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TRUTH WITH PRECISION: CRASHAW'S REVISIONS OF A LETTER

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Richard Crashaw [ca. 1613-1649] was an important Catholic poet in a hostile Protestant world who himself entered the Church as a convert from Puritanism and Anglicanism during the English Civil War. Influenced by continental mysticism, Crashaw often wrote of Divine love in sensuously human terms, thereby giving rise to a common opinion that he lacked intellectual perception and was rather over-emotional in his poetic craft. Such a judgment has also been used to devalue his conversion. Nonetheless, Crashaw has won strong admirers as well as detractors, and his work remains a source of contention to the present day. In the article which follows, R. V. Young shows convincingly that Crashaw was a man of acute perception who reflected precisely in his poetry the ultimate differences between not only Catholic and Protestant pieties, but doctrines as well. In so doing, the author reveals as much about the fundamental quarrel of the Reformation as about the genius of Richard Crashaw himself.



THE AVAILABILITY OF DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE SAME POEM IS A GREAT ADVANTAGE to criticism. Revision provides unique evidence both of the significance of a given poem and of the poet's own grasp of his subject and purpose. A. Alvarez remarks that Richard Crashaw "revised his poetry with considerable care and always for the better,"(1) and Kirby Neill's discussion of the successive versions of Crashaw's Nativity hymn furnishes a convincing demonstration of Alvarez's generalization with regard to one particular poem. Neill argues that Crashaw's revisions of the Nativity poem show a "growing sense of form" and a structural unity based on "the unity of its underlying theological concept." (2) A close examination of the changes made in *A Letter to the Countess of Denbigh* contributes further to our appreciation for Crashaw's oft-questioned intellectual integrity. (3)

The poem is a late one, first appearing in *Carmen Deo Nostro* (Paris, 1652) and subsequently in a pamphlet by itself (London, probably 1653).(4) Quite simply, it is an appeal to the poet's patroness-nominally still an Anglican-to save her soul by converting to Catholicism (as Crashaw himself had done). Unlike most of Crashaw's religious poems, which are devotional in character, *A Letter* is an argument rather than a celebration. Although the poet does not expound Catholic dogma to the Countess, the way in which he alters his expostulation in the second version reveals that Crashaw possessed a clear understanding of the theological issues which divided the Protestant Reformers from the Catholic Church. Indeed, the nature of the revision suggests that the purpose of the second version was to render a clearer metaphorical definition of the Catholic faith proffered the Countess.(5) A brief look at the controversies of the Reformation will throw Crashaw's efforts into high relief.

According to John Calvin, in his reply to Cardinal Sadoletto, “justification by faith [is] the first and keenest subject of controversy between us.”(6) Indeed, the dichotomy of Catholic justification by works versus Protestant justification by faith is widely regarded as a definitive statement of the central theological issue of the Reformation. But the Catholic Church has never maintained a doctrine of “justification by works”, a point strongly emphasized in the “Decree Concerning Justification” of the Council of Trent. Calvin himself, in his “Antidote to the Council of Trent”, said “Amen” to its first three canons on justification, which maintain, respectively, that man cannot be justified by his own works of human nature or the law without the grace of Christ; that this grace does not merely make salvation easier, but is absolutely necessary; and that the “prevenient inspiration of the Holy Ghost” is required even for the predisposing of the soul so that “the grace of justification” may be conferred.(7) Calvin’s first objection came with Canon IV: “If any one saith, that man’s free-will moved and excited by God, by assenting to God exciting and calling, nowise co-operates towards disposing and preparing itself for obtaining the grace of justification; that it cannot refuse its consent, if it would, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive: let him be anathema.” To this Calvin replied, “Paul declares, not that a faculty of willing is given to us, but that the will itself is formed in us, ...so that from none else but God is the assent or obedience of a right will. He acts within, holds our hearts, moves our hearts, and draws us by inclination which he has produced within us.” Canons V through VII assert, respectively, that Adam’s sin did not obliterate free will; that man does evil only on his own with God’s permissive will and not his proper consenting; and that man is not utterly incapable of doing good before justification. Commenting on the last of these canons, Calvin said, “Assuredly a bad tree can only produce bad fruit. But who will be so shameless as to deny that we are bad trees until we are ingrafted in Christ?” The doctrine of total depravity necessarily implies that man is not merely incapable of saving himself, but incapable even of the least act of goodness before justification, or of willing participation in any way-negatively or positively- in the work of



grace. Hence the crucial issue in the Reformation is not faith, but the freedom of the human will. (8)

This issue was no less crucial in England than on the Continent, for the influence of Calvin on the English Reformation was immense: if the Established Church under Elizabeth resisted the “puritanism” of the returning Marian exiles, this conflict was largely over ecclesiastical order and liturgical practice.(9) This remained basically true under James I and Charles I down to the outbreak of the Civil War. The official theology of the Church of England was (and if we regard the thirty-nine “Articles of Religion” as “official”, still is) essentially Calvinist, as parts of the *Lambeth Articles* of 1595 indicate: “Saving grace is not given, is not communicated, is not granted to all men, by which they might be saved if they would.... It is not placed in the will or the power of every man to be saved.” (10) It is a mistake, therefore, to see in the notion of the *via media* a significant doctrinal compromise: the theology of the Church of England, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at least, is Reformation theology. The idea of a “High Church” or of an “Anglo-Catholic” movement in the seventeenth century is anachronistic. Moreover, the theology behind the Anglican devotional poetry of the period is also thoroughly “reformed”, despite the influence of continental Catholic meditative techniques.(11)

To be sure, the predestination elements of Calvinist theology appear to be a source of anxiety, if not a stumbling block, to many anti-Puritan Anglican poets-most notably John Donne, with his Recusant background. But Donne was not typical. The most “English” of the Anglican devotional poets, George Herbert, was fully committed to a basically Calvinist view of election and grace.(12) Among the devotional poets commonly associated with the Metaphysical school, only Crashaw made a clean break with the predestinarian implications of Reformation theology, because only Crashaw became a Catholic.

It has been frequently asserted that Crashaw would have remained an Anglican had it not been for the Puritan triumph in the Civil War.(13) This view coincides neatly with the doubts of many critics about the strength and integrity of his character and with the common im-

age of him as a poet of irrational passion and quasi-religious sensuality. To judge the deepest motives of a man now dead more than three hundred years is a presumptuous undertaking. What we can, in some measure, determine is the extent to which he understood the differences between the church he was abandoning and the one he came finally to embrace. Because it is an argument, *A Letter to the Countess of Denbigh* furnishes a crucial insight into Crashaw's grasp of the question. Arno Esch remarks that the revision of the poem reduces the erotic imagery and personal focus of the first version and clarifies the argument.(14) Still more important is the shift in the poem's metaphorical structure. By changing the emphasis in the figurative depiction of the relation between God and man, Crashaw implicitly defines the difference between Protestant and Catholic interpretations of grace and justification, locating the center of the conflict in the question of man's free will.



CRASHAW'S CLARIFICATION OF THE ISSUE

The first twenty-six lines of the two versions contain virtually the same material; apart from some slight, though not wholly insignificant, verbal alterations,(15) the only difference lies in the order of the lines. A comparison of the following passages (lines 7-20) shows that a series of alternating questions and exclamations in the *Carmen Deo Nostro* rendering of the poem, which suggest a mood of puzzled anxiety in the speaker, give way to a stern and more confident tone in the pamphlet:

1652 [*Carmen Deo Nostro*] Version

Say, lingering fairl why comes the birth
Of your brave soul so slowly forth?
Plead your pretences (O you strong
In weakness) why you choose so long
In labor of your selfe to ly,
Nor daring quite to live or dy?
Ah linger not, lov'd soul! a slow
And late consent was a long no,
Who grants at last, long time tryd
And did his best to have deny'd.
What magick bolts, what mystick Barres

Maintain the will in these strange warres!
What fatall, yet fantastick, bands
Keep the free Heart from it's own hands!

1653 Revision

Ah! linger not, lov'd Soul: A slow
And late Consent was a long No.
Who grants at last, a great while try'de
And did his best to have Deny'de.
What Maggick-Bolts, what mystick Barrs
Maintain the Will in these strange Warrs?
What Fatall, yet fantastick, Bands
Keep the free Heart from his own Hands?
Say, linger Fair, why comes the Birth
Of your brave Soul so slowly forth?
Plead your Pretences, (Oh you strong
In weaknesse) why you chuse so long
In Labour of yourself to ly,
Not daring quite to Live nor Die.

In the second version Crashaw moves the general religious principle ("A slow/And late Consent..."), which begins in line thirteen of the 1652 version, up to line seven. All the questions in the rearranged passage are then bunched together, directed almost accusingly at the Countess in the light of the general command ("linger not"), whose force is strengthened by its more prominent position at the beginning of the passage. Then there is a crucial shift, not only in arrangement, but also in punctuation: lines nine through twelve in the early form of the poem are changed from a diffident question to a firm imperative. Coming at the end of a series of three questions in the 1653 version, these lines (17-20) now imply that the Countess has no answer for the questions; she can only "Plead pretences..."

The rearrangement of lines seven through twenty radically alters the tone of the striking simile of the frozen waters which follows (11. 21-26, 1652 & 1653). In the first version the image creates a mood of bewildered melancholy for the nymphs' (and the Countess') "sad selfe-captivity". The only significant verbal alteration, the change of "sad" to "cold", makes the passage more concrete and more precise, since it identifies the ice with the state of the Countess' religious affections rather than with the speaker's feelings about them. Instead of an expression of uncertainty, the simile is now an explanation, and the regret is tinged with disapproval. Whatever "pre-

tences” the Countess may “plead”, the “Magick-Bolts” and “mystick Barrs” that keep her outside the “Gate of Blisse”-the Catholic Church- are lodged, in the coldness of her own heart:

So when the Year takes cold we see
Poor Waters their own Prisoners be:
Fetter'd and lock'd up fast they lie In a cold self-
captivity.
Th'astonish'd Nymphs their Floud's strange Fate
deplore,
To find themselves their own severer Shoar.
(1653, 11. 21-26)

The effect of the changes in the first twenty-six lines of *A Letter* is to strengthen the emphasis of the poem on the problems of the Countess' will, to clarify the contention that the decision to accept or reject grace is finally hers. These modifications at the beginning of the poem may seem somewhat subtle, even obscure, in intention, but the purpose of those that follow is quite explicit. In *Carmen Deo Nostro* Crashaw abruptly turns away from the Countess in line twenty-seven and addresses our Savior (as “Almighty LOVE”) directly:

Thou that alone canst thaw this cold,
And fetch the heart from it's strong Hold;
Allmighty LOVE! end this long warr,
And of a meteor make a starr.
O fix this fair INDEFINITE.
And 'mongst thy shafts of soveraign light
Choose out that sure decisive dart
Which has the Key of this close heart,
Knowes all the corners of t, and can controul
The self-shutt cabinet of an unsearcht soul.
(1652, 11. 27-36)

Thus, in the 1652 version, God Himself is called on to solve the problem, to make the decision for the “irresolute” noblewoman. When, in the middle of a sentence, Crashaw again addresses the Countess, he uses the imagery of wounds and darts which has served him in the celebration of the mystical raptures of Saint Teresa:

Unfold at length, unfold fair flowre
And use the season of love's showre,
Meet his well-meaning Wounds, wise heart!
And hast to drink the wholesome dart.

That healing shaft, which heavn till now
Hath in love's quiver hid for you.
(1652, 11. 43-48)

Teresa's famous vision, recounted in her *Life*; of a seraph piercing her heart with a fiery spear obviously made a deep impression on Crashaw; and his adaption of Teresa's language in the poems he wrote about her is very moving. In the earlier version of *A Letter*, however, Crashaw seems to have fallen into the imagery of mysticism almost out of habit; it is hardly appropriate for him to urge the raptures of mystical union on a woman who has not yet even entered the Church. After years of prayer and mortification, the experience of a Saint Teresa may aptly be described in terms of divinely erotic passion; but the Countess is yet to give the minimum affirmative response to the courtship of Christ, and the intensity of such language does not fit the Countess' situation. Crashaw seems to have realized the incongruity, for the changes in the later version aim principally at bringing theme and image into greater harmony.

In the London pamphlet, “Love” is not apostrophized; instead the poet insistently addresses the hesitant lady, pointing out that the love which shaped the universe is everywhere manifest in it(16) and has provided ample means of salvation if she will but see and accept it:

Love, that lends haste to heaviest things,
In you alone hath lost his wings,
Look round and reade the World's wide face,
The field of Nature or of Grace;
Where can you fix, to find Excuse
Or Pattern for the Pace you use?

Implicit in these lines is the assumption that Nature and Grace act in harmony to issue the same message concerning God who is Love; that is, if we “read” the book of the Creation (“the World's wide face”), then the Scriptural revelation is reiterated.(17) Hence the natural behavior of the lower creatures contrasts with the Countess' unnatural or “unkind” lack of gratitude.(18) In view of the image of the frozen river above-an image of the Countess' heart-the subsequent evocation of flowing waters acquires additional significance:

Both Winds and Waters urge their way,
And murmure if they meet a stay,
Mark how the curl'd Waves work and wind,
All hating to be left behind.

Each bigge with business thrusts the other,
And seems to say, Make haste, my Brother.
(1653, 11. 39-44)

In place of the earlier invocation of Love (1652) then, Crashaw has substituted an account of Love's action in the World, in Nature (11. 27-56). But for fallen man it is impossible to follow the universal pattern; as the Tridentine decree on justification maintains, man lacks the capacity to save himself in his own corrupt nature without the addition of God's grace. Hence while all other creatures are "Suitours" to God, "Man alone is wo'ed,/Tediously wo'ed, and hardly wone..." (11. 58-59). Still, the very figure of wooing implies that the final assent lies within the human will. Therefore, instead of an invitation to irresistible rapture in the earlier version, Crashaw shames the Countess by contrasting her own hesitancy with eager, persistent love of God. To be sure, the erotic metaphors of the relation between the soul and Christ are not wholly abandoned; however, in the 1653 *Letter* Christ is no longer depicted as a Cupid with unerring darts-a virtual ravisher-but as a humble, oft-rejected suitor:

When love of Us call'd Him to see
If wee'd vouchsafe his company,
He left his Father's Court, and came
Lightly as a Lambent Flame,
Leaping upon the Hills, to be
The Humble King of You and Me.
Nor can the cares of his whole Crown
When one poor Sigh sends for him down)
Detain him, but he leaves behind
The late wings of the lazy Wind,
Spurns the tame Laws of Time and Place,
And Breaks through all ten Heav'ns to our
embrace. (1653, 11.67-68)

THE EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION

We ordinarily think of John Donne as an Anglican poet with strong ties to Continental Catholicism, given the Recusancy of his family and his own interest in Catholic meditation techniques.(19) Even so, there is a striking contrast between Crashaw's *A Letter to the Countess of Denbigh* and Holy Sonnet 10, which treats of salvation in the same metaphoric terms-the yielding of a fort and erotic union. Donne insists that his heart be battered, that-like "an usurpt towne"-he must be overthrown and conquered. There will be no consummation of the mar-

riage with the divine Spouse "except you ravish mee." As Richard Strier points out, "Crashaw's God only knocks, breathes and shines, does not ravish but waits for 'the awful daring of a moment's surrender' to bestow the ultimate gift." (20) The Countess will not be "ravished", will not be taken by storm; her salvation is, finally, in her own hands. The strength and merit are Christ's, but hers is the decision:

Yield to his Siege, wise Soul, and see
Your Triumph in his Victory.
Disband dull Feares, give Faith the day:
To save your Life, kill your Delay.
'Tis Cowardise that keeps this Field;
And want of Courage not to Yield.
Yield then, O yield, that Love may win
The Fort at last, and let Life in.
Yield quickly, lest perhaps you prove
Death's Prey, before the Prize of Love.
This Fort of your Fair Self if't be not wone,
He is repuls'd indeed, buf You'r undone.
(1653, 11. 79-90)

Insofar as Crashaw's mature sacred poems resemble the work of the Anglican poets of his time, the similarity is often fortuitous: when Crashaw uses a metaphor of erotic rapture to describe the relation between a soul and God, he is speaking of mystical union-a glimpse of the beatific vision in this life, granted to none but a few devout contemplatives. But in the holy sonnet, Donne uses the figure to describe the experience of grace *necessary for salvation*. This is an expression of the Protestant view of justification which defines faith as precisely the subjective experience of saving grace-as the confidence that one has been chosen irrevocably by God. According to the Reformation theology, all the elect are, here and now, saints. There are no degrees among Christians, and all the elect undergo a conversion experience which is described in terms often reminiscent of the language of mysticism.(21) Hence Crashaw's removal of such language from *A Letter to the Countess of Denbigh* may be interpreted as a deliberate rejection of the Protestant view, and an acknowledgement that the Countess, still not in communion with the true Church, was nowhere near the special state of mystical union to which the erotic analogy is appropriate within the framework of Catholic theology.

The figure developed in the revision of the poem, of a Christ who woos tirelessly, but does not carry off,

is more in accord with Catholic theology, and it has parallels in the Catholic poetry of the Continent. Lope de Vega's *Rimas sacras* (1614) furnishes a good example:

What have I, that you seek my love?
What benefit results for you, Jesus mine,
That at my door covered with dew
You spend the dark nights of winter?
Oh how hard were my bowels,
Since I did not open up to you! What strange
 madness,
If the icy cold of my ingratitude
Withered the wounds in the soles of your pure
 feet!
How often the Angel said to me:
“Soul, lean out the window now,
And you will see how lovingly He persists in
 calling!”
And how often, sovereign beauty,
“Tomorrow I will open to him,”
I replied, only to reply the same tomorrow.(22)

We are, of course, also reminded of Crashaw's *Charitas*

Nimia, a poem which similarly celebrates divine patience rather than divine power. All three poems are essentially Catholic in their insistence that man's will is free to accept or reject God's freely offered grace.

Crashaw himself having converted before the composition of even the first version of his poetic exhortation to the Countess of Denbigh, the second version does not represent a change in his belief about free will. What it does indicate is the poet's ability to criticize and improve his own work in the light of continued meditation on the faith he meant for it to serve. The revision of *A Letter to the Countess of Denbigh* is better organized, and hence the argument is clearer. More important, its metaphorical strategy corresponds more closely to the Catholic understanding of conversion which is, finally, the theme of the poem. This tighter coherence of figure and idea makes the revision more vivid and compelling, and more mature—in every way a better poem.(23) To improve what is already an interesting and impressive poem is not the work of naive emotion, but of skilled intelligence, which Crashaw possessed in a degree for which he is too rarely given full credit.



NOTES

1 *The School of Donne* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 105. This view is not, of course, universal. Crashaw's revisions are dismissed by Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660* (2nd rev. ed., Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), p.147.

2 *Structure and Symbol in Crashaw's Hymn in the Nativity* in *PMLA*, 63, 101-113. The quoted phrases are from the first and last pages.

3 Apart from Alvarez it is a rare critic, even among those generally sympathetic, who is willing to concede Crashaw the faculty of rational judgment. T.S. Eliot credits his poetry with “brainwork” in *A Note on Richard Crashaw in For Lancelot Andrewes* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1929), pp. 134-35; but the view that Crashaw is continually guilty of emotional “excess” has long been dominant. In addition to Bush, loc. cit., see Joan Bennet, *Five Metaphysical Poets* (3rd rev. ed., Cambridge: The University Press, 1964), pp. 94, 102-06; Patrick Cruttwell, *The Shakespearean Moment...* (N.Y.: Random House, 1960), p. 81; Robert Ellrodt, *L'Inspiration Personelle et l'Esprit du Temps chez les Poetes Metaphysiques Anglais* (Paris: Jose Corti, 1960), 1, 416-20; H.J.C. Grierson, *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century...* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), pp. 174-76; Jim Hunter, *The Metaphysical Poets* (London: Evans, 1965), pp. 141-46; John Peter, Crashaw and ‘The Weeper’ in *Scrutiny*, 19, 258-73; Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), p.245; Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renais-Style* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 238-39, 242-43; Martin Turnell, *Richard Crashaw After Three Hundred Years in The Nineteenth Century and After, 146*, 100-14; Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1939), p.204; and Yvor Winters, *Forms of Discovery* (n.p.: Alan Swallow, 1967), pp. 91-92. Even the foregoing list is by no means exhaustive, but its diversity, as well as its length, should give some idea of the pervasiveness of the sentiment.

as its length, should give some idea of the pervasiveness of the sentiment.

4 This information is found both in L.C. Martin, ed., *The Poems of Richard Crashaw* (2nd ed., Oxford,.: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. xxxviii; and George Williams, ed., *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970) pp. 146-7. Since Williams helpfully prints the two versions of the poem on facing pages, I quote from his edition throughout.

5 Richard Strier, *Crashaw's Other Voice* in SEL, 9, 144, terms A Letter “thoroughly anti-Calvinist”; but he not only fails to see that the second version is more “thoroughly anti-Calvinist” (and more intelligently so), but in fact dismisses the latter as “more characteristic” and “inferior and far less interesting” (p. 136, n.3).

6 *John Calvin: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), p.95.

7 Dillenberger, p. 193. Subsequent quotations from these canons and Calvin's comments are from this edition, pp. 193ff. For a complete text of the Tridentine “Decree Concerning Justification”, see John C. Olin, ed., *A Reformation Debate: Sadoletto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966), Appendix II, pp. 114ff.

8 The denial of free will is not peculiarly Calvinist; it lies at the very source of the Reformation. Consider, e.g., only the title of the work written by Luther in his controversy with Erasmus: *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525), “Of the Enslaved Will”.

9 Cf. C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 39, for the reasons behind “Elizabeth's own willingness to go much farther in doctrinal change than in changes of order.”

10 From articles 7 and 9 as quoted by Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1969), p. 246. See also William Halewood, *The Poetry of Grace* (New Haven: Yale Press, 1970), pp. 56ff.

11 This, of course, is the major thesis of Halewood's book; and it has been corroborated-though from a very different perspective-by Patrick Grant, *The Transformation of Sin* (Amherst: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1974). Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Press, 1954), esp. chap. I and III, is probably the first modern scholar to have made this point about Herbert; and Malcolm M. Ross, *Poetry and Dogma* (Rutgers, 1954, repr. N.Y.: Octagon Press, 1969), shows the Protestant bent of the seventeenth-century devotional poets with regard to the Eucharist. Barbara K. Lewalski, *Donne's Anniversaries and the Poetry of Praise...* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 73-107, tries to establish the existence of an independent Protestant tradition of meditation; and Stanley Archer, *Meditation and the Structure of Donne's 'Holy Sonnets' in John Donne's Poetry*, ed. A.L. Clements (N.Y.: Norton, 1966), pp. 237-46, denies that meditative techniques have any substantial relevance to the “Holy Sonnets”. E.I. Watkin, *William Crashaw's Influence on his Son in Poets and Mystics* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1953), pp. 179-80, observes that the influence of the Little Gidding community probably delayed Crashaw on his way to Rome because it offered such an attractive, but thoroughly Protestant alternative. This would appear to be the significance of Crashaw's letter from Leyden (transcribed by Martin with a facsimile, pp. xxvii-xxxi) in which he acknowledges a “fault” or “at least a disproportion of weak soul to severer courses, [that] I am not at present purposed for fixing.” Regardless of the extent to which one is willing to endorse any or all of the above judgments, there is certainly a weight of evidence indicating that the milieu from which Crashaw emerged was decidedly Protestant-he abandoned more than his fellowship at Peterhouse in becoming a Catholic.

12 Grant, *Transformation*, pp. 73-76, draws a contrast between Herbert's firm conviction of Calvinist predestinarianism and Donne's Arminian tendencies. See also Summers, *George Herbert*, pp. 140-42. Donne's theological positions have long been subject to controversy, although it is now generally accepted that he was a sincere Protestant. Still, he is often ambiguous about-and apparently uncomfortable with-some of the harsher Reformation doctrines, especially in their Puritan formulations. *A Sermon Preached to the Houshold at White-hall*, April 30, 1626 (*Sermons of John Donne*, eds. George R. Potter and E.M. Simpson [Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1953-62], VII, v, 141-63), provides some interesting equivocations. At one point Donne suggests a position of absolute pre-destinarianism: “...Christ doth not begin to make that man his, but now declares to us, that he hath been his, from all eternity; For in the Book of Life, the name of Mary Magdalen was as soon recorded, for all her incontinency, as the name of the blessed Virgin, for all her integrity; and the name of St. Paul who drew his sword against Christ, as soon as St. Peter, who drew his in defense of him: for the Book of Life was not written successively, word after word, line after line, but delivered as a Print, all together” (p. 153). But a few pages further, immediately after referring to “the Eternal Decree of my Election,” he attacks what would appear to be a necessary corollary, the doctrine of “irresistible grace” (a notion he attributes to “the later School”): “...He came not to force and compel them, who would not be brought into the way:

Christ saves no man against his will” (p.156); the subsequently denies another familiar Calvinist doctrine, “perseverance of the saints”: “Even the Elect themselves have not a constant righteousness in this world...” (pp. 158-9). However, Donne next qualifies in the opposite direction: the elect man is righteous if God “look upon him, in that Decree which lies in his bosom, and by which he hath infallibly ordained him to salvation...” (p. 159). What emerges from this series of apparent contradictions is the suggestion that Donne is, finally, more interested in the experience of contrition and grace, like Luther, than in codifying it, like Calvin. The implications of the Protestant interpretation of salvation, when embodied in a system, seem to cause him extreme discomfort. Cf. Sanders, *Dramatist and Received Idea*, pp. 248-49.

13 E.g., by Itrat-Husain, *The Mystical Elements in the Metaphysical Poets...* (Edinburg & London: Oliver & Boyd, 1948), p. 162; and Warren, *Richard Crashaw*, p. 50. The latter makes much of the lack of specifically theological argument in *A Letter to the Countess of Denbigh*.

14 *Englische Religiöse Lyrik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tuebingen, 1955), p. 134.

15 E.g., “intreated” becomes “Beseiged”, emphasizing the paradox of a heart which is outside the “Gate of Blisse”, yet subject to siege.

16 Cf. the last line of the *Divine Comedy* (“The love that moves the sun and the other stars”).

17 The relation between nature and grace could be a problem for a Protestant poet, as A.S.P. Woodhouse observes in “Nature and Grace in ‘The Faerie Queene’” in *Elizabethan Poetry: Modern Essays In Criticism*, ed. Paul Alpers (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 364. The emphasis on this relationship may be interpreted as another specifically Catholic element of Crashaw’s poem. Cf. Ruthe Wallerstein, *Richard Crashaw: A Study In Style and Poetic Development* (Madison: Univ. of Wisc. Press, 1935), p. 54, who points out that “external nature viewed as the symbolic alphabet of God” is a frequent theme of Crashaw’s later poetry.

18 See C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (2nd ed. Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), pp. 32-33,43, for a discussion of “natural” as “having due affection” and “unnatural” or “unkind” as the reverse, or ingratitude. King Lear, of course, is the locus classicus for considerations of the various implications of “natural” and “unnatural” children, and Herbert treats the concept in a religious context in *The Temple* (e.g., “Love” III: “I, the unkinde, ungrateful?”).

19 See Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (2nd ed., New Haven: Yale Press, 1962); and Helen Gardner, ed., *The Divine Poems of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), for the Ignatian background. For some dissenting views, see above, n. 11. In the present essay, the text and numbering of the Holy Sonnets are taken from the Gardner edition.

20 SEL, 9, 148. But see above, n.5.

21 Cf., Calvin, *Institutes*, III, ii, 14-15; III, xi, 11, 19; and III, xiv, 1-12. It is undoubtedly the close resemblance between the Calvinist Theory of justification and the experiences described by Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century, like Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz, which led the Inquisition to suspect, for a time, the orthodoxy of the latter. Regarding Calvin’s concept of the Christian life and membership in the Church, an amusing analogy is drawn by C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 42: “In academic jargon, he lowered the honours standard and abolished the pass degree.”

22 *Obras poeticas*, ed. Jose Manuel Bleuca (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1969), 1, 324-25: “?Que tengo yo, que mi amistad procuras?/?Que interes se te sigue, Jesus mio,/que a mi puerta cubierto de rocío/pasas las noches del invierno excuras? ?Oh cuanto fueron mis entranas duras,/pues no te abrí! ?Que extraño desvario,/si de mi ingratitud el hielo frío/seco las llagas de tus plantas puras!/Cuantas veces el Angel me decia:/“Alma, asomate agora a la ventana,/veras con quanto amor llamar porfiar:/!Y cuantas, hermosura soberana,/“Manana le abriremos,” respondia,/para lo mismo responder manana!”

23 It is, therefore, regrettable that every anthology which includes *A Letter to the Countess of Denbigh* prints the earlier version from *Carmen Deo Nostro*.