Packet to Accompany
The 17th Century
Richard Lovelace  
1618 to 1657

The poems of Richard Lovelace typify the Cavalier spirit in English poetry. Lovelace himself was a proto-typical Cavalier: a courtier and soldier, a poet and a lover, a scholar and musician, a connoisseur of painting, and one of the handsomest men in England. He died young, having written several lyrics that are as fine as any by the Cavalier poets.

Lovelace came from a landed family with a long tradition of military distinction. His father, Sir William Lovelace, who had been knighted by James I, was killed in 1628 while serving in Holland. Young Richard was then ten, the eldest in a large family. Then in 1634 he entered Oxford University and two years later was granted a master's degree at the request of one of the Queen's ladies who was impressed with his "most amiable and beautiful person, innate modesty, virtue, and courtly deportment."

In 1642, Lovelace was imprisoned for seven weeks, during which time he wrote his most famous lyric, *To Lucasta On Going to the Wars*. During a second imprisonment (1648), Lovelace collected and revised a volume of poems, published in 1649 under the name of *Lucasta*. The name comes from a Latin phrase meaning "pure light."
“To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars”
by Sir Richard Lovelace

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field,
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more.

Questions:

1. What is the speaker asking of Lucasta?
   Answer: That he not be angry that he is leaving her to go to war
   Example: Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind, / That from the nunnery / Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind /To war and arms I fly.

2. What inconstancy does the speaker urge Lucasta to accept?
   Answer: He has two loves – her and honor. He wouldn’t love her as much if he weren’t as honorable
   Example: I could not love thee, dear, so much, / Loved I not honor more.
Sir John Suckling
1609 to 1642

Sir John Suckling has been called “the Central Diamond on the Cavalier chain.” He was many things: wit, rake, lover, gambler, soldier, and poet. He was a courtier capable of both courage and cowardice, the servant of the King and a Member of Parliament, a conspirator, fugitive, exile, and suicide. In his poetry Suckling was a master of the light touch, of spontaneity and colloquial directness, of reckless, careless ease. Like Lovelace, he produced several lyrics that are timeless celebrations of the Cavalier spirit.

“Why So Pale and Wan”
by Sir John Suckling

Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
   Prithee, why so pale?
Will, when looking well can’t move her,
   Looking ill prevail?
Prithee, why so pale?

Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
Prithee, why so mute?
Will, when speaking well can’t win her,
   Not saying do ’t?
Prithee, why so mute?

Quit, quit for shame! This will not move;
   This cannot take her.
If of herself she will not love,
   Nothing can make her:
The Devil take her!

Questions

1. In the first and second stanzas, what advice does the speaker offer the “fond lover”?

   First stanza
   Answer: Stop being so sickly looking. Ironically, try looking sickly if you can’t win her over with good looks.
   Example: Will, when looking well can’t move her, / Looking ill prevail? / Prithee, why so pale?

   Second stanza:
Answer: Stop being so silent. Ironically, try not speaking if you can’t win her over with words.
Example: Will, when speaking well can’t win her, / Not saying do ’t? / Prithee, why so mute?

2. What does the poem suggest about the efficacy of the lover’s suit?
Answer: He won’t be successful – he shouldn’t waste his time.
Example: Quit, quit for shame! This will not move; / This cannot take her.

The Constant Lover

Out upon it! I have loved
Three whole days together!
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather.

Time shall not molt away his wings
Ere he shall discover
In the whole wide world again
Such a constant lover.

But the spite on ’t is, no praise
Is due at all to me:
Love with me had made no stays,
Had it been any but she.

Had it been any but she,
And that very face,
There had been ere this
A dozen dozen in her place.

Questions

1. How long has the speaker been in love? How does the speaker view this brief span of time?

Answer: three days – an eternity
Example: Three whole days together!

2. What two meanings of the word “constant” fit the speaker of this poem? Which meaning is ironic?

Answer: 1) not changing or varying; uniform; regular, invariable. 2) continuing without pause or letup; unceasing. 3) Regularly recurrent; continual; persistent. 4) Faithful; unswerving in love, devotion, etc. 5) Steadfast; firm in mind or purpose; resolute. 6) (obsolete) certain; confident
Example: In the whole wide world again / Such a constant lover.

Answer:
Example:

3. What rather dubious compliment does the speaker give his lover? Is his attitude any different from that at the beginning of this poem?

Answer: The credit belongs to her, not him. Had it been anyone else, he wouldn't have been so faithful.
Example: Love with me had made no stays, Had it been any but she.

4. In both of these poems by Suckling, what attitude towards love and toward women is evident in the poems?
Answer: Love is temporary and fleeting. Women are replaceable.
Example: Quit, quit for shame! . . . The Devil take her! Out upon it! I have loved Three whole days together! And am like to love three more, If it prove fair weather . . . . . Had it been any but she, And that very face, There had been ere this A dozen dozen in her place.