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Roger Crab and the Rhetoric of Reclusion

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Roger Crab and the Rhetoric of Reclusion

By: Rory Tanner

Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies,
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Abstract

Prophet, pamphleteer, and hermit, Roger Crab (c.1616-1680) stands out from the sectarian tumult of mid-seventeenth century London as a zealous religious independent and a noteworthy oppositional figure. This study describes Crab's brief publication career as shaping a "rhetoric of reclusion," identifying in his work the distinct patterns of self-representation intended to free a purportedly divine message from the damaging influences of printers and booksellers, hireling ministers, and even the authorial self. Crab writes against the untoward mediation of his own text, but also against such interference with other sacred text. Beyond reclusion, the hermit's task proves one of reclamation. He seeks through publication and public attestation to reclaim the word of God from wayward church interpretation and from sectarian misappropriation.

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Conventions & Acknowledgments

“Reader, this is to let the understand...”

Dagon's-Downfall

Outdated spellings encountered in the seventeenth-century texts quoted here have not been modernized, although outdated characters have been – I have replaced *f* with *s*, *VV* with *W*, and so on. All reproductions of seventeenth-century publications included here originate from document scans made available through Early English Books Online (EEBO).

I remain deeply indebted to Professor Nicholas von Maltzahn for his patient direction over the course of this project, and am grateful too for the fellowship of friends and family, who, during my pursuit of the hermit, prevented me from becoming one myself.

Abbreviations

- DD Roger Crab, *Dagon's-Downfall; or, The great Idol Digged up Root and Branch*. (London, 1657)
- ODNB *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
- EH Roger Crab, *The English Hermite, or, Wonder of this Age*. (London, 1655)
- FD Francis Jenings, *The Faithful Description of Pure Love in Perfect Peace, Which is the Bond of all Perfections*. (London, 1659)
- GC Roger Crab, *Gentle Correction for The High-flown Backslider: or, A Soft Answer to turn away Strife*. (London, 1659)
- MM Boehme, Jakob. *Mysterium Magnum*. (London, 1654)
- OED *The Oxford English Dictionary*
- TS Roger Crab, *A Tender Salutation: or, The Substance of a Letter given forth by the Rationals, to the Despised Remnant, and Seed of God, in the People called Quakers*. (London, 1659)
- YP *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. Gen. Ed. D. M. Wolfe. 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82)

Introduction

“Great spirits now on earth are sojourning.”

John Keats

The life of Roger Crab (1621? – 1680) reads like the stuff of fiction. He was a giant by the standards of his day at well over six feet tall, and fought for seven years with Cromwell and the Roundheads during England's civil war. By 1649, however, head wounds and political views put an end to his career as a soldier, and Crab was sentenced to death by Cromwell himself. His crime seems to have been Leveller agitation. Although the sentence was not carried out, he received “two years imprisonment... for [his] paines” (EH 4). Upon his release, he set up shop in Chesham as a haberdasher, which sale of head gear was a fitting trade, perhaps, for one whose “skull [had been] cloven to the braine in the late War for the Parliament against the King” (EH 4). Crab came to be one of the town’s most successful tradesmen and also one of its most unusual. Much later report has it that “both day and night [he] was seen praying either behind his counter, or in any other place in which he happened to be” (Wilson, *The Eccentric Mirror* [1806], 46). Perhaps owing to such devotion, Chesham’s hatter remained unsettled: “He appears to have had much of the enthusiast in his disposition, and his love of seclusion served to increase his gloom” (Wilson, 46).

In 1651-2 Crab came to a turning point, which he later described in *The English Hermite, or, Wonder of this AGE* (1655), his first publication:

I shall begin with my self, who have transgressed the
commands of God, and so found guilty of the whole Law,

living in pride, drunkenness, and gluttony, which I upheld by
dissembling and lying, cheating and cozening my Neighbors:
But now *that light which enlighteneth every man that cometh
into the world*, according to *Johns* writing, *hath discovered
the love of God to my understanding*, which causeth me to
with-draw from what I have done... (EH 1-2)

Such inspiration moved Crab to sell his “considerable Estate” (EH, sig. A2^f) and donate much of it to the poor, in keeping with the scriptural injunction found in the gospel of Mark (10:21) that he would later cite as foundational to his religious beliefs. Despite this generosity, Crab’s departure from Chesham may have been an inglorious one. He dedicates his first publication to Mr. Godbold, a preacher, who informed Crab’s “friends of Chesham, That [he] was a Witch, and was run away, and would never come againe” (EH, sig. A4^v). At least in part Godbold spoke the truth – Crab would not return to his life at Chesham. Following his epiphany, he retreated to Ickenham, some 20 kilometres distant, where he undertook the life of a hermit. There he built a small cottage, where he lived alone, sustained by what food he was able to grow on his “small Roode of ground” (EH, sig. A3^f). He spent his days in prayer and in his garden, where he purportedly experienced inspired visions, and he sometimes visited nearby parishes to debate with preachers there. Crab published twice during these years: *The English Hermite* (1655), and, two years later, *Dagon’s-Downfall; or, The great Idol digged up Root and Branch* (1657).

Crab’s hermit writings constitute the subject of this study, along with two pamphlets that he produced after he left his hermitage: *A Tender Salutation: or, The Substance of a Letter given forth by the Rationals, to the Despised Remnant, and Seed of God, in the*

People called Quakers (1659) and *Gentle Correction for The High-flown Backslider: or, a Soft Answer to turn away Strife* (1659). In addition to these four works, I will discuss his significant contribution to Francis Jenings's *A Faithful Description of Pure Love in perfect Peace, Which is the Bond of all perfections* (1659), a collaboration hitherto unnoted by Crab scholarship. As well as his novel and extraordinary life story, "the English Hermite" leaves much for literary historians to consider. This study is situated in plain sight of Crab as a hermit and eccentric, but more importantly as an author – and a particularly conflicted one at that. Disseminating divine revelation proves no simple task for Crab. Although his pamphlets bear his name in some form or another, the hermit does not view himself as the true creator of the texts he publishes, nor does he embrace the role of author. Others would seek to claim it, however, and by doing so they threaten the hermit's intended message. The printers and booksellers whom he employs stand to jeopardize the unbiased dissemination of his prophetic message by intrusively framing the hermit's text and by adding to it text of their own.

Crab encounters additional challenges in the contemporary marketplace for radical ideas. His pamphlets are not easily differentiated from the scores of sectarian tracts that issued from London's busy presses in the 1640s and 1650s. A clamour of radical dissent had arisen by the time of *The English Hermite's* publication, and even though Crab dismisses it as futile – "We all cry out against many opinions," he writes, "yet every one would have his owne opinion justified" (EH 10) – his work can only be read within that larger context. Although Crab was, in the words of his publisher, "neither for the Levellers, nor Quakers, nor Shakers, nor Ranters" (EH ii), as a religious radical and pamphleteer he remained a participant within an active culture of complaint. His participation within it is

emphasized by the terms he uses, some of which appear in works by fellow-sectarians. Crab's characterization of the church as "whore" was a common refrain in his day, often sung by Levellers and Ranters alike, and his favored images of the garden and spade also appear in the work of other such radicals, as the best-known Ranter Abiezer Coppe, and the famous Digger, Gerrard Winstanley. Much as paratextual constructions of printer and bookseller infringe upon Crab's first pamphlets, the hermit's work is also affected by the "many opinions" offered by fellow sectarians. As a participant in contemporary sectarian discourse, Crab finds his texts in danger of being subsumed by it.

Although London's book trade and its ongoing sectarian debate presented many impediments to the clear, unmediated delivery of Crab's inspired text, he found some remedy in his eremitic undertaking. Through reclusion Crab seeks to overcome these obstacles, in order to present his message just as it first came to him, or so he professes. Crab's reclusion takes many forms, some literal and some more symbolic. It entails a drawing away from the busyness and language of society, but also from the authorial self. Reclusion also, in Crab's case, leads to rhetoric – only after he becomes a hermit does he seek publication. This "rhetoric of reclusion" offers hope to the hermit seeking to circumvent the mediations and paratextual constructions that would influence the composition and reception of his own pamphlets.

It becomes clear that Crab's chief concern is not for his own text. His disdain for mediation reaches well beyond hindrances to his own publications. He also takes issue with the wayward Biblicism of religious independents and clergymen. In Crab's view, scripture suffers beneath the interpretive edifice erected upon it by the persistent re-reading and even re-writing of sacred text undertaken by clergyman and sectarian alike. This proves to the

hermit as alarming as any affront to his own publications. He seeks to redress the problem through his own reading and writing of sacred text.

Although logic may suggest otherwise, the hermit's pursuit of publication does not necessarily conflict with his "love of seclusion." For Crab, the godly hermit is necessarily – and paradoxically – a public figure, an exemplar whose combative, oppositional stance must be seen so that others might believe. A place somewhere between Adam's Eden and John's Patmos, Crab's hermitage provides a site for the genesis of his reclusive, puritan theology and also for the revelation he purportedly receives. However, its occupant must leave it behind, albeit temporarily, for the purposes of the dissemination required by what he understands as a prophetic calling. This dissemination is not only inscribed, but epideictic. Rhetoric, like reclusion, proves a broad term in its application to Crab, and includes various forms of public attestation. The term "rhetoric" in this case is expanded, full-spectrum representation. Crab's private piety, inspired by what he understands to be the hand of God, is made public not only through his printed pamphlets but through his repeated appearances before the courts and through representations of his character by contemporary authors.

Moreover, Crab's rhetoric encompasses his appearance as he is publicly displayed. As a vegetarian, Crab turns his physical body into a symbol of his guiding tenets: the denial of self, and the complete adoption of spiritual values. As a martyr, Crab uses public display as an opportunity to give citizens the chance to "read" his body. By intentionally breaking laws for logical and doctrinal reasons, and embracing the consequences that follow, Crab makes public display a central part of his oppositional discourse, whether he appears emaciated, clapped in irons, publicly beaten, or locked in the stocks. Crab's private piety

ultimately depends upon his status as a public figure, and vice versa.

And yet we find in Crab's printed publications more than a simple discourse of opposition. The hermit's rhetorical aim can also be understood as one of reclamation. Through his rhetoric of reclusion, he writes to resolve wrongful mediation of divine word, and seeks to reclaim the language of Church and God from the liturgical language of the Catholic Church and the Church of England. The hermit's writings against centralized religious discourse and the mediated faith it espoused hinge on deep linguistic change. Crab redefines widely accepted terms, and reinterprets the bible's foundational stories with the intent of revealing the fallacy of church practice. Language itself proves an inadequate vehicle for divine dissemination. Crab's later publications are but brief, and in them he alters accepted language ways that reflects deeper meaning. The hermit's attentions necessarily extend beyond language, however. Before he can reclaim the word of God from the clergyman and sectarian, Crab must reclaim for himself a certain degree of original, Adamic perfection. He achieves this conspicuously through his strict vegetarian diet.

Some degree of academic attention has been paid to Crab's work in recent decades. In his entry on Crab in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Ariel Hessayon culls biographical details from Crab's own works and supplements them with useful archival discoveries to provide a fuller understanding of Crab's life. Hessayon promises a forthcoming study as well. Beyond biography, scholar Rick Bowers provides a broad consideration of Crab's rhetorical career in "Roger Crab: Opposition Hunger Artist in 1650s England" (2003), and considers the trajectory of his publications in relation to the social events of the revolutionary and Reformation eras. In his analysis, the English hermit proves a distinct and noteworthy radical figure of his day. Tristram Stuart devotes a chapter

to Crab in his recent study of the history of vegetarianism, *The Bloodless Revolution* (2006). He emphasizes the great extent to which the hermit's strict diet of herbs and roots informs and even constitutes part of his oppositional discourse.

Crab's name surfaces briefly in other recent publications as, where he is most often introduced on account of his uncommon diet and eremitic way of life. As with Wilson's account in *The Eccentric Mirror* (1806), very seldom do later raconteurs resist the temptation to use Crab as something of a set piece, or an early modern curiosity. Christopher Hill's short piece on Crab neatly places him in among his gallery of radical figures of the day, suggesting that he was the original "mad hatter" upon whom Lewis Carroll based his character of the same name (*Puritanism and Revolution*, 314). It has since been convincingly argued that the use of mercury and other harmful chemicals in the felt-making process likely made such madness a widespread phenomenon among those who practiced the trade (Bowers 108). Crab was not the only, nor the first, mad hatter. Nevertheless, he remains an eccentric figure, and his novelty – so real in his day – still has some spark today.

This novelty drove Crab to publish. His first pamphlet, written in response to his rising public stature, provides an autobiography of sorts, and – more importantly – a justification of his unusual way of life. From outset, Crab makes clear the great extent of his perceived inspiration, and he situates his own views in stark contrast to wayward church practice. The work is explanatory, and also hortatory. Crab's ongoing debates with England's clergy feature prominently in both *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall*. And through such accounts he casts himself among a longer tradition or continuum of exemplars. Crab considers himself a suitable example only because he so diligently follows

other, more suitable examples. In this, he professes unwavering focus. The ideals and ethos that distinguished Crab are motivated by what he refers to as a “single eye”:

*Let us labour for a single eye which maketh the whole body
light; I meane a single heart in single designes, which cannot
stand with linsey-woolsey garments, nor with double tongues,
nor varieties of fancies after meates and drinks*

(EH sig. A4^v)

The hermit is distinguished by his pursuit of singular virtue, which leads him to dismiss even relatively modest accommodations as frivolous. Thus “undone and empty,” the hermit considers himself fully given to “love and zeale” (sig. A4^v). By way of this “single eye,” Crab seeks an understanding of sacred text that remains unhindered by mediators he perceives in the church, in the print marketplace, and in himself.

Crab’s intended singularity invariably leads to public exposure. Such attention seemingly facilitates the hermit’s prophetic project, as his purpose as a worthy exemplar must be realized through public attestation. However, the hermit’s “gazing stock” chiefly lies in the “*straining opinions which he holds*” (EH, sig. A3^v), and not in his uncommon piety. Crab labours to become single, and others recognize him as so – albeit not in the way he intended. More often than not, the hermit’s “singularity” is read as eccentricity instead of devotion, and thus overlooks the weightier matters of his inspired address. Hill humorously acknowledges this dilemma: “Crab was not a rich young man, but he wanted to be perfect. So he sold all he had, and gave it to the poor. Naturally all good Christians thought him mad” (*Puritanism and Revolution* 314). Such is the hermit’s constant struggle, between his self-representation as a pious ascetic and his reception as a misguided

eccentric. This dilemma persists even after his death as he is featured in publications such as *The Eccentric Mirror* – a work billed on its title page as “A faithful Narration of every instance of singularity, Manifested in the Lives and Conduct of Characters who have rendered themselves eminently conspicuous by their Eccentricities.” When framed in such a way, Crab’s conspicuity displaces his prophetic message.

Bowers rightly terms Crab an “oppositional figure” (95) because the hermit proves doubly so. His opposition entails more than censure of church authority, and includes an opposition inherent to his career as a public hermit. Crab proves an intermediary figure, and exploits this capacity in various ways over his career. Hill also notes Crab’s distinct intermediate position, as the English hermit,

looks back to St. Francis of Assisi and those mediaeval ascetics who strove to overcome the world by contracting out of it. But he also looks forward to those Nonconformist radicals who believed that man's life here on earth could be made better, and that the way to control the blind forces which rule our competitive society was through individual self-mastery. (*Puritanism and Revolution* 321)

Defiantly radical yet on the trailing edge of his society, Crab harkens back through his original and lively discourse to past time and teaching. He occupies this medial position through much of his life, and it comes to affect his rhetoric – as a prophetic, guided author, and would-be intermediary between heaven and earth.

Chapter 1 – ‘Wonder of this Age’: Early Days of the Pamphleteering Hermit

“A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.”

The Gospel of Matthew

Roger Crab ended the year 1654 not in his cottage at Ickenham, but in London’s Clerkenwell prison. He found himself there awaiting trial for his censures of the protectorate. This prisoner and prophet had done more than to trade the privacy of his hermitage for that of a gaol, or the austere comfort of one cell for another. Before the English Hermit’s eponymous first pamphlet was printed, its author had already gained some notoriety, of which his imprisonment and trial were apparent side-effects. Crab’s foray into more public life did not mark an end to his eremitism, however. The hermit published carefully, and engaged in public, printed dialogue without jeopardizing his eremitic way of life or foregoing the philosophy behind it. The same principles that inform his critique of the church and provide the impetus for his reclusion also influence his association with London’s printers and booksellers. The hermit held high expectations of the pressman. He describes his own rapport with God as one that necessarily remains unmediated by clergymen’s devices. Likewise, he wishes his own texts to be reproduced with no undue outside influence.

Crab left Clerkenwell before long and first published soon thereafter. The London newsletter *A Perfect Account* (No. 210, 10-16 January 1655) mentions Crab’s trial and confirms that he was not convicted, having “insisted much upon the Freedome of the Creature, and cleered himself of that particular, wherein they charged him with a reflection

upon the Government, by notion of Tyranny.” The news writer then darkly comments that he “shall not make any construction of this at present; but conclude, that much might be said, was the time convenient” (1680). What was left unsaid in the *Account*? At the very least, we can speculate that Crab, with his unusual ways, was at this time busy capturing the imagination of many a Londoner. “*This Roger Crab is well known to many in this City and the Country,*” his bookseller acknowledges (EH, sig. A3^r), and further reading proves that during the 1640s and -50s the hermit had gained some measure of publicity. Crab himself acknowledges this in *The English Hermite*, giving it as the ostensible reason why he pursues publication in the first place: “Seeing I am become a gazing stock to the Nation,” he writes, “& a wonderment to many friends in this my reserved life, I shall therefor indite a few lines” (1). Not oblivious to the diverse opinions concerning his character that were circulating at the time, Crab thought it best to offer an account of his own.

The public recognition that Crab obtained by the mid-1650s was some years in the making. One of the earliest mentions of Crab appears nearly a decade previously, in Thomas Edwards’ massive heresiography, *Gangraena* (1646). Here, Crab is described as

a Dipper and a Preacher, who vents strange doctrines against the Immortality of the soul, etc. This man was complained of this summer to the Lord Mayor, for speaking words against the King, as that it was better to have a golden Calfe or an Asse set up, with such kind of expressions, then to have a King over them... (qtd. in Hessayon, “Crab, Roger [c.1616–1680]”, DNB)

Here, Crab’s politics appear enfolded in his religious belief. While freely baptizing and

preaching, he also spread his anti-Royalist, parliamentary views in so abrasive a manner that he elicited official complaint. Additional references to Crab surface in early 1655, which – although diverse in opinion – all complement the aforementioned issue of *A Perfect Account* in which Crab’s trial was front-page news (Hopton 4). *Certain Passages of Every days Intelligence* (No. 79, 19-26 January 1655) describes Crab as leading “the strickest life of a Hermet that we have heard of” (164), while the *Mercurius Fumigosis* (No. 37, 7-14 February 1655) speculates that he “had a Sow to his Valentine, and went presently and brought her a *Bunch of Carrets*.” The *Fumigosis* also offers a brief, unflattering take on Crab in verse:

Like churlish Nabals surfeiting with excess,
Shortens their lives with their own wickedness:
Which makes brave Poets almost thought Divine,
To live like Crab on roots, and with smoak dine. (296)

In dark comment on Crab’s own emphatic Biblicism, and perhaps anticipating the author’s construction of his adversaries as Nabals (1 Sam 25), the satirist adopts a similar tone for his critique of the English Hermit. But whatever their intent, references in periodicals such as these added to Crab’s growing reputation as a self-proclaimed prophet, a strict vegetarian, and – above all – a most eccentric figure.

Crab evidently considered public exposure to be useful, despite its apparent complication of the hermit life. He contributed to the development of his reputation through his itinerant pursuits, travelling from one town to the next and disputing with “all Sexes and Ministers in most Counties in England” (EH 1). Moreover, Crab pursues print dissemination, and does so in such a way that demands more direct contact between the

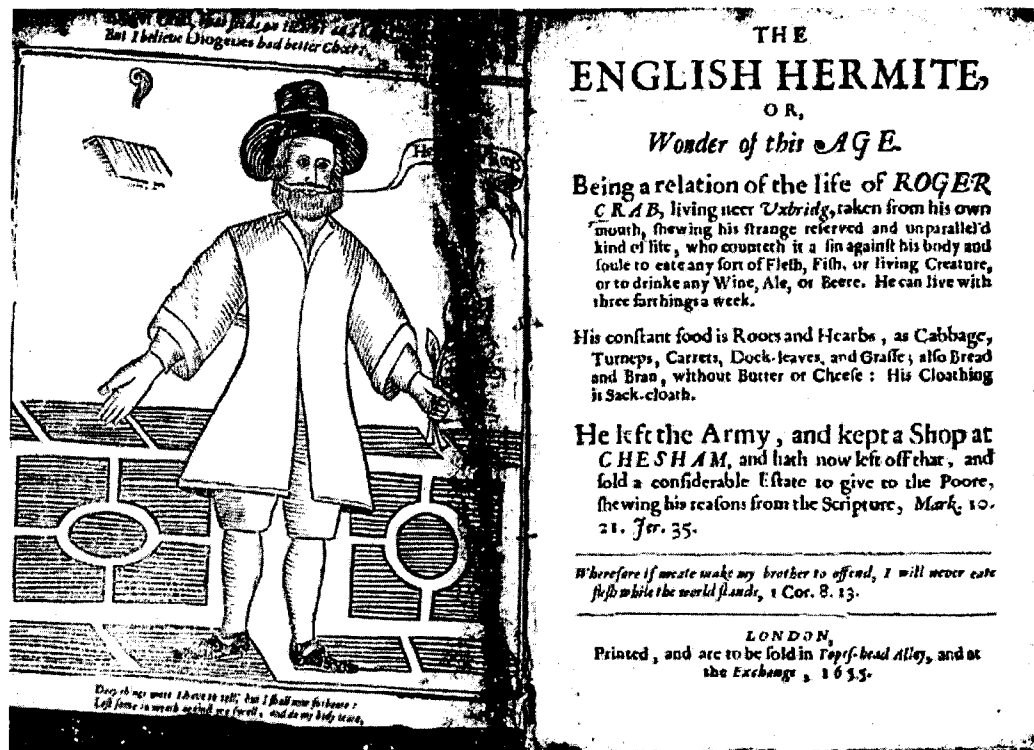
hermit author and the reading public. “Send me word,” he writes in *Dagon’s-Downfall*, “and I shall come” (19). Crab stands “here ready to be tryed by any person or persons whatsoever” (EH 3). The hermit’s increasing notoriety then was no chance thing, but a phenomenon of his own creation. Bowers suggests that Crab not only “endured,” but “encouraged... much in the way of public rebuke and misunderstanding” (95), presumably as a way of drawing attention to his cause. The self-styled “English Hermite” desired to be a public figure as well. In this the independent Crab proves as much a prophet as he does a hermit, raising his own “gazing stock” to aid the spread of his God’s message. The distribution of his first pamphlet depended upon his status as a conspicuous eccentric, and he does much to ensure his presence in the public forum.

Although Crab directly – and at times violently – opposed England’s church through his pamphlets and preaching, such activity was not universally frowned upon in his day. At the time, independent religious groups had much credibility, not least in the eyes of Cromwell. In *A Declaration of His Highness the Lord Protector, upon his actual Dissolution of the Parliament of England, on Monday the 22th of January, 1654 [= 1655]*, he speaks highly of “the Independents,” saying “hee knows them to be godly” (7). And Crab is by no means alone in his dissent. To some readers, *The English Hermite* would have appeared as but the latest in a larger series of sectarian tracts that issued from London’s presses. Many small sects had formed by mid-century, and the English Hermit was but one radical among many. Despite instances of similarity and intersection between Crab and other religious groups of his day, he denies his affiliation with any sect. This is a necessary distinction for Crab, who seeks to distinguish himself within the active contemporary marketplace for radical literature.

Judging from the number of times Crab's name appears in the popular press, his effort met with success. Crab stood out from the larger radical movement of the day, and London's reading public was at least on some level gaining a sense of this "stricktest" of "Hermets." This is due in part to the breadth of Crab's religious, social, and economic critique. His contemporaries found no shortage of reproof there. Beyond his quarrel with the clergy, Crab takes issue with lawmakers, independent sectarians, and even laymen. Crab also criticises the Protectorate, just as he had the monarchy years earlier. The political structure of the Interregnum, once the dust settled after the civil war, proves only marginally different from the preceding monarchy in Crab's view, and he ultimately dismisses the Protectorate's legitimacy, conceding in *The English Hermite* that despite "all our fighting to regulate Government in the old Man, we see it still as bad, if not worse than it was before" (2). Such remarks may have led to Crab's imprisonment in Clerkenwell some two years previously. Yet having "stood with sword in hand against the Highest Powers in England" (DD 27) during the revolutionary war, Crab clearly felt that another form of resistance was in order.

Following on the heels of this publicity, Crab's own inaugural pamphlet, *The English Hermite, or, Wonder of this Age*, was printed. The bookseller and great book collector George Thomason dates its publication on 23 January of 1654/5. The preface to this work reveals some details of Crab's stay in London during the work's production: while his accommodations were for a time at Clerkenwell Prison, upon his release he resided at "the Golden Anchor in white Crosse Street" with Mr. Carter, a glover, and so not remote from the English hermit's previous life as haberdasher. We can infer that the purpose of Crab's extended stay in London during this time was to oversee the release of

The English Hermite. But whom might he have charged with the work's preparation? All of Crab's imprints fail to name their printers. This is characteristic of the clandestine publication that often took place in this period. The printers' desire for anonymity, however, although justifiable given the controversy surrounding their radical author, does not remain impenetrable. Closer scrutiny reveals the likely identity of some of those responsible for printing and selling Crab's works.



Moreover, a deepened understanding of Crab's relationship with his printers and booksellers reveals the extent to which the principles that governed the hermit's search for divine knowledge also governed his dissemination of it in the print marketplace. Changes in Crab's preferred printers and booksellers – he used the services of at least three – resulted from ideological differences that arise between radical pamphleteer and dissenting stationer. The hermit understands that scriptural truths suffer from church interpretation,

and that those who act as mediators or custodians of the divine often defeat the potential for revelation in the common man, thereby doing a great disservice to original sacred text. Crab's concern for his own text proves similar, and he intends that it would not be presented in a way that would encourage misreading. The hermit's rhetoric of reclusion, written with radical intent from the margins of London's civil and religious society, remains in danger of being subsumed by the normative influence of its printer and seller.

The frontispiece and title page of *The English Hermite* present a suggestion of the pamphlet's origin, as well as a likeness of Roger Crab. Although the imprint does not directly indicate the name of the work's printer, it provides one clue: copies are "Printed, and are to be sold in Popes-head Alley, and the Exchange." From this telling address we can suppose that Crab entrusted the printing and selling of his first work to Livewell Chapman, a most active supporter of the dissenting press who kept shop in Popes-head Alley, and his close associate, Matthew Simmons, who is better known as John Milton's printer of choice. Cross-referencing of *The English Hermite* to the larger physical record of the very many contemporary religious publications confirms the identity of the hermit's first printer. A distinctive versal featured in Crab's pamphlet can be traced to earlier publications attributed to Simmons. William Ames's *The saints security, against seducing spirits* (1651), which was printed by "M. Simmons," includes this distinctive woodcut:



(sig. A2^r)

An identical embellishment reappears in *The English Hermite*, although with a changed orientation:



(EH 1)

Stylistically, this versal compares with another used by Simmons. The letter T pictured below appears in *A confession of faith, of several congregations or churches of Christ in London, which are commonly (though unjustly) called Anabaptists* (1651), a work “Printed by M. S. and ... to be sold by ... L. Chapman at the Crowne in Popes-head Alley.” The illuminated letter is comparable to the illuminated S in terms of artistic style and subject matter, and the two versals were likely part of a larger set used by Simmons.



(sig. A4^r)

About Livewell Chapman we know a great deal, and his catalogue of publications contains items similar in scope and purpose to Crab's work. His radical sympathies made him suspect in the eye of the law, and he was frequently brought before the authorities as a result (Hessayon, “Chapman, Livewell [fl. 1643–1665]”, DNB). Nevertheless, Chapman

was by far the busiest bookseller in Popes-head Alley during the mid-1650s, as a search through imprints in those years reveals. For a writer like Milton, even, shifting from his career as civil servant to radical pamphleteer, Chapman was the bookseller of choice for his *Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings from the Church* (1659). Such a pamphlet shares with Crab's work a decidedly critical view of the hireling ministry. Moreover, Milton had in the 1640s worked with the Simmons family to print his tracts. Numerous publications feature imprints linking the Chapman and the Simmons families; *The English Hermite*, "printed... [and] sold in Popes-head Alley, and the Exchange," is another example of a work produced and distributed by the two associates.

While such analysis confirms the compatibility between Crab and the possible printers and sellers of his first work, the historical record contains further suggestion of their identity, and also of the way in which Crab encountered these men to begin with. Crab's relation to these printers and booksellers included a shared fascination with the work of German mystic Jacob Boehme – an author in whom Crab had a growing interest, and who would come to influence Crab's later publications and religious affiliation. Simmons printed many works of the German mystic Jakob Boehme. *Mysterium Magnum* (1654) was one such publication, and Crab's familiarity with it is evident in *A Tender Salutation* and *Gentle Correction*. The hermit then may have first met Simmons not as a prospective author but as an enthusiastic customer.

For the independent, sectarian Crab, the process of publication became a struggle for authorship. Although he had no use for clergy to mediate his reckoning with God, he needed help when he seeks to publish his views. Printers and booksellers functioned doubly as mediators for the English hermit, in one sense through disseminating his text as media,

and in another through mediating Crab's self-representation by tampering with the text in ways that influence the reader's understanding of it. This latter form of mediation proved troublesome for the publishing hermit, as the printer's composition of *The English Hermite* extended well beyond preparing the presses. He also added to the content of the pamphlet. A verse above Crab's portrait on the work's frontispiece, presumably added by the printer or bookseller, reads:

*Roger Crab that feeds on Herbs and Roots is here,
But I believe Diogenes had better Cheer.*

Rara avis in terris.

Here, the printer's paratext preempts the hermit's text. Diogenes, a Greek philosopher, shared Crab's disdain for the traditions of men, and was also a notable grouch. The hermit, then, is judged as an even crabbier fellow than his Greek predecessor. A brief Latin phrase following the printer's couplet confirms the obvious – Crab is indeed a very rare bird.

The printer's choice to emphasize the more obvious aspects of the English Hermit proves a hindrance to his inaugural publication. The pamphlet's paratext encourages a sensationalized, external reading of Crab that neglects subtler aspects of his character and message. A stanza at the foot of Crab's portrait – presumably written by the hermit himself – suggests as much: "*Deep things more I have to tell; but I shall now forbear: Lest some in wrath against me swell, and do my body teare.*" The facing title page features a similar surface-level reading of the hermit, presumably provided by the bookseller. Here, the reader learns about the particulars of Crab's "strange reserved and inparallel'd" existence: "His constant food is Roots and Hearbs," "His Cloathing is Sack-cloath," and "He can live with three farthings a week." Passing reference is made to scriptural citations that Crab deems

relevant, but only after more sensational details are presented. The frontispiece and title page provide at the very best a summation of Crab's "gazing stock," but no real insight into the man behind it.

Once beyond these opening pages, print mediation continues its conflict with the hermit's text. *The English Hermite* begins not with Crab's note "To the Impartial Reader," but instead with a passage titled "The Publisher to the Reader":

Before you come to the Authors own Epistle, and Narration, I shall mention some remarkable passages, which I had from his own mouth, and finde them not mentioned in his writing; and I can assure thee in this Relation is no feigned story, or fable, but thou hast it presented to thy view, as I received it from the Author himself, with all the Verses of his own composing. (sig. A3^r)

In what proves a lengthy preface, the "publisher" nevertheless provides little discussion of the text itself. He prefers to describe the hermit's character, experience, and philosophy. This framing of Crab, however, predisposes readers of the pamphlet to approach it in ways unfavorable to its author. Remarks found in the preface to *The English Hermite* suggest that Crab had good reason to find another printer for his later works. In one place the preface's author dismissively states that Crab "is the more to be admired that he is alone in this opinion of eating, which though it be an error, it is an harmlesse error." The error was not so harmless for one Captain Norwood, who, as the publisher notes, "[followed] *the same poore diet till it cost him his life*" (sig. A3^v) – a fact that Crab himself neglects to mention. Elsewhere, the preface-writer argues against Crab's vegetarianism according to scriptural

proof, stating “*the Apostle saith, That every creature of God is good, if it be received with thankfulness, 1 Tim. 4.4*” (sig. A3^v), and concludes his preface with further reprimand:

I shall no longer detaine the Reader from the Hermits relation;
these things I thought would be most pertinent to impart to
thee, hoping thou wilt make this good use of it, by avoyding
these two Extreames, and walking in the golden meane of true
godliness, which hath the promise of this life, and of that
which is to come. (sig. A4^f)

In these criticisms, the publisher preempts Crab’s work in his own direct appeal to the reader. Surely this troubled the English Hermit, who places such a high value on unmediated text and utterance, and intends his work to be taken seriously. His publisher, however, sees it differently. He considers the story of The English hermit most useful as a cautionary tale, and offers a warning to the reader: “*Felix quam facit alienem pericula cautem*” (sig. A3^v), or “Happy is he who learns from another’s troubles.” Beyond describing Crab’s history and experience, the publisher passes strict judgment on the author and his views, and most likely leaves the “impartial Reader” whom Crab addresses in his own preface a little less so.

Beyond *The English Hermite*’s treacherous preface, even the printer adds to the text in ways unlikely to have pleased the work’s author. Crab’s early lines suffer from the printer’s inclusion of a large, illuminated letter S, already noted above, that may depict, as Stuart views it, “Crab naked, in a compromising position with an unidentified herbivore” (30):



(EH 1)

Although the woodcut, which appears in earlier works printed by Simmons, was not created to honour the hermit, the unsavory image overshadows Crab's grave opening passage. Doubtless it would bring to the reader's mind the unflattering account in *Mercurius Fumigosis* of Crab's beastly valentine, and may indeed have inspired the satirist to begin with – his account appears roughly one month after the publication of *The English Hermite*. Simmons's dubious woodcut also undermines Crab's own condemnation of "a *Sodomite* generation, living now upon *English* ground" (1). Thus, both bookseller and printer have subverted *The English Hermite's* message. Their framing paratext detracts from the gravity of Crab's inspired, prophetic message and instead draws the reader's attention to the hermit's "gazing stock."

Although Crab regains control of his narrative following the publisher's preamble, his work appears to close with another outside contribution. The main text of *The English Hermite* is followed by a brief, halting verse:

If men and Angels do prove silent, than

Why should not I, an inferior man:

Now am I silent, and indite no more,

Pray use no violence then against the poor. (EH 14)

This stanza seems to signal an end to the hermit's writing, and a return to silence. Crab closes the pamphlet much as he began it, citing the higher causes he perceives behind his life's work. Across the page opening, however, the tract continues. Despite statements to the contrary, its author does not appear to remain silent. His simple quatrain promptly gives way to further verses: a full page of poetry provides a second ending to the pamphlet. Yet these verses are quite unlike the brief foregoing stanza. They are written in ballad stanza and in a more elevated tone. References here to "wenching" and wife-pleasing seem out of place in relation to the rest of *The English Hermite*, as does the particular critique of labor relations between tradesmen and gentry. These concluding verses seem inconsistent with Crab's brief stanza on the opposite page, and with lines found in his later publication, *Dagon's-Downfall*, where he "clumsily but feelingly versifies" (Bowers 103). The second conclusion to *The English Hermite* appears in all points seem beyond the poetic style – if not beyond the ability – of the humble hermit.

The final verses reveal their authorship in more than their evident stylistic differences. Apparently foreseeing such skepticism as I offer here, their true author provides a belabored assurance of the poetry's origin. Amid the lengthy poetic afterward, he includes the following verses:

If any would know who is the Author,

Or aske whose lines are these:

I answer, one that drinketh water,

And now a liver at ease.

This assurance, when considered in addition to the publisher's earlier statement that "the Verses" were entirely of "[Crab's] own composing," becomes dubious. The repeated claim

for the verses' legitimacy instills doubt, not confidence; indeed, their true author "doth protest too much." In *The English Hermite*, it appears that Crab's print mediators have not only the first but also the last word, leaving the reader to find the titular hermit somewhere in between.

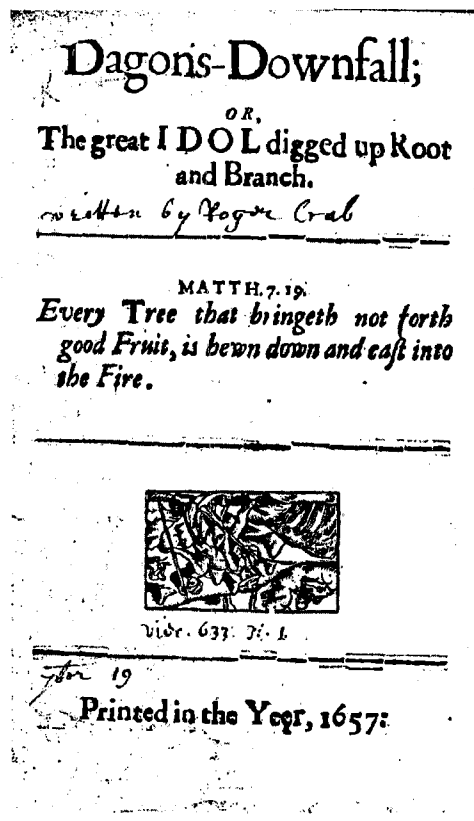
The bookseller's unauthorized supplements to *The English Hermite's* provide further cause for Crab's concern, and not on grounds of offense or pride, but of a perceived assault on sacred text. As Crab writes, "I shall give an account of this my undoing, owning Christ and the Prophets to be exemplary both in prophecy and practising, as farre as God shall give power to any man" (1). Crab's writing is, by his own account, inspired. He goes as far as to ascribe to his work as much divine grace as is humanly possible. As the publisher turns ventriloquist and puts his own words on the hermit's page, he therefore does a disservice not only to the hermit, but also to the higher power that inspires Crab. Unwelcome additions to Crab's "prophecy" betray his prophetic purpose. According to Crab's understanding of sacred text, and his inclusion of *The English Hermite* within that category, the work's bookseller offends not only as an imposter or meddler, but also – and more seriously so – as a blasphemer; he imposes not upon the words of Crab, but upon the word of God.

The hermit's transition from private to public figure proves a difficult one, and not only because of the trials, scourging, and imprisonment he experiences. His work's integrity also suffers, as the publisher's influence jeopardizes the reader's acceptance of Crab's prophetic message. That aside, London's rumours and libelous press confront the hermit at every turn. The dissemination of his purportedly inspired message suffers as a result. Nevertheless, Crab counts not the cost of his publicity, considering it a necessity for

the modern-day prophet. He writes *The English Hermite* to account for his way of life in the face of growing curiosity, but the text is motivated by evangelical requirements as well. Such prophetic dissemination necessarily exceeds the confines of the quiet hermitage. As “the Prophet David... knew that there was a Talent of God hid in a Napkin, or in the Earth within him, which Talent must be raised up or discovered” (DD 13), Crab realizes that his own status as exemplar must itself be realized through public exposure. If righteous examples are to be of any use, he reasons, they must be seen. Likewise, witnesses must be heard. While the life of a hermit provides the way to piety, duty calls that it must thereafter be publicized so that others might learn from it. Such are Crab’s intentions, yet the reality of *The English Hermite* indicates that they go unfulfilled. The inaugural pamphlet is not published on its author’s own terms, and represents a one-sided struggle for authorship that ends with the printer supplanting the publishing hermit.

Yet the problems surrounding Crab’s first print venture did not discourage him from seeking publication thereafter – although it did ensure that he use the services of a different stationer. *Dagon’s-Downfall*, his second work, was published two years after *The English Hermite*. The pamphlet is doubly anonymous; it gives no clear indication of its printer or bookseller, and aside from Thomason’s handwritten note, Crab’s name does not appear on its title page (pictured below). Thomason also makes reference to a previous publication in his inscription “vide 633,” referring to an earlier issue of *A Perfect Account* (No. 24, June 25 – July 2 1651) included in volume 633 of his collection, which describes the unfortunate fall from grace of one “Capt. *Robert Norwood*” (193). We can read into Thomason’s reference that Crab’s association with Norwood, as well as that poor man’s fate, were not forgotten, even years after the events had unfolded. At least one early-modern reader

lastingly associated the two men.



Book-historical evidence provides conclusive connection between *Dagon's-Downfall* and its printer, although it is more circuitous than the evidence connecting Crab and Simmons. Like *The English Hermite*, *Dagon's-Downfall* contains some suggestion of its printer's identity. The work appears in volume 925 of the Thomason collection alongside many works sold by Giles Calvert, an ardent supporter of religious independents and a publisher of many radical tracts (Hessayon, "Calvert, Giles [bap. 1612, d. 1663]", *ODNB*). The bookseller, like the hermit, was considered by some to be at or beyond the limit of acceptable religious heterodoxy. In *Vindicae literarum* (1654), Thomas Hall condemns Calvert's shop as "That forge of the Devill, from whence so many blasphemous, lying,

scandalous Pamphlets ... have spread over the Land, to the great dishonour of the Nation” (215, quoted in Hessayon, “Calvert, Giles [bap.1612, d. 1663]”, *ODNB*). Such strict censure failed to deter the publishing prophet from using Calvert’s services. Distinctive woodcuts and versals featured in *Dagon’s-Downfall*, such as the letter T pictured below, can be traced to Calvert, who proves a most likely publisher for the hermit’s second work:



(DD 1)

This same versal begins the opening line of *A true narrative of the examination, tryall, and sufferings of James Nayler*, also published in 1657. Although this pamphlet does not disclose its printer or bookseller, many of Nayler’s works were printed by Calvert. Further investigation links *A true narrative* to Calvert, as an ornate woodcut featured in the work is reproduced in works clearly attributed to Calvert, such as James Nayler’s *A true discoverie of faith* (1655):



(1)

The recurrence of such specific print artefacts confirms that Calvert issued Nayler’s *A true narrative* and, by extension, Crab’s *Dagon’s-Downfall*. Moreover, Calvert, like Simmons,

supported the reprinting of certain works by Jacob Boehme, a circumstance which may have initially led to Crab's acquaintance. He also sold works similar in scope and purpose to the hermit's. Upon its release in 1657, *Dagon's-Downfall* may have been sold alongside such works as George Weare's *The doctrins & principles of the priests of Scotland, contrary to the doctrine of Christ and the apostles* (1657), or with Thomas Speed's *The guilty-covered clergy-man unveiled* (1657).

Giles Calvert also published several tracts penned by members of the Leveller sect – but whether Crab can be counted among their number remains in dispute. Crab's biographers provide much speculation about his political affiliation during the 1640s, and most maintain that he was part of the Leveller agitation of 1647-9. Crab lost his commission during the time of the agitation, and he was later referred to in *A Perfect Account* as an "agitator" (No. 210, 10-16 January, 1655), the common term for Leveller activists at the time. Two passages in *The English Hermite* make reference to the Levellers. In the first, the work's publisher claims that Crab "*is neither for the Levellers, nor Quakers, nor Shakers, nor Ranters, but above Ordinances*" (sig. A3^v). Some biographers take this statement at face value, and maintain that Crab was not for any sect, although the publisher of *The English Hermite* may have made such a claim to distance the pamphlet's author from the Levellers so as not to limit his readership (Stuart 520, no. 3). The Levellers themselves did the same thing, owing to the negative connotations that the word accumulated (Sharp xvi). In *The English Hermite*'s second reference to the Levellers, Crab laments,

Surely if John the Baptist should come forth againe, and call
himself *Leveller*, and take such food as the wilderness

yielded, and such cloathing, and Preach up his former
Doctrine, *He that had two coats should give away one of
them, and he that hath food should doe likewise*; How
scornfully would our proud Gentlemen and Gallants look of
him... therefore this Scripture must be interpreted some other
way, or else denied... (12)

This statement is best read as the hermit's critique of common reception of radicalism – not as his endorsement of one particular strain of it. Whatever his previous affiliation with the Levellers, when *The English Hermite* was printed Crab's allegiance lay elsewhere.

In Calvert, Crab finds a more agreeable partner in publication than he had in Simmons and Chapman. *Dagon's-Downfall* issues from the presses unscathed, a text apparently liberated from the undue influence of a printer or bookseller. Absent are the intrusive preface and attendant judgments that hinder Crab's first pamphlet, as are conspicuous verses of dubious origin and print ornaments of questionable taste. Such a publication must be read as a more genuine expression of Crab's views, as his imperatives – that the text be unadulterated and unmediated – appear intact. However felicitous Calvert's collaboration with Crab may have been, the bookseller nevertheless chose to withhold his name from the work – and for good reason. The hortatory purpose of Crab's work increases in *Dagon's-Downfall*, and the pamphlet is more radical and targeted than *The English Hermite*. Its censure extends to both church and parliament:

The Parliaments Treasure
Hath blinded his Eye,
He cannot see to measure

The truth from a lye
He lets Land at an exact hand,
And will devoutly pray;
Yet he will cut the throats
Of the poor folks
That labor for him by the day break (24)

Such sentiments may have concerned Calvert, who had been brought before the council of state in 1656 – but one year previously – for his distribution of works critical of the current government (Hessayon, “Calvert, Giles [bap. 1612, d. 1663]”, *ODNB*). Although England’s church made an acceptable target for pamphleteers, her government did not. That such comments could be found in *Dagon’s-Downfall* may have proven enough reason for Calvert to distance himself from Crab. In any event, the ideological compatibility between the two men proved temporary. During the mid-1650s, Calvert was London’s publisher of choice for Quakers – the very group with whom Crab was to have some disagreement in his later career. Calvert’s brother-in-law, Thomas Simmonds, would later print George Salter’s *An answer to Roger Crabs printed paper to the Quakers* (1659), in response to Crab’s *Tender Salutation*. By this time, Crab had aligned himself with yet another London stationer.

Through his ongoing efforts to achieve unmediated publication, the hermit discovers that the identities of printers and booksellers are reflected in more than the imprints of the pamphlets they produce. Crab’s stationers frame and shape his publications in a variety of ways and consequently drive him to seek freer channels of dissemination. Whether pressman or clergyman, the impediments to Crab’s divine utterance are manifold. Seeking to remove any obstacles to the reader’s appreciation of the inspired word, the

printing prophet challenges the economies of a hireling ministry and a community of stationers.

Chapter 2 – The Rhetoric of Reclusion

“It is my joy that the Lord hath made me a stranger to them.”

Dagon's-Downfall (29)

Roger Crab gained his fame and began his print career as a hermit. His reasons for leading this “Heremeticall kinde of life” are threefold: “out of conscience, “in obedience to that command of Christ, to the young man in the Gospell,” – namely to “go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor” (Mark 10:21) – and “in imitation of the Prophets, and the Recabites” (EH, sig. A3^f). Crab follows these principles to the letter, both living and writing as a hermit. His eremitic authorial voice shapes a “rhetoric of reclusion,” an expression of divine truth and text ostensibly uninfluenced by the social dimensions of sectarian and ecclesiastical religious discourse. The publishing hermit seeks to write beyond ceremony, liturgy, and prophecy, returning to an original sacred discourse and language, and thereby reclaiming the word of God from the confines of the church.

Ickenham, where Crab lived for roughly four years (1653-7) in a “mean Cottage of hiis [sic] own building” (EH, sig. A3^f), seems a suitable location for a hermitage. Home to about 30 families in Crab’s day, it was a small, “exclusively agricultural” community, nestled between the River Pinn and the Yeading Brook some twenty kilometres west of London. It was 300 years later before a major road passed through the area. If Crab imagined himself like the Recabites, a nomadic, teetotaling band lauded by the prophet Jeremiah for their adherence to the commandments of their forefathers (Jeremiah 35), then he had chosen in Ickenham an ideal place to sojourn.

The hermit’s simple existence at Ickenham proves in many ways shaped by the

practices of those Old Testament prophets “who were ordered by their practice to shew *Israel* their transgressions” (EH 11). Their piety, as understood by Crab, dictated austerity in all points, encompassing both diet and dress: “Ezekiel took of wheat, barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet... and made bread thereof,” whereas Isaiah was “ordered not only to wear sack-cloth, but to go naked, and without shoes three years” (EH 11). Crab also considers his subject and manner of address to be determined by prophetic precedent. He sees the prophet-rhetorician as serving two purposes: “crying against” misguided ministries and practices, and “telling plainly” how their followers were mistaken (EH 36). Crab strikes a balance between the two – albeit an unsettled one – over the course of his publishing career. The plain-speaking and logical approach of *The English Hermite* gives way to the more amplified message and oblique symbolism of *Dagon’s-Downfall*, which few layreaders would describe as “plain.” Crab’s later writings prove even less so, and present an emphatic eschatology as confusing as it is compelling. The hermit’s self-representation as a heavenly being appears to shake his grounding in an earthly reality.

Such prophetic pretensions complicate the definition of authorship in Crab’s works. Although the life of a hermit is a solitary thing, the writing of a hermit marks for Crab a departure from solitude. He claims divine inspiration, effectively making *The English Hermite* a product of collaborative, not solitary, authorship. Crab’s words are not entirely his own, as his “few lines” are written by his own account “as the most high shall direct me” (EH 1). Crab also understands the role of the reader to be guided by divine inspiration. Even what readers take from *The English Hermite* will prove of little use, “before God hath enlightened their understandings” (10) as he did Crab’s. The hermit and prophet is a co-author of the text, and his audience co-readers of it.

The hermit's conception of the relationship between the divine, the writer, and the reader suggests a "communications circuit" spanning heaven and earth. His reckoning expands upon the version of this circuit described by critic Robert Darnton, who envisions it as running "from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader," and concludes that "the reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition" (Darnton 111). Crab's model of dissemination roughly follows this sequence, although it is altered to accommodate inspired discourse. As he understands it, the circuit does not begin with the prophetic author, but with the inspiration the prophet receives. Yet Darnton's circuit does more than transmit messages: it also "[transforms] them en route, as they pass from thought to writing to printed characters and back to thought again" (111). In this, Crab finds cause for concern. He seeks to avoid any such "transformation" of his inspired message as it undergoes publication. The hermit imagines neither the inspired prophet nor reader as meaning makers. Writers do not simply create inspired texts such as *The English Hermite*, nor do readers simply consume them. Both are fellow-participants in the project of prophecy.

Crab himself is defined as a prophet as much by the texts he produces as he is by those he reads. The hermit acknowledges the priority of scriptural precedents, and, more generally, the importance of biblical text itself. He exhorts his readers in *The English Hermite* to "let the Scripture rule us" (EH 13) and diligently supports his censure of church practice and doctrine with explicit references to biblical passages. Crab's "prophecy" rests upon a pervasive biblicism, the specifics of which reveal much about the intended purpose of his writings. Crab draws widely from the Bible, citing Old Testament stories and

gospel teachings in support of his views and in contrast to wayward church doctrine. Crab also places special emphasis on the Hebrew prophets, whom he saw as his predecessors, and on other biblical figures with experiences similar to his own. He reminds his readers that Daniel refused “*The Kings meate,*” which defiled his body, and that he preferred to “*eate pulse, and drinke water*” (EH 3). The hermit commiserates with Moses, for Crab observes that the English all too often refuse “Angels food called *Manna,*” in preference for “*the flesh-pots of Ægypt*” (EH 9). Yet Crab’s reliance on scriptural precedent provides more than a simple justification of his views. In some measure, it counteracts the celebrity and “gazing stock” he had obtained, by positioning the hermit not as an anomaly but as a familiar figure not unlike the pious men of old.

Scriptural precedent and divine inspiration purportedly guide the hermit, and so too does his own capacity for reason. Despite his claims of revelation and his foregrounding of biblical figures in *The English Hermite* and *Dagon’s-Downfall*, the hermit himself necessarily plays a significant role in the pamphlets’ preparation. His writings, however “directed,” remain a product of his pen. In addition to the hermit’s numerous unwavering, apodictic claims, there is a well-reasoned, logical side to his tirade. His stock is not simply in “blinde zeale,” but “according to knowledge,” and reason (EH 13). Using language suited to a treatise on economics, for example, Crab outlines the problems with excessive consumption: “for by... drunkennesse and gluttony Corn is made dear; and Corne being dear, Land is made dear, so that the Farmer must give a great rent for his Farme, and is constrained to hire many more Acres...” (EH 7). Here Crab’s account is logical, explaining the nation’s economic hardship – and justifying his own unusual diet – using the law of supply and demand. He revisits this theme in *Dagon’s-Downfall* as he condemns the

celebration of Christmas:

there is more spent of Wines and Beer, Flesh and Wheat, and
all other Varieties in them twelve dayes, then will keep the
whole Nation twelve weeks if discreetly used; so that this
must needs make all manner of Food the scarcer; and this
scarcity must needs oppress the poor... (9-10)

The faults of the nation and her inhabitants described in Crab's work are often those he has observed and made sense of by way of his own human reason. Moreover, the hermit maintains that "reason it selfe will discover a glimps of Gods proceedings in these our days" (EH 6). Although the importance of "direction" and enlightenment should not be underestimated in a consideration of *The English Hermite*, Crab emphasizes his human capabilities as well.

Yet the hermit's reason is not to be understood as a supplement to his divine inspiration, but as an expression of it. Understanding and reason do not come naturally to Crab, but are imparted to him in a moment of truth:

But now *that light which enlightneth every man that cometh
into the world*, according to Johns writing, *hath discovered
the love of God to my understanding*, which causeth me to
with-draw from what I have done... (EH 1-2)

Inspiration then entails more than ecstatic vision. It provides to the hermit the breath of reason, enabling him to rightly prophesy and publish. Such divine understanding appears akin to the "right reason" Milton extols in his *Second Defense* (1654). Once man "[learns] to obey right reason," he can then "master [himself]" (YP 4:684). In Crab, this mastery –

which proves an exercise of reason, and thus a rapprochement to the divine – means a withdrawal from a life lived “in pride, drunkenness, and gluttony... upheld by dissembling and lying, cheating and cozening” (EH 1). Throughout *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall* Crab expresses divine inspiration in this way, as a blend of both reason and revelation. In so doing, he establishes a middle ground between the inspired writer and the divine authority he perceives behind his work.

Scholars describe such middle ground as the ascetic's purview, and see the hermit as a distinctly liminal figure. The Venerable Bede's account of Cuthbert, a “renowned saint of early Anglo-Saxon Northumbria” and notable hermit, “ultimately insists,” according to one reading, “on the saint's liminality” (Aggeler 17). Cuthbert spent years in his Farne Island hermitage, “cut off from the commotion of the world” (19), and occasionally “having conversation from within his cell with visitors... through the window” (20). His hermitage proves “a paradoxical space, both an isolated contemplative retreat and yet a busy place of interaction between the saint and his visitors” (20). It is a middle ground, both public and private, both isolated and accessible. Geoffrey Galt Harpham describes a similar liminality:

Asceticism neither simply condemns culture nor simply endorses it; it does both. Asceticism, we could say, *raises the issue* of culture by structuring an opposition between culture and its opposite. Despite the fanaticism of its early Christian practitioners, who constantly extolled the value of “single-mindedness,” asceticism is always marked by ambivalence, by a compromised binarism. (xii)

Such “ambivalence” does not doom the ascetic to failure, however, nor to inconclusive

endeavour. For Crab, the hermit's is a productive ambivalence. His "mean Cottage," literally a structure between culture – or, "the commotion of the world" – and its opposite, the divine, provides a locus for the revelations that inform his prophetic publication. And like Cuthbert, the English Hermit's "binarism" can be read as "compromised." While at Ickenham, he was by no means a hermit inaccessible, an anachronism, evidenced only by "wreath of smoke sent up, in silence, from among the trees!" (Tintern Abbey 17-18). He had considerable contact with the outside world through his frequent debates with clergy, through his sporadic pamphlet publications, and through his burgeoning medical practice. His ongoing public attestation of private piety crosses the boundaries between hermitage hinterland and London metropolis. That attestation crosses another, still greater boundary: the self-proclaimed prophet is also a would-be intermediary between heaven and earth, and between God and man.

While the English Hermit occupies a middle ground, his occupation is not necessarily a peaceful one. The active struggle between human and divine purposes defines Crab's reclusion. He writes in part to resolve it. Yet the distinction between these two categories remained, in Crab's day, ill-defined. One thing Crab knew, however: the nation was fraught with interconnected problems, religious and economic, and was sadly adrift. He considered the church's representation of the divine to be profoundly misguided, and he maintained that its representatives were not fulfilling their office. Ministers were unduly profiting from work that should be done *gratis*. "Bishops were exalted next to Christ," and the Army's "Sects" – such as the Levellers – also "became exalted" in their own right (EH 6). Beyond the church and religious independents, Englishmen were plunging to new depths of excess, and the result of Parliamentary victory in the civil war was an England

too much like that of Charles I's previous rule. A varied list of complaints, but the conclusion of it all, according to Crab, is that "the Body of *England* is become a Monster" (EH 8). Seeking to reclaim the language of religion and God from a monstrous church, the recluse leaves society.

The hermit's self-imposed exile entails more than retreat to the hermitage. Crab attempts to reject every claim society has on him, even at a linguistic level. His rhetoric of reclusion is isolation language, a voice crying in the wilderness that marked its speaker as a holy man. From within this register, Crab actively resists the idiom of contemporary religious discourse. He rejects well-worn metaphors as errant, and questions longstanding practices, traditions, and widely-accepted church readings of scripture. To the hermit, the constraints presented by these conventions are very real. They constitute the linguistic and interpretive edifice constructed by the church, which, in Crab's view, makes them immediately suspect. And "the church" proves a broad term in the hermit's usage, including the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. He sees little difference between the two, asking "Whence came our Bishops? Came not their descent from *Rome*?" (DD 8). The hermit's reaction against the church doctrine and mediation, however, entails more than simple renunciation. It requires reexamination, followed by appropriate change at the most basic level – that of language.

A reading of the hermit's utterance as an attempt to bring about such change can be problematic, particularly in view of literary theorists who emphasize language's social dimension. When considered in relation to Crab's rhetoric of reclusion, their work encourages us to question the pretences at isolation held by those who would speak as "hermits." In the context of Ferdinand de Saussure's emphasis on the great extent to which

language is a social phenomenon and Louis Althusser's writing on the pervasiveness of ideology, the individual would seem a doomed subordinate who is from the moment of consciousness "always already" subject to Language. The solitude-seeking ascetic proves no different; he remains dogged by his history as a participant in the system of signification. The hermit can live alone, but he cannot write alone.

The "rule" of scripture supersedes Crab's authorial subjectivity in *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall*. Grand claims of divine inspiration as well as extensive biblical citation and allusion leave the works' authorship unsettled, directing attention away from "The Wonder of This Age" and towards the text upon which his pamphlets are based. Here, scriptural texts are given clear precedence, while the eremitic author remains hidden, if not entirely absent. And "absence" may prove too light a term. Roland Barthes describes "The Death of the Author," and questions the real contribution of an individual to the texts he produces. A text proves "not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. [It] is a tissue of quotations..." (146). Crab's writings are no exception, and their meaning is largely determined by historical precedent, not by authorial influence.

However "multi-dimensional" Crab's own text may appear, the hermit considers scriptural text to be "theological" in meaning, as "the 'message' of the Author-God." He perceives the Bible as holy writ and understands it to be the work of many hands, all subject to a single inspiration. This view was not shared by "the Tythe-Priests, and Pharisees, Publicans and Lyars" who set scripture at odds with itself by "[bringing] *Timothy's Epistles...* to confute *Paul*" (DD 15). Such readings deny the primacy of

scripture and instead privilege the Church interpretation thereof. That they would arise to begin with is, in Crab's view, understandable, given the difficulty encountered in certain of Paul's exhortations. His comments on marriage – "that it is not good to touch a Woman" and that "he that giveth not his Daughter in Marriage, doth better then he that giveth her" (DD 16) – prove particularly controversial. Nevertheless, the hermit does not reject their author in response. He provides a reading that both confirms and elaborates upon Pauline teaching, and by extension the divine inspiration Crab attributes to it. Although "the Marriage of the Serpent and his Seed, which marrieth for the sake of corruptible things" remains as reprehensible as Paul originally suggests, more virtuous forms of marriage do exist:

First, The Marriage of the Lamb. Secondly, The pure Marriage of Nature only for Generations sake, purely ordered of God, as you may see and read in the Book of the Creation, the Beasts of the field, the Fowls of the heaven, the Fishes of the sea. (DD 17)

Although arguments had long existed "that the Church had created Scripture and had established its canon, and that this showed that the Church had authority over Scripture" (Gonzalez 49), Crab makes no distinction between scripture and canon. He considers Church pretensions of authority to manifest themselves solely through interpretation. The Bible remains, for Crab, a product of unified, inspired authorship.

Crab attributes the same authorship to his own works, and in keeping with his contempt for earthly mediators, embraces "the death of the author." He is a willing subaltern, if to no human power, and remains contentedly subject to the dictates of scripture

and divine revelation. Were he an independent author, Crab himself would stand to detract from his pamphlet's inspired message. His eccentricity presents a problem, as the hermit's status as a public figure – his “gazing stock” – potentially distracts attentive Londoners from the weightier matters of his prophetic calling. Crab thus considers himself to be a threat to the divine texts he disseminates. In response to this concern, he becomes increasingly ambivalent towards his own name as it appears over the course of his publications. The ostensibly autobiographical passages in *The English Hermite* give way to *Dagon's-Downfall*, a work slow to identify its author. The title page does not include Crab's name, although the following page bears the title “THE English HERMITES Spade AT THE Ground and root of IDOLATRY” (DD 1). Crab's proper name is not expressly given until page three, where he mentions in passing that “the old Whore gave me her title, Master CRAB” (3). The hermit considers his name an earthly encumbrance, and of as little significance as the derogatory terms used by others to describe him: “my Name is called upon the Whores account, *Roger Crab*, or Mr. *Crab*, or sometimes Devil, Rogue, or Witch; but my Name in the Book of Life is without Letter or form; and so I sing” (19). Crab has little use for the name given to him at birth. Reclusion, for the publishing hermit, then extends even to his identity as an author, and he largely absents himself from it.

The hermit requires more than rhetorical self-censure if he is to foil the persistent mediator who overshadows his text and accompanies him into wilderness. Early in *The English Hermite* Crab introduces what amounts to an inner division, between the “old man” and the “new man.” The lonely recluse Crab finds his fiercest foe in himself. He recognizes this, and proposes to overcome such an adversary:

... So the warrs began, *The Law of the old man in my fleshly*

members rebelled against the law of my mind, and had a shrewd skirmish; but the mind being well enlightned, held it, so that the old man grew sick and weak with the fluxe, like to fall to the dust; but the wonderful love of God well pleased with the Battle, raised him up againe, and filled him full of love, peace, and content in mind ... (2)

Having “conquering [his] left side” (DD 20), Crab considers himself “freed from all the Commandments and Traditions of men” (DD 23) and more attuned to divine inspiration. As a new man, Crab is better able to understand and act upon the dictates of scripture. In this, Barthes’s death of the author – which coincides with the birth of the reader – may inform the demise of the hermit’s “old man.” Once the burden of authorship is cast off so too is its accompanying subjectivity, which, for Barthes, only stands to interfere with the reader’s interpretation of a text. Thus Crab’s persistent mediator – his old man – disappears. Assuming that, as Barthes asserts, the text is indeed not “the ‘message’ of the Author-God”, what then remains after Crab’s self-removal from his role of author? Can we consider this posthumous text as being simply “the ‘message’ of God”?

The hermit’s oblique self-representation lends credence to such a reading. By “[casting] off the old man with his rudiments” (EH 14), Crab removes what he understands to be the fallible, misguided humanity that accompanies the individual author, and replaces it in this case with what he understands to be a blameless, faultless, higher power. The opening step of Crab’s rhetoric of reclusion – his denial of authorship – paradoxically serves to authorize Crab. As hermit and prophet, Crab depends upon an insulating distance from the earth and a proximity to the divine. Accordingly, his publications are framed as

missives from God, which therefore require no introduction nor brook any opposition. This understanding governs the preparation of Crab's works and also their intended reception. Purportedly "directed" by "the most high" (EH 1), *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall* represent for the hermit publications of biblical importance. The pamphlets are not intended to be read as copies, updates, or rewritings of the Bible, but as equally relevant and equally inspired works.

Although Crab embraces the preeminence of scripture, certain of his sectarian contemporaries react against it – even though such text appeared to govern their own publications as well. Members of the Ranters sect produced publications that were remarkably blended, containing numerous, and sometimes indistinguishable, layers of biblicism and poetry. Even so, the Ranters considered such evocative intertextuality of little value. They notably "[rejected] the literal truth of the Bible" (Smith 3), and their "pamphlets constitute... a type of rewriting" of it (6). Some Ranters went a step further, considering language itself incapable of expressing divine truths (30). Such views distance Ranter philosophy from that espoused by Crab, although the hermit does intermittently exhibit an "enthusiasm" in his work akin to that which infuses many Ranter texts. In contrast to his fellow sectarians, Crab places a high value on scripture, and in no way tries to replace or rewrite it. Moreover, his pursuit of eremitic life is the result of baldly literal interpretations of gospel teaching. To Crab's eye, the Bible suits just fine; church treatment of its contents, however, leaves much to be desired.

Crab, like the Ranters, advocates changes in man's approach to sacred language. However, he does not propose to leave language behind entirely – even though he may have good reason to do so. In his reading of asceticism, Harpham justifies an aversion to

language, noting that it has “meaning with a ‘body,’ and shares in the carnality of the material world” (11). Crab himself professes in *The English Hermite* an awareness of ill-used and carnal language, and cites “the many lyes, swearing, and deceiving that is too too frequently used by most Shop-keepers & Tradesmen” as reasons why he first “betooke himselfe to this Hermites reserved life” (EH, sig. A3^v). While language presents the hermit Crab with a problem, for him to thereby forgo it in its entirety is counterproductive. To meet the requirements of his role as a prophet, language is a necessary tool. But, as we see, the new man speaks much differently than the old.

In opposition to material language, that carnal mode of the oath and the sermon, is what we might refer to as language immaterial, which is, according to Crab’s understanding, that divine language inseparable from God. Such is the language described in the opening words of John’s gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” and is that which “framed” the worlds, “so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3). Language contains these two opposing discourses, of the material and of the immaterial. The hermit attributes the former to the old man and to the church, those speakers who have yet to “unlink themselves from the world” (EH 5). Although the church liturgy and sermons that Crab targets are framed within a scriptural context, they do not constitute the higher form of discourse he describes. The biblical pretensions of “These frothy Bores” (DD 14), Crab maintains, are clearly outmatched by their hypocrisy:

the Priests themselves ... preacheth against cheating, and
cozening, and witchcraft, and deceit; and yet he at this time is
the great Witch, and notorious Juglar in the Parish where he

lives for he cryeth against deceit, when he at the same time is a deceiving; he speaketh against Witchcraft, whilst he is a bewitching; and all this done upon the Sabbath, which is of their own inventing... (DD 11).

Those who take to the pulpit offer but empty words. The same can be found by “these Christians and *Heirs of Heaven* ... brought forth to be hanged at the Gallows.” Even though, as Crab wryly observes, “the Hireling prays devoutly for him to God at the Galows, intreating God *that he out of his infinite mercy would pass by his Offences, and accept of him in Christ...* they themselves will hang him...” (DD 5-6). The language of the church aspires to a higher discourse, yet it proves, for Crab, devoid of a higher cause.

Shortcomings in the authenticity of church language indicate a divide between church and the divine. Crab struggles at this point between what prove to be competing ideologies of Church and God, and between liturgical discourse and the prophet’s divine discourse. These two can be considered respectively in somewhat simpler terms as the word of man and word of God, or as in *Dagon’s-Downfall*, the Whore and the Lamb. “There is such a great difference,” Crab notes,

betwixt her designes and the designes of the Lamb of God;
betwixt her Righteousness, and the Righteousness of the
Lamb of God. Her Pimps divine for money, and say the Lord
sent them, when he never spoke to them: But the Apostles of
the Lamb were not to take a penny in their Purse; her Pimps
and her Ponders [sic] divine for both, and Shows and long
Robes, and high Seats in the Synagogues, and the honorable

Places at Feasts... (DD 2)

Crab fears that the incompatibility of these two ideologies will remain unrecognized, despite what he considers to be an obvious disparity between them. He wishes to clarify what Althusser, quoting Lenin, terms the “dividing line between the true ideas and false ideas” (21), and prove that the hireling’s “juggling” is not “of the pure God” (DD 12). Thus the hermit attempts to draw away not from language or ideology as a whole, but from one ideology and towards another, from the old man to the new, and – ultimately – from falsehood to truth.

The recluse reclaims the word through reinterpretation. In *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall*, Crab revisits Christianity’s foundational stories and presents them anew in ways that differ widely from the generally accepted understanding. Many of the hermit’s readings are given in support of vegetarianism and asceticism. In a brief prefatory note before *The English Hermite*, Crab concludes that the purpose of an ark full of animals was to sustain Noah and his family until the earth's vegetation was restored after floodwaters abated. At this point they were intended to remove meat from their diet, and presumably live as Crab did – on herbs and roots (sig. A4^v). In his version of the wedding at Cana (John 2), the hermit denies that Christ took meat or strong drink during the feast, but attended only “to shew forth the power of his father, in turning water into wine” (EH 9). Crab also revisits the curse visited upon Adam after the fall, going as far as saying “that all our proprieties are but the fruits of Gods curse; therefore the greatness of propriety, and the more we encroach the things of this Life, the greater is Gods Curse, and nearest in conjunction with the old Serpent” (DD 13). According to Crab’s reading, to embrace natural prosperity is, by extension, to embrace God's original condemnation.

Many of Crab's reinterpretations of scripture target specific aspects of the doctrine and practice of those "self-ended people professing Religion" (EH 3). He takes issue with "wicked Hirelings" who "[call] their Steeplehouse a Church," doubting that "Christ had shed his blood for a Church made with Bricklayers, with Lime and Brick, or dead Stones" (DD 14). He urges his readers to "flee" from "this notorious Idol which they have set up in our Nation, I mean the Priests Market-Day, wherein they are hired as Hirelings to bent their Ware, and they call it the Lords Day, or Sabbath" (DD 24). Moreover, Crab questions that

if God did all his Works on the six dayes past and we believe it, Whether it will not be a vain babling, and a cheat for any to take money to pray and beg of God to do any thing for us now, seeing he hath left Work, and is at rest, if it be so as they say? (DD 25)

Crab is very quick – and not humourless – in pointing out the fallibility in the Church's practises and in its application of sacred texts. Marriage, infant baptism – which amounts to "cozening ... with a little Water sprinkling on their faces" (DD 15) – and a hireling clergy are condemned in turn, each practice showing its various shortcomings when held up to scriptural precedents.

It is this habit of shortcoming that Crab deems indicative of a deeper divide between God and the Church. It also necessitates his project of reclamation, for scripture is considered to be at such a far remove from the Church and its ministers that

...all the true practicall part of Scriptures must bee layd aside, onely talk of it and dispute of it a little, and pick out of it a few places to preach out off, and to write, to get some money

to uphold their pride and honour in this world, to please the
old man in the flesh... (EH 11-12)

Crab laments that passages considered hard to bear by the clergy “must be interpreted some other way, or else denied” (EH 12). The hermit’s project of reclamation therefore extends to such unused and abused scriptures, with a view to revaluing such passages. In so doing, Crab seeks to extract scriptural text from church paratext. Barthes acknowledges the threat posed by such an author, and warns that “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147). Crab delimits the scripture in his denial of the authoritative influence of the church, so that England’s lay-readers might be “enlightened” by divine revelation (EH 10).

The promise of such an outcome draws the hermit Crab towards his fellow men, and his first publications do much to bridge the gap between the eremitic author and his readership. Yet the hermit understands publication to be but one aspect of his responsibility as a prophet, and that he must go beyond the tasks of “crying against” and “telling plainly.” As dictated by the examples of Elijah and John the Baptist, both of whom lived alone in the wilderness for a time, the modern-day prophet must also be a man set apart. Although this sense of responsibility complicates our understanding of Crab’s place in his society, as a simultaneously private and public figure, the contradiction is reconciled in his rhetoric of reclusion. Public attestation and private piety are met together as Crab’s insight, itself enabled by solitary life, is shared with his readers in a way that does not necessarily jeopardize the author’s solitude.

Chapter 3 – Beyond Rhetoric: Herbs, Roots, and the Natural World

“God the first garden made, and the first city, Cain.”

Cowper, *The Task*

Crab’s justifications for vegetarianism, as those he gives for eremitism, are threefold: “first we ought to believe, because the Scripture saith so. 2. I believe it from experience. 3. From Reason” (EH 3). Behind the triple authority of scripture, experience, and reason, however, lies further motivation for Crab’s preference of “herbes and roots.” Just as Crab’s rhetoric attempts to reclaim the word of God, his diet attempts to reclaim man’s original place in Eden and man’s original image – which is in God’s own.

Vegetarianism greatly advances the hermit’s project of reclusion, and provides the means to enliven his “new man” and overcome his “old man.” Beyond the diet’s favour with old testament prophets, Crab holds it up as a healthier alternative to one rich in meat, and credits it with giving him a “light to the constitution” that enables him “to administer physick to others” (EH 4). This “conquering [of the] left side” (DD 20) is only made possible by Crab’s dietary restrictions. “Instead of rost Mutton, and Rabbets, and other dainty dishes,” Crab gives his old man “broth thickned with bran, and pudding made with bran, & Turnep leaves chop’t together, and grass” (EH 2). Through self-induced starvation, Crab’s “flesh” grows ever weaker – until the hermit finds himself finally made “free from sinne, as lust, pride” (EH, sig. A3^v). Vegetarianism enables Crab’s reclusion from his past life, from his previous self “who ... transgressed the commands of God, and so found guilty of the whole Law, living in pride, drunkenesse, and gluttony, which [he] upheld by dissembling and lying, cheating and cozening [his] Neighbors” (EH 1). To leave such a life

behind marks an unlikely about-face, yet “the Crab diet” is a heavy undertaking that promises a life-changing – and in “Cap. Norwood’s” case life-ending – experience. However, the hermit's dietary edicts were not so outrageous as to frighten away the “hundred or sixe-score Patients” (EH 4) who consulted him for medical advice.

Crab’s choice to sustain himself through foraging and small-scale agriculture distances him from what he condemns as an unequal and inefficient economic system. Vegetarianism permits Crab to produce in his garden what seems to have been a sufficient supply of food. The English Hermit lives on “onely such poore homely foode as his own Rood of ground beareth, as Corne, Bread, and bran, Hearbs, Roots, Dock-leaves, Mallowes, and grasse, his drink is water...” (EH, sig. A3^r). In short, Crab’s diet consisted of produce he grew or gathered for his own consumption. Such a diet might have been undertaken for both spiritual and practical reasons in Crab’s day: the widespread food shortages of the 1620s-50s have been described as the most terrible in English history (Winstanley 20). But Crab’s vegetarianism may have also been a political act. A recent analysis observes that “meat was a sign of wealth; renouncing it was an act of solidarity with the oppressed” (Stuart 28). The Crab diet eschews not only meat, but, more generally, it takes issue with excessive consumption by those such as “*the great Eater of Kent, who could eate a whole sheep at a meate, besides other victuals*” (EH, sig. A3^v). By Crab’s reckoning, men will drink “in one day as much as a bushell of barley will make, which will keep two ordinary families a whole week in bread” (EH 7). To partake in this system is impossible for one of Crab’s convictions. A simple, vegetarian diet enables Crab to leave behind both the old man in himself but also the twisted dealings of a society that is itself a product of the old man’s governance.

Such governance fosters exploitative social structures that leave their members vulnerable to mistreatment. As Crab observes, “Experience tells us (without us) that we are in a posture not contented one without the other; yet most of us could easily consent for our own gain or revenge to have one another destroyed” (DD 22). The needs of Crab’s contemporaries do not appear to exceed simple selfishness. In response, the English Hermit removes himself from this ultimately self-destructive fallacy, leaving his successful business in Chesham and retreating to Ickenham. In time, Crab uncovers an alternative approach to gain and sociality, which, although reasoned, follows no earthly logic. Its beginnings, however, are not so different from the way of life he spurned years before. As Crab develops an understanding of his role as a prophet, he finds himself as discontented “without the other” as those whose presence and attitude drove him to the wilderness to begin with, for without him the prophet has no audience. In his altruistic pursuit of the other, through publication and preaching, the hermit-prophet replaces “self-ended” society with prophetic outreach. Crab thereby upends the latter half of his original observation, setting aside his “own gain or revenge,” and actively consenting to his own destruction so that others might be restored and edified. His own gain – and that of “the most high” – comes not to the detriment of others, but for their salvation.

Crab also finds sustenance beyond that which grows in his garden. Provisions born of a “power above man” set the hermit beyond the nation’s economy and religion, these great “Inventions and Traditions of men” (DD 24). In accounts that border on the miraculous, the English Hermit describes himself as directly sustained by God and nature. For example, he is provided with “intelligence according to [his] worldly occasion” by certain “naturall formes, namely birds of the Aire.” As Crab describes in *The English*

Hermit,

For almost three years space I have observed them, for they would foretell me of any danger or crosse, or any joy from friends; I mean any danger of dishonour to my person, or losse of cattell, or corne, or any other disadvantage to my advancement in the world; and this cleerly convinced me, that there was a power above man... (12)

Once sufficiently removed from the world of men, Crab finds that he is better for it. No longer one “lusting after the flesh-pots of Egypt,” Crab instead contents himself with “this Angels food calld *Manna*” (EH 9). Beyond this, “All our properties” are condemned by the hermit as “but the fruits of Gods curse; therefore the greatness of propriety, and the more we encroach the things of this life, the greater is Gods Curse” (DD 13). Instead, Crab casts his life as one lived according to and sustained by his faith in the divine. Indeed, the man of God, as conceived of by Crab, should require nothing else. And the hermit’s vegetarianism, along with his asceticism, enables him to be just such a man, having both his words and means supplied to him from a higher power.

Even Crab’s original bookseller was co-opted into the hermit’s self-representation as a man sustained by God. As a postscript to his preface, he recounts “one more remarkable thing” that Crab had told him. During the hermit’s imprisonment at Clerkenwell, the efforts of his jailer to deprive him of food were foiled by a persistent stray dog that brought him crusts of bread in the prison yard:

There came a Spannell, and walked after him three or foure turnes, with a peece of bread in his mouth... He looked at the

Dogge, and he layd it downe: and perceiving it was bread, he walked away againe, and the Dog walked after him with it againe: then he stooped, and the Dog layd it downe to his hand, then he took and wiped it, and eate it. (EH, sig. A4^r)

The bookseller's relation, which he assures us is "no feigned story, or fable" (sig. A3^r), provides the only account of this unusual event – Crab does not mention it himself. Instead, he speaks of his extraordinary provision in general terms, and simply: "God hath promised me in the Life and Light of Christ never to forsake me, but to make me a strong witness" (DD 19). In the receipt of his provenance, Crab looks beyond crude messengers, both avian and canine, and on to the divine. Naturally, the printer and bookseller of *The English Hermite* had cause of their own to amplify the hermit's claims. A greater "gazing stock" stands to draw more curious Londoners to Popes-head Alley.

Extraordinary though Crab's provision may be, the hermit understands himself as akin to others whose needs were similarly met. He observes that "God made use of a bird to feed *Elias* the Prophet" (EH 13). Such an observation, closely following the description of Crab's own provisioning by the "birds of the Aire," suggests that the hermit understood his providence to share a source with those whom he would term his foregoers. Crab takes this as an indication that their purposes and calling are shared as well, concluding that sustenance is given to those who require it to support their worthy undertakings. That Elijah lived on ravens' bread during his wilderness sojourn (1 Kings 17:6) proves, for Crab, a ringing endorsement of the prophet's work. In response to this account, Crab writes: "I saw that he made use of natural causes to fulfill natural desires, so I came to know God in nature" (EH 13). If the English Hermit equates God with nature, then his understanding of

“natural desire” necessarily implies alignment with the divine. Such desires are the desires of God, and, as Crab testifies, one who shares them will elicit divine provision.

The churches’ greatest error – Dagon’s chief downfall – lies in man’s divergence from “natural desires,” and thereby from the desires of God. Granted, Crab sees in man a statement of divine perfection, asserting that “God was a perfect Creator,” and that he “made man perfect in his own Image” (DD 12). The hermit’s struggle between the old man and the new man draws him towards this perfect, original man, one who predates original sin. Crab’s “new man” proves in fact the oldest man, God’s image afresh. Time’s passing, however, deeply changes this privileged originality, and Crab sees himself as in the midst of nothing less than a “*Sodomite* generation, living now upon *English* ground” (EH 1). “Oh man,” he laments in *Dagon’s-Downfall*, “what art thou come to? how notorious and corrupt in the sight of God? how unfit is thy body for the pure God to dwell in?” (DD 5). Should man “try [himself], and look within” (DD 13), he will only find there a distortion of God’s image. To illustrate the extent of man’s deviation from his natural state, Crab compares his behaviour with that of other natural creatures. In response to the assorted misdemeanours undertaken in the name of religion, which Crab berates in turn, he asks of his readers, “Canst thou paralel this corrupt Action with any Beast of the field, or Fowls of the Heavens, or fishes in the sea; I know no such amongst all these...” (DD 4). Contrary to a society that pits “the transgressor against the transgressor” (EH 4), Crab maintains a conception of nature devoid of the injustices and hypocrisies that plague mankind.

Although man’s natural body in its common state remains disgraceful in Crab’s eyes, it yet stands to be made perfect. And despite being the cause and the site of great conflict, the body suffers no condemnation in *The English Hermite* or *Dagon’s-Downfall*.

To “condemn every one his Neighbour, because they differ in physiognomy” is to “condemn the work of God without us,” and constitutes a “rebellion against our Maker” (EH 10). Not to be confounded by the shortcomings and failures he sees as common to English laymen, Crab considers the original, Edenic perfection of man to be attainable in his day. To this end, he calls to the minds of his readers certain efforts of “the Most High,” who is “now once more beginning to break through the clouds of darkness in poor innocent forms of earth, raying them up from carpenting, fishing, and Tent-making, *to confound the high and mighty...*” (EH 8). Having been “rayed up” from his previous career as a soldier, then a haberdasher, Crab sees himself as an example of this sublimation process.

Crab’s understanding of his diet and body illustrates the reciprocal relationship he observes between his physicality and spirituality. With due dietary consideration, man’s physical condition stands to invite the divine presence and encourage the moment of theophany. Through its work of purification, vegetarianism enables this “raying up” that Crab advocates, and the new man’s victory over the old. For Crab, this proves an essential process, as a “pure God” requires a pure body. And this pure body has a name: *Adam*. Crab sees the divine promise of perfection – bodily or otherwise – in Eden. In Eden, Crab finds his “new man.” The Garden often occupies the hermit’s thoughts, and not only as memory or imagination. Crab professes to have some familiarity with the place. In *Dagon’s-Downfall*, he describes at great length a most peculiar vision:

When I was in my earthly garden a digging with my Spade,
with my face to the East side of the Garden, I saw into the
Paradise of God from whence my Father Adam was cast
forth; this sight drave me oftener into the Garden, so that I

saw in a Myserie of the Tree of Life, and also the Tree of
Knowledge of good and evil... (20)

As Crab's vision – or fantasy – continues, he is tried by “one of the Serpents children,” and “exhorted... to take again of the Tree of Knowledge.” His Eden remains unsullied by the fall, however. Crab responds to the temptations therein differently than his forefather, “being single,” and having “conquered [his] left side.” He withstands the serpent, as well as “the flaming Sword,” and partakes only of “the Tree of Life” (20). Crab's Eden is not a place of exile or of failure, but one of promise. The diet of “herbes and roots” returns him to a state of natural perfection, making him at home in Eden, and able to avoid the corruption that so often besets the human form. Crab concludes that the Fall itself could have been averted if only “naturall Adam had kept to his single naturall fruits of Gods appointment, namely fruits and hearbs.” Adherence to the hermit's simple rule of “Innocent creatures for innocent food, and beastly creatures for beastly and fleshly food” (EH, sig. A4^v) ensures a degree perfection comparable to that of prelapsarian Adam.

In *Dagon's-Downfall* Crab revisits and revisions at length the garden's provisions, its temptations, and also its original inhabitant, with the intent of establishing his own legitimate, God-given place alongside prophets and apostles. Although Eden itself embodies divine perfection, its legacy largely remains open to interpretation. By refiguring the purposes and capabilities of biblical figures, Crab aligns them with his own views on the relation between humanity and divinity. Adam, for example, when subjected to Crab's analysis, undergoes an inner separation similar to that undergone by the hermit himself. Crab introduces his twofold perception of Adam in *Dagon's-Downfall*:

All the Sons of men that taketh delight, and hide their lives in

the things of this world, and revive themselves in the increase
or glory thereof, which the second *Adam* refused, they are the
Sons of the first *Adam*, and fallen with the Serpent, and lives
in the Serpents Kingdom, and their inward man feeds in the
Dust with the Serpent, which are the mortal things of this
life... (DD 21)

In much the same way as Crab describes his “old” and “new” man, he identifies what he refers to as the “first” and “second” Adam. This conception of a former and a latter man – one a failure, the other an exemplar – underlies Crab’s self-understanding as an adjunct to the centuries-long history of biblical tradition. Through his re-reading and redefining Adam, Crab argues that original Adamic perfection is attainable. The promise of renewal that Crab sees as extended to all in the overcoming of the old man exceeds the authority of both the established church doctrine and the generally accepted understanding of holy scriptures. The figure of Adam suffers under this jurisdiction, remaining bound by accepted interpretation and understood chiefly in terms of creation, temptation, and fall. In Crab’s figure of the “second *Adam*,” conversely, lies the promise of free grace and even a testament of its work. Looking upon Eden, Crab points to a way in, both for himself and for others who would enter.

The specific terminology of Crab’s reimagining of Eden justifies his reclamation of holy text and supports his inclusion into a longer tradition of holy men. Beyond the natural desires and causes that Crab considers to be signs of divinity, he describes in *Dagon’s Downfall* the handing down of divinity through what amounts to natural succession. Crab’s reinterpretations of biblical tropes and figures contain the suggestion of a direct lineage that

exists between the hermit and God. As a son of Adam, and a “weak brother” (DD 16) of Paul, Crab understands his relationship with the divine – and indeed his title to it – as familial. Yet Crab’s emphasis on the importance of this spiritual lineage leads to the dismissal of his natural one. He holds his own family in low regard: “had not my natural Mother had twenty pounds a yeer, my Father and his Parents had not swopt; neither would they have agreed that they should have come together for generation” (DD 2). Crab justifies this dismissal with that gospel exhortation “to *deny father and mother, wife, children, lands and livings, and all for Christs sake* in the Spirituall essence” (EH 5).

In opposition to this exposition of a divine family, Crab establishes a competing metaphor that describes another type of relationship between man and god: that of the marketplace. He holds up filial ties as alternatives to commercial ones, as his preferred terms – sons and brothers – are countered with “Pimps” and “Pondors” (DD 1). The implication of these two metaphors is clear. Crab’s new man, through his “new birth” (DD 29) enjoys a position of privilege, while “Christ cannot own a Hireling” (DD 6). And although “The gifts of God cannot be bought with money” (DD 6), the word of God does have a place in the marketplace. London’s booksellers provide an alternative to the hireling’s “wares,” and it proves a relative bargain; one can “buy a Bible... at the Stationers Shop,” instead of “[giving] three times the worth of it to hear a Priest make one hours Discourse out of it” (DD 25).

Crab’s pursuit of renewal, coupled with his nostalgic desire to see God’s creation as it once existed, begins with the recognition that “it is high time to cast off the old man with his rudiments, with his malice and envy, and entertain light, love, and peace, and joy in the holy Ghost” (EH 14). Once so divested, the hermit’s nostalgia becomes enlivened; as

prophet, hermit, and new man, “single” in “eye, heart, & design” (EH, sig. A4^v), Crab witnesses both original perfection, which he embodies in his daily living, and latter-day corruption, which he decries in his preaching and publications. Indeed, the old man’s “rudiments” are many, and all encroach on the privileged originality of man and “the Church that Christ shed his blood for” (DD 15). The new man must “flee” from them, “from all these abominable Idols, Times and Seasons, New-Moons and Sabbaths, invented of men to worship God” (DD 24), and ignore preoccupations “concerning [this] Kingdom of Dust or Dirt” (DD 20), before he can recognize and appreciate the divinity beneath them.

Crab’s effort to do so was met with some scorn. During his vision of Eden, Crab encounters “one of the Serpents children,” who, passing by his garden, asks him “how we should preserve our Nation from a forraign Enemy if every one should do as I do” (DD 20). Whether regarding church doctrine or national security, such pressing concerns fail to restrict the hermit. However, he does not completely ignore the cares of the day in his devotion to this reclamation of original divinity. Individual piety, Crab suggests, can be made to bring about a change in the well-being of the nation. The opposite also holds true, and Crab argues that those given to great natural excesses, such “*the great Eater of Kent, who could eate a whole sheep at a meate, besides other victuals*” (EH, sig. A3^v), are by no means “no bodies foe but [their] own” (EH 7). Such gluttons are “the greatest enemies to the poor fatherless orphans, widows, and strangers, which are below them” (EH 7). Crab argues that the oversight of the individual can become that of the society as a whole. In a promising reversal of this rule, it follows that private piety can turn public, when accompanied by encouraging dissemination. According to such logic, the hermit makes a greater contribution to the nation as a hermit than he had as a haberdasher, or even as a

soldier.

The hermit's body, emaciated and weakened, functions as a text in itself, supplementing Crab's printed publications. Just as his use of language is in keeping with the "new, untainted, Adamic, and perfected" rhetoric that scholars see as characteristic of mid-century prophecy (Smith, "Non-conformist voices and books" 424), the hermit's vegetarianism performs a rhetorical function. Beyond its practical support of the eremitic life, vegetarianism proves a sign of Crab's legitimacy as a divine emissary. The seventeenth-century prophet has responsibilities similar to those whom Crab considers his predecessors, namely "to shew [men] their error in matter of food." Here Crab cites Ezekiel, who "took of wheat, barley, and beans, and lentiles, and millet... and put them in a vessel, and made bread thereof" (EH 11). Yet such an exemplary diet was not undertaken solely for reasons of righteous living or scriptural precedent. And "if these scriptures are written for our learning, imitation, and practice," Crab writes, "then we are to judge which are the Prophets of God, by this practice in Scripture; and if so, where shall we find Prophets of God" (EH 11). This stringent diet marks Crab as a prophet in keeping with biblical tradition, and his emaciated appearance is intended to be read as a sign of his credibility according to scriptural precedent. And the toll of his vegetarianism did not go unnoticed. The English hermit was so stricken in his appearance that it drew telling comment from his Quaker opponent, George Salter: "If one look upon thy flesh, it is loathsome, and would make one sick" (5). If this description is any indication, Crab's radical views were matched by his radical appearance. In its striving for original meaning and truth, the hermit's rhetoric of words is supplemented by that written on the body.

This interchangeability between self and text, which is itself enabled by dietary

discretion, supports much of Crab's prophetic effort. Crab mediates the divine Word anxiously, always conscious of the corruption inherent in man's flesh. Both stand to threaten the hermit's delivery of a divine message. Just as Crab wished to have his publications printed by one who would not interfere with or dismiss their content, he also desired to be a transparent mediator of his inspired message. To this end, he attains what he considers to be bodily perfection through selective diet and through his situation in a country hermitage. These measures are effective, and in time the hermit's form becomes a text itself. The hermit's spiritual self and his divine text are, at this point, indistinguishable. Both fulfill and proclaim scriptural edicts, and both support the hermit's goal of reclamation. Crab's body speaks the same message he was destined to carry through his preaching and pamphleteering. It is to be read as the body Adamic.

Crab goes on to make the difficult transition from Edenite to Nazarite, presenting his body as a testament to perfectibility and also as a sacrifice. The printer of *The English Hermite* notes in his preface to the text that "Roger Crab is well known to many in this City and the Country" (sig. A3^r), and the hermit himself acknowledges his status as "a gazing stock to the nation" (1). His notoriety arose from his many eccentricities, including his "hermetically" life, his vegetarian diet, and his public preaching, debating, and baptizing. This sense of public wonderment is more than a justification for the publication of *The English Hermite*, however. I suggest that Crab consciously uses the term "gazing stock" as it is used by the prophet Nahum: namely as a curse. Nahum condemns the Ninevites in clear terms: "I will cast filth on thee, and make thee vile, and set thee as a gazingstock" (Nahum 3:6). Crab himself fared much the same. He faced public trials, imprisonment, condemnation by the clergy, and mockery by the press. The public exposure that facilitated

Crab's first publication clearly came at a cost, and threatened not only his ascetic solitude, but also his life. The English hermit was an oddment, a curious eccentric, and a martyr.

Crab was aware of, and even sought out the curse of his "gazing stock." He determines his presence in the public consciousness, however adverse it may be, as a blessing as much as it is a curse. Martyrdom and spectacle prove useful means of encouraging the dissemination of his views – in print or otherwise. Reflecting on a history of tribulation, Crab concludes that "all those things wrought together for the best to me, and in my estimation are of more value then an office of five hundred pounds a year, for I in some measure know my self" (EH 4). And for a benefit such as this, Crab remains grateful; *The English Hermite* bears a dedication to one of his vocal critics, "Mr. *Godbold*, Preacher at *Uxbridge*," who, Crab writes, "was my friend to help conquer my old man, by informing my friends... That I was a Witch" (EH, sig. A4^v). Beyond enabling his print publications, Crab's public notoriety – and the trials it entails – provides a more personal benefit. Through it he is made to understand the nature of his "old man," as well as that of its welcome replacement in the "new man."

Crab's body can be read to include both sides of the dialogue between martyr and oppressor. Just as the body, bearing the results of having taken "such food as the wilderness yielded, and such cloathing" (EH 12), testifies of its inhabitant's purpose and philosophy, the persecution it encounters thereafter constitutes a response – whether it be trial, imprisonment, or the stocks. Through martyrdom, as through vegetarianism, the hermit's body gains another layer of textuality. And, as Crab attests in verse, the self-knowledge he discovers through tribulation in no ways dictates self-preservation:

My body is but Serpents meat,

And that thou wouldst destroy;
Thy honour and glory's but a cheat,
For all must vanish away. (DD 25)

Indeed, for a prophet such as Crab, the body's highest use lies in its being changed into hortatory text, a speaking object. Crab holds that he has seen the divine. That he should suffer for it matters little.

Within these instances of martyrdom and spectacle, this paradox of the “hermit as public figure” begins to unravel. Crab’s solitude is obviously compromised by his obligations as a prophet. By his own account, he finds himself closest to the divine presence in his quiet cottage and garden, and beyond, to the verdant pastures of Ickenham. Nevertheless, he does not make himself unavailable for anything besides. Although uncharacteristic of a self-proclaimed hermit, Crab makes himself available, and explicitly initiates a form of dialogue with his readers. Crab’s persistent questioning develops into an oft-sung refrain: “What sayest thou Reader?” This form of address attempts to erase any potential barrier between Crab and his readers, thereby encouraging them to “be changed by renewing of your minde” (DD 5). Crab recludes from the monstrous body of England, but not from those who would discuss with him the things he has seen. Crab not only asks them to judge his words, but also to “try thy self, and look within thee” (DD 13). Should this prove insufficient, another course is made available; “Send me word,” he writes to those who remain curious, confused, or outraged, “and I will come; for God hath promised me in the Life and Light of Christ never to forsake me, but to make me a strong witness against all Abominations” (DD 19). In *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall*, the prophet and the hearer are met through the printed word.

Indeed, the role of the prophet and the role of the reader are in certain ways the same. Readers encounter the Word in Crab's text much as Crab himself encounters it in moments of inspiration. Although the place of hearing differs, the voice is ostensibly the same; both Crab and his readers are respectively invited to hear the divine word, and he who has "ears to hear" is left to do so as best he can. In this way the success of Crab's work depends on its readership. The hermit depends on his readers in other ways as well, and in one case relies on their own conjecture where his own falls short. "The Abominations of this day in number, are beyond the reach of my weak capacity," Crab writes, "that I shall come short if I strive to number them all, and therefore I shall leave them and the rest of my discourse to the Readers construction" (DD 19). The "spade at the ground and root of idolatry" (DD 1) is not to be borne by the hermit's hand alone. His efforts depend on the readers' own judgement, and the shared realization that "the Body of *England* is become a Monster" (EH 8). Publication allows this collaboration to take place from afar; however, martyrdom does not.

Martyrdom instead allows Crab heightened moments of public attestation. It reaches beyond notoriety and spectacle, and makes the hermit more than one simply "well known to many in this City and the Country." A martyr exceeds the passive gaze, and seeks to repay public attention by turning the spectators' gaze back again. Through trial and torture the hermit's body is again turned to text, as the public gaze, once passive, turns inquisitive. And as Crab often does in his pamphlets, it provides the reader with a question: *for what cause is this?* So arrives the martyr at the moment in which his undertaking is justified, when attention becomes communication. The question, now posed, must have an answer. The martyr's perspective affords him an appropriate response. As Milton, acknowledges,

“Martyrs bear witness to the truth, not to themselves” (YP 3:575). Crab himself witnesses a great number of truths, all worth suffering for. Yet chief among them is the promise that the divine presence “*is even near thee, even in thine heart*” (DD 7). To find it, one needs only inspired reason and a good crop of bran.

Chapter 4 – Beyond Reclusion: Rationals, Quakers, and Life 'without the Gate'

"Because the Sun begins to peep out, and its a good while past day-break,
I'll creep forth (a little) into the mystery of the former history, and into
the in-side of that strange out-side businessse."

Abiezer Coppe (Smith, *Ranter Writings* 104)

Roger Crab did not remain a hermit. By 1659, he had abandoned his cottage at Ickenham and moved to Bethnal Green, near London. Crab's prophetic voice, once heard crying in the wilderness, then joined the chorus of "the Philadelphians," a religious group referred to by historian John Strype in 1720 as "sweet singers." Crab's pen, however, languished. The two post-hermitage pamphlets of Roger Crab, *A Tender Salutation* (1659) and *Gentle Correction for the High Flown Backslider* (1659), amount to no more than a half-dozen pages. Having gained association with like-minded folk, and even formed a group of his own – the "Rationals" – Crab may have found readier modes of disseminating his prophecies than through print publication. I suggest, however, that Crab's departure from the printed word reflects a larger change in his patterns of self-representation, from the inscribed, literal, and physical, to the immaterial and the symbolic – a change that corresponds with what he understands to be his complete and final reclusion from the world. Crab ultimately describes himself as a heavenly body, not an earthly one. Having gained this highest ground, the former-hermit turns from reclusion to inclusion, urging his readers to join him there.

The brevity of Crab's third and fourth publications in part corresponds with a reduction in their implied readership. The intended readership of Crab's early pamphlets had been relatively broad. In *The English Hermite*, Crab addresses a general audience of

readers intrigued by his unusual philosophy and way of life. He there seeks to account for his “gazing stock.” In *Dagon's-Downfall*, he develops his critique of the church and addresses like-minded radicals and independents. The focus of Crab’s later work, however, narrows significantly. He directly addresses the Quaker sect in *A Tender Salutation* and does so again in writing to one of their members, George Salter, in *Gentle Correction*.

The nature of Crab’s address changes as well. In his early works he writes to a wide readership regarding a specific target. In later works, however, Crab’s readership and target are more nearly the same. Granted, the criticisms Crab offers in these works are mild when compared to the rigorous attack in *Dagon's-Downfall* on the misguided church. The pamphlets’ titular adjectives hold true: most of Crab’s overtures to the Quakers and to Salter are indeed “gentle” and “tender.” Nevertheless, Quaker readers – referred to as a “despised remnant” – found some strong words there. In *A Tender Salutation*, Crab calls for the Quakers’ purification: he exhorts them to “look with a single Eye which pierceth through all Forms and Beloveds” (2). In Crab’s final publication, *Gentle Correction for the High-flown Backslider*, the judgment upon the Quakers reads plainer. Crab names and condemns five Quakers who “had not patience to hear him speak” as “lyars, and false accusars” (3). He dismisses George Salter’s claims, made in the pamphlet titled *An Answer to Roger Crabs printed paper to the Quakers, and likewise to his principles and doctrines*, not with logic or reason, but on principle. A flawed man, Salter thus provides flawed arguments. “To him that lives in self,” Crab concludes, “I appear selfish: and to him that lives in darknesse, I appear as in the Clouds; to him that is a murderer, I appear as a murderer” (GC 1).

As in Crab’s earlier works, the Quaker letters emphasize their target’s shortcomings

as much as their author's divine authority to point them out. Yet in his later publications Crab claims such authority directly, without the logical and more persuasive argumentation of *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall*. Instead, Crab surprisingly describes his alignment with divine authority as a *fait accompli*, and uses what Bowers terms "a voice of God style of narration" (104) to describe himself in a disembodied and self-deprecating third person as he bears his message to the Quakers:

...for even I wisdom have prepared a Fool, and cloathed him
in White Sheeps Cloathing, and sent him back again through
the three Gates, to deceive you of your Black Sheeps
Cloathing, and of the Pride that you have therein, and all your
Artificial Colours invented by the Serpents Wisdom onely
and alone to please the pride of the Eye... (TS 2)

Crab is wisdom's "Fool," and judging from his reference to "the three gates" – presumably those of the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21:13 – understands himself as heaven-sent. Such lofty presumption reveals Crab's confidence in his own perfectibility. Although no longer a hermit, he remains an in-between figure, one whose range has come to extend from earth to heaven and "back again."

Crab's reproof of the Quakers suggests an increase in the body of texts he considers sacred and thus a legitimate foundation for divine authority. He here enlarges his established repertoire of scriptural precedents and prophetic predecessors by enlisting the work of the influential mystic, Jakob Boehme. The account of "Sheeps Cloathing" suggests at first reading a continued connection between Crab's later work and this fellow tradesman turned theologian. Bowers observes that Crab's conception of seven governing spirits in

Dagon's-Downfall, despite being “rooted in the book of Revelation (1:4), owes something to the German mystic Jakob Boehme and his unifying theological assertion of seven fountain-spirits” (102). Crab’s Behmenist interest, incipient in his first works, takes a fuller shape and more explicit rhetorical expression in his later career. His discussion in *A Tender Salutation* of this “white sheeps Cloathing” recalls Boehme’s *Mysterium Magnum* (1654), first printed in England five years before *A Tender Salutation* (although actually written some thirty years previously). “The Cainicall Church,” Boehme writes, “makes a very specious and Renowned shew in the white sheepes cloathing, and therein lodgeth the High Priest of selfhood *without* Christs Spirit... he putteth Christs garment of innocency on him for his *Cloake* and covert” (MM 156). Boehme’s use of this metaphor is in keeping with its famous scriptural equivalent, Matthew 7:15, which warns “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” The metaphor expands under Crab’s pen, however, to include both white and black clothing, one for the elect and the other for the wayward and false prophets, implying that the Quakers’ wrongdoing, despite attempts at concealment, remains visible to “the Single Eye.” Other intersections between Crab and Boehme exist: he describes God as “the will of the Wisdome: the wisdome is his manifestation” (MM 1), and Crab too includes wisdom within his later concept of divinity. Moreover, the name of Crab’s sect follows from “the wise Rationaillists” lauded in *Mysterium Magnum* (313).

Patterns of biblical citation in *A Tender Salutation* and *Gentle Correction* appear to diverge from those in Crab’s earlier works. This change, when considered in relation to Crab’s burgeoning Behmenism, reflects his growing self-understanding as a part of what he comes to see as an ever-expanding field of New Testament prophecy. In *The English*

Hermite, Crab had described the first step toward the divine as undertaken in response to a simple gospel exhortation, “go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor” (Mark 10:21). Old Testament precedents confirm it: the hermit Crab wished to live as a Recabite, as a “Second Adam”. These precedents had governed his early interpretations of scriptures and the shape of his publications. Through his eremitic endeavour, Crab discovers the extent of his role as a prophet within an ongoing new testament, whose duty remains to point through the cacophony of sectarian discourse to a chorus of the elect. Crab thus seeks to define himself not in relation to the holy men of old, but instead to men such as Boehme – and even certain Quakers – whom he considers modern-day prophets. When represented graphically, the patterns of Crab’s scriptural allusion, and the differences between his early and late works, are made evident:

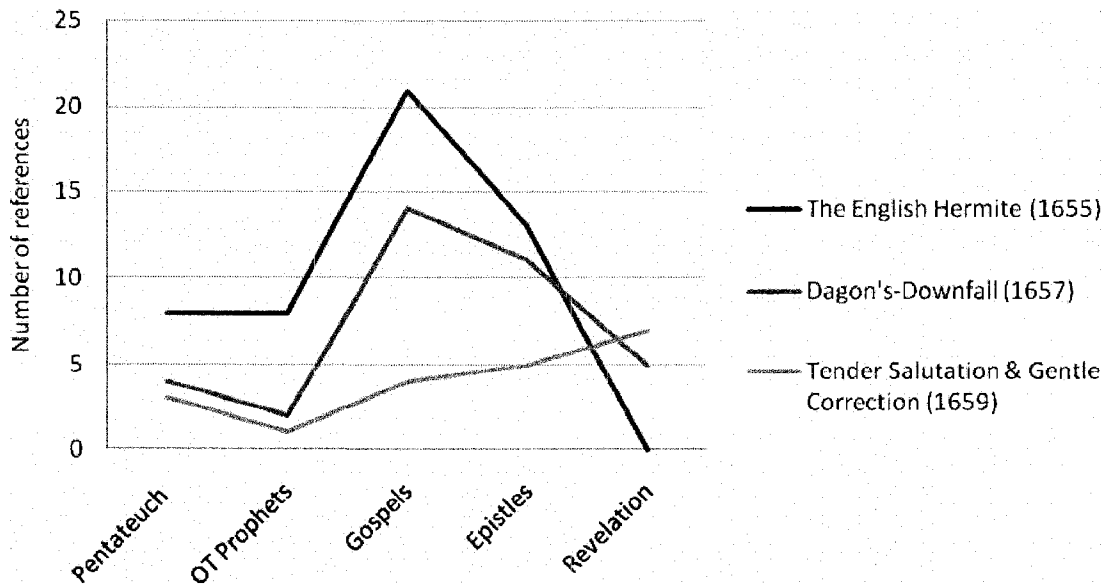


Fig. 1

For the purposes of discussion, I have tallied Crab’s citations according to five segments of the Bible: the Pentateuch, the Old Testament prophets, the Gospels, the

Epistles, and the book of Revelation. I have also grouped *A Tender Salutation* and *Gentle Correction* together, which presents a clearer picture of the trends at work over Crab's publication career. From *The English Hermite* to the Quaker pamphlets, Crab's initial preference of Gospel and epistolary allusion first weakens, then further subsides. Post-hermitage, Crab chiefly evokes not Old Testament prophecies or Gospel parables, but apocalyptic revelation. This trend becomes more apparent when Crab's references are considered proportionally, instead of quantitatively:

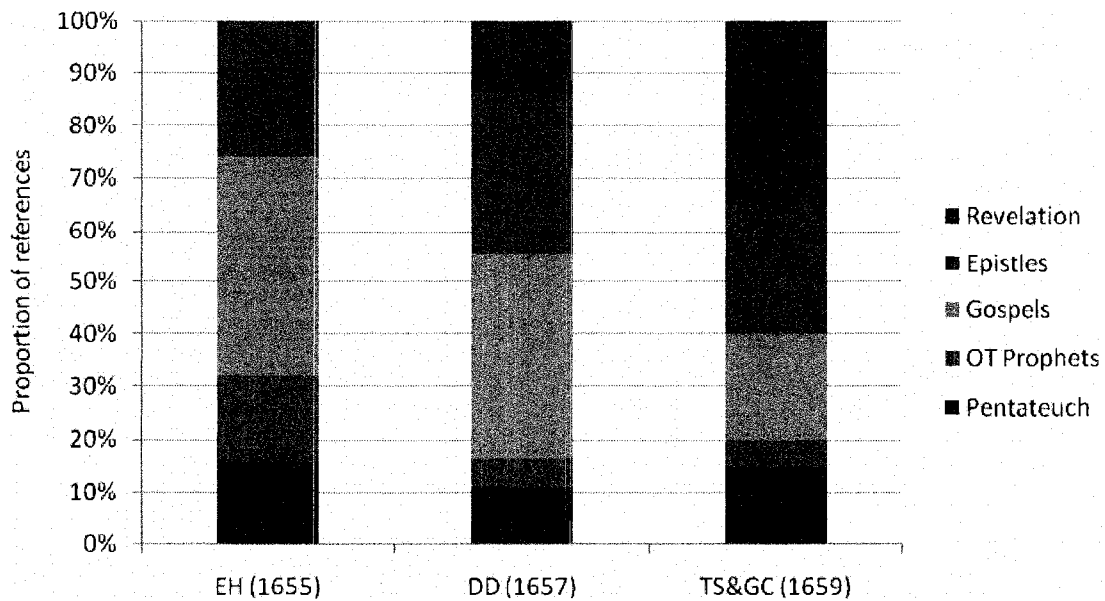


Fig. 2

References to Adam and Eden, which constitute the majority of Crab's allusions to the Pentateuch, mark one constant in Crab's theology: a firm belief in the original perfection of man, and its re-attainability through a strict vegetarian diet.

The capacity of John the Divine for ecstatic vision provides Crab with a model for his own interaction with the divine. In his increased attraction to the book of Revelation, Crab embraces a more open-ended discourse – not of staid precedent but of immediate

inspiration. Such immediacy imparts brevity to Crab's later works and also influences the way in which their author incorporates other inspired text into his own. Whereas in *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall* Crab often specifies the sources behind his biblical quotations and allusions, in the post-hermitage works such reference largely go without open citation. In this, Crab echoes the Ranter Jacob Bauthumley, who, in accordance with the "intensity" attributed to Ranter rhetoric, intentionally omits any citations of his scriptural references. Were Bauthumley to take such care, he writes, he would surely "loose, or let pass what was spiritually discovered inside [him]" (Smith 33). This same urgency marks Crab's later publications, overruling even his old habits of representation. The lessening number of scriptural allusions in Crab's later works is accompanied by the tracts' decrease in length, leaving these later works more densely and conspicuously intertextual than either *The English Hermite* or *Dagon's-Downfall*. Here, the authorial presence is ostensibly outmatched by an intense intertext that speaks of his fuller dependence upon the inspired word.

Crab's move beyond certain scriptural precedents remains in keeping with his prophetic role. The unfolding of biblical tradition requires a prophet who, as Sacvan Bercovitch writes, "resembles *and supersedes* his predecessors; his role as exemplum is at once recapitulative and prospective" (13). Over the course of his publications, Crab leads from the Old Testament to a living New, "resembling and superseding" his predecessors and fellow sectarians, while gesturing toward an ongoing engagement with the Biblicism of his contemporaries. In this role, Crab resembles in many ways the New World puritans whom Bercovitch describes at length in *The American Jeremiad*. Crab, like the Puritans, "both laments an apostasy and heralds a restoration" (31) in his own version of the

Jeremiad, which he delivers from the “waste and howling Wilderness” (Danforth) of Old, not New, England. Crab, like the Puritans, identifies himself as among a chosen people, and on a God-given errand. “Sacred history,” Bercovitch writes, “unfolds in a series of stages or *dispensations*, each with its own (increasingly *greater*) *degree of revelation*” (13, italics his). Crab’s own dispensation can be no different. As “wisdom’s Fool,” his revelation must necessarily be uncommon and remarkable, just as that of John the Apostle, or John the Baptist before him.

Crab does not completely disengage himself from scripture in favour of more contemporary revelation, although he appears to give precedence to works within the longer tradition of New Testament prophecy. His *Tender Salutation*, for example, follows a clear scriptural precedent. Crab’s message to the Quakers echoes the language and form of the messages intended for “the seven churches which are in Asia”, as written in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation. Such a message comes to the church at Ephesus: “[thou] hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted” (Rev. 2:3). Crab’s writing to the Quakers covers similar ground: “you have suffered stripes and imprisonments, burnings, sufferings, and what not; and in all this you fainted not” (TS 1). By placing the Quakers alongside churches addressed in biblical history, Crab attempts to forestall any offense to or alienation of his audience by elevating it to the level of a distinguished precedent. Crab’s messages for the Quakers, as those sent to churches at Ephesus, Thyatira, and so on, are carefully targeted, and although critical, are written for their recipients’ benefit.

The criticisms in *A Tender Salutation* and *Gentle Correction*, however egregious to the Quakers, remain tempered with promise. Crab’s admonishment of the Quakers accords

with his “Motives for their return to the Witnesses, that leadeth out of Self into Eternity” (GC I). The predominant themes of renewal and rebirth found in *The English Hermite* and *Dagon’s-Downfall* also have a place in Crab’s Quaker pamphlets. These themes are altered, however: that Crab invites Quakers to join him as fellow martyrs and witnesses suggests a change in the ex-hermit’s preoccupations. In his early texts, Crab’s concern lies in ensuring his own inclusion into the elect, whether it be through positioning himself in relation to other biblical figures, or re-reading biblical texts in ways that accommodate his peculiar philosophies and refute church practice. His interest lay in establishing his own legitimacy in the eyes of his readers. In the later works, Crab takes his own legitimacy for granted, not arguing his divine approval, but simply presenting himself as having already obtained it. Instead, the legitimacy and renewal of others becomes Crab’s issue of concern. Here he is preoccupied not with his own, but others’ inclusion among the “Witnesses.”

Yet Crab’s arrogation of divinity met with harsh rebuke from those he sought as coreligionists. If Salter’s lengthy response to *A Tender Salutation* is any indication, the Quaker reaction to Crab’s overtures was hostile. Salter’s “letter” begins with a plain statement of the Quakers’ judgement of Crab’s message: “Wee have viewed thy letter, which is not the word of the Lord, but much confusion there is in it” (2). This in itself proves sufficient grounds for the dismissal of *A Tender Salutation*: for the Quakers, “there is no confusion in the power of God, which goes over the confusion, the evil, the darknesse, and confounds it” (5). Salter addresses Crab as “a corrupt bulk of Fog, who art like a quagmire that sucks up them that comes upon thee,” and rejects all further association with him: “thy beastly garments are not to be touched” (5). Salter dismisses Crab’s revelation as mere invention. The vision of heaven that Crab relates is denounced as untenable, and his

biblical pretensions as unpalatable. Salter rejects them out of hand. Crab refused to be discouraged, however, and continued his address to the Quakers. And through his persistence, Crab re-affirms his departure from the eremitic life.

A Tender Salutation, *Salter's Answer*, and the following *Gentle Correction* mark Crab's re-evaluation of reclusion. His "motive," or rhetorical task, in the later works lies not in describing the value of asceticism or in justifying his act of leaving the world behind, as he had done in *The English Hermite* and *Dagon's-Downfall*, but rather in gesturing toward what proves the birthright of the faithful witness. Not to be confined by the perceived limitations of reclusion, Crab instead advocates inclusion – whether it be into a "cloud of witnesses" as in Hebrews 12:1 or into an association of fellow "Rationals." Reclusion, for Crab, comes to encompass a reaction, a moving away from something, be it England's churches, marketplaces, or battlefields. Inclusion, conversely, implies active movement towards a "New Heaven, and a New Earth, where no impure thing can be" (TS 1). An act of reclusion may define the recluse in terms of the world he eschews, whereas Crab's new commitment to inclusion aligns him with the perfection attained following a successful separation from "natural desires" and "natural causes" (EH 13).

Crab's self-consciousness as a modern-day prophet predominates his post-hermitage writings. In these works his disavowal of an authorial role becomes more obvious. Whereas in *The English Hermite* he describes his work as "[indited]... as the most high shall direct me" (1), Crab presents his later writing not as his own, but as nothing less than "the Word of the Lord unto you people called Quakers" (TS 1). He closes this work with a confident flourish: "Even so it shall be, for I am the Lord" (2). More than ever before, Crab represents himself not as an author responsible for creating meaning, but as a conduit of the divine

word. And more than ever, his words and writings are inflected, informed, and supplemented by authors outside established biblical tradition. Having vacated the role of author, Crab seeks others who might fill it.

That the final two sections of *Gentle Correction* are attributed ostensibly to the work's printer, "J.B.", serves as further evidence of Crab's willingness to relinquish any hold of the authorship in works that ostensibly bear his name. Unlike verses appended to *The English Hermite*, these are clearly attributed to a second party, and prove compatible with the writing that precedes them. The first of these passages presents itself in a divine first person, and, like Crab's contributions to the pamphlet, it too is written as the word of God. Both Crab and J.B. appear to be capable of relating the divine word – which proves independent of those who would claim to convey it. Therefore Crab's importance, like J.B.'s, proves to be of a most rudimentary nature. As mere scribes, these men would be understood as having little influence on the content of the message they deliver. Their responsibility does not exceed its transmission. This effectively settles the balance that – in Crab's early works – shifts between the divine and the inspired, or between the message and its intended audience. The direct address to the Quakers made in the later pamphlets makes clear the extent of Crab's participation within the communicative circuit he imagines spanning heaven and earth.

According to Crab's new, more inclusive reckoning, he is by no means the only mortal within this circuit. In addition to J.B., Crab, through reference and echo, indirectly shares the page with Boehme. Crab also contributes to the works of others. The preface to *The Faithful Description of Pure Love in perfect Peace* (1659), a short pamphlet "Written by Francis Jenings R. and now published for their sakes who are subject to be burthened

and tormented” (1), is attributed to “Rowedger Criup. O” (2). The two authors share in the work the task of “[leading] all that follow... out of all the visible worlds vanities” (4), and are later listed alongside each other among those whom the Quaker Robert Rich considered “Friends to the Bridegroom” (6) in *Love Without Dissimulation* (1667). In his later publications, Crab freely borrows from and builds upon the work of his contemporaries, at times drawing attention to the fact, and at times ignoring it. Yet a reading of the prophet as if plagiarist seems a misprision of Crab’s approach to his sources. He attributes continuity to purportedly divine utterances, holding that the inspiration behind them is the same. The dictates of Wisdom, whatever their manifestation, come from a power – or author – above man. The theme of inclusion that develops in *Tender Salutation* and *Gentle Correction* applies to those whom Crab would welcome into “the Witness” (GC title page), and also to his own participation with those who are but conduits for the divine word.

The composition of *Gentle Correction* establishes two personae: Crab as man and Crab as prophet. The pamphlet is divided into four portions, the first of which is both attributed to and written in the voice of “ROGER CRABB” (1). A second passage follows, written in a “voice of god,” and describing the “Tryal of Spirits” (3) to which the Quakers were subjected. This second passage is attributed to “Roger Crabb, O” (4). *A Tender Salutation* also bears variations of this name, which is inscribed as “Rodger Crabb, O.” on the frontispiece, and as “Rowedger Criup, O.” following the main text. The title “O” goes without any clear definition in these works, although Bowers offers one explanation: “does the ‘O.’”, he asks, “designate Crab as the ‘One’?” (105). Crab’s own message lends some credence to this reading, as he describes himself as a prepared body, as a servant, and as a “Beloved One” (TS 1). An alternate reading exists, however, also suggested in Crab’s own

writings, and, beyond these, in some of Boehme's: Crab's "O" represents not one, but none. The abbreviation "O." was commonly used in the seventeenth century as a representation of "the figure or symbol zero, 0; nought; (hence) a cipher, a mere nothing," as in Milton's *Eikonoklastes*, "To be..cast away like so many Naughts in Arithmetick, unless it be to turne the O of thir insignificance into a lamentation with the people," or – more tellingly, perhaps – as in *King Lear*, "Thou art an O without a figure" (OED). Boehme offers a similar reading of the relation between nothingness and divinity that may have informed Crab's understanding: "When I consider what God is, then I say, He is the *One*; in reference to the *Creature*, as an Eternall Nothing: he hath neither foundation, beginning, or Abode: he possesseth nothing, save onely himselfe" (MM 1). Such interpretations match Crab's low regard not only for the authorial role, but for his physical form, which – in itself – he deems of little worth, save as a conduit of the divine word. Indeed, Crab reasonably aspires to such a lowly place. His version of New Jerusalem remains inaccessible to those who are not "brought down to nothing" (TS 2).

This title of "O" that Crab adopts is no mere artifice or conceit, but reflects its bearer's consciousness of and indeed his emphasis upon his status as representative of the divine. Crab intends his experience to be read and understood not as concrete, or literal, but as a cipher or symbol. In his introduction to *The English Hermite and Dagon's-Downfall*, Hopton observes that "The real and the metaphorical become blurred in [Crab's] vision of Eden, only to give way to the conflicting assertion of a fundamental belief in the separation of the ideal and the real, of the soul and the body" (9). These distinctions, however ill-defined they may be, indeed extend far beyond Crab's division between body and soul in his re-reading of Eden. By representing himself as an "Eternall Nothing," Crab seeks

release from the limitations of “natural causes” (EH 13), and reveals the great extent to which he comes to privilege the immaterial above the real. The distinction between these two is further developed in *The Faithful Description*: “In nothing there is no Offence; All Offences are in something, and from something, and to something” (8).

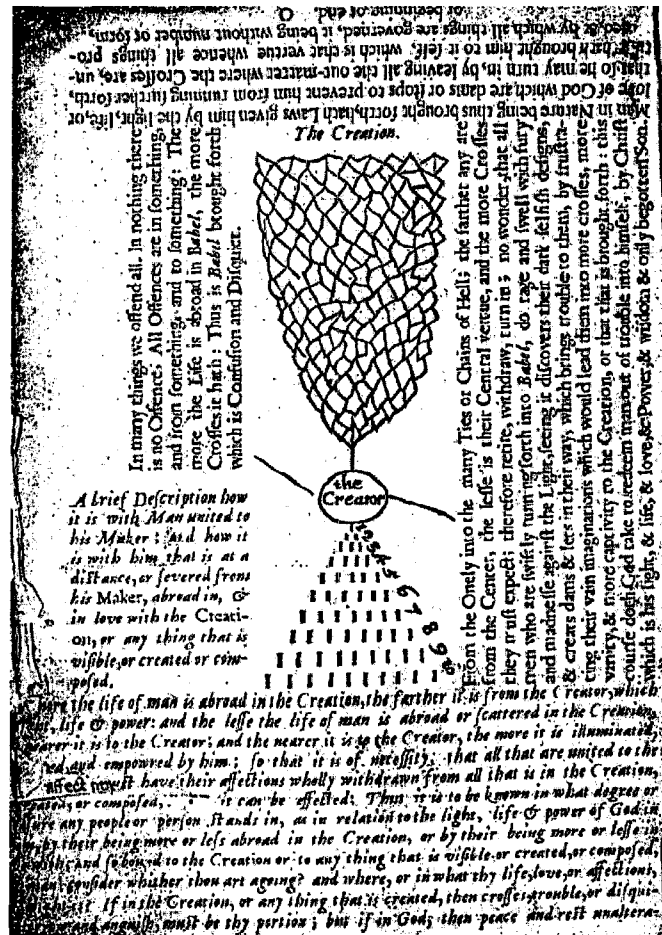
Crab’s final reclusion then marks a departure from the material world toward the immaterial. He laments that the Quakers “must be beholding to walls, and locks, and strong bolts made by Art,” (GC 3), and addresses them not from a hermitage, but – as he would have his readers believe – from heaven itself:

Therefore, know this my friend whosoever thou art, that thou
canst not be-ly me; for what thou imagin in the outward of
me, that I am without the Gate where all imaginations are.
And distinctions of names, terms, and forms, and every earth
thing that will throw down other, and set up it self (GC 1)

The hermit’s middle ground becomes less literal and more symbolic for the post-hermitage Crab, and describes no physical space in between country and town, or between seclusion and society, but rather one between heaven and earth. His “rhetoric of reclusion” culminates in this transition to abstract symbolism, allegedly enabling Crab to exceed the world itself – literal, concrete, and temporal – and witness the eternity “without the Gate.”

The Faithful Description features a visual representation of the material and the immaterial on its final page, following the foregoing sections attributed to Crab and Jenings. Although the authorship of this section is not clearly specified, Crab appears to have had some hand in its composition. Passages surrounding the diagram (pictured below) include imagery of “dams” and “crosses,” which figures centrally in Crab’s preface to the

pamphlet, and one passage in particular ends with the familiar “O” cipher. Here, we read “A brief Description how it is with Man united to his Maker; and how it is with him that is at a distance, or severed from his Maker, abroad in, & in love with the Creation, or any thing that is visible, or created or composed.”:



Creation, represented by the upper side of the rendering, is described here as chaos: “Thus is Babel brought forth which is Confusion and Disquiet.” The successive levels pictured beneath “the Creator” presumably represent man’s descent “From the Onely into the many Ties or Chains of Hell.” Although the realities of these two material locations are equally bleak, as both constitute the “visible, or created or composed,” Crab maintains the possibility of “leaving all the out-matter where the Crosses are.” Such is the “two-fold

crose” that he describes in the opening line of his preface to *The Faithful Description*: “one to crose the earthly mind, the other to crose the heavenly mind” (2).

Crab uses complementing rhetorics of text and image to emphasize his disdain for “*the Creation, or any thing that is visible, or created or composed.*” The unusual arrangement of concentric, successively shorter paragraphs suggests a spiral, first drawing the reader’s eye to the interior diagram, then emphasizing the circle located at its centre. This layout provides a distinct typographical echo of the accompanying textual exhortation to “Therefore retire, withdraw,” and, as Crab twice repeats, to “turn in.” Jenings also calls for a “turning in” earlier in the same work. Referring to “pure Love” that “hath dominion” over “those bodyes of flesh,” he urges his reader to “turn in and seek for it in thy self, there thou mayst find it (and there it is best found) in power without form” (6). The page’s typography thus reinforces Crab and Jenings’s textual exhortation, turning inward, as man himself ought, toward “the Creator.” In later life, Crab advocates a reclusion reminiscent of his original eremitic calling: the “*more the life of man is abroad in the Creation, the farther it is from the Creator... the lesse the life of man is abroad or scattered in the Creation, nearer it is to the Creator.*” The former-hermit yet preaches withdrawal from “the Creation, or any thing that is created.” And for him who would not take heed, “then crosses, trouble, or disquiet... must be [his] portion.”

Crab undergoes and advocates a process of purification through which he attains “Central virtue” (FD 8). As with Crab’s visions of Eden, which “drave [him] oftener into the Garden” in order to obtain a deeper revelation, he gains his place “without the Gate” through a process of purification. As he is drawn “nearer... to the Creator,” he finds himself “illuminated” and “empowered” (FD 8). Crab undergoes a similar process of purification

by degrees in *Tender Salutation*, in which he passes “through the three Gates” of New Jerusalem. Crab passes through these gates, each guarded by “Watch-men”:

the Watch at the first Gate examines and tries all Passengers and Spirits that would enter; And if they cannot lose the pleasure of the outward Sense, the pleasing of the Pallat, the Lust of the Flesh, and the Pride of the Eye, they will not admit, nor suffer them to enter. The second Gate... tries the secrets of the Heart... The third Gate none can enter, that feeds of the Tree of Knowledge... (2)

Crab re-reads the account given in Revelation of New Jerusalem’s three gates in much the same way as he did that of the Garden of Eden in *Dagon’s-Downfall*, supplementing details in the text with speculations presumably gleaned from divine revelation. Aside from the given number of gates – dismissed flatly by the Quaker Salter as “the gates thou hast invented” (4) – and the presence of watchmen, Crab’s vision differs much from John’s. His gates each serve a specific purpose, and prevent transgressors of assorted stripes from crossing their respective thresholds. Although different, the gates share one attribute – none admit earthly encumbrances. Sensory pleasure, idols, and “any Earth-thing that bears either Name or Term” (TS 2) have no place beyond them. Thus prevented from the inscribed, the literal, and the concrete, Crab instead seeks out the currency of heaven in the not-inscribed, the not-literal, and the not-concrete, or, in short: in symbol.

Crab revises the terminology of certain “Earth-things,” intending to exceed the limitations of language by augmenting its terms with symbolism that reflects truer meaning. In his preface to Jenings’s work, Crab reinscribes certain terms so that they might provide,

in a purpose fitting to the work's title, a more faithful description of their subjects. Three terms undergo this transformation, through what are effectively puns: Wisdom turns to "ways-dam," Serpent to "serve-pains," and Adam to "A-dam." According to Crab's logic,

it is All-ways-dams work to crosse or dam up all the waies
and wiles of man fallen into the Serve-pains wisdom, and so
he creates and makes the old earthly A-dam; The other that
crosses the heavenly mind, is that which is called the second
Adam, which was from Heaven heavenly... (FD 2)

In the "Serve-pain" Crab presumably sees Lucifer, the original unwilling servant, and in the "old earthly A-dam" the lapsarian dam or "crosse" that impedes "the heavenly mind."

Beyond these reimaginings, Crab also converts his much maligned authorial name to a more fitting form. Roger Crab becomes "Rowedger Criup" – a refiguring that reappears in *A Tender Salutation* with roughly the same spelling, and that proves one in keeping with the prevailing agricultural metaphors found throughout Crab's work. Might "Row-edger" refer to that most useful garden tool, the spade? Or is it more akin to the German form of Roger – "Rüdiger" – meaning "row digger"? "Criup" suggests "crop," and thus Crab redescribes himself in terms of the vegetarian philosophy to which he adheres. He thus leaves behind the name given to him at birth, dismissing it as an earthly encumbrance and as having no place "without the gate."

Beyond their practical purpose, the three heavenly gates that Crab imagines provide a threshold between his early and later experience. In specifics, they no doubt pleased the hermit and vegetarian Crab of old, rejecting "the pleasing of the Pallat" and "of the outward Sense," and even promising a reward for those who subsist on more simple fare. Yet they

are nevertheless an imagining of the later, Philadelphian Crab, and therefore bear his mark as well. It is likely that Crab's gates are in part inspired by Boehme's. He too writes of these "Gates of the Eternall Onely life," which, like Crab's triple gates, one "*cannot* attaine" unless he "break and quell the desire and lust... depart from his Contrived Abominations, and forsake and destroy that *Substance* [or matter] which he hath forged, and made in his minde" (MM 123). And so Crab's gates are not his own, nor do they rightly belong to Boehme, or even John the Divine. In this middle ground between man and the divine, Crab is an autobiographer without a subject, growing older, less himself, and soon an "eternall nothing" – both resembling and superseding even the life of that most enigmatic of English hermits.

Epilogue: The Hermit's Grave

Tread gently Reader near the dust
Committed to this Tomb Stones trust;
For while 'twas Flesh it held a Guest,
With universal Love possess;
A Soul that stemn'd Opinion's try'd,
Did over Sects in Triumph ride,
Yet separate from the giddy Croud
And paths Tradition had allow'd.
Through good and ill Report he past
Oft censur'd, yet approv'd at last;
Wouldst thou his religion know
In brief 'twas this: To all to do
Just as he would be done unto.
So in kind Natures Laws he stood,
A Temple undefiled with Blood,
A Friend to ev'ry thing was good.
The blest Angels alone can fitly tell,
Hast then, to them and him; and so Farewel.

From the tombstone of Roger Crab
(Hatton, *New View of London*, 1708)

So reads the English hermit's gravestone, set in a Stepney churchyard following his death on September 11, 1680. Historian Edward Hatton records the epitaph in his *New View of London* (vol. 2, 225), and John Strype also includes it in his 1720 revision of John Stow's *Survey of London* (vol. 2, App. 1, 99). By 1795, the inscription upon the "very handsome tomb" was "almost defaced" (Lysons 456), leaving later historians and biographers no choice but to consult the accounts of the tombstone and its "trust" in *New View* and *Survey*. Yet Crab and his remains would descend into deeper obscurity. A 1878 reporter laments that Crab's grave had been "stupidly covered in gravel, in the path leading to White Horse Street" (Hare 353).

Little is known about Roger Crab's later life. He appears to have ceased publication

after the release of his Quaker tracts in 1659. The only further writing by Crab on record is his will, penned some twenty years later, one week before his death. He garnered scarcely a mention in the press during those final two decades, perhaps because, as archival sources suggest, Crab's radical bent had straightened in the early Restoration years. He was married in 1663 and later obtained gentle status (Lysons, 454). His funeral, held at Saint Dunstan's Church, was reportedly well-attended (Stuart 37) by those who wished to pay their respects to Stepney's "Pilgrim" (Hatton, vol. 2, 225). Crab's latter-day title – "the Pilgrim" – suggests that he was no longer known chiefly for his radical eccentricity, but was acknowledged and even "approv'd" by some of his peers as a religious devotee. His "gazing stock" moderated, Crab may have enjoyed in those years a more welcome response to some gentler expression of his peculiar theology.

Yet Crab's apparent departure from the print marketplace remains notably abrupt, following five forays into print in about as many years. This silence need not indicate that Crab altogether ceased publication of his unmediated, inspired writing. Although the scope and purpose of his pamphlets changed over the course of his works, Crab remained much the "enthusiast." Could he have indeed restrained his pen during his final decades? If Crab's disdain for the authorial name continued, he may have published anonymously or even under another name. Or, he may have contributed to radical publications more quietly, adding to the pamphlets of others, as he does to Jening's *Faithful Description*. Crab's bibliography may yet increase should such works be unearthed and properly attributed.

Hopeful speculation aside, Crab's abandonment of radical pamphleteering at the end of the 1650s likely followed changes in the politics of the day. Government control of the press returned in the post-Restoration years. The unmediated representation that Crab

sought became especially unlikely in this later, more restrictive print marketplace. His previous print collaborators found themselves sorely pressed by the Licensing Act of 1662 and its proponent, the Surveyor Roger L'Estrange (Hessayon, "Chapman, Livewell [fl. 1643-1665]", *ODNB*). Crab surely found warning in the experiences of Chapman and Calvert in those years. Their repeated imprisonment led to the failure of Chapman's business and of Calvert's health (Hessayon, "Calvert, Giles [bap. 1612-1663]", *ODNB*). Such enforcement may have silenced Crab, or at least driven him to more obscure, unregulated methods of dissemination.

Whatever circumstances dictated Crab's retirement from publishing, he retained his unorthodox, oppositional perspective thereafter. The opening lines of his will prove that he maintained an unusual conception of his earthly life until its final days:

A matter of Thirty and five yeares agoe I had like to I have
departed this humane Life And according to Scripture I
looked upon my Selfe to regenerated upon which account the
Lord himselfe took my Soule into his custody Soe itt would
bee ridiculous for me to pr[e]sume to take upon me to
dispose of my Soule againe. (qtd. in Hessayon, "Crab, Roger
[c. 1616-1680]", *DNB*)

Although upon his deathbed, and beset by failing strength and eloquence, Crab did not see himself as one preparing to leave the natural world behind. By his own reckoning, he had already done so, having "disposed of" his soul many years before. This may inform the otherwise commonplace distinction between body and soul that appears in the opening lines of Crab's epitaph: "Here remains all that was Mortal of Mr. Roger Crabb, who entered

into Eternity the 11th Day of Septemb. 1680. In the 60 Year of his Age” (Hatton, vol. 2, 225). Crab’s lasting eremitic legacy informs his final self-understanding as a heavenly being, one but marginally earthbound. The tombstone verses give further indication that Crab’s latter-day preoccupations were not far removed from those of his early life. As “a temple undefiled with blood,” Crab presumably remained a vegetarian. Despite a church marriage and burial, Crab likely remained a religious independent as well. The epitaph describes his beliefs as in accordance with that simple edict – “to all to do / Just as he would be done unto” – rather than summarizing them in a way that clearly aligns Crab with the church. Although his preferred methods of dissemination changed in later life, his radical views likely did not.

Yet closer scrutiny of Crab’s epitaph suggests that the memorial verse presents a false picture of its subject. Although such commemorations are necessarily abbreviated and simplified, here the poet pointedly omits any real acknowledgement of the radicalism that defined Crab. To describe him as a “Friend to ev’ry thing was good” is to overlook the strong oppositional force behind his life’s work. He had proven himself just as much an enemy to everything he considered false, and had elicited “inveterate hatred” (DD 3) as a result. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine Crab as “separate from the giddy Croud,” when, as a radical pamphleteer, he purposefully entered into the thick of it. His direct engagement with sectarian discourse goes unacknowledged in the epitaph. The summary of “his religion” ignores Crab’s lofty pretensions of prophecy and his even grander claims of experience “without the gate” (GC 1). Instead, it subordinates Crab to “kind nature’s law,” thereby marginalizing his status as a religious independent or radical.

Crab’s death thus provides a final reclusion from “self-ended religion” (EH 3) and

“the inventions and traditions of men” (DD 24), but gives him no lasting respite from the persistent influence of those who would intervene between him and his readership. The hermit’s peers, critics, and biographers present readings of his life and work either disproportionately amplified or subdued, according to Crab’s fluctuating “gazing stock” (EH 1). It rises surrounding the publication of *The English Hermite*, diminishes in the post-Restoration years, and appears to increase again as Romantic reappraisals of his life seize upon his eccentricity. As a result, Crab comes to play a variety of roles, from “Pilgrim,” “crazy sectary” (Chambers 334), and “enthusiast” (Wilson 48), to proverbial “mad hatter” (Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* 314). He proves an eccentric figure for the ages, and one quick to catch the antiquary’s eye and historian’s imagination. Yet the English hermit’s works greatly repay a calmer reading. Crab’s address, whether delivered from his “mean cottage,” or while he “sate in the Stocks,” or even from “Beyond the gate,” provides an engaging study of the publishing prophet as he seeks an ideal form and forum for his purportedly inspired message. In confronting sectarian discourse, wayward church practice, and an imperfect authorial self, Crab proves as much a creative rhetorician as he does an ambitious religious independent.

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