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# "My Souls Country-Man": The Critical Recovery of Crashaw

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Thomas F. Healy. *Richard Crashaw.* Medieval and Renaissance Authors. Vol. 8. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986. Pp. 161.

John R. Roberts, ed. *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw.* Columbia: University of Missouri, 1990. Pp. xi, 234. 7 illus.

No better apology could be found for Crashaw's poetry that the one than he devised for Teresa of Avila's mystical writings. "What soul so e're, in any language, can / Speak heav'n like her's is my souls country-man" (ll. 21-22). Lorraine and John Roberts' introductory essay briefly charting the history of "Crashavian Criticism" in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw* reminds us that Crashaw has suffered singularly among seventeenth-century English poets from the critical tastes, pronouncements, and fixations of successive ages. But I doubt that we shall ever be able "to approach the poet without apology and without prejudice" (p. 1), as the Robertses hope. Indeed, such a hope may well be misplaced, since a chief aim of Crashaw's devotional verse is to express the "black and deep desires" that lie heavy on the heart and "to liberate the contemporary reader" not once but repeatedly from the burden and the despair of his sins.

Earlier readers of Crashaw more readily heard the call of Christ in his religious verse: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11.28). However, both Thomas Healy's cultural study of Crashaw's religious poetry and John Roberts' collection of essays on his life and art are the appreciative and informed works of readers who come to his devotional verse as "friends." Our age has good cause to befriend Crashaw. His contemplative poetry continually exhorts us to make peace with one another but directs us to find that peace, which comes from Christ, first within ourselves. At a time when our human resources seem so finite and our planetary coexistence so perilous, Crashaw is, indeed, in the words of Thomas Healy (Preface) "too important a poet to ignore." While his importance is increasingly recognized among seventeenth-century scholars such as Healy and the contributors to Roberts' collection of essays, this poet has much to offer other sensitive, searching readers. He writes of the depth

and the richness of a world that remains largely unknown to us, that of the innermost self. Such meditative exercises as "Blessed be the paps which Thou hast sucked," "Hymn to the Name of Jesus," and "Santa Maria Dolorum" require the reader to examine him or herself inwardly in order to interpret the poem. The persistent interest which both Healy and Roberts' essayists take in these poems suggests what a mystery we still are to ourselves and one another. Discoveries yet to follow in Crashavian criticism will, it is hoped, focus on this poet's acute understanding of the spiritual life and on the material encouragement which he gives his readers to discover and cultivate this life themselves.

In a letter written in exile from Leyden, Crashaw complained that the Dutch city where he sought refuge in 1643 could not provide the religious milieu to support his spirit. Leyden may be said to have atoned for its sins with the publication of Thomas Healy's tribute to Crashaw's greatness as a devotional poet. He relocates this poet for us, tracing his genius not to foreign sources, but to a native English tradition that became Crashaw's lasting inheritance at Cambridge. Healy's study of the university environment in which Crashaw blossomed as a poet is an invaluable tool for scholars. He has amassed an impressive body of source material—tribute to his own powers of research—which will, no doubt, aid many future studies of this poet. In the process, he eliminates a few red herrings such as Williams' suggestion that Crashaw's anonymous friend in Lincolnshire could have been the editor of either the 1646 or 1648 *Steps to the Temple*. Healy's analysis of the source (p. 8) provides pretty convincing evidence that the autograph manuscript of his poems that Crashaw left with his friend before fleeing abroad was never published or used to correct his printed work, though it might, regrettably, have furnished the material for a third edition of the *Steps*.

What Healy does not really dispute is the prevalent assumption "that Crashaw's religious conversion had a negative effect upon his poetry" (Roberts, p. 10). Crashaw has suffered the fate of fellow Catholic countrymen which was to be branded "un-English." Healy does not correct this religious prejudice so much as turn it a blind eye by arguing that Crashaw was more truly an English than a Roman Catholic poet. He contends that Crashaw's devotional beliefs are most properly seen as a reflection of the Anglican "catholicity" that flourished in the relatively enlightened intellectual atmosphere of Cambridge and that was elaborated in Laudian formal worship. He argues that Crashaw's most fruitful and representative English religious verse was probably completed before his conversion (pp. 6-7).

In a sense, Healy takes as axiomatic the early view which the Church of England constructed for itself as a body which had not planted a new religion but simply renewed the old. Yet this was no reassurance to those first sixteenth-century English recusants who were declared enemies of the state because of their adherence to the "old religion" and who did not appreciate what would become a life-and-death distinction between catholic and Catholic. Perhaps the Cambridge

of the 1630s held out the promise of actually securing the fabled Anglican *via media* or "catholic continuity of the Church of England between the extremes of Puritanism and Rome" (p. 77). But by the early 1640s, this "contenfull kingdom" had been destabilized by the Puritan arm of the Church and Crashaw had taken to the road that would lead him to Rome.

One of the intriguing questions of literary history is whether Crashaw would have converted to Catholicism had the Laudian movement survived and sustained the "comprehensive Christian understanding" (p. 13) which Healy rightly sees as a mark of his spiritual vision. Though Crashaw was steadfast in his defense of Laudian ideals, his faith was, by no means static. As Healy notes (p. 25), his Anglicanism developed naturally from his father's. Moreover, the Laudian movement not only enriched and deepened his faith but led him to the God who is a beckoning Word in his finest religious poetry. Who is to say that this God did not beckon him in the end to Catholicism, even if this faith does not appeal to all of his readers?

Healy himself admits that "Crashaw's Laudian orientation may easily become confused with Roman Catholicism" (p. 82). If Crashaw were a doctrinal poet concerned to codify the institutional teachings and regulations of the English Church, it might be possible to accept Healy's assurance that Crashaw's religious poetry upholds "the differences Laudian Anglicans saw between themselves and Rome" (p. 93). Yet as Healy acknowledges at the outset of his book (p. 4), Crashaw is a devotional poet. He was absorbed not simply in distinct Laudian precepts and rituals but in the more inclusive practice of prayer.

As "chaplaine of the virgine myld," he made Mary "the faire Center" of his prayer life at Peterhouse. Recent critics have written appreciatively of the feminine focus of his devotional poetry as we shall see shortly in Roberts' collection of essays. I have already explored this subject provisionally and will return in a forthcoming work, *Feminine Engendered Faith*, to consider the crucial importance of Mary's sacred motherhood to the religious dynamics of both Crashaw's and Donne's poetry. Healy appreciates that the Virgin Mary figured significantly in the devotional intention of his poetry which is to include the reader spiritually in her "direct experience of Christ" (p. 129). He accepts that Mary featured prominently in Laudian solemnities and thus attracted the charge of Roman Mariolatry. Then as now, the veneration of Mary as a Mother who not only bore Christ, bore his suffering on the Cross but continues to bear the pain of mankind distinguishes Catholic devotion. Healy argues that Mary chiefly functions in Laudian piety and Crashaw's contemplative verse as a spiritual paradigm of total union with Christ. However, the lasting impression which many readers have of Mary from his poetry is this Catholic sense of her as a human mother who first cared corporeally for Christ and who extends this maternal love to his *corpus mysticum*. "The whole world's host would be thy guest / And board himself at thy rich BREST" ("O Gloriosa Domina," ll. 7-8).

In fact, I would argue that Crashaw's ardent devotion to Mary's sacred motherhood led him by degrees to a Catholic celebration of the Eucharist as a mystery in which Christ became present in the bread and wine—physically as well as spiritually. Healy elegantly traces the Laudian effort to negotiate a course between the Puritan's mundane and the Catholic's wondrous view of this Sacrament. Laudians emphasized the "real spiritual presence" of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine, but insisted that there was no physical transubstantiation (pp. 118-119). Their doctrinal distinctions remain unclear to scholars and must have hopelessly confused the ordinary layman for whom "real" meant actual, objective existence and for whom "body" meant the physical. In a seminal epigram such as "On the Blessed Virgins bashfulness," Crashaw contemplated the almost indivisible physical union between Mother and Son. His perception that Mary had worshipped Christ in and with her own body would transform his understanding of the Eucharistic trope, "this is my body, this is my blood." He was moving towards, but arguably even beyond, an acceptable Catholic view of this Sacrament as the sole ministerial responsibility of men.

The faith that Crashaw embraced was certainly comprehensive, but like the Christ Child in the Epiphany Hymn, it kisses both the catholic and the Catholic on the cheek. In his mature religious poetry, he set his mind, not "wholy in heavenly things" above like Donne, but on the heaven within which he had discovered when he beheld the mystical incorporation of the Son and Mother in each other. "Twas once *looke up*, 'tis now *looke down* to Heaven" ("On the Blessed Virgins bashfulnesse," l. 8). In his outstanding discussion of the "Hymn to the Name of Jesus" which constitutes Chapter V of his book, Healy suggests the importance which this poet "accorded the inner spiritual state" (p. 110). Healy's extensive analysis of this meditative poem also demonstrates the range of his own critical "powres." He uses his considerable scholarship to link Crashaw's nebulous song to the melodic line of Christian history. While observing how "the Polyphonic music of Peterhouse produces interesting comparisons with Crashaw's poem," he appreciates "Crashaw's wish . . . for his text to be far more musically expansive" (p. 106). Quite simply, the human instruments do not yet exist to interpret the music of his hymn. For the poet was listening to the Name of Jesus which, with mystical vision, he understood as the song which resounds through the universe.

Thomas Healy's study is an attempt to show that Crashaw's devotional poetry is closer to mainstream Anglicanism than has been generally accepted. However, in his illuminating discussion of the "Hymn to the Name of Jesus," Crashaw emerges not as a more central so much as a centered poet. The "Hymn to the Name" may profitably be read as a poetic elaboration of the venerable but simple "jesus Prayer." Healy draws our attention to the importance of the heart in devotion to Christ (pp. 83-84). Perhaps nowhere is this more true than in the Jesus prayer or so-called "Prayer of the Heart" when the name of Jesus is joined to the heartbeat and to the breath as a means of expressing the constant desire for fellowship with

Christ. The poet's profession of spiritual poverty (p. 103) and of his need for heavenly assistance (p. 111) may thus be seen as an acknowledgement that none can pray the name of Jesus except with the help of the Holy Spirit who prays in the heart. The promise of Eucharistic communion (p. 113) and the sense which Crashaw's speaker has of being empowered by the host of heaven (pp. 110-112) voice the belief of the Jesus prayer that in Christ we become, "whole SELF" in body and soul; and in his Holy Sacrament internalize "whole CHRIST" ("Lauda Sion Salvatorem," X). The Jesus prayer reminds the readers of Crashaw's devotional poetry that the body and soul are not distinct entities. The chronic tendency in the history of Christian thought to define the spiritual life apart from or as above the body constitutes a tragic failure of faith, since, in the end, it is a denial of the complete humanity and divinity of Jesus.

In his discussion of the "Hymn to the Name," Healy remarked upon "Crashaw's deep literary response to the Bible" (p. 114). This is an important source of spiritual power in Crashaw art. But with a predominant school of thought maintaining that Biblical meditation is a Protestant practice, there has not been marked appreciation of the Scriptural profundity of his sacred verse. Fortunately, R. V. Young's keystone essay for *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, "Crashaw and Biblical Poetics," emphasizes the "deep sensitivity" of this poet to the Word of God as the living force of his verse and in his soul. Young helps put Healy's work in perspective by reminding us that "Protestant and Catholic poets of the seventeenth century still shared, for all their differences, a common Christian culture centered on the person of Jesus" (p. 31) and that Crashaw's "Hymn to the Name of Jesus" is "a biblical poem tying together specific texts from the Old and New Testaments" (pp. 41-42). In his Scriptural analysis of Crashaw's English translation of the *Stabat Mater*, Young affords us the benefit of a Catholic perspective by showing how devotion to Mary deepens Christian apprehension of the Gospels. "Scripture is 'applied' to the self as the Passion of Christ is 'written' not only in the words of the Gospel but also in the heart of his mother" (p. 38). Thus Mary should not only be seen as "an ideal pattern (and defence) for Laudian practice" of prayer (Healy, 133), but as the model for the contemplative who knows that however formulated, all prayer must descend to the heart. In his examination of this point, Young pursues the first part of Simeon's prophecy where Mary is told that a sword will pierce her soul (Luke 2:35); but not the haunting second half, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (p. 36). The finely balanced prophecy suggests that through Mary's participation in the Redemptive Sacrifice, the heart of mankind is laid open to God. The Catholic view of Mary as intercessor has always honored the fact that she speaks on behalf of man. But Crashaw's *Stabat Mater* carries the full weight of Simeon's mysterious prophecy. We learn to speak from the heart, that is to pray, through contemplation of Mary's suffering at the foot of the Cross. As Young rightly observes, she is "the model for all Christians" (p. 38).

In his essay on "Crashaw and the Sense of History," Thomas Healy returns to a subject which preoccupied him in Chapters 3 and 6 of his book. This is the problem of reading the notorious epigram, "Blessed be the Paps," quoted here in full for those who have forgotten its disconcerting impact.

> Suppose he had been Tabled at they Teates,
> Thy hunger feels not what he eates:
> Hee'l have his Teat e're long (a bloody one)
> The Mother then must such the Son.

The solution which Healy turns to with some relief is, as earlier, Laudian Eucharistic theology which "direct(s) attention away from the literal, leading the reader towards an awareness of a greater religious reality that is being intimated" (p. 54).

I must confess my disappointment with this explanation in so far as it diffused the consternation contained within the Scriptural passage occasioning the poem. This is the incident from Luke where a woman exclaims the sanctity of the Mother who bore and breastfed Christ. His reply to this well-meaning woman is that she should not bless his natural mother, but "they that hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:27-28). With this chastisement ringing in our ears, it is evident that Crashaw's poem cannot be addressed principally to Mary (as Healy assumes) but to those who let the word of God sink into their hearts, who absorb and digest Holy Writ as once they did their mother's milk. They exemplify the correct meditative stance for the readers of this poem. Healy has concentrated on the nursing imagery inherent in the two most disturbing words of this epigram, "suck" and "teat." He reasons that "the text immediately establishes the opposition in the poem, the material and moral nourishment provided by the earthly food as opposed to the higher nourishment" of the word of God. Mary, he concludes, is hungry for the Eucharistic food her Son would feed man from the Cross (p. 55). What I should like to suggest is another kind of hunger or passion in the poem which is continually opposing itself to the Passion of Christ. We think of the relationship of a mother and child as one of passionate fulfillment. This is how it should be when, in the words of Julian of Norwich, "Christ is our Mother." Yet what honest parent will not admit that this relationship is often flawed by unruly desires? These are the passions which Crashaw interprets through imaginative contemplation of Luke as a deep unwillingness to respond to God and to show the obedience that Christ demonstrated on the Cross. I would thus conclude that the difficulty of responding to words like "teat" and "suck" is a permanent fixture of the poem, and there as a continual reminder of our sinfulness. The controversial interpretations which surround this epigram are often as illustrative of the dark side of our human nature as of the poem itself, as I believe Crashaw intended. The only "solution" is to realize, again in the words of Julian of Norwich, that we are all children, indeed,

"there is no higher state in this life that childhood, in weakness and failure of strength and of understanding, until the time that our gracious Mother has brought us up to our Father's bliss" (*Revelations of Divine Love*, ch. 63).

If the opening of this poem requires the reader to see himself as a woman, the conclusion forces him/her to become a babe in Christ; and then, perhaps, to throw the baby out with the bath water, with the sudden realization that our understanding of Christ's words can only be provisional. In the essay "Crooked Crosses in Donne and Crashaw," A. B. Chambers conducts an intricate stylistic comparison of Crashaw's 1646, 1648 and 1652 verse on Christ crucified and notes the various changes (with the help of diagrams). From the complications and the inconsistencies which each revision contains, he wonders if Crashaw himself may not have concluded that all revision is "hopeless." "While Crashaw reworked various details in the main body of the poem, he never changed, apparently, its conclusions. . . . What he could do, however, was to look again at the deep truth in somewhat different ways" (p. 167). If Chambers' wise suggestion that Crashaw did not see his poetic revisions as definitive statements about the unfathomable mystery of Christian truth, then it would become difficult to argue for the absolute superiority of any one published edition of his English poetry. As I have already indicated with regard to "Blessed by the Paps," interpretation would become less conclusive, but not "hopeless." Here Julian of Norwich once more provides a useful commentary on Crashaw's poetics and further, his "sense of history." In beholding Christ on the Cross during a series of mystical visions, she "saw cause for mirth and cause for mourning" (ch. 72). Indeed, much to her astonishment, she saw Christ smile merrily at her from the Cross with the joy that his Passion could be the means of her Redemption (ch. 22).

Like this medieval mystic, Crashaw penetrated through the Cross to the other, Joyous, sacred side of history. Healy sees that his absorption in salvation history, especially at a period of unprecedented temporal upheaval, poses special problems for contemporary readers, however much they may honor his commitment to central Christian mysteries (pp. 64-65). Given his intense avowals of faith but seeming indifference to historic change in his poetry, Lorraine Roberts, for one, states near the outset of her essay on "Crashaw Sacred Voice" that "not only is it true that we do not know Crashaw as a person through his poetry, but it is also true that we do not know how he felt about the world around him—the natural, the political, the social—for these considerations do not enter his verse" (p. 68). In his full-length study of this poet, Healy has marshalled a wealth of evidence to show that Crashaw was personally involved in the influential world of Cambridge. But if we are not to describe him as an impersonal poet, how are we to regard him? Roberts argues that despite the prevalence of personal pronouns in his verse, there is no sense of self-consciousness such as that which distinguishes Donne's religious poetry. She concludes that Crashaw conformed to Counter-Reformation, and especially Jesuit directives in the subsuming of the self to the corporate

Christian life focused on God. With the aid of exceptionally fine reproductions of Caravaggio, she suggests how the poet employed a similar technique to Baroque religious painting which aimed to draw Christian everyman into the wondering truths of sacred history.

Roberts' essay is important in directing attention to Crashaw's "Depth of vision" (p. 78) and in suggesting how his poetry encourages men to live *sub specie aeternitatis*. In an attachment to God so strong as to drive out all concern for his own sinfulness, all cares other than those to do with love, Crashaw was, I would argue, contrary to Roberts, an extraordinary mystic poet. It is true that only a handful of his religious poems treat the subject of mysticism, but many convey something of that unaccountable experience. One of his singular but as yet unrecognized achievements was to show that the mystical encounter with God was but one, profound aspect of the ordinary Christian prayer life and not simply the daunting achievement of a religious prodigy like St. Teresa of Avila. His populous mystical vision had important consequences for his understanding of history as well. God is seen moving within not outside of time; sacred history is viewed as a hidden but charged dimension of secular occurrence which can redeem man from his repeated blunders in the world.

Earlier, Robert Young had suggested how Crashaw meditated on Mary's role in sacred history in order to understand and compose himself to bear "the spiritual situation of his own time" (p. 38). In what will surely be seem as the most illuminating analysis of "Sancta Maria Dolorum" (or *Stabat Mater*) yet published, Eugene Cunnar enlarges on Mary's Catholic role as intercessor and co-redemptrix on Calvary, a role which was vehemently contested by many Protestants; and more generally, he notes the importance which the poet gives to "feminine principles in the salvific process" (pp. 102-03). As in a prior essay on Crashaw's "Hymn to the Name of Jesus," Cunnar has the gift of making Christian devotions and liturgy come alive as he illustrates the fervent meaning they acquire in Crashaw's poetry. In my earlier response to Healy's book, I argued that Mary contributed centrally to Crashaw's poetic and Catholic development as Mother of his Eucharistic devotion. Cunnar adds a wholly new dimension to this argument by indicating why Crashaw rejects the "lo spasimo" or swoon of the Virgin at the foot of the Cross. He shows how "Sancta Maria Dolorum" constructs a theology of compassion around Mary. Suffering is no longer seen as a staggering blow to oneself and to others but as an active occasion to take the life of Christ to heart and to share in his Redemptive work on the Cross. One of Cunnar's most notable accomplishments is to focus attention on Mary's mystical priesthood in this poem. She depicts "the Church who presents the oblation of the daily Mass" (p. 118) and the feminine as opposed to faint heart which, in opening to Christ, ensures the efficacy of his sacrifice (p. 124).

In an essay which complements the superlative work of Cunnar, Paul Parrish reminds us of the importance of Jungian psychology in appreciating the feminine

interiority that is fathomed in Crashaw's devotional poetry. He makes the most convincing case yet for the feminine spiritual quality of "The Weeper"; and in the process, makes a virtue of Mario Praz's criticism of this poem as "a rosary of epigrams... clumsily linked together, without progression" (*The Flaming Heart*, pp. 221-22, 218). Parrish argues that the poem works associatively rather than logically, with the aim being to deepen the felt knowledge of God. He thus challenges our hallowed notion of spiritual which makes us impatient with "The Weeper's" extravagant circumlocutions. Instead of judging this poem according to some imaginary scale of poetic, or worse, spiritual perfection, he urges us to appreciate its feminine register. Perhaps the images of liquefaction and femininity which fall and then rise in "The Weeper" are best likened to the inner life which Christ offered the Woman of Samaria at the well. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). As I have already indicated, Crashaw's poetry takes soundings from this well. Again and again he reaches down in to the heart for the words which will rise up to God. The weeper herself is a reminder of the work of the Holy Spirit who, if I may complete Young's earlier citation from Romans 8:26 (p. 42), "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," and whose tears on our behalf cannot be numbered.

In her study of "Crashaw, Teresa and the Word," Diana Benet suggests how Crashaw promotes the power of the word over the visual image as living spiritual truth in his Teresa trilogy. As the power of his poetic word is so often the power of prayer from the heart, Benet is right to link Crashaw's dismissal of the painter to his admiration for the mystical writings in which St. Teresa showed the eloquence of love. Yet in her subtle conclusion, she argues that while the poem communicates the saint's luminous life in Christ more truly than the picture, "Crashaw effaced the importance of his word in order to honor and celebrate the power of Teresa's" (p. 156).

The spiritual humility which characterizes Crashaw's closing tribute to Teresa, is also to be heard in the poet's only surviving letter from Leyden. In a note in which she considers "Who was the Recipient of Crashaw's Leyden letter," Elsie Duncan-Jones speculates that only Joseph Beaumont, who has long been regarded as likely editor of the *Steps*, could claim the honor of being "the much worthier half of your poore friend. R.C." Her note adds one further piece to the jigsaw puzzle of Crashaw's life, especially after his disappearance in 1643 from Cambridge. But it is Hilton Kelliher's essay "Crashaw at Cambridge" which provides scholars with a rich new vein of historical information on Crashaw's life and habits through his access to records of the Vice-Chancellor's Court with their detailed account of Cambridge University life in the first half of the seventeenth century. Kelliher's investigative research will rank alongside the work of Austin Warren and Allan Pritchard in showing how Crashaw's devotional interests attracted the unwelcome attention of untutored as well as the learned authorities of Cambridge. In one

incident of 1640, Crashaw is verbally abused by a parishioner of Little St. Mary's for keeping the children in his ministerial charge too long at their catechism and for, perhaps, introducing the subject of their guardian angels, or, at any rate, exploring the resemblance of these winged creatures to the birds of the air. This flight of fancy is what we would expect of a poet who is described in the Preface to the *Steps* as speaking "the Language of the Angels" (l. 19) and as making his nest in Little St. Mary's (ll. 39-40). As Kelliher points out, the incident is also "the first real indication" that Crashaw took a keen interest in children (p. 196), though his poetry suggests that he remained in touch with the child himself, and may even have felt God's presence strongly as a child.

If friendship with God and with childhood went hand in hand, so, interestingly, did Crashaw's growing proficiency in Neo-Latin verse and appreciation for feminine powers and divinities. In a richly worked essay on "Crashaw and the Diva," Stella Revard examines the exuberant Renaissance hymns to classical goddesses where the poet first acquired the rhetorical skills that he would later bring to his poetic celebration of Catholic holy women such as the Virgin Mary and St. Teresa. The learned Latin which Crashaw practiced is usually regarded as a male specific language, "a medium isolated from the emotion-charged depths of one's mother tongue" (Walter Ong. *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 113-14). However, it is clear from Revard's vivid essay, that Latin became for this poet the medium to introduce the mother goddess figure with her language of love back into patriarchal discourse. As Revard notes in conclusion, "the female Diva represented the full possibility of female nature" (p. 98).

From what Revard's fellow contributors have added to our understanding of the poet, we can also appreciate that in the shimmering beauty and enveloping love of the diva, Crashaw may have first glimpsed our full and fair humanity. He would depend upon the clarity of Christ to realize this mystical vision in his mature religious verse. John Roberts' collection of distinguished essays suggests that the spiritual thinking which irradiates his poetry may not be a thing of the past but a way forward if we are to have a future. Thomas Healy's longer critique of this poet defended the Laudian formalism that gave Crashaw his bearings as he lost himself in the deep inward mystery of Christ. In his own day, we might now recall, Crashaw was acclaimed as "Poet and Saint," a dual title which for Cowley was as inseparable as Christ's joining of divinity to humanity. These two studies challenge us to reconsider Crashaw's merits as a devotional poet. But what of his entitlement to sanctity? If a saint, he makes no claim to spiritual perfection in his poetry. On the contrary, he constantly reminds us of his weakness and powerlessness; yet thus affirms that he had no meaning-- whether in life or in verse-- apart from Love.

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