



DELPHI
CLASSICS

Richard Crashaw

Complete Works

DELPHI POETS SERIES

D E L P H I P O E T S S E R I E S

Richard Crashaw

(c. 1613-1649)



Contents

The Life and Poetry of Richard Crashaw

Brief Introduction: Richard Crashaw by Edmund William Gosse
Complete Works of Richard Crashaw

The Poems

List of Poems in Chronological Order
List of Poems in Alphabetical Order

The Biography

Richard Crashaw (1900) by Sidney Lee

The Delphi Classics Catalogue

RICHARD CRASHAW

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Richard Crashaw



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NOTE



When reading poetry on an eReader, it is advisable to use a small font size and landscape mode, which will allow the lines of poetry to display correctly.

The Life and Poetry of Richard Crashaw



Detail from Visscher's 'View of London', 1616 — Richard Crashaw was born in London in c. 1612. He was the only son of Anglican divine William Crashaw. The exact date of his birth and the name of his mother are unknown.

Brief Introduction: Richard Crashaw by Edmund William Gosse



From '1911 Encyclopædia Britannica', Volume 7

RICHARD CRASHAW (1613–1650), English poet, styled “the divine,” was born in London about 1613. He was the son of a strongly anti-papistical divine, Dr William Crashaw (1572–1626), who distinguished himself, even in those times, by the excessive acerbity of his writings against the Catholics. In spite of these opinions, however, he was attracted by Catholic devotion, for he translated several Latin hymns of the Jesuits. Richard Crashaw was originally put to school at Charterhouse, but in July 1631 he was admitted to Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he took the degree of B.A. in 1634. The publication of Herbert’s *Temple* in 1633 seems to have finally determined the bias of his genius in favour of religious poetry, and next year he published his first book, *Epigrammatum sacrorum liber*, a volume of Latin verses. In March 1636 he removed to Peterhouse, was made a fellow of that college in 1637, and proceeded M.A. in 1638. It was about this time that he made the acquaintance and secured the lasting friendship of Abraham Cowley. He was also on terms of intimacy with the Anglican monk Nicholas Ferrar, and frequently visited him at his religious house at Little Gidding. In 1641 he is said to have gone to Oxford, but only for a short time; for when in 1643 Cowley left Cambridge to seek a refuge at Oxford, Crashaw remained behind, and was forcibly ejected from his fellowship in 1644. In the confusion of the civil wars he escaped to France, where he finally embraced the Catholic religion, towards which he had long been tending.

During his exile his religious and secular poems were collected by an anonymous friend, and published under the title of *Steps to the Temple* and *The Delights of the Muses*, in one volume, in 1646. The first part includes the hymn to St Teresa and the version of Marini’s *Sospetto d’ Herode*. This same year Cowley found him in great destitution at Paris, and induced Queen Henrietta Maria to extend towards him what influence she still possessed. At her introduction he proceeded to Italy, where he became attendant to Cardinal Palotta at Rome. In 1648 he published two Latin hymns at Paris. He remained until 1649 in the service of the cardinal, to whom he had a great personal attachment; but his retinue contained persons whose violent and licentious behaviour was a source of ceaseless vexation to the sensitive English mystic. At last his denunciation of their excesses became so public that the animosity of those persons was excited against him, and in order to shield him from their revenge he was sent by the cardinal in 1650 to Loretto, where he was made a canon of the Holy House. In less than three weeks, however, he sickened of fever, and died on the 25th of August, not without grave suspicion of having been poisoned. He was buried in the Lady chapel at Loretto. A collection of his religious poems, entitled *Carmen Deo nostro*, was brought out in Paris in 1652, dedicated at the dead poet’s desire to the faithful friend of his sufferings, the countess of Denbigh. The book is illustrated by thirteen engravings after Crashaw’s own designs.

Crashaw excelled in all manner of graceful accomplishments; besides being an excellent Latinist and Hellenist, he had an intimate knowledge of Italian and Spanish; and his skill in music, painting and engraving was no less admired in his lifetime than his skill in poetry. Cowley embalmed his memory in an elegy that ranks among the

very finest in our language, in which he, a Protestant, well expressed the feeling left on the minds of contemporaries by the character of the young Catholic poet: —

“His faith, perhaps, in some nice tenets might
Be wrong; his life, I’m sure, was in the right:
And I, myself, a Catholic will be,
So far at least, dear saint, to pray to thee!”

The poetry of Crashaw will be best appreciated by those who can with most success free themselves from the bondage of a traditional sense of the dignity of language. The custom of his age permitted the use of images and phrases which we now justly condemn as incongruous and unseemly, and the fervent fancy of Crashaw carried this licence to excess. At the same time his verse is studded with fiery beauties and sudden felicities of language, unsurpassed by any lyrical poet between his own time and Shelley’s. There is no religious poetry in English so full at once of gross and awkward images and imaginative touches of the most ethereal beauty. The temper of his intellect seems to have been delicate and weak, fiery and uncertain; he has a morbid, almost hysterical, passion about him, even when his ardour is most exquisitely expressed, and his adoring addresses to the saints have an effeminate falsetto that makes their ecstasy almost repulsive. The faults and beauties of his very peculiar style can be studied nowhere to more advantage than in the *Hymn to Saint Teresa*. Among the secular poems of Crashaw the best are *Music’s Duel*, which deals with that strife between the musician and the nightingale which has inspired so many poets, and *Wishes to his supposed Mistress*. In his latest sacred poems, included in the *Carmen Deo nostro*, sudden and eminent beauties are not wanting, but the mysticism has become more pronounced, and the ecclesiastical mannerism more harsh and repellent. The themes of Crashaw’s verses are as distinct as possible from those of Shelley’s, but it may, on the whole, be said that at his best moments he reminds the reader more closely of the author of *Epipsychidion* than of any earlier or later poet.

Crashaw’s works were first collected, in one volume, in 1858 by W. B. Turnbull. In 1872 an edition, in 2 volumes, was printed for private subscription by the Rev. A. B. Grosart. A complete edition was edited (1904) for the Cambridge University Press by Mr A. R. Waller. (E. G.)



Pembroke College, Cambridge — Crashaw entered Pembroke Hall in 1631 where he formally matriculated the following year.



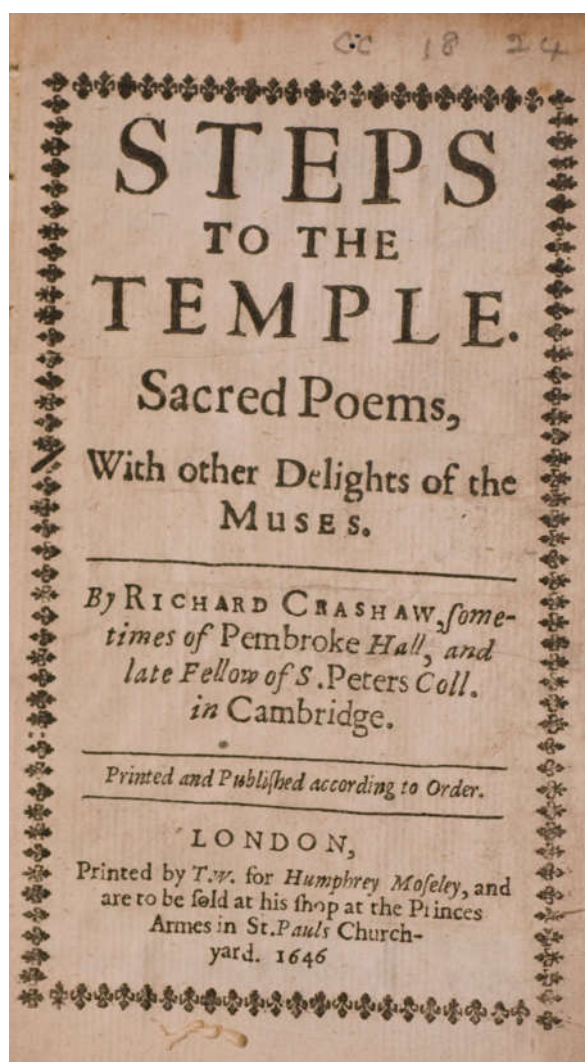
Sir Ranulph Crewe (1558-1646) by Peter Lely — William Crashaw died in 1626 and rendered Richard an orphan when he was 13 or 14 years old. However, Sir Ranulph Crewe, a prominent judge, was a friend of his late father at the Inner Temple, and was appointed as the orphan's guardian. He supported Richard's entry into the Charterhouse School in 1629 and subsequently entry into Pembroke Hall, Cambridge.



Little St Mary's, Cambridge — in 1638 Crashaw took holy orders in the Church of England, and was installed as curate of the Church of St Mary the Less. This church is adjacent to Peterhouse and had served as the college's chapel until the opening of a new chapel within the college in 1632.



A 1656 portrait of Oliver Cromwell by Samuel Cooper — when Cromwell seized control of Cambridge in 1643, Crashaw was ejected from his parish and became a refugee, first in France and then in the Papal States.



Title page of Crashaw's celebrated 'Steps to the Temple' (1646), which was published during Crashaw's exile



Abraham Cowley (1618-1667) was one of the leading English poets of the seventeenth century. He discovered Crashaw living in abject poverty in Paris after the poet's enforced exile. Cowley sought the Queen's influence in securing Crashaw a position in Rome. Crashaw's friend and patron, Susan Feilding, Countess of Denbigh, also used her influence at court to persuade the Queen to recommend Crashaw to the Pope.



Saint Teresa of Ávila by Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1615 — Crashaw's poetry took on decidedly Catholic imagery, especially in his poems about the Spanish mystic Saint Teresa of Avila.



Giovanni Battista Maria Pallotta (1594-1668) — Crashaw found employment as an attendant to Cardinal Pallotta at Rome. While in exile he converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism. In April 1649, Cardinal Pallotta appointed Crashaw to a minor benefice as canon of the Shrine of the Holy House at Loreto where he died suddenly four months later.

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