THE BLOW THAT WAS HEARD ACROSS THE CHANNEL: ELIZABETH I'S INDIRECT RESPONSE TO JOHN KNOX'S INFAMOUS *THE FIRST BLAST*

Sofia Patino-Duque

Introduction by David Como, Professor of History, Stanford University

Sofia Patino-Duque's incisive and creative essay was written for my course on "Political Thought in Early Modern Britain." Patino-Duque began with a deep interest in the question of how Queen Elizabeth I of England (reign 1558-1603) managed to rule her kingdom, despite and in the face of the patriarchal and often oppressive gender regime that prevailed in early modern Europe. Sofia also wanted to explore the ways that "political thought" – usually conceived as a rarefied field of intellectual endeavor – actually affected political life on the ground. She chose to do this by looking at the famously misogynistic polemical tract The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, written by John Knox, the legendary Calvinist reformer and one of the fathers of Scottish Protestantism. Knox's work, written on the eve of Elizabeth's unexpected accession to the throne, expatiated in lurid terms upon the unfitness and ungodliness of feminine governance. Patino-Duque's paper tried to show how Elizabeth I, after arriving at the pinnacle of power, navigated and indeed at times managed to exploit the very patriarchal assumptions and misogynistic tropes that found expression in Knox's book. Patino-Duque's thoughtful essay, built on a highly creative and historically nuanced concept, stands as a testimony both to its author's skill and to the canny and sophisticated techniques of self-presentation deployed by one of early modern Europe's most impressive political figures.

The Blow That Was Heard Across the Channel: Elizabeth I's Indirect Responseto John Knox's Infamous *The First Blast*

Sofia Patino-Duque

John Knox did not expect that his journey home would take him five months. With reports flooding Geneva in November 1558 that the Protestant princess Elizabeth would ascend the English throne, the English Marian exiles rejoiced at the news and what Elizabeth's accession would entail for them: a return home. With Elizabeth in the highest position of authority, Protestants, like the Scottish Knox, saw this as an important message for the security of all Protestants as the new queen would protect them and their rights to their religious practice.[1] Many would be returning after a five-year religious and political exile from the previous Catholic regime. Though Elizabeth was not his ruling monarch, Knox still saw the young Elizabeth's rise in power as an important step towards the larger Protestant cause as her supporters had painted her to be the great Protestant monarch whose influence would even her northern Catholic neighbor Scotland. Thus, when Knox stepped on the boat that would bring him back to his beloved Scotland in January 1559, he did not anticipate being barred entry to the English realm. Queen Elizabeth refused to issue the Scottish religious reformer a passport to travel across her kingdom, for the year before he had published a political tract challenging a woman's right to rule titled *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstruous Regiment of Women*.[2] The title alone ensured the contents could not be interpreted otherwise; Knox had written, and then published, a radical piece arguing that women were denied the right to rule by God. Though The First Blast was written with Queen Elizabeth's Catholic half-sister in mind, Mary Tudor, the message and arguments expressed in the piece were ones that could undermine the newly-appointed queen's authority.

Although Knox was a minor figure in Queen Elizabeth's life, his tract remains important as it offers acute insight into atti-

1 Geddes MacGregor, The Thundering Scot: A Portrait of John Knox (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1957), 111.

2 Ibid., 100.

tudes on gender in the middle of the sixteenth century. The tract provides a critical framework for considering how Elizabeth may have negotiated with her gender identity during her reign. Though she was appalled by what Knox had written about queenship, Elizabeth ultimately conceded that governance is fundamentally gendered. However, instead of letting her gender debilitate her, she learned how to consolidate her power by building upon and manipulating public perceptions of her sex. What stemmed from Elizabeth's reign was a marriage of masculine authority and a new conscious form of queenship that altered the perception of ruling power. By placing her public and private speeches, as well as correspondences, in conversation with Knox's *The First Blast*, one sees Queen Elizabeth I's prowess in reconstructing gender to her benefit.

Though her subsequent reign was certainly not a direct response to Knox's comments, Elizabeth was aware of the gender debates surrounding her right to rule. English authorities had banned The First Blast's distribution and threatened its readership with the death penalty.[3] If *The First Blast*'s attack on female rulers had been unfounded, the royal authority would not have issued this severe of a response. These actions illustrated that political elites could not afford to ignore the document and the conversation it ignited.[4] It was a broader discussion about gender and power that had caused Elizabeth to react to Knoxian critique, not necessarily him but what his tract represented. His opinions were an illustrative set of deep-rooted prejudices to which Elizabeth would need to respond in a calculated fashion throughout her reign.

The First Blast tract, though extreme, does offer examples of assumptions on gender and power that were widespread in early modern Britain. Knox based his opposition against the rulership of women on three main ideas. The first claimed that God had denied women the right to rule as women rulers were unnatural. The second targeted those inherent characteristics that would impede women from being rulers. And the third emphasized the importance of marriage and how women should be subjugated to their husband's will. What Knox did not anticipate was how a future female monarch like Elizabeth would turn these critiques to her

3 MacGregor, The Thundering Scot, 98.

4 Ibid.

advantage.

When Knox asserted that God had denied women the right to rule, Elizabeth refuted this claim by acknowledging how God had explicitly chosen her to lead the English people. His attack on how women lacked the characteristics that made men fundamentally better leaders were the exact characteristics Elizabeth drew upon to establish pathos in her speeches and writings. While Knox claimed that women should be subject to their husbands, Elizabeth twisted this reasoning and married herself to her kingdom to avoid the transition of power to a spouse. All of these reactions demonstrate how conscious Elizabeth was about gender during her reign and how she learned to balance, and indeed intertwine, monarchical power and gendered politics in the sixteenth century.

Sounding *"The First Blast"*

At the beginning of 1558, no one could have expected how the axis of European power was about to shift. Both England and Scotland were under the stronghold of Catholic power.[5] For Marian exiles like Knox, the return to Protestant rule was limited to wishful thinking, especially as the Catholic Habsburgs continued to dominate Europe. As one of the last Protestant leaders to have left England when Queen Mary ascended the throne in 1553, Knox escaped to Europe to find religious toleration.[6] He was drawn to Geneva, Switzerland, where he mingled with Protestant thinkers like John Calvin, who convinced Knox to become a minister for a congregation of other religious English refugees which doubled as a platform to explore polemical ideas.[7]

Growing more critical towards Mary's regime and her anti-Protestant policies, Knox, alongside his fellow Marian exiles, launched a resistance campaign that consisted of pamphlets with messages and ideas intended to remove her from power.[8] His

5 Jane E.A. Dawson, "The Two John Knoxes: England Scotland and the 1558 Tracts," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 42, no. 4 (October 1991): 556, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046900000518.

6 James Stevenson McEwen, "John Knox," Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified February 6, 2020, accessed March 4, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Knox.

7 McEwen, "John Knox," Encyclopædia Britannica.

8 During Queen Mary's reign she enacted religious oppression policies, such as burning Protestants alive, which were later remembered in history by the name of Marian persecution; Dawson, "The Two John," 556.

frustration with England's intolerant religious policy and volatile political power enraged him to write and publish a tract with a single purpose: to remove Queen Mary from the throne.[9] The gravity of his claims and the audacity of his argument required him to publish the piece anonymously.[10] The piece made its way across the English Channel and royal authorities were appalled. They immediately issued a royal proclamation commanding that anyone found in possession of the tract, and anyone who failed to destroy it, would face the death penalty.[11] Though the threat existed, the tract still made its rounds in political circles attracting debate on Knox's gendered and religious claims.

Knox intended his pamphlet to ignite revolution in England, but instead of fomenting rebellion, the tract sparked controversial discourse regarding rulership. Calvin criticized Knox for being a "thoughtless arrogant" for publishing the piece.[12] Knox, too, would later acknowledge that the pamphlet was unwise, but this admission came too late since his writings had found their way to the English Protestant princess Elizabeth.[13] Though Knox would eventually plead to Elizabeth for forgiveness, especially as she was not the person who inspired the piece, he did remain steadfast in his opinion that she could rest her claim "upon divine providence which could override the general law forbidding female rule."[14] She simply rejected both his apology and stipulation, and she extended her displeasure to anyone who had associated themselves with him, including Calvin.[15]

The very fact that Knox could not have guessed Elizabeth's rise to power makes *The First Blast* fascinating as it offers an unobstructed window into a sixteenth-century political theorist's opinions about gender. His piece offers important insight for historians who are interested in examining how gender affected Eliza-

9 Ibid., 556.

10 MacGregor, The Thundering Scot, 97.

11 Ibid., 98.

12 Sharon L. Jansen, Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 41.

13 MacGregor, The Thundering Scot, 100.

14 Jane E. A. Dawson, "John Knox (c. 1514–1572)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, last modified September 23, 2004, accessed March 3, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15781.

15 MacGregor, The Thundering Scot, 100.

beth's reign, for the arguments in the pamphlet were made against the new Protestant queen throughout her rule. While Knox's opinion was neither novel nor widespread, he represented a larger movement of critics whose purpose was to undermine a female monarch's claim to power. In addition, Knox's *The First Blast* is a unique historical document as there is documented proof that Elizabeth had known of its existence and therefore elicits attention in seeing how gender criticism affected her reign.

A (Wo)Man's Divine Right to Rule

Knox claimed in *The First Blast* that women were denied the right to rule not because of any actions they had committed, but because it was per God and nature's will. He felt that "[t]o promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire aboue any realme, nation, or citie, [was] repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reueled will and approued ordinance, and finallie it [was] the subuersion of good order, of all equitie and iustice."[16] By arguing female rulers were against nature, he not only depicted their rule as unnatural, but also as direct conflict with God's will. While Knox spewed this rationale, Elizabeth thought otherwise. In her first speech addressed to her lords at Hatfield, three days after Queen Mary's death, Elizabeth refuted the Knoxian theory that a woman ruler was "a thing most contrarious to [God's] reueled will and approued ordinance."[17] She even copied his language of "ordinance" and stated, "[she was] God's creature, ordained to obey His appointment."[18] Especially during the beginning of her reign, Elizabeth continued to discredit the Knoxian argument that "God by the order of his creation hath spoiled woman of authoritie and dominion."[19] God had not only "ordained" her to rule, but had also given "His permission" for her to govern "a body politic" as he saw her as the next legitimate ruler of England.[20] Her gender, contrary to Knoxian ideology, did

16 John Knox, The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women 1558, ed. Edward Arber (The Editor, 1878), 11, accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_First_Blast_of_the_Trumpet_Against_t/x9EyAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

17 Knox, The First Blast, 11.

18 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 51.

19 Ibid.

20 Knox, The First Blast, 11.

not restrict her from accepting her divine destiny. From her first speech, Elizabeth felt the need to establish that her right to rule was anything but in agreement with God's plans, despite what gender critics may have believed after reading Knox's tract.

In addition, Elizabeth did not mention that her gender would debilitate her rule nor that she was an exception to the rule because she was a female; Knox, on the other hand, would have disagreed. His tract drew upon Deborah, the prophetess of the God of the Israelites and the only female judge in the Book of Judges, to illustrate why she had been an exception to God's otherwise steadfast rule against women rulers.[21] Knox attributed her authority to God's suspension of divine commandment as the reason why He had allowed a woman to rule. Though people remembered Deborah as an exceptional leader in the Bible, her success, Knox argued, relied on her promoting God's Word and not her advancement of the law of the land (which would have been outside her jurisdiction as a female ruler).[22] She had known her place in society and therefore was a rare and commendable example of a legitimate female ruler. Knox suggested Deborah was exceptional because "[God] made her prudent in counsel, strong in courage, happie in regiment, and a blessed mother and deliuerer to his people."[23] Besides Deborah, Knox argued woman monarchs had cheated themselves to their thrones: "For that woman reigneth aboue man, she hath obteiened it by treason and conspiracie committed against God."[24] It was unfathomable for Knox to consider that a woman could naturally succeed without it being an exception to the norm.

While she may have wanted to be compared to Deborah, as the Israelite queen was revered for her steadfastness and success as a monarch, Elizabeth would not have wanted her legitimacy as a ruler to rely solely on an exception. Though she privately prayed to God to give "[her] strength so that [she], like another Deborah, … may free Thy people of Israel from the hands of Thy enemies," she admired the Israelite for her strength and leadership, not because

---

21 John Knox and Robert M. Healey, "Waiting for Deborah: John Knox and Four Ruling Queens," The Sixteenth Century Journal 25, no. 2 (1994): 371, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2542887.

22 Knox and Healey, "Waiting for Deborah," 379.

23 Knox, The First Blast, 40.

24 Ibid., 49.

she desired to be her reincarnation.[25] In fact, Elizabeth also drew upon the biblical figures of Judith and Esther in the same prayer, which demonstrates more of her awareness towards the legacy she wished to uphold rather than replace.[26] While Elizabeth and her advisors drew upon imagery of Deborah, it was never with the intention of describing Elizabeth as a unique case. Deborah's iconography was used to emphasize that Elizabeth shared enlightened qualities with the Israelite judge and not to suggest that the English monarch was a carbon-copy. This is an important distinction, especially as Knox used Deborah to legitimize his argument that God had denied women the right to rule. Elizabeth never saw her authority as an exception but as the natural succession since she was next in line. In an exchange between Sir Robert Cecil and Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex, Elizabeth wrote that "God hath raised me high…God hath made me to be queen" which emphasized God's role in approving her royal authority.[27] Her insistence on God's blessing challenges Knox's argument that God had denied women the right to rule.

Though Knox made bold statements about the unnaturalness of the female monarch, he and Elizabeth did not disagree on all aspects of governance; both understood the important role that nobility played in establishing the a ruler's legitimacy. For that reason, Knox warned nobles in *The First Blast* that those who "receiue[d] of women authoritie, honor or office, be assuredly persuaded, that in so maintaining that vsurped power, they declare[d] them selues enemies to God."[28] To avoid them becoming "enemies to God," he encouraged the men to "refuse [a queen's offer] to be her officers, because she is a traitoresse and rebell against God."[29] Knox understood that he would rattle Queen Mary's foundation of governance by targeting the power structure that surrounded her, especially if he framed their support of the queen as an offense against God: "[Whoever] receiueth of a woman, office or authoritie, are adulterous and bastard officers before God."[30] Supporting

25 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 157.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 337.
28 Knox, The First Blast, 49.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 48.

a woman monarch became a sinful activity because"[God] will neuer, I say, approue [a woman's rule], because it is a thing most repugnant to his perfect ordinance."[31] Knox argued that a nobleman would run the risk of going against God's will for supporting "a thing most repugnant to his perfect ordinance."[32] In addition, "[erecting] a woman to that honor, is not onely to inuert the ordre, which God hath established: but also it is to defile, pollute and prophane (so farre as in man lieth) the throne and seat of God."[33] The decision to support and back a queen would entail turning away from God and his natural laws.

In contrast to Knox, Elizabeth promised her nobles the opposite of what *The First Blast* claimed: prosperity and God's favor. While Knox berated female monarchs' "weakness" because of their natural lack of good "counsel," Elizabeth played into the Knoxian assumption of female weakness in "ciuil regiment" and appealed to her nobility for guidance.[34] In a speech at Hatfield, where she addressed her lords for the first time, she acknowledged the importance of "good advice and counsel."[35] While Knox warned the nobility of the dangers of a queen, Elizabeth quickly squashed those fears by promising them, "with [her] ruling and you with your service may make a good account to almighty God and leave some comfort to our posterity in earth."[36] She understood her limitations "as [she was] but one body naturally considered…to govern" and recognized,"[she] shall desire you all, my lords (chiefly you of the nobility everyone in his degree and power), to be assistant to [her], that [she] with [her] ruling [may be successful.]"[37] Importantly, she did not appeal to her gender here when she stated that she was "but one body naturally considered;" her word choice emphasized the enormity of the task ahead of her, which was to rule a nation, and how it would take the nobility's "good advice and counsel" to succeed.[38] While Knox promised condemnation to any noble who supported a female monarch, Elizabeth promised shared prosperity

31 Ibid., 18.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 33.
34 Ibid., 12.
35 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 51.
36 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 52.
37 Ibid., 51.
38 Ibid.

of the land and also, crucially, suggested to members of the ruling elite that they would play a significant role in governing the kingdom. By appealing to the body which presented the largest threat to her rule, she understood, like Knox, that having the nobility support one's claim would only legitimize her authority and success.

She's the Man

Instead of divorcing her gender and rule, Elizabeth found power in marrying the two. A prime example which contradicted Knoxian theory on gender and power was her speech at Tilbury in 1588, where she addressed a group of English soldiers who were readying themselves to fight the Spanish Armada. Looking only at the number of men and track record of both respective navies, the English were prepared for a defeat as there was no chance they could succeed against what was then the mammoth of European power. The queen's words, however, ignited spirit in these men. In her speech, Elizabeth drew upon her gender and on the specific characteristics that Knox had previously critiqued: "weak" and "feeble". She told the men that "I know that I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England too." [39]With this example, Elizabeth illustrated to her men that though they too may feel "weak and feeble", they had the power, like she, to "have the heart and stomach of a king," and not just any king but "a king of England."[40] She resorted to using her gender in the speech not only to remind them of her womanly qualities, but also to show that anything is possible when one remained strong and courageous in the face of adversity. Though she was trying to build contrast between the images of a weak woman against the strength of a king, she was not saying that a woman could not rule—instead, she was playing into the stereotypes that Knox perpetuated and used these perceptions to help inspire her men when the odds were dire. After her short digression into her femininity, Elizabeth returned to her stately authority and promised the soldiers "in the word of a prince [that the soldiers] shall not fail"—evoking the masculine authority to legitimize her power.[41]

Her conscious use of her gender in her speeches illus-

39 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 326.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

trates her advanced rhetoric. She turned what was perceived to be a weakness into an emotional and political strength. Instead of squirming away from her gender, Elizabeth used womanly and motherly qualities to instill pathos into her rhetoric, especially when addressing her public. She particularly played up the role of a mother when fending off complaints from Parliament about not marrying or producing any offspring, stating, "for every one of you, and so many as are English, are my children and kinfolks, of whom, so long as I am not deprived and God shall preserve me, you cannot charge me, without offense, to be destitute."[42] She expanded upon this motherly rhetoric and argued that "though you [England] have had and may have many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had or shall have any that will be more careful and loving" for it was her "sexly weakness" which allowed her to feel the compassion she felt towards her kinsman.[43] Elizabeth successfully exploited her perceived femininity when she saw fit, a tactic which would have dumbfounded Knoxian gender theorists.

One of the many problems of Knox's tract was its incapacity to depict women as anything but one-dimensional, a viewpoint that Elizabeth rejected as she saw how her gender gave her the fluidity to evoke her femininity when she saw fit. By Knox laying down what "[God] affirmeth woman to be a tendre creature, flexible, soft and pitifull," he gave Elizabeth a framework to understand how she could twist those perceptions to her advantage.[44] Whether it was her intention to undermine her critics is not clear, but her specific use of words like "weak" and "feeble" point towards a collective understanding of the terms used against her sex. Her visit to Cambridge in 1564 illustrated this further: "Although feminine modesty, most faithful subjects and most celebrated university, prohibits the delivery of a rude and uncultivated speech in such a gathering of most learned men, yet the intercession of my nobles and my own goodwill toward the university incite me to produce one."[45] Not only did she mention her "feminine modesty", but she also concluded her speech to the "most learned men"

42 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 59.
43 Ibid., 340.
44 Knox, The First Blast, 25.
45 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 87.

saying she "[had] detained your most learned ears so long with my barbarousness [Latin]."[46] Her use of "feminine modesty" and "barbarousness" illustrates how she leaned into the general public's opinion of women to humble herself. By addressing the elephant in the room—her gender—she ended up achieving more clout from her followers by acknowledging her supposed female limitations and twisting them to her benefit —an unfathomable outcome for Knoxian theorists. In evoking female gender stereotypes, Elizabeth made the men in her company feel flattered so that they would pay more attention to her.Though she was a master of drawing upon her womanly qualities when needed, Elizabeth also used masculine authority to legitimize her claims. She did not shy away from using princely language,often addressing herself as "prince" or "king." By drawing upon these traditionally masculine terms, Elizabeth may have implied that it was her prerogative, as a ruler, to invoke any title needed. When addressing Parliament during her famous Golden Speech, Elizabeth exemplifies a sophisticated pairing of masculine and female authority: "For myself, I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a king or royal authority of a queen as delighted that God made me His instrument to maintain His truth and glory, and to defend this kingdom from dishonor, damage, and oppression."[47] In this one sentence, she not only laid claim to kingship and queenship, but also alluded to God's approval as He had "made [her] His instrument."[48] Her conscious choice of not feminizing her language, unless she evoked it, and her dominion of masculine authority revealed a union between an advanced rhetoric and conscious form of gender politics, a pairing which granted her the freedom to evoke any royal authority she desired.

I Take You, England, To Be My Regally Wedded Husband

Beyond her lasting mark on the rhetoric of queenship, Elizabeth challenged customs of marriage with her insistence that she remain the virgin Queen. For Knox, the idea of a woman wielding so much free will to make that decision would have been blasphemous. For her advisors, it was an obstacle they had not expected. However, she immediately raised the marriage question when she

46 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 89.
47 Ibid., 342.
48 Ibid.

ascended the throne and made it clear that she had no intentions of marrying. She informed her advisors and Parliament that she was already committed: England was her spouse while her subjects were her children. She was "already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England."[49] Her coronation day had also, unbeknownst to anyone besides herself, been her wedding day. In a letter to the Scottish Ambassador William Maitland, Laird of Lethington, she told him that she was "married already to the realm of England when [she] was crowned with this ring, which [she] bear[ed] continually in token thereof."[50] With this circular logic, she not only was able to create a sound argument, but also used her gender to achieve the outcome she desired most: remaining unmarried. She avoided the idea that "Man is not of the woman but the woman of the man" which Knox's tract proclaimed.[51] She had succeeded in turning Knox's argument against her critics and instead used the institution of marriage to give her more freedom than was thought possible for a woman in her position.

After witnessing the disaster of her half-sister's marital union, Elizabeth saw marriage as a power trap. The second she agreed to marry someone, she would lose her power as it would be her duty, as Knox wrote, to "serue and obey man, not to rule and command" her husband.[52] She understood that a marital union would be the most glorious day for her spouse but a funeral for herself, stripped of her sovereign power. Though Elizabeth had advance knowledge of queenship, she could not disagree with the Knoxian argument that "[God] hath subuected [woman] to one… [H]e will neuer permit her to reigne ouer manie."[53] Even if she found a husband who would allow her to rule, the public would still default kingly authority to her husband and not view her as the head sovereign.

Elizabeth twisted the marital language and rhetoric to her advantage. With the House of Commons scandalized by her refusal to marry, she retorted that "when the public charge of governing the kingdom came upon [her], it seemed unto [Elizabeth] as an

49 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 59.
50 Ibid., 65.
51 Knox, The First Blast, 15.
52 Ibid.,15.
53 Knox, The First Blast, 28.

inconsiderate folly to draw upon [herself] the cares which might proceed of marriage. To conclude, [she was] already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England, and that may suffice you [from pressing the topic further.]"[54] The House of Commons, like her advisors, were less worried about who Elizabeth married and more concerned what this would mean for the line of succession. At one point, the House of Commons begged her to choose anyone in order to secure an heir: "Whosoever [your husband] be that your majesty shall choose, we protest and promise with all humility and reverence to honor, love, and serve as to our most bounden duty shall appertain."[55] Their singular desire was for her to have a successor and particularly an heir who would uphold Protestant values. However, Elizabeth would never be convinced to forgo her status as a virgin queen nor her authority as sole ruling monarch.

Elizabeth played into what was expected of her as a wife, but unconventionally projected those expectations onto her metaphorical matrimony. An argument Knox brought up in The First Blast was a wife's devotion to her husband, an idea Elizabeth happily applied to England. If her critics desired her to be devoted to a partner for life, let that partner be the very kingdom that infused her with power and authority. Knox claimed that "[f]or those that will not permit a woman to haue power ouer her owne sonnes, will not permit her (I am assured) to haue rule ouer a realme"—she had successfully turned his reasoning against him.[56] Elizabeth twisted the claim that a woman's sole purpose was to be submissive to her husband. If that were the case, then she would need to subvert to her husband, England, which would mean she would need to pay heed to his needs, prosperity of the land, and take care of their children, her subjects. Her marriage, therefore, was destined for greatness as she and her "husband" held the same principle: to protect their realm at all costs. She astutely played into people's perceptions of women and then used those stereotypes to her advantage.

Conclusion

The year 1558 was a pivotal year for both Knox and Elizabeth: the one published his most famous political tract, the other

54 Elizabeth, et al., Collected Works, 59.

55 Ibid., 76.

56 Knox, The First Blast, 14.

gained a kingdom. Though Knox specifically attacked three aspects of female rule in The First Blast, his message ended up backfiring on him as he provided a framework for Elizabeth to manipulate her gender in her favor. She turned his language and claims against Knox and addressed each major point he made in his tract throughout her life as a public figure. She targeted Knox's major claims by defending her divine right, configuring her gender as a rhetorical asset, and not relinquishing her authority to a husband. What results from placing Elizabeth's words and actions into conversation with Knox's claims is a more nuanced perspective of the importance of gender in the sixteenth century. Elizabeth never saw her queenship as an opportunity to pioneer the female position in society; instead, she learned how to operate in a patriarchal structure and twist her gendered restrictions to her advantage. The question, therefore, is not if Elizabeth was a feminist, but rather, what tactics she used to ensure that her gender would be used to her benefit in a complex political environment. It would be more accurate to call her a visionary. When Knox concluded his essay writing that "the trumpet hath…blown" degrading women, he had no idea of the reply that awaited him by the most celebrated female monarch in history.[57]

57 Knox, The First Blast, 53.