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"Scholler" and "Master": Mystical Instruction in Richard Crashaw's *Carmen Deo nostro* (1652)

Fabrice Schultz♦

The son of an Anglican divine, Richard Crashaw was born in 1612/1613 and died in 1649 in Italy, following his exile and conversion to Roman Catholicism. His last collection of sacred verse, *Carmen Deo nostro*, was edited by Thomas Car and printed posthumously in Paris in 1652. Adorned with twelve engravings, this short work provides readers with a hitherto unpublished piece, "Letter to the Countess of Denbigh," accompanying the final version of previously printed poems.

Two illustrations remarkably hint at a lineation from highly popular mystical texts to Crashaw's poetry. Indeed, the engraving preceding "The Weeper," which was actually drawn by the poet (Crashaw, 1652: 85), bears some striking resemblance to the frontispiece of John Preston's translation of Thomas a Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* entitled *The Christian Pattern, or, the Following of Christ* and published in Cambridge in 1642.[1] Both drawings foreground a burning heart flanked, on each side, by two large outspread wings, the visual echo signifying that Magdalene may be a pattern on which one may model one's life in order to attain salvation.

Similarly, the visual representation of Teresa of Avila (Crashaw, 1652: 94), the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic who founded the order of the Discalced Carmelites, is reminiscent of the engraving by Martinus Vanden Enden facing the title page of *The Flaming Hart*, Tobie Matthew's 1642 English translation of

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1 Although there is no biographical evidence that Crashaw ever owned a copy of the *Imitatio Christi*, we can assume that he was familiar with this highly popular devotional treatise, and possibly this English translation printed in Cambridge when Crashaw still resided there.

her autobiography, *Libro de la vida*. Several details suggest that Jean Messager, the engraver of the portrait printed in *Carmen Deo nostro*, drew his inspiration from the Dutch artist: framed at waist level, the mystic is crowned with a halo and wears similar clothes. She is praying with clasped hands and looks up at a dove located in an upper corner. A scroll reading "*Misericordis Domini in* Æternum *Cantabo*" is placed between Teresa and the uppermost edge.

At the core of those fundamental works lies the conception of instruction as the possibility of passing on the divine love gained through one's experience to help readers on their way toward mystical union with Christ. Teresa, like Thomas a Kempis before her, aims to teach readers how to become one with Christ. Treading in Thomas a Kempis's footsteps, Teresa professedly sought to instruct her readers, as is notably evidenced by the introductory epigraphs preceding each chapter.[2] Visual echoes of contemporaneous copies of those fundamental mystical works suggest that Crashaw might have sought to convey what he learned from them, which leads us to investigate the poet's vision of instruction understood both as "the action, practice, or profession of teaching" and "the fact of being taught" (*OED*), as well as his own didacticism. Such questions have so far been largely ignored by critics.

Empirical Instruction

Though Crashaw's engraving of Magdalene echoes the frontispiece of *The Christian Pattern*, the saint's life and tears of contrition are depicted as a singularly edifying source of instruction:

> Upwards thou dost weep.
> Heavn's bosome drinks the gentle stream.
> Where th' milky rivers creep,
> Thine floates above; and is the cream.
> Waters above th'Heavns, what they be
> We'are taught best by thy TEARES and thee.
> ("The Weeper,"[3] 25-30)

2 See for instance the beginning of chapter 25: "She treats heer, of the way, and manner, of vnderstanding those words, or speeches, which Almightie God is pleased to vtter to the Soule, though yet without hearing anie voice, or sound; and of some errours, or abuses, which may happen heerin; and, how the right, may be knowne, from the wrong. It is of much vse, and profit, for such, as see themselues in this Degree of Prayer; for it is declared very well; and the Doctrine containes great instruction" (Avila, 1642: 335). The didactic intention of Teresa is thoroughly analyzed in Braguier, 2008.

3 Titles and quotations are all from Crashaw, 1972 [1970].

An explicit reference to supracelestial waters mentioned in the Psalms is linked to the notion of knowledge from a Christian perspective.[4] The expression "what they be" and the verb "taught" raise the question of the true nature of those waters, a question which preoccupied the early Church Fathers and gave rise to heated discussions,[5] as well as that of the possibility of accurately comprehending them. Their incomprehensibility, like the paradoxical spiritual elevation of the tears of contrition expressed in the verse "Upwards thou dost weep," can only be approached by the study of Magdalene's life ("taught best") and the imitation of the model she provides, as the rhyme "be" / "thee" implicitly suggests.

Various textual elements highlight Crashaw's validation of empirical instruction. The influence of Teresa and Thomas a Kempis is conspicuous in a recurring spatial metaphor literalizing the notion of imitation. In "The Weeper," Magdalene follows Christ wherever he goes: "He's follow'd by two faithfull fountaines; / Two walking baths; two weeping motions" (112-113). There is a similarly worded filiation between Teresa following Christ and Teresa's own followers who may profit from her experience:

> Thou with the LAMB, thy lord, shalt goe;
> And whereso'ere he setts his white
> Stepps, walk with HIM those wayes of light
> Which who in death would live to see,
> Must learn in life to dy like thee.
> ("A Hymn to Sainte Teresa," 178-182)

Crashaw's literal interpretation of the topos of the following of Christ seems to be drawn from Thomas a Kempis and Teresa's works. Indeed, if Christ is the "pattern" one must follow, Thomas a Kempis is also the paragon for those wishing to become one with Him, as is suggested in the preface of the English translation: "Reader, […] Take this follower of Christ; thy example; Gods familiar friend and acquaintance; who whilst he lived on earth, I say not, He dwelt in heaven; but more, Heaven it self nay God dwelt in him" (Kempis, 1642: unnumbered page). Teresa implicitly echoes Thomas a Kempis's work when she writes "[O]ur Lord himself shewed this way of perfection; by saying: *Take thou vp thy Crosse, and follow me.* For he is to be our Patterne; and whosoeuer shall follow his counsels, and that, for no other reason, then to content him, may be sure, that he shall haue nothing to feare" (Avila, 1642: 192).

The latent empiricism of instruction is similarly underscored by the emphasis on martyred human bodies. The mystical knowledge one may learn is written on

4 Ps 148, 4 : "ye waters that be above the heavens."

5 Thomas Aquinas summarizes those debates in his *Summa theologiæ* and concludes that authors fail to agree, which testifies to the superiority of Scripture over human understanding. See Aquinas, 1999 [1984]: 621-623.

the torn bodies of martyrs, the most spectacularly eloquent of whom is Christ. In "Hymn to the Name of Jesus," the death of proselytizing martyrs teaches pagans the true love of Christ in order to convert them to the Christian doctrine: "On their Bold BRESTS about the world they bore thee / And to the Teeth of Hell stood up to teach thee" (204-205). Similarly, Teresa wishes to travel to "the Moores" to instruct them:

> She'l offer them her dearest Breath,
> With CHRIST'S Name in't, in change for death.
> She'l bargain with them, and will give
> Them GOD; and teach them how to live
> In him: or, if they this deny,
> For him she'l teach them how to DY.
> ("A Hymn to Sainte Teresa," 50-54)

Martyrdom is specifically endowed with some marked didactic significance as the parallelism "teach them how to live" / "teach them how to die" clearly suggests. The echo between "to live" and "to die" sheds light on the central paradox of life in death inherent in mysticism. Her suffering body and ultimate death provide the best example to follow.

Furthermore, the imparting of any form of knowledge or wisdom is generally preceded by a reference to the way it has been acquired in the first place, which establishes a dialectic between learning and teaching. Central to this dynamic is the protagonist's encounter with Christ and the ensuing mystical experiences. The didactic force of experience vivifies the poetic evocation of the conversion of the sun from pagan sun-worshipping cults to Christianity:

> (1.) Thus shall that reverend child of light,
> (2.) By being scholler first of that new night,
> Come forth Great master of the mystick day;
> And teach obscure MANKIND a more close way
> By the frugall negative light
> Of a most wise and well-abused Night
> To read more legible thine originall Ray,
> (Cho.) And make our Darknes serve THY day;
> ("Hymn in the Glorious Epiphanie," 205-212)

In view of the recurring antitheses "light" / "night" and "Darknes" / "day," "mystick" must be taken literally as a direct intertextual echo of the title of Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*. According to the Athenian theologian, in order to become united with "Mystic gloom" in "mystic contemplation," one must "leave the senses and the activities of the intellect and all things that the senses

or the intellect can perceive" before being "led upwards to the Ray of that divine Darkness which exceedeth all existence" (Dionysius, 1920: 191-192). This mystic obscurity is not opposed to light, it surpasses it as the divine transcends everything man can perceive or comprehend: "Unto this Darkness which is beyond Light we pray that we may come, and may attain unto vision through the loss of sight and knowledge" (Dionysius, 1920: 194).

In "Hymn in the Glorious Epiphanie," the lexical field of instruction ("scholler," "master," "teach," "read") subtends the description of the sun's changing role. The "scholler" becomes the "master" and the shift from learning to teaching, which accompanies the sun's conversion to divine light in darkness, suggests that instruction is first and foremost envisioned as the transmission of the knowledge or wisdom acquired through one's experience. The sun, having experienced Christ's ineffable light, is now able to instruct others in mystical theology. The dynamic movement underlying Crashaw's conception of instruction thus involves an ontological change in the learner which can only happen through his intimate experience of the divine.

An Experience of the Divine

Instruction through the transmission of a mystical message is only possible if one manages to transcend human limitations. The first part of "A Hymn to Sainte Teresa" recounts Teresa of Avila's youth and more specifically the way her readings sparked her wish to die a martyr:

> Scarse has she learn'd to lisp the name
> Of Martyr, yet she thinks it shame
> Life should so long play with that breath
> Which spent can buy so brave a death.
> She never undertook to know
> What death with love should have to doe;
> Nor has she e'er yet understood
> Why to show love she should shed blood;
> Yet though she cannot tell you why,
> She can LOVE, and she can DY.
> ("A Hymn to Sainte Teresa," 15-24)

The trochaic inversion at the beginning of line 15 brings the adverb "Scarse" into prominence and initiates the topos of limitation further suggested by the verb "lisp" which some "childlike" or "imperfect" utterance delivered with "faltering articulation" (*OED*). Three negations ("never," "nor" and "cannot") also qualify the possibility of acquiring or imparting knowledge ("know," "understood"

and "tell"). However, although the line "She can love, and she can die" (24) strikingly disrupts the regular succession of tetrameters, the syntactic parallelism assimilates love and death to suggest that in spite of these limitations young Teresa has already been inflamed with divine love and is able to fathom the essence of mystical union, which seems beyond words and understanding.

If man's abilities are limited, instruction is ultimately impossible without God's action. The poetic voice's insistence on the importance of Teresa's experience of the divine recalls the Spanish mystic's own insistency. Indeed, when the speaker of "An Apologie for the fore-going Hymne" exclaims, "O 'tis not spanish, but 'tis heav'n she speaks!" (23), he synthesises the idea that the mystic's words were directly inspired by God, who, according to Teresa, was her only master:

> Whilst I was in want of a Directour, and the while, went reading the Bookes afforesayd, whereby I thought I grew to vnderstand somewhat; by little, and little, I came, indeed, to find afterward, that, if our Lord had not been my teacher, I should haue learnt very little, by those Bookes; For, really, it was nothing, which I vnderstood, till his Diuine Maiestie was pleased to make me know it, by experience; nor indeed, did I know, what I did. (Avila, 1642: 292)

This ambivalent conception of knowledge does not necessarily imply an unambiguous criticism of reason. Teresa distinguishes between a discursive form of reason relying on words to express and grasp meaning and a contemplative form of intelligence which receives knowledge in an infused and supernatural manner from God and alone can lead to mystical union. Drawing attention to the central notion of mystical instruction, Teresa's words echo Thomas a Kempis's *Imitatio Christi*:

> If thou dost more rely upon thine own reason or industry, then upon the virtue of obedience to Jesus Christ, it will be long before thou be illuminated with grace: for Almighty God will have us perfectly subject unto him, and that being enflamed with his love, we transcend the narrow limits of humane reason. (Kempis, 1642: 26)

The direct connection with the heavenly spheres underlined in "An Apologie for the fore-going Hymne" suggests that the teaching found in Teresa's books came directly from God, without the mediation of other forms of instruction. Indeed, the conception of education that emerges from *Libro de la vida* is wholly founded on the experience of divine love which supplements and supersedes any valuable scholarly instruction that could be derived from academic studies.

Given the divine origin of instruction, the didactic function of experience is seconded by a form of anti-intellectualism subtended by the validation of rhetorical simplicity found in poems like "Hymn in the Holy Nativity." When

Crashaw's rustic shepherds describe themselves as "poor Shepheards, home-spun things: / Whose Wealth's their flock; whose witt, to be / Well read in their simplicity" ("Hymn in the Holy Nativity," 91-96), they display the same self-professed lack of refinement as Teresa of Avila writing "For God gaue not me the talent of discoursing with my Vnderstanding, nor to help my self, by the vse of my Imagination, which I haue so heauie, and grosse" (Avila, 1642: 29-30).

Indeed, in *Libro de la vida*, the qualification of abstract theoretical teaching is perceptible, notably, when Teresa alludes to Dionysius's mystical theology without any form of schoolmasterly didacticism: "This was not in the manner of a Vision, but I thinke they call it Mysticall Theologie; and it suspends the Soule in such sort, that she seems to be wholy out of her self" (Avila, 1642: 107-108). Circumlocutions betray her lack of conceptual learning. Besides, although the intertextual echoes of the Greek Church Father's works are explicit in "Hymn in the Glorious Epiphanie" when the three Kings directly mention "the right-eyed Areopagite" (191) and the "negative light" (209) reminiscent of his negative theology, Dionysius's mystical teachings are best passed on by the description of the Sun's conversion from pagan sun-worship to Christianity and by the arabesque repetition of antitheses and oxymorons bringing together light and darkness—"thou DAY of night" (22), "Bright IDOL, black IDOLATRY" (51), 'That dark DAY's clear doom" (143), "That forfeiture of noon to night" (149), "His new prodigious night, / Their new and admirable light" (172-173), "make the night it self their torch to thee" (188)—culminating in the climactic succession of simply worded oppositions: "A mutuall trade / 'Twixt sun and SHADE, / By confederat BLACK and WHITE / Borrowing day and lending night" ("Hymn in the Glorious Epiphanie," 215-218).

Therefore, even as the faculties of human reason seem limited and inherently imperfect, man can ascend toward God through divine teaching which can be experienced through mystical union.

Legible Instruction

Mary standing at the foot of the Cross is depicted as an edifying pedagogue from whom the speaker wishes to attain clear perception of mystical union. Her role as an exemplar is sustained by the metaphorical association of body and book:

> O teach those wounds to bleed
> In me; me, so to read
> This book of loves, thus writ
> In lines of death, my life may coppy it
> With loyall cares.
> ("Sancta Maria Dolorum," 51-55)

The speaker addresses Mary, who has become a model he aims to follow. Christ's body is a book and his wounds must become legible. The rhyme "bleed" / "read" emphasises the topos of mystical union achieved through the attentive reading of this book and the way it shapes the speaker's life. Christ's martyred body is metaphorically depicted as a book one can study to achieve mystical union and the Virgin provides the exemplar instructing the speaker and paving the way toward mystical union.

Indeed, despite the suggestion that instruction must rely on experience rather than on textbooks, references to Teresa's works also seem to imply, paradoxically, that written words may instruct. The didacticism of books is prevalent in Crashaw's Teresa hymns, as the exemplar provided by the Spanish mystic can be studied through her works. When the speaker underlines the importance of Teresa as an object of imitation, paradoxical conceits bring together life and death to conjure up the idea of mystical union:

> By all of HIM we have in THEE;
> Leave nothing of my SELF in me.
> Let me so read thy life, that I
> Unto all life of mine may dy.
> ("The Flaming Heart," 104-108)

The speaker's desire to lose himself to become one with God is voiced in a poignantly personal way. An explicit reference to the act of reading underlines the importance of books as physical objects to invest a divinely inspired message with a physical form to move their readers.

In Crashaw's hymns, the speaker refers to the mystic's published works, and a centripetal movement from the heavenly spheres representing the divine origin of the instruction she purports to provide is followed by the centrifugal movement of the reader's soul ascending towards heaven, which denotes the spiritual profit that may be derived from reading her and following her example:

> Those rare WORKES where thou shalt leave writt
> Love's noble history, with witt
> Taught thee by none but him, while here
> They feed our soules, shall cloth THINE there.
> Each heavnly word by whose hid flame
> Our hard Hearts shall strike fire, the same
> Shall flourish on thy browes. and be
> Both fire to us and flame to thee;
> Whose light shall live bright in thy FACE
> By glory, in our hearts by grace.
> ("A Hymn to Sainte Teresa," 155-164)

A fairly regular alternation of pronouns and possessive adjectives referring to Teresa and to her readers conjures up the implicit identification of the readers, including the poetic voice, with the author. Furthermore, the fire metaphor ("Both fire to us and flame to thee"), emphasised by the syntactic parallelism, brings together Teresa and her readers. The expression "live bright in thy FACE" is an explicit intertextual echo of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Co 13, 12). In this verse, the apostle describes the way the Blessed may attain the most perfect vision of God once they approach him in Heaven. In Crashaw's poem, the speaker thus suggests the possibility of achieving true union with God and true knowledge if Teresa's works are read closely.

If the Spanish mystic's divinely inspired words come from the heavenly spheres to touch the reader's heart, the effect produced involves an opposite movement from the reader's heart to heaven as his soul soars to find its place among the Angels and the Blessed, next to God:

> 'Tis heav'n that lyes in ambush there, and breaks
> From thence into the wondring reader's brest;
> Who feels his warm HEART hatch'd into a nest
> Of little EAGLES and young loves, whose high
> Flights scorn the lazy dust, and things that dy.
> ("An Apologie for the fore-going Hymne," 24-28)

The bird/nest conceit assimilating the souls of readers to fledglings leaving their nests highlights the metamorphosis wrought by the reading of Teresa's works. The metaphorical nest gives access to spiritual truths fostering mystical contemplation. The reference to eagles is fraught with symbolical meaning as they were capable of beholding the sun without flinching and could aptly stand for man's ability to see God's dazzling immaterial light.

The Poetic Voice as "Scholler" and "Master"

Instruction is ostensibly envisaged as an experience toward mystical union, which leads us to investigate further the way the poetic voice sought to transmit what has been learnt in Teresa's works and to become another exemplar unto readers. Indeed, the Teresa hymns overtly testify to the speaker's wish to emulate the Spanish mystic:

> Thus have I back again to thy bright name
> (Fair floud of holy fires!) transfus'd the flame
> I took from reading thee; tis to thy wrong
> I know, that in my weak and worthlesse song
> Thou here are sett to shine where thy full day
> Scarse dawnes. O pardon if I dare to say
> Thine own dear bookes are guilty. For from thence
> I learn't to know that love is eloquence.
> That hopefull maxime gave me hart to try
> If, what to other tongues is tun'd so high,
> Thy praise might not speak English too; […]
> ("An Apologie for the fore-going Hymne," 1-10)

"Maxime" is literally defined as "An axiom; a self-evident proposition assumed as a premise in dialectical or mathematical reasoning [1450]," but the general truth this "pithily worded" proposition expresses may be "drawn from science or experience [1605]" (*OED*). This noun highlights the topos of instruction and yet the sentence "love is eloquence" points to teaching that transcends the possibilities of language. Metaphors of fire and enlightenment draw attention to the message of divine love expressed by Teresa in her works and the verb "transfuse" assimilates the poem and Teresa's autobiography to vessels apt at containing the ineffable message of divine love conducive to mystical union. The prosaic awareness of the speaker's own limitations ("my weak and wortheless song," 4) does not abate his exalted optimism.

Crashaw's familiarity with Teresa's books has been amply discussed[6] and is most conspicuously evidenced by a manuscript version of "A Hymn to Sainte Teresa," currently held at the Pierpont Morgan Library and annotated in Crashaw's own hand. The marginal notes scribbled next to the poem link several lines of the poem to chapters of Teresa's autobiography (Martin, 1952: 272).[7] In addition to evident intertextual echoes, the poetic voice strives to convey a similar sense of intimacy with the divine and adopts Teresa's mystical poetics based on repetition, excess and orality.[8]

The essence of Crashaw's poetic enterprise in *Carmen Deo nostro* may lie in an attempt to convey to his own readers the practical mystical knowledge he gained

6 See Young, 1982: 79-112 or Husain, 1966: 181-182.

7 In "A Hymn to Sainte Teresa," the allusion to the mystic's desire to travel to "the Moores" (47) is an intertextual reference to the first chapter of her autobiography. The line "Of a sweet and subtle PAIN" (97) summarises the long chapter devoted to the difference between union and rapture and, furthermore, "Blest SERAPHIM, shall leave their quire" (94) refers to the depiction of Teresa's ecstasy after a Seraphim repeatedly pierced her heart with a flaming dart (Avila, 1642: 3, 248-275, 419-420).

8 For the influence of Teresa's mystical poetics on Crashaw and notably the declamatory vehemence found in their texts, see Schultz, 2021.

from reading Teresa's work. In Crashaw's poems, one experience described by Teresa is given a particularly marked pedagogic and edifying function, namely the detailed account of her ecstasy. We notice an overt form of didacticism in the way the speaker addresses the intradiegetic reader in an apostrophe at the beginning of "The Flaming Heart": "Readers, be rul'd by me; and make / Here a well-plac't and wise mistake" (6-7). The speaker adopts the posture of a master delivering a lecture to help readers understand and interpret Teresa's ecstasy. A few lines further down, the repetition of "wise" echoes the beginning of the poem: "Let mystick DEATHS wait on't; and wise soules be / The love-slain wittnesses of this life of thee" (83-84). The speaker refers to Teresa's readers and followers but also to the readers he addresses at the beginning of the poem to highlight the spiritual benefit that can be drawn from the reading of his poem.

The pedagogic and anagogic aims of the speaker are highlighted if we shift from the addressee to the model reader whom the former foreshadows (to use Umberto Eco's term)[9] and who is foreshadowed by the echoes of the Spanish mystic's works in the 1652 version of "Letter to the Countess of Denbigh". This shift sheds light on the nature of the reading contract postulated by the liminal poem of the posthumous collection. The poetic voice introduces the addressee, the Countess of Denbigh, but also the model reader of *Carmen Deo nostro*, to the ecstasy one may hope to achieve by reading the poems. Apostrophes and imperatives work on the reader's emotions and culminate in a final call to surrender:

> 'Tis cowardise that keeps this feild
> And want of courage not to yeild.
> Yeild then, o yeild, that love may win
> The Fort at last, and let life in.
> Yeild quickly. Lest perhaps you prove
> Death's prey, before the prize of love.
> ("Letter to the Countess of Denbigh," 61-66)

The anaphora of "yield" and the vocative underscore the performative force of the poetic word. Each line is an arrow fired at the reader's heart. The poem thus elaborates on the metaphor of the wound of love a few lines earlier:

9 The model reader posited by the text and able to interpret it in accordance with the author's intention should not be confused with the empirical reader actually reading the text (Eco, 1979: 7-8).

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.
O Dart of love! arrow of light!
O happy you, if it hitt right
("Letter to the Countess of Denbigh," 45-50)

The rhyme "heart" / "dart" recurs in Crashaw's poems dealing with mystical union.[10] It sonically and metaphorically unites the heart and the dart held by the angel, which connects it to the heavenly spheres. Furthermore, the imperative and the lexis used line 45 are intensely evocative of the beginning of "The Flaming Heart": "Well-meaning readers! […] make / Here a well-plac't and wise mistake" (1-8). Indeed, the topos of the dart is borrowed from Teresa's account of her ecstasy in *Libro de la vida* and has already been elaborated upon in "The Flaming Heart." In the concluding lines of "Letter to the Countess of Denbigh," the speaker becomes analogous to the Seraphim plunging his fiery dart into the heart of the mystic as his own words wound the heart of the Countess of Denbigh to convert her and also, in a broader perspective, to guide her toward mystical union.

However, if the poetic voice strives to convert the Countess by enabling her to taste divine love, a comparison between this version of the poem and the one published separately a year later as a pamphlet (Crashaw, 1653) suggests that the scope of the opening poem of *Carmen Deo nostro* is much wider. In the 1653 pamphlet, the typography is more restrained and the imagery of flames and darts recalling the description of Teresa's ecstasy in her autobiography and in Crashaw's Teresa hymns is altogether absent. The opening line of the poem is amended ("What heav'n-intreated HEART is This?" becomes "What Heav'n-beseiged Heart is this") to herald the neatly echoing concluding military conceit. Additional lines indeed strengthen the logical rigour of the speaker's demonstration. By its loosely-structured argumentation, its marked mystical imagery and its emphasis on orality, the first version of "Letter to the Countess of Denbigh" transcends the proselytising function suggested by the full title of the poem, "TO THE Noblest & best of Ladyes, the Countesse of Denbigh. Perswading her to Resolution in Religion, & to render her selfe without further delay into the Communion of the Catholick Church" (Crashaw, 1652: unnumbered page) to imply a different reading contract between the poetic voice and the model reader who may, if the propaedeutic is properly followed, yield to the divine wound of love and thence attain mystical union.

10 See "In Cicatrices Domini Jesu," 9-10 and 15-16, "A Hymn to Sainte Teresa," 105-106, 135-136 or "The Flaming Heart," 35-36, 67-68.

In the liminal poem of *Carmen Deo nostro*, exclamations, imperatives and vocatives underline the fact that Crashaw's poems pertain to declamation. Poems become vocal prayers that should lead to mystical union, as is suggested in "A Song," one of the poems in which the desire to become one with God and the realization of mystical union are voiced with greatest vehemence:

> LORD, when the sense of thy sweet grace
> Sends up my soul to seek thy face.
> Thy blessed eyes breed such desire,
> I dy in love's delicious Fire.
> O love, I am thy SACRIFICE.
> Be still triumphant, blessed eyes.
> Still shine on me, fair suns! that I
> Still may behold, though still I dy.
> Second part.
> Though still I dy, I live again;
> Still longing so to be still slain,
> So gainfull is such losse of breath,
> I dy even in desire of death.
> Still live in me this loving strife
> Of living DEATH and dying LIFE.
> For while thou sweetly slayest me
> Dead to my selfe, I live in Thee. ("A Song," 1-16)

Exclamations, spondees and stressed personal pronouns characteristically suggest that poems ought to be read aloud to convey the emotional intensity of the message the speaker wishes to convey. While the capitalization of key words seems to guide the reader in the musical inflection of his voice, the speaker proclaims his soul's deepest aspirations. Inflamed by the divine love kindled by Teresa's words, the speaker wishes to instil the same mystical urge and momentum in the reader's heart to lead him toward similar ecstasy.

In accordance with the reading contract posited by "Letter to the Countess of Denbigh" highlighting the fact that the speaker's enterprise aims to ravish his reader's soul, the recurring use of "I" in a poem meant to be declaimed fosters the reader's identification with the speaker. Even if Crashaw's poems are not meditative exercises *stricto sensu*, they are influenced by sixteenth and seventeenth-century meditations, notably those described by Ignatius of Loyola and François de Sales (Claydon, 1960). The "I" of the poetic voice invites the reader to replicate the speaker's voice in a shared desire for mystical union[11] and the reader seizes on the speaker's words to communicate with the divine.

11 The poetic voice's "I" has a similarity to the malleability of Ignatius of Loyola's "I," which, according to Roland Barthes, enables every reader to take it over (Barthes, 1971: 56).

Central to Crashaw's vision of instruction in *Carmen Deo nostro* is the notion of ontological metamorphosis. Just as the "scholler" may become the "master," the transmission of mystical knowledge infused with divine love deeply affects the soul of the "scholler" / reader as the underlying metaphor of the melting heart beautifully suggests in "Letter to the Countess of Denbigh". The polysemy of "resolved" provides two answers to the riddle of the locked heart illustrating the poem:

> But kill this rebell-word, IRRESOLUTE
> That so, in spite of all this peevish strength
> Of weaknes, she may write RESOLV'D AT LENGTH
> ("Letter to the Countess of Denbigh," 40-42)

The speaker hints at the countess's newly found firm resolution but also echoes Teresa's "resolving SIGH" accompanying her ecstasy ("A Hymn to Sainte Teresa," 117). Reading *Carmen Deo nostro* ideally becomes an experience leading to mystical union with Christ.

Conclusion

The Shepherds, Mary, Magdalene or Teresa of Avila, are depicted as genuine pedagogues capable of passing on the key precepts of abstruse mystical theology through the description of their conversion to Christianity or union with Christ. Their lives and spiritual developments are regarded as models and objects of imitation or influence on the behaviour of others. They are the most eloquent paragons of successfully achieved union with Christ and their experience is regarded as worthy of imitation and as an estimable source of influence on the behaviour of others. The didactic potential of experience is sustained by an emphasis on rhetorical simplicity.

Carmen Deo nostro highlights the filiation of Crashaw from Teresa, Thomas a Kempis and ultimately Dionysius the Areopagite, to draw attention to the significance of mystical mysteries by virtue of union with God. If we may be entitled to use the adjective "didactic" about Crashaw's *Carmen Deo nostro*, the empiricism he endorses is different from what Francis Bacon advocates in the sense that the knowledge the speaker wishes to impart is neither natural, scientific or even theological but wholly spiritual and mystical.

The desired vocal rendering of poems suggests a form of interaction between mystical experience and poetic momentum. Reading a poem aloud is akin to praying aloud and the reader must recite the poems aloud to enable his soul to be ravished and ascend to the heavenly spheres in order to become one with God. *Carmen Deo nostro* is not a theological treaty. However, Crashaw's poems may

be considered vocal prayers darted up to God, and in this respect, their constant emphasis on experience and the transmission of divine love instruct readers by providing them with some practical means of achieving mystical union.

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