

“God shall always raise up some”:

John Knox, the Reformer as Prophet

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Even those who resist John Knox's 'message' must concede the superbly rhetorical nature of his 'medium.'¹ His control over figures of *pathos*—abusive similitudes, lavish ironies, and cutting epithets—is striking, and the careful *divisio* apparent in the structure of his tracts, as well as the scholarly listing of proofs and *exempla*, indicate his characteristic regard for figures of *logos*. Most notable, however, are his figures and cultivation of *ethos*, which deal with self-characterisation, or the personal qualities of the 'messenger,' which can stand apart from the message or medium. Characteristically, Knox likes, first, to portray himself as a prophet. The second part of his 'ethical' consciousness involves not so much the prophetic speaker as the hostile or resisting audience to whom he usually finds himself speaking.

In the opening decades of the Reformation, the fact of resisting audiences for reform-minded polemicists like Tyndale, Latimer or Knox must have presented massive problems of voice, persona, and proof, and hence authority. Often the Reformers meditated on these problems through the assistance of biblical phrases and formulations, refusing, for example, to give that which is holy unto dogs or to cast pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6), or acknowledging that a prophet had no honour in his own country (John 4:44), or naming their national audiences as stiff-necked, sinful Israels, in the manner of the prophets. With equal frequency the Reformers meditated on the problematic relationship of speaker to resisting audience through classical texts and formulations. From Aristotle and his influence—and it is never easy to determine how much Aristotle the Reformers had absorbed in their university experience—there would have flowed, not only a stress on proof, demonstration,

example, and enthymeme, but also a deep concern for the arousing and deflection of certain kinds of emotions. *The Art of Rhetoric*, for example, returns repeatedly to the metaphor of a court and to resisting, sceptical judges, who must be convinced emotionally. “In deliberative oratory and in court,” observes Aristotle, “one must begin by giving one’s own proofs, and then meet those of the opposition by dissolving them and tearing them up before they are made.”² For a regenerate prophet like Knox, the distinction made by the Aristotelean school between forensic and deliberative oratory (“Deliberative oratory is harder than forensic...because it is about what is to be”)³ would have been both a useful reminder and challenge about the audiences or judges who needed to be made to see “what is to be” in the reformed future. In many ways Quintilian reinforces the pragmatic slant of the Aristotelean tradition, stressing also how “the authority of the speaker” carries “greatest weight” in deliberative speeches, and pointing out how appeals to the emotions “are especially necessary”⁴ in deliberative oratory. Not only is it “in its power over the emotions that the life and soul of oratory is to be found,” writes Quintilian, but “few indeed are those orators who can sweep the judge with them....And yet it is this emotional power that dominates the court, it is this form of eloquence that is the queen of all.”⁵

Knox defines himself through two rhetorical strategies. The first is associative: Knox allies himself with the prophets of Israel, passing judgment on national life.⁶ The second is stimulative: Knox attempts to regenerate his audience into self-consciousness. Both strategies are evident in his notorious diatribe of 1558, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. As a rhetorician Knox here has an acute sense of audience, and this in turn generates a splendidly complex set of experiments with voice and persona in the presence of unregenerate readers.

The *First Blast* appeared anonymously in Geneva early in 1558; England was ruled by Mary Tudor, and Scotland was under the Queen Regent. Mary died on 17 November 1558—perhaps as a result of reading Knox’s *Blast*, or so Knox would have advertised the matter, having asked for and having predicted her demise. When Elizabeth I read Knox’s tract, she was understandably livid, and Knox must have meditated long and hard on his almost comic piece of mis-timing. “My First Blast,” he lamented in a letter from France in 1559, “hath blown from me all my friends in England,”⁷ a land through which he could now not pass en route to Scotland. When Robert Cecil, Elizabeth’s chief bureaucrat, pinned Calvin to the wall and asked him if he supported Knox’s insanity, the diplomatic French reformer scrambled to do some expert sixteenth-century damage control. “I brought forward Huldah and Deborah”

explains Calvin in a letter to Cecil, as examples of female figures of authority legitimized by scriptural history, and, having outlined his conversations with Knox on the matter, notes in closing: “I came at length to this conclusion...that realms and principalities may descend to females by hereditary right.”⁸

It was, of course, treason to have a copy of Knox’s tract: possession meant death. Knox’s central point is to re-emphasise “how abominable before God is the Empire or Rule of a wicked woman” (365).⁹ More specifically, he writes to denounce “the inordinat appetites of that cruell monstre Marie” (411), a Catholic monarch whom he labels “that cursed Jesabell” (393). On the basis of about a half-dozen scriptural texts, that is, “the reveled will...of God” (377), Knox knows that he can prove to the reasoning minds of his readers that “To promote a Woman to beare rule...is repugnant to Nature; contumelie to God” (373). Ancient history can prove that too, according to Knox, but his prime concern is “that the reigne, empire, and authoritie of Women hath no grounde within Goddes Scriptures” (413). He writes with the certainty that “God hath reveled to some in this our age, that it is more than a monstre in nature that a Woman shall reigne and have empire above Man” (366-7).

Prudence, fear, and the violent nature of sixteenth-century politics cannot silence Knox’s blast. We cannot, he writes—recalling the parable of the talents—“list to wrap up and hyde the talent committed to our charge” (366). Adds Knox later on the same page: “it is our dutie to open the truth reveled unto us, unto the ignorant and blind world.” His central warrant, however, comes from “the contrarie examples of the auncient Prophetes” (365)—“contrarie” because they did not remain silent when prudence would have dictated silence. There were in biblical societies constant threats of violence and harrassment, “yet ceased not the Prophetes of God to admonishe.” What Knox is doing in this *First Blast* is nothing less than constructing a prophetic persona modeled after his perception of biblical prophets. No less than his Old Testament types, writes Knox, “we...are bounde to admonishe the world...and to crie unto them, whether they list to heare or not” (366). The Israelites then were no more stiff-necked and unregenerate than Knox’s contemporary brethren are now. “Jeremie...did correct their errors, plainlie instructing them,” Knox points out, adding that “Ezechiel...did write his vision...sharplie rebukinge their vices” (366). Knox himself will do no less.

Yet who is the prophet’s audience? Is Knox speaking to the reprobate, or to the elect? Is this a prophet’s large and vague condemnation generally of a sinful people with unregenerate hearts? Knox’s sequence of ideas, his argument, the endpoint of

the persuasion is easy to follow; with its propositions and proofs this academic and logical exercise easily reaches the mind of a reader as it was designed to do. Much harder to determine is how this tract of a prophet is shaping its persuasion, and who the intended audience is.

The title reads “The First Blast, to Awake Women Degenerate.” Are women the audience? The two queens, who will heed the tract and so resign? Women are not his audience because, as Knox explains, “they lacke prudence and right reason to judge the things that be spoken” (387). It would do little good to address beings who are by nature “weake, fraile, impacient, feble, and foolishe” (374), and whose talents are for vanity, avarice, ambition, and pride.

As one advances through Knox’s *First Blast*, it becomes obvious that women as rulers is a subject that is far less problematic than the sin of “promoting” women to rule. “[S]o many learned,” observes Knox, “and men of grave judgement” (365) have permitted the present crisis to occur. Is it possible to reach these, and “to correct the foolishnes of those that have studied to exalt women in authoritic above men” (379)? Knox observes that there is in fact a “multitude of our brethren...a great number” that “have heretofore offended by errour and ignorance, geving their...consent, and helpe to establishe Women in their kingdomes and empires” (369). All that these promoters of women have demonstrated is their spiritual and intellectual unfitness; they are unqualified as an audience, and unreachable. Will his tract reach the highest, most powerful level of Mary’s advisers, counsellors, and promoters? “It shall not amend the chief offenders,” argues Knox, “partlie because it shall never come to their eares, and partlie because they will not be admonished in such cases” (367).

Clearly there are feminised males in his audience who fail to understand him. Knox describes these as “the companyons of Ulisses,” who “were changed from the wisdome, understanding, and courage of men, to the foolishe fondnes and cowardise of women” (375). These men Knox dismisses and condemns. It would be pointless to hope for change in them. Eventually the chief offenders might hear truth, for “the veritie of God is of that nature, that at one time or at other it will pourchace to it selfe audience” (368).

Knox’s real audience is, I think, those people that he describes in the phrase, “such as altogither be not blinded” (377). There is some hope in these “reasonable and moderate spirites” (404), but first “they must refuse to be her officers” (415). Adds Knox shortly thereafter: “The same is the dutie of the Nobilitie and Estates.”

Only those “suche as altogether be not blinded by the Devil” (381) can and will hear the Prophet’s words; only they may take action.

What may be done? For one, the “Nobilitie and Estates, by whose blindnes a Woman is promoted,” ought to “retreate that which unadvisedlie and by ignorance they have pronounced” (415-16). What of the biblical *exempla* which Calvin had noted, Deborah and Hulda? To them, argues Knox, God “gave moste singular grace and priviledge” (403), the key word being “singular.” He did not give it to women generally.

If “Women may and oght to be deposed from Authoritie” (414, marginal heading), may a people rise up? “[T]o suppress [the empire of Women] is in the hand of God alone” (368), declares Knox; it is not in the hands of human beings. Two major scriptural proofs figure significantly in Knox’s imagination of this theme. On the second page of the treatise a marginal gloss advises, “Reade Isaie the thirde chaptre” (374). In that text Israel is depicted as a “desolate” country by Isaiah, sinful and unrepentant, and as a kingdom being punished by the taking away of the strong and the competent. In their place, God will have “children to be their princes” (v. 4) and “women rule over them” (v. 12). Both Knox and Isaiah share a pleasure in envisioning the downfall of those who temporarily and wrongly enjoy political and military power.

Knox’s second proof, placed climactically at the very end of the treatise and left to speak for itself, is the exemplum of Athalia from the eleventh chapter of II Kings. “[B]y murthring her sonnes children,” explains Knox, Athalia “had obteneid the empire over the land” (416). In due course, however, the high priest Jehoiada called together the chief rulers of the people “to depose that wicked woman” (416). Adds Knox laconically, “which they faithfullie did” by the edge of the sword. This biblical precedent is left to speak for itself, and so it is literally true that the tract does not advocate the express, violent overthrowing of female rulers. Rather, the not so blind should avoid standing in the way of “Christes souldiours” (417), soldiers perhaps like Sir Thomas Wyatt, who in 1553 led a brief and unsuccessful rebellion to thwart Mary’s plans to consolidate the Catholicism of the English monarchy by marrying Philip of Spain. God has a purpose and a design; humans should not stand in His way. The contrast between human power and God’s is in any event one of the Reformation’s grander themes, and the Scottish prophet is reaffirming something central to the religious imagination of the new reform. Knox’s blast of the trumpet may thus be read, perhaps, as a sign that divine agency is about to begin.

By the time Knox writes his *History of the Reformation in Scotland* (1560-67), he has clearly advanced beyond the mere citation and evidence of scriptural exempla, norms, and models, though he is visibly still wrestling with problems of audience and voice. Now he offers to his readers and listeners a sense that Scriptures' history is being re-lived, re-enacted, and replicated in Scotland during those decades of reform.¹⁰ In Reformation literature this sequence is not unusual: one begins by citing Scripture, then moves to seeing scriptural history re-lived or re-enacted in current events, before envisioning (at the last stage) a theocracy, a society built on scriptural laws, directives, and models. In many writers this growth in the significance and normative power of the Bible signals a predictable increase in the ways in which Scripture is able to penetrate and 'transform their consciousness' to borrow Northrop Frye's wording and emphasis.¹¹

Knox's *History* embodies the second stage of that consciousness, where biblical history is seen to be embedded in current events.

Knox started work on the *History* in 1559 or 1560, writing the largest portion in 1566. The text ends in August of 1567, a few months before a letter in which Knox expressed the resolution to keep the work from publication during his own lifetime. His fears about the explosive nature of such a polemically skilful account were well founded. When Thomas Vautrollier attempted to print his edition of 1586 or 1587 in London, the officials of a wary Elizabeth seized all copies before the work was completed. Only in 1644 was a complete printed edition available when David Buchanan issued the *History* in London, with a fifth book, about whose authenticity there has been some controversy.

The *History* is a first-rate chronicle, running on in a straightforward line through facts, names, dates, and events. It is not, however, straightforward or conventional in its voice or methods of presentation. Where medieval chronicles are conventionally anonymous or dispassionate records, Knox prefers a speaking voice that is an authorial, royal first-person "we"—as in "we say" or "as affir we will hear." Some of this dramatisation may have been influenced by Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, printed in a 1564 large Folio. While Foxe may have supplied his Scottish counterpart with some data and many documents, there appears to be no precedent for his self-dramatisation, in dispassionate third-person style and voice as 'John Knox'—one of the many actors in his chronicled pageant. This created persona of one 'John Knox' enters history for the first time to meet a reform-minded martyr, George Wishart. The closeness of Knox to Wishart enables him to insert death-row speeches, the formal accusations, the court process, and Wishart's answers.

The created third-party persona of ‘John Knox’ is partly a self-protective measure. To write of Wishart in the first-person “we” or “I” would smack of egotistical self-display, and Knox wants the attention to fall on the actors in his history rather than on his biased or familiar relationship to them. This is not to suggest that he is removed from his chronicle account; the very opposite, in fact, is true. The composer of this *History* inserts dozens of letters, poems, creeds, and documents; he has incredible power and authority, to shape, order, and explain. Part of this ethical power and authority, indeed, comes from his admissions of ignorance and incompleteness. “[W]e can not affirme” (I:116) he will often say, pointing to the limits of his knowledge of events and causes, or will name some agents, but then add, “with diverse utheris, whose names came nott to our knowledge” (I:118).¹²

If events and dates are the chief glory of a chronicle history, then modern historians are still in debt to the excellence of his facts. However, on top of these Knox has layered a number of large themes and notable strategies of presentation. For one, the end or purpose of his *History* is nothing less than “the libertie of this our native countrie to remane free from the bondage and tyranny of strangeris” (I:298). Knox’s means and methods, however, are not simply or merely recastings of secular chronicle, impudent drama, or populist discourse as practised by the medieval or Renaissance artist. What I would argue is that Knox essentially draws his skills in narrative from Scripture. He writes as God’s instrument; reproves the unregenerate in the manner of the Old Testament prophets; recasts himself as a Saint Paul to the Gentiles; places the beast and Babylon in Scotland; and dramatises his homeland as a country replicating biblical history. It is a strategy of presentation which gives his *History* an authority beyond the merely human.

Knox as narrator is not only an intrusive, choric protagonist among the other *dramatis personae*, but also an inspired and divinely assisted instrument. God “assisted his weak soldeour” (I:201), notes Knox, and that assistance is both historical and literary. For his role as critic of governmental and institutional policy Knox knows that he has the warrant and example of the Bible’s prophets. One of his marginal glosses reads: “The Propheittis Haif Middillit With Policey, and Hes Reprovit the Corruptioun Thairof” (I:412). The text beside this gloss expands upon their task:

we will justifie and defend nathing in oure prechearis, quhilk we fynd not God to have justifeit and allowit in his messingeris befor thame; sua dar we not forbid thame oppinlie to reprehend that quhilk the Spreit of God, speiking in the Propheitis and Apostillis, hes reprehendit befor thame.

Knox then notes that the prophet Elias “did personallie reprove Achab and Jesabell of idolatrie, of avarice, of murther” (I:412). The actors in Knox’s chronicle come from a different, contemporary cast, but this order of ‘personal reproof’ is essentially what Knox delivers prophetically to the Catholic monarchs of England and Scotland. If Isaiah “callitt the magistrattis of Jerusalem...companzeounis to thevis, princeis of Sodome, [and] brybe-takeris,” Knox feels he has spiritual warrant for aiming similar charges against the governors within the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. Jeremiah made one charge long ago; Knox will make a parallel accusation against erring contemporaries. “Christ Jesus callit Herod a fox; and Paul callit the Hie Preist ane payntit wall.” These impeccable spiritual precedents give Knox the boldness to phrase his own self-directed question: “quha dar interprise to put silence to the Spreit of God...?” (I:412). We come closer to understanding more of Knox’s motivation in giving advice to monarchs with such seeming intemperance and zealous indecorum once we note his peculiar and particular identification with the Old Testament prophets. “[T]he Propheittis of God,” he loudly affirms, “hes nocht spairit to rebuke wickit kingis, alsweill in thair face as befor the pepill and subjectis” (II:433). Jeremiah was commanded by God to rebuke royalty; Elisha “feirit nocht to say to king Jehoram” words of reproof; and who, therefore, can forbid God’s fearless prophet John Knox from doing likewise? If God works even in his weaker vessels on earth, surely Knox may, as one of His messengers, reprove and reprehend spiritual corruption wherever he finds it.

When asked by one of the Queen’s defenders why he is miserably critical of the old, established church, Knox refers to a verse from Acts 26 and suggests that *his* task is the same as that assigned to the first apostle:

[T]hose wordis I find spokin unto Paul, ‘Behauld, I send thee to the Gentilis, to oppin thair eyes, that thay may turn from darknes to lycht, and from the power of Sathan unto God’ (II:432).

Over and over, Knox suggests to the *History*’s readers that he is a second Paul. In another reference he cites the wording of II Timothy 2:25 to clarify his own mission and own role:

‘Instruct with meiknes those that ar contrarie myndit, gif that God at onie tyme will gif thame repentence, that thay may knaw the treuth, and that thay may cum to amendment, out of the snair of the Devill’ (II:432).

Paul offered such instruction, as will now Knox. “[Y]e sall,” he says after this quotation from Timothy, “find my wordis to be the wordis of the Holie Goist” (II:432).

Knox’s *History* is so wildly dramatic an account because it is built on St. Paul’s metaphoric sense of light and darkness struggling for dominion in the kingdoms of the world. These huge Pauline polarities or antitheses are found in Romans 13:12 (casting off the works of darkness, and putting on the armour of light), II Corinthians 6:14 (“what communion hath light with darkness?”), and Ephesians 5:11 (“the unfruitful works of darkness” vs. “the light”). Knox chronicles nothing less than “the light of Christ Jesus” (I:5) in Scotland, exposing at the same time the “kingdome of darknes” (I:6) built by his unregenerate enemies. At one point he simply leans back from his satiric account and declares, “Thus ceased nott Sathan, by all meanes, to manteane his kingdome of darkness, and to suppressse the light of Christis Evangell” (I:119). His *History* throughout is animated by the huge Pauline antitheses of his imagination. On the one side stand “holy Evangell,” “the blood of the sanctis of God,” “trew knowledge of God,” power of his wourd,” “Spirit of God,” “the trew doctrine,” “godlic and wyse men,” “the servandis of God,” and “pure Prechouris.” On the other side, in their corruption and darkness, can be found a dramatically hyperbolic list of opposed forces—“spiritual fornication,” “blynd zeall,” “idolatrie,” “deceat, pryde, and tyranny,” “pestilent Papistis,” “bondage,” “worldlie pomp,” the “ennemies of Jesus Christ,” “abusearis of his holie worde,” and “abominatiounis.” Of these massive, opposed forces concludes Knox: “Thus did light and darknes stryve within the realme of Scotland” (I:242). His task as a chronicler is to make public that spiritual gulf, to instruct his readers in essential spiritual differences, “that the world may see what difference thair is betwix light and darknes, betwix the uprychtness of the Church of God, and the corruptioun that ringes in the synagoge of Sathan, the Papisticall rable” (II:366-67).

Students of Reformation polemic will, of course, recognise those polarised types and antitypes as found in Tyndale, Bale, and Foxe, but not, perhaps, the explicitly Pauline underpinnings of the antithesis. Far more conventional, expected, and immediately recognisable in the imaginative structure of Knox’s *History* are the repeated references to “that Romane Antichrist” (I:3) abuses, superstition, idolatry, and even “that Romane harlot” (II:283). The language immediately recalls the Book of Revelation as used by nearly every regenerate polemicist, to call to mind the imminence of judgment, and the durability of the spiritual enemy.

What his opponents term “thare Haly Mother the Kirk,” Knox uncovers as “that harlott of Babilon” (I:108). The bishop of St. Andrews is identified as “the crewell beast” (I:325). Papists are conventionally called “pestilent” (II:383), and when a certain preacher stresses that his audience must be able to discern the immaculate spouse of Christ from the mother of confusion, spiritual Babylon, Knox enters the narrative to second the work and words of John: “I no more dowbt but that...the Pape, to be that man of syne, of whome the Apostle speakis” [Romans 6] (I:189).

The chief hand and instrument in this *History* is not, however, John Knox, but God. Knox merely records God’s wondrous interventions—His providential interventions—in Scottish history. As Knox stresses in the “Preface,” “that same God that caused light to schyne out of darknes” (I:3) also brought the Reformation to Scotland directly. Not only does “the Spreat of God...forewarne his chosyn” (I:190) but God also works “secreatlie...by his providence in...men that knew nothing of his wirking” (I:89). In his “Preface” Knox promises to make “faythfull rehersall” indeed of “such personages as God had maid instrumentis of his glorie” (I:4). Many of these are nameless citizens, whose native cunning sees through prelatical and episcopal pretense or hypocrisy with ease, especially since “God geve his Holy Spreit to sempill men in great aboundance” (I:101). When the papal forces are destroyed in battle, “[w]orldly men may think,” interjects Knox, “that all this came but by mysordour and fortoun,” but those with any knowledge of God “may as evidentlie see the werk of his hand in this disconfiture” (I:88). Why has a certain debate between Knox and a Friar been inserted in the *History*? “[T]o the intent,” writes Knox,

that men may see, how that Sathan ever travellis to obscure the lyght; and yitt how God by his power, wyrking in his weak veschellis, confoundis his craft, and discloses his darkness (I:201).

The biblical allusions and roots run through Knox’s *History* in a steady, unspectacular fashion. His imagination is coloured by scriptural motifs, and his sense of himself and his role in narrating the historical is informed throughout by biblical models, analogues, and patterns. I will also add ‘biblical history,’ for Knox’s final tactic is to suggest that his chronicled account of the emergent Reformation in Scotland quite explicitly replicates biblical history and events. Readers of seventeenth-century Puritan literature are familiar with the imposition of scriptural events, persons, and crises on English events, or American persons. The accession of Queen Mary to the English throne in 1553, for example, signals the arrival of “that idolatress Jesabel, mischevous Marie, of the Spaynyardis bloode; a cruell persecutrix of Goddis people” (I:244). Or

a Scottish battle can become confused with a scene from I Kings, when “God faught against Benhadab, King of Aram, when he was disconfited at Samaria” (I:88), and so God does now, against Knox’s enemies. A plague in sixteenth-century Scotland enables a sermon against idolatry by Knox to “schew what terrible plagues God had tacken upoun Realmes and Nationis” (II:276) for that crime. “[A]s God suffered none of those whome he called frome Egypt to perishe in the Red Sea,” even now, no matter how large the danger to returning spiritual exiles, Knox asserts defiantly, “so suffered he none of us to be oppressed” (II:265). Many of these allusions form a casual backdrop of biblical reference, which keeps the spiritual equations before the mind and imagination of readers. In his words of welcome to Mary Queen of Scots, for example, Knox hopes that she might be “als blessed within the Commoun-wealth of Scotland...as ever Debora was in the Commoun-wealth of Israell” (II:286). Scotland is hence proving in its events what the biblical type predicted, or the biblical resonance and pattern is being superimposed over the modern instance to validate Knox’s judgments and reading of events.

However, Knox is equally adept at foregrounding the climactic events of his chronicle through biblical allusions, and at raising the dramatic, affective temperature of his accounts. When Knox’s martyred hero George Wishart, for example, is seized at night—through the urging of Cardinal Beaton and in Lord Bothwell’s territory—Knox notes savagely how Bothwell was a “bucheour to the Cardinall,” acting, like Judas, “for money” (I:138). As the treacherous nobles of “the Estaitte called Temporal” and the priests of “the Estaitte Ecclesiasticall” convene to judge Wishart, Knox compares this unholy alliance to the friendship which Herod might make with Pilate. “Yf we enterlase merynes with earnest materis,” adds Knox of this analogy, “pardon us, goode Readar; for the fact is so notable that it deservith long memorye” (I:145). Knox gives a further resonance to this drama of betrayal when he calls the governor of Edinburgh Castle a Pilate too, who in obeying Cardinal Beaton’s cohorts, “obeyed the petitoun of Caiaphas and of his fellowis, and adjugeid Christ to be crucifeid” (I:144). Caiaphas symbolises a type of religious corruption that can be applied to a woman as well. When Knox dramatises one of his arguments with Mary Queen of Scots, for example—a Mary who finds no great reason to change her opinion in the exchange—he adds the gloss, “[Neather yitt did Caiaphas, quhen Christ Jesus did reassone in his presence]” (II:173). Perhaps the most representative collocation of events and Scripture occurs when Knox is imprisoned at a castle in Rouen. A Scottish prisoner has just refused to worship or handle an image, much to the chagrin of the French warders. “These ar thingis that appear to be of no great importance,”

begins Knox, but then adds:

and yit yf we do rychtliche consider, thei expresse the same obedience that God requyred of his people Israell, when that thei should be caryed to Babylon; for he gave charge unto thame, that when thei should see the Babylonians wirschipe thare goddis of gold, silver, mettall, and woid, that thei should say, “The goddis that have nott maid the heavin and the earth shall perish frome the heavin, and out of the earth” (I:227-28).

That smooth and quick elision to a verse from Jeremiah 10:11 is fully in keeping with a master narrator whose creative and spiritual roots are embedded deeply in a re-experiencing of Scripture.

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Notes

1 In the *First Blast*, explicating St Paul’s advice “that everie one shuld communicate with the Congregation what God had reveled to them,” Knox states, in the third person but clearly with an eye on his own role and function as a prophet also, that “God shall alwayes raise up some to whome the veritie shalbe reveled, and unto such ye shal geve place, albeit they sit in the lowest seates” (IV:379). My understanding of Knox’s sense of, and relationship to, the readership of the *First Blast* is indebted to Rudolph Almasy’s subtle analysis of the tract’s social and political contexts as explored in an unpublished paper presented to the 27th International Conference on Medieval Studies in May 1993 at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, “The Politics of Discourse: John Knox’s *First Blast of the Trumpet*.”

2 Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. H.C. Lawson-Tancred (London, 1991), p. 257.

3 Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, p. 256.

4 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler. 4 vols (London, 1921-2), I:485.

5 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, II:419, 421.

6 In his incisive and pioneering study of Knox’s literary personae, “John Knox and Apocalyptic Thought,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984), pp. 449-69,

Richard Kyle pays primary attention to how “[a] sense of the apocalyptic undergirded Knox’s perception of vocation, i.e., his call to be a prophet and to proclaim God’s Word” (p. 449), but in passing offers a number of insights, which analysts have yet to acknowledge fully or develop, into the Scottish Reformer’s sense of himself as a crusading prophet. “John Knox unequivocally identified himself with the prophetic tradition,” observes Kyle, “and came to see himself as a latter-day prophet along the line of Isaiah, Elijah, Daniel, Jehu, Amos, or Jeremiah” (p. 456). In *First Blast* specifically, “he paralleled his pronouncements with those of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jehu, and Daniel” (p. 456), notes Kyle, adding that his subject, “more than any of the major reformers, regarded himself as a prophet in the Old Testament tradition” (p. 469). In this role “he emphasized the admonitory more than the predictive element of prophecy” (p. 449).

7 As cited by David Laing in his “Introduction” to *First Blast*, IV:353.

8 Cited by Laing, IV:357.

9 The text of *First Blast* appears in volume IV of *The Works*, ed. David Laing, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1846-64; rep. New York, 1966).

10 Richard Kyle, in “John Knox and Apocalyptic Thought” (note 6 above), declares that Knox characteristically and habitually “saw the drama of the Old Testament re-enacted in Scotland” (p. 455) from his prophetic-apocalyptic perspective. Writes Kyle: “Knox interpreted Scripture so literally that the Bible often became a book of precedents, a handbook for the judgment of God upon nations and powers in the world. Knox’s literal Old Testament hermeneutic affected his prophetic thinking in several ways. First, Knox constantly drew parallels between Israel and Scotland and Israel and England—parallels that often went beyond analogies or lessons and seem to become historical equations” (p. 458). And because God was so obviously involved in contemporary history as He had been in the experience of Israel, Knox felt licensed in his religious imagination “to parallel events and people so literally that history seemed to be recurring. The present was a re-enactment of the past” (p. 459).

11 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto, 1982), p. 226.

12 The text of the *History* takes up volumes I and II of *The Works*, ed. Laing.