

Sir John Suckling (1609-1642)

It is customary to characterise Suckling as both an irresponsible man and an irresponsible poet. Thus says Legouis: "Sir John Suckling typifies the cavaliers, their loyalty, death, petulance, frivolity, easy morals and wit. Rich, spendthrift, valiant, a gamester and a gallant, an amateur of the drama who wrote four not unsuccessful plays and a faithful admirer of Shakespeare, Suckling mocked at the pains Carow took to polish his verses. He was himself an improviser, one whose work is very unequal but who writes with irresistible swing."

Hardin Craig thinks such criticism to be unjustified, "His verses", says this critic "show no evidence of carelessness, and his dramas are rather carefully wrought. On the personal side also the estimate is a little misleading, since

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Suckling was a man who respected religion and wrote a treatise on the subject!"

Hardin Craig is more correct than Legouis who follows the traditional assessment of Suckling. Suckling in his poetry shows the twin influence of Jonson and Donne. His cynical observations on female capriciousness and inconstancy and his hard introspective realism remind one of Donne. His general attitude is well-leavened with what Geoffrey Walton calls "his uninhibited and boisterous cynicism." This attitude determined the "spirit of his poetry, the controlling wit." Suckling's delicate sense of observation is exemplified by the following lines from "A Ballad upon a Wedding":

"Her feet beneath her
petticoat

Like little mice, stole
in and out,
As if they feared the

light."

His best-known poem is the
song from Agdaura, "Why
so pale and wan fond lover?"
which expressed a somewhat
Donnean sentiment.

The end.

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