

Classic Poetry Series

Sir John Suckling
- poems -

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Sir John Suckling(1606-1642)

Born to an old and wealthy Norfolk family, Suckling was educated at Westminster School, Trinity College Cambridge and Grays Inn.

He inherited the family wealth at 18 and pursued a military and ambassadorial career overseas which saw him knighted in 1630. He returned to the English court in 1632 where through his wealth and charm he was known as an elegant and popular gallant and gamester, credited with having invented the game of cribbage. Like the other cavalier poets he scorned the sonnet and the sentimentality of love poetry, writing lyrics with short lines displaying an urbane, graceful and somewhat cynical wit. He won dramatic acclaim with his performances of Aglaura but much of his work was published only after his death.

A leader of the royalists he accompanied Charles I to defeat in Scotland in 1639, and was ridiculed for his troop's bright costumes and poor performance in battle. Two years later he was involved in a plot to rescue the Earl of Stafford from the Tower of London, and had to flee to Paris to escape arrest. Here he is rumoured to have committed suicide by poison within the year.

A Doubt Of Martyrdom

O for some honest lover's ghost,
Some kind unbodied post
Sent from the shades below!
I strangely long to know
Whether the noble chaplets wear
Those that their mistress' scorn did bear
Or those that were used kindly.

For whatsoever they tell us here
To make those sufferings dear,
'Twill there, I fear, be found
That to the being crown'd
T' have loved alone will not suffice,
Unless we also have been wise
And have our loves enjoy'd.

What posture can we think him in
That, here unloved, again
Departs, and 's thither gone
Where each sits by his own?
Or how can that Elysium be
Where I my mistress still must see
Circled in other's arms?

For there the judges all are just,
And Sophonisba must
Be his whom she held dear,
Not his who loved her here.
The sweet Philoclea, since she died,
Lies by her Pirocles his side,
Not by Amphialus.

Some bays, perchance, or myrtle bough
For difference crowns the brow
Of those kind souls that were
The noble martyrs here:
And if that be the only odds
(As who can tell?), ye kinder gods,
Give me the woman here!

Sir John Suckling

A Supplement Of An Imperfect Copy Of Verses Of Mr. William

One of her hands one of her cheeks lay under,
Cosening the pillow of a lawful kiss,
Which therefore swell'd, and seem'd to part asunder,
As angry to be robb'd of such a bliss!
The one look'd pale and for revenge did long,
While t'other blush'd, 'cause it had done the wrong.

Out of the bed the other fair hand was
On a green satin quilt, whose perfect white
Look'd like a daisy in a field of grass,
And show'd like unmelt snow unto the sight;
There lay this pretty perdue, safe to keep
The rest o' th' body that lay fast asleep.

Her eyes (and therefore it was night), close laid
Strove to imprison beauty till the morn:
But yet the doors were of such fine stuff made,
That it broke through, and show'd itself in scorn,
Throwing a kind of light about the place,
Which turn'd to smiles still, as't came near her face.

Her beams, which some dull men call'd hair, divided,
Part with her cheeks, part with her lips did sport.
But these, as rude, her breath put by still; some
Wiselier downwards sought, but falling short,
Curled back in rings, and seemed to turn again
To bite the part so unkindly held them in.

Sir John Suckling

At A Wedding

Her feet beneath her petticoat
Like little mice, stole in and out,
As if they feared the light.
And oh! She dances such a way
No sun upon an Easter day
Is half so fine a sight.

Sir John Suckling

I Prithee Send Me Back My Heart

I prithee send me back my heart,
Since I cannot have thine;
For if from yours you will not part,
Why, then, shouldst thou have mine?

Yet now I think on't, let it lie,
To find it were in vain;
For thou hast a thief in either eye
Would steal it back again.

Why should two hearts in one breast lie,
And yet not lodge together?
O Love! where is thy sympathy,
If thus our breasts thou sever?

But love is such a mystery,
I cannot find it out;
For when I think I'm best resolved,
I then am in most doubt.

Then farewell care, and farewell woe;
I will no longer pine;
For I'll believe I have her heart,
As much as she hath mine.

Sir John Suckling

I Prithee Spare Me Gentle Boy

I prithee spare me gentle boy,
Press me no more for that slight toy,
That foolish trifle of an heart;
I swear it will not do its part,
Though thou dost thine, employ'st thy pow'r and art.

For through long custom it has known
The little secrets, and is grown
Sullen and wise, will have its will,
And like old hawks pursues that still
That makes least sport, flies only where't can kill.

Some youth that has not made his story,
Will think perchance the pain's the glory,
And mannerly sit out love's feast;
I shall be carving of the best,
Rudely call for the last course 'fore the rest.

And oh when once that course is past,
How short a time the feast doth last;
Men rise away and scarce say grace,
Or civilly once thank the face
That did invite, but seek another place.

Sir John Suckling

If You Refuse Me Once, And Think Again

If you refuse me once, and think again,
I will complain.

You are deceiv'd, love is no work of art,
It must be got and born,
Not made and worn,
By every one that hath a heart.

Or do you think they more than once can die,
Whom you deny?
Who tell you of a thousand deaths a day,
Like the old poets feign
And tell the pain
They met, but in the common way?

Or do you think 't too soon to yield,
And quit the field?
Nor is that right, they yield that first entreat;
Once one may crave for love,
But more would prove
This heart too little, that too great.

Oh that I were all soul, that I might prove
For you as fit a love
As you are for an angel; for I know,
None but pure spirits are fit loves for you.

You are all ethereal; there's in you no dross,
Nor any part that's gross.
Your coarsest part is like a curious lawn,
The vestal relics for a covering drawn.

Your other parts, part of the purest fire
That e'er Heav'n did inspire,
Makes every thought that is refin'd by it
A quintessence of goodness and of wit.

Thus have your raptures reach'd to that degree
In love's philosophy,
That you can figure to yourself a fire

Void of all heat, a love without desire.

Nor in divinity do you go less;
You think, and you profess,
That souls may have a plenitude of joy,
Although their bodies meet not to employ.

But I must needs confess, I do not find
The motions of my mind
So purified as yet, but at the best
My body claims in them an interest.

I hold that perfect joy makes all our parts
As joyful as our hearts.
Our senses tell us, if we please not them,
Our love is but a dotage or a dream.

How shall we then agree? you may descend,
But will not, to my end.
I fain would tune my fancy to your key,
But cannot reach to that obstructed way.

There rests but this, that whilst we sorrow here,
Our bodies may draw near;
And, when no more their joys they can extend,
Then let our souls begin where they did end.

Sir John Suckling

Love Turned To Hatred

I will not love one minute more, I swear!
No, not a minute! Not a sigh or tear
Thou gett'st from me, or one kind look again,
Though thou shouldst court me to 't, and wouldst begin.
I will not think of thee but as men do
Of debts and sins; and then I'll curse thee too.
For thy sake woman shall be now to me
Less welcome than at midnight ghosts shall be.
I'll hate so perfectly that it shall be
Treason to love that man that loves a she.
Nay, I will hate the very good, I swear,
That's in thy sex, because it doth lie there, -
Their very virtue, grace, discourse, and wit,
And all for thee! What, wilt thou love me yet?

Sir John Suckling

Loving And Beloved

There never yet was honest man
That ever drove the trade of love;
It is impossible, nor can
Integrity our ends promote:
For Kings and Lovers are alike in this
That their chief art in reign dissembling is.
Here we are lov'd, and there we love,
Good nature now and passion strive
Which of the two should be above,
And laws unto the other give.
So we false fire with art sometimes discover,
And the true fire with the same art do cover.
What Rack can Fancy find so high?
Here we must Court, and here engage,
Though in the other place we die.
Oh! 'tis torture all, and cozenage;
And which the harder is I cannot tell,
To hide true love, or make false love look well.
Since it is thus, God of desire,
Give me my honesty again,
And take thy brands back, and thy fire;
I'm weary of the State I'm in:
Since (if the very best should now befall)
Loves Triumph, must be Honours Funeral.

Sir John Suckling

Out Upon It, I Have Lov'D

Out upon it, I have lov'd
Three whole days together;
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather.

Time shall moult 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 any been but she.

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

Sir John Suckling

Song

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,

Saying nothing 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.

Sir John Suckling

Sonnet

Oh, for some honest lover's ghost,
Some kind unbodied post
Sent from the shades below!
I strangely long to know
Whether the noble chaplets wear
Those that their mistress' scorn did bear
Or those that were used kindly.

For whatsoe'er they tell us here
To make those sufferings dear,
'Twill there, I fear, be found
That to the being crowned
T' have loved alone will not suffice,
Unless we also have been wise
And have our loves enjoyed.

What posture can we think him in
That, here unloved, again
Departs, and 's thither gone
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For difference crowns the brow
Of those kind souls that were
The noble martyrs here;
And if that be the only odds,
(As who can tell?) ye kinder gods,
Give me the woman here!

Sir John Suckling

Sonnet I

Dost see how unregarded now
That piece of beauty passes?
There was a time when I did vow
To that alone;
But mark the fate of faces;
The red and white works now no more on me
Than if it could not charm, or I not see.

And yet the face continues good,
And I have still desires,
Am still the selfsame flesh and blood,
As apt to melt
And suffer from those fires;
Oh some kind pow'r unriddle where it lies,
Whether my heart be faulty, or her eyes?

She ev'ry day her man does kill,
And I as often die;
Neither her power then, nor my will
Can question'd be.
What is the mystery?
Sure beauty's empires, like to greater states,
Have certain periods set, and hidden fates.

Sir John Suckling

The Constant Lover

Out upon it, I have lov'd
Three whole days together;
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather.

Time shall molt away his wings
Ere he shall discover
In such 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 any been but she.

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

Sir John Suckling

When, Dearest, I But Think Of Thee

When, dearest I but think of thee,
Methinks all things that lovely be
Are present, and my soul delighted:
For beauties that from worth arise
Are like the grace of deities,
Still present with us, tho' unsighted.

Thus while I sit and sigh the day
With all his borrow'd lights away,
Till night's black wings do overtake me,
Thinking on thee, thy beauties then,
As sudden lights do sleepy men,
So they by their bright rays awake me.

Thus absence dies, and dying proves
No absence can subsist with loves
That do partake of fair perfection:
Since in the darkest night they may
By love's quick motion find a way
To see each other by reflection.

The waving sea can with each flood
Bathe some high promont that hath stood
Far from the main up in the river:
O think not then but love can do
As much! for that's an ocean too,
Which flows not every day, but ever!

Sir John Suckling

Why So Pale And Wan, Fond Lover?

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

Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
Prithee, why so mute?--
Will, when speaking well can't win her,
Saying nothing 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,
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The Devil take her!

Sir John Suckling