

Little Gidding and its devotional settings: On rereading the importance of the Crashaw's foundation of the canonical ways of devotion in 17th century England.

Mr. Shantanu Siuli

*Assistant Professor & **Ph.D. Research Scholar

*Department of English,

ICFAI University, Tripura

Kamalghat, Agartala, India-799210

**Seacom Skills University

Birbhum, West Bengal, India

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to give some ideas about the Little Gidding and also investigate whether it bears any significant role in influencing Richard Crashaw's creative and imaginative faculty to explicate the divine thoughts in his works. It further discusses the background of the foregrounding of Crashaw's religious sensibility with a new orthodox that has acquainted us with the nonconventional pattern of the evangelical outlook of the England society, and how Little Gidding was established and incorporated and to what significant purposes are also discussed, to its truest belief and observation and investigation, in this paper to vivify a new vistas of the religious community of Crashaw's time.

Key notes:

Little Gidding, Ferrar community, fundamentals of the motto of the Little Gidding, life-style of Little Gidding.

Introduction:

Before entering to the said discussion further let us have a look on the background of the art and the life of the Gidding as well as of Crashaw sincerely so that we may be able to have some pungent ideas about the foundation of the canonical ways of the 17th century devotion of the England, invigorating us to objectify the general tendencies and the propositions of the real fact behind the aesthetic appeals of these place as well as of this most renowned character of the most dichotomous genre of the 17th century. The English church, as we know very well, of the first half of the seventeenth century found its historically claimed position, as it seems to the most of the researchers, as a balanced and ideal *via media* difficult to explain and maintain. The Church of England was marked by recurring conflicts and deep controversies for nearly about forty years of the century preceding the ascendancy of Puritan and the Commonwealth. The conflict, since the beginning of the seventeenth century, between Anglican and Catholic is in some ways, as it seems so, more easily drawn because it involved two distinct religious and national bodies formally separated and formally committed to different liturgical forms, different doctrines, different conceptions of the priesthood, and, most of the cases, different views of the the supremacy of the Pope. Controversies within the Anglican community are also more difficult to overcome at that time during the beginning of the ascendant of the Parliamentary regime.

Controversies between Puritan and High Churchman involve warring factions that remain members of the same community. Puritanism during this period is thus what Parrish called “**a body of dissident opinion within the established Church, held by men who wanted to jettison the freight of tradition, men more rigidly scripturalists and in terror of Catholic elements**” (15). **The abiding concern of the Puritan mind was that the English church was only partially reformed and that in such a state its practices and beliefs frequently reflected a Roman influence.**

England at that time was a house divided against itself, and the religious and political dissensions which rent the nation, divided the general tendencies and the aesthetic appeals and charms of the age. The “Reformation” which had affected deeply the outlook of the life of the whole population of England, Catholic and Protestant alike, naturally affected poetry. Among the dominant and most supportive issue in the ongoing controversies between the Puritan and the Catholic church people were the Puritan concerns with the reformed and processed purity, inward sanctity, and the absolute priority of faith. The puritan feared the excesses of elaborate clerical garb and expensive ornaments and artifacts within and without the church building. Laud and his followers encouraged uniforms and clerical dress and wanted to decorate the church houses as the centre and embodiment of the importance. If Puritans understood that Laud was tending toward Catholic doctrine and belief, it would not be accepted by the Anglican orthodox.

Discussion:

Crashaw’s years at Peterhouse (1635-43) were no doubt the greatest time of his entire life to flourish the central theme of his writings of the Divine objects and things. Paul A. Parrish¹ declared that “had he been able to stay in such surroundings he would probably have died in the communion of the Anglican church. On him influence of two doctrines raised so deeply. One was the religious community in Little Gidding and the other was the high Anglican and Royalist approaches to life of that society. The community of the Little Gidding was in light in the year of 1626 by Nicholas Ferrar and his mother as the foundational society of religion in Huntingdonshire to establish some devotional settings, consisting of a shepherd’s hut, a small ruined house and a church, to worship God and to nourish religious treatment.

Life at Little Gidding was interesting and controlled too where daily officers were noticed, meals were silent, plain life was living out with simple care throughout the day and night. The devotional life was gradually increasing its impact and ambiance and was hovering the Little Gidding silently. The life of devotion, in fact, was intense and praise demanding. The private devotional life was, at Gidding, made glorious compatible with the pronounced luxury of praising God in the public house of worship. New furniture, colourful curtains, materials for the decoration of the church were sold out rapidly to imbibe the ambiance totally at Little Gidding. The church was converted back from a barn into an elegant testament to the Laudian sympathies of the Ferrars. Peter Peckard, Nicholas Ferrar’s biographer recorded the changes happening at the Little Gidding:

“the pulpit was fixed on the north, and the reading desk over against it, on the south side of the church, and both on the same level; it being thought improper that a higher place should be appointed for preaching, than that which was allotted for prayer. A new font was also provided, the leg, laver, and cover all of brass, handsomely and expensively wrought and carved; with a larger brass lectern, or pillar and eagle of brass for the Bible”.

Peckard, later, informs us about the suspicious concerns of both the right and left of the Little Gidding. A few years after Nicholas Ferrar's death in 1637, a treatise was noticed to Parliament entitled "The Arminian Nunnery, or a Brief Description and Relation of the newly elected Monasticall Place called the Arminian Nunnery at Little Gidding" and attacking the papist features of Ferrar's community. While there is no evidence that the inhabitants of the Little Gidding were sympathetic to the Roman church, there is little doubt about the Arminiantheology of the community. Their aim was to serve the public as well as political life of England in the favor of their secluded existence. King Charles of England, for at least two occasions, visited Gidding, and in 1633, he visited short time to examine the condition of the church that was established under the Gidding community. A year later the Ferrars sent *The Concordance* to the king in London, using Laud and Cosin as its carriers. In 1642, Charles rapidly visited Little Gidding, and in 1647 the house, the church and grounds were occupied by the Parliamentary forces to stop the propagandism of the symbolic opposition represented by the community.

Crashaw's most Deluzian and Benjaminian moments are those in which his images appear like Baroque monads, containing an infinite world. In fact, Crashaw's desire of mixing nature and art in celebration of Christ is conventional, where he paints the very earthly kingdom of Christ.

Peckard describes the intimacy that given the religious and political views of each, seems almost inevitable: "several religious persons both in the neighbourhood, and from distant places, attended these watchings: and amongst these the celebrated Mr. Rich. Crashaw, Fellow of Peterhouse, who was very intimate in the family, and frequently came from Cambridge for this purpose, and at his return often watched in Little S. Mary's Church near Peterhouse. One of Crashaw's pupils at Peterhouse was **Ferrar Collet, nephew of Nicholas**, and his association with the Ferrars continued even after his exile from Cambridge. **The only surviving letter from Crashaw is dated February 1644 from Leydon, Holland; it is probably written to John Ferrar, brother of Nicholas, and primarily concerns two other members of the Ferrar community, Ferrar Collet and the mother of Little Gidding, Mary Collet.**

In fact, for a matter of fact, Little Gidding did not cast any special spell over the imaginative and literary faculty of Crashaw, never did Crashaw attend to arrest the ideas of both the political and religious sentiments at Little Gidding.

Conclusion:

Crashaw seems to have been aware of the beauty which lay behind the glittering expressions, and this beauty influenced Crashaw perhaps even more than his self manner and self quest. Gosse noted that Crashaw owes all the basis of his style to Donne and Jonson. His originality is one of treatments of the souls. Crashaw, in his own sense of humour, is so unique as to create a special world of devotion to fabricate the new image of the God to address himself for the first time of the natural recesses of soul. It would scarcely be fair and bold to announce that Crashaw was the first poet who allowed himself to use a splendid and meaningful phrase. His style has hectic and pure beauties that delight us to the paragon of the divine light. We can describe him in negatives, reminding us of the past moments in the light of the present and thus helps us to mingle the present experience with past actions. He is unequal too in his style, but resolute in sincerity and passion. His artistic temperament felt the charm of church music and architecture, and his ardent disposition responded to flourish the divine light brilliantly. If Herbert is sensitive and sincere and Vaughan in nature, it is Crashaw who can best be described, for his artistic impulses and thorough creed of nature, as a more ardent and temperate to be resolute to his

lyrical genius. In fact, he is more passionate and complex than that of Herbert and of Vaughan. He is sincere, simple and natural and plain in character, and his thoughts are akin to Wordsworth's.

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¹ Paul A. Parrish is an Associate Professor of English at Texas A&M University. He received his B.A. in English from Abilene Christian University in 1966 and in 1968 he received his M.A. degree from University of Kansas. He obtained his PhD in 1971 from Rice University on the Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Literature, completing dissertation on John Donne's two *Anniversary Poems*. In 1977 Winthrop Publishers published his anthology of literature entitled *Celebration: Introduction to Literature*.

