

# ‘Stone Walls’ and ‘I’ron Bars’: Richard Lovelace and the Conventions of Seventeenth-Century Prison Literature

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**Summary:** *In transcending stone walls and iron bars, Lovelace’s well-known song “To Althea, From Prison” celebrates a freedom distinctly at odds with prevailing, often religiously inspired transformations of seventeenth-century carceral realities. Lovelace’s celebration of “Minds innocent and quiet” fashions from traditional conventions of prison literature a political statement that redefines freedom through stoic resolve. Refusing to be bound in either song or spirit, the poem binds loyalists together in rituals of love and faith that create in the untroubled mind and the untrammelled soul a secular religion. For a moment in the 1640s, Lovelace uniquely captured the mirthful spirit of stoicism buoyed by the love, friendship, and loyalties expressed in its trinity of wine, women, and royalism.*

Stone Walls doe not a Prison make,  
Nor I’ron bars a Cage;  
Mindes innocent and quiet take  
That for an Hermitage;  
If I have freedome in my Love,  
And in my soule am free;  
Angels alone that sore above,  
Injoy such Liberty.  
Richard Lovelace

To be in prison under any circumstance is a bitch, but to be in prison and innocent of the charge is a most muthafucka.                      Etheridge Knight

Compared to the brutal realism of the lines Etheridge Knight wrote from the Indiana State Prison of the 1960s, the romantic idealism of the poem Richard Lovelace composed allegedly in the London Gatehouse prison of the 1640s sounds excessively optimistic and even glib. Metaphorically prison defines

for both writers a sense of membership in a beleaguered, if not suppressed social class; and each asserts his identity amidst isolation and suffering. The months Lovelace spent without freedom seem, however, almost irrelevant to his prison poetry. Unlike Knight and the strident voices from twentieth-century prisons, Lovelace denies the possibility “that physical brutality is as nothing compared to the brutality of the soul incurred by years and years of cancerous prison life.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps his was not the experience of the modern penal institution; perhaps literary conventions and political loyalties determined his response. The answers may lie both within the larger tradition of prison literature and within the specific contexts of the seventeenth century. To understand Lovelace’s transformation as well as transcendence of his confinement and to appreciate anew his famous song “*To Althea, From Prison*,” the seventeenth-century relationship between the realities of prison life and the conventions of prison literature warrant reconsideration.<sup>2</sup> In a century given to paradox, it may then become apparent, Richard Lovelace’s indomitable, festive stoicism is a distinct and individualistic part of a historic moment.

From the outset it must be made clear, however, that Lovelace’s experience behind stone walls and iron bars cannot be dated much less defined with any certainty. For his role in delivering the Kentish petition, Lovelace spent several months in London’s Gatehouse where, according to Anthony à Wood,<sup>3</sup> before being freed on bail in June 1642 “he made that celebrated song called *Stone Walls do not a Prison Make, &c.*” He is generally thought to have written “*To Lucasta. From Prison*” at the same time. Although a recent Lovelace editor dates both poems in the ten-month period the poet spent in Peterhouse before being discharged in April 1649, one month before the publication of *Lucasta*, the licensing of this volume in the Stationers’ Register on 4 February 1648 further supports the probability that the pieces “fram’d,” in Wood’s account, “for the press” while at Peterhouse were actually all written earlier. Allusions in both poems suggest this possibility, though neither these songs nor “*The Vintage to the Dungeon*” can be dated precisely.<sup>4</sup> Even if the relationship between the poet’s imprisonment and his work were established, the nature of Lovelace’s experiences in the Gatehouse and at Peterhouse eludes certain definition.

The little that is known about the various seventeenth-century prisons suggests they may have been quite unlike later carceral systems.<sup>5</sup> Men and women were not ordinarily sentenced to definite terms of imprisonment, and they did not face the solitude and deprivation that characterize the discipline and punishment increasingly dominant after the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Rather

than subject individuals to an isolation and a regimentation designed to transform behavior, institutions such as Newgate or the Fleet were intended largely to hold people until their fates were determined. John Lilburne succinctly defines their essential purpose when he protests to the lieutenant of the Tower in which he was held, "I doe not find any Law that makes prisons, places of executions, punishment, or torment, but only places of safe custody."<sup>7</sup> In this and the other tracts published during the 1640s, Lilburne adds his voice to the group of writers who decry a system that openly favored wealth and social class. Although prison walls may well bias their views of the life within, these seventeenth-century complaints, petitions, and remonstrances give some sense of the conditions Lovelace may have endured.

Traditional practice disregarded their widely voiced assertion "*that aal prisons and Goales what ever, be the Kings, for the publike good, and therefore are to be repared and furnished as prisons at the common Charge.*"<sup>8</sup> Common law might not justify the system of fees and payments that had evolved, but well before the seventeenth-century gaolers and wardens claimed the right to exact payments for their services. Prisoners paid a fee to the keeper when first committed to confinement; another fee freed them from chains; and other sums provided numerous comforts. A list of charges in "The forme of the table that shall hange in the hall in the Fleete" outlines a sliding scale based on social position and "Lawes."<sup>9</sup> Prisons divided along class as well as economic lines, and those with sufficient means could hire their own chambers, bring their families and servants, and enjoy many amenities. John Lilburne, for example, paid fifteen shillings a week for chamber rent while the former Lord Mayor Sir Richard Garney paid three pounds for chamber and twenty-five pounds a week for diet.<sup>10</sup> The warden of the Fleet, Alexander Harris, in fact felt constrained to apologize for removing Edmund Chamberlayne to another chamber because the prisoner "laye at liberty in the Wardens Freehould, yea had two of the Wardens owne lodgings, a Studdy and another roome, where his wife, children, and Servants did (as it were) keepe continuall hospitallitie, gameing and discourseing with others over the Wardens owne Bedd Chamber, Soe as the Warden when he came weary home at night could neither take his rest nor be private."<sup>11</sup>

The inequities of this fee system are particularly apparent in the seventeenth century among the writers who protested their imprisonment for debt. While some actually welcomed the new life, where through elaborate strategies they could dupe their creditors and live well on the gains, most increasingly saw themselves as victims of extortion and oppression. Prison for them commonly appeared a hopeless economic hell. In Geffray Minshull's graphic

account of his fate in King's Bench Prison, prisoners at the mercy of "marble-hearted jaylers" are likened to

a poore weather-beaten bird, who hauing lost the shoare, is driuen by tempest to hang vpon the sailes and tacklings of a prison: the jaylor is the saylor, and if hee beate that bird off to sinke her in the seas, when by climbing vp to the maine top, or perhaps by lifting vp his hand, hee may take it and lend it heat from his warme bosome, it is an argument that his heart is made of the same rocks, that lie in wait to destroy ships in the ocean.<sup>12</sup>

Civil war exacerbated the conditions of imprisonment and intensified the complaints of another group, the close prisoners. Although protests against the restraint of prisoners in irons or in rooms, where "noe man may speake or bring them victuall; but the Warden is specially to provide for them,"<sup>13</sup> appear earlier in the century, charges of abuse are prominent on all sides during the 1640s. A "true relation" of John Lilburne's suffering in the Fleet reported to Parliament in February 1646 alleges that he was "laid in yrons, and his freinds denyed accesse to him; and that the officers of the Fleet strongly endeavoured to *starve him*."<sup>14</sup> Royalists also suffered for their loyalty, as the lengthy petition for "competent maintenance" published in June 1647 reveals. Its signers declare themselves prisoners of war who have

been lockt up in our Chambers close Prisoners for one or two yeares together, and none of our friends suffered to come at us but with our Keepers, or to minister to our wants, nor allowed a penny of maintenance by those that have held us Prisoners, but have been bidden, *Either to starve, or eate the walls wee were kept in*.<sup>15</sup>

Complaints about the hardships they and their families have suffered pale, however, when compared to the account of misery endured by the men at Oxford who refused to swear the oath of allegiance and were subjected to the tyranny of William Smith when the keeper carried out his threat to "make us take it, or he would make us to shit as small as a Rat."<sup>16</sup> Confinement of large numbers of prisoners in one room, some afflicted with smallpox and others left to putrify until the prisoners paid for their burials, was an extreme in the abuses of war; but a wide latitude countenanced close imprisonment "for matters of State."<sup>17</sup>

Whether the dashing Cavalier who delivered the Kent petition, "lived beyond the income of his estate,"<sup>18</sup> and suffered the consequences of the doomed 1648 uprising was ever incarcerated as a close prisoner or endured the deprivation of the fee system cannot be established. Rank and money may

have insulated the eldest son of an established family from the complaints about “*Goals* being the very *sinks and common sewers* of all wickedness,” for he never shares their view of prison as a “daily death” that suffocates the spirit and buries men alive.<sup>19</sup> He also ignores the contemporary cries of prisoners tormented by loss “of the benefit which Beasts enjoy, to walke abroad” and isolated by confinement “to the narrow limits of a prison where wee scarce ever converse with ought but our owne miseries; heare nothing but the clocke that tells our woes, our dayes and nights being both, as it were, produced at once, and twins in misery.”<sup>20</sup> But even if he had escaped the bonds of close confinement and had been imprisoned only in the comfortable Knights’ or Warden’s chambers, Lovelace would have understood how each prisoner remains ultimately “a slaue in the eye of all freedome, fettered in the lap of his mother, (his country).”<sup>21</sup> He chose nevertheless to see his separation from the world and his confinement within prison walls from another, traditionally ennobling context.

By redefining space and freedom this tradition inspired prisoners to transform harsh reality and to transcend physical boundaries. The common-places seen in the poem Francis Wortley published in 1646 while a prisoner in the Tower of London collapse distinctions between the wide world and the narrow cell:

Imprisonment, admit it neere so close,  
Is to a wise man but his soules repose;  
And the lesse roome he hath, his soul’s more free  
Then when she had her wanton liberty.<sup>22</sup>

Within and without are confounded “When sight’s contracted and is more intent,” and confinement may indeed seem more desirable than freedom. George Wither insists that “my Mind, that spight of prison’s free, / When ere she pleases any where can be”; and John Taylor believes that “a Iaile a Schoole of vertue is, / A house of study and of contemplation.” Both are part of a rich tradition David Lloyd invokes when he uses Gregory of Nyssa’s words to describe the imprisonment of Sir Robert Berkeley: “he might be Imprisoned, but not Restrained; or if Restrained, cloistered rather than Imprisoned; as an holy Anchorite, rather than an Offendor, retiring from a sad world, and not forced from it; where when alone, never less alone, not the suffering, but the cause making the punishment, as well as the Martyr; he thought his body always a streighter prison to his soul, than any prison could be to his body.”<sup>23</sup>



Such triumph of the mind over the body is often stoic and usually Christian. The consolation Boethius found in philosophy as he awaited execution was well-known in the seventeenth century, and writers offer their own counterparts to his belief, "The serene man who has ordered his life stands above menacing fate and unflinchingly faces good and bad fortune."<sup>24</sup> Prison imagery quite naturally lends metaphoric force to Joseph Hall's influential neostoic definition of the Christian fortitude exemplified by the patient man who calmly accepts the sentence of injustice: "The Gaolers that attend him, are to him his Pages of honour; his dungeon, the lower part of the vault of heaven; his rack or wheele, the staires of his ascent to glory; he challengeth his executioners, and encounters the fiercest paines with strength of resolution."<sup>25</sup> Prominent among the "Comfortable Cordials" William Prynne allegedly wrote in Latin on the Tower of London walls and published in a 1641 translation is his adaptation of Seneca:

A godly Man's at large in every place,  
Still chearefull, well content, in blessed case,  
Vnconquer'd; he a secret Heaven still beares  
About within his brest, which sad things cheares,  
Dispells his blackest cloudes of grieve, off shakes  
His chaines; and closest prisons open makes.<sup>26</sup>

The proverbial patience of Job also assumes an importance in Francis Wortley's characterization of the contented prisoner who turns upwards in contemplation, and years in London's prisons could not alter George Wither's steadfast commitment to the will of God and the promise of a liberty beyond.

The undistinguished lines of poetry that celebrate in the seventeenth century the "cleer Conscience" and the "upright heart" are often derivative and seldom moving, but their authors would have others believe that they themselves had transcended prison tedium and despair with a faith in the indomitable human spirit. Taught by religion that the world is a prison and the soul a prisoner, many not surprisingly accepted the consolation,

A Jayl's the centre of this Iron-age,  
Yet not my Prison, but mine Hermitage.  
He that can boldly dare, yet justly do,  
Fortune's his Subject, and his Vassal too.<sup>27</sup>

Sustained by the righteousness of their cause and an unwavering faith in God, the more zealously fervent ballads and prison meditations bear witness to the "inward Peace and Tranquillity of Mind" that enabled the faithful to accept

affliction patiently and to “rejoice, and in a Dungeon sing / For joy of heart, that Christ is there.”<sup>28</sup>

Lovelace’s celebration of “Mindes innocent and quiet” departs in its stoic resolve from these well-established religious contexts. The version of “*To Althea, From Prison*” published in 1649 in fact appears less religiously connotative than any of its six manuscript variations.<sup>29</sup> The emphasis in two of these on “the spotlesse soule and Innocent” and the stress in the remaining four on “A spotlesse mind, and innocence” or “Innocent” are less neutral than the final “Mindes innocent and quiet.” When compared to “The Pensive Prisoner’s Apology,” an undated seventeenth-century adaptation of the song to Althea, Lovelace’s eschewal of a specifically moral and religious tenor is even more apparent. Between the two opening and the concluding stanzas taken from Lovelace’s song, the anonymous pastiche of prison poetry adds nine stanzas of decidedly didactic and Christian consolation.<sup>30</sup> The guidance of faith, hope, and patience it emphasizes and the liberty through Christ it proclaims recall the values and language found often in the religious traditions but never in Lovelace’s poetry. The stanzas in “*To Althea, From Prison*” that lead to Lovelace’s resolution suggest indeed that in this poem as well as in his other prison poetry Lovelace celebrates a stoicism consciously at odds with prevailing, religiously inspired transformations of prison’s harshness.

Secular rather than divine love enthralls the prisoners of *Lucasta*. The paradox of confined freedom evoked in the first stanza of “*To Althea, From Prison*” envisions a realm of carefree liberty and seductive sensuousness that might initially be confused with a fashionable literary exercise:

When Love with unconfined wings  
Hovers within my Gates;  
And my divine *Althea* brings  
To whisper at the Grates:  
When I lye tangled in her haire,  
And fetterd to her eye;  
The *Gods* that wanton in the Aire,  
Know no such Liberty. (ll. 1–8, p. 78)

Lovelace invites the reader to imagine the speaker literally confined to prison but then defies any sense of physical separation. The abstract love that brings Althea and the grates that frustrate the lovers’ union dissolve: the two lovers become= love and are one. Realistically the speaker would have had to invite Althea into his cell in order to “lye tangled in her haire,” a possibility that rank and money could have brought about; but poetically the tenuous line

between the literal and the figurative in the image of entanglement neither tolerates nor provokes literal-minded objection. The “snaring haire” of Francis Beaumont’s “The Willing Prisoner to His Mistris” and the “nets of Gold whose Tramels might insnare” in Henry Glapthorne’s “To Lucinda. He being in Prison” are part of a conventional poetic situation, and in many instances the text does not clarify the nature of the prison.<sup>31</sup> Lovelace’s adaptation, however, goes beyond the traditional compliment that informs this poetic play.

Although other poems in the volumes to Lucasta succumb to a Petrarchan enthrallment, Lovelace’s tributes to his Aramanthas, Amyntors, and Altheas often test the conventional understanding of love’s liberty. Particularly in the 1649 collection tributes to women celebrate the inspiration and fulfillment found in the paradoxical liberation of captivity. *Lucasta* ends with the lovers triumphantly “chain’d” or “Fast pinion’d in each others armes” (p. 118), and throughout the preceding poems separation from the source of light is a threat that must be overcome. The lady who in the famous lines of “*To Lucasta, Going to the Warres*” makes love and honor one symbolizes elsewhere the completion embodied in the women of the Caroline masques, and in her various names she gives purpose to a poetic world unusually preoccupied with images of captivity, bondage, and imprisonment. Separated from her in “*To Lucasta, From Prison*,” the poet finds only contradiction and confusion in “an universall mist,” for she seems to become synonymous with the “sacred Beame” that also flows from the King’s “Starry Waine.” Similarly in “*To Althea, From Prison*” the confined love that surpasses the freedom of mythological deities creates a sense of oneness that also assumes a masquelike and Royalist note.

The next stanza explicitly gives political dimension to Lovelace’s adaptation of the conventional prison conceit. The “unconfined wings” that bring the paradoxical bondage of Althea are paralleled in the liberation from “thirsty grieve”:

When flowing Cups run swiftly round  
 With no allaying *Thames*,  
 Our carelesse heads with Roses bound,  
 Our hearts with Loyall Flames;  
 When thirsty grief in Wine we steepe,  
 When Healths and draughts go free,  
 Fishes that tipples in the Deepe,  
 Know no such Libertie.

(ll. 9–16)



The lines recall the exhortation in “The *Vintage* to the *Dungeon*” to throw off the shackles of care and to break the manacles of sorrow:

Live then Pris'ners uncontrol'd;  
 Drinke oth'strong, the Rich, the Old,  
 Till Wine too hath your Wits in hold;  
 Then if still your Jollitie,  
 And Throats are free;

*Chorus*

Tryumph in your Bonds and Paines,  
 And daunce to th'Musick of your Chaines. (ll. 8–14, p. 46)

But the freely flowing wine is not the mirth of an alcoholic reverie. Unlike the carousing tenor of “The *Vintage*,” the song to Althea extols the healths that slake troubled hearts and intensify “Loyall Flames.” The circle formed as the cup goes round circumscribes a Cavalier fellowship and loyalty distinct from the religious tenor of much seventeenth-century prison poetry.

Writers had, of course, long praised the carefree conviviality of drinking, but in the 1640s tributes to the cup assumed unmistakable political associations. Even before Parliament banned the traditional rite of drinking healths to the monarch, Royalists had been stigmatized as revelling with Bacchus, and recent cultural studies have shown how attitudes towards festive mirth reflect political and religious differences.<sup>32</sup> In the prison literature of this decade, the extremes are apparent in William Prynne's and Francis Wortley's expressions of political defiance. Prynne pointedly contrasts the cropped ears he suffered with the jewels worn by courtiers and concludes,

Chaines, Mutilations, Pillories, Brandes bring,  
 To godly Christians farre more joyes, heaping  
 Most large rewards upon them. Players, Playes,  
 Jests, Dancing, Maskes, Songs, generate alwayes  
 But deadly Laughters, feigned shoutes.

Most “happie” is the inmate who has Christ as his “Fellow-prisoner, who doth gladde / With heavenly Sunbeames, Goales that are most sad.”<sup>33</sup> The Tower also echoes a distinctly different commitment in the communal festivity of Wortley's “Loyall Song of the Royall Feast.” The personal suffering acknowledged in the long catalogue of “loyall blades” and the royal concern counterpointed in the refrain culminate in the healths to the King and his family. The royal huntsman Charles had provided the occasion for the feast, sending the prisoners of Parliament “Two brace of Bucks to mend the cheere”;

and his grateful subjects respond, "Wee'l drink them o're and o're again / Else we're unthankfull creatures."<sup>34</sup> Bound in loyal service and cheerful camaraderie, Wortley and his peers create in 1647 a faint imitation of the Whitehall festive mirth Prynne excoriates; others opposed to the zealous spirit that threatened the old order joined in their own ritual drinking.

Not all prisoners, however, raised their cups only to the Caroline cry, "Let's merrily quaff our wine / To the King and his Consort divine."<sup>35</sup> Long before the numerous catches and songs of the 1640s and '50s encouraged all listeners to "Ne'er trouble thy self at the times or their turnings" and to "Ne'er chain nor imprison thy soul up in sorrow,"<sup>36</sup> alcohol had provided English prisoners an escape from boredom and depression. Early seventeenth-century accounts of prison life complain that "euery chamber is nothing els but a continuall drinking roome" whose inhabitants waste away their lives and money on exorbitantly priced wine and beer.<sup>37</sup> Though alcoholism must have been a constant problem throughout the penal system, by the outbreak of the civil war a popular image tended to displace the often bitter Jacobean impression of prisoners who "must chant merry songs, / Like birds in cages, and are glad to sing / Sweet tunes to those, who them to thraldome bring."<sup>38</sup> Carousers who drank their liberty from the depths of the bowl now did so with defiance: "Our Dungeon is deep, but our Cups are so too; / Then Drink we round in despite of our foes, / And make our hard Irons cry clink in the close."<sup>39</sup> The oblivion of alcohol still attracted prisoners who wished to escape oppression in wine and thereby create their own versions of the tipsy, whirling world of civil upheaval, but the fortunes of war as well as of temperament prompted the King's supporters to fashion other images of the reveller. The author of *The Cambridge Royalist Imprisoned*, who boasts of drinking his parliamentarian gaolers under the table, sings with uplifted cup and swaggering confidence of the gallant spirit and royal leadership that mark the early months of conflict.<sup>40</sup> "The contented Prisoner his praise of *Sack*" finds another music in the bondage of chains as he drowns cares in wine and conquers fate with silence, confident that contentment is his "If our conscience be cleere, / And our title be good." The author of this poem, alternatively entitled "The loyal Prisoner,"<sup>41</sup> avoids any overt political commitment, but his allegiances are unmistakable in a period where "He that won't drink and sing, / Is a Traytor to's King."<sup>42</sup>

This quintessential gesture of loyalism gains still greater significance in Lovelace's prison poem to Althea. Gracefully and naturally he adds to the royal healths his loyal songs:

When (like committed Linnets) I  
 With shriller throat shall sing  
 The sweetnes, Mercy, Majesty,  
 And glories of my KING;  
 When I shall voyce aloud, how Good  
 He is, how Great should be;  
 Inlarged Winds that curle the Flood,  
 Know no such Liberty. (ll. 17–24)

Lovelace disregards the warning in a common emblem that the nightingale “Beinge kepte in cage, she ceaseth for to singe, / And mournes, bicause her libertie is barde”; and he does not heed the further moral “The Prouerbe saithe, the bounde must still obey, / And bondage bringes, the freest man in awe.”<sup>43</sup> Like the linnet, one of the most aerial, free roving, and sociable of finches, the speaker refuses to be bound in song and spirit. In bearing testimony to the King’s greatness, albeit with a “shriller throat,” the song is witness to Lovelace’s unvanquished loyalty. The unheard music to be voiced aloud and the healths that keep the round of flowing wine create harmony in discordant times.

The music of love and loyalty behind the iron bars is not the harmonious communion of Prynne and the other religious prisoners. Lovelace does not envision the “sweet society and fellowship” that united the prisoners at Colchester in prayer and brought them comfort “by *reading, singing, and brotherly obligations*, whereby your *Prison* was turned into a *Temple* and *Sanctuary*, as the *Goalers house*, and other prisons, was by *Paul and Silas*.” Nor does the song to Althea forsake the “vain songs . . . sung to the World” for the “Psalms, Hymns, and spiritual Songs, making melody in the heart.”<sup>44</sup> Its royal music cannot be confused with the rapturous contemplation that transports the confined beyond all thought of affliction as it transforms prison into paradise, yet it also should not be associated simply with the increasingly common escapist mirth:

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.<sup>45</sup>

The harmony Lovelace encourages brings loyalists together in rituals of love and faith that create in the hermitage of the quiet mind and the heaven of the untrammelled soul a secular religion.

Lovelace's essentially stoic alternative to much seventeenth-century prison literature celebrates, in effect, a trinity that is at once traditional and distinctive. The simple assertion of mirthful freedom in "The *Vintage* to the *Dungeon*" and the obvious devotion to both the beloved lady and the King in "To *Lucasta*. From Prison" are transformed in the song to Althea into the celebration of wine, women, and royalism that transcends the immediate experience of the London prisons.<sup>46</sup> Where other writers found it to their advantage to accentuate and perhaps exaggerate the hardships of prison, Lovelace fashioned his own political statement from the well-established conventions of prison literature that redefine the limits of freedom. In the strife-torn 1640s prison bound him closely to a threatened class and occasioned an idealistic defiance. His is the "Free-borne Loyaltie" of the "cleare Cavalier" who finds both inspiration and solace in the knowledge that "Vertue is her own reward, and fortune is a Whore."<sup>47</sup> Lovelace may have found encouragement in the other prison poems of the 1640s, or he may have helped inspire the works that appear during this decade; the uncertain dating of these poems renders the issue of influence moot. None of Lovelace's contemporaries, however, brings all the literary conventions and loyalist values together in similar fashion, for the seemingly effortless transformations in "To *Althea*, From Prison" surprisingly have no immediate parallels among the prison poems prompted by the political upheaval.

The closest approximation, a piece attributed to Roger L'Estrange, underscores Lovelace's uniqueness. This thirteen-stanza poem may have appeared in print two years before the publication of *Lucasta*, and conceivably its author may have known the song to Althea in manuscript, or perhaps the long piece may have been known to Lovelace;<sup>48</sup> whatever the relationship, the two poems shape a common body of ideas with markedly different spirit. Although David Lloyd approvingly quotes all seventy-eight lines as the "generous Expressions of a worthy Personage,"<sup>49</sup> the poem widely anthologized under different titles in the seventeenth century fails to rise above its prosaic certitude:

That which the world miscalls a jail,  
A secret closet is to mee;  
Whilst a good conscience is my bail;  
And innocence, my liberty.  
Locks, walls, bars, solitude, together mett,  
Make me no prizoner, but an anchoret.<sup>50</sup>

With great prolixity and little verve, subsequent lines invoke the stoic apathy that overcomes prison's torment as they seek the inspiration that transforms the cell into a citadel. The presence of an Althea or Lucasta is felt only indirectly: "The manacles upon my arme / I, as my sweetheart's bracelets, wear"; and the Royalist recourse to wine is absent. In his contemplative and decidedly religious solitude the speaker is bound in paradoxical freedom to the suffering monarch:

Have you not seen the nightingale,  
A pilgrim coopd up in a cage,  
How she doth sing her wonted tale  
In that, her narrow hermitage?  
Even such her chanting melody doth prove,  
That all her barrs are trees, her cage a grove.

I am that bird, whom they combine  
Thus to deprive of liberty.  
So, though they doe my corps confine,  
Yet (maugre hate) my soul is free;  
And though immurèd, I can chirp and sing  
Disgrace to rebels, glory to my king.

The song is Cavalier in subject, but the melody lacks grace, and the harmony seems flat. L'Estrange does not possess the deft touch characteristic of the Caroline sons of Ben Jonson; and, more important, he does not recognize the mirthful dimension of the Cavalier devotion. The women in Lovelace's poetry inspire a love and honor either explicitly or implicitly synonymous with the King, and raising a cup to the monarch's health and being raised by the image of the beloved seem in the context of "*To Althea, From Prison*" one.

Writers less studied and more lyrical than L'Estrange also fail to duplicate Lovelace's spirit,<sup>51</sup> and the aftermath of defeat dampened the loyalist mirth of comrades in chains. Where once the caged linnet sang the uplifting notes of royal music, the dominant song is now discordant. The nightingale in Thomas Jordan's poem has grown "sick, sick, sick," and the "Royal vocal wood" where once each bird sang in sweet concord "Is defil'd by Rebels, where they hug / Their Leaguer Lady / Jug, jug, jug."<sup>52</sup> Those who drink the now forbidden royal healths struggle to stave off disillusionment and cynicism in a homeland that has become for Royalists a prison. The revellers in "The Royal Rant" who call for the bar boy "think upon the dayes / Of Love and Musick, Loyalty and Playes"; they are not, however, completely dispirited:



In a dungeon deep we lye,  
 Crampt with cold captivity,  
 Where the bedless bottom owns  
 Nothing to relieve our bones;  
 Yet such is the sacred scope of the soul  
     That we never think  
     Of the stink  
 When cold water we drink,  
 For Conscience crowns the bowl.<sup>53</sup>

In the dungeon that England has become, an unsullied conscience and a steadfast soul comforted those who waited the turn of fortune's wheel. Their voices, however, sometimes strain with a new bravado:

Clog me with Chains, your envies tire,  
 For when I will, I can expire;  
 And when the puling fit of Life is gone,  
 The worst that cruel man can do, is done.<sup>54</sup>

Cups could only be raised mutely to the fame of a king "we dare not name," the brimmers of sack were drained of their inspiration, and Royalist prisoners lapsed into indifference.<sup>55</sup> The value of a gesture once fraught with political significance now appears questionable.

Lovelace also reflects this altered temperament in his subsequent publication, *Lucasta Posthume Poems*. No prison poems appear in the 1660 volume published two years after its author's death, and the Cavalier trinity is no longer upheld with confidence. *Lucasta* reappears as a source of light, "She that holy makes the Day, / And'stills new Life in fields of Fueillemort" (p. 135); but new forces abroad threaten her call to "play and sport," and she inspires little of the honor and love that give serious dimension to the image of women in the earlier volume. The call for the camaraderie of loyal fellowship and brimming cups is also noticeably less apparent, and the wedding of "Mad Love with wilde Canary" follows a drunken harmony suited to a staggering world. In the new era of "brave *Oliver-Brutus*," references to the old order are veiled, and a sense of enclosure is far more pervasive than the literal walls and bars of *Lucasta*. Flies caught in cobwebs, toads paralyzed by spiders, and falcons impaled by herons are emblems of a world in which all seem fated to consume or be consumed. The undaunted spirits who like the falcon or the rhinoceros triumphantly assert themselves in death offer an ennobling consolation, but the "Sage Snayl" that turns in upon itself is the "Wise Emblem of our Politick World." In the stoic self-containment the snail

exemplifies, Lovelace appears to embrace the enclosure he had long sought to transcend: "Thou sleep'st within thy Marble Cell; / Where in dark contemplation plac'd, / The sweets of Nature thou dost tast" (p. 137).

The movement inward suits the times, for the decline and defeat of the King's cause had dated the resolve of the song to Althea. At some moment in the 1640s, before the image of Cavalier superiority dissolved in the inevitable loss, Lovelace captured the mirthful spirit of a less restrictive stoicism buoyed by the love, friendship, and loyalties of the Caroline world. But when the optimism of the Royalists waned, the realities of imprisonment remained, and the prison poem synonymous with Lovelace's Cavalier life and spirit seemed a quixotic ideal. In the earlier war-torn England, Lovelace shared the heightened awareness of space and time that force prisoner and poet alike to confront the meaning of liberty.<sup>55</sup> His response to an increasing loss of freedom shapes a long tradition of stoicism into a testimony to the unvanquished human spirit, an affirmation that counters with its secular faith the fervor of the imprisoned religious zealots. Forthrightly proclaimed, his transcendent values convey the resonance of the past and the conviction of the moment with a deceptive simplicity that invites yet resists the jaded response:

Let Stoics boast of a contented mind,  
The joy and pleasure of a life confin'd,  
That in imprisonment the soul is free—  
Grant me, ye gods, but ease and liberty.<sup>57</sup>

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## Notes

1. Etheridge Knight, "Inside These Walls," in *Black Voices from Prison*, ed. Etheridge Knight (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 129.
2. Neither the conventions nor the development of seventeenth-century prison literature has been studied. Numerous writers have, of course, responded to imprisonment, and lists of these authors as well as some critical commentary can be found in a range of works: John A. Langford, *Prison Books and Their Authors* (London: W. Tegg, 1861); Isidore Abramowitz, *The Great Prisoners* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946); H. Bruce Franklin, *The Victim as Criminal and Artist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); *In Prison*, ed. James E. Trupin (New York: Mentor, 1975); Chikwenye Okon Jo Ogunyemi, "The Song of the Caged Bird: Contemporary African Prison Poetry," *Ariel* 13 (1982): 65–84.
3. Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ed. Philip Bliss (London, 1817), 3: 461.

4. Thomas Clayton, ed., *Cavalier Poets: Selected Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 275; H. M. Margoliouth's review of Wilkinson's Lovelace edition, *Review of English Studies* 3 (1927): 94; Willa McClung Evans, "Lovelace's Concept of Prison Life in *The Vintage to the Dungeon*," *Philological Quarterly* 26 (1947): 62–68; Manfred Weidhorn, *Richard Lovelace* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), pp. 59, 71.
5. Recent scholarship has focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and comparable attention has not been given to either the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. The most useful survey is Clifford Dobb, "London's Prisons," in *Shakespeare in His Own Age*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, *Shakespeare Survey* 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964): 87–100. Although they concentrate on the earlier centuries, two other studies are relevant: Ralph B. Pugh, *Imprisonment in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) and John Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 162–198. Some sense of contemporary seventeenth-century accounts of prison life is suggested in Phillip Shaw, "The Position of Thomas Dekker in Jacobean Prison Literature," *PMLA* 62 (1947): 366–391, and W. Carew Hazlitt, "A Tentative Catalogue of Our Prison-Literature, Chronologically Arranged," *The Bibliographer* 6 (1884): 70–75. The following discussion draws heavily upon *The Catalogue of the Pamphlets, Books, Newspapers, and Manuscripts ... Collected by George Thomason, 1640–1661*, ed. G. K. Fortesque (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1908).
6. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), Michel Foucault concludes, "In short, penal imprisonment, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, covered both the deprivation of liberty and the technical transformation of individuals" (p. 233).
7. John Lilburne, *The Oppressed Mans Oppressions declared* (London, 1646), p. 2.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
9. Alexander Harris, *The Oeconomy of the Fleete*, ed. Augustus Jessopp, Camden Society, New Series 25 (London: J. B. Nichols and Sons, 1879), inserted between pp. 152–53.
10. Lilburne, *The Oppressed Mans Oppression* offers a good summary of fees.
11. Harris, *Op. cit.*, pp. 120–121.
12. Geffray Minshull, *Essayes and Characters of a Prison and Prisoners* (London, 1618), reprinted for W. and C. Tait (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co., 1821), p. 70.
13. Harris, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.
14. John Lilburne, *A true relation of the materiall passages of Lieut. Col. Iohn Lilburnes sufferings* (London, 1646), p. 4.
15. *A True Relation of the Cruell and Unparallel'd Oppression* (London, 1647), p. 2.
16. Edmund Chillenden, *The Inhumanity of the Kings Prison-Keeper at Oxford* (London, 1643), p. 4.
17. Harris, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

18. Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 3: 462.
19. *A brief dolorous Remonstrance* (London, 1648), broadside; *An Appeale to Heaven* (London, 1644), p. 6.
20. *The humble Remonstrance and Complaint of Many thousands of poore distressed Prisoners* (London, 1643), p. 6.
21. Minshull, *Essays and Characters*, p. 76.
22. Francis Wortley, "Upon a true contented Prisoner," in *Characters and Elegies* (London, 1646), p. 56.
23. George Wither, *The Shepeards Hvnting*, 1622, in *Juvenilia Poems, printed for the Spenser Society* (Manchester: Charles S. Simms, 1871), p. 529; John Taylor, "The Vertve of a Iayle," in *The Praise and Vertve of a Jayle and Jaylers, in All the Workes of Iohn Taylor The Water-Poet* (London, 1630), p. 128; David Lloyd, *Memoires of the Lives, Actions, Sufferings & Deaths of Those Noble, Reverend, and Excellent Personages* (London, 1668), p. 97.
24. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Green (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), p. 9.
25. Joseph Hall, "Of a Patient man," in *Characters of Virtves and Vices*, ed. Rudolf Kirk (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1948), p. 155. See also, for example, "The Christian Stoick," in *A Poetical Rhapsody, 1602-1621*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 1: 290-291.
26. William Prynne, *Comfortable Cordials*, in *Mouvnt-Orgveil* (London, 1641), p. 3.
27. Samuel Speed, "The free Prisoner," in *Prison-Pietie* (London, 1677), p. 96; see also Speed's "Advice to Prisoners," pp. 126-127, and Wither's "*Confinement* is more advantageous than *Liberty*," in *A Triple Paradox* (London, 1661), and *An Improvement of Imprisonment* (London, 1661), in *Miscellaneous Works*, the second and third collections published by the Spenser Society in 1872 and 1874. Thomas More develops the standard Christian view of the world as a prison in *A Dialogue of Comfort Against tribulation*, Part Three, Chapters 19-21.
28. John Griffith, *Some Prison-Meditations and Experiences* (London, 1663), p. 12. Lovelace, of course, would not have been familiar with the later Interregnum pieces that are more zealously fervent than the prison meditations of William Prynne and George Wither. Still others earlier embraced imprisonment and execution eager to give testimony to their religious conviction and certain of their spiritual freedom. None is as extreme as the Catholic in "Calvary mount is my delight," a ballad that ends with the speaker's eager anticipation of the hanging, drawing, and quartering that await him; but all anticipate freedom from the bonds, fetters, and chains of life and sin. See *Old English Ballads, 1553-1625*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), pp. 147-151, and in the same edition, "O God above relent," "Jerusalem, thy joys divine," "Some men for sudden joy do weep," and "True Christian hearts, cease to lament." Ballads also commonly recorded the religious testimonies of repentent criminals about to be executed.

29. C. H. Wilkinson transcribes these manuscripts in his edition *The Poems of Richard Lovelace* (1930; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 276–286; he also mentions another manuscript “with peculiar but unimportant variations” (p. 350). Wilkinson’s edition will be cited in the text.
30. “The Pensive Prisoner’s Apology,” in *The Roxburghe Ballads*, ed. William Chappell, printed for the Ballad Society (London: Stephen Austin and Sons, 1875), 3: 179–182. The dating of this ballad is uncertain, and the editor’s belief that the poem alludes to a line from a Restoration play is questionable. The British Library catalogue suggests that the poem may have been published around 1670.
31. The Wyatt piece in *Tottel’s Miscellany* entitled “The lover describeth his restless state,” for example, appears to a modern editor to be about the poet’s imprisonment in 1541. Similarly Raleigh’s “My body in the walls captived” has been read as a reflection of his incarceration in the Tower; and a poem like Arthur Gorges’ “The Prisone sweet that Captyve holdes my minde” challenges attempts to separate the biography of the author’s prison stays from the paradoxes standard in Petrarchan love poetry – *The Poems of Francis Beaumont*, in *The Works of the English Poets* ed. Alexander Chalmers (London: J. Johnson, 1810), 6: 190; *The Plays and Poems of Henry Glapthorne*, ed. R. H. Shepherd (London: John Pearson, 1874), 2:182–183; *Sir Thomas Wyatt: The Complete Poems*, ed. R. A. Rebholz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 362; *Sir Walter Raleigh, Selected Writings*, ed. Gerald Hammond (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), p. 282; *The Poems of Sir Arthur Gorges*, ed. Helen Estabrook Sandison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 214.
32. David Underdown, *Rebel, Riot, and Rebellion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) and Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986). As Underdown suggests, “Roundheads noted the ‘admired jollity, and frequent drunken meetings’ of cavalier gentlemen” and “their encouragement of resistance to Parliament by the use of hospitality and feasting” (p. 268). Paul H. Hardacre stresses the Royalist defiance in drinking healths once they were forbidden: *The Royalists During the Puritan Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), p. 75.
33. Prynne, *Comfortable Cordials* pp. 5, 3.
34. Francis Wortley, “A Loyall Song of the Royall Feast, kept by the Prisoners in the Towre in August last” (London, 1647), broadside.
35. Thomas Jordan, “A Chirping Cup,” in *A Royal Arbor* (London, 1664), reprinted by J. Payne Collier in *Illustrations of Old English Literature* (London, 1866), p. 93.
36. “A Catch,” in *Merry Drollery Compleat* (London, 1661), ed. J. Woodfall Ebsworth (Boston: Lincolnshire, 1875), p. 219; see also Henry Bold, *Latine Songs, With their English: and Poems* (London, 1685), p. 40.
37. Minshull, *Essays and Characters* pp. 84–85.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 79..
39. William Cartwright, “A Catch,” in *Merry Drollery Compleat*, p. 289. The song appears in the first act of *The Royal Slave*, a play performed at Oxford in 1636.



40. *The Cambridge Royallist Imprisoned* (London, 1643), particularly sigs. A2v-A3v. This attitude is less attractively seen in another account of the same period written by a prisoner who had fallen into the hands of the Royalists at Oxford and who complains of two Cavaliers encouraged "to drinke healths and carrouses in the roome with Mr. Frankling to abuse and torment him"; Chillenden, *The Inhumanity of the Kings Prison-Keeper at Oxford*, p. 10.
41. The poem is entitled "The loyal Prisoner" in *The Loyal Garland*, ed. J. O. Halliwell, Percy Society, vol. 29 (London, 1850):50-52. Woodfall Ebsworth designates Francis Wortley the author in *Choyce Drollery* (London, 1656), (Boston, Lincolnshire, 1876), p. 300.
42. Alexander Brome, "A Catch," in *Alexander Brome Poems*, ed. Roman R. Dubinski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 1: 174.
43. Geffrey Whitney, *a Choice of Emblemes* (Leyden, 1586), p. 101.
44. Samuel Fairclough, *The Prisoners Praises for Their Deliverance from their long Imprisonment in Colchester* (London, 1650), p. 31; Speed, *Prison-Pietie*, sig. A5r.
45. Brome, "The Royalist," 1:117. A year after this poem was written Marchamont Nedham wrote in *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (14 December 1647), "Come let us live, and laugh away / The follies of this Age; / Treason breeds care; we'll sing and play / Like birds within a cage." He reprinted this poem as par of *A Short History of the English Rebellion* (London, 1680), p. 8.
46. Cf. Douglas Bush's definition of "the cavalier trinity, beauty, love, and loyal honour" in *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 122.
47. "On Loyalty in the Cavaliers," attributed to Samuel Butler in *Westminster Drolleries* (London, 1671), 1672, ed. J. Woodfall Ebsworth (Boston, Lincolnshire, 1875), 2: 48-51.
48. G. Thorn-Drury's response to "Merry Thoughts in a Sad Place," *Notes and Queries* 10th ser., 1 (1904):250.
49. Lloyd, *Memoires* pp. 96-97.
50. The poem is published with variations as "The Requiem of Libertie of an Imprisoned Royalists," "Loyalty Confined," and "The Loyal Prisoner." The text is that reproduced by Andrew Clark in "Merry Thoughts in a Sad Place," *Notes and Queries*, 10th ser., 1 (1904): 141.
51. See, for example, Pathericke Jenkyn, "To Amorea from Prison," in *Amorea, the Lost Lover* (London, 1661), p. 9; Thomas Weaver, "A Song in Prison," in *Songs and poems of Love and Drollery* (London, 1654), pp. 6-7.
52. Jordan, "The Royal Rant," p. 144.
53. Jordan, "The Royal Rant," p. 143.
54. Thomas Flatman, "The Immoveable," in *Poems and Songs* (London, 1674), p. 112.

55. Brome, "The Prisoners," 1:150–151; Weaver, "To certain Prisoners, who had appointed a Drinking-Match," pp. 44–45.
56. In "Les Poètes et la prison" Albert Béguin has suggested that there may well be "a natural and substantial bond, a significant affinity" between the poet and the prisoner, both of whom are especially sensitive to confinements they seek to escape; *Création et destinée* (Neuchâtel, 1973), 1:145–46, as quoted by Victor Brombert, *The Romantic Prison* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 3.
57. "The Paradox," in *Poems on Affairs of State*, ed. Galbraith M. Crump (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 4: 225