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 1830. 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 Ballad upon a Wedding

I tell thee, Dick, where I have been, Where I the rarest things have seen, O, things without compare! Such sights again cannot be found In any place on English ground, Be it at wake or fair.

At Charing Cross, hard by the way Where we, thou know'st, do sell our hay, There is a house with stairs; And there did I see coming down Such folks as are not in our town, Forty at least, in pairs.

Amongst the rest, one pest'lent fine (His beard no bigger, though, than thine) Walked on before the rest:
Our landlord looks like nothing to him;
The King (God bless him!) 'twould undo him, Should he go still so dressed.

At course-a-park, without all doubt, He should have first been taken out By all the maids i' th' town: Though lusty Roger there had been, Or little George upon the Green, Or Vincent of the Crown.

But wot you what? the youth was going To make an end of all his wooing; The Parson for him stayed. Yet, by his leave, for all his haste, He did not so much wish all past, Perchance, as did the maid.

The maid (and thereby hangs a tale), For such a maid no Whitsun-ale Could ever yet produce; No grape that's kindly ripe could be So round, so plump, so soft, as she, Nor half so full of juice!

Her finger was so small the ring Would not stay on, which they did bring; It was too wide a peck: And to say truth (for out it must), It looked like a great collar (just) About our young colt's neck.

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

He would have kissed her once or twice, But she would not, she was so nice, She would not do 't in sight: And then she looked as who should say "I will do what I list today, And you shall do 't at night."

Her cheeks so rare a white was on, No daisy makes comparison, (Who sees them is undone), For streaks of red were mingled there, Such as are on a Catherine pear, (The side that's next the sun).

Her lips were red, and one was thin Compared to that was next her chin, - (Some bee had stung it newly); But, Dick, her eyes so guard her face, I durst no more upon them gaze Than on the sun in July.

Her mouth so small, when she does speak Thou'dst swear her teeth her words did break, That they might passage get; But she so handled still the matter, They came as good as ours, or better, And are not spent a whit.

If wishing should be any sin, The Parson himself had guilty been, (She looked that day so purely); And, did the youth so oft the feat At night, as some did in conceit, It would have spoiled him surely.

Just in the nick, the cook knocked thrice, And all the waiters in a trice His summons did obey. Each servingman, with dish in hand, Marched boldly up, like our trained band, Presented, and away.

When all the meat was on the table, What man of knife or teeth was able To stay to be entreated? And this the very reason was, Before the parson could say grace, The company was seated.

The business of the kitchen's great, For it is fit that man should eat; Nor was it there denied. Passion o' me, how I run on! There's that that would be thought upon, I trow, besides the bride.

Now hats fly off, and youths carouse, Healths first go round, and then the house: The bride's came thick and thick; And when 'twas named another's health, Perhaps he made it hers by stealth. And who could help it, Dick?

O' th' sudden, up they rise and dance; Then sit again and sigh and glance; Then dance again and kiss. Thus several ways the time did pass, Whilst every woman wished her place, And every man wished his!

By this time all were stolen aside
To counsel and undress the bride;
But that he must not know;
And yet 'twas thought he guessed her mind,
And did not mean to stay behind
Above an hour or so.

When in he came, Dick, there she lay Like new-fallen snow melting away ('Twas time, I trow, to part). Kisses were now the only stay, Which soon she gave, as one would say, "God-be-with-ye, with all my heart."

But, just as Heavens would have, to cross it, In came the bridesmaids with the posset: The bridegroom ate in spite; For, had he left the women to 't, It would have cost two hours to do 't, Which were too much that night.

At length the candle's out, and now All that they had not done they do; What that is, who can tell? But I believe it was no more Than thou and I have done before With Bridget and with Nell.

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 whatsoe'er 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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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 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.

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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.

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.

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!

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, Nothing can make her: The Devil take her!

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