

The Lyndsay Letters: the Public Correspondence of a Poet and Herald in Early Sixteenth-Century Scotland¹

Because we are all keenly interested in the study of early Scottish history, it is probable that the name of Sir David Lyndsay, as well as some facts about his career, and one or two of his works, are familiar to us. Some of us may link Lyndsay with heraldry, aware that he compiled Scotland's earliest official armorial manuscript and possibly was involved in redesigning the royal crest in 1536.² A few among us may have been lucky enough to have seen a performance of Lyndsay's superbly entertaining political morality play, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*.³ There have been several Edinburgh Festival productions since the first gave its audience such an exhilarating experience in 1948.⁴ At that time the play had not been performed in Edinburgh since 1554, when the dowager Queen, Marie de Guise, had been among the audience.⁵ She could have understood only too well the play's astute commentary on the current state of Scottish society—weakened by intermittent war with England, troubled by religious and political division—as by then it certainly was.⁶ There had been an even earlier performance of *Ane Satyre* at which Lyndsay himself may have been present.⁷ This 1552 version was played on his home territory of Cupar in Fife, and contained many wickedly specific references to its residents.⁸ But these two performances came at the end of Lyndsay's life. What preceded them?

Forty years before, at the time of James V's birth, Lyndsay, already working at the court, had been appointed the king's usher. This privy chamber position, which he held until 1525, was unique to Lyndsay.⁹ And it

¹This paper was delivered to the Sydney Society for Scottish History on the 16th February 1995, as the Geoffrey Ferrow Memorial Lecture.

²On these see C. Burnett, 'The Development of the Royal Arms to 1603', *The Double Tressure*, I (1977/78), 7-19, and *Facsimile of an Ancient Heraldic Manuscript Emblazoned by Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount Lyon King of Arms 1542*, ed. D. Laing, engraved W.H. Lizars (Edinburgh, 1822).

³The earliest versions of the text of this play are found in volume II of *The Works of Sir David Lindsay*, ed. D. Hamer, 4 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1931-36), hereinafter 'Hamer'.

⁴See, for example, Sir David Lindsay, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, ed., J. Kinsley, critical introduction A.M. Mackenzie, foreword I. Brown (London, 1954), pp. 27-33.

⁵Hamer, IV, xxxiv-xxxvii.

⁶See J.H. Burns, 'The Political Background of the Scottish Reformation, 1513-1625', *Essays on the Scottish Reformation, 1513-1625*, ed., D. McRoberts (Glasgow, 1962), 1-38.

⁷See C. Graf, 'Theatre and Politics in Lindsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*', *Bards and Makars*, eds, A.J. Aitken, M.P. McDiarmid and D.S. Thomson (Glasgow, 1977), pp. 143-55 (148).

⁸On Cupar names see A.J. Mill, 'Representations of Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 47 (1932), 636-51 (637-39).

⁹*The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland* (hereafter ER), ed., J. Stuart *et al* (Edinburgh, 1878-1908), XIV, 8-9, 127-28, 156-57, 220; *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* (hereafter TA), eds, T. Dickson and J. B. Paul, 10 vols (Edinburgh, 1877-1913), vol. V, p. 112. There were chamber ushers of varying seniority in the king's household, but only Lyndsay's post

gave him daily contact with the young king. During after-school hours, according to his own statements (though official records do not put them in doubt), Lyndsay and the boy prince would sing, dance, play, and tell stories; at meal times, Lyndsay was James's sewer, cupbearer and carver—for the important years of the king's minority.¹⁰

Later, when the sixteen-year-old king took on the task of personal rule, Lyndsay was also given various heraldic posts. He was called Lyon Depute, for example, on a document for which he was among the witnesses, in 1529,¹¹ and at the time of his 1531 diplomatic mission to the court of Charles V, Lyndsay was commended to the Emperor by James V as his 'chief herald...called Snawdon'.¹² Lyndsay was referred to as Lyon King of Arms from about 1538,¹³ and seems to have continued to hold this position after James's death in 1542 and until his own in 1555.¹⁴ As an officer of both the Crown and the Kingdom, Lyndsay had to carry out high judicial, administrative and executive duties.¹⁵ It was Lyon King who granted, recorded and corrected abuses of arms, preserved and certified the royal genealogy, received the king's pronouncements and proclaimed them to the people, carried out diplomatic missions on the king's behalf, as we have noted already, and devised and recorded the ceremonial for State, royal and public occasions.¹⁶ In the years preceding the performances of *Ane Satyre*, David Lyndsay's life, it would appear, was extremely busy, varied, and closely in touch with the king. Fortunately, he also managed to write about it.

Of the twelve surviving poetic pieces by Lyndsay besides *Ane Satyre*, eight or perhaps nine of them were written during the lifetime of James V.

was linked to the king, whether he was described as 'hostiario domini regis', 'kepar of the Kingis grace' or 'Kingis uschar'.

¹⁰See Historical Manuscripts Commission (hereafter HMC), *Report on the Manuscripts of the Earl of Mar and Kellie* (London, 1904), p. 12 (fifth section), where a list is given of the occupations of those who must be the king's close servants. From his own remarks, David Lyndsay seems to have taken on more than one of these positions. See Hamer, I, *The Dreime*, ll. 1-46 and *The Complaynt*, ll. 1-510.

¹¹SRO, B30/1/1. 'Protocol Book of Mr Meldrum', fol. 110v.

¹²*The Letters of James V*, collected and calendared by R.K. Hannay, ed., D. Hay (Edinburgh, 1954), p. 193; *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII*, 21 vols (London, 1862-1932), vol. V, p. 254. Hamer (IV, 254) gives a transcription of the Latin text, B.L. Add. MS 21505, fol. 12.

¹³TA, VI, 423; *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, eds, M. Livingstone et al (Edinburgh, 1908), II, 4910.

¹⁴See Hamer's discussion, IV, Appendix V. Sir Thomas Pettigrew, also called Lyon King in Scotland between 1529 and 1542, appears thus in more than the two records Hamer notes; see J. Balfour Paul, 'Clerical Life in Scotland in the Sixteenth Century', *Scottish Historical Review*, 17.67 (1920), 177-89 (179).

¹⁵*Court of the Lord Lyon; List of His Majesty's Officers of Arms and Other Officials ... 1318-1945*, ed., F.J. Grant, Scottish Record Society (Edinburgh, 1945), Introduction, n.p.

¹⁶See T. Innes of Learney, 'Heraldic Law', *An Introductory Survey of the Sources and Literature of Scots Law*, ed., H. McKechnie, Stair Society (Edinburgh, 1936), pp. 379-95.

These Lyndsay addressed directly to the king with few exceptions, for it would seem that one of the principal concerns of this poet and herald was to enhance the young James's understanding of the nature of sovereignty and of his own role as King of Scots.¹⁷ Four of Lyndsay's poems may be read thus as letters to the king. They are *The Dreame*, *The Complaynt of Schir David Lyndsay*, *The Answer...to the Kingis Flyting* and *Ane Supplication...to the Kingis Grace in Contemptioun of Syde Taillis*. In a fifth poem, *The Testament and Complaynt of the Papyngo*, Lyndsay introduced two formal epistles, the first of them, again, addressed to the king; the second speaking to his courtiers. This suggests that the initial audience for this poem was intended to be larger—a gathering of the king with his gentlemen of the privy chamber. A sixth poem, *The Complaynt and Publict Confessioun of the Kingis Auld Hound, callit Bagsche*, bore some resemblance to *The Testament of the Papyngo*. It, too, was perhaps an inner chamber entertainment, for the gruff speaker of the poem is the king's discarded mastiff, Bagsche, who includes within his complaint a document—a 'bill' or 'cedull' (as it is diversely called)¹⁸—from himself to the King's current canine favourite, Bawte, and his companions.¹⁹

In addition to these literary letters that were probably read aloud, Lyndsay is likely to have written many letters in prose as he reported to the Scottish government on his missions abroad. Tantalisingly, only one of them still survives.²⁰ The official letter, like the poems, was written in the Scots language, which was increasingly used for diplomatic correspondence at this time.²¹ The letter was preserved initially because it seems to have fallen into English government hands. Later, the seventeenth-century English antiquary and politician, Sir Robert Cotton, considered its contents sufficiently important to acquire the single leaf for his library. Cotton's collection was recognized at the time as it is now for its many treasures, but it is exceptionally rich in original papers relating to England's foreign relations, including those with Scotland. Thus this particular letter of Lyndsay's joined

¹⁷On this see further: S. Cairns, 'Sir David Lindsay's *Dreame*: Poetry, Propaganda, and Encomium in the Scottish Court', *The Spirit of the Court*, eds, G.S. Burgess and R.A. Taylor (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 110-19 and J. Hadley Williams, 'David Lyndsay's Making of King James V', *Stewart Style, 1513-1542: Essays on the Court of James V*, ed., J. Hadley Williams (East Linton, Scotland, 1996) pp. 201-26.

¹⁸'Bill' did not always signify a letter—see A.K. Moore, 'Middle English Verse Epistles', *Modern Language Notes*, 44 (1949), 86-87—but since Lyndsay tells us its contents, Bagsche's bill, with its conversational tone, frequent naming of its recipients, and epistolary ending, could be so classified.

¹⁹Hamer, I, 3-38 (*The Dreame*); 39-53 (*The Complaynt*); 55-90 (*The Testament of the Papyngo*); 92-99, *The Complaint and Publict Confessioun of...Bagsche*.

²⁰British Library, London, MS Cotton Caligula B I, fol., 313.

²¹See R.J. Lyall, 'Vernacular Prose before the Reformation', *The History of Scottish Literature I: Origins to 1660*, ed., R.D.S. Jack (Aberdeen, 1988), 163-82 (esp. 166) and J.G. Russell, *Diplomats at Work* (Gloucestershire, 1992), pp. 3-50.

forty-three volumes of documents on the same theme shelved in Cotton's Caligula press.²²

Even from this brief survey it would seem that a closer look at Lyndsay as a letter writer both in poetry and in prose is of value. All the same, it would not be because his letters were artless revelations. Whether in poetry or prose, Lyndsay's letters are carefully composed. They disarm us by their use of some of the then-standard conventions of the personal letter; for instance in their opening formulae—'Rycht Potent Prince' (*Dreme*), 'Schir, I beseik thyne Excellence' (*Complaynt*), 'Prepotent Prince, peirles of pulchritude' (*Papyngo*).²³ But as Lyndsay's use of them attests, these were also formulae adopted in what we would now think of as literary letters—those verse supplications and petitions from a hopeful writer to a potential patron or a person of influence. Literary letters at this time, whether or not they were elaborately crafted, were sometimes a necessary part of real life; the near-equivalent of a job application today.²⁴ Among Lyndsay's colleagues there were clerks, chaplains and grooms of the inner chamber who, in hopes of gaining additional notice, were also part-time poets, and some of their petitions still survive.²⁵ Lyndsay's early petitionary letters show that he, too, saw himself as another servitor-poet.²⁶ If, in these circumstances, Lyndsay's letters cannot offer direct evidence of his personal feelings or character, nevertheless there is much to be learned of them, and of the personality of the royal recipient Lyndsay knew so well, by cautious inference. If, in addition, we can bring to bear on these letters documented external information of various kinds, then their interest may be extended into literary and linguistic concerns, to the glimpsing of a climate of thought—what makes a writer select a particular item as worth repeating?—and, through references to events, topics or people, to other contemporary socio-historical matters.

²²See C.E. Wright, 'The Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries and the Formation of the Cottonian Library', *The English Library before 1700*, eds. F. Wormald and C.E. Wright (London, 1958), pp. 176-212 and K. Sharpe, *Sir Robert Cotton 1586-1631* (Oxford, 1979).

²³N. Davis, 'Style and Stereotype in Early English Letters', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 1 (1967), 7-17).

²⁴See further, J.A. Burrow, 'Autobiographical Poetry in the Middle Ages: The Case of Thomas Hoccleve', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68 (1982), 389-412; *idem*, 'The Poet as Petitioner', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 3 (1981), 61-75. and P. Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 104-6.

²⁵Alexander Kyd, a canon of the Chapel Royal, Stirling, is one example. His poem to James V is preserved in the Bannatyne Manuscript, National Library of Scotland, Adv. MS 1.1.6 (fols 92^a-93^a) and ed., W. Tod Ritchie, 4 vols, Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh, 1928-34), vol. II, pp. 242-45. Lyndsay refers to him in *The Testament of the Papyngo*, l. 43.

²⁶His position in James V's household seems, however, to have been more secure than most. After he and others were replaced at court by Douglas family and supporters Lyndsay's yearly pension was continued until 1527 (*ER*, XV, 229). Payment in arrears for that year was also paid to him in 1528 (*ER*, XV, 395).

I

Let us examine, first, a few of Lyndsay's verse epistles. *The Dreame*, Lyndsay's earliest surviving work, appeared auspiciously—as celebration, praise, and advice—at the beginning of James V's personal reign (1528). It has been argued that the poem was published soon after composition²⁷ and a contemporary, similarly celebratory address to the king in Latin, which is still extant in published form, adds some support to this possibility.²⁸ If so, then another dimension is added to the study of those of Lyndsay's verse letters that were published: Lyndsay may have written them as intimate exchanges, but once printed, they were public letters of some state importance, accessible to all who could read or have these addresses read to them. With *The Dreame* Lyndsay may have had this in mind from the first. The petitionary opening to the poem reminds the king of his childhood spent with Lyndsay: 'Quhen thow wes 3oung, I bure the in myne arme / Full tenderlie, tyll thow begouth to gang' (8-9). Lyndsay recalls how he and James V had played 'fairsis on the flure' (13) and how he disguised himself as the 'feind' (15) or 'the greislie gaist of gye' (16). He remembers the king's later interest in being told 'antique storeis and dedis marciall' (31), 'mony fabyll' (40), 'Seigis all' (42) and 'Prophiseis of Rymour, Beid, & Marlyng [Merlin]' (43). These interests were considered fitting recreation for a king: contemporary literature contains frequent mention of the reading aloud of stories in the royal privy chamber.²⁹ The references to stories, moreover, carefully introduce Lyndsay's counselling dream vision to follow. The vision is to contain sober counsel and some factual information, but with perspicacity Lyndsay describes it to the king as a new *story* ('ane storie of the new', 48).

In the context of the poem's publication, Lyndsay's opening divertingly introduced to James V's subjects a youthful and innocent monarch. While James V is described as he is now, at the beginning of his reign—'hye of Ingyne' (30), that is, brimming with natural intelligence or ability—the homely details of childhood play that are also mentioned imply that possession of intelligence should not be equated with possession of political experience. Such an 'image' was helpful to James V himself, since it drew a distinction between the activities of his past, when Lyndsay was his playmate and the instigator of his recreations, and the present, where James himself is the responsible leader, and Lyndsay but 'a wracheit worme' (27), as he calls himself, glad to be 'agreabyll' to 'sic ane Prince' (28). But the further effect

²⁷D. Hamer, 'The Bibliography of Sir David Lindsay (1490-1555)', *The Library*, Fourth Series, 10.1 (1929), 1-42 and Plate 1.

²⁸See further, *Ad Serenissimum Scotorum Regum Iacobum Quintam de suscepto Regni a diis feliciter ominato Strena*, Thomas Davidson [Edinburgh, 1528], STC 14435. It is reproduced in facsimile in *The Bannatyne Miscellany*, II, ed., D. Laing and T. Thomson, 3 vols, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1827-55), vol. II, pp. [ix-xvi], 1-8. See also L. O. Fradenburg's discussion: *City, Marriage Tournament* (Madison and London, 1991), pp. 47-64.

²⁹See for example, J. Gower, *The English Works*, ed., G.C. Macaulay, 2 vols, Early English Text Society (London, 1900), I, iv, 2790-97 or Hamer, II [*Ane Satyre*], 1835-38.

is to absolve the new sovereign from blame for the high-level corruption and instability that had beset the kingdom during the minority, and to endorse the king's current legislation to right these matters.³⁰

Both the style and diction of this opening letter are unostentatious, varying between the formal (though not Latinate or elaborately courtly) and the colloquial. Appropriate for the one-to-one communication, this also established a direct and easy relationship with the larger public audience. Similarly, the choice of Scots (as opposed to Latin), considered the verse letter's primary recipient, a monarch whose excellent early education as a European prince had been curtailed when power had fallen into the hands of less responsible counsellors, at about the time he was twelve.³¹ Scots was the familiar language of many of James's subjects, too, and a means of uniting king and kingdom. And in using the language with considerable skill, Lyndsay made a further point: that the reign of James V recognized its rich inheritance of writing in the vernacular, and would continue it with fresh authority.³²

II

The more informal petitionary letter, *The Complaynt* (1529-30), was written to the king soon after he began his adult reign. The poem is in conversational four-foot couplets, and opens in the manner familiar from Chaucer, Hoccleve or Dunbar, where a patron is reminded of faithful service as yet unrewarded:

Schir, I beseik thyne Excellence,
Heir my complaynt with pacience.
My dolent hart dois me constrane
Off my infortune to complane (1-4)

As the poem continues, Lyndsay creates and maintains with particular adroitness a special *rapport* between himself as writer and the king as recipient. He describes, in piquant detail, the unhappy situation that the prince and his personal servant shared during the king's minority, as first one pressure group and then another sought to gain control of the government. Of that time Lyndsay recalls that the young king's reverses (and occasional moments of happiness), were the same as his own. He now assumes, as the corollary, that his own present 'misfortunes' are temporary, because the king

³⁰See, for example, D. Easson, *Gavin Dunbar* (Edinburgh, 1947), p. 40.

³¹Note payments to Gavin Dunbar the king's 'Maister' in *TA*, vol. V, pp. 111 and 129. See also Easson, *Gavin Dunbar*, pp. 1-7, 25-32, and HMC, *Report on the Manuscripts of Mar and Kellie*, I, 11, where brief reference is made to the king's early instruction in reading, writing, Latin and French.

³²*The Testament of the Papyngo* develops this point, praising above all those native poet-translators of the classics, Gavin Douglas and John Bellenden (ll. 22-36, 49-54).

is at last 'in his aistait Royall' (115). Lyndsay argues his case with an assumption of intimacy that sounds genuine, yet one detail also raises questions. Lyndsay reminds the king,

Thow hes maid baith lordis and lairdis,
And hes gewin mony ryche rewardis
To thame that was full far to seik,
Quhen I lay nychtlie be thy cheik. (77-80)

Lyndsay's reference to his earlier nightly activities is puzzling. They were clearly important, for Lyndsay continues by calling as witnesses to the truth of his remark people who were well known about the court:

I tak the Quenis grace, thy mother,
My lord Chanclare, and mony vther,
Thy Nowreis, and thy auld Maistres
I tak thame, all, to beir wytnes.
Auld Wille Dile, wer he on lyue,
My lyue full weill he could discryue. (81-86)³³

Yet Lyndsay does not elaborate, taking it for granted, in the manner good letter-writing friends sometimes do, that the king will understand it.

We, too, may do so, but only with the help of other records. From these we know that the early 1520s were for the young king a time of constant risk of kidnap by those seeking power, and that the alarm of the king's guardians was heightened when the ambitious Archibald, Earl of Angus, on his marriage to the widowed queen, became James V's stepfather.³⁴ An Act of Parliament 'anent the sure keeping of the king' was passed in 1524.³⁵ But even earlier an 'Ordinance for the Keeping of King James the Fifth' had been issued in an effort to settle the question of his custody.³⁶ The ordinance holds the key to Lyndsay's poetic reference, for it stated that the king's schoolmaster, the usher (Lyndsay's post at this time), together with the valets, were to 'ly in the Kingis chalmer'. Outside it were to be his captain of the guard, his lieutenant, and four from a pool of twenty footmen who 'sall nightlie weche'.

³³James V's Chancellor was Gavin Dunbar, formerly his tutor (*TA*, vol. V, pp. 111 and 129); his Nowreis or nurse was Marion Douglas (*TA*, vol. V, p. 330; *ER*, vol. XIV, p. 350); his 'Maistres' or governess, later also seamstress, was Elizabeth Douglas, (*TA*, vol. V, pp. 146, 300, 375, 385). William Dillye is listed as at court over a long period; *TA*, vol. V, p. 276 records his role as crossbowman.

³⁴On the Earl of Angus see M.G. Kelley, 'The Douglas Earls of Angus: A Study in the Social and Political Bases of Power of A Scottish Family from 1389-1557', Unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Edinburgh, 1973), vol. II.

³⁵*Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland* (hereafter *APS*), ed., T. Thomson (Edinburgh, 1814), vol. II, p. 289.

³⁶HMC, *Report on the Manuscripts of Mar and Kellie*, I, 11-12.

Lyndsay's allusion now makes perfect sense, and his tone is better analysed. The simple yet concentrated line, 'Quhen I lay nychtlie be thy cheik', recalling a mutual trust made necessary by political and legal circumstances, can no longer be viewed as an overstatement or as sentimental. Together, ordinance and poem allow us to catch sight of the privileged yet prison-like arrangements of the king's boyhood. Even more interesting, the explanation of the small detail has added to our scanty information about precisely why James, on escaping from his close 'keeping' in 1528, showed such harshness towards the Douglas family.

An aside in the same poem, recalling to the king a few special times of childhood, gives us some different information. Lyndsay says to the King:

The first sillabis that thow did mute
Was *pa, Da Lyn: vpon* the lute
Than playt I twenty springis...
...
Fra play thow leit me neuer rest,
Bot gynkartoun thow lufit, ay, best. (91-93, 95-96)

Again, from a literary point of view, the comments create the impression of one-to-one intimacy that is essential to the poem's formal success, but they do more. Here is an indication of Lyndsay's musical abilities. These were in line with the times, for the musical recreation of the king was not left exclusively to professionals; there is ample evidence that at this time and earlier a king's chamber servants could be called upon to dance, sing and play a variety of musical instruments (recorders, harps, and lutes included).³⁷ We may catch also a laughing ruefulness about Lyndsay's reminder, 'Fra play thow leit me neuer rest' (95)—was he induced to sing the same song more than once?—that adds something to our store of information about Lyndsay the man.

The king's own musical interests, revealed here in his enthusiasm for lute song, are confirmed from a variety of official sources. By the 1530s, the Treasurer's Accounts, for instance, regularly recorded the cost of James's heavy demand for lute strings.³⁸ The mention of the king's particular favourite, a song called 'gynkartoun' (96), is worth noting, but no other contemporary reference to it has so far been found. On the other hand, the reference to 'gynkartoun' has provided musicologists with the only record of this tune before the late seventeenth century, when it is mentioned again in a

³⁷See further R.F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 54-59 and J. Stevens, *Music and Poetry at the Early Tudor Court* (1961), reprinted with corrections (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 265-95.

³⁸TA, vol. VI, pp. 18, 87 (two entries), 179, 181, 185, 206, 216, 250 and 257.

collection of older songs called Constable's MS Cantus. Some words of 'gynkartoun' thereby were saved, but, alas, no music!³⁹

III

We may touch very briefly on the first of the formal epistles found in *The Testament of the Papyngo*, which is addressed to James V. This is a mingling of several literary genres, for the bird's opening address, 'Prepotent Prince' (227), and following blessing, 'Glore, honour, laude, tryumphe, & victorie/ Be to thy heych excellent Celsitude' (228-29)⁴⁰ give way to a testament from the dying bird: 'I leif to the my trew vnfenzeit hart,/ To gydder with this Cedull susequent' (233-34). The letter in which we are interested is thus a letter within a letter. The parrot describes it to the king further, tongue-in-cheek, as another of those documents: 'Be [by] plesande Poetis, in style Heroycall,/ Quhou thow suld gyde thy Seait Imperiall' (239-40). Here is a signal that James V is about to be given direct advice, and the use of the parrot-poet, privileged to speak truth by the imminence of death, deepens the expectation. By these means, Lyndsay's letter, unusually, puts a distance between himself, his material, and its recipient, and what follows is certainly traditional counsel, not always palatable:

Off thy vertew Poetis perpetuallie
Sall mak mentioun, vnto the world be endit:
So thov excers thyne office prudentlie... (262-64)

James's ideal life is set out in detail—how many men and women are at his service (273), how 'Halkyng, hountyng, armes, and leiffull amour' (274) are James V's by right; how, for James's recreation, 'Masteris of Museik' sing softly and play on 'plesande Instrument' (277). In these lines Lyndsay was in part enhancing the reputation of the Scottish king and court; it may not be coincidental that the poem was published soon after its composition not in Scotland but in England.⁴¹ But through his parrot mouthpiece, Lyndsay continues, with inviting flattery, to the heart of the matter:

Quharefor, sen thov hes sic capacitie
To lerne to playe so plesandlie, and syng,
Ryd hors, ryn speris with gret audacitie,
Schute with hand bow, crosbow, and culueryng,
Among the rest, schir, lerne to be ane kyng... (283-87)

³⁹See *The Works of Lindsay*, ed. Hamer, III, 53; *The Complaynt of Scotland*, ed. J. Leyden, (Edinburgh, 1801), p. 283 and K. Elliott, 'Trip and goe, hey: a truly Scottish song', *Stewart Style, 1513-1542*, ed., J. Hadley Williams, pp. 153-78.

⁴⁰On the blessing as a formula of greeting in the personal letter see N. Davis, 'A Note on Pearl', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 17 (1966), pp. 403-05.

⁴¹Hamer, IV, 17-18.

These details and compliments appear to be of a piece with the gracefully worded, but apparently conventional advice, but are they more?

Regarding James's interest in music we may recall Lyndsay's mention of it in *The Complaynt*, but there is also further apposite corroboration. It is to be found in a late sixteenth-century voice part-book compiled by the priest Thomas Wode, in which he noted that James V had possessed 'ane singular gud eir and culd sing that he had never seine before, bot his voyce wes rawky and harske.'⁴² Again the Treasurer's Accounts, incomplete and insufficiently detailed as they often are, also come to our assistance. There we find documentation that the king was riding from a very early age; that he had indeed learned to 'run' spears, since there are several payments for their purchase and delivery to the king; that he had an interest in culverin or hand guns, and in one instance had one mended, and that he frequently practised with the crossbow under the watchful eye of his old servant, William (or Wille) Dile (or Duly), the same man upon whom Lyndsay called as one of his witnesses in *The Complaynt*.⁴³ The stanzas within this more formal letter take inspiration from literary tradition, it is evident, but the advice that they offer is given greater relevance because Lyndsay has made good use of his knowledge of this particular monarch's interests and activities.

IV

A final piece, Lyndsay's *Answer...to the Kingis Flyting*, most vividly conveys a sense of the unmediated two-way exchange common to letter writing.⁴⁴ Purporting to be his reply to the king's insulting charge that the poet was no longer sufficiently 'vail3eand' in 'Venus werkis' to belong to his bachelor 'Court of Love', it draws upon elements of the literary flyting—in which two opponents took it in turn to quarrel in apparently impromptu, but clearly skilfully prepared, abusive verse⁴⁵—but it also recognizes, and makes use of, the similarities of the flyting form to the letter of advice. We should note, too, the poem's strictly privy chamber context. Evidence suggests that the poem was published for the first time only thirteen years after Lyndsay's death.⁴⁶

⁴²Wode Cantus Part-Book, Edinburgh University Library MS Laing III.483, p. 176.

⁴³See note 27 above.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, I, 101-104. It was written c. 1535.

⁴⁵See further, J. Kurtz, 'The Flyting', Unpublished thesis (Columbia, 1964); P. Bawcutt, 'The Art of Flyting', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 10.2 (1983), 5-24; D. Gray, "'Rough Music': Some Early Invectives and Flytings', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 14 (1984), 21-43, and Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, 220-56.

⁴⁶For bibliographical discussion, see Hamer, IV, 45-48 and *idem*, 'The Bibliography of Sir David Lindsay (1490-1555)', *The Library*, Fourth Series, 10.1 (1929), 1-42 and Plate I.

Throughout the poem attention is drawn to the acts of reading and writing. Lyndsay greets the king not with flyting insults but in good epistolary style—'Redoutit Roy'. He has read the king's 'ragment' or challenge, and he answers the stinging royal criticisms as, seemingly, he reads them over:

Quhat can 3e say forther, bot I am fail3eit
 In Uenus werkis? I grant schir, that is trew:
 The tyme hes bene, I was better artail3eit
 Nor I am now. . . (29-32)

By the end of the first three stanzas, Lyndsay has admitted that he is no poet, and has capitulated to his royal opponent with the cry: 'Proclamand 3ow the Prince of Poetry' (21). It is only then, when the king is presumably disarmed by approaching victory, that Lyndsay begins his attack on James's personal behaviour in matters of love, revealing as he goes his serious concerns for the the king's health, and for the realm's wellbeing, suffering as it is from James's ill-chosen counsellors, and so long without an heir born in wedlock. These are delicate matters and the fusion of elements of the flyting style with those from the personal letter accommodates them well. Thus, for example, using the flyting force of alliteration and with the further assistance of animal and battle imagery, Lyndsay says, half-offensively, half admiringly, to the king:

Thocht 3e rin rudelie, lyke ane restles Ram,
 Schutand 3our bolt at miny sindrie schellis... (36-37)

He takes advantage of James's high-spirited attention to add, in plainer speech:

Quharefore be war with dowbling of the bellis,
 For mony ane dois haist thair awin saule knellis...(39-40)

Later Lyndsay recalls a libellous incident that the two have shared:

Remember how besyde the masking fat [vat]
 3e caist ane quene ouerthort ane stinking troch:
 That feind...
 Cast down the fat, quharthrow [whereupon] drink, draf [dregs], &
 iuggis [swill]
 Come rudely rinnand down about 3our luggis. (52-56)

This encounter in the royal brewing house is exploited further for its alliterative fun at the expense of James and the 'duddroun...drowkit with dreggis' (59-60), but it is also used as a focus for Lyndsay's pointed criticism

of the king: 'On 3our behalf I thank God tymes ten score,/ That 3ou preseruit from gut and grandgore' (62-63).

The poem ends with a return to the opening theme with praise to the king as the 'flour' of 'flowand Rethorick' (70). A 'signed' postscript couplet reinforces the idea of the poem as a letter, and comically reduces Lyndsay's talent still further: 'Quod Lindesay in his flyting/ Aganis the Kingis dyting' (71-72).

Lyndsay's *Answer* recalls the lighter epistles of Clément Marot, with their conversational complicity and telling anecdote.⁴⁷ A link would not be surprising; many of the Frenchman's epistles were written for the court of Francis I in the early 1530s, and Lyndsay is likely to have encountered them on his diplomatic missions to France during the middle and later years of that decade. This must remain conjecture. Nevertheless, it is interesting that such direct speaking was permitted at James V's court. The poem's ostensible topic, a case for the king's 'Court of Venus', reminds us that while the negotiations for James V's marriage continued—with first Mary of Hungary, next Mary Tudor, then a Danish princess, or Marie de Vendôme put forward as suitable partners—James and his court sought many bachelor diversions, more and less bawdy. There is some evidence that James's familiar servants wrote verses of a courtly nature on love. Some still survive, a few of them with their music,⁴⁸ but none of these poems on love are attributed to James V himself. The very existence of Lyndsay's *Answer* to the king, though the latter's own challenge is lost, is therefore significant. In the prologue to his translation of Livy's history of Rome, Lyndsay's contemporary, John Bellenden, praised James V for his own 'ornat stile poetically/ Qwik flowand vers of rhetorik cullouris'.⁴⁹ Lyndsay's poem, with its studied compliments to the king on rhetorical matters, at least, gives some support to the truth of Bellenden's comment.

V

When we turn to study Lyndsay's prose letter, we are reminded that his writing in verse must have been fitted in around his many activities as Scotland's acting chief herald. By the end of the reign, as part of this demanding role, Lyndsay had travelled to the Low Countries, France and England. His sole surviving account of these visits to foreign courts concerns Lyndsay's first known mission, which was to Brussels in June 1531.

⁴⁷See, for example, Marot's 'Epistre à son amy Lyon' (Epitre X), composed in 1526; first published in 1534, Clément Marot, *Les Epîtres*, ed., C.A. Mayer (London, 1958), pp.127-31.

⁴⁸See *Music of Scotland, 1500-1700*, ed. K. Elliott and H.M. Shire, *Musica Britannica XV* (1957; London, 3rd rev. ed. 1975), Nos 39 and 45, both by James V's courtier-servant, George Steill.

⁴⁹John Bellenden, *Livy's 'History of Rome'*, ed., W.A. Craigie, 2 vols, STS (Edinburgh, 1901-3), I, 1, ll. 17-18.

Lyndsay wrote his report to the king's 'greit secretair', Thomas Erskine, from Antwerp, almost two months after his meetings in Brussels. He reports briskly of his prompt reception, and that he has 'gottin [th]e auld aliansis and confederationis confermit for [th]e space of an hundred 3eiris...'. Scotland's 'auld aliansis', we might have thought, were to do with France. What were these? The answer is found in James V's preparatory correspondence with the Emperor Charles V, setting out the purposes of Lyndsay's mission.⁵⁰ James, sending his own confirmation, was requesting in turn the Emperor's confirmation of a one hundred-year-old peace treaty, originally made between the dukes of Burgundy and Brabant, the counts of Flanders and Holland, the emperor's predecessors, and the kings of Scots.

In the second paragraph of Lyndsay's letter, he speaks of the 'materis pertenyng to the marchans'. These, too, were referred to in James V's preliminary correspondence: James, now that he was ruling personally, was seeking from Charles delayed redress for an attack by Spanish pirates on a Scottish vessel loaded with valuable cargo. Lyndsay notes that these negotiations took him 'vii owikis and od dayis' to complete, but he gives no further explanation of what seems a rather unnecessarily drawn-out process.

In the same paragraph, however, Lyndsay refers to delays—are these the real ones?—encountered in arranging a meeting with a certain 'sf donpedir delecowe', that is, Pedro de la Cueva, the emperor's chamberlain and privy councillor, whom it is clear Lyndsay had expected to find at the imperial court.⁵¹ Lyndsay's puzzling reference to de la Cueva hints at a further purpose for his journey that was not noted by James V, nor included in Lyndsay's own instructions as they have come down to us—in an officially-sanctioned letter book written by the Scottish Clerk Register, Lyndsay's colleague and fellow poet, James Foulis.⁵² Indeed, it is largely chance that has preserved the earliest suggestions that, in addition to the formal business described above, Lyndsay was to re-open enquiries into the prospect of a Scottish marriage with the emperor's sister, the queen dowager of Hungary, and this failing, to broach the matter of an imperially-approved alternative partner. But the hoped-for, though delayed, meeting with de la Cueva offers a hint of this secret purpose, since de la Cueva had participated in the earlier meetings with secretary Erskine. At these Scotland had indicated readiness to treat secretly on the question of a marriage alliance, while the Spanish

⁵⁰*The Letters of James V*, pp. 191 (James V to Charles V, May 25, 1531); pp. 193 and 194, (James V to Charles V, 30 June 1531).

⁵¹*Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers, relating to negotiations between England and Spain* (hereafter *CSP, Spanish*), vol. IV, pt. 2, ed., P. de Gayangos (London, 1882), pp. xiv-xvi.

⁵²*James V Letters*, p. 194 and R.K. Hannay's introductory notes, p. xi.

representative had temporized.⁵³ The continuing delays, the result of shifts in the European balance of power, may be further traced in Scottish documents of this time.⁵⁴ Somewhat amusingly, they also appear in marginalia on a Spanish document, written by Covos, the secretary and High Commander of Leon: 'A gracious letter to be written to the Cardinal [of Ravenna], asking him to entertain the Scots with fine words until we can see more clearly through the English affairs'.⁵⁵ Lyndsay's embassy on other valid matters must have presented a welcome opportunity to push the matter further, just as Lyndsay's comment, that de la Cueva 'gaiff me na answer of 3or writtins quhill I was reddey to depart' is, in the light of our additional documentation, unsurprising.

Early notice of international interest in these steps to negotiate a Scottish marriage is found in a report made to English central authorities. This referred to information obtained from a Scottish messenger, David Panter, arrested near the Anglo-Scottish border in late September 1531. Letters had been found on him, and under close questioning, Panter had given details of the results of Lyndsay's mission, including those relating to the marriage negotiations. He had further informed his captors that secret information, unknown to him, was to have been sent to Scotland by an imperial messenger but that insurrections had prevented this. Instead, according to Panter's reported testimony, 'lyndsey the Scottes harrold was appoynted to bryng the same with hym...'.⁵⁶

Panter's testimony must be treated with caution, given the circumstances surrounding its collection. Even so, the context itself is suggestive of the lengths to which governments of the time were prepared to go to obtain information about potential enemies, and gives some idea of the risks Lyndsay had to take on these missions, although his status as herald would have given him some protection.⁵⁷

A letter written later in the same year, from the Scottish secretary, Thomas Erskine, to the Cardinal of Ravenna (then also protector of Scotland), provides useful corroboration.⁵⁸ Erskine mentions Lyndsay's role in the marriage negotiations, and confirms the messenger David Panter's

⁵³*CSP, Spanish*, vol. IV, pt. (2), pp. 85-7 (Miçer Mai to the Emperor, 10 March 1531); p. 88 (The Cardinal of Ravenna to the Emperor, 12 March 1531); pp. 101-103 (Miçer Mai to the High Commander, 23 March 1531).

⁵⁴See, for example, Erskine's letter to the Cardinal of Ravenna, August 1531, *James V Letters*, pp. 197-98.

⁵⁵*CSP, Spanish*, vol. IV, pt. 2, p. 115 (Consulta of the Council, — April 1531).

⁵⁶*State Papers of Henry VIII*, 11 vols (London, 1830-52), vol. V, pt. 4, pp. 574-75.

⁵⁷See further, J.R. Alban and C.T. Allmand, 'Spies and Spying in the Fourteenth Century', *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages*, ed., C.T. Allmand (Liverpool, 1976), pp. 73-101.

⁵⁸*James V Letters*, pp. 203-4.

statements that the queen of Hungary had refused the Scottish proposal, but that she and the emperor had suggested an alliance with one of the emperor's nieces, the Danish princesses. Revealingly of the silent subtext to Lyndsay's letter, Erskine also adds that Lyndsay had carried back to James V portraits of both women.

In the second paragraph of his letter Lyndsay also refers to the rumour, in circulation at the time of Lyndsay's arrival, that James V was dead. This piece of news is clearly related in Lyndsay's mind to the two other matters this paragraph contains, both emphasizing delay, and both with the emperor's relations with Henry VIII as an unstated but important factor. When he speaks of the rumour, Lyndsay notes without comment that the information about James's death had been 'send for werrite furth of England'. Such rumours were not uncommon at a time when communication lines were so varied and uncertain, but Lyndsay's studiously plain reportage implies, perhaps, that there had been deliberate rumour-mongering by England. Lyndsay takes care to note his own role in defusing the petard; the rumour had been 'haldin for effect' as he puts it, until his arrival at the imperial court. In addition, as a perceptive diplomat, he has thought of what else could be learned from the rumour, and thus goes on to mention that the imperial response to it had been prompt and correct, with prayers for the king's soul ordered, and that the news of the king's prosperity had brought expressions of pleasure from the dowager queen. This last is noteworthy, since Lyndsay knew, by the time he wrote the letter, that Mary of Hungary was not a contender for James's hand. Her goodwill had not been lost.

In the final paragraph, Lyndsay speaks of matters outside his formal instructions, choosing news that could be useful to the Scottish government. First are references to the triumphs and jousts that he has witnessed at court. A 'gret tournament', in particular, has impressed him. Lyndsay says that he has 'writtin at lenth' of it in articles to 'schaw the kingis grace at my haym cuming'. In Scotland, it was Lyndsay and his fellow heralds who were responsible for such events, so his interest must have been both intense and highly professional. All the same, it is intriguing that this 'gret tournament' does not figure in any of the major reference works on the triumphs and tournaments of Charles V's reign so far consulted.⁵⁹ Possibly its absence serves to underline the differences between the small, poorer kingdom of Scotland and one of the great European empires, as well as to emphasize the dearth of major spectacles in Scotland since the famed tournaments of the black lady during the reign of James V's father. This was Lyndsay's first mission abroad, we remember, and it is possible that with his

⁵⁹Among these: *Fêtes and Cérémonies au Temps de Charles Quint*, ed., J. Jacquot (Paris, 1975), and R. Strong, *Splendour at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and Illusion* (London, 1973). A search of the collections in the Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, Brussels, kindly undertaken by the Keeper of Manuscripts, C. van den Bergen-Pantens, has failed to find any references to it.

very limited first hand experience of spectacle up to this time, the scale of the imperial devisings had been outside Lyndsay's imaginings, although their splendour, from spoken, written and painted record, could not have been unknown to him.⁶⁰

The matter-of-fact statements that follow note that the queen of Hungary remains regent, and that 'ye emprior purposis to depart at the fyn of yis moneth and passis wþ In alman3e for the reformation of ye luteriens'. The latter reference catches Charles V in the midst of the constant journeying that his desire for personal control over his empire forced upon him. Lyndsay's laconic remark also shows that he expected his audience in Scotland's royal secretariat to be familiar with the growing power of Lutheranism in Europe, where it had taken official hold in some of the German principalities. In using the word 'reformation' (meaning improvement or redressing of the existing state of things) Lyndsay was expressing the non-extremist official attitudes of his country at this time: Scotland had banned the import of books by Luther and his followers by Act of Parliament in 1525, but was yet to see the need to ban their possession by persons within the realm as well.⁶¹ Lyndsay's personal opinion may well have been different: by 1554, at least, he had given the corrupt parson in the *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, the revealing words, which he spoke to the character, Spirituality: '...go distroy all thir Lutheriens:/ In speciall 3on ladie Veritie' (1118-19).

Lyndsay's letter also tells us something of his abilities as a writer in prose, albeit in a public role only. His style here is noticeably fluent but words are not wasted. The opening address to the king's secretary is brief and unremarkable: 'My Lord, I recommend my hartly seruis on to 3our L[ordship]'. This formula might be compared with the King's own opening phrases in a letter to Erskine: 'Secretair I commend me rycht hartly to you...'⁶² or with Gavin Douglas's to his agent and friend, Adam Williamsons: 'Brothyr master Adam, I commend me hartly to yow'.⁶³ At the conclusion, Lyndsay has simply given a note of place and date: 'written w^t my hand at handwarp [Antwerp] ye xxiiij day of [au]gust by 30^r servitour at his powir Dauid Lyndsay harauld to o^r sowerein Lord of scotland'. Lyndsay was writing to the secretary, not James V himself, and his ending forms a sharp contrast to the formula Cardinal Beaton, that worldly and wily politician who

⁶⁰Lyndsay was not part of the embassy to England in 1524-25, and thus had not seen the combats and mock assault staged over Christmas at Greenwich, for which see E. Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*, ed., H. Ellis (London, 1809), pp. 587-91.

⁶¹APS, vol. II, pp. 241 and 341 (1535).

⁶²'The Pittodrie Papers', *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, ed., J. Stuart, 5 vols (Aberdeen, 1841-52), vol. II, p. 193.

⁶³*The Poetical Works of Gavin Douglas*, ed., J. Small (Edinburgh, 1874), vol. I, p. xxxix.

was also a prince of the church, often used in his ambassadorial reports to the King: 'And I pray god preserue 3our grace eternallie'.⁶⁴

The businesslike preference for direct plainness is also apparent in the body of Lyndsay's letter. He uses few qualifiers. He sets a positive tone to the completion of his main task with a spare use of 'gud' — 'I haue gottin gud expedioun...'. Sir Don Pedro is courteously and shrewdly said to have shown Lyndsay 'gret humanitie for 3or L[ordschips] saik'. Only in his references to the imperial triumphs he witnessed does Lyndsay become a little more 'literary' or, perhaps, more self-revealing. But in keeping with the directness and brevity of the rest of the letter, Lyndsay uses the rhetorical method of abbreviation known as *occupatio*, as he refuses to describe the triumphs in full ('It war to lang for me to writ'), yet briefly refers to various aspects of them ('triumphand lustynis', 'terribill turnements', 'feychtyn on fut In barras').

Orthography is a dangerous subject for study in fifteenth and sixteenth century Scotland, where spelling remained unfixed, but the word 'luterien' is worth remark. According to the editors of the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, its use in Lyndsay's letter is the earliest known Scottish instance. The English equivalent, current from ten years earlier, simply added the suffixes 'an' or 'ane' to Luther's surname. By contrast, Lyndsay's spelling of 'luterien' possibly indicated a transmission that was directly from the French word, 'Luthérien', and thus perhaps indicative of the closer ties of these two countries at this time.

The handwriting of this official piece of prose correspondence links it in a most useful way to Lyndsay's poetic output, where in all cases an authorial manuscript is wanting. Lyndsay's is a largely cursive secretary hand, far from the open, rounded and almost illegible hand of his king.⁶⁵ But what can be learned from a full analysis of *ductus* or character, in Lyndsay's handwritten letter must await another occasion.

From the glimpses we have had of Lyndsay as a letter writer in prose and poetry there emerges an impression of the man as plain yet diplomatically spoken. He is loyal, extremely competent both as poet and diplomat and not afraid to point this out where it is justified, but he has a dry wit that prevents him from any overriding self-aggrandizement, and an ability to recognize where and how a word should be spoken and where withheld. Whether for public or private audience, whether the writings are in poetry or

⁶⁴A. Lang, 'Letters of Cardinal Beaton 1537-1541', *Scottish Historical Review*, VI.22 (1909), pp. 150-58 (154).

⁶⁵For an illustration of the king's hand, see 'Pittodrie Papers', vol. II, p. 193, and adjacent plate. See also G.G. Simpson, *Scottish Handwriting 1150-1650* (Aberdeen, 1977), esp. 'Historical Background', pp. 3-36.

prose, Lyndsay's chief concern is with answering the needs of his king and of responding appropriately to the impact upon the realm of Scotland of behaviour or events occurring both within and without the country. Yet he is, it would seem, not uninterested in literary matters, such as the latest European trends in the writing of verse letters. It could not be said that Lyndsay's prose letter reveals any indication of his poetic skill, or even a liking for an apt literary allusion or proverb. On the other hand, the letter does not fall short as a concise and perceptive official communication. As records of his life and times, Lyndsay's letters make a substantial contribution, particularly when, as we have done here, they are considered in conjunction with various other primary sources.

Janet Hadley Williams
Honorary Research Fellow
Department of English
Australian National University
Canberra