

---

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Crashaw, Richard. The English Poems of Richard Crashaw. Ed.  
and intro. Richard Rambuss**

**Kenneth Borris**

---

Volume 38, numéro 1, hiver 2015

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1088700ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i1.22791>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

Citer ce compte rendu

Borris, K. (2015). Compte rendu de [Crashaw, Richard. The English Poems of Richard Crashaw. Ed. and intro. Richard Rambuss]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 38(1), 157–159.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i1.22791>

---

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2015

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

---

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

**Crashaw, Richard.**

***The English Poems of Richard Crashaw*. Ed. and intro. Richard Rambuss.**

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. Pp. lxxxvi, 449 + 10 ill. ISBN 978-0-8166-8068-9 (hardcover) \$39.95.

Important for seventeenth-century English literary studies, this first scholarly edition of Crashaw's verse since George Walton Williams's *Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw* (1970) revivifies his unfortunately neglected metaphysical poetry for the twenty-first century. Though Crashaw occasioned some panic among the Anglo-American literary academy in the past century, the grounds on which he was then marginalized, as his new editor Richard Rambuss argues, now seem narrow-minded, arbitrary, and dated. This poet needs serious and sympathetic reevaluation which Rambuss greatly facilitates.

Crashaw wrote Latin as well as English poetry. Aside from an early volume of Latin poetry on sacred themes (1634), in Crashaw's own time his verse was published in three overlapping collections, mainly in English but also in Latin: *Steps to the Temple: Sacred Poems, with Other Delights of the Muses* (London, 1646); an eponymous revised and expanded second edition (London, 1648); and a Catholicized repackaging of *Steps to the Temple's* sacred verse, *Carmen Deo Nostro* (Paris, 1652), newly illustrated with twelve engravings (including two often attributed to Crashaw himself). He was apparently unable to supervise these editions, for he had fled to the Continent around 1644 to avoid Puritan religious persecution, and died in 1649.

Rambuss's edition focuses on the English verse from both the 1646 and 1652 volumes; the latter presents its poems largely as they appear in the revised *Steps* of 1648, but with numerous significant variants. Rambuss further includes Crashaw's English poems that uniquely appear in the 1648 edition, his English verse appearing only in manuscript, and a 1653 edition of his poem *Letter [...] to the Countess of Denbigh*, which revises the version in *Carmen Deo Nostro*. In reproducing the English poems of the 1646 and 1652 volumes, Rambuss restores their original order abandoned in Williams's 1970 edition. Thus we may consider the significances that order may have had for the poet or his publishers, and for the readers of his time. This edition aptly juxtaposes the 1646 and 1652 volumes: the former presents the poet as a Laudian Anglican within the Church of England, as does its 1648 successor; the latter, as a Roman Catholic following his conversion on the Continent around 1645.

Rambuss's apparatus is invaluable both for appreciating Crashaw's poetry and for discerning the vagaries of his reception since the later nineteenth century. Following a brief chronology of the salient events of the poet's life and writing, there is a learned, graceful, and fascinating "Reintroduction" to the poet. After being attractively presented in this text, the poems themselves receive extensive and astute commentary at the volume's end, including variant readings; the edition provides a bibliography of the major twentieth-century editions and relevant critical studies, and an index of titles for Crashaw's poems. Unfortunately, the running titles for the "Editor's Notes" do not include the page numbers locating the poems to which the notes refer. This oversight makes the volume much less convenient to use, and to dip into, than it would have been otherwise. The notes for a given poem cannot easily be found.

Notorious for "startling weirdness" (xxi), Crashaw's verse disturbs some readers and stimulates contrivances to sidestep him. Barbara Lewalski's influential monograph *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* avoids Crashaw on the grounds that his poetry is Roman Catholic in sensibility. But he certainly wrote most of it when Protestant, and thus reflects some significant High-Church currents within early-modern English Protestantism. Others dismiss him as un-English, "an exotic Italian import like pasta or castrati" as Frank J. Warnke claims (cit. Rambuss xviii), though Crashaw was born an Englishman in London and educated at Cambridge, where he became a fellow and curate at Peterhouse College until driven to the Continent by Puritan iconoclasts who stripped him of his livelihood and his beloved parish church. His subsequent conversion to Catholicism appears to have been at first reluctant, as an extant letter that he wrote during his exile in 1644 indicates (li–lii). If Crashaw had not been persecuted, he would probably have remained at Cambridge as a Laudian Anglican. In any case, by such methods as Lewalski and Warnke's he has been further exiled to the margins of English literary history and anthologies.

Crashaw inspires discomfort, as Rambuss observes, because he "rates among the queerest of devotional authors." Yet that impression arises because "his poetry amounts to the most sustained endeavor among English poets to render—and by rendering stimulate—ecstasy" (xxii). He assimilates Continental and Greco-Roman influences in a cosmopolitan and transconfessional manner, using sensational imagery to render spiritual desires and states in erotic and homoerotic ways that sometimes assume androgynous and feminine

perspectives. As if this pious author were the Heliogabalus of English devotional verse, he is sometimes accused of “more than slightly perverse sexuality” as Warnke proposes, or “of something sick or unmanly” as Austin Warren says (cit. Rambuss xxvii, lxviii). But his poetic procedures are means of vertiginous defamiliarization for spiritual purposes, and developments of age-old Judaeo-Christian traditions arising from the Song of Songs and Pseudo-Dionysius among other precursors. Rambuss’s edition includes various helpful illustrations, and among these is a photograph of Bernini’s sculpture *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, wherein she swoons with pleasure as a pretty adolescent angel prepares to penetrate her with his love-dart aimed at her abdomen. Since she is the representative human being here, male viewers perceiving her situation and applying it to themselves become rather feminized. Profound religious art does not comfortably accord with conventional categories and viewpoints. And since all seventeenth-century devotional verse is now bound to be an acquired taste, penalizing Crashaw for his particular differences increasingly seems narrow. For T. S. Eliot he is “quite alone in his peculiar kind of greatness,” a writer of “the finest baroque poetry”: “grotesque and [...] hideous” yet “in its way *beautiful*” (cit. Rambuss, xvii, lx).

KENNETH BORRIS  
McGill University

**Cruz, Anne J. and Maria Galli Stampino, eds.**  
***Early Modern Habsburg Women: Transnational Contexts, Cultural Conflicts, Dynastic Continuities.***

Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. xviii, 294 + 29 ill, 10 tables. ISBN 978-1-4724-1164-8 (hardcover) \$129.95.

This interdisciplinary collection of essays offers a variety of perspectives on the lives of six women of the Habsburg family who lived between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The focus is mainly on the Spanish branch of the Habsburg clan, although also included are some women of the Austrian branch who married their Spanish relatives and the French bride of Philip IV, Isabel of Borbón. These six figures are relatively little known to the English-speaking world, and their presentation here offers a welcome expansion of our