Christians in post-Reformation England inhabited a culture of conversion. Required to choose among rival forms of worship, many would cross – and often recross – the boundary between Protestantism and Catholicism. This study considers the poetry written by such converts, from the reign of Elizabeth I to that of James II, concentrating on four figures: John Donne, William Alabaster, Richard Crashaw, and John Dryden. Murray offers a context for each poet’s conversion within the era’s polemical and controversial literature. She also elaborates on the formal features of the poems themselves, demonstrating how the language of poetry could express both spiritual and ecclesiastical change with particular vividness and power. Proposing conversion as a catalyst for some of the most innovative devotional poetry of the period, both canonical and uncanonical, this study will be of interest to all specialists in early modern English literature.

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for E. L. M. and J. H. M.
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Note on the text

In quotations from primary sources I have silently modernized i/j and u/v, as well as superscripts and subscripts, but have otherwise preserved original spelling.

I have used the following abbreviations throughout:

BL: British Library
ELH: English Literary History
HJ: Historical Journal
JEH: Journal of Ecclesiastical History
MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly
MP: Modern Philology
PMLA: Proceedings of the Modern Language Association
PQ: Philological Quarterly
RH: Recusant History
SEL: Studies in English Literature

I have used the following editions of poetry, with line numbers quoted in the text:

Note on the text


Unless otherwise noted, I have used the Authorized Version for all Biblical quotations.