance of an ameliorated, stable, and civilized society. Failure on the part of a subject to obey the laws deprives him of their protections; and failure on the part of the ruler to maintain and observe them places him, likewise, outside the protection of the laws."

These ideas expressed by Buchanan would be very influential, first upon authors like Milton and the other puritan republicans who clashed with James I's son (Charles I) during the English Civil war in the mid seventeenth century (see unit 5). Some of these ideas, in turn, would evolve into more secular versions and re-emerge in the process of American Independence, and also in the type of political radicalism that grew in England in the late 18th century and eventually stood behind some of the political reforms implemented by the English Parliament during the 19th century (see units 6 and 8).