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Edward Muir

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EDWARD MUIR is the Clarence L. Ver Steeg Professor at the Northwestern University. His publications include *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (1981) and *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta in Renaissance Italy* (1998).

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# *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*

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Second edition

EDWARD MUIR  
*Northwestern University*



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To  
Edward Wallace Muir  
and  
Mary Margaret Muir  
and  
In memory of  
Robert Scribner

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## Acknowledgments

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Most of the first edition of this book was written while I was an Associate Fellow at the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, during a sabbatical year made possible by a leave from Louisiana State University and a Fellowship for Independent Study and Research from the National Endowment for the Humanities. During that year I enjoyed the opportunity to explore ideas with the remarkably congenial and stimulating community of scholars who gathered there and especially with the members of the seminar on ritual.

I first presented some of the views found in this book in a lecture at the Center, which was published as “Gaze and Touch: Ritual in the Renaissance and Reformation,” *Ideas from the National Humanities Center* 2 (Summer 1993): 4–14. While finishing the book, I was particularly fortunate to try out some of the more controversial ideas at various meetings, including the biannual Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Studies at New College, Sarasota, Florida; the annual Conference of the American Academy of Religion; the annual Sixteenth-Century Studies Conference; a conference on “Spectacle, Monument and Memory” at York University, Ontario; and one on “La ville à la Renaissance: espaces – représentations – pouvoirs” at the Centre d’Etudes Supérieures de la Renaissance, Université François-Rabelais, Tours, France. I was also granted the opportunity for extended discussions on various issues found in this book at lectures and seminars at Northwestern, Dartmouth, Harvard, the Graduate School of the City University of New York, and the University of California at Santa Barbara. The many scholars from various disciplines who commented on and criticized my work have altered the book in so many ways that it would be impossible for me to thank everyone individually. If I have failed always to follow their advice, it is not because I was disinclined to listen but because I am relapsed in my errors.

The late Bob Scribner first invited me to write this book and read the entire manuscript of the first edition to its considerable improvement. The influence of his scholarship and superb critical sense continues to



x Acknowledgments

hover over this revised second edition and to enliven my understanding of the historian's calling. His loss still stings all of us who admired him. In a field of scholarship sometimes eviscerated by an arid pedantry or confessional identity that confuses the life of the mind with a narrow hermeneutics, the example of Bob's work continues to inspire.

He understood how the task of the historian, especially the historian of the Reformation, is to struggle to resurrect the conflicted lives of the past, not just to interpret its surviving texts according to some interpretive or dogmatic canon, and especially to imagine how the people of the sixteenth century made their own destiny according to their own wants and needs rather than just following the dictates of reformers, princes, and prelates. He appreciated how in an era dominated like no other by the clamor of conflicting interpretations of the Word, so many people still continued to care more about making their lives good than arguing about what was true, more about making their communities peaceful than pure. An Australian Catholic who studied German Protestants and pursued his career in the two Cambridges, Bob loved the contradictions and unruliness of history, and I imagine his heaven as a perpetual conversation with that disordered crowd in the sixteenth-century town square depicted in Pieter Brueghel the Elder's "Battle between Carnival and Lent." This book is an attempt to overhear what Bob might have learned.

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