

CRASHAW AND THE EMBLEM REVISITED

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This paper intends to look into Crashaw's poetry in a manner which not only justifies the problematic juxtaposition of imagery in his verse, a direct consequence of his method of composition, but more importantly, opens up possibilities for further analysis on the function of the emblematic as the reader's stronghold beyond rhetorical stratagems. In essence, the mode in Crashaw grants the poet a margin of rhetorical experimentation framed by the materially unmoveable, recognisable, images of reassuring emblematic quality for the informed reader.

When in 1979 Peter Daly published his book *Literature in the light of the Emblem* a whole body of emblematic criticism was re-launched. The word 'emblematic' had, then, a double projection in the critical arena. On the one hand, names like Praz, Freeman, or Wallerstein were relocated not as prominent figures, because they had been so for years, but as leading figures or precursors of what Daly was initiating. On the other, criticism on the function of the emblem in literature, starting with Henry Green at the end of the nineteenth century, took on a different role and started being approached as a bibliographical body rather than handy references to the content of emblem books. But not only emblematic names had worked on the emblem.

One of the beneficiaries of this revamping of emblem studies was Marc Bertonasco, a Crashaw scholar who had published a few years before a study on Crashaw and the emblem. Bertonasco's aim was to persuade readers of Crashaw that they have been misreading Crashaw if they have not informed their reading in the emblematic tradition. For Bertonasco "the grotesque or perverse, are in fact emblems ... and failure to perceive this fact is perhaps responsible for numerous and gross misapprehensions which abound in critical studies" (1968: 8). But the function of the emblem in Crashaw is more than just saving us from a misreading. As Bertonasco says the ancillary use of the emblem, the reading of sources in poetry, be it as source-hunting or as parallel, may not be enough, it is more a matter of "the emblematic mode of expression which affected his poetic utterance" (1968: 38). Defining the expression 'emblematic mode' may take us to cover a wide array of possibilities, but for the purpose of

this paper we will use the generous definition which springs from the concept of Word-emblem as proposed by Peter Daly. Word-emblem is “a verbal image that has qualities associated with emblems” (Daly 1979: 55). The flexibility of this concept and its application will help us look into Crashaw’s poetry in a manner which not only justifies the problematic juxtaposition of imagery in his verse. It is a direct consequence of the method of composition but, more importantly, it opens up the ground for further analysis on the function of the emblematic as the reader’s stronghold beyond rhetorical stratagems. In essence, the mode in Crashaw grants the poet a margin of rhetorical experimentation framed by the materially unmovable, recognizable, images of reassuring emblematic quality for the informed reader.

Several poems by Crashaw might offer appropriate contexts for an analysis of the kind suggested. I suggest to have look at the poem “The Flaming Heart”, which belongs to the so-called “The Teresa Poems”, published in 1646 and joined by “A Song of Divine Love” and the poem we are reading in a second edition in 1648. There was still a further addition of twenty-four lines in the edition of 1652 (Williams 1970: 52). The poems of this group are all dedicated to the Spanish saint: “A Hymn to the name and honor of the admirable Sainte Teresa...”, “An Apologie for the Fore-Going Hymn...”, “The Flaming Heart” and the song. So the choice tries to be as removed as possible from any charge of arbitrariness since in these poems coalesce devotion, emblem and gender, the three major lines of research in Crashaw scholarship, and I dare say chronologically arranged.

The flame, the heart, *flamma amoris*, the darts of love, all of them recognizable topica for the scholar of Renaissance poetry appear at the service of Teresian eulogy. All these commonplaces, which during the sixteenth and the seventeenth century supported a direct link with Ovid, Petrarch and other authors, had by the time “The Flaming Heart” is published generated numberless visual translations. Cardiomorphics might even reach the status of “minor discipline” by looking at the amount of visual renderings. It is worth mentioning here works like *Cardiomorphoseos* by Francesco Pona (1645), or Van Haeften’s *Schola Cordis* (1635) which Christopher Harvey translated and adapted into English under the title of *Schola Cordis or the heart of it self* (1647), these were real monographs on the heart, but there were also plenty of examples in emblem books of more general contents. This is the case with Georgette de Montenay and her *Emblemes ou devises chrestiennes* (1571), of notable influence in Scotland during the end of the sixteenth century, or Daniel Cramer and his *Emblemata Sacra* (1624).

As Peter Daly asserts “recognition of meaning depends on an understanding of the thing portrayed” (1979: 43). Crashaw, by entitling his poem “The Flaming Heart”, does not only connect directly with the Teresian vision in the *Vida*, but also sets up the ground for those he expects to read the poem and defines as “well-meaning readers”. Crashaw addresses “Well-meaning” or informed readers, whose reading fitness is acknowledged from the very start by recommending “Make not too much haste t’admire/ That fair-cheek’t fallacy of fire” (3-4). The poet warns the reader to lay aside the customary luggage in spite of the clear allusion of the title, which sets up an emblematic mood. But while the emble-

matic mood goes without saying, a rhetorical game is proposed:

Readers, be rul'd by me; and make
 Here a well-plac't and wise mistake,
 You must transpose the picture quite,
 And spell it wrong to read it right; (6-10)

The picture, as Williams informs us was part of the frontispiece used in several of the saint's books (1970: 61). She is walking towards a book, in a sort of synthetic rendition of the *vultus/oratio* debate, followed by a seraphic figure



with a dart. The goal of piercing the heart is in suspension, because the poet's suggestion obliges the reader to make the effort to "read HIM for her, and her for him;/ and call the saint the seraphim" (11-12). Thus, the emblem is offered and postponed or, perhaps, it is just waiting to be corrected. The Flaming Heart has not yet been kindled, a pronoun, a function switch is proposed, and while at it, the painter must justify the visual rendering: "painter, what dost thou understand/ to put her dart into his hand!" While the picture and the first section of the poem have succeeded in gathering orthodox elements of the iconography associated with a flaming heart (darts, flames), the completion of the image and, thus, the reading free way is still on hold. An adjustment needs to be made. If the pronoun switch created a rhetorical game, its qualification sets up an intertextual link with the group of poems about Saint Teresa:

...this speakes pure mortal frame;
 And mockes with female FROST love's manly flame.
 One would suspect thou meant'st to paint
 Some weak, inferiour, woman saint. (25-26)

These lines present a clear echo of the title of the hymn which opens the Teresa poems: "A Hymn to the name and honor of the admirable Sainte Teresa; A woman for angelicall height of speculation, for masculine courage of perfor-

mance, more than a woman...". The relation of Crashaw's poetry to the feminine has undergone a re-evaluation since Mario Praz equated "manliness" in Crashaw with "rhetorical restraint, imagistic simplicity and logic" (Mintz 1999: 112). The equation, no doubt, brings back to our minds the image of the painter and his inadequate picture of the saint. The corrective movement, the painter is invited to perform, pursues another kind of picture, one which, Susannah Mintz defends, "valorizes women as either *loci* of or thresholds to spiritual power..." positing "a kind of spiritual androgyny from Crashaw's poetic transgressions of traditional gender categories" (1999: 112). These transgressions should, in words of Maureen Sabine, be taken as a "positive trait" in Crashaw's poetry, as a logical extension of the Mariolatry so present in his poems. Sabine's book, entitled *Feminine Engendered Faith*, pursues a re-assessment "of the great joint loves that inspired much of the reflective verse ... Christ and his Mother" (1992: x).

It follows, then, that to view the flaming heart, to restore to the able reader the possibility of viewing "The Inflaming of the Heart" (Harvey's emblem), a visual rectification must take place after the suspension carried out during 38 lines:

Resume and rectify thy rude design
Undresse thy seraphim unto Mine.
Redeem this injury of thy art;



(Harvey 1647: 36)

Give him the vail, give her the dart. (39-43)

The fusion of the two seraphims, perhaps a prelude of transverberation, and the reassignment of the tools of love launches the poem into a review of the postponed emblematic expectations of the beginning. Now, the reader, once the modifications have been operated, may read on through Darts and Shafts: "All ye wise and well-peirc't hearts/ That live and dy amidst her darts" (49-50). Darts from the saint/seraphim provoke the mystical death so painful and desired. A few lines of the Hymn present a more detailed context:

O how oft shalt thou complain
Of sweet & subtle Pain.
Of intolerable IOYES;

Of a DEATH, in which who dyes
 Love his death, and dyes again.
 And would for ever so be slain. (97-102)

It is a kind of death which seeks to deploy a consciousness of the inexpressible, a simultaneity at the expense of the orthodoxy of the iconography of the poem. But the price to pay is not very high. Whether it is the seraphim, the saint, or Cupid, the scheme remains the same, the shoots fire the heart, the heart maintains the flame. The emblem not only stands as source for imagery, or as mode of expression, in “The Flaming Heart” it is also the artifice of repair. The only unquestionable and recognizable artifact amid the rhetorical stratagem of Crashaw is precisely the emblem as he says, “Leave her alone THE FLAMING HEART”(68):

The Flaming heart illuminates the labyrinth of the heart: dart, shoots, seraphim (Cupid), Wound. Readers, who finally get on track, are suddenly challenged by a



(Wither 1635: 39)

pharmaceutical vision of another expected image, the wounding of the heart:

The wounded have received the dart, the wounding shots. The saint not only enjoyed a graphically amended representation. It is not only a change of



(Harvey 1647: 33)

roles with the seraphim, but a conflation of both roles. As “weak saint” she is wounded, as the new seraphim she wounds. Though not as wounding wound, Harvey’s emblem *Cordis Emollitio* contains the essence of the pharmaceutical

function of the heart:

Live here, great heart; and love and dy and kill;
And bleed and wound; and yield and conquer still. (79-80)



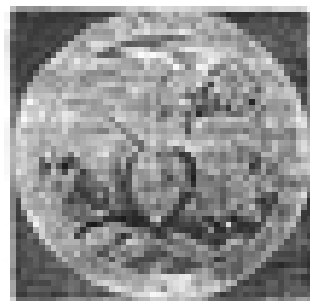
(Harvey 1647: 16)

Him or her, frost or flame, have turned into “love and dy”, “bleed and wound”. It is not simply that both parts (“love’s both parts”) contaminate each other, both parts are each other: The wounding of the heart is also the cure.

As Cramer’s emblems show, in the wound as in the cure, the weapon is always on the heart, present, acting as modifier.



(Cramer 1624)



In his study about the sublime in Crashaw, Michael McCandles (1974) has shown that the demand placed on what Praz calls “manly” skills is too great. Logic is flooded with pronouns, the image is corrected at the source and the rhetorical restraint is turned into a carrousel with the only goal of finally conforming to the most orthodox and well known sequence of emblematic motives. This care might just be the reason why Crashaw, the poet, chooses to show his heart to

the saint under the guise of a carcass:

This carcass of Paradin holds the eagle which lines later in “The Flaming Heart” will participate in the enumeration of synthetic emblems: Thirst of Love, watering



(Paradin 1591)

of love, flame as water...Emblems which have different renditions in most of the emblemata sacra published in England throughout the XVIIth century.

Vision must end with a prayer. Crashaw has taken the reader through a narrow path with wide gates. Emblems have remained unmovable at the core of the revolving lines. Santa Teresa’s transformation, transverberation, has proceeded grammatically and succeeded poetically, because the obstacles have been cleared by the poet. Only an image of union is needed, a union of hearts, as shown in Harvey’s emblem 39:

Leave nothing of my SELF in me,
Let me so read thy life, that I
Unto all life of mine dy. (106-108)



(Harvey 1647: 39)

In these final lines of the poem, Crashaw conforms to the final goal of any meditation, the surrendering of the self. However it must be pointed out, as Bertolasco indicates, that the poet prefers the salesian method instead of the

Ignatian, because of the absence of decisions to be made during the meditation proper (1971: 532). In this intellectually less demanding context, the giving up of the self, the union of two in one, is not a union with a lover or God; The emptying of the self leads to reading (“let me so read thy life”) a book, a book with a flaming heart which will change HIS life by extinguishing it, extinguishing the poem with the most proper word for a finale: DY.



William Race defines ekphrasis as “an expository speech which clearly brings the subject before our eyes” (1988: 56). Leonardo da Vinci says in the Codice Atlantico: “L’anima desidera stare col suo corpo, perché senza gli strumenti organici di tal corpo nulla può operare ne sentire”. In Crashaw, devotion, emblem and gender coalesce in multiple combinations but their coexistence and complementation usually takes the form of an ancillary relationship for the modern reader: emblems help disclose troubling aspects of the imagery while devotional meditation frames the interpretation. And yet, Crashaw tries to enhance discursivity out of ekphrasis, bringing before the eye more than just the subject, letting us view the emblem as background, as guardian of his own rhetoric, as unchangeable “corpo” able to shelter the perambulation of the “anima”.

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