

**Romana Zacchi and Massimiliano Morini, eds. 2012.**  
***Richard Rowlands Verstegan:***  
***A Versatile Man in an Age of Turmoil***  
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This useful collection of essays is the product of a collaborative research project sponsored by the Alma Mater Studiorum at the University of Bologna. It is presented as a companion piece to Paul Arblaster's seminal work, *Antwerp and the World: Richard Verstegan and the International Culture of Catholic Reformation* (2004). Most of the contributors are Italian, and although it is not immediately apparent why this extraordinary Anglo-Dutch figure should attract such sustained interest from Italy, it is a testament to the international turn in English Catholic studies.

Richard Rowlands Verstegan (1550–1640) was an English Catholic exile who settled in Antwerp in the late 1580s, operated as a propaganda agent of the Jesuit leader Robert Persons and then, after the disappointment of James's accession, turned to more literary and philological pursuits. In 1610 he married Catherina de Sauchy and began writing in Dutch. So disparate were the different parts of his career that at one time scholars thought he might be two people, perhaps father and son. If there is one distinctive contribution that this collection makes, it is to demonstrate that his Catholic allegiance is crucial to an understanding of all his works.

In line with the subtitle "A Versatile Man," the essays are divided into three groups: dealing with Verstegan as philologist, socio-political observer and poet and story-teller. The first concentrates on *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (1605), a work

that, as Massimiliano Morini shows, now holds a secure place in historical linguistics. Alessandro Zironi explains how Verstegan's apologia for the Teutonic origins of the English nation and language feeds into the Reformation-era debate over British and Saxon identity: where the English Reformers wished to exploit Anglo-Saxon resources to assert the independence of the Church in England, Verstegan reinforced Persons's affirmation, in *A Treatise of Three Conversions* (1603-1604), of the Germanic Catholic character of the Anglo-Saxon past. Zironi's essay could usefully be read in conjunction with Felicity Heal's important article, "What can King Lucius do for you? The Reformation and the Early British Church," which is unfortunately not cited here. Giulio Garuti Simoni then deals with Verstegan's Dutch adaptation, *Nederlantsche Antiquiteyten* (1613), which promised a lot more than it delivered.

In the second section, but still drawing mainly on *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, Paul Arblaster enquires into Verstegan's version of womanhood and offers an intriguing insight into recusant culture. The curious explanation of "woman" as "that kynde of Man that is Wombed" counters the contemporaneous commonplace that a woman was a defective man, and resonates with multiple depictions, in *A Restitution* and other works, of victorious suffering and martial valour.

The earlier polemical works get surprisingly little attention; this reviewer would have liked to see more discussion of Verstegan's involvement with Persons's *Philopater* (1592), but his English abbreviation of that influential Latin work, *An Advertisement written to a secretarie of my L. Treasurers of Inghland [...] Concerninge an other booke newly written in Latin* (1592), does not even appear in the list of Verstegan's published works, although it is dealt with in Arblaster's *Antwerp and the World* (58). There is, however, a very illuminating analysis by Romana Zacchi of the *Theatrum crudelitatum haereticorum nostri temporis* (1587; French version 1588). Zacchi contrasts Verstegan's book with Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563, 1570, 1576, 1581, 1596), which is notable for its memorable woodcut illustrations, but subordinates them to the text. In Verstegan, the written narrative is reduced to captions, and the sequentiality of episodes is suppressed. The result, she argues, is "a fragmentary 'atlas de géographie sacré' constructed with the purpose of horrifying and outraging readers rather than informing them" (72). Here she quotes

a phrase from Frank Lestringant (2004:146), and her essay is an important contribution to the expanding scholarship on Reformation-era iconography. In particular, it complements the important account of Verstegan's *Theatrum* given by Anne Dillon (2002:243-76).

Verstegan's attachment to the Catholic cause found its most effective satirical voice in Dutch in his entertaining polemic against the Protestant North, *De Spiegel der Nederlandsche elenden* (1621), of which Herman van der Heide gives a penetrating account. An English version, *Observations concerning the present affayres of Holland and the united Provinces*, appeared in the same year; this was published by the English College Press in St Omer, showing Verstegan's continued solidarity with the English Jesuits and their educational and polemical programme. Van der Heide quotes mainly from the *Observations* to demonstrate Verstegan's satirical wit. His essay appropriately precedes the third section, which presents a more sustained literary-critical approach to some of Verstegan's lesser-known works: his contribution to *The Primer or office of the blessed Virgin Marie* (1599), the *Odes in imitation of the seven penitential psalmes* (1601) and the English quatrains found in Otto van Veen's *Amorum emblemata* (1608). All of these poems have a curious Herbert connection: Vaenius's love emblems, analysed here by Tina Montone, were dedicated to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, the "onlie begetter" of Shakespeare's sonnets published the following year, and Valentina Poggi interestingly compares Verstegan's translations of the Psalms with those by Sir Philip Sidney and his sister Mary Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke.

All in all, the collection could appropriate to itself the title *A Restitution*, and it fittingly concludes with Sylvia Notini's discussion of the "Pied Piper of Hamelin," a story told by Verstegan in *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*. His version seems to have been the most influential, and was apparently known to Ben Jonson, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Browning. Notini argues that the story as Verstegan tells it reflects his Catholic concerns, bringing the familiar story back to the context of his age of turmoil.

**References**

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