

# Sir John Suckling

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# The Collected Poems

of

Sir John Suckling

SAMPLE

Shearsman Books

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## Introduction

Sir John Suckling (1609–1641) was a significant figure in the group of poets who followed Ben Jonson (often referred to collectively as the “tribe of Ben”), and was a close friend of several others on the group, such as Herrick, Lovelace and Carew. These poets tend to be described as *Cavalier poets*, having been supporters of King Charles I in the English Civil War and, in some cases, having fought actively with the royalist forces. Suckling raised troops and led them into battle – singularly unsuccessfully: it seems they all ran away at the first sign of violence and thus Suckling could proudly report that not one person under his command had been lost in battle. He had a sense of humour, as did many of his friends in the “Tribe”. Suckling was also a “wit” – an educated man about town, able to turn a courteous and amusing phrase, or a poetic tribute, but also a gambler, a womaniser, and a man who dabbled in court politics. A card-player of some reputation, he is reputed have invented the game of cribbage.

Not a *great* poet, but still a very good one, Suckling’s work can stand alongside that of many of his contemporaries, such as Waller, even if this editor does not rate it as highly as that of, say, Herrick or Carew, not to mention older poets such as Jonson and Donne, whose work is considerably superior. However, it is one of the joys of this period in English letters that there were a number of fine poets of the second rank, who deserve their day in the sun, free from the overwhelming shadows projected by Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Donne, and – later – Marvell and Milton, two poets whose politics took them into the Parliamentary camp.

John Suckling was the son of a government official who was knighted for his service by King James I in 1616. His father, also John, served as a member of the Privy Council until his death in 1627, and had previously been an MP. John’s mother came of a London mercantile family and died in 1613. Young John was born in Twickenham, was educated privately, and entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1623. He was later to spend time at Gray’s Inn, one of the Inns of Court, not as a trainee lawyer, but – like many a young man of high station – getting some postgraduate training, some of which may well have included matters juridical. He left Gray’s Inn upon the death of his father, when he inherited a considerable fortune. He subsequently spent some time with Sir Edward Cecil’s forces in the Netherlands, and briefly attended the University of Leiden. He was back in England in 1630, the year he was knighted.



His early life as a knight of the realm was chiefly notable for his louche and spendthrift ways, and his less-than-gallant treatment of certain ladies. His pursuit of Anne Willoughby, perhaps for pecuniary reasons in the wake of his own excess spending, was rejected by her father, and – given a number of other active suitors – led to duels, lawsuits, and a brief imprisonment for our poet in 1634. Despite his gambling and amorous activities, he still found time to write, and had a play, *Aglaura*, performed by the King's Company in 1638. This was then performed at Court in a revised version that converted the tragedy into a tragicomedy. In 1637 he also wrote a religious tract, *An Account of Religion by Reason*.

In 1638 Suckling was made a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber, indicating that his stock was high with the royal family. The initial unsuccessful foray with his own troops occurred in Scotland in 1639, but he was then commissioned as captain of a troop of carabineers in 1640. He was soon also elected to Parliament but held his seat only briefly in the "Short Parliament" (1640). His politicking was soon to see him involved in the plot to free the King's adviser, the Earl of Strafford (Sir Thomas Wentworth) from the Tower, to which Strafford had been condemned for treason after falling out with Parliament. It was a sign of the times that, despite the King's support of Strafford, he was forced by Parliament to sign the Earl's death-warrant. Suckling's involvement in the rescue plot was evidently serious, as a warrant for his arrest was issued (along with others, including one for his friend and fellow-poet, William Davenant). Suckling was subsequently convicted of high treason by the House of Commons in August 1641. By this time he had already fled to France, where he died not long after his arrival, possibly a suicide by poison (according to John Aubrey in his *Lives*), although other lurid accounts were given some credence at the time. Strafford was executed in May 1641, around the time of Suckling's flight. When King Charles I followed him to the gallows nine years later, among his last words were that God had permitted his execution as punishment for his having consented to Strafford's death: "that unjust sentence which I suffered to take effect".

Suckling's poetry, as was common at this time, was collected by his friends and admirers after his death and published in three volumes; *Fragmenta Aurea* (1646), *The Last Remains of Sir John Suckling* (1659) and *The Works of Sir John Suckling* (1676, reissued 1696). Some of the works collected in these volumes are not now accepted by scholars as Suckling's, confusion no doubt arising from poems by others having been copied out in Suckling's hand, or by similarities of style.

There is a good modern edition (1971) of Suckling's works – now out of print, alas – from Oxford University Press, and the text here follows that edition in cases of doubt. Facsimiles of the first editions of *Fragmenta Aurea* and *The Last Remains* were also consulted during the preparation of this volume. Poems left out of this edition are those that are commonly accepted as not being by Suckling, despite their appearance in the posthumous collections. The text here is unmodernised – our standard practice where a good edition is no longer in print. The only exceptions to this rule have been to abandon the “long S” in favour of its modern iteration, the replacement of VV with modern W, and to expand period abbreviations, such as w<sup>th</sup> for *with*.

Tony Frazer

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## His Dream

On a still, silent night, scarce could I number  
One of the clock, but that a golden slumber  
Had locked my senses fast, and carried me  
Into a world of blest felicitie,  
I know not how: First to a Garden, where  
The Apricock, the Cherry, and the Peare,  
The Strawberry, and Plumb, were fairer far  
Than that eye-pleasing Fruit that caus'd the jar  
Betwixt the Goddesses, and tempted more  
Than fair *Atlanta's* Ball, though gilded ore.  
I gaz'd a while on these, and presently  
A Silver-stream ran softly gliding by,  
Upon whose banks, Lillies more white than snow  
New faln from heaven, with Violets mixt, did grow;  
Whose scent so chaf'd the neighbor air, that you  
Would surely swear that Arabick spices grew  
Not far from thence, or that the place had been  
With Musk prepar'd, to entertain Loves Queen.  
Whilst I admir'd, the River past away,  
And up a Grove did spring, green as in *May*,  
When *April* had been moist; upon whose bushes  
The pretty Robins, Nightingals, and Thrushes,  
Warbled their Notes so sweetly, that my ears  
Did judge at least the musick of the Sphears.  
But here my gentle Dream conveyed me  
Into the place where I most long'd to see,  
My Mistress bed; who, some few blushes past,  
And smiling frowns, contented was at last  
To let me touch her neck; I not content  
With that, slippt to her breast, thence lower went,  
And then—I awak'd.

A Supplement of an imperfect Copy of  
Verses of Mr. Will. Shakespears,  
By the Author

1.

One of her hands, one of her cheeks lay under,  
Cozening the pillow of a lawful kisse,  
Which therefore swel'd, and seem'd to part asunder,  
As angry to be rob'd of such a blisse:  
The one lookt pale, and for revenge did long,  
While t'other blusht, 'cause it had done the wrong.

2.

Out of the bed the other fair hand was  
On a green sattin quilt, whose perfect white  
Lookt like a Dazie in a field of grasse,\*  
And shew'd like unmelt snow unto the sight:  
There lay this pretty perdue, safe to keep  
The rest oth' body that lay fast asleep.

3.

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

4.

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; some guided  
Wiselyer downwards sought, but falling short,  
Curl'd back in rings, and seem'd to turn agen  
To bite the part so unkindly held them in.

*\*Shakespeare up to this point.*

## Love's Representation

Leaning her head upon my Brest,  
There on Loves Bed she lay to rest;  
My panting heart rock'd her asleep,  
My heedful eyes the watch did keep:  
Then Love by me being harbored there,  
(No hope to be his Harbinger)  
Desire his rival, kept the door;  
For this of him I begg'd no more,  
But that, our Mistress to entertain,  
Some pretty fancy he would frame,  
And represent it in a dream.  
Of which my self should give the Theam.  
Then first these thoughts I bid him show,  
Which onely he and I did know  
Arrayed in duty and respect,  
And not in Fancies that reflect.  
Then those of value next present,  
Approv'd by all the World's consent;  
But to distinguish mine asunder,  
Apparell'd they must be in wonder.  
Such a device then I would have,  
As Service not reward should crave,  
Attir'd in spotless Innocence,  
Not self-respect, nor no pretence:  
Then such a Faith I would have shown,  
As heretofore was never known.  
Cloth'd with a constant clear intent,  
Professing always as it meant.  
And if Love no such Garments have,  
My mind a Wardrobe is so brave,  
That there sufficient he may see  
To cloath Impossibility.  
Then beamy Fetters he shall finde,  
By admiration subt'ly twin'd,  
That will keep fast the wanton'st thought,

That ere Imagination wrought:  
There he shall find of Joy a chain,  
Fram'd by despair of her disdain,  
So curiously that it can tie  
The smallest hopes that Thoughts now spie.  
There acts as glorious as the Sun,  
Are by her veneration spun,  
In one of which I would have brought  
A pure unspotted abstract thought  
Considering her as she is good,  
Not in her frame of Flesh and Blood.  
These Attoms then, all in her sight  
I bad him join, that so she might  
Discern between true Loves Creation,  
And that Loves form that's now in fashion.  
Love granting unto my request  
Began to labor in my Brest;  
But with this motion he did make,  
It heav'd so high that she did wake,  
Blush'd at the favor she had done,  
Then smil'd, and then away did run.

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## [A Barley-break]

1.

Love, Reason, Hate, did once bespeak  
Three mates to play at barley-break;  
Love, Folly took; and Reason, Fancy;  
And Hate consorts with Pride; so dance they:  
Love coupled last, and so it fell,  
That Love and Folly were in hell.

2.

They break, and Love would Reason meet,  
But Hate was nimbler on her feet;  
Fancy looks for Pride, and thither  
Hies, and they two hugge together:  
Yet this new coupling still doth tell  
That Love and Folly were in hell.

3.

The rest do break again, and Pride  
Hath now got Reason on her side;  
Hate and Fancy meet, and stand  
Untoucht by Love in Folly's hand:  
Folly was dull, but Love ran well,  
So Love and Folly were in hell.

## A Candle

There is a thing which in the Light  
Is seldom us'd, but in the Night  
It serves the Maiden Female crew,  
The Ladies, and the Good-wives too:  
They use to take it in their hand,  
And then it will uprightly stand;  
And to a hole they it apply,  
Where by its good will it would dye;  
It spends, goes out, and still within  
It leaves its moisture thick and thin.

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## A Pedler of Small-Wares

1.

A PEDLER I am, that take great care  
And mickle pains for to sell Small-ware:  
I had need do so, when women do buy,  
That in small wares trade so unwillingly.

2.

L.W.

A Looking-glass, wilt please you Madam, buy?  
A rare one 'tis indeed, for in it I  
Can show what all the world besides can't do,  
A Face like to your own, so fair, so true.

3.

L.E.

For you a Girdle, Madam? but I doubt me  
Nature hath order'd there's no Waste about ye;  
Pray therefore be but pleas'd to search my Pack,  
There's no ware that I have that you shall lack.

4.

L.E. L.M.

You Ladies, want you Pins? if that you do,  
I have those will enter, and that stiffly too:  
It's time you choose, in troth; you will bemone  
Too late your tarrying, when my Pack's once gone.

5.

L.B. L.A.

As for you, Ladies, there are those behind  
Whose ware perchance may better take your mind;  
One cannot please ye all; the Pedler will draw back,  
And wish against himself, that they may have the knack.

## A Soldier

I am a man of war and might,  
And know thus much, that I can fight,  
Whether I am i'th' wrong or right,  
devoutly.

No woman under heaven I fear,  
New Oaths I can exactly swear,  
And forty Healths my brain will bear  
most stoutly.

I cannot speak, but I can doe  
As much as any of our crew;  
And if you doubt it, some of you  
may prove me.

I dare be bold thus much to say,  
If that my bullets do but play,  
You would be hurt so night and day  
I'll love me.

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## A Barber

I am a barber, and I'de have you know,  
A Shaver too, sometimes no mad one though:  
The reason why you see me now thus bare,  
Is 'cause I always trade against the haire.  
But yet I keep a state; who comes to me,  
Whose're he is, he must uncover'd be.  
When I'm at work, I'm bound to find discourse  
To no great purpose, of great *Sweden* force.  
Of *Witel*, and the Burse, and what 'twill cost  
To get that back which was this Summer lost.  
So fall to praising of his Lordships haire,  
Ne'r so deform'd, I swear 'tis *sans* compare:  
I tell him that the Kings doth sit no fuller,  
And yet his is not half so good a color:  
Then reach a pleasing Glass, that's made to lye  
Like to its Master, most notoriously:  
And if he must his Mistress see that day,  
I with a Powder send him strait away.