In early modern England, religious sorrow was seen as a form of spiritual dialogue between the soul and God, expressing how divine grace operates at the level of human emotion. Through close readings of both Protestant and Catholic poetry, Kuchar explains how the discourses of “devout melancholy” helped generate some of the most engaging religious verse of the period. From Robert Southwell to John Milton, from Aemilia Lanyer to John Donne, the language of “holy mourning” informed how poets represented the most intimate and enigmatic aspects of faith as lived experience. In turn, “holy mourning” served as a way of registering some of the most pressing theological issues of the day. By tracing poetic representations of religious sorrow from Crashaw’s devotional verse to Shakespeare’s weeping kings, Kuchar expands our understanding of the interconnections between poetry, theology, and emotion in post-Reformation England.

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THE POETRY OF RELIGIOUS SORROW IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

GARY KUCHAR
For Erin E. Kelly
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Abbreviations and notes on texts

OED  Oxford English Dictionary (2nd edn)

The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw, ed. George Walton Williams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970). References to “The Weeper” are from this edition and are given in the text by stanza number. Except when noted otherwise I cite the 1648 version of “The Weeper.” Other references to Crashaw’s poems are from this edition and are indicated as either line or stanza numbers in the text.

The Complete English Poems of John Donne, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: Dent, 1985). Except when noted otherwise, references to Donne’s Songs and Sonets are from this edition and are given by line numbers.


The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, volume 7 part I: The Holy Sonnets, ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). Except when noted otherwise, references to the Holy Sonnets are from this edition and are given in the text by sequence (Original, 1635, Westmoreland, or Revised) and by line numbers.

references to Herbert’s poetry are from this edition and are given by line numbers in the text.


William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Charles Forker, Arden 3rd Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2002). References to the play are from this edition and are given in the text by act, scene, and line numbers.


Except when noted otherwise, references to the Bible are from a modern spelling edition of the King James version.

All italics in quotations are original except where marked.

Naya Tsentourou, Modern Language Review, Vol.113 (2), April, 2018 

An essential inclusion on any Herbert bibliography. 

The ultimate payoff of George Herbert and the Mystery of the Word is not just a deep sense of Herbert's commitment to mystery, but the realization that this may be a root cause of the blossoming of seventeenth-century religious poetry. 

