Cavalier Poets

The glamorous guys of 17th century poetry...
What makes them “cavalier”?  

- They were “cavaliers” in two senses:  
- 1. They were courtly gentlemen (specifically, most of them were members of King Charles I’s court).
2. Their poetry, as you will see, reveals a rather "cavalier" attitude towards the world. ("Cavalier" being defined as "offhand or unceremonious" in attitude or behavior.)
Compare these love poems, for example.

- Shakespeare (NOT a cavalier!) writes of love, in Sonnet # 116:
  “Let me not to the marriage of true minds
  Admit impediments. Love is not love
  Which alters when it alteration finds,
  Or bends with the remover to remove:
  O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
  That looks on tempests and is never shaken;”
Here is part of a love poem by a Cavalier poet …

- (From Robert Herrick’s “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time”)

- “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
  Old time is still a-flying;
  And this same flower that smiles today
  Tomorrow will be dying.”
See the difference?
The Cavalier poem
- Uses more informal language
- And urges the reader to live for today, that youth (and life) are inconstant and impermanent
That (2\textsuperscript{nd} item) sums up the Cavalier philosophy:

- Carpe diem (or, in other words, seize the day)
So, the Cavalier poets have in common …

- 1. a lifestyle (most of them were supporters of Charles I and members of his court)
2. a philosophy (or theme for their poems): carpe diem
3. An informality to their language and their tone
4. A similar subject matter, most often related to love
Oh, and just so you can see our glamour guys...

Richard Lovelace
And...

Sir John Suckling
Presentation by Allison Carey
Spring 2007