



## **The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.**

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his Death

Containing The First of his Letters

**Pope, Alexander**

**London, 1751**

XXVI. Observations on Crashaw's poems.

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**Nutzungsbedingungen**

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L E T T E R XXVI.

Decemb. 17, 1710.

**I**T seems that my late mention of Crashaw, and my quotation from him, has mov'd your curiosity. I therefore send you the whole Author, who has held a place among my other books of this nature for some years; in which time having read him twice or thrice, I find him one of those whose works may just deserve reading. I take this poet to have writ like a gentleman, that is, at leisure hours, and more to keep out of idleness, than to establish a reputation: so that nothing regular or just can be expected from him. All that regards design, form, fable (which is the soul of poetry) all that concerns exactness, or consent of parts (which is the body) will probably be wanting; only pretty conceptions, fine metaphors, glittering expressions, and something of a neat cast of verse (which are properly the dress, gems, or loose ornaments of poetry) may be found in these verses. This is indeed the case of most other poetical writers of miscellanies; nor can it well be otherwise, since no man can be a true poet, who writes for diversion only. These authors should be consider'd as versifiers and witty men, rather than as poets; and under  
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this head will only fall the thoughts, the expression, and the numbers. These are only the pleasing part of poetry, which may be judged of at a view, and comprehended all at once. And (to express myself like a painter) their colouring entertains the sight, but the lines and life of the picture are not to be inspected too narrowly.

This Author form'd himself upon Petrarch, or rather upon Marino. His thoughts, one may observe, in the main, are pretty; but oftentimes far fetch'd, and too often strain'd and stiffen'd to make them appear the greater. For men are never so apt to think a thing great, as when it is odd or wonderful; and inconsiderate authors would rather be admir'd than understood. This ambition of surprizing a reader, is the true natural cause of all fustian, or bombast in poetry. To confirm what I have said, you need but look into his first Poem of the Weeper, where the 2d, 4th, 6th, 14th, 21st stanza's are as sublimely dull, as the 7th, 8th, 9th, 16th, 17th, 20th and 23d stanza's of the same copy, are soft and pleasing: and if these last want any thing, it is an easier and more unaffected expression. The remaining thoughts in that poem might have been spared, being either but repetitions, or very trivial and mean. And by this example in the first one may guess at all the rest; to be  
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like this, a mixture of tender gentle thoughts and suitable expressions, of forced and inextricable conceits, and of needless fillers-up to the rest. From all which it is plain, this author writ fast, and set down what came uppermost. A reader may skim off the froth, and use the clear underneath; but if he goes too deep will meet with a mouthful of dregs; either the top or bottom of him are good for little, but what he did in his own, natural, middle-way, is best.

To speak of his numbers, is a little difficult, they are so various and irregular, and mostly Pindaric; 'tis evident his heroic verse (the best example of which is his Music's Duel) is carelessly made up; but one may imagine from what it now is, that, had he taken more care, it had been musical and pleasing enough, not extremely majestic, but sweet: and the time consider'd of his writing, he was (even as uncorrect as he is) none of the worst versificators.

I will just observe, that the best pieces of this author are, a Paraphrase on Psal. xxiii. On Lefsius, Epitaph on Mr. Ashton, Wishes to his suppos'd mistress, and the *Dies Iræ*.