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978-0-521-87774-9 - Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England

Timothy Rosendale

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## LITURGY AND LITERATURE IN THE MAKING OF PROTESTANT ENGLAND

The Book of Common Prayer is one of the most important and influential books in English history, but it has received relatively little attention from literary scholars. This study seeks to remedy this by attending to the Prayerbook's importance in England's political, intellectual, religious, and literary history. The first half of the book presents extensive analyses of the Book of Common Prayer's involvement in early modern discourses of nationalism and individualism, and argues that the liturgy sought to engage and textually reconcile these potentially competing cultural impulses. In its second half, *Liturgy and Literature* traces these tensions in subsequent works by four major authors – Sidney, Shakespeare, Milton, and Hobbes – and contends that they operate within the dialectical parameters laid out in the Prayerbook decades earlier. Central to all these cultural negotiations, both liturgical and literary, is an emphasis on symbolic representation, in which the conflict between collective and individual authority is worked out through complex acts of interpretation. Rosendale's analyses are supplemented by a brief history of the Book of Common Prayer, and by an appendix which discusses its contents.

TIMOTHY ROSENDALE is Assistant Professor of English at Southern Methodist University, Dallas. His work has appeared in various journals including *Studies in English Literature*, *Renaissance Quarterly*, and *Early Modern Literary Studies*. This is his first book.

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*For my family*

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. . . nam liber loquitur obscure,  
et quamvis coneris candide interpretari,  
non poteris effugere magnam absurditatem.

(Dryander to Bullinger, 5 June 1549)

. . . [The Book of Common Prayer] speaks very obscurely,  
and however you may try to explain it with candour,  
you cannot avoid great absurdity.

“O Sir, the prayers of my mother, the Church of England,  
no other prayers are equal to them!”

(George Herbert)

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## *Acknowledgments*

The course of a typically busy and self-absorbed life too infrequently forces us to stop, take stock, and reflect on those who have helped us along the way. This is too bad, because even though it deprives us of our solipsistic fantasies, doing so is an occasion of genuine pleasure; it reminds us of all the people who have more or less willingly involved themselves in our lives.

I'll begin with my institutional debts. My graduate studies at Northwestern were assisted by any number of fellowships, and the John P. Long Prize for graduate research, which enabled a summer of blissful immersion in the British Library, Lambeth Palace Library, the old PRO, and the Parker Library at Cambridge. My department and college at SMU have been even more generous, and in particular the University Research Council has enabled productive leave and summer work on this project.

Also important to the progress of this book has been the publication of parts of it in progress. Parts of Chapters 1 and 2 appeared in *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.4 (2001) as "Fiery tongues: Language, Liturgy, and the Paradox of the English Reformation." An earlier version of Chapter 4 was published in *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 44:1 (Winter 2004) as "Milton, Hobbes, and the Liturgical Subject." And part of Chapter 3 was included in Taylor and Beauregard, eds. *Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England* (Fordham University Press, 2004), under the title "Sacral and Sacramental Kingship in Shakespeare's Lancastrian Tetralogy." I am grateful both for the original publication of each, and for the subsequent permission to include them here, back in the project which originally generated them.

My personal debts are more extensive and varied. Rudi Heinze gets the credit, or the blame, for first getting me interested in the English Reformation and the Prayerbook. The original version of this project was ably guided by Wendy Wall, Lacey Baldwin Smith, and Mary Beth Rose; Regina Schwartz gave feedback in later stages. More recently, I received encouragement and advice from Debora Shuger, William Kennedy,

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### *Note on texts*

All quotations from the Book of Common Prayer (also referenced as the Prayerbook or BCP) are taken from either F. E. Brightman's magisterial *The English Rite* or E. C. Ratcliff's *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*. Brightman's text is more scholarly; Ratcliff's is handier and more widely available; both are very useful. In most cases, unless Brightman's content or apparatus made its use necessary or specifically beneficial, I have used the more convenient Ratcliff, citing only parenthetically by page. I have left these quotations in their original spelling, for the most part, though I have done i/j and u/v modernizations, and I have quietly expanded printing elisions with the elided letters in italics.