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*Kenneth Farrow*

### The Literary Value of John Knox's *Historie of the Reformatioun*

The purely literary riches of John Knox's *Historie of the Reformatioun of Religioun within the Realme of Scotland* have yet to be fully appreciated, for it is a largely neglected treasure hidden in the field of Scottish Literature. Accorded proper consideration, *The Historie* lays more than a fair claim to being the first truly great work of prose written by a Scot, and it is, without question, a masterpiece in its own right. However, critics perhaps tend to forget that such a work could not have come about without the influence of a literary inheritance on the part of the author, and if we are to understand Knox's *magnum opus* at all, we must first set it in context.

When Knox began to write in 1559,<sup>1</sup> the compilation of prose histories was no new thing in Scotland. In the sixteenth century, the first significant example was John Major's *Historia Majoris Britanniae tam Angliae quam Scotiae* (1520) and in 1527, Hector Boece followed up with his *Scotorum Historiae a prima gentis origine*. These works clearly embody two differing literary strands, both of which become relevant when we consider Knox's *Historie*. Major is generally recognized as thoroughly medieval, and has

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<sup>1</sup>Knox's first reference to the composition of a history is contained in a letter to Gregory Railton, dated October 23, 1559: "The autoritie of the Frenche King and Quen is yet received, and wilbe in wourd till thei deny our most just requeastes, which ye shall, God willing, schortlie hereafter understand, together with our hole procedings from the beginning of this mater, which we are now to sett furth in maner of Historie," *The Works of John Knox*, 6 Vols., ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1846-64), VI, 87. Further references will appear in the text.

been continually disparaged as a dry, tedious and scholarly writer,<sup>2</sup> but before dismissing him from our sphere of consideration, we should note that he had both a personal and academic influence on Knox. That the latter became a thoroughgoing schoolman, much in love with the metaphysics of logical disputations, can be clearly seen at several points in *The Historie* (see, for example, *Works*, I, 139-200; II, 425-60). Boece, on the other hand, was a humanist, and therefore represents not a declining, old-fashioned movement, but an ascending one. Indeed, historiographical humanism was perhaps to reach its literary peak with George Buchanan's *Rerum Scotticarum Historia*, a work which was only slightly later than, and certainly influenced by, Knox's.<sup>3</sup> Boece's Latin text stimulated two fine Scots translations: John Bellenden's *The Chronikles of Scotland* and the anonymous *Mar Lodge* version, which at least testifies to a popular taste for the "new" histories, and although Knox probably shared Buchanan's dislike for the fantastic and credulous elements so evident in Boece, there is compelling evidence to suggest that he occasionally borrowed material from *Scotorum Historiae*, first hand.<sup>4</sup> Knox, of course, is light years away from being a dazzling humanist like Desiderius Erasmus and Philip Melanchthon, or a precocious one, like his revered spiritual master, Jean Calvin,<sup>5</sup> but he was not unaware of the movement nor altogether unresponsive to it, even if his deepest roots, initially at least, lay with the scholasticism of Major. When Knox's *Historie* began to

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<sup>2</sup>In his *Defence of Martin Luther against the Furibund Decree of the Parisian Theologians* (*Ein Urteil der Theologen zu Paris über die Lehre d. Luthers*), the reforming humanist Philip Melanchthon attacked Major as the supreme spokesman of scholastic tail-chasing. See Margaret H. B. Sanderson, *Cardinal of Scotland, David Beaton, 1494-1546* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 76.

<sup>3</sup>See Andrew Lang, "Knox as Historian," *Scottish Historical Review*, 2 (1905), 150-58.

<sup>4</sup>Knox seems to have borrowed his material on the martyrdom of Paul Craw from *Scotorum Historiae*. See *Works*, I, 6, and Hector Boece, *Scotorum Historiae a prima gentis origine* (Paris, 1527), Liber XVII, fol. 352<sup>v</sup>. The tell-tale sign of influence is the lexical item "*deprehensus*" (Boece), "deprehended" (Knox).

<sup>5</sup>Melanchthon (Philip Schwarzerd) was appointed to the new chair in Greek at the University of Wittenberg in 1518 at the age of only 21. Calvin's early commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*, on the other hand, was not particularly well received, but he never ceased to be influenced by humanism. See Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London and New York, 1981), pp. 118, 161. In an early part of *The Historie*, Knox tells us that, as a young tutor, he taught his pupils from the writings of "humane authoris." See *Works*, I, 186. But for a general insight into the influence of humanism on Knox's work as a whole, one can compare his rhetorical practices with those frequently outlined in Lee A. Sonnino's *A Handbook to Sixteenth Century Rhetoric* (London, 1968).

take shape, of course, other historical accounts, such as *The Diurnal of Remarkable Occurrents* and *The Historie of the Estate of Scotland* were also being written, and although they provide us with useful parallels to the Reformer's work, they are nothing like as important.

We should also remember that Knox spent years in England and in exile. His evident taste for martyrologies is apparent in his free use of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perilous Dayes*, (and Foxe may be reciprocally indebted to Knox for information relating to Scotland).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Buchanan tells us that the chronicles of Edward Hall and Richard Grafton were among the models adopted for the composition of *The Historie*,<sup>7</sup> but a European tradition is more discernible and overt. Two continental examples deserve mention in connection with Knox. There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that he was familiar with John Sleidan's *Commentariorum de Statu Religionis et Reipublicae, Carolo Quinto, Caesare*, although perhaps the closest parallel is not Sleidan's, but the *Ecclesiastica Historia* (the so-called *Centuriae Magdeburgenses*) of Matthias Flaccius Illyricus. This, in fact, allows us to differentiate Knox's text from those of his predecessors in Scotland. His is a history of religious affairs, not a more general overview of the nation's past, nor, as he personally disclaims "ane universall Historie of the tyme" (*Works*, I, 95). Thus, even if Knox stands within a long tradition which dates back to Eusebius of Caesarea and embraces figures such as Gregory of Tours and "the venerable Bede," his exclusively religious vernacular prose history was something new in Scotland. More incidentally, we might note in passing that Knox's first sermon, preached at St. Andrews in 1547, indicates a knowledge of *Chronicon Carionis* / (*Carion's Chronicle*),<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>It is possible that Foxe owes his own account of, say, Cardinal Beaton's death, to Knox, through an intermediary (Robert Barrant). See *Works*, I, 179, fn. 2; also Thomas M'Crie, *The Life of John Knox* (Edinburgh, 1831), p. 400; and Andrew Lang, *John Knox and the Reformation* (London, 1905), pp. 20-21.

<sup>7</sup>Buchanan writes: "as to maister knoks his historie is in hys freindis handis, and thair in consultation to mitigat sum part of the acerbite of certaine wordis and sum taintis quhair in he has followit to muche sum of your inglis writaris as M. hal et suppilatorem eius Graftone, & C." (G. Buchanan / to his singular freynd M. RANDOLPH maister of postis to the queinis g. of England. In London)," *Vernacular Writings of George Buchanan*, ed. Peter Hume Brown (Edinburgh and London, 1892), p. 58. This passage however does not testify to Knox's putative anglicization of the Scots language, as Buchanan is referring only to the reformer's rhetorical vehemence.

<sup>8</sup>This is still too early for the English translation *The Thre Bokes of Chronicles, whyche John Carion . . . Gathered wyth great diligence of the best authours that hawe written in Hebrue, Greke or Latine*, tr. Walter Lynne and John Funcke (London, 1550).

so critics should never again consider *The Historie* in blissful isolation, but take in the wider picture. Contextualizing, then, brings us, as it were, within range of this great work. My task now is to communicate something of its very essence and striking vivacity.

Few, if any, have ever rightly estimated the quality of Knox's "merrie tales," which belong to the first book of *The Historie*. Again, when we consider such subject matter, it is appropriate to see a long tradition behind the Scottish Reformer. Chaucer's *fabliaux* come to mind, as do the apocryphal stories which gathered round the name of Skelton. Anti-clericalism often goes hand-in-hand with such narratives, so again we observe the intermingling of literary strains, and Knox's efforts also involve this combination. In fact, prior to, and indeed during, the Reformation, satire aimed at the Church gradually became less of a laugh at oneself, less of a fond indulgence (such as we find, say, in Richard Holland's *Buke of the Howlat*),<sup>9</sup> when the possibility of real reform, and its concomitant, a new Church, began to present itself. In Scotland, writers such as David Lindsay epitomized the changing, hardening mood in poetry and drama, while in France, say, Francois Rabelias did so in prose. Knox, however, is the earliest to do so in original and vigorous Scots prose-narrative.<sup>10</sup>

There are seven of the tales, contained in the early part of *The Historie*, although four at least seem to have been orally communicated to Knox, directly or indirectly, via a certain Friar William Arth (*Works*, I, 36-41). But there can be no doubt that the following tale which, in the course of my research, I have eponymously labelled The Sandie Furroure Narrative, constitutes Knox's first, wholly original attempt at telling a "merrie bourd," and he manages it superbly. It is too long for full inclusion, so here is the opening section, which is self-explanatory, and deals with the theme of ecclesiastical misconduct:

Sandie Furroure, who had bene emprisoned sevin yearis in the Toure of Londone, Sir Johne Dignewaill, according to the cheritie of Churche men, entertained his wyiff, and waisted the poor manes substance. For the which caus, at his returning, he spaik more liberallie of preastis then thei could bear, and so was declaired to be accused of heresy, and called to his ansuer to Sanctandrose. He

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<sup>9</sup>See Felicity Riddy and Priscilla Bawcutt, eds., *Longer Scottish Poems, Vol. I, 1375-1650* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 46-84.

<sup>10</sup>John Ireland's *The Meroure of Wyssdome*, of course, is the first "substantially original" work in Scots prose, (c. 1490); see Roderick J. Lyall, "Vernacular Prose before the Reformation," in *The History of Scottish Literature . . . to 1660*, ed. R. D. S. Jack (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 172. But even if we allow that *The Meroure* has been underrated, Knox's *Historie* is an infinitely superior work.

lapp up mearely upoun the scaffold, and, casting a gawmound, said, 'Whair ar the rest of the playaris?'. Maister Andro Olephant, offended thairwyth, said, 'It shalbe no play to yow, Sir, befor that ye depart'. And so began to read his accusatioun. The first article whereof was, That he dispyssed the Messe. His ansuer was, 'I hear mo Messes in awght dayis, then three Bishoppis thair sitting sayis in a year'. Accused secundarily, of . . . (*Works*, I, 42-3)

There are three mainstays to the humor: irony, a compelling sense of farce, and, most important of all, equivocation. The irony is used straight-forwardly, to convey counter-meaning. The "cheritie" of Churchmen evidently entails not "man's love of God and his neighbour, commanded as the fulfilling of the Law" (Matthew 22:37, 39), but the love of woman for gratification and personal profit. Where we should find a specifically religious virtue, we encounter theft, adultery and a shameless appreciation of the good life. The second element, farce, is more consistently augmented by metaphors and expressions which are apparently drawn from theatrical sources: "*entertained his wyiff*," which is also sexually suggestive, "*he lapp up upoun the scaffold*," "*casting a gawmound*" and the more obvious "playaris" / "play".

The incorrigibly irreverent and histrionic Mr. Furrou is certainly very much aware that he is a man mocked by outrageous fortune, and he is only too eager to reciprocate. The charge against him, after all, is ridiculous and false. He is not a heretic, merely an understandably aggrieved husband, who finds himself in a situation where the accusers are more corrupt than the accused.<sup>11</sup> There is an emotional clash when Furrou's attempts to deflate the situation meet with the pomposity of "Andro Olephant," but the efforts of the latter to restore order and credibility to the proceedings only make him sound ridiculous, and his patronizingly courteous form of address, "Sir," falls rather flat. He evidently takes himself too seriously, and can neither sustain nor project his self-image with any degree of authority.

The equivocation comes in toward the end of my quotation and is subtly complemented by other factors. For instance, when delivered orally, the phrase, "That he had dispyssed the Messe" can be articulated with a mock seriousness or exaggerated emphasis, adding to our impression that Furrou is the victim of a kangaroo-court, as indeed he is. But when he implies that the attending Bishops are deficient in administering even their own religious practices, the shaft goes home with a vengeance. That their lack should be memorably illustrated by the antics of an ignorant man, a Balaam's ass, is

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<sup>11</sup>This was a theme with which a poet like Robert Henryson could work wonders; see "The Sheep and the Dog" in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford, 1987), pp. 47-64.

something which must have particularly amused Knox, one feels, for he had little real sympathy for Furroure.<sup>12</sup>

Knox shows a comparable skill in dramatic narrative. With multiple reservations, I have chosen an episode from his account of Cardinal Beaton's murder to substantiate this, although, as you will see, I am deliberately moving away from an egregious stereotype. The following section narrates how Beaton's assassins gained access to St. Andrews Castle in 1546:

Thei address thame to the myddest of the close, and immediatlie came Johne Leslye, somewhat rudlye, and four personis with him. The portar, fearing, wold have drawin the brig; but the said Johne, being entered thairon, stayed, and lap in. And whill the portar maid him for defence, his head was brokin, the keyis tackin frome him, and he castin in the fowsea; and so the place was seased. The schowt arises: the workemen, to the number of mo then a hundreth, ran of the wallis, and war without hurte put furth at the wicked yett. The first thing that ever was done, William Kirkcaldye took the garde of the prevey posterne, fearing that the fox should have eschaped. Then go the rest to the gentilmenis chalmeris, and without violence done to any man, thei put mo then fyftie personis to the yett: The number that interprised and did this, was but sextein personis. (*Works*, I, 175)

Knox's supreme control of pace and tension contributes more to this episode than it did in the previous sample of his prose. An expression like "address thame to . . ." seems to imply a no-nonsense approach on the assassins' part; they are single-minded and resolute. From the opening lines we also know that the action is fast and abrupt, even if we suspect that "somewhat rudlye" is used purposely without emphasis. Knox combines the use of present tense ("the portar, *fearing*. . .") and supposition ("*wold* have") to suggest both that the events are taking place "here and now" and that anything might happen, but the options are narrowed down when Leslie acts with the expected determination.

However, it is with Knox's description of the unfortunate porter's fate,<sup>13</sup> that he really wrings effect from the nuances of language (and, one might argue, his use is suspect and tendentious). There is a sort of trinary rhythm which makes the act sound almost perfunctory. One, the porter's head was cleft, two, the keys were obtained, and, three, his body was swiftly disposed of. But the most crucial phrase "his head was brokin," is passive, and shifts

<sup>12</sup>The narrative ends when the attending priests and officials, so frustrated by Furroure's accusations, take up a collection for him. Says Knox: "And so everie prelate and riche preast, glaid to be qwyte of his evill, gave him somewhat; and so departed hie, for he understood nothing of religioun," *Works*, I, 44; see also Sanderson, p. 85.

<sup>13</sup>The porter's name was Ambrose Stirling, and he had long been associated with the Beaton; see Sanderson, p. 226.

the responsibility for the crime away from its perpetrators. This is especially evident when we juxtapose Knox's account of the incident with that contained in a letter, written by a certain James Lindsay to an unknown correspondent, and dated the 29th of May, 1546. (This letter can now be found among *The Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII.*)<sup>14</sup> Although this short text seems independently to confirm much that Knox says, Lindsay tells us that the porter refused to admit the assassins to the Castle "quhill ane of yame straik hym wyth ane knyff."<sup>15</sup> This is not the same thing at all. The letter says that the porter, who is an innocent party, was deliberately and ruthlessly eliminated. Knox says that he somehow got himself into trouble. The Reformer subsequently picks up the use of present tense when he observes that "the showt arises," and does so again, slightly later, with an alliterative collocation which involves a favorite image "fearing that the fox . . ." But now the mood of the narrative has changed. It no longer deals with comparatively furtive, underhand activities, and has become a more open, if not exactly creditable, affair. When Knox goes on to observe that a hundred people were driven from the Castle "without hurte" he partially succeeds in making the assailants, who are in the final analysis, murderers, appear more humane (although one says this in the knowledge that Cardinal Beaton himself was far from perfect). Knox's motivation is similar when he notes that no "violence was done to any man" while a mere sixteen conspirators evacuated a further fifty persons. But when he emphasizes the magnitude and apparently incredible nature of these events, he is, as ever, hinting at the influence of an omnigerent God working through humble or even wicked human agents to shape history and ultimately to punish malefactors, like Beaton. What he does not mention, perhaps because it weakens his case somewhat (although not altogether), was that the coup could only have been effected through the assassins' pre-arranged collusion with the Castle guards, a rather more mundane intrigue.<sup>16</sup>

Knox may have occasionally colored the truth, but there can be no doubt that he was also a conscientious, moralistic Preacher who often shaped his narratives, humorous, dramatic or otherwise, into explicit lessons, as he does toward the conclusion of the Cardinal Beaton episode, above (*Works*, I, 180,

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<sup>14</sup>See John S. Brewer and James Gairdner, eds., *Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII (Foreign and Domestic)*, 21 vols. (London, 1862-1910), 21, Part I, No. 948, p. 464.

<sup>15</sup>The text here is quoted from the original manuscript. I am indebted to Roderick J. Lyall who located and transcribed the codex for me, PRO, SP, 491/9.

<sup>16</sup>See Sanderson, pp. 225-7.



which takes the form of a *moralitas*). He does this again for example in Book III of *The Historie*, when he describes the actions of a cruel and mercenary French soldier. The following incident took place in 1560:

As the French spoilyed the countrie in thair retournyng, one capitaine or soldiour . . . entered upoun a poore woman that dwelt in the Whytsyd, and began to spoyle. The poore woman offered unto him suche breid as sche had redly prepared. But he, in no wayis thairwith content, wald have the meill and a lytill salt beiff whiche the poore woman had to susteine hir awin lyfe, and the lyves of hir poore chylderein; neather could tearis nor [pitifull] wourdis, mittigat the merciles man, but he wald have quhatsoever he mycht carie. The poore woman perceiving him so bent, and that he stoupped down in her tub . . . first cowped up his heillis, so that his heid went down; and thairefter, outhr by hirself, or if ony uther cumpanie come to help hir, but thair he endit his unhappie lyfe; God so punnissing his crewell hairt, quho could nocht spair a miserable woman in that extremitie. (*Works*, II, 15)

The lesson here is an old one and recognizably part of a Scottish tradition. Knox may be thinking of Romans 13:4, which outlines the function of the powers ordained by God: "But yf ye do that whiche is euil, bee afrayde; for he beareth not the sworde in vayne; for hee is the mynister of God, a reuenger to execute wrathe vpon him that doethe euil (London, 1553). We might also think of the *moralitas* to Robert Henryson's "The Wolf and the Lamb," where the poet chastises "mychtie men" who "will not thoill in pece ane pureman be," and he warns them, ominously, "for till oppres, thow sall haif als grit pane / As thow the pure with thy awin hand had slane."<sup>17</sup> If we move in the other direction, we can find comparable sentiments in the poetry of Robert Burns, even if Henryson and Knox place a greater and grimmer emphasis on retribution. In "The Twa Dogs," for example, Cæsar pities those "Poor *tenant-bodies*, scant o' cash, / How they maun thole a factor's snash."<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, in the poetry of both Henryson and Burns, we notice a dislike for the injustices perpetrated by an indigenous social hierarchy, which is not a theme of this particular prose passage by Knox. But we should also remember Knox's famous response to Mary, Queen of Scots, when he was asked "What are ye within this Commonwealth?":

'A subject born within the same', said he 'Madam, and albeit I neather be Erle, Lorde nor Barroun within it, yitt hes God maid me, (How abject that ever I be in your eyes,) a profitable member of the same: Yea, Madam, to me it apperteanes

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<sup>17</sup>See Fox, pp. 101-2.

<sup>18</sup>*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), I, 140.

no lesse to foirwarne of suche thingis as may hurte it, yf I foirse thame, then it does to any of the Nobillitie; for boyth my vocatioun and conscience craves playnes of me'. (*Works*, II, 388)

This, of course, is Knox's finest moment, his "*Hier stehe ich / ich kann nicht anders*,"<sup>19</sup> but his own words here, unlike Luther's, are replete with political import, and we *do* see an exaltation of the common man, regardless of social condition.

But we can admire the literary features of the lengthy Knox passage (dealing with the French soldier) as well as the democratic philosophy behind it. He uses a technique of repetition, creating considerable pathos through his use of adjectives: "poor woman" (x 4), "miserable woman," "poore chyldelein," "pitifull wourdis." This feature is played off against the cruelty and consistently aggressive obstinacy of the soldier. The expression "But he . . . wald have" (x 2) is apparently designed to convey something of his remorseless intent. Adding to this effect is the eliminative and idiomatic "in no wayis . . . : At the center of the passage, Knox skilfully uses a "neather . . . nor . . . but" construction to foreground progressively the outrageous nature of the Frenchman's behavior. Alliteration is put to good use with the rhythmical "mittigat the merciles man . . ." until idiom ("cowed up his heillis") is finally used to create humor of a particularly unmirthful kind.

Overall, it is clear that the prose is reportage, evidenced by the fact that Knox himself stands at one remove from the action and he freely admits to the possibility of imprecision. However, his moral certainty is almost palpable, and we can watch it steadily strengthening into overt condemnation as he reaches the end of the narrative. However, no matter how black and white the issue here, we should bear in mind that Knox had no reason to present the French pro-Catholic forces in a favorable light.

This brings me to a related point. Knox, and his *Historie*, are often violently partisan. To deny this would be naive, and to gloss over such a facet of his character and work would be to misrepresent him altogether. But it is the duty of the literary critic to eschew attack or defense of any particular "-ism," no matter where one's own sympathies lie, if indeed anywhere. So, I come to my next passage in an open, non-condemnatory frame of mind. It describes the arrival, in Scotland, of Mary, Queen of Scots. My only concern is to emphasize that Knox's description represents prose composition of the very highest order. He writes:

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<sup>19</sup>Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Biography of Martin Luther* (London, 1951), p. 187.

The nyntene day of August, the year of God jmv̄c three scoir ane yearis, betwix sevin and aught houris befor noon, arryved MARIE, QUENE OF SCOTLAND, then, widow, with two galayis, furth of France . . . The verray Face of heavin, the time of hir arryvall, did manifestlie speak what comfort was brought into this cuntrey with her, to wit, sorrow, dolour, darkness and all impietie; for in the memorie of man, that day of the year, was never seyn a more dolorous face of the heavin, which two dayis after did so contineu, for besides the surfett weat, and corruption of the air, that skairse mycht any man espy ane other the lenth of two pair of buttis. The Sun was not seyn to schyne two dayis befor no two dayis after . . . (*Works*, II, 269)

I have already said much about Knox's control of features like pace. Here what impresses us is his creation of atmosphere. He relies heavily on rhetoric to achieve the effect. Initially, he employs concision together with evenly spaced observations. But the most rhetorically powerful devices occur in the middle of the passage. Knox packs his prose full, but never overloads it, with detail. Consequently, the reader's attention does not falter. Earlier, when I discussed the farcical Sandie Furrour Narrative, I noted the ironic use of the term "cheritie." Knox uses "comfort" in this instance with just as blatant an irony, but now he explodes the effect immediately with his scathingly definitive "to wit, darkness, dolour and all impietie." The gloominess of *that* is exceptionally penetrating. But Knox, of course, has simply built upon a real meteorological occurrence, substantiated by other writers. For example, one of Mary's travelling companions, the Chronicler, Pierre de Bourdeilles Brantôme, complained that, upon arrival, they encountered "*grand brouillard*."<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, the belief, which Knox evidently evinces, in a direct relationship between prodigious phenomena such as exceptionally bad weather or, say, stellar activity, is, of course, an ancient and popular one. Since observers often did not fully comprehend natural causes, they tended to look for recognizable effects upon humanity, often pessimistically, as Knox does. There are many similar descriptions to be found in the history of Hector Boece.<sup>21</sup>

However, returning to literary features, one can observe how Knox subtly intermingles registers. "Verray," "manifestlie," and "impietie" are obviously the everyday tools of a fiery Preacher, but when Knox mentions "two pair of buttis," he draws from the vocabulary of contemporary sport. Also,

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<sup>20</sup>Pierre de Bourdeilles Brantôme, *Oeuvres Complètes du Seigneur De Brantôme Accompagnées de Remarques Historiques et Critiques* (Paris, 1823) V, 94.

<sup>21</sup>See for example Boece's *Scotorum Historiae*, Liber X, fol. 200<sup>v</sup>, which contains descriptions of comets very similar to those occasionally found in Knox's *Historie*, *Works*, I, 255.

the language is consistently metaphoric, with a switch from noun to verb ("Face" to "speak"), creating personification or pathetic fallacy. The intense power of the prose is further heightened by the adverb "skairse," which qualifies the degree of the speaker's utterance, thus adding just a trace of doubt and helping to create an almost surreal impression. When Knox mentions the "corruption of the air," which in the sixteenth century carries connotations of contagion and disease, he suggests a Macbeth-like scene, and indeed, for him, Mary's arrival did usher in a world where "fair is foul and foul is fair" (*Macbeth*, I, i, 9). We can also detect a certain symmetry, with the balanced observation "two dayis befor . . . two days after." It may be fanciful to suppose that this passage was first written at much greater length and later selectively condensed to give it such an electrical charge, but the composition of *The Historie* did entail a process of revision and re-writing.<sup>22</sup>

Knox's occasional comments on the Queen are, however, less compelling than his accounts of direct encounters with her. One incident especially, dating from 1561, gives us an engaging insight into his mind. Summoned before the Queen for inflammatory preaching, he was requested by Mary to discuss his grievances with her directly and face to face. He replied:

. . . albeit at your Grace's commandment I am heere now, yitt can not I tell what other men shall judge of me, that at this tyme of day am absent from my book and wayting upoun the Courte'.

'You will not always', said she, 'be at your book' and so turned her back. And the said John Knox departed with a reasonable meary countenance, whairat some Papists offended said 'He is not effrayed'. Which heard of him, he answered, 'Why should the pleasing face of a gentill woman effray me? I have looked in the faces of many angrie men, and yit have not bene effrayed above measure'. And so left he the Quene and the Courte for that tyme. (*Works*, II, 334-5)

In assessing this incident, one might perhaps argue that Knox is rather too concerned with appearances, initially at least. Also, he unwittingly gives the Queen an opportunity for a riposte involving both a thinly veiled threat and a deliberate snub, which was evidently ineffectual. Knox, I think, knew how to roll with the punches. Nearly fifteen years of intense controversy had certainly taught him that, as we see in his *Breifff Discours off the Troubles begonne at Franckford in Germany, Anno Domini, 1554* (*Works*, IV, 9-68).

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<sup>22</sup>The original MS of *The Historie* is in Edinburgh University Library, having previously belonged to David Laing. The final text was produced by eight scribes, three of whom can be identified as Richard Bannatyne, John Gray and Paul Knox (the Reformer's nephew). Handwriting which is probably Knox's own occasionally occurs in the margins.

The passage, however, follows a pattern, which occurs elsewhere in *The Historie*.<sup>23</sup> An offended Queen cursorily dismisses the complacent Knox from her presence. He subsequently encounters a few stray members of the court and cracks a joke which toys with, and implicitly mocks, their expectations of him. David Murison observes that this particular encounter was "an occasion for one of Knox's rare pleasant jokes"<sup>24</sup> and, indeed, we are amused because the Reformer manages to be courteous in his description of the Queen while largely depriving her of special status. But Professor Gordon Donaldson comes closer to the heart of the matter when he considers what this passage reveals about Knox's "attitude to physical danger."<sup>25</sup> He finds the apparently casual phrase "above measure" especially important, presumably because, contrary to widely held perceptions, it implies that Knox was often fearful, but had the capacity to overcome the emotion. A fearless man, after all, does not need courage. But, acting in his capacity as a historian, Professor Donaldson has moved into the domain of literary criticism, and from within this discipline, it is perhaps possible to extend and color his observations. Ben Jonson's comments on the relationship between language and psychology, in *Discoveries*, can provide us with elegant and eloquent testimony. He writes:

Language most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired and inmost parts of us, and is the image of the parent of it, the mind No glasse renders a man's forme, or likenesse, so true as his speech.<sup>26</sup>

No belief could be more crucial to my study of John Knox.

His relationship with Mary, of course, never amicable even at the best of times, steadily deteriorated, until Knox was finally arraigned for treason and summoned to appear before the Queen, William Maitland of Lethington and Privy Council. In book IV of *The Historie*, Knox relates at length how he was unanimously acquitted by the Nobility, not once, but twice, much to

<sup>23</sup>See, for example, *Works*, II, 389, and Pierre Janton, *Concept et Sentiment dans L'Eglise chez John Knox* (Paris, 1974), pp. 22-3. Janton observes, rightly, "Quand Knox moralise sur l'éphémère beauté des dames de la cour, il continue la tradition des pessimistes du XVe siècle. Quelques exemples suffiront."

<sup>24</sup>David Murison, "Knox the Writer," in *John Knox: A Quatercentenary Reappraisal*, ed. Duncan Shaw (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 49.

<sup>25</sup>Gordon Donaldson, "Knox the Man," Shaw, pp. 19, 23.

<sup>26</sup>See Charles H. Herford and Percy Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, 11 Vols. (Oxford, 1925), VIII, 625, 2031-5, under "Oratio imago animi."

Mary's displeasure. After all, it was she who had finally told him, sometime prior to his eventual trial: "I offered unto you presence and audience whensoever it pleased you to admonische me; I avow to God, I shal be anes revenged" (*Works*, II, 387). It was in pursuing such an end that the following results were achieved:

The Lordis voteit uniformelie thai coulede find no offence. The Quene wes past to hir cabinet. The flatteraris of the Courte, and Ledingtoun pryncipally, raged. The Quene wes brocht agane, and placeit in hir chyre, and thai commandit to vote oure agane; quhilk thing heichlie offendit the haill Nobylattie, and began to speik in opin audience, 'What! sall the Laird of Lethingtoun haif power to controle us: or sall the presence of ane woman caus us to offend God, and to dampne ane innocent aganis oure conscience for plesour of onie creatour?' And so the haill Nobylattie absolved John Knox agane, and praisit God for his modestie, and for his plane and sensible ansueris . . . This persauit, the Quene began to upbraid Mr. Henrie Synclair, then Bischope of Ross, and said, heiring his vote to agree with the rest, 'Trubill nocht the barne: I pray you trubill him nocht; for he is newlie walknit out of his sleip. Why soulede nocht the aulde fule follow the futestapis of thame that haif passit befor him?' (*Works*, II, 411)

Knox's evident satisfaction at the frustrated expectations of the Queen's party charges the prose with dynamism. We sense their embittered incredulity through Knox's short sentences, then we are implicitly invited to condemn the apparently clandestine actions of the Queen as she presumably resolves further strategy. But incredulity and ill-will subsequently become the predominant emotions on the part of the Nobility, when they are brusquely directed to find another answer, one which Mary finds more satisfactory. Significantly, they express their outrage candidly, and Knox would expect his readers to pick up on this. Nothing goes on behind closed doors. We can see that Mary's blatantly obstinate refusal to accept the first decision opens a festering wound among the Nobility and simultaneously leaves her vulnerable to a reply. Knox, seasoned campaigner that he was, quickly realized the propaganda value of the incident, and he capitalizes on the praise that he receives, although perhaps it is more an indirect expression of aversion to the Queen's behavior. And is it not clear what really happened here? Mary's almost obsessive and indiscriminating eagerness to have Knox in her power caused her to act without the care and subtlety which might have effected the desired end.

But it is in "the Quenis tant to Henry Sinclair" (*Works*, II, 411, marginal note), that the latent bitterness of the scene becomes naked malignity. If she did in fact utter the words that Knox records, she reveals a talent for very scathing mockery and a withering distaste for what she saw as weak, sheep-like, behavior. Certainly, we know enough about her astuteness and personal attributes to admit that there must be some truth in Knox's presentation.

This granted, Mary's vigorous use of Scots brings the sting of saltiness to her remarks in a way which is wholly memorable. Her sudden contrast between the "newlie walknit barne" and the "aulde fule" following in the footsteps of others is extremely effective. It is no wonder that Sinclair was driven to answer "cauldlie." Knox's own characteristic strain of mockery subsequently emerges slightly further on in this narrative, and how different it is from the Queen's; much less spontaneously emotional, much more calculated: "for Madame [Mary] wes disappoyntit of hir purpos," he observes, making her sound girlish, pompous and peevish. This was one prophet's head which was not going to be delivered on a platter to a dancing girl.<sup>27</sup>

I contend, then, that John Knox was, and still is, the master of a crucially important literary voice, but a voice which has been stifled. We must, however, rise above the controversy Knox can cause, and rediscover his voice. Objectivity and rationality are not qualities beyond the ken of historians and theologians. Why should literary critics be any different? And we must not abuse our right to exercise subjective judgment. Lyall has demonstrated that with Knox's *Historie*, older Scottish prose writing reaches an all too fleeting but nevertheless confident maturity.<sup>28</sup> It is a maturity which is multiform and manifold; rich in drama, indomitable and of great forcefulness. Either we hearken to it attentively, or lose a substantial and very valuable part of our own inheritance.

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<sup>27</sup>The controversy between Knox and Mary concerning her marriage resembles the gospel narrative in which John the Baptist rebukes King Herod and his wife Herodias, see Matthew 14:8 and Mark 6:25.

<sup>28</sup>Lyall, p. 179.