

## Notes on To Lucasta, Going to the Wars by Richard Lovelace:

Richard Lovelace has a great name. Until you realize it's pronounced "loveless," and then you just feel sorry for the poor guy. Still, we think he did just fine, despite his rather unfortunate surname. Word on the street is, when he was at Oxford, he cleaned up with the ladies, who were drawn to his gentlemanly ways.

It didn't hurt, either, that Lovelace was in with the so-called Cavalier poets, who wrote about the pleasures of love and—gasp!—sex. But here's the thing: their penchant for pleasure isn't why they're known as cavalier. In fact, the Cavalier poets were so called because of their politics.

We know. Sounds boring right? Ah, but it's anything but. English politics in the 17th century were like a juicy episode of a family soap, complete with idealistic dreamers, cynical schemers, and more power grabs than an episode of 24. The 1640s were a particularly tumultuous time, when the English finally got sick of each other and fought a civil war over whether or not the King or the Parliament should have the ultimate say in England.

The Cavalier poets were squarely on the King's side, and unfortunately for them, when all was said and done, the Parliamentarians eventually won, and in order to demonstrate their newly acquired power they beheaded the King of England, Charles I in 1649. Yeah, awkward times for Lovelace and his cronies.

Because of his royalism, Lovelace was arrested and sent to the slammer several times by Parliament for his political activities during the 1640s. Most folks think that it was during one of these bouts in the clink that he wrote "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars." The "wars" in the title refer either to skirmishes of the English Civil War or to other military engagements Lovelace was involved in back then.

As for this Lucasta lady, well, no one's quite sure who she is. But our best guess is that it's one Lucy Sacheverell, for whom Lovelace was head-over-heels (he used to call her Lux Casta, which takes the cake for worst term of endearment ever). The story goes that when Lovelace was off getting injured in a battle at Dunkirk (in Northern France) in 1646, Lucy thought he was dead and ditched him for another dude. Needless to say, poor Richard was heartbroken. Maybe "loveless" is more fitting than we thought.

But hey, this is all speculation. What we do know for sure is that "To Lucasta" was published in 1649, along with several other poems about his ladylove, in a volume called, appropriately, Lucasta. As with most stories, the true facts aren't quite as interesting as the juicy gossip.

### WHY SHOULD I CARE?

Okay, so maybe you've never left behind your true love and gone off to war. Maybe, though, you've given up a weekend morning to volunteer at a homeless shelter, or donated some money to a charity, or thought about moving to a third world country in order to give back.

While these activities are, on the one hand, a far cry from what is described in Lovelace's "To Lucasta," the same idea's at work. Sacrificing something valuable or enjoyable for what you think is a little more important in the big picture is what this poem is all about. The speaker doesn't just leave behind Lucasta because of some patriotic zeal (although that is part of it), he

does it for honor, for something that he absolutely must defend if he is to be taken seriously as a man, both by himself and by others (or so he thinks).

While we're hoping your life decisions won't involve quite as much drama, life is full of tough calls. We'll always find ourselves in situations in which we must make the difficult decision to sacrifice something we love and cherish in order to do what's really more important in the grand scheme of things. Maybe "To Lucasta" can provide a little help in that department.