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## **A. Introduction**

This short essay is about Sir David Lindsay's play *The Satire of the three Estates*. The play was first performed at Linlithgow Palace in 1540<sup>1</sup>.

A play always has something to do with the facts that concern the people it was written for. In Sir David Lindsay's case this meant the king, probably his closest friends and knights as well as his counsellors. To understand what kind of an impact such a play had on its audience it is inevitable to also have a look at the time it was first performed. The same as news on catastrophes, political decisions and so forth move people in the twenty – first century topics of comparable relevance effected the people in the sixteenth century. Therefore one has to have a close look at the problems of the time, but also at new ideas or the balance of powers in Europe of those days.

In this essay I will give a short summary of the play and then I would like to give some information on Sir David Lindsay.

Afterwards I will have a closer look at the political background of the first performance. My last point will be to reveal the possible real characters symbolised by the characters in the play.

## **B. The three Estates**

### **A short summary of *The three Estates***

The play *The Satire of the three estates* by Sir David Lindsay consists of two parts. In the first part there are 27 different characters. In the second part there are seven more which are added.

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<sup>1</sup> Kemp, Robert; *The Satire of The Three Estates by Sir David Lindsay of the Mount; The Acting Text prepared by Robert Kemp for Tyrone Guthrie's production at the Edinburgh Festival 1949*; Edinburgh 1949.

The most important characters are: King Humanitie, Divine Correction, Sensualitie, Spiritualitie, Temporalitie, Gude Counsel and Chastitie.

The play is opened by Diligence.

King Humanitie is a young king whose counsellors make him take a mistress. This also is the starting point of the misleading way of living regarding Christianity. In the following scenes he is fooled by three disguised liars. In the scene where the liars appear Gude Counsel is sent to prison by the liars who already have taken control over King Humanitie. With the beginning of his lecherous new life the king forgets about the goods of Christianity and is not able to judge properly anymore.

In the course of the following scenes the audience see how the three so called Vices Discretion, Devotion and Sapience try to get rid of everything and everyone who could be dangerous to them. For instance Lady Chastitie who is homeless since the church in Scotland is not as it was meant to be. She wandered around and had asked Spiritualitie, Temporalitie und at last the People to give her shelter. But she is not successful with neither of the groups. In the end when Lady Chastitie is sent to prison by the Vices Divine Correction enters the stage. This is the moment when the vices know that their time has come and they flee and take away the king's treasure box. Correction frees Gude Counsel, Chastitie and Vertie. He advises the young king to call a parliament and gives him advice regarding a successful reign. One of these advice are for instance to call all the estates and discuss what can be done to change the situation present at that moment.

The second part starts with an interruption. A member of the People called Poor Man disturbs Diligence's opening and tells his story. Afterwards the Pardoner enters the scene and tries to sell pardoners. Poor Man hears that and buys *pardoners* worth '*ane groat*'. But Poor Man is not satisfied and gets angry and so they start to argue.

In the following scene Diligence opens parliament and King Humanitie, Correction, the king's courtiers and the virtues enter. The three estates greet the king and parliament is opened. John Common – Weal stands up and talks to the King and Correction. He reveals all the failures of the estates. In the course of the following hearing Temporalitie gets punished but as this estates wants to cooperate this is just a short episode.

Spiritualitie does not agree on what is said about their estate and fights back. But there are too many accusations against this estate and therefore they also have to give in.

The three Vices are imprisoned and sentenced to be hanged.

Flatterie tried to get away by betraying his fellows Falsehood and Deceit but this did not work out.

In the end of the second part the three vices Deceit, Falsehood and Flatterie are allowed to say something before they are hanged. With the execution of the vices Diligence closes the play and advises the audience to go their ways and enjoy their time.

### **Sir David Lindsay (1486 – 1555)**

Sir David Lindsay of the Mount in Fife was born in 1486 on the estate of his family near Cupar in Fife. He probably attended school in Cupar and later studied at St. Andrews University. In 1511 he came to the court of James IV. When two years later James IV was killed in Flodden Lindsay became one of the closest people to the young James V.

In 1529 Lindsay was knighted by king James V. He now took part in diplomatic missions to England and France and in 1548 to Denmark. Sir David Lindsay also was responsible for the preparations for James V's marriage with Mary of Guise Lorraine in 1538. After James' death in 1542 Lindsay did not leave the court but stayed there. It is reported that he died in April 1555.

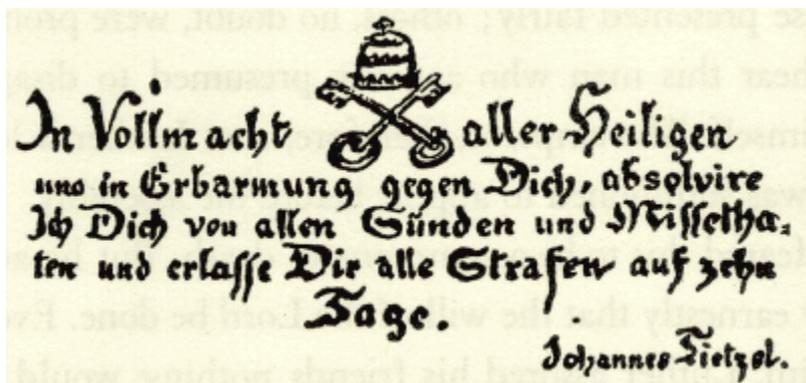
His most famous work was “*Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*”. The play was performed at Linlithgow Palace in 1540, but it took over sixty years until the play was published. Even so Lindsay was Catholic he was open to new ideas and in his play he also shows the audience that he was aware of the deplorable states of affairs.

### Historical background of the first performance

The historical background even though enormous must be summed up briefly.

One has to imagine that fifty years before the play was performed for the first time the New World had been discovered. This was a shock for the omniscience of Catholic Church as this proved that the earth was not flat, but round like a ball. And even later on, the existence of the natives in South and North America turned out to be a theological problem as they were not mentioned in the bible<sup>2</sup>.

In October 1517 Martin Luther had unintendedly started the Reformation by pointing at the problems of holding masses in Latin instead of the language of the people or the use of the indulgence. (see example)



<sup>2</sup> Deloria, Philip J.; *Playing Indian*; Yale University Press New Haven & London, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indulgence> Date: 4th September 2005. *An indulgence granted by authority of the Pope by Johann Tetzel in 1517.*

These were the two major shocks that shook the clergy in the Old World.

It was also the time of the Renaissance which came from Italy and covers the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth century in Western Europe. Renaissance meant that the educated people became aware of the traditions and ideals of the ancient Greek and Roman cultures. Influences were felt in literature and art. Another aim was to achieve a balance between religion and worldly matters. New Academies were founded and science was pushed forward. Leonardo da Vinci is just one who must be mentioned in this context.

Another point which is very important is the balance of power in Europe at that time. Scotland was friendly with France and the ruling class in Scotland had hardly any interest in England. This constellation often brought England into conflict with both, Scotland and France. It never could be sure that it had just one enemy. Another point that could change the balance of powers in Europe in the near future were the Turks.

The Turks were a major threat to Europe and it was just a matter of time until they would reach out for the south – east of Europe.

### **The characters of the play and possible relations to reality**

In this part of my short essay I want to point out a few relations between characters in the play and their possible historical equivalent actors in real life in the sixteenth century.

*King Humanitie* can be associated with James IV. James also was a very young king and there were a lot of temptations for him as well. Since his father died when he was very young he always had to rely on someone else's advice. For him it must have been as hard as it was for King Humanitie to distinguish between false and good friends and advisors.

*Correction* can be related to the Reformation. This movement also forced the estates to rethink. The name stands for the correction of the way the church was established. Away from Latin scriptures. The Reformation had almost the same points of criticism as Divine Correction.

*Sensualitie* symbolises all the mistresses and the women who lived in sin with clergy men and men who were married. In this connection one also must name *Hameliness* who stands for the children that were given birth by nuns and concubines of clergy men like abbots, monks and friars. *Spiritualitie* stands for the Catholic Church in Scotland. In combination with *Spiritualitie* one has to mention the character *Pardoner*, he is meant to symbolise those who sold indulgences to the people. *Gude Counsel* can be interpreted as a wise old person, or as a teacher, like Sir David Lindsay was for James IV. Maybe Sir David Lindsay really tried to portray himself with this character, but this is just my own speculation.

*Verity* and *Chastitie* symbolise the Christian virtues. *Vertity* and *Chastitie* were those virtues the people expected the Reformation to bring back to Christianity. The *temporalitie* must be connected with the nobility of Scotland. For the nobility it was not uncommon to send children that could not be provided with jobs or land into cloisters or they became abbots. Therefore the ties between *temporalitie* and *spiritualitie* were very important in this play. Only the fact that the church lost land and possessions after the reformation and they were given to the nobility made them split. The *Poor Man* stands for the ordinary people in Scotland. He feels cheated and in a way robbed. The character does not understand why the laird stole his mare after his father had died and why the priest had the right to take away a cow every time one of his family died. The scene with the pardoner shows how the ordinary people in the street were convinced to give money for indulgences which did not help them in their real life.

And *John the Common – Weal* is the speaker of the ordinary people and speaks against temporalitie and spiritualitie when King Humanitie and Divine Correction open parliament. He combines what the people who would have been forgotten otherwise think and feel. And John Common – Weal sees what temporalitie, spiritualitie and the merchants and burgesses do not see about each other. He knows what really moves the people. John Common – Weal characterises a person who has actually never existed.

### **C. Conclusion**

My conclusion after reading this play is that it is highly political. The mentioning of The New Testament which was associated with England and Henry VIII was unequivocal to the people of those days. James IV and also Mary of Guise Lorraine must have been aware of this. And the fact that Mary de Guise Lorraine let a group of actors perform the play one more time after James IV death shows that she understood what was being presented to her.

It is also interesting to see that it took over sixty years until the play was published. The Catholic Church had tried to ban the play. To know what this play meant and in how far it made people think one has to have a look at the time and its highly moving events.

The Catholic Church had to go on the defensive versus Reformation. If the clergy would have lived what they had preached to the people it all might have turned out different. But the Reformation set in at a point where there was enough to fight for and a lot to change. Here one just has to mention corruption. As we can see in the second part of *The Satire of the three Estates*.

In my opinion this play symbolises in how far theatre can be used as an political instrument.

#### **D. Works cited**

Deloria, Philip J.; *Playing Indian*; Yale University Press New Haven & London, 1998.

Kemp, Robert; *The Satire of The Three Estates by Sir David Lindsay of the Mount; The Acting Text prepared by Robert Kemp for Tyrone Guthrie's production at the Edinburgh Festival 1949*; Edinburgh 1949.

#### **Illustrations included**

<http://www.geocities.com/cartedatrionfi/Fragments/Images/Estates3.html> Date: 20th August 2005.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indulgence> Date: 4th September 2005. *An indulgence granted by authority of the Pope by Johann Tetzel in 1517.*