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Rust, Jennifer R. The Body in Mystery: The Political Theology of the Corpus Mysticum in the Literature of Reformation England

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Rust, Jennifer R.

The Body in Mystery: The Political Theology of the Corpus Mysticum in the Literature of Reformation England.

Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014. Pp. xx, 249. ISBN 978-0-8101-2931-3 (paperback) \$39.95.

Jennifer Rust explores a passage of corporate theology through the Reformation in five texts in four long chapters annotated extensively with reference to most (if not all) literary readers and historians in their respective fields. (Andrew Pettegree's work on persuasion in Reformation culture is a notable gap.) Her close reading of John Foxe, William Shakespeare, and John Milton argues that the well-trodden Protestant passage from Mass to martyr was not entirely secular, nor was the journey wholly debased.

At issue was the church visible, post-Reformation, as defined by politics, not the Augustinian-Lutheran formula of invisible souls and structures; a kingdom with an established church was, Rust claims, at odds with its own degraded version of a "body of Christ." Whether readers, playgoers, or parliamentarians sought its echo in the same way is probably a question for another monograph. What we find here is a rather brilliant use of a theological argument to assess how those audiences may have perceived a connection to the "English" around them as a corporate body under king and church.

By filtering Ernst Kantorowicz's influential thesis of the *King's Two Bodies* through Henri de Lubac's 1944 work, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, Rust explores two aspects of Kantorowicz's work which have remained undeveloped in early modern literary studies: sacramental liturgy as "constitutive of social relations in premodern Christian culture," and the "sacrifice" of the Mass as an event joining all members, clergy and lay, together in the Real Presence, "divorced from any necessary connection to a social or communal context" (xi–xii).

From the 1563 original, John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* is, for Rust, an officially-sanctioned "liturgy of martyrdom" with support for Elizabethan supremacy following Mary's excesses. Martyrs and set forms of liturgy, principally the Book of Common Prayer, would prove highly influential in imagining the English mystical body.

Rust turns to the worldly stage for its echo: two of Shakespeare's plays reveal ironic sub-texts of mystical connection invisible to the absolutist ruler and

the voluble puritan. The anachronistic apparition of a ruined monastery in the revenge tragedy *Titus Andronicus* functions as “the present-absence of a salvific Christian horizon to transcend vengeful pagan Rome” (101). In *Measure for Measure*, Rust’s contrasting of the true love relations as aspects of a holy mystical body with the worldliness of exchange in the brothel plays on the hidden value of coinage, base and real, as joining all elements in true love—from the ruler through the people.

Milton’s Sonnet 18 on the Irish and Piedmontese massacres of the early 1640s attempts the “impossibility of locating a space or a history uncontaminated by foundational violence” (157). Rust brackets the sonnet with his dissection of the “martyrdom” of Charles I’s hagiographic memorialization, *Eikon Basilike*, as a signal failure against the Foxean formula. For many, Charles I was a martyr (175), where Mary of Scotland could never have been.

Rust’s discrete essays disinter politics of nostalgia, of violence, of degradation in English texts which might, in another light, seem a narrative of Protestant exceptionalism rather than anxiety. Historians, who might otherwise look wistfully upon the more vaulting connections of theologians and literary readers, will find that Rust enlightens in theologizing her textual investigations of an age where theology was a common language.

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Scott, Tom.

The Early Reformation in Germany: Between Secular Impact and Radical Vision.

UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. ix, 283. ISBN 978-1-4094-6898-1 (hardcover) \$124.95.

This collection of Tom Scott’s ten essays, some previously published and others appearing for the first time, has a purpose beyond the usual celebration of a senior scholar’s work on a given topic: it seeks to address the lacuna in Reformation scholarship on the Early Reformation and urge renewed attention to marginalized aspects of those heady beginnings of Reform.