



Music At Midnight

John Drury

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For the first time, John Drury convincingly integrates the life and poetry of George Herbert, giving us in *Music at Midnight* the definitive biography of the man behind some of the most famous poems in the English Language. 'Love bade me welcome . . .' 'Teach me my God and King . . .' George Herbert wrote, but never published, some of the very greatest English poetry, recording in an astonishing variety of forms his inner experiences of grief, recovery, hope, despair, anger, fulfilment and - above all else - love. He was born in 1593 and died at the age of 39 in 1633, before the clouds of civil war gathered, his family aristocratic and his upbringing privileged. He showed worldly ambition and seemed sure of high public office and a career at court, but then for a time 'lost himself in a humble way', devoting himself to the restoration of the church at Leighton Bromswold in Buckinghamshire and then to his parish of Bemerton, three miles from Salisbury, whose cathedral music he called 'my heaven on earth'. When in the year of his death his friend Nicholas Ferrar, leader of the quasi-monastic community at Little Gidding, published Herbert's poems under the title *The Temple*, his fame was quickly established. Because he published no English poems during his lifetime, and dating most of them exactly is impossible, writing Herbert's biography is an unusual challenge. In this book John Drury sets the poetry in the whole context of the poet's life and times, so that the reader can understand the frame of mind and kind of society which produced it, and depth can be added to the narrative of Herbert's life. (T.S. Eliot: 'What we can confidently believe is that every poem in the book [*The Temple*] is in tune to the poet's experience.') His Herbert is not the saintly figure who has come down to us from John Aubrey, but a man torn for much of his life between worldly ambition and the spiritual life shown to us so clearly through his writings. The result is the most satisfying biography of this exceptional English poet yet written. JOHN DRURY is Chaplain and Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. He began as a biblical scholar, and while Dean of King's College, Cambridge, worked with Frank Kermode on the *Gospels for The Literary Guide to the Bible*, which sharpened his sense of the role of imagination in the formation of the Gospel stories. He took this interest further, and into the realm of Christian paintings and their meaning, in *Painting the Word*, written while he was Dean of Christ Church, Oxford. *Music at Midnight* is the culmination of a lifetime's interest in Herbert, whose *Complete Poetry* he is now editing for Penguin Classics.

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