

The English Poems of Richard Crashaw. Richard Crashaw.

Ed. Richard Rambuss. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. lxxxvi + 450 pp. \$39.95.

It has become a kind of perverse ritual for studies of Richard Crashaw's work to quote in introductory passing the snubs and slanders the poet has suffered at the hands of literary scholars, as if to show just how benighted, how in need of a transformative critical perspective, Crashaw's readers have been. In the "reintroduction" that opens his new edition of Crashaw's poetry in English, Richard Rambuss nods to tradition and mentions those grimmer appraisals of Crashaw only to provide a reframing that should obviate the need for such a gesture from now on. Crashaw has been described by his critics as flamboyant and perverse, extravagant and voluptuous, Catholic and Continental — that is, as fundamentally foreign: "the most un-English of all the English poets," as George Walton Williams, editor of the last major edition of Crashaw's poetry, describes him (*The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw* [1970], xv). Against this marginalization of Crashaw from the main line of early modern English poetry, Rambuss offers up a companionable yet learned volume whose splendid prefatory essay places Crashaw within the nuanced historical, theological, and aesthetic cultures of the period, establishing the poet as a product of his complex English environment generally, and of mid-seventeenth-century Cambridge particularly. And while specialists will lament the absence of the robust body of Latin and Greek epigrams that constitute Crashaw's earliest published work, Rambuss's focus on the poet's English verse aligns with his project of reclaiming Crashaw as one of the major poets of the English canon.

Rambuss's volume opens with an account of Crashaw's life that goes beyond mere survey, mapping the "networks of affiliation — literary, religious, political, intellectual, collegiate" (xxxvi) that developed between the poet and his contemporaries. Rambuss delves into archival material to thicken Crashaw's biography for a twenty-first-century audience, and supplements that narrative with evidence of the esteem in which he was held by his fellow writers, including Joseph Beaumont and Abraham Cowley. Beyond these friendships, Rambuss traces lines of literary influence between Crashaw and Herbert, Milton, and Shakespeare, among others, demonstrating just how enmeshed in English literary culture Crashaw's work is. As elsewhere in his scholarship, Rambuss is not interested in recuperating Crashaw's reputation "at the cost of banally discounting the startling weirdness of his writing" (xxi), but he argues against understanding Crashaw's stylistic exorbitance as a signal that he was "always already a Catholic" (l) and amasses proof enough that Crashaw's ecstasies feed as much on Herbert's Anglican

Church as on Saint Teresa's Rome. Indeed, Rambuss's introduction presents a Crashaw whose poetry bespeaks his literary and religious ecumenicalism, which Rambuss describes as devotional cosmopolitanism.

This reframing is welcome indeed, and timely too; Williams's 1970 edition is long out of print, though not yet so long as L. C. Martin's 1927 edition (reprinted in 1957). Like Martin, Rambuss orders the poems to reflect their original printing, which allows for a consideration of poems in sequential conversation with one another. The 1646 volume *Steps to the Temple*, printed in London with Anglican packaging, is thus distinguished from the posthumous *Carmen Deo Nostrum*, published in Paris with a stronger Catholic flavor. The organizational strength of Rambuss's edition is supplemented by generous endnotes, which furnish this volume particularly well for a wide readership as they provide additional information on each poem's publication history, gloss difficult passages, identify historical figures and literary allusions, and offer light interpretation. (With such a helpful commentary apparatus, it may seem churlish to complain that the endnotes are not keyed to the pages on which the poems appear; that lack of coordination makes for some frustrating back-and-forthing.)

Given his editorial investment in presenting Crashaw's poems "as they appeared to his early modern readers" (xiv) and his intellectual commitment to preserving Crashaw's "startling weirdness," it is surprising that Rambuss should have chosen to modernize spelling and routinize capitalization and italics. Crashaw's poetics is deeply tied to his incarnationalist sensibilities; he is aroused by the corporeal, and his poems reflect his investment in their material substantiality as texts. To normalize his ostentatious typography is to flatten out one dimension of his dynamic expression. Perhaps Rambuss believed a little flattening was necessary to make this often under-read poet seem more available, and less strange, to a new generation of readers.

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