

**LOOKING FOR LOVELACE:  
IDENTITY, STYLE AND INHERITANCE IN  
THE POETRY OF THE INTERREGNUM**

Thesis Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the work of the Cavalier poet Richard Lovelace in two contexts in particular: first, within the political and cultural constraints operating during the period of the English Civil War and the Interregnum; second, against the background provided by the work of contemporary, often obscure, poets whose aesthetic and political attitudes help illuminate Lovelace's own.

The study examines a number of apparent paradoxes in the work and status of poets in Lovelace's *milieu*. The desire to fashion an individual and lasting literary persona in the mould of Ben Jonson, for example, conflicts with the practice of circulating essentially un-authored lyrics within an educated and exclusive male coterie. Lovelace's amatory verse is viewed through the prism of contemporary attitudes towards female constancy, but also through seventeenth-century poets' habitual borrowings from Latin and Greek sources. Lovelace's attempt at a lengthy pastoral partakes of the cultural poetics of nostalgia for a vanished Court and the genres associated with it. His interest in music and the fine arts inspires many poems which comment on contemporary politics while participating in an immemorial debate about art and artificiality versus nature. His prison and drinking songs have earned him a place in anthologies of poetry as a minor classic, but they also crystallize a conjunction of genres peculiar to the years between 1640 and 1660.

The thesis draws on much unpublished material and on rare early books and pamphlets, and hopes to provide an unprecedented sense of Lovelace's creative conditions. Recovering Lovelace's verse as much as possible in the context of his contemporary admirers, imitators, influences, and readers brings to the fore the intense intertextuality of seventeenth-century poetry generally speaking, but also illustrates the ways in which poets transcended those "trans-shifting times" of political and religious unrest.

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