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Ritual in Early Modern Europe

The first comprehensive study of rituals in early modern Europe, this new and expanded edition argues that between about 1400 and 1700 a revolution in ritual theory took place that utterly transformed concepts about time, the body, and the presence of spiritual forces in the world. Edward Muir draws on extensive historical research to emphasize the persistence of traditional Christian ritual practices even as educated elites attempted to privilege reason over passion, textual interpretation over ritual action, and moral rectitude over gaining access to supernatural powers. Edward Muir discusses wide-ranging themes such as rites of passage, carnivalesque festivity, the rise of manners, Protestant and Catholic Reformations, and the alleged anti-Christian rituals of Jews and witches. The new edition examines the impact on the European understanding of ritual from the discoveries of new civilizations in the Americas and missionary efforts in China and adds more material about rituals peculiar to women.

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

Second edition

EDWARD MUIR
Northwestern University



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[More information](#)

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

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction: the lure and danger of ritual	1
PART I: The ritual moment	15
1. Rites of passage	21
2. The ritual calendar	62
PART II: Rituals of the body	89
3. Carnival and the lower body	93
4. Manners and the upper body	125
PART III: Ritual and representation	155
5. The Reformation as a revolution in ritual theory	163
6. The Reformation as a ritual process	202
7. Government as a ritual process	252
Epilogue: mere ritual	294
<i>Glossary</i>	303
<i>Index</i>	312

Figures

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1 Pieter Brueghel the Elder, <i>The Peasants' Wedding</i> ,
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria. Foto
Marburg/Art Resource, N.Y. | page 44 |
| 2 Scene from the <i>Ars Moriendi</i> from Lionel Henry Cust, <i>The
Master E. S. and the "Ars Moriendi": A Chapter in the History
of Engraving During the XVth Century</i> . Oxford: Clarendon
Press, 1898. Photo courtesy of the Newberry Library. | 53 |
| 3 The Christian liturgical calendar | 66 |
| 4 Elevation of the host, from Andrea da Bologna, initial to
the prayer "Deus qui" of the Corpus Christi mass. Vatican,
Archivio San Pietro B 63, fol. 227v. | 75 |
| 5 Pieter Brueghel the Elder, <i>Battle between Carnival and Lent</i> ,
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Foto Marburg/Art
Resource, N.Y. | 90 |
| 6 Fra Angelico, <i>Marriage of the Virgin</i> , Museo di San Marco,
Florence, Italy. Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y. | 108 |
| 7 Witch kisses the devil's ass, from Francesco Maria Guazzo,
<i>Compendium Maleficarum</i> . Milan: Apud Haerdes August.
Tradati, 1608. Photo courtesy of the Newberry Library. | 241 |
| 8 Witches sacrifice babies, from Francesco Maria Guazzo
<i>Compendium Maleficarum</i> . Milan: Apud Haerdes August.
Tradati, 1608. Photo courtesy of the Newberry Library. | 243 |
| 9 Gentile Bellini, <i>Procession in Piazza San Marco</i> , Accademia,
Venice, Italy. Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y. | 259 |

Acknowledgments

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

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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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