

Bubble

Richard Crashaw

Translated by David Reid

What follows is a verse translation by David Reid of the University of Stirling of Richard Crashaw's Latin poem, *Bulla*. The editors have supplied a plain translation of the four elegiac verses that precede the poem proper, as well as the six that close it, creating a frame around the lyric. For a new edition of the Latin text, see the appendix to the preceding essay by Professor Francis Newton.

Why does my vain bubble hold out her curves to you?
What does my empty trifle do for your weighty dignity?
A more gallant toga is in store for my shoulders; look,
That bubble is mine, my spirit in your right hand.

What are you, what invention	5
Quickening (so chance a sphere)	
Into brief surface tension?	
What kind of Venus here	
Shaking virgin curves—	
Venus still new, still fresh—	10
Among her froths and surfs,	
Brought forth this shimmering flesh?	

You gleam from your native shell.
 Freed with a lovely bound,
 Your exuberant curvings swell 15
 Into this full-blown round.
 Over your changing skin
 Drunk with a thousand dyes,
 The Rainbow, irising,
 Shining, slippery, flies 20
 With a rout of wandering
 Shapes in colourful dance,
 Goddess! wantoning
 In whirling insouciance
 Treacherous giddiness, 25
 Chasing herself. She falters
 Beautifully, then flows,
 So delusive, alters
 Continually and goes
 All possible winding ways 30
 Of coming back. A vein
 Stains the wandering maze
 And spills a drunken train.
 So in glittering fight
 The *melée* suddenly splits; 35
 The level field is light,
 The fields are flying, and its
 Self chasing, itself fleeing,
 Losing, finding, the mad
 Array runs toing, froing, 40
 All lovely Chaos spread.
 Here living rivers wander
 Between banks not their own;
 In companionable meander
 Crowded pleasures run 45
 Together, whose close change shows
 How they intertouch

So delicately, with such
 A slippery division,
 Such subtle marks, one knows 50
 In all that florid procession
 No distinguishable streams,
 No familiar glance.
 The sweet swarming gleams;
 Richness and radiance 55
 Its purple self blaze,
 Private splendour declined.

The flood of a wandering flower,
 The public star of a flower,
 Spring, with golden days, 60
 Advances, and unconfined
 Pours its increasing power.
 All colours are no colour and so
 Haughtily likeness invades
 Variety's bright show: 65
 The pale torch droops and fades
 At the water's coming close;
 A wave's delicate vein
 Is drunk with flame and gross,
 Learns purple ways and is seen 70
 To spring from the blushing trough;
 Milky rivers lap
 The blood-glow given off
 By purple; the golden crop
 Is swayed by the dark blue sea; 75
 Light's quick complexion fades
 In a fog's vacuity;
 In the grapes' rubicund shades
 Sober lilies burn;
 Roses border on snows, 80
 Snows on roses; they turn

Rose snow, snowy rose
 And roses light the snows
 And snow puts out the rose.
 The lovely lascivious reel 85
 Here blushes green and there
 Greens red. The teetering wheel
 Traced by its starry tail
 Revolves in a higher sphere.

Complexity in heaven! 90
 Spheres run into each other:
 The golden fleece is even
 Among the bright flock of ether,
 Innocent teeth that graze
 The black pasture of night. 95
 Whatever wandering blaze
 Shakes heaven's stage with fright
 Is painted here as a lark.
 Here the young world embraces
 Itself and in an arc 100
 Of a globe, self-circled, traces
 Its own meandering glory.
 Here mocking the trembling day
 Torches with transitory
 Gleam blink, then steal away 105
 To sheltering gloom and hide
 With all their splendid freaks
 And shamelessly subside.
 And all these are the tricks
 Of brevity come to pass 110
 In a sphere where all things run,
 A sphere not made of glass
 Like the Sicilian one,
 But more glittering than glass,

More breakable than glass 115
 And glassier than glass.

I am the wind's brief creature,
 Truly a flower of air,
 A star of water; of nature,
 The travelling chatter and fair, 120
 Golden laugh and short dream;
 Of trifles, the sorrow and glory.
 The sweet, learned gleam
 Of nothing is all my story,
 I, golden daughter of deceit 125
 And mother of the quick smile,
 Clay only more fortunate,
 A drop, of prouder style.
 I'm wobbling hope's reward,
 A Hesperidean isle, 130
 A sort of box, the absurd
 Lovers' little blind eye
 And vanity's light heart.
 And I am fortune's die
 Given those who take her part, 135
 The blind goddess's glass:
 In me behold her sign
 Which causes weak faith to pass
 With tipsy man for divine
 And seals his bits of paper. 140
 I'm caressing, light and pert,
 Beautiful, shining, proper,
 A bit gaudy and smart,
 Got up with roses and snow,
 With waves, flames, air, a thing 145
 With paint, gems, gold, aglow—
 I am O! not anything.

If it is irksome to have drawn out, tenacious in tedium, this
Long display, and the bubble seems too much a foolish old
woman;

Avert your eyes, the smooth thread will drop, 150
Leisurely Fate will cut her off with nimble hand.
Still she lived. Why did she live? Just because you were
reading this far;
So it was time then to have died.