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# Word's Worth Shakes Spheres: The Art of Reading between the Alphabets

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**Abstract**

To arrive at the core of any textual comprehension and ensuing interpretation, it is necessary that each and every word in the text is scrutinized with scientific tools. All the possible connotations and collocations even in connection with the etymological or phonological connections to similar languages must be meticulously analyzed for a fuller understanding of any text. This article is such an attempt to comprehend the poem "The Recommendation" by Richard Crashaw, while in the process highlighting the need for such detailed analysis of all texts.

**Keywords**

Reading between the Alphabets; "The Recommendation"; Richard Crashaw

## Introduction

It is expected of a critical literary scholar to get acquainted with the exigencies of analytical criticism – exegetical, analytical, etymological, hermeneutical, historical, paranomosical etc., – before his arriving at a reasonably valid interpretation of any literary text. In spite of the title's obvious allusion to the names of two great 'William's of English Literature, the present study does not purport to make a genealogical, etymological or historical analysis of the names William Shakespeare and William Wordsworth. All the same, apart from serving the purpose of giving a pensive and attractive title, it does connote

an invitation to seek for the worth of each and every word in a literary piece or even to seek for the worth of the 'word' or the 'Logos' (λογος) which could be double-edged and very powerful to the extent of literally shaking spears or spheres. The present study, however, is inspired upon mainly by two reasons.

The first one, is my perusal of an article entitled "Paranomastics: the Name of the poet from Shakespeare to Donne to Glueck and Morgan," which, as a matter of fact, was written by yet another William (Harmon, 1992). Beginning his article in the mode of medieval hermeneutics, and offering a commentary on the Psalm 46, William Harmon quotes the beginning and end of the Psalm from the King James Version of the Bible which was first published in 1611, and then comments on the possibly implied connotation and connection in this Psalm's translation to the name of Shakespeare. He states:

> To repeat: this is Psalm Forty-Six. Its forty-sixth word happens to be "shake". The forty-sixth word from the end (not counting *Selah*) is "spear". It was most probably drafted in 1609 or 1610, when William Shakespeare was either in his forty-sixth year or forty-six years old. . . . (Harmon, 1992, 115).

It is true that Harmon's article is mainly concerned with the possibility of rebus, double *entendre*, pun, quibble and paranomasia in connection with different authors' names. But the connotation possibilities of words suggested in this article of William Harmon induced me to think that all words in a literary piece are prone to have such informative interpretations, on closely analyzing them. As indicated above, the reading of this article acted as a seminal influence for the present study.

The second reason prompting me for this study is one of the sessions with an esteemed Professor Emeritus, Dr. Inge Leimberg, in the English Department of the *Westfälische Wilhelms Universität, Münster,* Germany, under whose friendly guidance I had the occasion of conducting a post-doctoral research program as a guest student. She suggested that any critical research on Poetry should be deemed as something closely akin to the work done by scientists or medical doctors or scientific analysts. Just as they insist on meticulously

examining the minutest details by dint of all the scientific equipments and apparatuses as microscopes and other such tools of operation, so also should a critical scholar be bent on getting to the core of the text by seeking the worth of each word, and to a great extent, by seeking for the worth of each alphabet. An offprint of her article, "The Letter Lost in George Herbert's 'The Jews'," (Leimberg, 1993) was handed over to me as a specimen or model for the methodology to be followed during my research pursuit. In that article, it is established that the crucial letter lost by over-keeping, is "T" by which "Jews and Christians (sinners both) are united in the history of salvation. As in the distant past, it was the mark set on the foreheads of the Jewish remnant, and as it was, in the fullness of time, the Cross of Christ, it will be, in the apocalyptic future, the seal of the elect to be saved by him who never wavered from keeping the covenant of law fulfilled in love" (Leimberg, 320-321). It is this same Professor who insisted on the necessity for a research scholar's possessing at least the following two volumes, as the minimum requirements of working tools, if at all he or she is to become an earnest pursuer of research: *The Oxford English Dictionary* and *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology.* Very much desirably recommended for anyone doing research in the 17th century poetry is also the possession or at least the availability of *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* and dictionaries of other Greco-European Languages. Although most Asian students are at a clear disadvantage in this regard, especially due to the lack of knowledge or familiarity with the European Languages except English, an attempt is here made in the present study to highlight into the 'art of reading between the alphabets,' not ignoring the inter-connections with other languages.

The use of the phrase 'the art of reading between the alphabets' need not be taken as too presumptuous. Almost since the last ten centuries, one is familiar with the English phrase "to read between the lines," which means "to discover a meaning or purpose not obvious or explicitly expressed in a piece of writing" (See *Oxford English Dictionary,* Line, *sb2,* 23a. See also *OED,* read, *v* 16c. When meanings of words are quoted from this Dictionary hereafter, it would be

referred to parenthetically as *OED* followed by the word and its meaning number.). Notably, "line" in the quoted phrase means "a row of written or printed letters," (*OED,* line *sb2,* 23a) and hence it may be argued that the phrase "to read between the lines" would have been expressive enough to convey what is proposed to be spoken of here. All the same, precisely for the sake of double emphasis and better clarity, the present study opts to use the phrase 'reading between the alphabets'. Although this demands meticulously painstaking concentration when properly executed, an earnest critic, as a matter of fact, can elevate it to the level of an 'art' and therefore it is ventured here to talk of it as 'the art of reading between the alphabets.' The present study, however, would not be talking much about the theoretical aspects of this art. Rather, it is purported to show how one could approach and interpret a poem in conglomerated way of mixing the varied analyses (dwelling thereupon on the exegetical, etymological, historical, morphological, metaphorical and allegorical nuances etc.,) by rendering an interpretation of a small poem, "The Recommendation," by Richard Crashaw as an example for case study. In the present interpretation of this poem, special focus is laid on the predominantly implied mercantile metaphors as well.

**The Context of the Poem "The Recommendation"**

In the 1648 edition of *Steps to the Temple: Sacred Poems with the Delights of the Muses,* this poem "The Recommendation" was included along with or as a part of the poem "The Office of the Holy Crosse," with the subheading "The Recommendation of the Preceding Poems," which as hymn-stanzas had the general heading "Upon Our Blessed Saviour's Passion" (Martin, 1927). In the 1652 edition, i.e., *Carmen deo Nostro, Te Decet Hymnus, Sacred Poems . . .,* the poem "The Office of the Holy Crosse" is given elaborately with versicles, responses, hymns, prayers and the antiphona for the service of hour and then finally comes this poem "The Recommendation"(Martin, 263-76). Without forgetting this original position or location of the poem, an attempt is made here in the present study to interpret this small poem as an independent one.

**The Title: The Recommendation**

The word 'recommendation' is not used in the sense of "the action of recommending a person or thing as worthy or desirable" in spite of its being in vogue at the time when Crashaw wrote this poem (See *OED,* recommendation, *sb,* 4. As recorded, this meaning is in currency from the thirteenth century onwards.). A similar French feminine noun '*recommendation*' refers to advice (*conseil*) and recommendation in law and politics (See *The Oxford Hachette French Dictionary,* recommendation and *conseil.* It should be noted that during the year 1645 Crashaw had to reside in Paris in exile, and hence the possibility of Crashaw's being initiated into the French Language cannot be discarded). However, the English noun 'recommendation' which is formed on the verb 'recommend' is in usage from the XVth century onwards (See *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology,* recommend). 'Recommend' comes from the medieval Latin *recommendare* and is formed on 'RE + *commendare* which means 'commend'. The verb 'commend' means 'give in trust or charge' and 'approve conduct or character of,' and comes from the Latin *commendare* which is formed on 'Com-(intensive) + *mandare'* = commit, entrust, and in the earlier middle English the same was expressed by the word 'command' (See *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology,* commend. See also *OED,* commend, *v,* Forms). 'Commend' and 'commendation' with their well-known derivatives in the feudal and ecclesiastical law, definitely imply the sense of 'giving in trust or charge and entrusting oneself to the feudal care' (See *OED,* commend, *v,* 1 a & b, & 7; and commendation, I.1, & II. 7). As the words 'command' and 'commend' are formed on the Latin '*com-*(intensive) + *mandare,* meaning 'to commit into one's hand or charge etc.,'(See *OED,* commend, *v,* Forms), the sense of handing over to one's hand is made explicit when we further split the Latin word '*mandare*' to *manus* + *dare*. The Latin words '*Manus-us'* means 'hand', and '*do, dedi, datum, dare*' means "to confer gratuitously, to give possession of, make a gift of, give" (See *Oxford Latin Dictionary, do,* v. tr. 1), "to give as payment, pay (See *OLD, do* 6a), "to give for a

certain price, sell" (See *OLD, do,* 6b), "to give what is due or demanded, pay debts, tax etc.," (See *OLD, do,* 7), and "to hand over, give as a pledge, surety etc." (See *OLD, do,* 11).

In the light of this etymological note and reading the text of the poem, one is prompted to assert that Crashaw's title "The Recommendation" did have for its meaning the first two senses of the word given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, namely, "the action of recommending oneself to another's remembrance, a message of this nature," (*OED*, recommendation, *sb,* 1) and "the action of recommending or committing to another's care" (*OED,* recommendation, *sb,* 2). A parallel from the 17th century devotional literature has been pointed out by Louis L. Martz, in connection with Crashaw's hymn "To the Name above Every Name," (Martz, Louis L, 1954, Appenidx 1 & notes), which would help us understand the exact meaning of the title "The Recommendation". In his *Arte of Divine Meditation,* Joseph Hall allots and makes 'Recommendation' to be the last and final step of meditation, "wherein the soule doth cheerfully give itselfe and repose itselfe wholly upon her Maker, and Redeemer; committing herselfe to him in all her wayes, submitting herselfe to him in all his wayes"(Martz, Louis L, 336). In so far as the title of the poem "The Recommendation" itself refers to the act of entrusting or committing one's self or a thing to another's hand, care and possession, the title itself introduces the mercantile tenor of the poem. The motivation for this commitment and what sort of 'commerce' is implied therein, would be made clearer in the analysis of the eight lines of the poem.

**The Recommendation**

These Houres, & that which houer's o're my END,
Into thy hands, and hart, lord, I commend.
Take both to Thine Account, that I & mine
In that Hour, & in these, may be all thine.
That as I dedicate my devoutest BREATH
To make a kind of LIFE for my lord's Death,

So from his liuing, & life-giving DEATH,
My dying LIFE may draw a new, & neuer fleeting BREATH. (Martin, 1927. 276).

Evidently, these four couplets are replete with various mercantile metaphors. The action of recommending is expressed in the first two couplets. It can be noted in a closer analysis that even the structure of these four lines suggests a sort of crossing out: 'these hours & that [hour]' of the first line diagonally finishing with 'may be all thine' of the fourth line, and 'In that Hour, & in these' of the fourth line diagonally finishing with 'I commend' of the second line and ultimately with 'my END' of the first line. No one can miss the St. Andrew's cross that can be formed out of this diagonal joining of the phrases. This cross from the structure of the poem becomes significantly relevant as and when we understand the crossing out and balancing the account effected through the transformation of 'that I & mine' of the third line becoming 'may be all thine' in the fourth line. Such a 'communion' is already hinted at when we think of 'end' in the first line, and 'lord, I commend' of the second line. The word 'commend' can be further split into 'come' and 'end' implying the sense of one's coming and getting mingled with the end. Moreover, the whole atmosphere of the word combination using 'hours' and 'houers [hovers]' suggestively leads one to the forming of 'ours' to make the communion fully implicative.

It should be admitted that, the content of the first four lines of the poem undoubtedly leads one to the last part of the most popularly used Catholic Prayer besides the Lord's Prayer [Our Father], viz., 'The Hail Mary'. The second part of this prayer, viz., "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death had been only a later addition by the Catholics to the popular prayer. But during the life time of Crashaw this complete "Hail Mary" was already a popular prayer. Although Crashaw was an Anglican in the former years of his life, the order issued by Pope Pius V in 1568 that this prayer should be used daily before each canonical hour and after the Compline, (*A Catholic Commentary*, 1951, 59) and Crashaw's using of these lines invite one's special attention. Irrespective of whether Crashaw used these lines in accordance with the papal instruction or not, his including it in one small poem after "The Office

of the Holy Crosse" which consists of the prayers for the various hours and his private devotion to Mary the Mother of God, fashioned after the Laudian spirit, suggest one thing for certain. The use of the phrase 'now & in the hour of death' which is included in the repeated versions of 'The Prayer' in the poem "The Office of the Holy Crosse" (See 'The Prayer' repeated in Matines, Prime, The Third, The Sixth, and the Ninth., in L.C. Martin, 1927, pp. 266-72.), and its corroboration in "The Recommendation" is probably influenced by the aforementioned second part of the prayer 'Hail Mary.'

**'These Houres'**

Before we come to an understanding of this phrase a closer look at etymological connection to the Latin language would be very helpful. Two of the relevant meanings of the Latin word '*hora-ae*' in this context are "a twelfth part of the day between sunrise and sunset, . . . an hour" (See *OLD,* hora, 1) and "the duration of human life" (See *OLD,* hora, 7). The word also connotes to the Latin words '*oro, oravi, oratum, orare'* meaning "to pray to, beseech, supplicate" (See *OLD, oro,* 1) and a derivative of it '*ora-ae*' meaning, "prayer". By phonetic similarities, the word also alludes to the Latin word '*aurum-i'* which means "gold as a metal" and "gold as a valuable possession or medium of exchange, treasure, money, riches" (See *OLD, aurum-i, 1 & 2)* and also to the English word 'ore' which means "precious metal" (See *OED,* ore[2], 2). The word 'ore' is also inherently implied or present in a hidden way, in the words "o're" of the first line and "Lord" of the second line. A laconic information of all these possible allusions to the word 'hours', prompts one to consider the word 'hours' in the background of the prayer as well as with regard to the commercial nuances of a precious metal.

In the light of the "Hail Mary" background, however, the phrase 'these houres' refers to the 'present moment' or 'now', the hours at which the prayer or recommendation is to be done and is being done. The ecclesiastical suggestion of the word 'hour' leads one to view them as 'the prayers or offices appointed to be said at the seven stated times of the day allotted to prayer; Canonical Hours (See *OED,* hour, *sb,* 5). 'These houres' can also refer to the span of hours of one's

earthly life, and in Crashaw's case personally, even to the hours he spent for composing these hymns or poems, or to the poetic or artistic hours which Crashaw spent on. Moreover, as can be derived from what L.C. Martin asserts, 'these houres' can also allude to the 'hours' that Crashaw spent in the 'temple of God,' at St. Mary's Church near St. Peter's College, where Crashaw "penned these poems, Stepps for happy soules to climbe heaven by"(Martin, xxiii).

**'that which houer's o're my END'**

Taking into account the precedent 'these hours' the words 'that which . . .' clearly refer to the hour which hovers over one's end. In order to have a better understanding of this 'hour hovering over one's end', it is necessary that we keep in mind the various senses of the words 'hover' and 'end' too. Primarily, the phrase 'my end' may be taken as referring to Crashaw's death. During the 16th & 17th centuries meditation on death had been developed into a brilliantly imaginative exercise especially under the influence of the teachings of *The Imitation of Christ* (where in Book I Chapter 23 Thomas A. Kempis, instructed: "If thou didst well, thou shouldst so behave thyself in every deed, and in every thought, as thou shouldst in this minute die," and "Blessed be the persons that ever have the hour of death before their eyes, and that every day dispose themselves to die") and the tradition of the *Ars Moriendi* (The Art of Dying). So Crashaw probably meant 'death' by the word 'END'. Moreover, in the 'Meditation of Death' death is usually pictured as tarrying, thereby justifying Crashaw's picturing the hour of death as tarrying and hovering in the line 'that which houer's o're my END." A death bed scene described by Robert Persons in *A Christian Directorie* reads as follows: Imagine then . . . and thou lying there alone mute and dumme in most pitiful agonie, expecting from moment to moment, the last stroke of death to be given unto thee" (Quoted by: Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, pp. 136-37.)

The hour of death "remains waiting, it tarries, it lingers, it hesitates before taking action," which meaning of the word 'hover' (See *OED,* hover, *v* 3a) becomes aptly appropriate when we interpret the word 'end' in Crashaw's line to mean

'death'. Just before the hour accomplishment of his Mission on earth, Jesus Christ declared on the Cross: "The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified." And then he prayed: "Now is my soul troubled; . . . Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:23, 27). Revelation also speaks of such tarrying of death: "And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them"(Revelation 9: 6).

**'Into thy hands, and hart, Lord, I commend.'**

The mercantile tone introduced in the title "Recommendation" as we have deemed it in conjunction with the Latin verb *mandare* or *manus+dare* is made more explicit by the phrase 'into thy hands'. The poet seems to be handing over or bartering away himself totally into the hands of the Lord. But the poet doesn't stop there; it is further intensified; he commends himself not only to the hands of the Lord, but also to his heart. The implicitly hidden word 'ear' inside the word 'heart' suggests still another sense. Crashaw implies a commitment of his whole self, his present hours (praying and otherwise) and his final hour of death also to the 'ears' of the Lord, so much so that his commending himself would be heard and accepted by the Lord. The various senses of the word 'heart' (See especially, *OED,* heart, *sb,* 2, 5, 6a, 7, 8, 9a, & 10a) make us view Crashaw's commitment not merely as an exchanging of himself into the possession of the Lord's hands (and 'ears') alone, but also as a complete and integral submission and docility to the Lord. This action of commitment and communion is made more intensely touchy by the sheer progression of 'end-hand-and-commend'.

**'Take Both to Thine Account, that I & mine'**

Crashaw requests the Lord to take 'both to his 'account'. Considering the antecedents for the word 'both', it can primarily refer to 'these hours' and 'that [hour] which houer'so're my End' and secondarily, to 'commending to the hands [and ears]' and 'commending to the h[e]art'. The total commitment of Crashaw is intensified and the mercantile tone of this commitment corroborated by using the words 'Thine Account'. The word 'account' here means "rendering of a reckoning" or 'a reckoning" (See *OED*, account, *sb* 7, 8, & 13). The request to the

Lord for taking 'both' to his 'account' is intended for an effective exchange of possession as is suggestively indicated by the clause of purpose implied in "that I & mine" and is culminated in the last part of the next line "may be all thine", whereby the crossing out is perfectly achieved.

**In that Hour, & in these, may be all thine**

Crashaw's commitment of his present hours which may be his artistic hours, prayerful hours, or hours of his life time as well as the future hours which may hover around him till the last moment of his death and his earnest request to the Lord for accepting 'both' to his 'account' clearly set the mercantile imagery. Crashaw's use of this imagery for describing the Lord's taking 'both' to his 'account' can be better understood if we consider it in the background of Crashaw's combination of the imagery of writing which overlaps with two mercantile images as can be seen in his poem "Charitas Nimia or The Dear Bargain".

In the poem mentioned above, in between the explicit mercantile metaphors in the lines "If my base lust,/Bargain'd with Death & well beseeming dust," (ll. 55-56) and "Why should his unstained brest make good/ . . . How dearly thou hast payd for me" (61-64), the quartet of lines 57 to 60 shows Crashaw's ingenious combination of them by a metaphor of writing:

> Why should the white
> Lamb's bosom write
> The purple name
> Of my sin's shame? (57-60).

Notice how the lines "the white/ Lamb's bosom write" alludes to the writing in the Book of Life as can be seen from Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; & 20:12 in general and more precisely to the writing of the Lamb's Book of Life:

> And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

Taken along with the two structuring mercantile metaphors which come before and after this quartet of writing metaphor in Crashaw's poem, the Lamb's

writing in the Book of Life projects the Book of Life itself as a 'ledger book' wherein a merchant is used to keep his accounts. The word 'account' is used attributively in combination with 'book' and 'accountbook' meant "a book prepared for the keeping of accounts" (See *OED*, account *sb* 17). In the poem "The Recommendation" Crashaw requests the Lord to take 'both' to His account and to take possession of whatever belonged to him [Crashaw] and make it His own: "Take Both to Thine Account, that I & mine/ In that Hour, & in these, may be all thine." This commitment is doubtlessly identified with the commercial transference of bartering of whatever is 'mine' to 'thine'.

**That as I dedicate my deuoutest BREATH**

The verb 'dedicate' is formed on Latin *dedicat,* which is the past participle third person singular of the verb '*dedicare*'. The verb *dedicare* is a combination of *de* + *dicare,* or a weak verb in combination with *dic* of the Latin verb *dicere* = to say. Hence, apart from the meanings, "to devote (to the Deity or to a sacred person or purpose) with solemn rites, to surrender, set apart, and consecrate to sacred uses" (See *OED,* dedicate, *v,* Ia), and "to give up earnestly, seriously, or wholly, to a particular person or specific purpose" (See *OED,* dedicate, *v,* 2), the verb 'dedicate' connotes also to the verb 'dictate' which too is formed on the Latin verb *dicere* = to say. The verb 'dictate', however, implies a sense of authoritative command (See *OED,* dictate, *v,* 2) in express terms. Combining the meanings of both 'dedicate' and 'dictate', the adverbial clause of purpose introduced in this line becomes more intensively significant. Not only does Crashaw dedicate or devote or consecrate his 'breath', but he also 'dictates' his breath, simulating an act of 'creation'. More of this would be clearer when we analyze the next line of the poem. Crashaw dedicates and dictates, devotes, recommends and gives his devoutest breath in order to "make [create] a kind of life for my Lord's death", as is clear from it.

Before we come to that line a little more discussion on "my devoutest BREATH" is essential. Together with the respiratory activity suggested by 'breath' (See *OED* breath *sb* 3b, "generally: the air received into and expelled from the

lungs in the act of respiration. This is now the main sense, which colours all others," and 5 a, "The faculty or action of breathing, respiration. Hence breathing existence, spirit, life;" and 6, "An act of breathing, a single respiration". ) the word 'breath' should also be considered against the background of the Bible and Christian theological traditions in order to get a full grasp of its significance in the present poem.

*The Encyclopedia of Religion* brings out a study on 'Breath & Breathing' in the background of various religions. In the biblical views, however, the role of breath rests on the concepts entitled *ruah, neshamah, nefesh, psuche,* and *pneuma.* Of all these, *nefesh* and *psuche* directly refer to the "individual, the person or I."(Findly, Ellison Banks. 1987, 303). But, more important for the present study is the explanation of the concept '*ruah*':

> The Hebrew term *ruah* means 'breath, wind' or 'spirit'. As a concept of nature, it refers to the winds of the four directions, as well as to the wind of heaven. For humans as a species, *ruah* is a general principle, covering such things as the physical breath that issues from the mouth and nostrils, words carried forth on this breath, animated emotions, . . . and occasionally, mental activity and moral character. *Ruah* is also the spirit in man that gives him life; because this spirit is created and preserved by God, it is thus understood to be the God's spirit (the *ruah elohim* of Genesis 1:2).(Ibid.)

The senses of 'speech' (words carried forth on this breath), 'spirit', and 'life' have been adapted in the English language too with regard to the word 'breath', but the biblical source, however, is not pointed out (See *OED*, breath *sb* 5 a & 9 a transf.: "Whisper, utterance, articulate sound, speech; judgment or will expressed in words."). But Crashaw having been a theologian and priest knowing Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages, at least to the extent of being capable "to translate a book of *Iliad* and the first forty five Psalms from the Apollinarius' edition of the Hebrew," might not have missed the possible connection of Hebrew *ruah* with the English word 'breath'. On 2 October 1631 Crashaw was elected to

a Greek Scholarship under the provisions of the Watt Foundations, for which these were the minimum qualifications of the candidate. (See: Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (1939; rpt. Ann Arbor Books, 1957, p. 22. See also: Paul A. Parish, *Richard Crashaw* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980, p.22) .Thus Crashaw's line implicates that he dedicates his respiratory activity of breathing, his life and spirit, his words, utterance, judgment and will. Moreover, the possibility of Crashaw's having had in mind the respiratory techniques similar to those used in the Indian *Yōga* and which was adopted in the Christian tradition of "hesychasm" in connection with the "Jesus Prayer", also should be explored. As the explanation given by *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* 'hesychasm' is:

> A type of prayer in Eastern Christianity based on a control of physical faculties and a concentration on the Jesus Prayer to achieve peace of soul and union with God. . . .
>
> The traditional breath control that begins hesychastic contemplation is used like *prānāyāma,* to prepare for mental prayer, that is, to bring about a 'return of the mind' . . . all the while ceaselessly repeating the Jesus Prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me!' This exercise prepares one for the attainment of absolute quietude of the soul and for the experience of divine light (Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol II, 308)..

It is true that probably no historical evidence can be produced to support this view view of Crashaw's relationship to the hesychastic tradition. Yet, the possibility of Crashaw who wanted to partake in St. Teresa of Avila's mystical way, having come across with the hesychastic tradition and the Jesus Prayer, cannot be completely ruled out as something historically impossible. As *The Encyclopedia of Religion* records: "Although the earliest descriptions of the hesychastic method of contemplation go back at least to the fifth century to John of Jerusalem, the earliest datable combination of the Jesus Prayer with

respiratory techniques is in the writings of Nikephoros the Solitary(fl. 1260)" (See Volume II, p. 308).

Moreover, Crashaw did have a predilection for the Name of Christ as revealed in many lines of his poem "To the Name Above Every Name, the Name of Jesus". Consider, for example:

SWEET NAME, in Thy each Syllable
A Thousand Blest ARABIAS dwell;
A Thousand Hills of Frankincense;
Mountains of Myrrh, & Beds of Spices,
And ten Thousand PARADISES
The soul that tasts thee takes from thence (183-87).

Probably due to this predilection for the name of Jesus, Crashaw connected his 'breath' with the Jesus Prayer and intended this breath to be a 'prayerful breath' as is evident from its being qualified with the superlative adjective 'devoutest'. This also suggestively corroborates the interpretation of this line in the light of the dedication of the Eucharistic Prayer. This 'devoutest breath' is identical with the "mindfull, mystick breath" occurring in his poem "Lauda Sion Salvatorum. The Hymn for the Bl. Sacrament":

But lest THAT dy too, we are bid
Euer to doe what he once did.
And by a mindfull, mystick breath
That we may lieu, reuiue his DEATH (25-28).

The devoutest breath of Crashaw, when interpreted as the breath in the Eucharistic Prayer, is for the purpose of our living by reenacting the death of Christ in the Eucharist. The whole set of new meanings would be more clear with the last three lines of "The Recommendation".

**To make a kind of LIFE for my lord's DEATH**

Crashaw dedicates, dictates, devotes and recommends his 'devoutest breath', his respirations, prayers and especially the Eucharistic Prayer, inviting the Lord Jesus to live in the Eucharist and thus in the World. Speaking in the light of mercantile metaphors, 'this making a kind of life for the Lord's death' is

the first gain which Crashaw attains through his commitment or dedication of the devoutest breath. At the same time, by making a kind of life for the lord's death, by reenacting this life in the Eucharist, Crashaw, in turn, gains his own Breath or Life, which is the second part of the gain which Crashaw attains. This is achieved by participating in the 'Bountifull Bread' described in his poem "The Hymne of Sainte Thomas in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament":

O dear memorial of that Death
Which liues still, & allowes vs breath!
Rich, Royall food! Bountifull BREAD! (37-39).

On the one hand, as and when Christ's life and death are resuscitated in the Eucharist it is tantamount to 'making a kind of life for my lord's death'; on the other hand, by dint of dedicating the devoutest breath of the Eucharistic Prayer and receiving from the 'bountiful bread', Crashaw himself gains Life. This interconnected activity also refers to the meaning of Christian Life as a participation in the Paschal Mystery – the Passion, Death and Resurrection – of Jesus Christ. As an extension of Christ himself, the Christian becomes another Christ. One's transformation into being another Christ (*Alter Christus)* in the world, definitely makes a 'kind of life' for the Lord's death.

Elsewhere also Crashaw has made such a prayer highlighting his commitment to the Lord's death:

O faithful friend
Of me & of my end!
Fold up my life in loue; and lay't beneath
My dear lord's vitall death ("Sancta Maria Dolorum" 115-18).

In fact, these lines constitute a prayer made to Mary, Mother of Sorrows. But this prayer to Mary lead us to the meaning of the Christian's participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, by partaking in his death and resurrection and thus making a 'kind of life' for the lord's death. These four lines from "Sancta Maria Dolorum" lead us also to the idea included in the first four lines of "The Recommendation" and to what is being recommended or committed in them.

**So from his liuing, & life-giuing DEATH,**

**My dying LIFE may draw a new, & neuer fleeting BREATH.**

The allusion to Christ's buying back of the mankind through his ransoming and redemptive death as well as to the Eucharist gets intensified in these two final lines of the poem. But it also pronounces the net-result of the small prayer-poem in terms of commercial transaction. "His living and life-giving death' refers on the first hand to the earthly life and his ransoming death on the cross; on the other hand it alludes to the resuscitation of his living, his passion and death as reenacted through the Eucharist. Getting a parallel from another poem of Crashaw's, "Lauda Sion Salvatorum" (line 9) one can easily identical nature of "his liuing & life-giuing death' with "the liuing & life-giuing bread" of that poem. In spite of all its bizarre nature, Christ's death on the cross gets transformed as something, which is 'life-giving'. So this life-giving death becomes something eatable. Crashaw has very ingeniously corroborated this by the use of the word 'eat' implicitly in the final words of all the last four lines of "The Recommendation": breath, death, death, and breath. In the last line it is doubled up by adding up the 'eat' sound in 'fleeting' and making it a 'fleeting breath'. A progression of breath to death, eating (bread) and the fleeting breath is implied here. This is further confirmed when we consider the serial of words 'recommendation', 'end' and 'commend' in association with the Latin verb *mendere,* which means, 'to eat'.

Just as in the first four lines of the poem which is described above, still another crossing out is effected in the final two lines also. Joining 'living' with 'never fleeting BREATH' as well as 'death' with 'dying life' diagonally with each other another St. Andrew's Cross is effected. Syntactically speaking, a crossing out of the account, or bringing it to an end, is achieved here not only through the meaning of the lines, but also by means of the structure of the poem. Yet, it does not end there, as the last two lines specify the purpose of the recommendation.

The 'dying life' with regard to Crashaw could be identical with the loosing of one's life or sacrificing one's life for the sake of one's love of Christ. This is

described in theological tradition as 'dying to the self' or 'dying to the world' as is derived from the theology of St. Paul the Apostle's verse: "As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed" (II Corinthians 6:9).

Exploring further, we may forget for a moment the oxymoron expressed in 'dying life' and concentrate on the word 'life' in relation with the participial adjective formed on the word 'dye' instead of on 'die'. Then, 'dy[e]ing life' of Crashaw clearly refers to the artistic hours and life of Crashaw. This argument becomes justifiable as Crashaw himself suggests implicitly that this 'dying life' may 'draw' something. Adding up his artistic hours together with the self-mortifying hours in the life of Crashaw he commits the artistic hours also together with his life in the poem "The Recommendation". In and through this recommendation, he is drawing a 'new, & never fleeting breath'.

Apart from this artistic sense of the word 'draw', at least two more meanings of it should be considered as relevant in the context of the present line: "to take in (air etc.,) into the lungs; to breathe, inhale" (See *OED,* draw, *v,* 23 a) and "to bring about as a result, cause to follow as a consequence, entail, induce, bring on" (See *OED,* draw, *v,* 30). Through the recommendation Crashaw wishes that his 'dying life' may draw or inhale a new and never fleeting breath; he wishes that his 'dy[e]ing life' may bring on a never fleeting breath (touch of brush). This poetic sense of his life is further established when we consider the Latin word for 'draw', namely, *haurīre.* Although there is no etymological connections between 'draw' and '*haurīre,* an analysis of this word in the context of the present poem becomes befitting due to the phonemic resemblance of *haurīre* to 'hours' of which a recommendation is made in the poem. The Latin verb *hauri - haurīi – haurītum – haurīre* means "to draw (water etc.,); scoop up" (See *OLD,* haurire, 1), "to draw, derive from a source" (See *OLD,* haurire, 1 c) and is used in figurative phrases especially with reference to poetic inspiration (See *OLD,* haurire, 1 b). Another meaning of this Latin verb *haurīre,* "to drink in with the mind or senses, have one's full of, to experience to the full, imbibe deeply" (See *OLD,* haurire, 6

& 6 b), brings us back to the commercial imagery connected with 'eating' of the never fleeting breath, that is the Bread of the Eucharist. It should be noted well that by adding the phrase 'never fleeting' before the word 'breath', Crashaw positively eschews its sense of "the type of things unsubstantial, volatile or fleeting" (See *OED,* breath, *sb,* 3 d). Crashaw is not talking of an unsubstantial and fleeting breath, but of a substantial breath or everlasting life, which can be had to the full from the Lord's living and life-giving death that is the Eucharistic Bread.

**Conclusion**

It is for gaining this net-profit, namely, the Salvation or the Everlasting and Eternal Life that is nurtured by the new and never fleeting breath and bread of the Eucharist, that Crashaw makes the recommendation of his present hours and future hours, of his human, religiously devout as well as artistic or poetic life. What is produced by and through this recommendation is something eatable as far as it refers to the Eucharistic Bread bringing out the eternal life or the never fleeting breath. A sort of transposing between life and death, and death and life is aimed at and masterfully achieved in Crashaw's poem. This achievement is extended also to the syntax of the poem, by interchanging "these hours & that" in the first four lines of the poem, and also by transposing the two oxymorons "living death" and "dying life" in the very last couplet, which also speaks best for the mercantile crossing out of an account.

The above study has been an attempt, as much and as well as I could, to highlight into the praxis of the 'art of reading between the alphabets' taking the poem "The Recommendation" as a sample and starting point. The possibility of arriving at more and varied nuances of this poem by quite another study, probably by one who is more conversant with more European Languages, is not at all excluded. By reading any piece of literature again and again, interlinking it with words of as many languages as one knows, would enhance the merit of one's interpretations, remarkably. Making a mastery of such an art of reading between the alphabets is of paramount importance, for each and every word,

each and every letter or alphabet, is multi-edged. The worth of each and every word, each and every alphabet, can definitely shake the spheres.

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