
This book on Crashaw fits into the category of studies in comparative literature that explain the phenomenon of a literary figure in one country by the phenomenon of a literary movement in another. Here, an English Metaphysical poet is discussed according to the literary ideals of the Spanish Golden Age. R. V. Young originally drafted this book as a doctoral thesis under Louis Martz' supervision at Yale, and he contends that the Golden's Age's mystics, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, explain Crashaw's mysticism. He affirms, moreover, that the Age's great lyricist, Lope de Vega, is the source for the "gay tone" of Crashaws sacred parodies, and that the Age's other critic and lyricist, Luis de Gongora, was the inspiration for the refined and artificial beauty of Crashaw's verse. Effectively, in spirit if not in body, Crashaw was a Spanish Golden Age poet.

Young's critical point of view is grounded on a number of avowed assumptions. These include that a clearly identifiable, presumably homogeneous "English devotional tradition" existed, from which Crashaw along among contemporary English poets deviated. Another assumption is the "modern Anglo-American culture is more disposed to accept the expression of emotion in private circumstances", and that Crashaw, having in the Renaissance written emotional public verse, is therefore an English Metaphysical poet *manqué* (p. 8). A further assumption is that Renaissance poets who wrote in Latin may be grouped into a coherent body of a "neo-latin" writers no matter what their national origins and convictions were; because of their "neo-latin" homogeneity, the real influence of these poets on Crashaw may be dismissed, as nothing fundamental in him resembles them.

Another guiding principle in Young's book is that Spain was the country to hold the "preeminent role" in the Counter-Reformation. Being a Counter-Reformation poet, Crashaw must therefore conform to "Spanish" ideals as did the Dutchman Reubens who, Young contends, living in Holland under Spanish rule, was perforce one of the three Spanish painters with El Greco and Murillo to whom Mario Praz compares Crashaw (p. 13). Yet another guiding principle behind Young's argument is that sacred parody is more "insistent" and "pervasive" in Crashaw's verse than in the work of any other English poet, including Alabaster's and Donne's sonnet sequences, and Southwell's, Beaumont's, Constable's, Lok's, Brerely's, and Barnes' religious lyrics. Crashaw was not a prophet but a stranger in his own country in virtue of his identity with the Spanish Golden Age and his resulting differences with English writers. Finally, the book defines mysticism as "the intensification of Christian love for God" not differing in essence from ordinary Christian experience (p. 27), and it suggests that "the selection and disposition of poetic elements" are the hallmarks of the baroque as a poetic style (p. 157).

As Young's identification of Crashaw with the Spanish Golden Age progresses, a number of modern critics and scholars, who have explained Crashaw's work in other ways, take a beating. Joan Bennett, H. J. C. Grierson, and Douglas Bush are noted "for similar instances of blank incomprehension erected into dogma" of Crashaw's little degree of intelligence and display of emotion (pp. 175, 18). Furthermore, in one place Bennett's criticism of Crashaw is described as the
factor responsible for her "distaste" of his personality, and in her hands, consequently, Crashaw's poems deteriorate into "pseudo-clinical evidence" in a case study of "masochism" (p.24). Young's language is strong, but so far many people would be sympathetic to his claims. They might even feel such claims overdue.

Unfortunately, however, Young continues to attack strongly, beyond pseudo-psychological criticism onto the trickier ground of historical appreciation. His frontal method tends to spoil. Another modern critic, Robert Adams, in supporting Bennett's claims, for example, is made to conclude implicitly that Crashaw's poetry is "a seething kettle of latent sexual perversion" (p.25). This may be going too far. Later, Ivor Winter's rejection of the pertinence of "sexual imagery to religious imagery" appears "untenable" to Young because he, Winters, "casually dismisses" the old "Christian tradition" of relating them (p. 28). That such a tradition existed has yet to be proven. For her part, Rosemund Tuve seems "mesmerized" by the suggestions of the word "parody", and unable to cope with Crashaw. Young dismisses her because of her inability to recognize the existence of "sacred parody" as opposed to general parody, and her criticism degenerates into a "crudely biographical interpretation of the concept of poetic tension" (pp 29-30). Elsewhere in Young's pages, Robert Petersson is declared "not altogether correct" in his assertions about Crashaw's imaginative creativity at the end of the first poem to Teresa; then, the "speculations" of so valid a critic as Ruth Wallerstein on the musical qualities of Crashaw's poetry appear merely to "restate the problem rather than . . . answer it;" and, what the venerable Austin Warren has to say about Crashaw's changes in style "drives a destructive wedge between literature and religion (or style and content)" (pp. 115, 162). Finally, Young claims the existence of a "general misapprehension" of Crashaw's "Epiphany" poem by modern critics because of their over-emphasis on neo-Platonism.

The reader of Young's book is disconcerted by the isolation into which, critically speaking, he corners not himself but Crashaw. Crashaw, who never left England and who therefore never saw the Continent until the vast majority of his poetry was written and practically all of his life was over, is stripped of his English origins. A Spanish Golden Age influence, identified according to principles of international cultural literary penetration, is made to explain a whole man. And yet, the prosodic parallels between Gongora and Crashaw (p. 168), stick in the reader's memory. To read that "the similar use of long and short lines to pursue a single idea or to unfold a single scene through a series of images—unrestricted by a strict prosodic form—which seem to tumble forth one on top of another", is a pleasant change from reading that Crashaw gives off too much heat. Nevertheless, Richard Crashaw and the Spanish Golden Age tempts the reader to think that Young has followed Warren, Bush, Wallerstein, Petersson and Tuve into what he describes as their errors.

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