

## Steps to Crashaw

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John R. Roberts. *Richard Crashaw: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, 1632-1980*. Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1985. Pp. 477.

John R. Roberts' *Richard Crashaw: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, 1632-1980* provides the most comprehensive account of Crashavian criticism to date and in doing so provides the reader with a valuable research tool for evaluating and re-evaluating the poet's work. Like his three previous works, *John Donne: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism, 1912-1967* (1973), *John Donne: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, 1968-1978* (1982), and *George Herbert: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, 1905-1974* (1978), this work is thoroughly researched and judiciously and objectively annotated. The bibliography includes all editions of the poetry, all books and parts of books, monographs, and critical, biographical and bibliographical essays in English from 1632 through 1980 that deal with Crashaw. Quite rightly, Roberts excludes those passing references to Crashaw in other works (but includes any substantial discussion in such works), most book reviews, unpublished doctoral dissertations, and unpublished manuscript materials. Included are numerous publications in foreign languages that might otherwise go unnoticed. Although no bibliography is going to be 100 percent complete, this bibliography comes close in presenting some 1181 items on Crashaw. One may rest assured that no substantial discussion of Crashaw has been overlooked in this work.

Roberts' bibliography is, however, more than just a compilation. In the "Preface" he states his hope that the work "will serve as an impetus to renewed interest in Crashaw and will facilitate a scholarly re-evaluation of his very important contributions to seventeenth-century art and thought" (p. 2). Roberts' hope should be fulfilled because from this bibliography one may trace developing trends in Crashavian criticism

and begin to understand why the poet has the critical reputation that he does have. In comparison to Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, and other seventeenth-century religious poets, Crashaw is frequently thought of as being "un-English" in temperament, "foreign" or "perverse" in sensibility, "alien" in spirit, and "feminine" in sentiment. Moreover, Crashaw is frequently accused of writing poems with imagery in "bad taste" or structures that lack intellectual unity. Although admired by some in his own and later times, Crashaw the poet has been critically attacked by others because of his beliefs and conversion to Catholicism. For example, William Prynne in 1653 criticizes "this peevish sillie Seeker" who "glided away from his Principles in a Poetical vein of fancy, and impertinent curiosity" and concludes by stating that "this fickle shuttlecock so tost with every changeable puff and blast, is rather to be laughed at, and scorned for his ridiculous levity, than imitated in his sinful Apostasy and Revolt" (p. 15). Prynne's use of religious criteria to judge poetry and his attack on the poet's personality appear to have influenced subsequent critical judgment of Crashaw. It is precisely such historically determined attitudes and judgments that Roberts' bibliography allows the reader to trace.

As Roberts' bibliography shows, Crashaw does receive some favorable criticism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but much of it is mixed. Perhaps typical of this criticism is Francis T. Palgrave's comment in 1889 that Crashaw's poetry "is incomplete and irregular," but yet possesses "a charm so unique, an imagination so nimble and subtle, phrases of such sweet and passionate felicity, that readers . . . will find themselves surprised and delighted, in proportion to their sympathetic sense of Poetry, when touched to its rarer and finer issues" (p. 94). The quaint critical terms of the late nineteenth century—"sweet and passionate felicity," "pious fancy," "ardently religious"—soon yield to a more refined terminology with Grierson and the rediscovery of Donne and the metaphysical poets. Crashaw soon becomes the baroque poet of sensuous mysticism.

Roberts' bibliography traces Crashaw's critical fortunes through his rehabilitation by Warren, White, Wallerstein, and others, his encounter with the New Criticism, and finally what appears to be an emerging re-evaluation that begins to appear in the 1960s and 1970s. As Crashaw's imagery is situated in various intellectual and artistic contexts, that imagery is perceived less and less as shocking, repulsive, and alien and instead is seen as more a part of continental aesthetics or even congenial to certain aspects of seventeenth-century sensibilities.

Because this bibliography is so thorough and its annotations free of evaluative remarks, it does serve as an important stimulus for and

research tool in re-evaluating Crashaw's work. It is precisely because Roberts' annotations are descriptive, frequently quoting judicious passages from the works, and not evaluative that they allow the reader to gain a good sense of each work and of the evolving nature of Crashavian criticism. The reader can follow trends as they originate, develop, become modified, and even overturned. Moreover, the fullness and accuracy of those annotations direct the user to the major works of criticism as well as to more unique or specialized areas. As a significant aid to research, this bibliography is "user friendly." Not only are the annotations well-focused and accurate, but the author, subject, and poem indexes make this work easy to use and responsive to individual scholars' needs.

Outside of those who compile and prepare bibliographies, few probably realize the time, effort, knowledge, and critical acumen that are necessary to producing a useful annotated bibliography. This is especially true of many of us who assume the existence of these essential scholarly tools as if they were part of our academic birthright. Roberts' bibliography represents a sort of standard by which to measure others. Any person needing information about Crashaw's critical reception will need and want to use this work. Both Roberts and the University of Missouri Press are to be congratulated for giving us a little more of our birthright.

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