THE RISE OF PRISON LITERATURE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Examining works by some of the most famous prisoners from the early modern period, including Thomas More, Lady Jane Grey, and Thomas Wyatt, Ruth Ahnert presents the first major study of prison literature dating from this era. She argues that the English Reformation established the prison as an influential literary sphere. In the previous centuries we find only isolated examples of prison writings, but the religious and political instability of the Tudor reigns provided the conditions for the practice to thrive. This book shows the wide variety of genres that prisoners wrote, and it explores the subtle tricks they employed in order to appropriate the site of the prison for their own agendas. Ahnert charts the spreading influence of such works beyond the prison cell, tracing the textual communities they constructed, and the ways in which writings were smuggled out of prison, and then disseminated through script and print.

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Abbreviations and references

When quoting from early printed books, I provide semi-diplomatic transcriptions: superscript letters are lowered; contractions are expanded and supplied letters italicised; thorn and y are replaced with th and terminal -es graph with -es. These have been silently expanded. Deletions in the text are signalled with <xxx>, lost letters and words with [. . .], interlineations with /xxx/ and editorial insertions with [xxx]. Titles from early modern printed books have frequently been truncated for brevity. The following abbreviations are used for books, journals or libraries that are cited frequently:

BL  British Library, London
ECL Emmanuel College Library, Cambridge
EETS OS Early English Text Society, Original Series
HLQ Huntington Library Quarterly
LM  Certain most godly, fruitful, and comfortable letters of such true saints and holy martyrs of God (otherwise known as ‘Letters of the Martyrs’), ed. Henry Bull (London, 1564)
MED Middle English Dictionary
ODNB Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OED Oxford English Dictionary
Rerum Rerum in Ecclesia gestarum (Basle, 1559)
Latin biblical quotations are taken from St Jerome’s *Nova vulgata Bibliorum sacrorum editio* (Vatican City, 1979); English biblical quotations are taken from Miles Coverdale’s *Biblia the Bible* (Cologne?, 1535). I have used Coverdale’s translation (rather than William Tyndale’s, for instance) because it is this version that provides the source for the Psalm translations of Thomas Smith and Henry Howard, the earl of Surrey, amongst others. References to Psalms are by the Vulgate numbering.

Throughout this book, whenever a particular work was printed in more than one of John Foxe’s and Henry Bull’s publications (*Rerum*, *TAMO* (1563), *TAMO* (1570), *TAMO* (1583), and LM), reference will be made only to the earliest work in which it appears. However, if a holograph or early manuscript version of this work survives, reference will be made to that manuscript alone.