

LITURGY, RITUAL, AND SECULARIZATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

Simultaneously spiritual and material, liturgy incarnates unseen realities in concrete forms – bread, wine, water, the architectural arrangement of churches and temples. Nineteenth-century writers were fascinated with liturgy. In this book Joseph McQueen shows the ways in which Romantic and Victorian writers, from Wordsworth to Wilde, regardless of their own personal beliefs, made use of the power of liturgy in their work. In modernity, according to recent theories of secularization, the natural opposes the supernatural, reason (or science) opposes faith, and the material opposes the spiritual. Yet many nineteenth-century writers are manifestly fascinated by how liturgy and ritual undo these typically modern divides in order to reinvest material reality with spiritual meaning, reimagine the human as malleable rather than mechanical, and en flesh otherwise abstract ethical commitments. McQueen upends the dominant view of this period as one of skepticism and secularization, paving the way for surprising new avenues of research.

JOSEPH MCQUEEN is Associate Professor of English at Northwest University (Kirkland, Washington). His chapter on “Rituals and Sacraments” will appear in the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Religion in Victorian Literary Culture*. He has published articles in *SEL Studies in English Literature*, *European Romantic Review*, and *Christianity & Literature*.

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE
AND CULTURE*Founding Editors*Gillian Beer, *University of Cambridge*Catherine Gallagher, *University of California, Berkeley**General Editors*Kate Flint, *University of Southern California*Clare Pettitt, *University of Cambridge**Editorial Board*Isobel Armstrong, *Birkbeck, University of London*Ali Behdad, *University of California, Los Angeles*Alison Chapman, *University of Victoria, Canada*Hilary Fraser, *Birkbeck, University of London*Josephine McDonagh, *University of Chicago*Elizabeth Miller, *University of California, Davis*Cannon Schmitt, *University of Toronto*Sujit Sivasundaram, *University of Cambridge*Herbert Tucker, *University of Virginia*Mark Turner, *King's College London*

Nineteenth-century literature and culture have proved a rich field for interdisciplinary studies. Since 1994, books in this series have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, gender and sexuality, race, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. Many of our books are now classics in a field which, since the series' inception, has seen powerful engagements with Marxism, feminism, visual studies, post-colonialism, critical race studies, new historicism, new formalism, transnationalism, queer studies, human rights and liberalism, disability studies, and global studies. Theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts continue to unsettle scholarship on the nineteenth century in productive ways. New work on the body and the senses, the environment and climate, race and the decolonisation of literary studies, biopolitics and materiality, the animal and the human, the local and the global, politics and form, queerness and gender identities, and intersectional theory is reanimating the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of nineteenth-century literary studies, connecting the field with the urgent critical questions that are being asked today. We seek to publish work from a diverse range of authors, and stand for anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and against discrimination in all forms.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.

LITURGY, RITUAL, AND SECULARIZATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

JOSEPH MCQUEEN

Northwest University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-43595-6 — Liturgy, Ritual, and Secularization in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

Joseph McQueen

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009435956

DOI: 10.1017/9781009435932

© Joseph McQueen 2025

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009435932

First published 2025

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-009-43595-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-43595-6 — Liturgy, Ritual, and Secularization in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

Joseph McQueen

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

For Kellyn, Lily, and Eve

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction: Liturgical Modernity	i
1 Mediating the Modern: Wordsworth’s Liturgical Subjectivity	22
2 Memory and Revolution: Ritual Time in Wordsworth’s <i>Prelude</i>	46
3 Tractarian Liturgies: John Keble, Charlotte Yonge, and the Deification of Ordinary Life	71
4 Realist Liturgies: Enfleshing Ethics in the Novels of George Eliot and Mary Ward	100
5 Liturgical Aestheticism: Walter Pater’s Sacralization of the Body	127
6 Against Immanence: Oscar Wilde’s Liturgical Constructivism	148
Epilogue	165
<i>Notes</i>	171
<i>Bibliography</i>	218
<i>Index</i>	236

Figures

I.1	Simeon Solomon, <i>The Mystery of Faith</i> (1870)	<i>page</i> 13
E.1	David Jones, <i>A Latero Dextro</i> (1949)	168

Acknowledgments

The word liturgy comes from Greek roots meaning “the work of the people,” and this book has indeed benefited from the work of many people. Clare Simmons, David Riede, Aman Garcha, and Norman Jones read the first iteration of this project in its entirety and improved every part of it. Many others read early drafts of chapters or discussed these drafts as I presented them at conferences and colloquia. For such help, I am grateful to Lori Branch, Logan Browning, Devin Buckley, Christine Colón, Amy Coté, Tommy Davis, Karen Dieleman, Denae Dyck, Jill Galvan, Kevin Hart, Regina Hewitt, Josh King, Mark Knight, the late Kathy Lundeen, Emma Mason, Lucy Morrison, Thomas Pfau, Jake Risinger, and Ben Wiebracht. Bethany Thomas, George Laver, and the rest of the editorial staff at Cambridge University Press offered careful and patient guidance through each step of the publication process. I am also grateful to the Press’s two anonymous readers for their thorough, insightful reports. Anika Parsons’s meticulous copy editing saved me from many mistakes. Thomas Dilworth and Bradford Haas generously helped me obtain the image of David Jones’s *A Latere Dextro*. And I owe special thanks to Abby Rogers and Charles LaPorte who provided rich intellectual camaraderie and who read and commented on the manuscript at crucial stages.

Two journals have graciously permitted me to reprint material that previously appeared in their pages. Chapter 2 is a revised and expanded version of “Remembering the Revolution: Wordsworth, Benjamin, and Mnemonic Critique,” which appeared in *European Romantic Review* 28.2 (2017): 241–58. This material is reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd. An earlier version of Chapter 6 appeared as “Oscar Wilde’s Catholic Aesthetics in a Secular Age” in *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 57.4 (Autumn 2017): 865–6. The article was published by Johns Hopkins University Press, and the copyright belongs to William Marsh Rice University.

I am also grateful to my community at Northwest University. Jim Heugel and Sarah Drivdahl supplied conference funds, course releases, and a sabbatical that allowed me to share my work and to finish it. The staff at Hurst Library responded with cheer and efficiency to what probably seemed like endless inter-library loans. My colleagues in the English Department have offered daily support and close friendship: life in Fee Hall is a blessing because of Clint Bryan, Chrystal Helmcke, Suzan Kobashigawa, Lenae Nofziger, Richard Snyder, and Jeremiah Webster. My students – especially those in my Romantic Modernity and Literary Theory courses – have thoughtfully engaged ideas in this book and helped me see my arguments from new perspectives.

My parents, John and Nancy, and my sister, Corrie, gave me extra hours to write by providing childcare. They also – together with my brothers, Josh and Chris, and my brother-in-law, Graydon Muller – were kind enough to ask about the details of the project and to listen patiently to my ideas. They were often the first audience for my partially formed thoughts.

The following pages describe liturgy as a way of entering a mystery that one cannot master. Words can also participate in that mystery but not exhaust it. My words reach out in thanksgiving toward my wife, Kellyn, and my daughters, Lillian and Evangeline, but I cannot say fully what these three have given me: a home, a communion, a place of struggle and of fulfillment, and still more. This book is for them.