

‘At my grates no Althea’:  
Prison Poetry and the Consolations  
of Sack in the Interregnum

Dosia Reichardt

In the trans-shifting times of the mid-seventeenth century, imprisonment became as much a cavalier mode as the good life or love and affection. The prison poetry written in this period (not exclusively by those who had experienced confinement) moves away from the penitential meditations previously dominating this sub-genre into a celebration of common misfortune alleviated by drink. Classical drinking songs become politicised ‘catches’, individual authorship is subsumed, and Cavalier prison poets abandon complex rhetoric for simpler poems in ballad form which can be easily transmitted as propaganda and read as a defiant reaction to defeat.

When Ezra Pound was imprisoned at Pisa in 1945 he found by chance a volume of poetry which included Lovelace, and he records this experience in the *Pisan Cantos LXXX*:

That from the gates of death,  
that from the gates of death: Whitman or Lovelace  
found on the jo-house seat at that  
in a cheap edition! (and thanks to Professor Speare)

Pound continues in the following Canto (*LXXXI*) to make his allusion to Lovelace as a prison poet more explicit. In a parody of seventeenth-century lyric marked ‘libretto’ he refers in the refrain, ‘*Lawes and Jenkyns guard thy rest*’, to composers of the period who set the poems of Lovelace and others to music. Then he compares his own situation, ‘at my grates no Althea’, specifically with that of the Cavalier poet whose lady comes to whisper to him through the bars.<sup>1</sup> For Pound, there is no consolation in wine, women and song, that well-

<sup>1</sup> OED, *grate* n<sup>1</sup>: ‘A framework of bars or laths, parallel to or crossing each other, fixed in a door, window, or other opening.’ Pound seems to be punning on ‘gates’ and ‘grates’.

established Cavalier trinity which provides solace in troubled times and troubled places.

Almost all of the Royalist dramatists and poets writing from the 1630s onwards spent some time in prison between 1640 and 1660. Not all were inspired to write about it. Hazlitt remarks that Waller, in confinement, was ‘thinking too much of his neck to write verses with much felicity’.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is a characteristic of much of the Cavalier poetry on this subject that it breaks with the medieval and Tudor tradition of melancholy and solitary reflection to produce a vivacious defiance of circumstance. This boldness is fuelled by a variety of alcoholic beverages and often written in popular ballad style rather than in an imitation of well-established classical genres.<sup>3</sup> In Interregnum prison lyrics the Boethian consolation is rejected. Ancient Stoic ideals of detachment and self-sufficiency are suppressed; desperate pleas to the Deity or the acceptance of suffering as a means to improve the soul find no place.<sup>4</sup> The trope of entrapment (either of the soul within the corruptible body or the lover ensnared by love), so common in prison poetry up to this period, fails to resonate.

Poems such as Lovelace’s ‘To Althea, From Prison’ repudiate, in their passionate attachment to the King, and their sensuality, jocosity and mockery, the classic Stoic ideals of *oikeiosis*, *autarkeia*, and the Epicurean *ataraxia*. The undiluted loyalism of prison and drinking songs implicitly censures those outside the grates, who are sitting out the Cavalier winter in their (albeit reduced) estates,<sup>5</sup> and are there able to pursue the Epicurean ideal in tranquillity and

<sup>2</sup> W. Carew Hazlitt, *Lucasta* (London: John Russell Smith, 1864), p. xxxiv.

<sup>3</sup> The consumption of alcohol in prison is not merely a metaphorical activity. A survey of seventeenth-century prison literature reveals that prisoners could purchase drink or even accompany their keepers to the tavern. See G. M. of Gray’s Inn, Gent, *Essays and Characters of a Prison and Prisoners* (London: 1638). Thomas Weaver, in his *Songs and Poems of Love and Drollery by T. W.* (London: 1654), pp. 44-45, has a poem in which he cautions Royalist prisoners not to drink so much that they end up back in prison for debt: ‘To certain Prisoners, who had appointed a Drinking-Match’.

<sup>4</sup> Other than pamphlets about the vices of drink (many appeared in the 1650s), or prose accounts of prison conditions I have been unable to find any Puritan writing which deals with both of these topics together and poetically.

<sup>5</sup> The sequestration system in place after 1644 drained the ability of compounding Royalists to raise capital for the King’s cause. David Underdown, *Royalist Conspiracy in England 1649-1660* (Yale: Arcon Books, 1971), pp. 7-9.

unconcern, their *otium* the result of compromise with Parliament.<sup>6</sup> Much of the drinking and prison poetry produced in the Interregnum engages less with the politics of nostalgia than with that of avoidance, but much of it also belies the presentation of Royalist literary activity as quietist and consolatory. The politically engaged and subversive character of many lyrics is evident in the adoption and adaptation of traditional themes and metres to record contemporary events and political allegiance. A poem in praise of drink, for instance, many of which had circulated since the fifteenth century, loses its character as a paradoxical encomium when a stanza including the King's health is added.

Drinking songs, which have a respectable classical heritage, are appropriated by courtly Cavalier poets to express some potentially contrary impulses. The elitism of the courtly milieu becomes elided. An audience wider than the courtly coterie is necessary for the purposes of propaganda; for a brief interval, radical sects such as the Levellers become part of the drinking, imprisoned fraternity. Prison and drinking songs also construct a community of outsiders: women, those who are not poets, and those of a political persuasion favouring the government of Cromwell. These groups are not permitted within the charmed circle.<sup>7</sup> A hierarchy of drinks marks further boundaries.

Drinking songs of this period are little concerned with seduction. Generally wine and male camaraderie are preferable to women, and not drinking becomes

<sup>6</sup> A poem such as 'The Contented Prisoner, his Praise of Sack', *Choyce Drollery* (London: 1656), p. 93, which is discussed subsequently, in its references to 'happy' play reads, in places, as a parody of the many verses in the *Beatus ille* tradition derived from Horace and Virgil and imitated by Jonson and Cowley, amongst others.

<sup>7</sup> The water drinkers were excluded earlier, according to Suckling's letter of 1629: 'The wine-drinkers to the water-drinkers, greeting'. See Alexander M. Witherspoon and Frank J. Warnke eds., *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry*, 2nd edn (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1982), p. 434. This debate, a reflection of that between *ars* and *ingenium*, turns on the source of poetic inspiration. Originally associated with a trip to the Muses' mountain was a draught from the spring there, but poets soon began to parcel out plots while picnicking on Parnassus: thus the waters of the Hippocrene were for epic poets while writers of pastoral had to be content with the Arethusa. Cavalier poets, however, insist that no inspiration at all is to be derived from drinking water in solitary meditation. To qualify as a poet involves gathering and drinking with other male wits, as poems such as 'An Ode in the praise of Sack' or 'A Song Upon a Winepot' testify. These appear in the 1656 *Parnassus Biceps* but the mid-century manuscript and printed miscellanies are full of such verse.

a marker of femininity: ‘Then, why does this *Blade*, / *Drink* so like a Maid! / While he thinks nobody does mind him?’<sup>8</sup> Although some opprobrium had traditionally been attached to ‘pot-poets’, Interregnum verse increasingly insists that poets should also be drinkers:

Come smooth off your Licquor!  
It makes the Wit quicker  
And he, that his water refuses,  
Whilst we laugh and sing  
And quaff toasts to the King;  
Shall ne’re have a bout with the Muses.<sup>9</sup>

Wine, or more commonly Sack, is not simply a *sine qua non* of poetic inspiration but a sign of political defiance against the Puritan authorities. The drinking fraternity carefully differentiates itself from the sectarians. ‘We’l drink Wine / Though the fine / Presbyters vaunt it,’ writes Thomas Jordan in his poem, ‘A Chirping Cup’.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, exactly what one drinks carries new political connotations, as well as previous social ones. In Herrick’s *Hesperides* ale is the drink of rural celebration, although ale, a cottage industry, was being replaced by beer which could be stored longer and was more potent, but required more sophisticated brewing techniques imported from the Netherlands. Royalist poets seem prepared to allow ale-drinkers within their fraternity but are prejudiced against beer, perhaps because Cromwell’s family included brewers. In ‘The Answer of Ale to the challenge of Sack’ the anonymous poet writes: ‘Sack’s a drink for our masters / All may be ale tasters’<sup>11</sup> and these democratic drinkers

<sup>8</sup> Henry Bold, *Poems Lyrique, Macaronique, Heroique* (London: 1664), p. 65. Bold’s output dates from before the Restoration but was published later. It contains a large number of drinking songs and also poems by others printed under his name.

<sup>9</sup> This poem, ‘A Round’, occurs in Henry Bold’s posthumous collection assembled by his brother. It contains many songs of the 1640s and 1650s and lays claims to poems by Suckling and Lovelace among others. Henry Bold, *Latine Songs with their English: and Poems* (London: 1685), p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Jordan, *Music and Poetry Mixed in Variety of Songs and Poems* (London: 1663), p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Wit’s Recreations. Recreation for Ingenious Head-Peeeces. Or, a Pleasant Grove for Their Wits to Walke In* (London: 1645), p. 176. This publication was very popular and seven editions had appeared by 1683.

also find their way into *The Academy of Complements* (1647).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Cromwell appears eventually to have risen in the hierarchy of drinkers in a ballad which associates ‘King Cromwell’ with sack rather than beer:

The nose and fiery face,  
Speak thee a babe of grace,  
And most regenerate,  
As sack did e’er create.<sup>13</sup>

Claret was Jonson’s choice, but by the 1630s sack had become the fashionable drink of the blades about town and is recommended for those coming to London from their country estates. A poem titled ‘On Canary’ gives a useful summary of the denotations of a variety of available drinks. Canary is princely, but ‘Cyder and Perry’ are better avoided. Drinking the latter ‘Fluffs up our brains with froth and with yeast’; claret and wine are French; muscadel makes one sleepy; Rhenish is for the ladies, but sack turns the country bumpkin into an aristocrat who throws off his hob-nailed boots and starts dressing in velvet.<sup>14</sup> By the 1640s, however, the drinking of sack conveyed definite loyalty to the king. Thomas Jordan’s mock song, ‘Hold, hold, quaff no more’, is answered by Brome’s ‘Stay, stay, prate no more’, in which these distinctions are made explicit. At the end of the third stanza Brome writes that ‘Cromwel is an enemy to sack and red noses’. In the fourth stanza, ‘Beer and Ale makes you prate / Of the Kirk and the State’. A clear distinction is made in the poem between the loyalism of sack drinkers and the politically seditious and boring character of beer drinkers.<sup>15</sup> Henry Lawes’ *Airs and Dialogues* of 1653 contains a much re-printed panegyric on ‘The Excellency of Wine’ which compares the inspiring qualities of wine with the dullness of beer: ‘The drinkers of beer / Did ne’er yet appear / In matters

<sup>12</sup> ‘A Song in Praise of Ale’ (attributed to John Cleveland) in *The Academy of Complements* (London: 1647), p. 241. This was a publication aimed at a genteel and fashionable audience and providing mostly a ready cut-and paste of poetry suitable for lovers.

<sup>13</sup> W. Walker Wilkins, ed., *Political Ballads of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Longman, Green, 1860, Vol. I,) p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> C. J. and John Philips, *Sportive Wit: The Muses Merriment. Collected by a Club of Sparkling Wits*, (London: 1656), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Roman R. Dubinski, ed., *Alexander Brome: Poems* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 125-26.

of any weight.<sup>16</sup> The rhetoric shifts rapidly to the logic of exclusivity as the poem finishes: ‘Who then doth refuse / To drink of this juice, / Is a foe to the Common-weal.’

Underlying these songs is a festive inversion of the classical and medieval idea of the spirit imprisoned by a rejection of reason. In many drinking poems the mind is positively freed by an abandonment of rationality.<sup>17</sup> Drunkenness is presented as the only logical reaction to a topsy-turvy world, and this imaginative liberty then becomes a focus of prison poems that share much of their form, content and philosophy with lyrics such as those produced in quantity by Alexander Brome. This is the first stanza of his ‘The Companion’:

What need we take care for *Platonical* rules?  
 Or the precepts of *Aristotle*?  
 They that think to find learning in books are but fools,  
 True philosophy lies in the bottle.  
     And a mind  
     That’s confined  
 To the mode of the schooles,  
 Nere arrives at the height of a pottle.  
     Let the sages  
     Of our ages  
     Keep a talking  
 Of our walking  
 Demurely, while we that are wiser,  
     Doe abhor all  
     That’s moral  
     In *Plato*  
 And *Cato*  
 And *Seneca* talks like a Sizer.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Norman Ault, ed., *Seventeenth-Century Lyrics from the Original Texts* (London: Longmans, 1950), pp. 288-89. The poem is by Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery.

<sup>17</sup> In *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 134-40, Lois Potter discusses drinking as part of a Cavalier secret code. She also discusses prison as a locus for literary activity.

<sup>18</sup> Dubinski, ed., *Alexander Brome: Poems*, p. 131.

Hugh Crompton (described in the *DNB* as poet and drinker) makes this rejection of Seneca more explicit in some lines where Stoicism is associated with the Puritans, while the Cavaliers sing, drink and smoke.<sup>19</sup> The rival stereotypes presented here crystallised early and remained the staple fare of propaganda from both sides.<sup>20</sup> Crompton refers disparagingly to the close-cut hair of some of Cromwell's supporters while associating himself with those who write songs and drink:

Then let the dumb Stoick do all that he can,  
 We live by our Melody, he by his mettle.  
 A fig for the Rechabite, and Puritan,  
 Whose head is as round and dull as a Beetle:  
     I ever will follow  
     The drink of *Apollo*  
 Ejecting the juice of the weed.  
*And we are all Gentlemen drawers indeed.*

The Cavalier poetry of the Interregnum, most of which continued to circulate in manuscript, derives much of its tone from the educated exclusivity of (male) coterie poetry, in which drinking conveys conviviality and an opportunity to display classical learning. The root sense of conviviality (to feast together, so memorably encapsulated in Jonson's 'Leges Conviviales') suggests the extent to which intimate association enforce a particular moral and aesthetic decorum. Inner virtue requires not only conviction but also community accreditation often gained by an ability to 'pass the bowl'. Drinking is a defining feature of the Cavalier poets' Jonsonian legacy, and figures noticeably in the opening sequence of Herrick's *Hesperides*, but as their political fortunes fell Royalist poets performed a cultural re-appropriation of a tradition dating back to Anacreon. There is no classical template for combining meditations on alcohol with those on incarceration, but much of what passes for Cavalier vivacity is derived from Horace, and more directly from the *Anacreontea*, the first full translation of

<sup>19</sup> Hugh Crompton, *Pierides or the Muses Mount [Verses]* (London: 1658), p. 141.

<sup>20</sup> Parliament's propagandists especially exploited the image of dissolute Royalists whose 'custom was always to drink and roar as long as their money lasted'. David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England'. 1603-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 178.

which appeared in 1652.<sup>21</sup> ‘Now with Roses we are crown’d / Let our mirth and cups go round’<sup>22</sup> echoes in much Cavalier poetry. Lovelace’s celebrated ‘To Althea, From Prison’ has ‘When flowing Cups run swiftly round / With no allaying Thames, / Our carelesse heads with Roses bound.’<sup>23</sup> Cowley’s ‘The Epicure’ opens: ‘Fill the bowl with rosy wine, / Around our temples roses twine.’<sup>24</sup> But Anacreon’s short lyrics of youthful excess become politicised in the mid-seventeenth century, and one expression of this metamorphosis is their invasion of the decorous sub-genre of prison poetry.

Royalist prisoners, paradoxically enough, are often found to be merry: their devotion to the King is liberating, not confining, and they exhibit a marked clubbishness as if the ‘sons of Ben’ had merely shifted their London location from the ‘Lyrical Feasts at the Mermaid’ or those ‘Made at the *Sun*, / The *Dog*, the *triple Tunne*,’<sup>25</sup> to the ‘Loyall feast’ in the Tower celebrated by Sir Francis Wortley in 1647.<sup>26</sup> This latter poem indicates how the elitism of Stuart court cliques began to slacken when Cavalier poets started to exploit print culture as a useful tool of propaganda.<sup>27</sup> Critics often see this trend as a coarsening of Caroline poetry: Lawrence Manly attributes its decline not only to the war, but also to the absorption upwards of popular serio-comic techniques.<sup>28</sup> This is

<sup>21</sup> These drinking songs of Anacreon of Teos in which the individual poet survives only in fragmentary quotations are described by Gordon Braden as ‘undemanding little poems’ of love and wine, which emphasise a clubbable literary brotherhood. *The Classics and English Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 197.

<sup>22</sup> Galbraith Miller Crump, ed., *The Poems and Translations of Thomas Stanley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> C. H. Wilkinson, ed., *The Poems of Richard Lovelace* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Abraham Cowley, ‘The Epicure’, in *Selected Poems*, David Hopkins and Tom Mason eds., (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Herrick addressing Jonson in ‘An Ode For Him’.

<sup>26</sup> ‘A Loyall song of the Royall Feast, kept by the prisoners in the Tower in August last, with the names, titles and characters of every prisoner. By Sir F. W. Knight and Baronet, Prisoner’ (London: 1647). This poem continued to be reprinted into Victorian times and twenty verses appear in Charles Mackay, ed., *The Cavalier Songs and Ballads of England, from 1642-1684* (London: Griffin, Bohm, 1863), pp. 39-41.

<sup>27</sup> The rippling outwards of coterie verse is indicated by those compendiums of popular reading, the Drolleries of the 1650s, which hide the authors behind initials, but flatter the reader into an alliance through their elaborate title pages and prefatory material.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence Manly, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 518.



evident in the adoption by Cavalier court poets of popular song tunes, and in the writing and reading of ballads by ‘persons of quality’.

A particular feature of Interregnum prison and drinking songs is that solitary musings are treated with suspicion, as akin to Puritan introspection. The rejection of the pronominal form of many Cavalier lyrics is noticeable. Poets in prison speak not as ‘I’ but as ‘we’. This poetry favours civic dialogue, and the poet’s *locus amoenus*, that pleasant place of inspiration, virtue and value, shifts from the country house to the court, the tavern, and the prison. Jonson had anticipated this movement in his *New Inn*, where the hospitality of the inn compensates for the degeneration of traditional domestic hospitality, and the inn becomes the place where cultural capital is acquired and exchanged. This literary convention took on an ironic reality. In prison the Royalists drank and wrote poetry; meanwhile taverns and inns became places of political conspiracy,<sup>29</sup> or of confinement, as this anonymous poem records:

We found a handsome Roome, good wholesome Beere,  
Some hopes of Supper too, nor did we lack  
The promise of incomparable Sack.  
[...]

How, now, who’s drooping there? Who dares be so  
In the Kings Cause, and on the Kings day too?  
Pox on’t, ’tis scurvie; Ile tell thee, we shall bring  
(When we are merrie or lowsie) for the King  
As much of spirit as when we fight for him.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The Kentish Petition of 1642 which landed Lovelace in gaol was hatched at the Star Inn in Maidstone; in the same year the Swan Inn in Northamptonshire launched its petition. Alan Everitt, ‘The English Urban Inn, 1560-1760’, in *Perspectives in English Urban History*, Alan Everitt ed., (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 91-138.

<sup>30</sup> *The Cambridge Royalist Imprisoned* (an eight page verse letter sent from Cambridge to Oxford, July 1643). The role of alehouses, inns and taverns as a medium for dissent is complex. Peter Clark points out that the Puritan campaign of 1641 was organised in taverns, but by the 1650s alehouses were frequented by Cavaliers. The 1655 Royalist uprising involved alehouses in Shrewsbury. See Peter Clark, ‘The Alehouse and the Alternative Society’, in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill*, Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas eds., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 47-73. There is a more extensive discussion of the reaction of the authorities to drink and disorder, especially after 1655, in Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 108-09; 158-59; 177-79. Clark writes that Cavaliers kept up their spirits by singing songs, and drinking healths to the exiled Charles in pots of alehouse beer.

This poem relates the experiences of a group of Royalists held in custody overnight at the Beare Inn. A comparison with a Tudor prison poem highlights the salient characteristics of Interregnum prison poetry:

Eccho (alas) that dothe my sorow rewe,  
Returns therto a hollow sound of playnte,  
Thus I alone, where all my freedom grewe,  
In prison pyne with bondage and restraunte.

This is from the Earl of Surrey's 'Prison'd in Windsor, He Recounted his Pleasure there Passed'.<sup>31</sup> Cavalier prison poetry eliminates this solitary ego. The personal becomes the political; individual authorship is in many cases eroded, and the experience of prison becomes a communal activity and one which includes those outside the aristocratic court circle, as many poetic references to the imprisoned Leveller, John Lilburne, indicate. The Earl of Surrey laments his lack of an audience, but the Cavalier poets abandon elite genres to reach a wider group, many of whom will hear or read their songs while drinking, since inns became a focus for the circulation and distribution of print of all kinds.<sup>32</sup>

A typical example is provided by Brome's song 'The Prisoners', which opens with an apostrophe to the community of imprisoned and impoverished drinkers: 'Come a brimmer (my bullies) drink whole ones or nothing, / Now healths have been voted down'.<sup>33</sup> This song is sub-titled 'Written when O.C. attempted to be King'. It illustrates the trend for incorporating direct political comment into verses that belie their content with jaunty rhythms and eulogies of excessive drinking. The second stanza of Brome's poem refers to the Independents, the third to the frowns of committees, and the fourth and fifth present the Cavaliers

<sup>31</sup> Henry Howard, late Earle of Surrey, *Songs and Sonnets. Tottel's Miscellany 1557* (Menston: The Scolar Press, 1970). Tudor prison poems, even when political, make their points within religious or philosophical meditations.

<sup>32</sup> In 1649 Parliament banned the sale of printed matter by street sellers to curb the circulation of ballads, and regular attempts were made throughout the Protectorate to limit the circulation of comic or scurrilous verse. See Timothy Raylor, *Cavaliers, Clubs and Literary Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), p. 197. Sharon Achenstein points out that the objection of the authorities to ballads rested partly on their ability to be quickly disseminated throughout the country: 'Audiences and authors: ballads and the making of English Renaissance literary culture', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 (1992), p. 318.

<sup>33</sup> Dubinski, ed., *Alexander Brome: Poems*, pp. 150-51.

in gaol for debt, incurred as a result of the unlawful and unreasonable government of Cromwell. No opportunity is missed to refer to the illegality of drinking the King's health, a gesture punishable by death. The joyous defiance of the opening is, however, belied by the conclusion:

Where our ditties shall be *give's more drink, give's more drink boyes,*  
Let those that are frugal take care,  
Our Goalers and we will live by our chink boyes,  
While our Creditours live by the air.

Like many of the drinking songs circulating in manuscript between 1630 and 1660, these verses of Brome's seek to drown out a disordered body politic with ever increasing measures of wine.<sup>34</sup> Brome here exemplifies Cavalier poetic *sprezzatura* forced to acknowledge its disempowerment. The speaker in 'The Prisoners' addresses the audience as if from a place of confinement and stresses loyalty to the executed King. Drinking toasts had been a contentious issue since Prynne in his 1628 pamphlet *Health's Sickness* suggested that prayer was a better way of showing loyalty to the King than drinking. During the Interregnum, Acts against drunkenness (commonly linked with uncleanness, swearing or adultery) proliferated, and the image of the drunken Cavalier as a threat to public order was eagerly adopted by the Puritan pamphleteers.<sup>35</sup> Not all Royalist sympathisers, however, were in accord with the drinkers. Richard Braithwaite (c. 1588-1673) in his many publications attacks alehouse poets, ballad makers and frivolous styles of dress. Thomas Jordan's mock song to the popular tune of 'Stay, shut the gate' opens, 'Hold hold, quaff no more' and lists the damage done:

<sup>34</sup> Though she does not discuss this poem, Elise Jorgens concludes that the Cavaliers were not very happy in their cups despite the surface jollity of their poems. Elise Bickford Jorgens, 'Politics and Women in Cavalier Song: A Report from a Collection of Secular Song Manuscripts', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 15 (1989), pp. 25-48.

<sup>35</sup> Typically, the 1641 'A Preparative to studie: or the vertue of Sack', is countered in 1656 by 'The greatest sins of drunkenness and gluttony set forth in their proper colours'. These 'pamphlet wars' continued throughout the seventeenth century.

If you count what you've lost by your drinking  
 Three Kingdoms and Crowns  
 With their Cittys and Towns  
 While the King and his Progeny's sinking.<sup>36</sup>

One way of countering the negative image of the roistering Cavalier was to place the drinker in prison. Yet from the other side of the grates, drinking poems could express unmitigated cynicism as a reaction to political conditions in a world turned upside-down. 'Why should we [not] laugh and be jolly / Seeing now all the world grows mad?' asks an anonymous poem printed in a Royalist collection.<sup>37</sup> The poem continues to suggest that those, '[...]who do traffique and tittle / Can baffle the Crown and the Sword' and makes it plain that 'We laugh at those fools whose endeavours / Do but fit them for prisons and fines. / [...] Then let's not take care for tomorrow / But tittle and quaff while we may.' Henry Bold similarly concludes that since the 'State's brains are addled' and the Cavaliers are confined at home, if not in gaol,

We sit close at Home,  
 Content, with Lipp Room,  
 In the Infinite Space,  
 Of an Oceans Glasse.  
 Ne're saye to, but Drink the Canaries.<sup>38</sup>

Lovelace's 'A Loose Saraband', printed in his second, posthumous volume of poetry in 1659, is also cynical: 'See all the World how't staggers, / More ugly drunk than we, / As if far gone in daggers, / And blood it seem'd to be.'<sup>39</sup> It is hard to chart this mood change accurately throughout the mid-century, but defiant political songs of drink and imprisonment were being collected and

<sup>36</sup> Ashmole 47 fol. 137r.

<sup>37</sup> John Cotgrave and Richard Gaywood, *Wits Interpreter, the English Parnassus* (London: 1655), pp. 61-63.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Bold, *Poems*, Song XLVIII, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> Wilkinson, ed., *The Poems of Richard Lovelace*, p. 139.

published, even if they were no longer being written. Many appeared in two anthologies, in 1656 and 1657, which especially outraged the authorities.<sup>40</sup>

From the mid-1640s, drinking songs such as 'Upon Sacke' had rarely resisted an opportunity to scoff at the King's enemies.<sup>41</sup> Even a conventional panegyric to Bacchus, 'An Ode in Praise of Sack', places itself in a political camp by assuring drinkers that 'Here's that will further grievances prevent, /Without a Parliament.'<sup>42</sup> A useful illustration of the use of such verse to record political disaffection is provided by Tom Weaver's 'The Compounder's Song'.<sup>43</sup> This poem starts conventionally with an apostrophe to the publican, 'Come Drawers, some Wine', but launches immediately into a loyalist toast to the King. There follows a catalogue of complaints about Goldsmith's Committee, the forced separation of the King and Queen, the poverty of the Cavaliers, and their hatred of Pym, the Anabaptists and the Independents.<sup>44</sup> Another drinking poem which usefully records some political events of 1651 from the Royalist point of view is Bold's 'On the Act of the Rump Against Titles of Honour given by the King':

<sup>40</sup> C. J. and John Philips, *Sportive Wit* (1656) was reported in the Council of State to contain, 'much scandalous, lascivious, scurrilous and profane matter', and along with *Choyce Drollery* (1656) all copies were ordered to be seized and burned that year. The latter was described as 'a book stuffed with profane matter and tending to the corruption of morals.' See Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 268.

<sup>41</sup> B. L. Egerton 2725 fol. 124.

<sup>42</sup> G. Thorn-Drury, ed., *Parnassus Biceps or Several Choice Pieces of Poetry 1656* (London: Frederick Etchells, 1927), p. 61. James Loxley in *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: The Drawn Sword* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 6. points out that the compilation and publication of this volume was a partisan act aimed at reviving Royalist discourse through the practice of poetry.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Weaver, *Songs and Poems*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>44</sup> The Committee of Sequestration of Estates sat at Goldsmith's Hall London, while the King was closely imprisoned at Carisbrook, in 1647. Christopher Hibbert, *Cavaliers and Roundheads. The English at War, 1642-1649* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 263.

## 1.

Draw the *Wine!*  
     Fill the *Bowle!*  
 Ne're *repine!*  
     Or *Condole!*  
 At the *Usage*, the *States*, lay upon us.  
 Though they *Trample* us down,  
 Under *foot*, from a *Crown*,  
     If we, but *hold up*  
     For a plentiful *Cup*,  
 Wee'l *forgive*, all the *mischief*, th'ave *done*.  
 Let our *Honours*,  
 And our *Mannours*,  
 Be *confiscate*, to their *powers*;  
     If we *Sack*,  
     May not *lack*,  
 The whole *World* shall be *ours*:  
 And while their *kindness*, this fair *boon* afford,  
 Though we cannot *spend*, wee'l be as *drunken* as *Lords*.

## 2.

Then about  
     Give the *Glasse!*  
 Suck it out!  
     Let it *passe!*  
 And who *Tipples*, as long, as He's able,  
 Though He's *shrunk*, from *Sr. John*,  
 To Poor *Jack*, all is *One*;  
     Let's *Lady*, take *Snuff*,  
     If *he drink*, but *Enough*,  
 We'le install him *Kt.* of the *Round Table*:  
 Other *Titles*.  
 Are but *Trifles*,  
 Not deserving our *Thinking*,

Hence wee'l make,  
    *Lawes*, to take  
Our *Degrees*, from *Good Drinking*:  
*Honour's* a *Pageant*, we disclaim the *Thing*,  
Who'd be a *Knight*, where *Charles* is not a King?

3.

Drink away!  
    *Have at all!*  
While we stay,  
    Let us call,  
And, as Lilburn would have us, be *freemen*,  
And who *Tope* out their *Time*,  
Till the *Midnight* shall *Chyme*,  
    Their *Mistresses*, *They*  
    Shall be *Ladies*†of the *May*,  
And *Themselves*, of the *Bottles*, the *Yeomen*.  
The *Commanders*,  
That were *Raners*,  
Shall Commence, now, to be *Hectors*.  
    And be still  
    As *Gentile*  
As the *Kingdom's* Protector's  
And bear, (dispiht of *States*, or *Herauld's Rules*)  
Ith' *Pockets*, *Argent*, in their *Faces*, *Gules*.<sup>45</sup>

Many loyalist drinking songs are less specific. A 'catch' set to music by John Hilton has only the barest allusion to the prisoners being Cavaliers:

<sup>45</sup> Henry Bold, *Poems*, Song LII, pp. 82-4.

Down in a dungeon deep  
 I heard a fearful noyse, the prisoners could not sleep,  
 There were such Ro-ring Boys. They cry'd aloud, some Tobacco  
 Sacko Sacko, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly boys.<sup>46</sup>

A number of other partisan drinking songs, otherwise unpublished, are collected together as anonymous 'catches' in the 'Pills to Purge Melancholy' section of *Wit and mirth, an antidote against melancholy compounded of ingenious and witty ballads, songs, and catches, and other pleasant and merry poems*.<sup>47</sup> In this volume Cowley's elegant translation of one of the epigrams of Anacreon, 'The thirsty Earth drinks up the Rain', is placed between forgotten ditties encouraging inebriation. Some of these very short lyrics are direct challenges to the Commonwealth in calling for toasts to the King.<sup>48</sup> The exclusive and political nature of this gesture is underlined:

If that here be any Roundhead  
 That refuse this Health to pledg,  
 I wish he was then confounded  
 Underneath some rotten hedg:  
 And the *Frenchman* overtake him,  
 And upon his face appear;  
 And his wife a Cuckold make him  
 By some jovial Cavaleer.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> A catch referred, in the early seventeenth century, to a musical round in which one singer can catch the words of another, often to comic effect. Playford started to publish secular music in 1651 and incorporated, though rarely attributed, in his playbooks many Cavalier poems. It is interesting to find many now canonical lyrics dismembered, re-titled and labelled as 'catches' in these song-books which enjoyed multiple editions for several more decades. John Hilton, John Benson, and John Playford, *Catch that Catch Can, or a Choice Collection of Catches, Rounds, & Canons: For 3 or 4 Voyces* (London; Playford, 1659), p. 23. Pre-war, Suckling had been associated with the 'Roaring Boys'.

<sup>47</sup> Catch nos 4, 12, 16, 18, 21 in *Wit and Mirth; Pills to Purge Melancholy* (London: 1682), pp. 115-122.

<sup>48</sup> These epigrammatic addresses to fellow drinkers all specifically mention the King but it is not a *sine qua non* of Interregnum drinking songs. Charles Cotton, for instance, wrote a number of drinking songs with a couple of fleeting references to Cromwell but only in his epode, 'To Mr Alexander Brome', does he write: 'Our *Loyalty* the Center, we the *Ring*, / Drink round, and Changes to the *King*.' John Buxton ed., *Poems of Charles Cotton* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 228.

<sup>49</sup> Catch no. 16, *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, p. 119.



Occasionally, it seems, there was resistance to this collective ritual. In 1648 Timothy Gunton produced a page of versified objections to toasts: ‘An extemporary answer to a cluster of drunkards, met together at Schiedam: made by Timothy Gunton, who was compelled thereto, upon his refusall to drink the King’s health. Whether such impetuous drinking of other mens healths were lawfull, profitable, commendable, or reasonable?’<sup>50</sup>

Alexander Brome’s ‘The Royalist’, written in 1646 but not published until 1661, is another politicised poem dealing with drinking in prison.<sup>51</sup> Brome is the author of numerous drinking songs, the popularity of which is indicated by their frequent appearance in the manuscript verse miscellanies of the period:

Come, pass about the bowl to me,  
A health to our distressed King;  
Though we’re in hold, let cups go free,  
Birds in a cage may freely sing.  
The ground does tipples healths apace,  
When stormes do fall, and shall not we?  
A sorrow dares not shew its face,  
When we are ships and sack’s the sea.

This first four lines of this poem bear a very close affinity to the second and third stanzas of Lovelace’s ‘To Althea, From Prison’, supposedly written in 1642 while Lovelace was in the Gatehouse prison at Westminster.<sup>52</sup> The association of the imprisoned Cavalier poet with a bird, which can still express its opinions, became a commonplace in Interregnum poetry. For instance, Sir Roger L’Estrange’s ‘The Liberty and Requiem of an imprisoned Royalist’ ends: ‘And tho immured’d, yet can I chirp and sing / Disgrace to rebels, glory to my King.’<sup>53</sup> Brome’s poem, however, makes its political point immediately and

<sup>50</sup> *Thomason Tracts* 246: 669, fol. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Dubinski, ed., *Alexander Brome: Poems*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>52</sup> Wilkinson, ed., *The Poems of Richard Lovelace*, pp. 78-79. Some manuscript copies of Lovelace’s poem are even closer to Brome’s than the printed version since they read: ‘When thirsty soules in wine we steepe / When cups and bowls go free.’ BL Harleian 2127; MS Ashmole 36/37 has ‘When cups and healths go free’.

<sup>53</sup> Thorn-Dury, ed., *Parnassus Biceps*, pp. 107-10

directly. Drinking healths to the King was a forbidden gesture.<sup>54</sup> Brome's invocation to his fellows is to engage in a communal ritual which excludes only the unwilling. The second stanza makes it plain that the jollity of inebriated prisoners represents a moral victory, since 'In vain they'l think their plagues are spent, / When once they see we don't repine'. The prisoners are to live on poetry, optimism and loyalty. The third stanza emphasises the social aspect of the experience:

We do not suffer here alone,  
 Though we are beggar'd, so's the King.  
 'Tis sin t'have wealth, when he has none,  
 Tush! Poverty's a Royal thing!  
 When we are larded well with drink,  
 Our heads shall turn as round as theirs,  
 Our feet shall rise, our bodies sink  
 Clean down the wind, like Cavaleers.

This circular metaphor is continued into the final stanza where the circularity of the drinking glass becomes '*Plato's* year, / Where everything is as it was', with the implication that the wheel of fortune will eventually turn back in the Royalists' favour. The circle formed by the passing around of the cup is also, as Raymond Anselment points out (in a discussion of Lovelace's 'The Vintage to the Dungeon'), that which 'circumscribes a Cavalier fellowship and loyalty distinct from the religious tenor of much seventeenth-century prison poetry'.<sup>55</sup> Brome's poem is a good illustration of the mid-century tension between a poetry that is leisurely, classicised, metropolitan, and elite, and one that is pulled towards burlesque, doggerel and contemporary politics. C.V. Wedgwood regarded this poem as a degeneration of Cavalier sentiment, but the comic imagery emphasises the importance of an undefeated appearance, and artifice

<sup>54</sup> Swearing allegiance to the King while he still lived, or proclaiming Charles II as such came under the jurisdiction of the March 1648 'An Act for the abolishing the Kingly Office in England and Ireland, and the Dominions thereunto belonging.' C. H. Firth and R. S. Tait eds., *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*. Vol. I. (London: HMSO, 1911), p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond A. Anselment, 'Stone Walls and Iron Bars: Richard Lovelace and the Conventions of Seventeenth-Century Prison Literature', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 17 (1993), 23.

and image had been the pre-war stock in trade of the court poets.<sup>56</sup> The poem also takes on the Puritan-promoted mythology of the Cavaliers as immoderate drunkards and, by exaggerating this propaganda, goes some way to deflating it. Brome's poem, however, fails to engage with the belief that the excesses of pleasure, drink, and expenditure on entertainments by the Stuart court and its hangers-on were partly responsible for the civil war.

A year after Brome's poem, Sir Francis Wortley produced his enduring ballad on the feast in the Tower. In 1647, Sir Francis had written a petition to the King about the hardships of many prisoners in the Tower. The King responded with the gift of two fat bucks, and Sir Francis responded in turn by producing a ballad to be sung to the tune of 'Chevy Chase'. The poem provides a catalogue of Wortley's fellow-prisoners, not all of them aristocrats, but all included in the loyal toasts Wortley adds. Wortley's choice of a popular tune carries an interesting sub-text. The ballad known as 'Chevy Chase' had been licensed in 1624, but dated from the 1540s, and its original lyrics referred to the prisoner King James I of Scotland and the results of a 'woeful hunting'. Its opening lines, 'God prosper long our noble King / Our lives and safetyes all;' are rewritten as 'God save the best of kings, king Charles!'<sup>57</sup>

Ben Jonson had remarked that a poet should detest a ballad-maker, but Wortley makes it plain that he is not writing anything else.<sup>58</sup> The last stanza of 25 reads:

This if you will rhyme doggerel call,  
(That you please you may name it)  
One of the loyal traytors here  
Did for a ballad frame it:  
Old Chevy Chase was in his mind;  
If any suit it better  
All those concerned in the song  
Will kindly thank the setter.

<sup>56</sup> C. V. Wedgwood, *Poetry and Politics under the Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 107.

<sup>57</sup> I am using the version printed in Thomas Wright, ed., *Political Ballads Published in England During the Commonwealth*, Vol. III (London: Percy Society, 1841), pp. 87-99.

<sup>58</sup> Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad: A Study in Origins and Meaning* (Hatboro: Legacy Books, 1978), pp. 57-61.

The ballad opens and closes with a rousing toast to the King and Queen – ‘wee’l drink them o’re and o’re again’ – and laments the political and financial disasters which have befallen the king’s supporters. Wortley is assumed to have written another very popular Interregnum poem on drinking in prison, ‘The contented Prisoner his praise of Sack’.<sup>59</sup> A note in a later reprint of this poem misleadingly suggests that this is ‘The earliest appearance in print, known to us, of this characteristic outburst of Cavalier vivacity’.<sup>60</sup> The regular rhyme scheme of this poem, beaten out by the rattling of chains, makes the sentiment expressed more attractive and disguises the inconsistency of the prisoner who can overcome his fate with resolve in the opening lines and yet succumb to melancholy soon after:

How happy’s that Prisoner  
 That conquers his fates,  
 With silence, and ne’re  
 On bad fortune complains,  
 But carefully plays  
 With his Keyes on the Grates,  
 And makes a sweet consort  
 With them and his chayns.  
 He drowns care with Sack,  
 When his thoughts are opprest  
 And makes his heart float.  
 Like a Cork in his Breast.

*The Chorus*

Since we are all Slaves  
 That Ilanders be,  
 And our Land’s a large prison,  
 Inclos’d with the Sea:  
 Wee’l drink up the Ocean,  
 To set our selves free,  
 For man is the world’s Epitome.

<sup>59</sup> *Choyce Drollery* (1656), pp. 93-96.

<sup>60</sup> *Merry Drollery Compleat, Or, a Collection of Jovial Poems, Merry Songs {&C}*. First reprinted from the final edition, 1691. J. W. Ebsworth ed., (Boston, Eng: R. Roberts, 1875), p. 300.

The poem continues to imply that those in prison are innocent, while usurers and bloodstained pirates rule the land. The simplicity of the lyric is belied by a burst of classical references in the fourth and fifth stanzas, where the author attributes the wisdom of Aristotle, Copernicus and Diogenes to their fondness for wine. The original four verses of this poem soon became six, and up to 17 were eventually added. The poem attacks the Puritan ethos of temperance, but it also serves as a reminder of the plight of imprisoned Royalists for those who have compounded with the authorities. It is interesting that, as in many other drinking poems, the fraternity is expected to consume mythically enormous volumes of alcohol as if in response to the narrowness and lack of their actual situation. Whilst the flux of inebriation may allow the Cavaliers to redeem poetic creativity and to achieve a sense of fluid oneness, the impossibility of ‘drinking the Ocean’ strikes a parallel with the hopelessness of achieving their desired liberty. Lovelace’s ‘The Vintage to the Dungeon’ is a shorter but later lyric on the same topic and suggests that wine, not philosophy, will free the mind and the imagination, if not the body:

Sing out pent Soules, sing cheerfully!  
 Care Shackles you in Liberty,  
 Mirth frees you in Captivity:  
 [...]  
 Live then Pris’ners uncontrol’d;  
 Drinke oth’strong, the Rich, the Old,  
 Till Wine too hath your Wits in hold.<sup>61</sup>

In her analysis of this poem Willa Evans argues that it does not derive from the poet’s own experience, but from Cartwright’s *The Royal Slave*.<sup>62</sup> She does not note the reliance of Lovelace’s poem on Cartwright’s ‘A Pox on the jailer’:

A pox on the jailer and on his fat jowls.  
 There’s liberty lies in the bottom of bowls.  
 A fig for the rascal whate’er he can do.  
 His dungeons are deep, so are our cups too.  
 Then drink we a health in despite of our foes  
 And make our cold irons cry chink in the close.

<sup>61</sup> Wilkinson, *The Poems of Richard Lovelace*, p. 46.

<sup>62</sup> Willa McClung Evans, ‘Lovelace’s Concept of Prison Life in *A Vintage to the Dungeon*’, *Philological Quarterly* 26 (1942), 62-68.

The editor of a collection in which this appears notes that it was reprinted in 1652 and again in 1661 and 1671: ‘No doubt imprisoned Cavaliers sang it, and remembered it fondly later.’<sup>63</sup> Unlike the prison and drinking poems discussed here, Cartwright’s poem, part of a musical entertainment for the Stuart court in 1636, was not a response to the plight of the Royalists during the mid-century. It appears regularly, however, in musical settings over the next three decades, generally titled ‘Down in the Dungeon.’<sup>64</sup>

This image of the Cavalier prison poet proved popular in subsequent anthologies of seventeenth-century verse. A (probable) Victorian parody of the Cavalier prison and drinking lyric, ‘A Lay of the Tea-Drinking Roundhead’, testifies to the lasting impact of these particular lyrics. Supposedly penned by ‘Sir Wilful Lawless, at Coventry, *in loco penitentiae*, January 1656’, it contains, in miniature, those consolations of community denied to Pound and to poets confined in other eras:

A naughty world it is, my friends,  
 And naughty Drink men swim in;  
 An evil fate on those attends  
 Who turn to Wine or Women.  
 Such saintly crew as *I* -and -you  
 Much nobler bliss would seek up;  
 Cavaliers true we must undo,  
 So pass around the Tea-cup!<sup>65</sup>

On examining the drinking and prison lyrics of the mid-century, it becomes apparent that the transmission of loyalist sentiment was more important than individual poetic recognition. The authorship encouraged by Jonson, which separates itself from the ‘common’ place of the market, was rejected in favour

<sup>63</sup> John Wardroper, *Lovers, Rakes and Rogues* (London: Shelfmark Books, 1995), p. 201.

<sup>64</sup> A version set to music by John Hilton can be found in John Hilton, John Benson, and John Playford, *Catch that Catch Can*, p. 28.

<sup>65</sup> J. W. Ebsworth, ed., *Cavalier Lyrics: ‘For Church and Crown’* (London: Stephen Austin and Sons, 1887), p. 54

of a re-absorption of and into popular festive sources of literary expression.<sup>66</sup> In the resulting dialogue of world and text, the reader, or the listener, frequently completed the poetic text by adding to it, re-writing it, or appropriating it without any acknowledgment. In particular, those lyrics which could be sung to existing tunes or were set to music, such as Lovelace's 'To Althea, From Prison', were likely to travel further than complex poetic forms or lengthy panegyrics. In becoming organic cultural artifacts the Royalist lyrics discussed here were able to acquire the status of a received myth or well-known folk tale, with the benefits not of individuality or originality but of predictability and a capacity to be reproduced and imitated without loss. The success of Cavalier poetry in achieving this implicit aim is evident in the ineradicable image of the Cavalier, merry as Anacreon's or Cowley's or Lovelaces's grasshopper, sipping and singing, carelessly producing verses, even in prison.

*James Cook University  
Cairns*

<sup>66</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 76-77 argue that after Jonson the movement towards the emergence of the modern bourgeois individual is exemplified in the construction of the 'author', but examining these and other seventeenth-century lyrics suggests a lack of boundaries between the works of individual writers and between courtly and popular genres. Despite the existence of (often posthumous) single author editions, the constant borrowing and modification of classical and contemporary sources renders many of the lyrics discussed essentially authorless.