

The Cavalier Poets



From the History of the Term

- denoted a horseman, especially a mounted warrior, such as a knight;
- *cavalier* became a political term during Charles I's reign;
- the personal style of the Cavaliers, which featured long, flowing hair and elaborate dress, contrasted sharply with that of the austere garbed Roundheads;
- the most gifted were Sir John Suckling, Robert Herrick, and Richard Lovelace.

Features of Cavalier Poetry

- Conversational Style
- Elaborate Conceits
- Meditative Tone
- Classicism
- Regular Poetic Form
- Carpe Diem



Conversational Style

cultivated a conversational style based on natural speech patterns.

I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers;
Of April, May, of June, and July flowers ...
(R. Herrick)



Elaborate Conceits

- some of the Cavalier poets shared Donne's fondness for elaborate conceits;
- the majority of their poems were less obscure and more accessible than those of the metaphysical poets.



Meditative Tone

- most of the poems seem controlled;
- at times poets seem self-mocking

*I must confess, when I did part from you,
I could not force an artificial dew [tears]*

Upon my cheeks . . .

(J. Suckling)



Classicism

- admired the poetry of the ancient Greeks and Romans;
- rich in classical allusions (the names of Greek and Roman gods);
- the forms of the poems are often based on classical models (the odes of Horace, the satires of Juvenal, and the eclogues of Virgil).



Regular Poetic Form

- used regular rhythmic patterns, carefully structured stanzas, and simple language also reflects the classical influence;
- welcomed the tidy order of regular meter and rhyme schemes;
- used heroic couplets (pairs of rhymed iambic pentameter lines);
- regularity allowed the poems to be set to music.

Carpe Diem

- the classical influence is seen in the choices of subject;
- love was a popular theme and wrote about idealized love and addressed their poems to women to whom they gave classical names as Julia, Althea, and Lucasta;
- reflected on the uncertainty and brevity of life and wrote poems that expressed a precept known as *carpe diem* (Latin for “seize the day”).



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