

Cavalier Poets and Poetry. Cavalier Lyricists

There were two groups of poets in the middle of the 17th Century. They were religious and secular poets. The secular poets were called the Cavalier poets. Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, John Suckling and Richard Lovelace are known as Cavaliers or lyricists. They shared a few common features. Except Herrick, all of them had leaning towards the King. But they did not use poetry as a means of propaganda against the foes of the Court party. They were lyrical poets and dealt chiefly with love, beauty and war. They wrote songs in lighter vein, gay, trivial, and often licentious. Let us see their contribution to English literature.

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The Cavalier Poets were greatly influenced by Ben Jonson and John Donne. They were proud of calling themselves 'the sons of Ben'. From Ben Jonson they derived clarity and lucidity of expression, control of emotion, felicity of phrase and sophistication of tone, Donne's influences characterise their poetry with conversational tone, metaphysical conceits and the tendency of introspective self-analysis. As the poetic masters of these poets, Ben Jonson and Donne disciplined them in exuberant feelings and elaborate fancy and exerted a dignified restraint and a sensitive literary tact. They did not sing so naturally as the Elizabethan lyricists. They could not achieve the careless rapture of Shakespearean songs, but they exhibited the calm perfection of Horace. They possessed the lyrical power of the high order, at the same time, they are also meditative and observant. They exhibited love for trees, plants and flowers, not for their own sake, but as emblems of human predicaments.

Robert Herrick is the greatest of the Cavaliers. His 'Noble Numbers' and 'Hesperides' are the collections of his short poems. The former deals with the sacred subjects while the

latter contains secular ones. His religious poems are remarkable for awe and fear with some glimpses of trust and hope. But religion was not his pre-eminent concern. It was only a passing phase of feeling. His poetic qualities are at play in his love poems which abound in quaint and charming fancies. No doubt, he ^{lacks} the gift of touching the deepest chord of human nature and fails to arouse high purposes and enthusiasm. But in fact, this lack is common to all the lyricists, for the Renaissance song was that of a Nation in its childhood, unconscious of complexity of thought and knowing nothing of modernity. It was the lyric of men, contented to fleet time in the golden world of their own imagination. In short, among all the singers of the day, when England was a nest of the singing birds, Herrick reigns as a king.

Thomas Carew is known as a courtly and polished love poet. His poetic work is the work of an amorous. His love poems are addressed to a mistress known as 'Celia'. He is obviously sensual in 'The Rapture', where he openly advises Celia to flout the 'Giant Honour' and enjoy the pleasures without scruples. The Paradise he paints to his love lady is the most licentious. In his song 'Ask Me No More' he discovers all the beauties of Nature united in the mistress. However, his lyrics do not enjoy the range of Herrick. But, though he lacks spontaneity and freshness of Herrick, he is superior to him in craftsmanship.

John Suckling is also a reputed Cavalier poet. He possesses poetic ability, but disclaims serious and sustained labour. His poems are love poems which display an irresistible swing. He reminds of Donne who he mocks at women's capriciousness. His two best lyrics are 'Ballad upon a wedding' and 'Why so Pale and wan, Fond Lover'. These poems show the tricky elegance that is his

own. Richard Lovelace⁽⁹⁾ is another poet of the group. He is neither as correct as Carew nor as natural as Suckling. He is remembered chiefly for his two poems, 'To Lucasta going to the wars' and 'To Althea from Prison'. His lyrics are wanting in craftsmanship and are marked for affected wit and grotesque conceits. However, his faults are not due to carelessness, but because of dullness and lack of taste. **M.A. HAQUE**

Thus, we see that the Cavalier poets contributed much to English Poetry. They continued the lyrical tradition and introduced some new tones. The fantastic idealism of Petrarch was replaced by the franker emotions of Horace. They were not professional but amateurs of poetry. They have touches of exquisite expression unsurpassed by any school of poetry.