Suckling can look up the rich lady's skirt, admire her thighs and 'parts more dear', but cannot know her, cannot give her a vocal or truly subjective part in his poem, and has no wish to. The testosterone levels are much vaunted, but the men are oddly monosexual creatures, and gaze on the woman as a curiosity, a being belonging to an alien species.

Another dialogue between Suckling and Carew over a woman took the form of an exchange of letters. They debated the question of whether Carew should marry a wealthy widow. Unsurprisingly Suckling advised his friend against the move:

'Tis not love (Tom) that doth the mischief, but constancy ... Dost thou know what marriage is? 'Tis curing of Love the dearest way, or wakening a losing Gamester out of a winning dream: and after a long expectation of a strange banquet, a presentation of a homely meal. Alas!

After all this, to marry a Widow, a kind of chew'd-meat! What a fantastical stomach hast thou, that cannot eat of a dish til another man hath cut of it?

Carew could have pointed out that it was Suckling rather than he who had been cured of mercenary courtships 'the dearest way'. As it was, he rebutted Suckling's arguments on less than idealistic grounds: 'there goes more charge to the keeping of a Stable full of horses, than one onely Steed ... when, be the errand what it will, this one Steed shall serve your turn as well as twenty more.'

These letters savour more of a rhetorical exercise on a set theme than a real episode in Carew's life. No record exists, at least, of his marriage or engagement to the widow. The situation served as an occasion for casually misogynistic set pieces. Rejecting Suckling's point about 'chew'd meat', Carew replied that he preferred an experienced sexual partner who knew, as he put it, how to chew. But a key skill in debating was arguing 'ut uramque partem', from either point of view: and elsewhere Carew said he liked his women younger:
Backslidings

Give me a wench about thirteen,
Already voted to the Queene
Of lust and lovers, whose soft haire,
Fann'd with the breath of gentle aire
O'er spreads her shoulders like a tent,
And is her vaile and ornament:
Whose tender touch, will make the blood
Wild in the aged, and the good.\(^{82}\)

In those ‘sweet embraces I/ May melt myself to lust, and die’. Carew
made the point often enough for it to stand as his motto: dismissing the
‘worldling’ for his love of money, the husband for his pleasure in wife
and children, ‘This is true blisse, and I confesse,/ There is no other
happinesse.’\(^{83}\)

Traditionally, we might call such writings ‘cavalier’, and oppose them
to the supposedly puritan attitudes espoused by William Prynne towards
women. But Prynne and Suckling are essentially the same in their view
of the opposite sex: both are sensible of the same charms, both similarly
oblivious to women as people. To both, females are little more than
walking temptations. The real difference between these writers lies in
their attitude to the sensations and fantasies provoked in the male. Suck-
ling and Carew permit the wishes Prynne prohibits, yet at root the
thoughts of cavalier and puritan are identical.

8

Even without the pride forfeited at Nottingham Bridge and Blackfriars,
and the henchman’s life lost at the latter, as a ‘famous gamester’ Suck-
ling had no place in decent company for the civic-minded puritan. Yet
gambling, as later during the Restoration, was a tolerated vice. The
otherwise prudish Edward Hyde, for example, had nothing to say
against the ‘fair house for entertainment and gaming’ which stood on
Piccadilly, with ‘handsome gravel walks for shade, and where were an
upper and a lower bowling-green, whither very many of the nobility
and gentry of the best quality resorted, both for exercise and
conversation.’\(^{84}\)