Cross, but those that flourished in the rich sermon culture of post-Reformation Church of England.


In Ryan Netzley’s fresh perspective on Christian life and devotional verse, Netzley argues that early modern religious lyrics teach about the “appropriate approach to an immanent divinity” and the “manner and practice of desiring God” (3). Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry highlights correspondences between the aspects of seeking God and the comprehension of written texts. The Introduction, “Desiring Sacraments and Reading Real Presence in Seventeenth-Century Religious Poetry,” positions The Lord’s Supper for investigation because the ceremony itself insists on a “Real Presence in the elements” of the sacraments, and because of the event’s ties to “controversies surrounding the operation of metaphor, signification, and words in general” (3). Netzley explores works of George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, John Donne, and John Milton, suggesting that religious desire is not based upon lack or absence. Each poet clearly articulates God’s presence within the gift of the Eucharist and affirms that desire for His presence is something one already has. The author also identifies resonances between the Lord’s Supper and poetry through discussions of the proper interpretation of signs. An important challenge to the world of literary scholarship courses through each poetic commentary as Netzley argues that neither God’s gift of the Eucharist nor the activity of reading are to be engaged as instruments for a purpose. Rather, instructions for loving God, attending to devotional practices, and reframing reading pedagogy, activities engaged for their own sake, belong to a liberating dynamic distinct from the aim of establishing meaning.

In the first chapter, “Take and Taste, Take and Read: Desiring, Reading, and Taking Presence in George Herbert’s The Temple,” Netzley advocates for the poem’s instruction regarding the taking of the sacrament, and validates the poet’s plain speech for devotion. Ritual and words serve as signs; to that end, communicants and readers must
maintain vigilant attention to acceptance of the present moment. It is important to note that Herbert’s *The Temple* invites readers to concentrate on the poem itself, its words on the page, and its immediate meaning rather than to anticipate a “takeaway” from the experience, or to view these activities as “work” (64, 65). The second chapter, “Reading Indistinction: Desire, Indistinguishability, and Metonymic Reading in Richard Crashaw’s Religious Lyrics,” focuses on the multiple relationships existing between God and his devotees. Refuting Crashaw’s detractors, Netzley makes clear that the poet’s belief in sacramental desire speaks to a divinity “indistinguishably present in immanent sensations” (67). Explications of “Carmen Del Nostro” and “Steps to the Temple” point out Eucharistic power. Believers accept that the Lord’s Supper does what it appears to do. When they desire an already present God and take God’s gift, words and signs conflate, exposing both the limits of language (74) and the advantage of metonymy when reading without expectations or aims (105).

“Loving Fear: Affirmative Anxiety in John Donne’s Divine Poems,” gives this volume’s chapter three an expansive view of sacramental desire. In both the *Divine Poems* and the *Holy Sonnets*, Donne rejects the absent God or a relationship of lack, proposing that anxiety and fear are to be sought after as “devotional dispositions” (106). Embracing devotional anxiety and accepting fear are encouraged; in fact, “transcending anxiety is the hallmark of devotion” (115). Even as the Lord’s Supper prepares one for an already existing divinity, readers of poetry concentrate on the here and now, a secular devotion that requires attention to the present moment.

“Desiring What has Already Happened: Reading Prolepsis and Immanence in John Milton’s Early Poems and *Paradise Regained*” both posits “positive sacramental desire as a principle of reading strategy,” and presents the activities of desire and reading as “analogous” (149). Netzley argues that devotees and readers need not search for more, new, or different meaning in their religious or reading practices because Milton’s poetry shows how to take in what is already there. Such behavioral and reading pedagogy trains readers to be “virtuous and loving” (150) as they value the present and reading for its own sake. In his discussion of the sacraments in *Paradise Lost* and the *Christian Doctrine*, Netzley reads Milton’s certain belief in the sign as an “imperative to
testify our faith and obedience with sincerity and gratitude” (157). Through the Eucharist, we accept God’s presence in the moment and “desire a state of affairs that has already been received” (165). *Paradise Regained*, with its critique on purposiveness, asserts that all too often Christ’s followers concentrate on a goal or aim. Milton points out the flaw in such reading and treats such ends as false devotion.

The conclusion, “Reading is Love,” crystallizes Netzley’s perspective on desire: it is neither an agenda nor a program. “A focus on religion follows the same pattern as a focus on reading,” the author maintains, and agreeing with his pedagogical thrust places sacramental devotion and reading practice into a particular alliance—one in which religious verse and its reader focus on a thing for its own sake. *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* brings insightful perspective to the complexities within early modern verse, and will appeal to scholars of poetry, religion, and critical theory.


The Toronto series “The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe” has made available a wide and useful variety of texts by early modern women writers, and this edition of Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell’s writings is another welcome addition to the list. Patricia Phillippy’s organization of the volume allows an overview of Russell’s productive life, and her inclusion of numerous images, along with a selection of documents written not by Russell, but by those with whom she was in correspondence, adds new dimensions to the usual character of a “collected works” edition. Indeed, since Russell made writing epitaphs and creating monuments to her family a kind of genre in itself, leaving out the images of the tombs she designed would deny readers an important context. And because Phillippy has also chosen to reproduce bills for celebrations, plans for funerals, even drawings of dinner table arrangements, the volume gives material evidence for the strategies and courtly knowledge Russell brought to the events of her life.