



Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship (Economy)

Michael C. Schoenfeldt

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Michael C. Schoenfeldt here offers the first major exploration of the connections between George Herbert's devotional poetry and the social practices and political discourse of his day. Viewing *The Temple* and *The Country Parson* as part of the larger "civilizing process" of Western Europe, Schoenfeldt shows how Herbert discovers in the discourses of courtesy and theology a common vocabulary of authority, selfhood, petition, and discipline.

Before entering the priesthood, Herbert nourished contacts in court, was elected University Orator at Cambridge, and served in Parliament. In turning to God, Schoenfeldt argues, Herbert did not simply turn away from the secular world but also turned its language, particularly the language of courtesy, into the medium for his lyric worship of God. The confluence of courtesy and spirituality in Herbert's poetry provides a fascinating insight into a society searching for an appropriate discourse of reverence in a time of baffling change. The first five chapters investigate the manifold ways in which Herbert's life and works exemplify the interdependence of social and religious behavior in the English Renaissance. The sixth and final chapter extends this investigation into the nervous eroticism of Herbert's poems.

Considering *The Temple* as well as Herbert's letters, speeches, Latin poems, collections of foreign proverbs, translations, *The Country Parson*, and less familiar lyrics, Schoenfeldt offers a thorough and detailed reading of Herbert's rich and conflicted corpus. *Prayer and Power* is not only a bold redefinition of the accomplishment of one of the finest poets of the English Renaissance but also the first sustained study to advance a cultural poetics of the religious lyric.

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