

**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The thesis draws on much unpublished material and on rare early books and pamphlets, and hopes to provide an unprecedented sense of Lovelace's creative conditions.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.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	1
Introduction	2
1. Picnics on Parnassus and the Liberty of an Imprisoned Royalist	15
1. 1 Lovelace's other prison poems	20
1. 2 "No such liberty": Lovelace in prison	26
1. 3 "To Althea": inheritance, imitation and echoes	28
1. 4 "I will ever follow/The juice of Apollo": drinking up the ocean	32
1. 5 Lovelace's drinking songs	40
2. Love and War: Valediction, Parting and Grief	50
2. 1 Poems of parting	58
2. 2 Expressing grief: "I must from whence these forward tears should flow"	63
2. 3 Platonic illusions and the chivalrous hero	68
2. 4 The woman abandoned	80
3. "My Mistress is a shuttlecock": Cupid's Games and the Constant Inconstancy of Women	89
3. 1 A choice of mistresses	92
3. 2 The valuing of women	98
3. 3 Cupid's deathly power	104
3. 4 "Thanks, <i>Cupid</i> , but the Coach of <i>Venus</i> moves/For me too slow"	112
3. 5 The "wilde boy" becomes a man	116
3. 6 Love's like a game at tables	119
4. "The Devil's Looking-Glasse": Woman as Muse	124
4. 1 "Truth and the Graces best when naked are": reading women	131
4. 2 "Their mistris glove, her ring, her fanne, her looking glass, her pantofle"	146
4. 3 "I have made my song a coat"	157
5. Lovelace's Poetry and the Sister Arts: <i>ars et coelare artem</i>	160
5. 1 "The picture of the mind in purer verse": Lely and the visual arts	161
5. 2 Veils, disguises and reversals	170
5. 3 Poets, musicians and the making of harmony	176
5. 4 Lovelace's untuneable times	182
5. 5 Moving trees, moving hearts: Orphic powers and poetry	188
5. 6 Feminine arts and feminised triumphs	195
6. "Aramantha" and the Poetry of Pastoral	201
6. 1 "Aramantha" in context	209
6. 2 Woman and metamorphosis	215
6. 3 The grove, the wood and a magical restoration	221

6. 4	Court, country and city: love in a changing landscape	226
6. 5	The architecture of retreat: country house as grove	231
6. 6	The Golden Age rejected	238

Bibliography		240
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