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Representing a Forsaken Woman: Crashaw's "Alexias"

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Much of Richard Crashaw's poetry has benefited from the advent of feminist criticism, on the one hand because so many of Crashaw's poems are addressed to women or concern women and, on the other, because earlier judgments that his style was not masculine and therefore of dubious quality have been effectively addressed by those who subscribe to feminist criticism.[1] Women as subjects or addressed persons is a noticeable feature of the poetry of Crashaw: The Virgin, Mary Magdalene, St. Teresa of Avila, Queen Henrietta Maria, the Countess of Denbigh, and two other unnamed contemporary women are the focus of some of Crashaw's most notable poems. Those addressed to the latter three persons are religious in nature, as those about saints, and demonstrate Crashaw's concern for the well-being of the souls of his female contemporaries. Speculation about Crashaw's interest in the feminine has developed positively in recent years, thanks to the work of critics such as Paul Parrish, Janel Mueller, Maureen Sabine, and Anthony Low, who suggest that Crashaw had a heightened sensitivity to women that is not

[1]See Lorraine M. Roberts and John R. Roberts, "Crashavian Criticism. A Brief Interpretive History," in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), pp. 1-29, for a summary of opinions about Crashaw's poetry.

present in the work of most other contemporary male poets.[2] Surprisingly, one of Crashaw's poems that not only focuses on a woman, but, more unusual, speaks in her voice—"Alexias. The Complaint of the Forsaken Wife of Sainte *Alexis*"—has been largely neglected. Informed by a fifth-century legend that perhaps raises more questions than it answers, "Alexias" lends itself to interesting speculation about Crashaw's decision to focus his attention not on the life of the saint, but on the life of the saint's wife, and offers an interesting addition to the recent focus of attention on the poet's own "feminist" emphases.

The legend on which the poem relies began in the fifth century in the East, and appeared in the tenth century in the West, probably a conflation of several saintly lives; it concerns a young wealthy Roman named Alexis, who married a bride of his parents' choice, only to forsake her before the consummation of the marriage vows in order that he might pursue a life of poverty, chastity, and prayer as a hermit in the East. Stationing himself at a church door, Alexis would beg alms for the poor, giving away each day all but the barest essentials for himself. According to the legend, Alexis lived in Edessa as a hermit for seventeen years, at which time an icon of the Virgin Mary spoke and revealed to those around that Alexis was a holy man—a "Man of God," according to his earliest biographer.[3] To avoid unwanted attention, the

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[2]Parrish, "The Feminizing of Power: Crashaw's Life and Art" in *"The Muses Common-weal": Poetry and Politics in the Seventeenth Century,* ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), pp. 148-62; Mueller, "Women among the Metaphysicals: A Case, Mostly, of Being Donne For, *MP* 87 (1989): 142-58; Sabine, "Crashaw and the Feminine Animus: Patterns of Self-Sacrifice in Two of His Devotional Poems," *John Donne Journal* 4.1 (1985): 69-94; and Low, *The Reinvention of Love: Poetry, Politics and Culture from Sidney to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[3]"All'origine della storia di sant' Alessio forse sta una Vita siriaca, scritta probabilmente verso la fine del V secolo e guinta a noi in due

expatriate returned to Rome, to the very steps beneath his parents' home, and continued for another seventeen years the same life of mortification and prayer. His parents frequently gave him alms, but without any recognition that he was their son. Near the end of Alexis's life, another miracle revealed to Pope Innocent the holiness of the hermit,[4] but when the Pope sought him in his humble abode beneath the family's stairs, Alexis died, holding in his hands a short biography revealing who he was.[5]

The left foreground of an eleventh-century fresco in the ancient church of San Clemente in Rome depicts this scene of death with Pope Innocent in attendance, while its center and right background attend to the parents and the long-awaiting wife, who, moments before Alexis dies, is allowed, as one tourist manual suggests, "the kiss she had been denied her entire marital life."[6] Alexis's life of renunciation of the riches of his family and the companionship of earthly marriage earned him the honor of sainthood. Through the ages this "saint of beggars," as he has been called,[7] has stood for the heroic virtues of poverty, chastity, and humility.

In the Church's early history, to be declared a saint was an informal process initiated by the devotion of local people to one they considered had lived a heroic life of sanctity;[8] the people did

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manoscritti della prima meta del VI, ora al British Museum de Londre" in a brochure from the church of Sant' Alessio (Rome).

[4]According to *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, tr. Granger Ryan and Helmet Ripperger (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1941).

[5]Most of the information in this paragraph is from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1981.

[6]A. Luff, *A Christian's Guide to Rome* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1957), p. 158.

[7]Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France, XIII century*, tr. from 3rd ed. by Dora Nussey (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1913), p. 274.

[8]See "Who Was a Saint?" in Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints and Society. The Two Worlds of Western Christendom. 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 141-84.

not necessarily want to live the same kind of life, but they did want to have a holy person to direct their prayers to and to ask for intercession on their behalf. [9]According to the editor of *Butler's Lives of Patron Saints*, "In its beginnings, the cult of the saints was the cult of patron saints: all saints were patrons." That is, building on the secular tradition of patronage, people turned to saints or holy people to depend on. At first, these patrons were martyrs; later the notion was extended to those renowned for their holiness. Canonization was a late development of the Church, around the tenth to eleventh century, a process involving papal ratification.[10]

Until the tenth century, the legend of Alexis was primarily popular in the East, but as the painting in San Clemente testifies, his story became known and honored in Rome. Indeed, one could say quite literally that the presence of Alexis was dispersed throughout Rome and Italy, for reputedly one can find one of his arms at St. Paul's-outside-the-Walls, another at St. Nicolas in Carcere (both churches in Rome), even a third at the Church of Saint Catherine in Venice. In addition, one of his ribs remains in the church of St. Praxedes, a tooth and a bone in the church of St. Cecilia, and another tooth and part of his jaw are at the church of St. Ignatius, all three important churches of Rome. So Alexis's presence is abundant in the West, even though the earliest versions of the legend claim he lived and died in the East! According to *The Golden Legend*, Alexis died in 398 on 17 July, which became his feast day in the church calendar.

The presence of these relics emphasizes that Alexis's life had great meaning for the Christians of the early Church, as well as for Christians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the end of the seventeenth century (1697), by order of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the office of Saint Alexis was made a semi-

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[9]See "The Saints," in Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 155-205, especially p. 175.

[10]Ed. Michael Walsh (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. xii.

double,[11] one of three kinds of feast since the thirteenth century, "all three regulated by the recitation of the Divine Office or Breviary." "The semi-double feast has two Vespers, nine lessons in Matins, and ends with Compline. The antiphons before the psalms are only intoned. In the Mass, the semi-double has always at least three 'orationes' or prayers."[12] The feast day of Alexis, as stated, was formerly celebrated in the Roman liturgy on 17 July, but in 1969 the cult of St. Alexis, along with that of Saint Christopher and others, was suppressed,[13] a result of an updating of "official " saints.

This legend and Crashaw's response to it raise some interesting questions, such as why the Church would honor a man who forsook his wife for thirty-four years, a wife who remained living with his parents in what Crashaw calls "femal constancy" (34),[14] about the virtues being extolled by this legend and why they were more important at certain times in the Church's history, about why the wife remained in the shadows to such an extent that we do not know her own name, simply the saint's name in feminine form (Alexias), about why this story out of the fifth century became popular both in the Middle Ages and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[15] and, perhaps most curious, about why the legend appealed sufficiently to Crashaw that he would freely translate a poem about it—in the wife's voice, with almost no reference to the saintly heroics of Alexis's life.

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[11]S. Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints* (London, 1898), 8:413-20.

[12]*Catholic Encyclopedia*: see "Ecclesiastical Feasts."

[13]*The Book of Saints: A Dictionary of Servants of God canonized by the Catholic Church*, 6th ed. (London: A. & C. Black, 1989).

[14]All quotations of Crashaw's poems and all titles are from *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, ed. George Walton Williams (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1970).

[15]Today, ironically, one of the most frequently used churches by young Romans to exchange their marriage vows is that of San Alessio, the Italian name for the same fifth-century saint who forsook his wife.

While there have been a number of recent essays on Crashaw's attention to female saints and to contemporary women to whom he offered spiritual direction in poetry, almost nothing has been said about the woman Alexias and the poem Crashaw has written from her point-of-view. That is unfortunate, for not only is the legend behind it intriguing, even mystifying, but so is Crashaw's response to it—especially his identification with the wife rather than the saint. One would assume that Crashaw would be sympathetic to the kind of life that Alexis chose—poverty, chastity, and prayer—because from what we know of Crashaw's biography, he too had a single life that involved some degree of mortification and prayer.[16] Yet in obliquely referring to this saint's life, he chose not to focus on what Alexis endured, but instead on the feelings and state of mind of the saint's forsaken wife. Mueller, although not speaking specifically of "Alexias," effectively explains the merging of consciousness of female speaker and male poet in Crashaw's poems. It is a technique "of quasi-narrative lyric," she suggests, where "this speaker alone knows and can tell the story of this female's heart, better even than herself, since his narrative stance is outside and his emotional place within."[17]

Crashaw's reasons for subsuming the voice and emotion of Alexias remain theoretical, but we do know the source of his inspiration. Crashaw's poem is a partial translation, with additions, of the poem by the Jesuit François Remond, whose narrative consists of seven Latin elegies entitled "Uxoris Sancti Alexii Querimoniae," or "The Laments of the Wife of St. Alexis," which appeared in *Epigrammata et Elegiae...*, a work first published in Antwerp in 1606 and several other times through the course of the century. Like most Jesuit verse, this poem is an example of wedding classical and secular forms and language to Christian

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[16]Most biographical details are from *The Poems English Latin and Greek of Richard Crashaw*, ed. L. C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. xv-xxxviii.

[17]"Women among the Metaphysicals," p. 151.

themes;[18] thus much of the poem is reminiscent of classical and Petrarchan secular love traditions. Austin Warren, for example, contended that Remond was writing a Christian counterpart to one of Ovid's *Heroides* while John Bernard Emperor noted influences from Catullus, and claimed that "this complaint of a deserted wife bears a considerable resemblance to the lament of the forsaken Ariadne," yet George Walton Williams found that "the language throughout recalls amorous complaints of rejected lovers of the Petrarchan tradition."[19]

Crashaw reduces the seven elegies of Remond's "Laments" to three, and in doing so he focuses only on St. Alexis's act of abandonment of his wife and makes her complaint part of the "literature of tears" as well as of classical and Petrarchan traditions.[20] In the judgment of Williams, the omission of many details of the saint's biography makes the lament less coherent (p. 205). Crashaw's translation of Remond's first elegy omits sixty lines. The opening of the lament of the wife in Crashaw's version tells us that she had been a much sought-after bride, but now is a widow before she was a wife, and has only tears to embrace and an "unkind FATE" (4) to kiss. She says that to know where her mate has wandered would be some solace, and to him she would send

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[18]See Terence C. Cave, *Devotional poetry in France c. 1570-1613* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), especially pp. 58-62, and Pierre Janelle, *Robert Southwell, The Writer: A Study in Religious Inspiration* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1935).

[19]Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), p. 137; Emperor, "Richard Crashaw (1613?-1649)," in *The Catullian Influence in English Lyric Poetry, Circa 1600-1650,* University of Missouri Studies, vol. 3, no. 3 (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1928), pp. 84-85; Williams, p. 205.

[20]A literature of repentance, meant to promote the sacrament of penance as a means to advance in one's love for Christ, first popularized in England by Robert Southwell in *Marie Magdalens Funeral Teares* (1591) and reaching what some consider a dubious apex in Crashaw's "The Weeper."

"woes in words should weep" (11) for her, for "(Who knows how powrfull well-writt praires would be?)" (12). Rejecting that means as too slow, however, she proposes instead that she fly to Alexis in the manner he has taught her, which is to abandon all to Love; if she is shipwrecked, either Love will teach her to swim or she will drown, and that death will be a sweet sacrifice. In death she will achieve a new name among the stars, and her story will inspire other lovers to pray that their "vowes/ [Be] [a]s true to [them], as she was to her spouse" (31-32). Her "femal constancy," she affirms, will have attained heaven for her and a reunion with the "lost fugitive" (37).

Most of Crashaw's second elegy is original. Only lines 19-30 correspond to Remond's Fifth Elegy, and they concern a simile that refers to the star that led the Magi to Christ. The opening of this section offers an example of Crashaw's interest in the literature of tears, expressed in the paradoxes and intensities that appear in a poem such as "The Weeper." The persona sees her bereft self as both the widow of Alexis and the wife of sorrow and tears, the latter a mate that will be constant and firm. Calling Alexis false, the persona claims that in her sorrow she has vexed the earth and torn the skies; she has talked to trees and silent groves, to hills and rocks, whose hardness reminds her of Alexis; she has wept out the sun and the hour-glass. Every star, she claims, has grown familiar with her grief, and she hopes one will lead her to Alexis as did the star that led the Magi to Christ.

Crashaw's third elegy corresponds more faithfully to Remond's Second Elegy. In it, the wife moves beyond tears to what might have been had Alexis not chosen to leave Rome. She expresses chagrin at the first "wandring knight" (4), who was responsible for the loss of "Nature's virginity" (6), because he and others like him went out to attempt to control the seas, the mountains, the rocks, and "the world's strong barres" (10). Even the rulers of Rome, she asserts, would have stayed home with their mates. Finally, she contends there was no need for Alexis to leave Rome in order to

live a chaste and holy life, for as his wife she would have willingly remained a virgin. In her words,

> Love's truest Knott by Venus is not ty'd;
> Nor doe embraces onely make a bride.
> The QUEEN of angels, (and men chast as You)
> Was MAIDEN WIFE and MAIDEN MOTHER too.
> (27-30)

As in Remond's version, Crashaw then refers to the life of Saint Cecilia, an appropriate reference for the argument of Alexis's wife.

Cecilia, another fifth-century saint, had rejected the love of Valerian, a young patrician of Rome, in order to live a life of virginity. Valerian, after having been baptized a Christian, was by that act enabled to see an 'angel guarding Cecilia's virginity and thus agreed to live a virginal marriage with Cecilia, though ultimately, both endured separate martyrdoms. Alexias responds to this legend by saying, "How sweet the mutuall yoke of man and wife,/ When holy fires maintain love's Heavnly life!" (51-52). Such was not the fate of Alexis's wife; when "thousands sought [her] love, [she] lov'd none but [Alexis]" (54). "ALEXIS, he alone is mine" (56), she concludes, but like prayers addressed to classical gods, only half turns out to be true: "ALEXIS is alone; But is not mine" (58).

Like most legends, that of Alexis has not come down the centuries without change or differing emphases. For example, the most prominent difference between the Remond-Crashaw versions and others is that in theirs Alexias did not consent to her husband's parting from her, but many versions make the situation more palatable by including the bride's consent. Another difference is the offering of Alexias to live a virginal marriage with her husband, which is a feature not usually present in other versions. But probably the most humanized treatment of the legend is that of a twelfth-century Old French account preserved in what is called the Hildesheim manuscript, which adds characters and a gamut of

emotions, and has an expanded wedding night scene where husband and wife interact after the husband announces his intentions of leaving.

In this version, the wife is at first shocked and self-concerned; her screams are overheard by her mother-in-law, who assumes they are those of consummated love. The wife feels rejected and abandoned, to which feelings the husband responds with a "sermon" about preferring the soul over the body. To her question of why he does not love her, the groom insists he does. Ultimately, the weeping girl gives him her blessing, and he responds by saying she may remarry after a year if she does not hear from him. The bride then expresses a greater concern for him, and both weep at their forthcoming separation. While she wishes to follow him, she cannot; she will thus grieve over the separation for thirty-four years. However, Alexis does not leave without guilt, saying he will pray for the salvation of his wife's soul. Three days before his death, Alexis and his mother are together, at which time the son, oppressed with a sense of sin, begs for his mother's pardon. The supposition is that this humanized account was meant for a more secular audience because it shows concern about human love, the role of women, problems of conscience, and the individual.[21] Crashaw's version is closer to this humanized one than to those that appear to extol Alexis for his active response to Christ's words that to follow Him one must leave father and mother and all those dear to him, give away all his possessions, and carry Christ's cross. Like the latter version, however, "Alexias" does elevate divine love above earthly love.

Crashaw's lament did not appear in *Steps to the Temple* (1646), a collection of his religious verse, or *Delights of the Muses* (1646), a collection of his secular verse, but was a part of *Delights of the Muses* (1648) and the posthumous *Carmen Deo Nostro* (1652). In the 1648 edition "Alexias" was the last poem in the volume, a part

[21] *The Vie de Saint Alexis in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century*, pp. 13-43.

of the secular rather than the religious verses. One can perhaps understand this first placement because of the influences of the classical and secular poets such as Ovid, Catullus, and Petrarch. But in the 1652 volume, consisting of only religious verse, brought to press in Paris by Crashaw's friend Thomas Car (Miles Pinkney), Founder and Confessor of the Monastery of Canonesses of St. Augustin at Paris, the poem is placed after those to major and minor saints, and between two groups of two poems each—after the poems to two contemporary women ("Prayer. An Ode, which was Praefixed to a little Prayer-book given to a young GENTLEWOMAN" and "To the Same Party Councel concerning her Choise") and before "Description of a Religious House and Condition of Life (out of Barclay)" and "An Epitaph upon a Young Married Couple Dead and Buryed Together," the latter also earlier having been a part of *Delights of the Muses*. This is an appropriate positioning, framed by Crashaw's two poems that recommend a spiritual marriage with the Lord and his poem that is concerned with Christian living—which to him is a life of simplicity and peace—and with the Christian death of a young married couple. In the latter poem Crashaw sees the couple's death as another wedding and the grave as their second marriage-bed, ideas reflected in the brief account of Cecilia's and Valerian's death, who also were buried together. He says that in life if

> The hand of fate could force
> 'Twixt SOUL and BODY a Divorce
> It could not sunder man and WIFE,
> 'Cause They Both lived but one life. (3-5)

While the context of these poems surrounding "The Complaint of the Forsaken Wife of Sainte *Alexis*" gives a form of counsel to the plight of Alexias, the poem "Alexias" does not convincingly emphasize the same meaning.

Viewed from a purely human vantage point, "Alexias" is not really a religious poem. In her lament, Alexias does not transform

her human suffering into a spiritual transcendence. Rather, the poems that surround "Alexias" in *Carmen Deo Nostro* provide the answer to the Complaint—which is to become the bride of Christ instead of the Bride of Alexis. But Alexias in Crashaw's poem is caught in time, and her life does not come to the happy conclusion that the San Clemente fresco suggests. On an allegorical level, however, the poem does portray a Christian soul that remains steadfast in its allegiance to its Lord, despite the absence of any visible presence of that Lord. But perhaps a clearer view of the poem would be as a quasi-autobiographical poem that represents Crashaw's own feeling of abandonment—his family history of the loss of a mother, a stepmother, and a father before he was thirteen or fourteen; his political history of being a "wandring knight" because of his support of King Charles; and his religious history of having to give up his Laudian practices and his life at Little Saint Mary's causing these feelings of abandonment.[22] Thus, perhaps Crashaw is not really concerned with faithful wives or saintly husbands, but the fact that the legend captures something of his own emotional experience.

Much has been made of Crashaw's attachment to the Virgin Mary and of his poems about female saints and contemporary females, and often cited in understanding this attachment and interest is the loss of his mother and stepmother at a very young age. More recently Crashaw's interest in and identification with the psychology and sensitivities of females have been construed by those interested in gender studies as the representation of an androgynous orientation unlike other male poets of his day. Sabine, for instance, sees Crashaw's devotion to Mary and other saints and his interest in the spiritual life of contemporary women as a reflection of "a special affinity with women that is not an end in itself but a means of achieving a fuller, more integrated concept

[22]See Martin, pp. xvii-xxxviii; Williams, pp. xv-xviii; Paul Parrish, *Richard Crashaw* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), pp. 19-32.

of what it is to be human."[23] Another perspective is that of Parrish, who suggests that in "the public world of religious controversy and political warfare, masculine qualities are, in Crashaw's hands, minimized and subdued"; but in his creative world of saints and idealized females "devotion and loyalty and love are also powerful and conquering."[24] Ultimately the most positive statement made about Crashaw's focus on women is that of Low, who reminds us that Crashaw was uninterested in active or "masculine" forms of devotion such as the militaristic toughness of Ignatian meditation but rather preferred a form such as Salesian meditation, recommended for women: that which emphasizes feeling rather than intellect, passivity rather than activity, a preference that Low sympathizes with because it entails sacrifice for others rather than empowerment of self, sympathy rather than vindication, and spiritual transcendence rather than material welfare, all truly elements of Christ-like power.[25]

Clearly "Alexias," written in first person from Alexias's point of view by a male poet, best supports the critical opinions about Crashaw's special sensitivity to the affections of women. But there are other points of identification between the emotional content of "Alexias" and the poet's adulthood. We know that Crashaw's life at Peterhouse and at Little Saint Mary's at Cambridge before the Puritan forces expelled him was for him "a little contenful Kingdom."[26] To be forced to leave Cambridge, to become a "wandring knight," was not an easy adjustment for him; and his presence through the course of five to six years at Leyden, Oxford,

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[23]"Crashaw and the Feminine Animus," p. 74.

[24]"The Feminizing of Power: Crashaw's Life and Art," p.162.

[25]*The Reinvention of Love*, Chapter 5, "Richard Crashaw: 'love's delicious Fires,'" pp. 108-31.

[26]Martin, p. xxix, ll. 31-32. The fuller context of the quote is, "I have I assure you no desire to be absolutely and irrespectively rid of my beloved Patrimony in St. Peter. No man then my self holds more high the humble scepter of such a little contenfull Kingdom.

Paris, Rome, and finally Loreto was proof that he did not easily find a new "contenful Kingdom." During these wanderings, probably in 1645, he entered the Roman Catholic Church, an act that conceivably would not have happened had he been allowed to worship in his accustomed manner at Little Saint Mary's. As David Mathew argues, the Laudian ideal was "singularly impervious to the assaults of Rome" and was not subject to an "inevitable progression...to Rome." Rather, he suggests, it was "the idea of order which they held to be existing in Rome alone after the destruction of the King."[27] One senses that Crashaw's convictions about religion have their ultimate genesis in a spiritual aesthetic rather than an intellectual or theological foundation. He responded to a devotional and liturgical life full of ritual, art, and music, not to one barren of ceremony. Thus, bereft of the life he had, almost literally, been married to, as his brief poem "On Marriage" suggests—

> I would be married, but I'de have no Wife,
> I would be married to a single Life—.

Crashaw was in a position to identify with the abandonment that the wife of Alexis feels. Not only had he lost his fellowship at Peterhouse, but, for an unknown reason, he was denied access to Mary Collet, a woman he called his spiritual "mother," whom he had known at Little Gidding.[28] Writing from Leyden after his exile from Cambridge, Crashaw tells the receiver of his letter (early speculation suggested John Ferrar or John Collet, but Elsie

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[27] *Catholicism in England: The Portrait of a Minority*, 3rd ed. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 90.

[28] Parrish, "Richard Crashaw, Mary Collett, and the 'Arminian Nunnery' of Little Gidding," in *Representing Women in Renaissance England*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), pp. 187-200.

Duncan-Jones makes a case for Joseph Beaumont),[29] that Mary is "the gentlest kindes[t] most tender-hearted and liberally handed soul ... aliue"[30]; being denied access to her is a great torment to him. Reminiscent of Alexias in her ultimate abandonment to Love, Crashaw tells the receiver of his letter what he will do when he has lost both his fellowship and his association with his "mother" at Little Gidding:

> Nothing but a third resignation of all to God.
> His good pleasure his gratious providence, ye one
> For ye end, the other for ye way and meanes to it,
> into these do I desire to resolue my totall self.[31]

But his losses have been great, as the rest of his letter verifies:

> I confess this last peece of my persecution the very
> Sorest I yet haue suffered, in my exclusion and
> Compleat excomunicacion from my gratious mother to
> Whome I had so holy and happy adherence, & in whome
> I treasured up to my self as much as you could wish
> (I need say no more of sacred satisfaction and Catholick
> Contentation, my extrusion and exhaereditation hence, I
> Say has been such a concussion of mee such a dislocation
> Of my whole condition, as puts mee into the greatest
> exigence both spiritually and temporall I was euer cast into.[32]

Clearly Crashaw's dislocation from church, country, and spiritual mother would make him sensitive to the position of Alexias, and might have determined his choice of concentrating on her feelings

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[29]Elsie Elizabeth Duncan-Jones, "Who Was the Recipient of Crashaw's Leyden Letter?" in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw,* ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), pp. 174-79.

[30]Martin, p. xxx.

[31]Ibid., p. xxx.

[32]Ibid., p. xxx.

of abandonment rather than on the saint's life of poverty, chastity, and humility.

When Alexias reflects on what might have been—that she could have lived a life of mortification and prayer with her husband as St. Cecilia and St. Valerian did—it is possible that Crashaw is reflecting on what might have been if he had been allowed to continue his spiritual relationship with Mary Collet. Admittedly, it is not characteristic of Crashaw to be autobiographical, but while in Rome from 1645 to April of 1649—poverty-stricken and alone[33]—his sense of abandonment must have been keenly felt, and he undoubtedly was capable of responding to that of Alexias. Crashaw's ultimate trip in 1649 to the Santa Casa at Loreto (the supposed home of the Blessed Virgin) about three months before his death must have provided him, however briefly, the comfort of "home" that had long eluded him, but like Alexias, his life must have occasioned a lament about what had been lost and a wonder about what might have been.

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[33]Ibid., pp. xxxv and xxxvii.