



John Donne: The Reformed Soul: A Biography

By John Stubbs

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"Will reveal Donne to a new generation...[and] propel John Stubbs into the first rank of biographers."?Peter Ackroyd

Metamorphosing from scholar to buccaneer, from outcast to establishment figure, John Donne emerged as one of the greatest English poets, concentrating the paradoxes of his age within his own crises of desire and devotion. Following Donne from Plague-ridden streets to palaces, from the taverns on the Bankside to the pulpit of St. Paul's, John Stubbs's biography is a vivid portrait of an extraordinary writer and his country at a time of bewildering and cruel transformation.

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John Donne: The Reformed Soul: A Biography By John Stubbs Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1162994 in Books
- Brand: W.W. Norton & Co
- Published on: 2007-04-17
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.60" h x 1.60" w x 6.50" l, 2.05 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 592 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For his first book, Stubbs has produced a biography of the enigmatic, conflicted poet familiar today to many people mostly thanks to a single, lovely line: "No man is an Island, entire of it self." John Donne—born in 1572, at the outset of the most politically tumultuous and religiously violent era in English history—searched throughout his life for passage to a continent, to find a homeland, to involve himself, as he put it, in mankind. Beginning life as a secular Catholic, Donne ended it as a pious Protestant priest; a dissolute young man, he evolved into a serious intellectual of delicate demeanor; a swashbuckler who fought against Spain for loot and adventure, he buckled down and became one of the finest poetical craftsmen of the Renaissance; a promiscuous loner once focused on making money and powerful friends, he married for love and left it all happily behind. Throughout his life, Stubbs shows, Donne was a study in paradoxes, and one of the strengths of this book is his ready acknowledgment of his subject's contradictions. "Part of the job of this biography," writes Stubbs, "is to trace the strands between these personae and point out the unity underlying them." He succeeds admirably. (*Apr.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review The greatest English metaphysical poet was and wasn't a man of letters, as Stubbs shows in as engaging a work of scholarship as a biography could ever be. Donne (1572?-1631) was more obviously a lifelong bureaucrat than an author. Initially hampered by his family's Catholicism, he studied law. He fought with Essex at Cadiz and Raleigh in the Azores, got a plum secretarial post, but fell in love with a wealthy squire's daughter. Their elopement brought immediate dismissal and years of scraping by. Only after Ann Donne's death did he take holy orders and rise swiftly to the deanship of St. Paul's Cathedral. He had written poetry since his late teens. Circulated in manuscript, it made him famous in society, enough so to allow Donne a sideline in writing commissioned verse that kept him afloat during the lean years. Adroitly employing Donne's poems to illuminate his life and arguing that Donne was always animated by his vision of the interdependency of all human beings, Stubbs opens a large window on the most durably fascinating society in English history. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"Rich, generous and capacious....Its triumph is to show how the brilliant, abrasive, phenomenally direct voice of the Songs and Sonnets...deepens and darkens, cracking sometimes under the harsh strain of his middle years, only to re-emerge in the humane and powerful sermons of his last decade."

"Highly readable...Stubbs manages to make Donne seem recognizable and sympathetic, and also the inhabitant of a world that has long since disappeared."

"An exemplary literary biography. Stubbs has all the appropriate skills: lucid prose style, deep historical knowledge, and a deftness in reading poems with a marvelous economy in his comments. I am grateful to Stubbs for aiding me to see John Donne more accurately and sympathetically, a person and a poet."

"John Stubbs treats Donne as 'a living concoction of differing, frightened spiritualities' in this vivid portrait, this rich and full life, of an English immortal enmeshed in his time. The result is a wonderfully precise study of a great poet, a soul formed and reformed. It is a stunning biographical debut."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kirk Fonseca:

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Javier Link:

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Anne Corchado:

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