



# Literature in Protestant England, 1560-1660 (Routledge Revivals)

*Alan Sinfield*

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The hardline, uncompromising theology preached by the English Church in the 16th and 17th Centuries had disturbing effects on the literature of the period. This study, originally published in 1983, assesses the importance of the prevailing religious climate to the work of several major writers, both in and out of sympathy with the contemporary protestantism. It is argued that the accepted view of the period as essentially 'Christian-Humanist' obscures the harsher aspects of a Calvinism which throws into relief the agonies of a writer like Donne, the acceptances of one like George Herbert.

Many writers rejected more or less explicitly the Christian dogma, through the heroic assertion of human potential in Shakespearean and other dramatic characters, the nihilism of Marlowe, or the secular rationalism of Bacon and Hobbes. Milton is central to this complex web of belief and rejection, piety and atheism, acceptance of predestination and determination to accept fate, that characterises the period.

Finally, Sinfield shows how this protestantism disintegrated under the strain of internal contradictions and external pressures, and in the process helped to stimulate secularism. In this original and clearly written book, scholarship is deployed unobtrusively to place many major works in an unaccustomed and stimulating perspective.

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