ENGLISH RENAISSANCE EPITHALAMIA

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CHAPTER I

THE CLASSICAL BACKGROUND

In the late sixteenth century, the classical genre of marriage songs called epithalamia[1] appeared in England. A few fine poems in this tradition were written by some of the major English poets: Sidney, Spenser, Donne, Jonson, and Herrick. The genre was important for only three decades in England before it fell into the hands of minor poets and literary hacks. When the English Renaissance poets took up the epithalamic genre, it had a two-thousand year old tradition behind it, a tradition which began in Greece, flourished for a time in Rome, then disappeared until the Renaissance, when epithalamia were written in Italian, French, Spanish, Latin, and English poetry. After the Renaissance, the classical tradition lost its influence on English epithalamia, and not until the twentieth century have major English poets written marriage songs patterned on the classical models.

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[1] To avoid confusion which might arise from the several forms of this word ending in -um, -a, -ie, -ies, -on, and -ons, the Latin forms, _epithalamium_ and _epithalamia_, will be used throughout this thesis except in quotations and titles where the original spelling will be maintained.

The English epithalamia of the Renaissance form a closely related body of literature. All of the epithalamists were writing in an old tradition which had become a stereotype by the time it reached England. It was inevitable that the English poets would be circumscribed by the conventions and patterns of the classical tradition. Furthermore, English epithalamists were influenced by one another. No major study exists which devotes itself to a close analysis of this small body of English Renaissance poetry. It is the purpose of this present work to fill this gap.

Only two histories of the epithalamic tradition in England have been written, and both are incomplete. Robert Case, in the introduction to his anthology of 1896, English Epithalamies, wrote a brief survey of the form from its beginnings to the nineteenth century. James McPeek's Catullus in Strange and Distant Britain (1934) contains a chapter, "The Marriage Songs," which is a history of the influence of Catullus on English nuptial verse. In addition to these works, there are small sketches concerning the form included in various studies of individual epithalamists. This study does not attempt to fill the obvious need for an adequate and complete history of epithalamia, but it does include a detailed history of the known Greek origins of the genre and of the Latin poems that influenced the

English Renaissance poets.

Where it is practical, the explications of the poems are presented in chronological order so that each poet's contributions to the genre can be seen in their proper place. However, with the Greek poems, the different conventions of the genre are traced separately, because it is the conventions found in the Greek poems that are important to this study, not the individual Greek epithalamia. The study then proceeds to an analysis of the Roman modification of the Greek tradition. This background is provided mainly to establish a sound basis for a detailed study of the English epithalamia.

The epithalamium is an occasional poem, Greek in origin, originally intended for use in a specific portion of the wedding celebration, the entrance of the bride and groom into the bridal chamber for the consummation of the marriage. The word epithalamium literally means "at or in the bed chamber," επι (in) θαλαμος (bed chamber). The term was used in Greek to indicate only the poem used at the bridal chamber, with ὑμεναιος (*hymenaios*) used to designate all types of wedding songs; however, epithalamium was sometimes used in a generic sense in Latin.[2] George Puttenham in the *Arte of English Poesie* [1589]

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[2]Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Melic Poets* (New York, 1963), p. cxiii.

limits the use of the term to its specific meaning:

> This rejoicing was done in ballad wise as the natall song, and was sung very sweetely by Musitians at the chamber dore of the Bridegroome and Bride at such times as shall-be hereafter declared, and thay were called Epithalamies, as much to say as ballads at the bedding of the bride: for such as were sung at the borde at dinner or supper were other Musickes and not properly Epithalamies.[3]

Many of the poems selected for study, all from the English Renaissance, go beyond Puttenham's limitations and celebrate the whole of the wedding ceremony. Robert Case says that "the term Epithalamium . . . has long been attached to every kind of nuptial poem, provided it is supposed to precede or even immediately succeed the nuptial night, and concludes with a few good wishes more or less allusive to the occasion."[4] Case includes in his anthology poems that are not called epithalamies and, in fact, are only general marriage songs praising the bride and groom. Everything considered, no single definition has proved altogether satisfactory. In practice, there has been considerable variation as the genre evolved.

Knowledge of Greek epithalamia is limited because only a few exist in their entirety and most exist only in tiny fragments.

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[3]George Puttenham, The Arte of English Poesie [1589], edited by R. C. Alston (Menston, England, 1968), p. 40.

[4]Robert H. Case, English Epithalamies (London, 1896), p. viii.

The lyrics of Sappho, 91-117, the longest of which is a four-line fragment, provide the earliest extant epithalamia. Because of their fragmentary nature, most that is known about them has come from imitations of Sappho, such as carmen 62 of Catullus. The "Epithalamium of Helen" by Stesichorus, an imitator of Sappho exists as a three-line fragment.

The form was well known enough to be parodied, and parodies of epithalamia by two Greek dramatists, Euripides and Aristophanes, are the oldest poems in this genre that are complete. In Euripides' Troades, Cassandra sings a frenzied epithalamium, imagining that she is to be married in Apollo's temple. This mad hymeneal contains some of the characteristics of the epithalamic form, but because it is a parody sung by an insane woman, it is, of course, not typical of the genre. Aristophanes ends both Pax and Aves with short hymeneals that contain the refrain common to epithalamia. The song concluding Aves is closer to being a true epithalamium than that in Pax, in that it seems to be sung just prior to the entrance to the bridal chamber; whereas the hymeneal in Pax precedes the wedding feast. Both of these songs are comic parodies of the epithalamic genre. Sappho's epithalamia were written for specific weddings, but no Greek epithalamium for an actual wedding exists from the time after these parodies were written. This pattern is seen again in

France and in England, where the form first appears as serious poetry used to celebrate marriages and, for a time, is an accepted part of wedding celebrations. But, because the form with all its lavish praise of the bridal couple is so easy to parody, pejoration of the genre begins, and it disappears from the wedding ceremony and from serious poetry.

The eighteenth idyll of Theocritus, sometimes called the "Epithalamium of Helen," is the only complete poem in the form by the Greek pastoral poets. The seventh idyll of Bion, which is titled "Epithalamium of Achilles and Deidamia" in the translation by Francis Fawkes, is fragmentary. Henry Smyth says that the poem by Theocritus is modeled in part on Sappho, but that it probably owes more to the "Epithalamium of Helen" of Stesichorus.[5] This short list of epithalamia--the fragments of Sappho, Stesichorus, and Bion, the three from Greek drama, and the idyll of Theocritus--comprises the entire body of extant Greek poems in this form.

The place of the epithalamic performance in the Greek wedding celebration is fairly uniform, coming at the bridal couple's entrance to the bed chamber, but the method of the performance is not always the same. In his description of the

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[5]Smyth, p. cxvii.

shield of Achilles, Homer refers to a bridal song, ὑμέναιος, sung during a procession from the bride's home to that of the groom:

> They were leading the brides along the city from
> their maiden chambers
> under the flaring of torches, and the loud bride
> song ὑμέναιος was arising.
> The young men followed the circles of the dance,
> and amoung them
> the flutes and lyres kept up their clamor as
> in the meantime
> the women standing each at the door of her court
> admired them.[6]

In this passage it is not clear who is singing; the men appear to be the active participants. Hesiod, in The Shield of Herakles, lines 271-285, describes the same scene, indicating that the singing was done by both men and women.

Pindar, however, in the "Third Pythian Ode," says that the marriage song was sung by women:

> She could not stay for the coming of the bride-feast.
> not for hymen cry in many voices, such things
> as the maiden companions of youth are accustomed
> to sing
> at nightfall, using the old names of endearment . . .[7]

Virgil's brief parody of the marriage song in Book IV of the Aenied has feminine performers. The epithalamium in the

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[6]Homer, The Iliad of Homer, "Book XVII," translated by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1951), lines 492-497.

[7]Pindar, Some Odes of Pindar, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1942), p. 9.

eighteenth idyll of Theocritus is also sung by twelve maidens in unison. Similarly, Euripides indicates that the hymeneal was sung by women. In Iphigenia Among the Taurians, lines 362-365, Iphigenia says, "My mother and the Argive women are singing marriage hymns, while you are killing me; all the house is tuneful with flutes, and I am dying, at your hands."[8]

In the fragments of Sappho's epithalamia themselves, there is little evidence to identify the performers. Robinson Ellis, in his commentary on Catullus, says that the amoebean character of carmen 62, the alternation of the maidens' lamentation for the loss of maidenhood with the youths' praise of marriage, "can be traced to the extant fragments of Sappho's epithalamia, in which a dramatic element is at times perceptible."[9] Two of the fragments of Sappho appear to be sung by the bride:

> 102 - Do I still long for maidenhood?
>
> 109A - Maidenhood, maidenhood, whither art thou gone from me?[10]

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[8]Euripides, Ten Plays by Euripides, translated by Moses Hadas and John McLean (New York, 1960), p. 251.

[9]Robinson Ellis, A Commentary on Catullus (London, 1889), p. 241.

[10]Sappho, Sappho, edited by Henry Wharton (New York, 1920), p. 102.

In the English Renaissance, the question of whether the epithalamic performers are male or female is not important, for the epithalamium had become a purely literary form without any musical associations. Instead, the emphasis is on the role of the epithalamist himself. In some of the epithalamic fragments of Sappho, especially 91, she seems to have taken the part of *precentor* or *choragus*, directing the wedding celebration and commenting on it as it progresses. Euripides has Cassandra take this role in *Troades* as she sings her imagined hymeneal, giving orders for the lighting of torches, for dancing, and for singing.

In the idyll of Theocritus, the poet does not take part beyond telling that at the wedding of Helen and Menelaus twelve maidens sang. The epithalamium itself is sung by the maidens, but they do not have the role of leading the ceremony, for the ceremony is over and the bridal couple already in the chamber when the maidens begin to sing.

In fragment 91 of Sappho, Ὑμήναον , Hymenaeus, is used for the first time as a proper noun, appearing as a cry to the god of marriage:

> Raise high the roof beams, carpenters.
> (Hymeneaus!)
> Like Ares comes the bridegroom,
> (Hymeneaus!)
> Taller far than a tall man.[11]

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[11]Sappho, p. 107.

A refrain of this type to the god Hymen becomes a characteristic device used in many epithalamia.[12] Aristophanes, Euripides, and Theocritus all use a refrain which repeats the god's name in some form. Catullus imitates and extends the refrain in his epithalamium for Manlius and Junia (61): "O Hymenaee Hymen, O Hymen Hymenaee."

In addition to the refrain, the extant Greek poems contain other features which were taken over by Catullus and other Latin poets to become part of the epithalamic tradition. Only a few of the features of Sappho's epithalamia are obvious from the extant fragments. In fragments 91, 101, 104, and 105, the bridegroom is praised. Poems 99 and 103 urge the bridegroom to rejoice because of the approaching wedding. Fragment 110, "Fool, faint not thou in thy strong heart,"[13] may be a chiding of the bridegroom. Several of the fragments praise the beauty of the bride, and one (95) praises the wedding night. There are also lines which lament the loss of maidenhood.

The eighteenth idyll of Theocritus, the only complete Greek epithalamium that lies within the limitations of Puttenham,

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[12]The origin of Hymen or Hymenios as the god of marriage is not known, although many authorities believe that the god is a personification of the marriage song, rather than that the hymeneal was named for the god.

[13]Sappho, p. 107.

begins with the maiden chorus chiding the bridegroom for sleeping on his wedding night. They suggest that Helen should have been left with other maidens if Menelaus intends to sleep. After telling Menelaus that he is most fortunate to have Helen for his bride, the maidens lavishly sing Helen's praises. They also remind Helen that she is now a married woman; they pray to Leto that she will bless this marriage with fine children; they ask Hymen to rejoice because of the wedding. In Euripedes' _Troades_, Cassandra speaks of the lighting of torches to Hymenaeus. She blesses the bridegroom and herself, and then asks that the wedding day also be blessed. She closes her hymeneal by asking a chorus of maidens to sing for her. In _Aves_, Aristophanes begins the hymeneal with an invocation to a muse, then follows the invocation with praise of the bridegroom. The marriage of Pisthataerus and Royalty is compared with the wedding of Zeus and Hera, and Pisthataerus is likened to Zeus. The hymeneal which concludes _Pax_ is performed by Trygaeus, the bridegroom, and the chorus. This short poem does not contain any praise of the bride, but does suggest that she should have many fine children.

The following epithalamic conventions, then, can be traced to the extant Greek nuptial poems:

1. An invocation to a muse or god.
2. A description of the procession to the bridal chamber.
3. Praise of the bridegroom.
4. Praise of the bride.
5. Wedding customs, such as the lighting of torches and descriptions of singing and dancing at the celebration.
6. The presence of choruses of young men and maidens.
7. Praise of the wedding day and night.
8. Lamentation over the loss of maidenhood.
9. A chiding of the bridegroom by the chorus.
10. Reminders to the bride of her responsibilities as a married woman.
11. Prayers that the wedding be blessed with fine children.
12. Various forms of the name Hymen in a joyful refrain.

The Greek epithalamium had no set meter or stanza form, nor, apparently, any definite rules as to what an epithalamium should contain.

The Greek influence on English epithalamia is not direct, but filtered through two poems by the Latin poet Catullus. Carmen 61 and 62 of Catullus are the primary models for most of the English epithalamia. Because many European epithalamists who were imitated by the British poets were in their own time imitators of Catullus, McPeek says that all of British nuptial verse is directly related to Catullus.[14] The first of the two poems, carmen 61, introduced Roman wedding customs into the epithalamia, while carmen 62 is patterned more closely on Sappho and Theocritus. Robinson Ellis says that carmen 61, in addition

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[14]James McPeek, Catullus in Strange and Distant Britain (Cambridge, 1939), p. 144.

to describing Roman wedding customs, also "is in the main Italian in its imagery and allusions," and that poem 62 "is almost a Greek study; the scene indeed seems to be laid in Greece, for it is not likely that Catullus would have introduced Olympus and Oeta with the same laxity afterwards made fashionable by Vergil and the poets of the Augustan era."[15]

Carmen 61 was written for the wedding of Junia Aurunculeia and Manlius Torquatus. It opens with an invocation to the god Hymen, asking that he come and be present at this wedding. He is asked to deck himself with a wreath of marjoram, a long, flame-colored veil, and yellow slippers, and then to sing the marriage hymns and dance. Praising Junia, the bride, Catullus compares her to Venus. Hymen is urged by the poet to come forth from Thespiae and call the bride from her home. So that Hymen will come more willingly, a chorus of virgins is directed to sing a hymn to Hymen. The hymn, thirty lines long beginning at line 46, says that no god can be compared to Hymen, for without him, passion cannot remain untarnished, a father cannot continue the family name, and a country cannot have children who may grow to serve the state.

The bride, now standing surrounded by torches at the door of her home, delays, weeping because she must marry. The poet

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[15]Ellis, 209.

urges her to cease her crying, for none is more beautiful than she. Lines 82-116 urge the bride to come out where she may be seen, saying that she is beautiful, that the procession is being delayed, that her husband is kind and free from disgrace, and that he eagerly awaits her. Line 91, "Prodeas nove nupta," translated by Barriss Mills as "Come forth, newly married girl,"[16] ends the second stanza of this seven-stanza section, and is repeated four more times in the section. This is the first example of a repeated line, other than the Hymen refrain, in an epithalamium. A line being repeated at the end of each stanza is a characteristic of many Renaissance epithalamia. Within this part, the poet speaks of the joys which await the bridegroom on this wedding night (Lines 112-114).

The procession begins at line 117 with young torch-bearing boys leading the bride. The boys are urged to sing the bawdy Fescennine songs with their allusions to the sexual responsibilities of marriage. The groom is told he must give up his favorite boy slave, and all pleasures that have been permitted him in the past. The bride is told that she must willingly give to her husband what he seeks, lest he be unfaithful and look elsewhere. While the boys sing these songs, the boy slave of the groom scatters walnuts in the procession's path.

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[16]Catullus, _The Carmina of Catullus_, translated by Barriss Mills (Purdue, 1965), p. 91.

Ellis says that having the favorite boy of the bridegroom scatter the walnuts is a departure on the part of Catullus from the usual Roman wedding custom. Other sources indicate that it was normally done by the groom himself. Puttenham offers a curious interpretation for this custom of scattering nuts at weddings.

> The first breach (of the epithalamia) was sung at the first part of the night when the spouse and her husband were brought to their bed, and the tunes of the songs were very loude and shrill, to the intent there might no noise be hard out of the bed-chamber by the skreeking and outcry of the young damosell feeling the first forces of her stiffe and rigorous young man. . . . For which purpose also they used old nurses to suppresse the noise by casting of pottes of nuttes round about the chamber upon the hard floore or pavement. . . . This was, as I said, to diminish the noise of the laughing, lamenting spouse.[17]

After the Fescennine songs, the bride is led across the threshold of the groom's home, while the poet tells her of the passion her husband has for her. She is led to the door of the chamber by a boy dressed in a praetexta, a robe signifying innocence and worn by girls before marriage and boys before reaching puberty. After the boy releases the bride's arm, the pronubae, matrons who have lived with one husband all their married lives, place the bride in bed. The poet then urges the couple to have children as soon as possible, that a male offspring may prove his mother's chastity by looking like his

[17]Puttenham, p. 41.

father. The chorus of maidens close the doors, and the poem ends with expressions of good luck to the couple.

Perhaps the most important feature of carmen 61 is the role of Catullus. The poet takes the role of a *precentor*, directing all of the events, even telling the bride and groom how they should feel. Almost all of the poem is written in the second person. This role, first seen in Sappho, is taken by almost all of the English Renaissance epithalamists with little variation, except for the novel use of the *precentor* by Spenser. The refrain to Hymen appears fifteen times in the course of the poem in two forms: "O Hymenaee Hymen,/ O Hymen Hymenaee" and "io Hymen Hymenaee io,/ io Hymen Hymenaee." Ellis believes that the first form has been corrupted and is not what Catullus wrote.[18] Another feature of this poem which is closely followed by English epithalamists is the strict chronological order.

The shorter carmen 62, although not as influential on the English as carmen 61, needs to be briefly mentioned because of it structure, that of an amoebean chorus. At the conclusion of the wedding banquet, the two choruses, the *Juvenes* and the *Puellae*, sing as the bride approaches. The maidens lament the loss of one of their companions and sing of the sorrows of the mother and daughter at their parting. Hesperus is called cruel

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[18]Ellis, p. 211.

by the maidens for causing this separation. The youths, on the other hand, praise Hesperus for the uniting of two people in marriage, and then accuse the girls of complaining falsely. The maidens compare the chaste girl to a flower which all cherish while it is growing and which is forgotten as soon as it is plucked. Continuing the botanical imagery, the boys point to the grape vine growing in an empty field, neglected unless it is wedded to and climbing an elm tree, saying that the unmarried girl will also be neglected and useless in old age unless she marries. The youths conclude the poem by telling the bride that she must not refuse to give her husband her virginity because two-thirds of it belongs to her parents who have given it to him as a part of the dowry.

The person of the director-poet is absent from carmen 62, and only the final section, which the boys speak to the bride, is written in the second person. Present at the end of each complete chorus is the refrain to Hymen, appearing in a slightly different form from that in carmen 61.

These two poems contain many features which become part of English Renaissance epithalamic tradition:

1. An invocation to Hymen at the poem's beginning.
2. A hymn of praise to Hymen.
3. A description of Hymen.
4. Praise of both bride and groom.
5. Amoebean choruses of maidens and youths.

6. Lamentations over loss of maidenhood and the parting from parents.
7. Reminders to the bride to give herself willingly to her husband.
8. An urging of the couple to have children as soon as possible.
9. Fescennine songs sung by young men.
10. A refrain based on the name Hymen.
11. References to wedding customs.
    a. Lighting of torches.
    b. Scattering of nuts.
    c. Use of marjoram.
    d. A young boy dressed in a praetexta leading the bride to the wedding chamber.
    e. Pronubae placing the bride on the wedding couch.
12. Precentor role of the poet.

In these two poems, Catullus also expresses two attitudes toward marriage which are not found in any of the extant Greek epithalamia. The bride is told in both of his epithalamia that she must give herself freely to marriage because she belongs to her parents and will be a burden to her father if she remains unmarried. In carmen 61, the bridal couple is told that their marriage has responsibilities and obligations outside the realm of their private life; they must have fine children who can grow to serve the nation.

After Catullus, Latin epithalamia were written by Statius and Claudian. With Statius, the epithalamium breaks completely with its musical associations and begins its development as a strictly literary form. In the epithalamia of Statius and Claudian, the form is that of a long narrative poem written in

dactylic hexameter. These poems, and other Latin epithalamia after Catullus, were not closely related to the Greek tradition, and had little influence in England. Of the Latin poets of the Renaissance who wrote epithalamia, only Joannes Secundus, with his freer and more explicit description of the sex act, may have had any influence on English wedding poetry. The Latin epithalamia underwent a major change in the Middle Ages, becoming a religious meditation concerning the marriage of Christ and His church. The German chorale "Wachet auf" by Phillip Nicolai (1556-1605) is a religious epithalamium showing the influence of both the sacred and secular Latin nuptial poems.

The genre was important in French vernacular poetry of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, with such writers as Ronsard and Du Bellay writing epithalamia, but the genre was parodied out of existence in France.[19] Du Bellay's epithalamium was of some influence on English poets, particularly Spenser. But it was neither a Latin nor French epithalamium that served as the model for the first one in English; it was an epithalamium by the minor Spanish poet Gaspar Gil Polo that Sidney chose to follow.

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[19] Thomas Greene, "Spenser and the Epithalamic Convention," The Prince of Poets, edited by John R. Elliot (New York, 1968), p. 154.

CHAPTER II

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

English epithalamia have an abrupt beginning, a rapid flourishing, and a sudden demise. At least one epithalamium had been written in the British Isles prior to Sir Philip Sidney's nuptial poem in Arcadia, George Buchanan's Latin poem "Epithalamium for Mary, Queen of Scots," but Sidney produced the first one in the English language. The precise date for the writing of Sidney's poem is not known. The poem was first printed in 1593, but it had undoubtedly been written sometime between 1577 and 1581. Bartholomew Young in 1583 translated into English the Spanish poem Sidney used as a model for his work, but it was not printed until 1598. In 1594, Spenser's "Epithalamion" was written. After Spenser, the genre was taken up by many poets and several fine epithalamia resulted. Possibilities of the form were almost exhausted by 1625, and, except for a few widely separated appearances in the hands of important figures, English epithalamia written after this time are easily forgettable.

The first English epithalamia is one of the poems in the eclogues of The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, which appear as

intermezzi in the prose work between the books or acts. Sidney's primary inspiration for *Arcadia* was Montemayor's *Diana* and the continuations of it by other Spanish authors. Gaspar Gil Polo in his continuation of *Diana* wrote an epithalamium, the style of which Sidney imitated. Sidney, who was well-versed in the classic authors, particularly Ovid, Vergil, and Horace and who was the first to translate Catullus into English, shows a skillful blending of the Spanish and classical models in his epithalamium. James McPeek points to Sidney's use of the vine and elm tree image found in Catullus and says that this image shows that Sidney had in mind the Catullus poem as he wrote his.[1] William A. Ringler discounts the influence of Catullus saying that the image is too common for this kind of argument.[2] Although Sidney's poem is a benediction in the manner of Gil Polo, close examination shows that the whole of the contents, including the elm tree image, is related to the classical epithalamic tradition of Sappho and Catullus.

The third group of eclogues, five poems between books III and IV, is concerned with marriage and is performed by the

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[1]McPeek, p. 153.

[2]Sir Philip Sidney, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, edited by William A. Ringler (Oxford, 1962), p. xxxv.

Arcadian shepherds gathering to celebrate the wedding of Lalus[3] and Kala. The opening poem of the set is a formal epithalamium performed by the shepherd Dicus. The stanza form of this poem is taken exactly from Gil Polo. It consists of an opening quatrain of iambic pentameter rhymed ABAB, followed by two lines of iambic trimeter, a line of iambic pentameter, one of iambic trimeter, and one of iambic pentameter, rhymed BCCDD.

> Let mother earth now decke her selfe in flowers,
> To see her offspring seeke a good increase,
> Where justest love doth vanquish *Cupid's* powers
> And warr of thoughts is swallow'd up in peace
>   Which never may decrease
>   But like the turtells faire
>   Live one in two, a well united paire,
>   Which that no chaunce may staine,
>   O *Himen* long their coupled joyes maintaine.
>   (Lines 1-9)

The final line of this first stanza is repeated as a refrain at the end of each of the following ten stanzas, being altered only in the final stanza to "For *Himen* will their coupled joys maintaine."

The use of a refrain line at the end of every stanza is characteristic of many English epithalamia. This type of refrain is not found in any of the extant classical epithalamia.

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[3]In the Folio edition of 1593 in which this poem first appears, the name is Thyrsis. In the original or *Old Arcadia*, the bridegroom's name was Lalus.

Catullus and others use a refrain based on the name Hymen, but not at the end of every stanza. The refrain at the end of each stanza of the epithalamium, appearing in the poems of Secundus, Ronsard, Gil Polo, and others, is not of classic origin, but more likely stems from the epithalamia's contact with Provençal and other vernacular poetic forms, such as the virelai. While the origin of this device is not English, it seems only natural that the English epithalamists used the refrain to the extent to which they did, for the English folk ballads and poems had long employed the refrain. The use of the name Hymen in the refrain by Sidney is a deliberate assimilation of the classical refrain with the later type of refrain. The Gil Polo poem does not include the name Hymen in its refrain.

Sidney's epithalamium is an example of correlative verse, as is its Spanish model. The first six stanzas beg the favor of earth, heaven, muses, nymphs, Pan, and virtue. The next four stanzas ask that lust, strife, pride, and jealousy absent themselves from the marriage. The final stanza is a recapitulation of the poem's main thoughts.

The opening stanza is directed toward mother earth, asking for harmony in marriage. The second of the short lines in each of the first six stanzas contains a simile appropriate to the theme of the stanza. In the first stanza, the poet asks that

the couple live in harmony and peace like a pair of turtle doves. The earth is told to "decke her selfe in flowers," calling to mind Catullus' exhortation to Hymen, asking him to deck himself with marjoram and come to bless a marriage. The probable relation to Catullus is seen even more clearly in the following line when Sidney says that the earth is decorating herself that she may come to see this couple, her offspring, come together that they may have good children. The third line says that a just love destroys the powers of Cupid which prevent harmony in marriage. Sidney may have had in mind the passage in Catullus where Hymen, representing faithfulness in marriage, is said to tame the lustful power of Venus.

Several allusions to elements of the classical tradition are skillfully combined in the second stanza. Calling forth the bashful bride, telling her that she must not hide her beauty, is an important part of the classical epithalamium. In this stanza, in which the "bashful Bride" is mentioned, heaven is told to show its face and not to hide its beauty. Heaven is also asked to grace the bride and bridegroom with the presence of its face, the sun, bringing to mind the torches which surround the bride at this point in the Catullus poem. The bridegroom is given here the appelative "honest," as in the comparable section of carmen 61 of Catullus, where the bride is

told not to worry because the love of her waiting bridegroom is pure and not deceitful. Sidney compares the couple's love and the approaching consummation of their marriage to the entwined elm tree and vine, embracing in "delightfull paine," one of the few obvious sexual allusions in this epithalamium.

The theme of the third stanza is chastity and purity. The Muses are asked to bestow their favors on the couple that they may be like the lilies. The poet's statement that the purity of the lilies pleases all eyes is the first of three references in this poem to the couple's responsibilities to society. Catullus said that the couple was obligated to have children who could grow to save the state, and Sidney puts forth the same idea in stanza five. Here in this stanza the couple is only told to remain faithful and chaste in the eyes of society, that their marriage may remain happy always.

The water nymphs who have previously praised the bridegroom's music are asked in the fourth stanza to grant long life to the couple. The nymphs are requested to end the couple's lives at the same time so that the pair may be together in death as in life. The bridal couple is likened to two rivers which flow together to become one stream containing the water of both. The rather morbid intrusion of death into the poem in lines 31 and 32,

> Let one time (but long first) close up their daies,
> One grave their bodies seize,

may carry with it an added sexual connotation. If these lines are considered to allude to the sex act, then the following lines about the flowing together of the two rivers are given added meaning.

In stanza five, Pan, "the god of silly sheepe," who is responsible for the increase in number of his flock, is asked to aid the couple in having a large number of children. It is here again that Sidney exhibits the same attitude as Catullus, saying that the couple must have children for the benefit of society, "Since from these good the other's good doth flow." The number of children the couple is to have is compared with a herd of sheep and drops of rain.

The last of the six stanzas addressed to those who can bless the marriage by their presence calls upon virtue, the chief part of God, to bind the couple to their vows and make them always faithful to each other. The couple is compared to the oak tree and mistletoe in that the woman will obtain her strength from the man, and his standing in the eyes of others will be increased by her virtue.

Beginning with the seventh stanza, the poet addresses himself to those elements which can best aid this marriage by

staying away. Cupid is called the "syre to lawlesse lust," and is told to keep his poisoned dart away from the bridal couple, lest his golden dart rust in the presence of their simple love. The simple, chaste love of the pair is said to have no need of the charming though cunning and deceitful art of love-making that is associated with Cupid. This stanza and stanza ten are directed to both the bride and bridegroom, for both are susceptible to lustful passion and jealousy, but the two other stanzas of the set of four are admonitions to the bride and groom separately. The use of a simile in the second of the short lines is discontinued after the sixth stanza. The next to the last line in stanzas seven through ten returns the reader's thoughts to pure and chaste love in preparation for the refrain.

In the eighth stanza, strife, inward and private spite, hateful words, and waywardness are all asked to flee from this marriage. Sidney, curiously, sees these as characteristics which most likely will appear in the man. Sidney says that the man must not always claim his rights and that he must not fight with his neighbors in the manner of a woman's debate. This stanza and the following one recall the examples in Greek and Latin epithalamia where the bridegroom and bride are reminded of their responsibilities to each other as married people. The ninth stanza admonishes the bride not to fall prey to vanity,

pride, or slothfulness. The bride is told that she must not long for her youthful beauty nor spend too much time trying to maintain her fading youth. Nor, on the other hand, is she to become slovenly in the care of her person and her home. She is told that she must strive for a golden mean.

The final stanza of this section is concerned with jealousy, "The evill of evils," the chief part of the forces of evil, as the final stanza of the first section was concerned with virtue, the most important force for good. The couple is warned to keep their hearts faithful and constant so that jealousy cannot destroy their marriage. The poem concludes with a stanza that restates the theme of each of the preceeding stanzas.

Because Sidney's epithalamium is a benediction poem and part of the tradition related to Theocritus, it does not have some of the important features of the classical epithalamium that most English poets followed. The poem does not celebrate the wedding day specifically, and the _precentor_ role of the poet is absent because the poet is deprived of the opportunity to direct the ceremony since the ceremony is not described. The opening line of the poem, "Let mother earth. . .," is in the second person, indicating that the poet may have momentarily considered employing a _precentor_, but the concept is not

developed further. The most important feature which is missing is praise of the bride and groom. The poem asks that the couple be happy and admonishes them to be faithful, but does not praise them. Even with these notable exceptions, many features of the main classical epithalamic tradition are present in the poem, several in a somewhat disguised form.

1. The calling forth of the bride.
2. Prayers for harmony in the marriage.
3. Prayers for many children.
4. Reminders to the bride and groom of their responsibilities.
5. A refrain based on the name Hymen.

The use of Hymen in the poem differs from the classical models. Except for the use of the name in the recurring line, Hymen plays no major part in the poem. Other gods or god-like elements are urged to bless the marriage with either their presence or absence. But it is not Hymen specifically who is asked to bless the marriage. Neither is Hymen described as being the protector of marriage against the onslaughts of Cupid and jealousy as in Catullus. Rather, virtue and simple love are marriage's defenders. Praise of Hymen is also absent from the poem, perhaps in keeping with the decision by Sidney to eliminate the element of praise from the poem entirely. In this respect, Sidney follows his Spanish model, in that the Gil Polo poem does not praise the bridal couple, nor does it describe the

wedding ceremony.

Sidney owes only a little to Gil Polo; the real basis for Sidney's nuptial verse is the classical tradition of Greece and Rome. He does not copy the older poems, but assimilates the major elements of the tradition into his poem. Though Sidney's poem is a minor work, influences of the poem are to be found in Spenser's "Epithalamion" and in other Renaissance nuptial poems.

CHAPTER III

EDMUND SPENSER

As early as 1580, Edmund Spenser was planning to compose a nuptial poem, "Epithalamion Thamesis," but there is no evidence to show that the project was ever completed. Had the poem been written, it would have been quite unlike the classical poems in this genre. In a letter to Gabriel Harvey, written in 1580, Spenser wrote concerning this planned epithalamium:

> In mind shortely, at convenient leysure, to sette forth a book in this kind [an experiment in English versification], whyche I entitle "Epithalamion Thamesis," whyche book I dare undertake will be very profitable for the knowledge, and rare invention and manner of handling. For in setting the marriage of the Thames, I shewe his first beginning, and offspring, and all the countrey that he passeth thorough, and also describe all the rivers throughout Englade, whyche came to this wedding, and their righte names, and right passage, &c.[1]

Though Spenser made no use of this material when he actually wrote an epithalamium in 1594, it may be the origin of the symbolic procession on the river Thames that appears in his "Prothalamion" of 1596. Spenser may have put this material to use also in "Colin Clouts Come Home Again," where the tracing of the river Mulla through Ireland is treated as a genealogy

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[1]Edmund Spenser, The Complete Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, edited by R. E. Neil Dodge (Boston, 1908), p. 772.

listing parentage, marriage, and offspring of the river. Spenser wrote two nuptial poems, the first of which, "Epithalamion," was written to celebrate his own wedding to Elizabeth Boyle on June 11, 1594. The poem was published in 1595 with the "Amoretti," a sonnet cycle of eighty-eight poems concerned with his courtship of Elizabeth Boyle, which began late in 1592 or early 1593. William Ponsonby, the publisher, added a dedication to Sir Robert Needham.

"Epithalamion" is a major poem, the only English nuptial poem that can be ranked with that of Catullus. It is an extremely complex work, embracing the whole of the epithalamic tradition to express a theme far more universal than the celebration of a specific wedding. The complicated form of the poem is a puzzle which has only recently been solved. Most critics have suggested that the form was based on the Italian *canzone*, but were at a loss to explain why there was much in the poem that was not characteristic of the *canzone*. James McPeek believed that the form was suggested by the long, rambling stanzas of an epithalamium by Buffet,[2] but A. Kent Hieatt showed that the form was original with Spenser and much

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[2] McPeek, p. 183.

more complex than had previously been suspected.[3]

Possible sources for materials used in "Epithalamion" have been cited by McPeek and others, primarily the epithalamia of the French poets of the Pléiade and of Catullus. A number of similarities between Spenser's poem and Buffet's epithalamium show clearly that Spenser knew the Buffet poem. However, as in other comparisons used to trace Spenser's material, the question of how much he owes to a specific poem and how much simply to a general knowledge of the genre cannot be answered. Much of the material is original with Spenser, or can be traced directly to Catullus, or to Sidney, a source not previously noted.

The first of the twenty-four stanzas opens the poem with an invocation to the Muses which is similar to the stanza in Sidney's epithalamium that is spoken to the Muses. Taking the traditional role of a precentor, Spenser asks for the Muses to aid him in composing this poem as they have done in the past with other poems of his. In the parallel stanza by Sidney, the Muses have previously shown to Lalus their secret ways and

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[3] A. Kent Hieatt, Short Time's Endless Monument (New York, 1960). A summary of Hieatt's findings is included later in the chapter so that a question may be raised as to this poem's possible influence on other Renaissance epithalamia.

are called upon to aid him in his marriage. Reference is made to the Muses' assistance in writing works of both a joyful and a tragic nature. The intermingling of joy, death, love, and the violence of fortune in the opening stanza sets a tone not in keeping with the classical epithalamium. Hieatt's study of the form leads him to the conclusion that one of the dominant themes in this poem is man's mutability, and thus the tone established momentarily in the opening stanza is appropriate if Hieatt is correct. As the stanza reaches its close, the Muses are told to put aside "those sorrowful complaints" and aid in praising the bride. A refrain, "The woods shall to me answer and my Eccho ring," concludes this stanza, and, with some variation, all stanzas except the brief _tornata_. Such a refrain is typical of epithalamia written in Spencer's time, but not of the _canzone_.

Dawn of the wedding day comes as the second stanza begins, and the bridegroom tells the muses to hasten to awaken his bride before the sun fully rises. Hymen is said to be already awake and ready to perform his masque. The bright torch which has been associated with Hymen and with wedding poetry from the classical beginning is referred to here. Hymen is surrounded by bachelors who will perform the masque. The wedding day is "the wished day," a day which will be a recompense for past

sorrows and pains, once again combining thoughts of joy with reminders of joy's opposite. While the bride prepares herself for the day's events, the Muses are told to sing to her of joy and solace. Spenser concludes his instructions to the Muses in the third stanza by directing them to gather all the nymphs from the rivers and forests, to have them deck themselves with flowers, and then have them bring flowers to decorate the bride and also to strew her bridal path. Having local river nymphs attend the wedding is a characteristic of French epithalamia.[4]

In stanza four, the bridegroom speaks directly to the nymphs, the "Nymphes of Mulla," who are told to prepare to present themselves unblemished at the wedding. The nymphs who protect the wildlife of the forest are also told to be present at the wedding to grace the bride. Spenser identifies the nymphs with an extensive description of wildlife. With the close of stanza four, the mythological characters who form the background for the day's events are all assembled.

Stanzas five and six are devoted to waking the bride and preparing her for the procession to the church. When the sun rises, a bevy of birds--the lark, the thrush, the mavis, the ouzell, and the ruddock--sing their "love-learned song" to

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[4]McPeek, p. 169.

awaken the bride, but she continues to sleep. The impatience of the bridegroom, a convention going back to Greek epithalamia, appears in this stanza when Spenser pleads with his bride-to-be, "Ah my deare love why doe you sleep thus long." When the bride awakes, her eyes are said to shine brighter than those of Hesperus. The mythical _Horae_, begotten of Jove, creators of the seasons, and makers of all that is fair in the world, are called on to wait upon the bride and to adorn her. The three Graces are also asked to be present. The use of the _Horae_ to attend the bride is not part of previous epithalamic tradition. Hieatt has shown that their presence here is related to the theme embodied in the structure of the poem.

Stanzas seven through sixteen are devoted to the wedding ceremony and to the celebration which follows it. The procession, which is preparing to start to the church in stanza seven, is modelled primarily on Catullus, though important Catullian elements are missing. The bride, with virgins attending her, is ready to start. Young boys wait upon the bridegroom. Since the wedding takes place in the daytime rather than in the evening as was the classical custom, there is no need for torches to light the bride's way. Spenser, however, incorporates this convention into the poem at the same place and in the same manner as Sidney, by having the sun light his bride's

face. He warns the sun to use only its "favorable ray" so as not to burn her face. Stanza seven also contains a prayer to Phoebus Apollo as "father of the Muse," which says that if he will grant the bridegroom his desires for this day, Spenser will devote the remainder of his days to Apollo by writing poetry. The stanza which follows describes the music and dancing which will accompany the procession, and the procession actually begins in stanza nine. There is no mention of the bride's delaying, and therefore no reason to include a summoning of the bride. This convention was used earlier in the poem when the bride was sleeping, although that was not the customary place for it to be employed.

The minstrels begin to play their music, signalling the start of the procession, while the young maidens dance and sing. McPeek says that the use of minstrels was suggested by Buffet,[5] but dancing and singing to the accompaniment of instrumental music in the procession can be found as far back as the first extant account of a Greek wedding, Homer's description of the shield of Heracles. The young boys running in the streets ahead of the procession shouting "Hymen io Hymen" are taken from the Fescennine merriment in carmen 61 of Catullus.

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[5]McPeek, p. 182.

All of this music and shouting meets with the approval of the noisy crowds which line the route of the procession.

Stanzas nine through eleven contain a description of the bride and the crowd's reaction to her as she makes her way to the church. The comparison of the bride's appearance with the moon's rising in the East is an allusion traceable to Catullus. She is clad in the traditional white of a virgin and likened by Spenser to an angel. The angelic imagery is continued with the description of her bright, golden hair. She is said to "Seeme lyke some mayden Queene," an extension of the comparison to Phoebe or Diana in the stanza's second line. Lines 159 through 164 tell of the bride's modesty and shyness, an old epithalamic convention, used here by Spenser to praise his bride for not being proud.

A curious, middle-class element enters the lofty world of epithalamia with the introduction of the town's "merchants daughters," who are asked by the bridegroom if they have ever seen "So fayre a creature." Spenser's use of maidens not of the upper-class may have been intended by contrast to further praise the bride. Spenser may have felt a need to enhance his own stature by making this contrast of classes, for while he was born to an ancient family, his immediate family had been poor and his father a merchant. It should also be noted that

his wedding took place in Ireland, and that this element may have been intended as a snobbish jab at the Irish people Spenser thoroughly disliked. Following a seven-line catalogue of the bride's physical beauty, the bridegroom scolds these middle-class virgins for ceasing to sing to the bride because they have been overcome by her beauty.

Stanza eleven is a description of the bride's spiritual beauty. Here, again, Spenser's debt to Sidney is seen, as he gives a catalogue of those qualities which control "base affections." Spenser's list of virtue, simple love, chastity, unblemished faith, a comely and modest attitude, and a respect for honor, is the same as that of Sidney when he names the forces which can overcome Cupid and Venus.

The procession reaches the church at stanza twelve. This stanza and the following one are concerned with the church ceremony. At this point, the immortals of Greco-Roman mythology are temporarily replaced with those of Hebraic origin. Spenser emphasizes this change by beginning stanza twelve in the manner of Psalm XXIV, "Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates." But instead of the King of Glory, it is Spenser's bride, given here the appellation "Saynt", who is entering the temple. As she enters with "humble reverence," the bridegroom tells the accompanying maidens to look closely at the bride's humble

manner and learn from her not to enter the church with "proud faces." Spenser directs the bride to the altar while the organ and the choir loudly praise the Lord, another allusion to a psalm. In the earlier stanzas, Apollo and the Muses are asked to bless the bride and the wedding; in stanza thirteen, the priest blesses the bride. Earlier, the mythical Hours, or Horae, who serve Jove, surround the bride; here, the Hours are replaced with angels who have forgotten their duty at the sacred altar and are flying about the bride, transfixed by her beauty.

In describing the bride's appearance during the ceremony, Spenser emphasizes the colors red and white, possibly symbolizing both the bride's purity and her coming loss of maidenhood. The bride's modesty at this point is indicated again by the old motif of the delaying bride. Spenser asks, "Why blush ye, love, to give me your hand,/ the pledge of all our band?" Angels singing alleluias conclude the stanza.

The Judeo-Christian elements are discarded in stanza thirteen as an unrestrained festival in honor of Hymen and Bacchus begins. As the bride is brought home amid joyous celebration, Spenser gives free reign to his own emotions, saying that man has never known a happier day and that it will forever be holy to him. Urging drunkenness on the celebrants, he then gives orders for the wine to flow without restraint.

Both Bacchus and Hymen are crowned, and the singing and dancing commence.

The next two stanzas are concerned with the wedding day, the day of St. Barnabas, and ironically for marriages, the longest day and shortest night of the year. Young men are told to ring bells to wear away the day. They are also told to perform certain acts which customarily belong to St. Barnabus' day, such as dancing around bonfires. As Spenser consoles himself over having chosen the longest day of the year, he writes a line that has additional meaning when the poem's mutability theme is considered, "Yet never day so long, but late would passe."

A common criticism of this poem is that Spenser was unable to effectively solve the problem of describing the bridegroom's impatient longing for the sexual consummation of the marriage and maintaining in good taste his double role of <u>precentor</u> and bridegroom. However, this problem does appear to have been solved in these two stanzas, for while Spenser does not explicitly state his desire for sexual pleasure, the desire is the unmistakable implication in these lines:

> Ah! when will this long weary day have end,
> And lende me leave to come unto my love?
> . . . .
> Hast thee, o fayrest planet, to thy home
> Within the western forme:
> Thy tyred steedes long since have need of rest.

The last line, expressing the need of Apollo's horses for rest, strengthens the sexual aspect of this section, since the horse has long been a male, sexual symbol. Whether Spenser meant this line as a double entendre or not cannot be determined, but the intent of the section is clear.

Stanza sixteen ends with the coming of twilight, and the appearance of Venus, the evening star, in the Eastern sky. This is an astronomical impossibility, as Hieatt has pointed out, for Venus appears in the east only as a morning star.[6] It may be that Spenser misplaced Venus deliberately to emphasize that the coming of night was to him a beautiful occurrence. He had earlier in the poem used the East to describe the appearance of his bride in the procession. With the coming of night in stanza seventeen, the maidens are told to disrobe the bride and place her in bed, a common epithalamic element. While taste perhaps prevents Spenser from being personal in describing the bride's preparations for bed, he does compare her with Maia, "when as Jove her tooke,/In Tempe, lying on the flowery gras." Spenser then dismisses the maidens and comes to his bride.

The wedding night is described in stanzas eighteen through twenty-three, which contain many prayers for the couple's

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[6]Hieatt, p. 93.

happiness and success in marriage. This section of "Epithalamion" is similar in content to Sidney's epithalamium, in that Spenser is not concerned with the wedding ceremony, but with prayers for blessings. The day's events and the poem itself reach a climax in the consummation now to take place. It is here that Spenser's dual role poses an insurmountable problem; it does not allow him to describe any part of the sex act except in the most veiled manner. At the climax of the wedding day, Spenser resorts to describing cupids playing above the bridal couple's bed. Another mention of one of Jove's affairs in stanza eighteen is the only other sexual reference in this section.

Stanza eighteen is a prayer to Night to wrap the couple in a cover of darkness, keeping them safe from peril, horror, and false treason. The young men and maidens are told to cease their singing, and the night is told to be quiet and peaceful. The emphasis on silence in stanza eighteen is continued in the following stanza as Spenser lists all of the nocturnal sounds he does not wish to hear on this night. This catalogue of horrors breaks once again the joyous tone of the wedding celebration. Lamenting cries, doleful tears, false whispers, deluding dreams, and dreadful sights are all asked to be absent on the wedding night. Likewise, evil spirits, witches, screech

owls, ravens, and vultures are exhorted not to come near the bridal couple. Sidney's listing of the forces that can bring trouble to a marriage is similar to the opening lines of this stanza and may be Spenser's source, just as Spenser's list of virtues in stanza eleven may have been taken from Sidney. As Night keeps evil away from the couple, the cupids sport and play about their bed.

Cynthia, the virgin moon goddess (an allusion to Queen Elizabeth I), is asked to favor the marriage. The specific favor asked of her is that the bride may soon bear children. Juno, Genius, Hebe, and Hymen are prayed to in stanza twenty-two. Juno is asked to help them keep their marriage vows sacred, and the others are asked to grant many children to the couple. Finally, the heavens are asked to bless this family with a prosperous and good reign on the earth and a reward in heaven for faithful lives.

The final stanza, like the _envoy_ of the Italian _canzone_, is addressed to the rest of the poem, in a manner that has puzzled many critics. Hieatt offered a solution to this stanza, and it is here necessary to include a brief summary of his findings. He says that the twenty-four stanzas represent the hours of the day and also the _Horae_, who are the creators of the

seasons. In the poem, there are three-hundred and ~~fifty-six~~ sixty-five long lines, pentameter, and sixty-eight shorter lines; the long lines represent the days of the year, and the short lines divide the twenty-four hours into quarter-hour periods. The stanzas are divided into sets of matching stanzas, one through twelve corresponding to thirteen through twenty-four, representing the twelve *Horae* of the heavens, each with their opposite in the Zodiac. The sun's movement through the various signs of the Zodiac is represented by the three-hundred and fifty-nine long lines in the first twenty-three stanzas. The sun moves each day in a circle of only about 359 degrees in relation to the so-called fixed stars, slipping back a little each day until the original position is reached in one year. The song, according to the *envoy*, was born before its time and ended at the three-hundred and fifty-ninth line, just as the sun's revolution is an incomplete circle of 359 degrees. The compensation which the *envoy* offers is the promise of renewal that lies in the cyclical pattern of the universe.[7]

The theme of this poem, symbolized in the form, is that while each man is subject to mutability and death, he can find comfort in the fact that life and the universe are cyclical and

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[7] Hieatt, p. 95-107.

eternal. This theme is appropriate for a wedding poem because marriage is the beginning of a new cycle, the hope of each man for continuing life through his succeeding generations. The poem contains references throughout to the eternal nature of marriage, but the main theme is not apparent in the content alone. The structure of the poem must be understood to fully comprehend the poem's theme.

Hieatt States in his introduction that the facts and interpretations "appear to have gone unnoticed for 365 years [1594-1959],"[8] but as will be shown in the next chapter, it is quite likely that Spenser's intentions were understood for a few years after the poem was written, for John Donne parodied them in his "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne." The structure of Spenser's poem may have also been understood and copied in epithalamia by Ben Jonson and Thomas Carew, but the similarities in formal pattern in these cases are not backed up by content and are probably just coincidental.

Spenser's other nuptial poem "Prothalamion" was written for the double marriage of the Earl of Worcester's daughters and was printed in 1596 by William Ponsonby. The title is original with Spenser, and has been used only once more for an

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[8] Hieatt, p. 3.

English wedding poem (Michael Drayton wrote a "Prothalamion" in 1630, but, except for the title, it does not resemble the Spenser poem). Spenser's poem is unlike all other epithalamic poems. It describes the passage of two swans, representing the two brides, down the river Thames to London for their marriage. The stanza form is similar to that of "Epithalamion," but is regular, all stanzas having seventeen lines and a two-line refrain. While "Prothalamion" is a wedding poem using a few of the epithalamic conventions, notably the procession, it is not an epithalamion that follows the classical tradition.

Spenser's "Epithalamion" influenced much of the wedding verse which followed it, and its publication may have been one of the factors that caused the flowering of the genre in England in the first three decades of the seventeenth century. At least two other English epithalamia were written before the end of the sixteenth century, the first epithalamium of John Donne and George Chapman's "Epithalamion Teratos," from his continuation of Marlowe's <u>Hero and Leander</u>, showing influences of Spenser and Catullus. The Donne poem, probably the third or fourth English epithalamium, is a brilliant parody of the genre in general, and Spenser's poem in particular.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN DONNE

John Donne's three contributions to the epithalamic genre belong to two different periods of his literary output. Two were written in 1613 for royal weddings; the third had been written two decades earlier while Donne was at Lincoln's Inn, between 1592 and 1595. A more precise date, the summer of 1595, has been suggested by David Novarr for this latter poem.[1] The present study will show that his dating of "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne" is correct, at least to the year, but that the evidence he uses to support the dating is inconclusive and, without the additional evidence which follows, leaves the date of composition still in question. These added findings, showing that Donne's first epithalamium was written in 1595, possibly in March, also give confirmation, perhaps unnecessary, to A. Kent Hieatt's interpretation of the form of Spenser's "Epithalamion."

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[1] David Novarr, "Donne's 'Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne,'" _Review of English Studies_, VII (1956), pp. 250-263.

Novarr argues that Donne's early poem could not have been written before Spenser's nuptial poem was published late in 1594, placing the date of Donne's poem at some time during his last year at Lincoln's Inn. He believes that the poem is a satirical epithalamium written for a mock wedding which was designed for a revel at the Inns of Court, and he adds that if "Donne had written his poem before he saw Spenser's, he probably would have satirized in the neo-Latin epical fashion familiar to some in his audience or in the pastoral-benediction fashion of Sidney."[2] Because Donne's poem is a lyrical work which incorporates a narration of the events of the wedding day, Navarr believes that Donne must have written his poem after having seen Spenser's epithalamium, which was the first in the English language to mix epic narration with an essentially lyrical style. However, this argument ignores the fact that the epithalamia of Catullus were known in England at this time, and Donne could have chosen his style from Catullus without having seen Spenser's poem; one of the epithalamia of Catullus is the most important example of lyric poetry blended with epic narration in this genre. But, as will be shown, Donne was not satirizing the genre, nor any branch of it; he was writing a close parody

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[2]Novarr, p. 261.

of a specific work, Spenser's "Epithalamion." The many parallels with Spenser make the poem much more than a mock nuptial verse written in the fashion of Spenser and Catullus.

The Donne poem is much shorter than the work it parodies, being only eight stanzas and ninety-six lines long, the difference in length being attributable to Donne's omission of mythological characters and all they represent in Spenser's poem. Donne's parody is effective on two levels, mocking both Spenser's content and his unusual form. Because the similarities in content provide the most obvious link between the two poems, and because the connection between the form of the poems could be dismissed as mere conjecture if the poems were not linked in other ways, it is necessary to discuss first the contents of the Lincoln's Inn epithalamium.

The first stanza is devoted to awakening the bride, and its two opening lines resemble certain lines of the Spenser poem:

> The Sun-beames in the East are spred,
> Leave, leave, faire Bride, your solitary bed,
> (Donne, lines 1-2)[3]

> His golden beame upon the hils doth spred,
> (Spenser, line 20)

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[3]John Donne, <u>The Complete Poetry of John Donne</u>, edited by John T. Shawcross (New York, 1967), p. 171.

> Wake now, my love, awake! for it is time:
> The rosy Morne long since left Tithones bed,
> (Spenser, lines 74-75).

The bride is told by Donne to leave her bed because it is like a grave and "nourseth sadnesse." In Spenser's opening stanza, he too refers to death and sadness, both of which are unusual elements in an epithalamium. The remainder of stanza one is unlike Spenser in its explicit sexual references, urging the bride to "put forth that warme balme-breathing thigh" which will meet another thigh the next time it is under sheets. The stanza closes with the refrain that ends each of the first four stanzas, "Today put on perfection, and a womans name."

Stanza two is more obviously connected with Spenser than the previous stanza; several parts of the Spenser poem are combined in this stanza. It is addressed to the "Daughters of London," bringing immediately to mind Spenser's "merchants daughters." London's daughters are told to dress the bride with flowers and jewels and to enhance the bride's appearance by being near her. Donne also calls these maidens "angels," punning on the appellation by telling the angels to bring with them "Thousands of Angels on your mariage daies." Angels were gold coins; thus the line is a reference to the maidens' dowries.[4]

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[4]Donne, p. 171.

London's daughters, in addition to being linked with Spenser's middle-class maidens, also resemble his "nymphes of Mulla," for the use of the name of the river draws attention to the place of Spenser's wedding, and London specifies the location of Donne's mock wedding. The daughters and the nymphs fulfill the same purpose in both poems, dressing and adorning the bride. As angels, the daughters are told by Donne "to praise / These rites," just as the angels which hover about Spenser's bride in the ceremony are told to sing alleluia.

The procession to the church is the concern of stanza three. The "frolique Patricians," companions of the bridegroom are directed to lead him to the church. The hermaphroditic bachelors who make up this part of the procession are humorous because they lack the dignified manner of the boys who accompany Spenser in his procession. John Shawcross suggests that Donne calls them "Hermaphrodits" because, as fellows of the Inns of Court, they are involved with both "study (community with men) and play (community with women)."[5] There is also another explanation for this term; if this wedding was a mock wedding staged at Lincoln's Inn, the women's roles would probably have been taken by men, and men dressed as women could be called

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[5]Donne, p. 171.

"Hermaphrodits." The last five lines of stanza three are devoted to the bride, and closely resemble Spenser's poem even to the use of identical wording:

> Loe, in yon path which store of straw'd flowers graceth,
> The sober virgin paceth;
> Exept my sight faile, 'tis no other thing;
> Weep not nor blush, here is no griefe nor shame."
> (Donne, lines 32-35)
>
> And let the ground whereas her foot shall tread
> . . . .
> Be strewed with fragrant flowers all along.
> (Spenser, lines 48 and 50)
>
> Loe! where she comes along with portly pace,
> (Spenser, line 148)
>
> Her modest eyes . . .
> . . . .
> . . . blush to heare her prayses sung so loud.
> (Spenser, lines 159 and 163).

Spenser, of course, has no doubts as to the identity of his bride when she appears in the procession, but Donne is not as certain about the person who is the bride in his procession and momentarily questions what his eyes behold, "Except my sight faile." Perhaps his puzzlement stems from the fact that the bride is a man.

Stanza four is concerned with the ceremony in the church. In the manner of Spenser,

> Open the temple gates unto my love,
> Open them wide that she may enter in,
> (Spenser, lines 204-205)

Donne calls for the opening of the church:

> Thy two-leav'd gates faire Temple'unfold,
> And these two in thy sacred bosome hold.
> (Donne, lines 37-38).

In light of the humorous vein of this poem, it is possible that the "two-leav'd gate" opening to the "bosome" may be a pun with sexual meaning. "Temple" undoubtedly refers to one of the Temples of the Inns of Court, which makes the adjective "faire" ironic.

Death makes a strong appearance in stanza four when it is mentioned immediately after the couple is joined by the church. This passage is one of the most interesting in the poem, for it points both to Spenser and to Sidney and also reveals that Donne may have understood the meaning implicit in the structure of Spenser's "Epithalamion."

> Then may thy leane and hunger-starved wombe
> Long time expect their bodies and their tombe
> Long after their owne parents fatten thee;
> All elder claims, and all cold barrennesse,
> All yeelding to new loves bee far forever,
> Which might these two dissever,
> Alwaies, all th'other may each one possesse.
> (Donne, lines 40-46)

Lines 41 and 42 are similar to the fourth stanza of Sidney's epithalamium, "Let one time, but long first, close up their days." The banishing of "elder claims" and "yeelding to new loves" is also an echo of the Sidney poem. Like Sidney's lines,

these speak of the mutability of man, the inevitability of death, and the eternality of love. Donne's blending of the womb and the grave into a single entity and his references in the adjoining lines to the death of the couple's parents and the hoped-for birth of children are clearly reminiscent of the theme found in the structure of Spenser's poem: although man is subject to death, he can receive comfort from the knowledge that life and the universe are cyclical in nature, and each individual will continue to live through the lives of succeeding generations. The presence of the same theme in both poems is not enough to prove that Donne understood Spenser's structure, but, this conclusion seems valid when other similarities yet to be discussed are considered.

In stanza five, Donne speaks of the merits of the winter season and the movements of the sun. Winter is considered best for weddings because of the longer nights. In the third through the fifth lines of this stanza, Donne mocks Spenser's timidity in describing the marriage's consummation. Donne covertly and discreetly alludes to the sex act in the same manner as Spenser, and this discretion in a poem which contains some bold sexual references serves only to heighten the mockery of Spenser's tone.

> Other sweets wait thee then these diverse meats,
> Other disports then dancing jollities,
> Other love tricks then glancing with the eyes.
> (Donne, lines 51-53).

The only physical contact Spenser mentions in his poem is the joining of hands in the religious ceremony, but he makes much use of visual contact, corresponding with Donne's "glancing with the eyes." Spenser looks upon his bride with pride; maidens and angels see her and are astonished; and the moon goddess peeps in the window of the couple's bed chamber after they have gone to bed. The "sonnes of Venus" which Spenser has dancing above the bed to symbolize the sexual consummation are told to "play your sports" and to "filch away sweet snatches of delight." The cupids are used by Spenser to divert attention from his failure to describe the consummation.

The second half of stanza five, first pointing to the unhappy fact that the sun is still shining and then to signs that the sun is setting, is closely copied from Spenser:

> Hee flies in winter, but he now stands still,
> Yet shadowes turne: Noone point he hath attain'd,
> His steeds will bee restrain'd,
> But gallop lively downe the Westerne hill;
> (Donne, lines 55-58)

> This day the sunne is in his chiefest hight,
> . . . .
> Yet never day so long, but late would passe.
> (Spenser, lines 265 and 273)

> Hast thee, O fayrest planet, to thy home
> Within the westerne fome:
> Thy tyred steeds long since have need of rest.
> (Spenser, lines 282-284)

With the coming of night, Donne changes his refrain to indicate that the sun has set just as Spenser did. The refrain now is "Tonight, put on perfection, and a woman's name."

In the same stanza as lines 282-284 above, Spenser rejoices at the rising of the evening star, and in the Donne poem, the evening star rises at the opening of the stanza which contains lines 55-58 above. In this sixth stanza, as the evening star rises, Donne suggests that the star of the wedding, the bride, should do the opposite and "inclose / Her selfe in her wish'd bed." The musicians are told to cease their labors and to rest along with all the other laboring beasts, for with the coming of night new labors in bed must begin; the line "in their beds commenced / Are other labours," contains a pun on the child-bearing and sexual meanings of labor. After quieting the maiden musicians, Spenser expresses his gratitude for the night "That long daies labor doest at last defray." Spenser means nothing more than the labors of the day, but Donne expands this passage with a pun as he continued his mocking of Spenser.

The two final stanzas are not as closely linked with Spenser as the other six stanzas. Stanza seven contains only

a few vague connections with Spenser. The bride is told to undress and place herself upon "loves alter," the wedding bed. Like Spenser's bride, who when naked is dressed in humility, the bride in Donne's poem is likened to truth and virtue when in this state. The seventh stanza also refers to the bed as a grave to virginity, and at the same time compares it to a cradle, alluding again to Spenser's theme of the cycle of birth, life, and death.

In the final stanza, after tying his poem tightly to that of Spenser, Donne completes the joke by doing what Spenser could not do and concludes by describing the sex act with a strong sexual simile. The bridegroom is likened to a priest and the bride to a sacrificial lamb. Line 90, "The priest comes on his knees t'embowell her," contains a pun on the word "embowell" meaning "to hide in the inward parts."[6] In concluding the parody in this manner, Donne points to what many critics have seen as the weak part of Spenser's poem, the failure to exploit the climax of the wedding day.

M. Byron Raizis would deny the close connection with Spenser because the poem does not make use of classical

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[6]Donne, p. 173.

mythology:

> There are no gods and classical allusions in this poem, [not entirely true, Flora appears in line 23] and evidence of any strong influence of earlier lyrics is also lacking. Though Donne knew the tradition, his "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne" is a remarkably original creation, expressing its maker's artistry and humor.[7]

Donne's artistic humor is certainly expressed, but the first portion of Raizis's statement seems unsupportable in light of the many parallels with Spenser's content and phrasing that have been shown. Beyond these parallels, there remains another strong connection, that of similar use of structure to state a theme.

Spenser's structure, representing the wedding day and the cyclical nature of the universe, is parodied by Donne. Though the poem is only eight stanzas long, and not twenty-four as in Spenser, it contains ninety-six lines, the number of quarter-hours in the day. Spenser divided his poem into quarter-hours with short lines, and he divided it into daylight and darkness by changing the refrain. As has already been shown, Donne also divides his poem in this manner. Spenser carefully shows in his poem the exact time of the coming of night on his wedding day.

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[7]M. Byron Raizis, The Epithalamion Tradition and John Donne, (Wichita, Kansas, 1966), p. 8.

If Novarr is correct in dating Donne's poem in the summer of 1595, then Donne may have shown the time of nightfall also. The evening star rises, if each line is a quarter-hour, fifteen and one-half hours after sunrise, the approximate length of a day in mid-summer in the latitude of London. However, the refrain had changed one line earlier at the end of the fifth stanza, and this change can suggest another date. If the poem is divisible into two equal sections of twelve hours each, the first four stanzas ending with "To day put on perfection," and the last four with "To night put on perfection," then the structure might represent the vernal equinox and might have been written for the light-hearted revels which followed the lenten Reader's Feasts at Lincoln's Inn.

Whether this last piece of conjecture has any real basis is beyond proof, but the poem is divided by the refrain into two sets of stanzas. Between the sets, there are matching stanzas, as in the Spenser poem, though not in the perfectly symmetrical manner of Spenser. Stanza one contains the rising of the sun and the calling forth of the bride from her bed. In stanza six the sun sets and the bride is told to retire. The bride is dressed stanza two and stanza seven is concerned with her undressing. The bridegroom and the bride are brought to the temple for the religious ceremony in stanzas three and four,

and in stanza eight, when the bridegroom comes to "loves alter" for the consummation, Donne describes the act with a religious metaphor.

With all of the foregoing evidence, it is now possible to firmly date this poem as having been written in 1595, for it could not have been written before Spenser's poem which it assuredly parodies. As to the actual date in 1595, there are two possible occasions when a mock wedding might have been staged at Lincoln's Inn, the revels that followed the formal Reader's Feasts during Lent and the mid-summer revels. There is internal evidence in the poem to support either of these times.

After the Lincoln's Inn epithalamium, Donne abandoned nuptial verse for almost two decades. His second work in this genre was a serious effort, quite unlike his first. Between the beginning of the seventeenth century and February of 1613, only a handful of epithalamia were composed, two by Ben Jonson in 1606 and 1608 and one by Thomas Campion in 1608. There was also a short, epithalamic-like nuptial song printed in "A Pilgrim's Solace," a collection of songs edited by John Dowland in 1612. Between Sidney's epithalamium and February of 1613, only seven epithalamia are known to have been written in the English language. A royal wedding in 1613 doubled that number, and this flurry of activity was followed by a sizeable outpouring

from English epithalamists. But the genre's masterpiece had already been written, and though many of the later poems are decent works, few of them are worth close study. The wedding responsible for all this writing was the marriage of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of James I, to Frederick, Count Palatine, on Valentine's Day, 1613.

Donne, who played a role in the marriage arrangements, was one of eight poets who contributed epithlamia for the wedding. George Chapman, Frances Beaumont, and Thomas Campion wrote masques which were performed during the course of the wedding ceremony and celebration. The masques of Chapman and Campion are concluded with epithalamia; the epithalamium by Beaumont, as given in the Case anthology, is in reality five songs performed at different times during the masque. All three of these epithalamia show clearly how limited the form is and that its possibilities had nearly been exhausted by this time, for they show little more than an acceptable re-working of old material.

Sir Henry Goodere, Henry Peacham, Thomas Heywood and George Wither are the other poets who wrote epithalamia for this wedding. Goodere's epithalamium was rescued from manuscript by Case, but in spite of his commending it, there is little in it to recommend it for serious study. Peacham wrote four

nuptial hymns; the first two show the influence of earlier English epithalamia, the third one is a transliteration of carmen 61 of Catullus, and the fourth is a long, descriptive epithalamium in the style of Claudian. Thomas Heywood wrote a lengthy poetic work, A Marriage Triumphe, from which Case extracts two songs. The second one, "A Nuptial Hymn," is interesting for its passages concerning the political importance of the wedding, but its verse is pedestrian and labored:

> He a prince is, gravely young,
> Cato's head, and Tully's tongue,
> Nereus' shape, Ulysses' brain;
> Had he with these Nestor's reign,
>   Enjoying all the rest
>   Of Heaven (that we request),
> That they likewise would afford
> To manage these a Hector's sword.[8]

Wither, attempting to atone for his satires which had brought him disgrace and imprisonment, wrote a long epithalamium in which he sometimes describes the proceedings and sometimes directs them. The poem contains some of the worst lines of any English Renaissance epithalamia:

> Yon's the bridegroom; d'ye not spy him?
> See how all the ladies eye him.
> Venus his perfection findeth,
> And no more Adonis mindeth.[9]

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[8]Thomas Heywood, "A Nuptial Hymn," quoted from Case, p. 45.

[9]George Wither, "Epithalamion," quoted from Case, p. 69.

It thus remained for John Donne to compose the only verse worthy of the occasion.

Donne's poem, "An Epithalamion, Or mariage Song on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine being married on St. Valentines day," is different from most works in this genre in that it is based primarily on a single, extended conceit which is amplified and complimented by related imagery. Following the legend that birds select their mates on St. Valentine's day, Donne compares the marriage of Elizabeth and Frederick to a wedding of two phoenixes, distorting the legend that only one phoenix exists at a time. Supporting this unique conceit, aviary imagery is found in all but one of the eight stanzas.

Donne was the only poet of the eight epithalamists contributing to the wedding of Elizabeth and Frederick who solved a problem connected with the composition of these particular epithalamia. In the epithalamic tradition, the poet, though praising the bride, is supposed to remind her that she must be completely submissive to her husband's wishes and that she must become a part of him. This concept was the accepted standard, but it presented a problem for a poet writing of a wedding which was an important political merger. The dual phoenix conceit

solved the problem by showing a marriage not of the usual man and sub-servient woman, but a marriage of equals.

Stanza one begins with an invocation, not to Hymen, but to Bishop Valentine. Following the invocation, there is a list of several varieties of birds who are mating on this day. The stanza concludes with a modification of the usual epithalamic refrain, repeating only the name Valentine at the end of every stanza instead of repeating the entire line.

In the second stanza, Donne begins the phoenix conceit, telling Bishop Valentine that this day will see a unique sight, one that has been seen by neither the sun nor Noah's ark, the mating of two phoenixes. The phoenix was not aboard the ark, for it existed singly, and not in pairs, as did all life in the ark. The mating phoenixes, Donne says, will create a fire and produce new phoenixes, but the old birds will not die and will continue to live and mate eternally. This distortion of the phoenix legend serves Donne's purpose of showing that as the equals are joined, the bride's identity as one of England's royal family will not be lost.

The poet's attention is turned to the phoenix bride in stanza three, where she is told to rise and "frustrate the Sunne" with her warmth. All birds, it is said, will receive their light and warmth from the bride this day instead of taking

them from the sun. From sunlight, the imagery shifts to starlight when Donne tells the bride to adorn herself with all her jewels, making herself a blazing constellation to signify "That a Great Princess falls, but doth not die." This line strengthens the meaning of the conceit that the bride is entering the marriage as an equal and not being absorbed by the union.

Stanza four calls the couple forth as two flames to be joined into one fire. Comparing the couple to flames is an obvious and natural extension of the phoenix conceit. Donne says that, as the two flames become inseparable, the couple will be twice joined, because those things which are infinite and those things which are a single entity can never be disunited, and the couple is both infinite and one. Having forcefully stated in the previous stanzas that this union will be a union of equals without the loss of the woman's identity, Donne here follows a usual epithalamic convention by speaking of the bridal pair as an inseparable unity. But he does not completely abandon the original idea of the phoenix conceit, for he combines in this stanza only the flames of the two birds; the phoenixes themselves are not merged until the final stanza. The fourth stanza concludes with the wedding ceremony before Bishop Valentine. The short description of the ceremony ends with

a tasteful sexual allusion, saying that following their union in church there is still one more way in which the couple must be joined.

In the manner of Spenser, Donne laments the length of the day, saying of the sun, "here he staies / Longer to day, then other daies." In February, the sun, of course, is not present longer than in the summer, but Donne borrows this concept from Spenser, for whom it was true on his wedding day, to express impatience at the delay of the consummation. Donne chides not only the sun for staying overhead to gather light from the bridal pair, but also the couple who walk too slowly in the procession, the gluttonous feasters, and the masquers who come too late and stay too long. Finally, Donne in exasperation asks, "did not Antiquity assigne / A night, as well as day, to thee, O Valentine?"

Answering the question, night comes in stanza six, and Donne continues his chiding of those who would delay the bride's preparations for bed. In this stanza, Donne drops the phoenix conceit as he approaches his description of the sexual consummation. A new image, prepared for in the stellar imagery of stanza three, comparing the couple to heavenly spheres begins in this stanza when the bridegroom comes to the bed and "passes through Spheare after Spheare. / First her sheetes, then her

Armes, then any where." The license here given the groom to take the natural, dominant role in physical union upsets the carefully controlled imagery showing the equality of the couple. However, Donne restores the balance in stanza seven by reversing the normal gender of the spherical imagery. He calls the couple a "shee Sunne, and a hee Moone" even though tradition has made the sun masculine and the moon feminine. Borrowing a concept from Sidney, Donne continues with "She gives the best light to his Spheare." That Donne intended to re-establish the equality he had created in the earlier stanzas is evident from the fourth line of stanza seven, "They unto one another nothing owe." He then contradicts this line in order to prepare for the return of the phoenix conceit, which will now have a different meaning. Donne says that the couple does owe each other everything, and that they are in a constant state of borrowing, lending, giving, and receiving all of themselves in a mutual union. The stanza concludes with a reference to two lesser birds, the turtle dove and the sparrow.

Donne brings the poem to a close by straightening out nature, at least legendary nature. The two phoenixes have mated, a marriage of equals, achieving Donne's purpose, and by the act of mating the phoenixes "are two no more, / Ther's but one Phenix still, as was before." Three times in the poem

the bride has been compared with the sun, and Donne says here that Valentine's day will be made longer, for all will await the awakening of the bride, not the rising of the sun, before beginning a new day.

This poem, like the two others already explicated, has a very interesting structure. Donne appears to have represented the date of the wedding with the stanza structure of the poem as he did earlier when he parodied Spenser. Valentine's day is on February fourteenth, and each stanza contains fourteen lines. Donne points to what he is doing by concluding each stanza with the name "Valentine"; also, six of the eight final lines contain the word "day." February fourteenth in the latitude of London has ten and one-half hours of daylight, from approximately 7:00 AM until 5:30 PM. If each line represents a quarter hour as in the first epithalamium of Donne, and if the counting of the hours begins with 12:00 midnight, the bride rises at line 29, 7:00 AM. The bride is compared throughout the poem to the sun, and she is told in line 29 to rise and "frustrate the Sunne." Before this line, Donne does not have any references to a rising sun. At line 71, 5:30 PM, ten and one-half hours after the bride-sun rose, Donne quotes Spenser, "night is come."

There are, however, several things about the poem which cannot be explained satisfactorily, making all speculation about the significance of the structure completely conjectural. There are one hundred and twelve lines in the poem, which, if each line is one quarter-hour, would make the day twenty-eight hours long. Donne does say in the poem's final line that the day is being made longer, lasting until the bride arises "to-morrow after nine." Counting from 12:00 midnight, 9:00 AM is thirty-three hours later. Counting from sunrise to sunrise as the Elizabethans usually did, if the wedding day ends on the fifteenth at 9:00 AM, the day is twenty-six hours long and not twenty-eight. Donne does not say that the bride will arise at 9:00 AM, but "after nine," possibly enough after nine to make the day twenty-eight hours long. "Nine" was probably chosen because it is the only number which rhymes with "Valentine." A final conjecture concerns the number twenty-eight, the number of hours arrived at by counting each line as a quarter-hour; there were twenty-eight days in February, 1613. It may well be that Donne did not intend any meaning in the structure of this poem, but the possibility that he did is supported by the fact that he had used number symbolism before in his first epithalamium.

Donne's final epithalamium was written about ten months later for the wedding of Frances Howard and Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset, on December 26, 1613. Chapman and Campion also contributed epithalamia for this wedding. Frances Howard is the only woman in epithalamic literature for whom epithalamia were written on two separate occasions; Ben Jonson and Thomas Campion in 1608 wrote epithalamia for her marriage to the Earl of Essex, whom she divorced in 1613 to marry the Earl of Somerset. Robert Carr's friend Thomas Overbury opposed the attempt to annul Lady Howard's first marriage, and he was murdered at her instigation in September of 1613. Her first marriage was then dissolved and she married Carr. Jonson did not write an epithalamium for the second marriage, but he did send the Earl of Somerset a congratulatory verse.

The Donne poem is as interesting for what it omits as for what it contains. A primary part of most, if not all, epithalamia is the praising of the bride's virginity, modesty, and faithfulness, elements not appropriate in poetry for this wedding, unless the poet wished to be ironic. Irony is present, however, for Donne praises the ability of the bride and bridegroom to inflame love and passion in the opposite member. Beneath this praise in a cleverly hidden allusion to their

notorious pre-marital relationship, Donne shows his disapproval of the couple whose marriage he is celebrating.

The epithalamium is enclosed in an eclogue, a conversation between Allophanes, Sir Robert Carr, and Idios, John Donne, in which Allophanes discovers that Idios has left the Court for the countryside to learn more fully to understand the blessings of the Court. The ironic intent of the epithalamium itself adds an ironic note to the eclogue. While absent from Court, Idios has written an epithalamium for the marriage of Somerset and Lady Howard, and he reads it to Allophanes, calling it a "poor song" and his sacrifice to the wedding day.

Like his nuptial verse for Elizabeth and Frederick, this epithalamium has a unifying image, the sun, representing aroused passion. The first stanza, "The time of Mariage," addresses the dying year and introduces the unifying image. The year is said to be within five days of its end, but a fire mightier than the sun will rescue the year from its death bed. The sun in winter is not considered mighty, so Donne says that the rescuing fire is stronger than the sun "When he doth in his largest circle runne," the sun of the summer solstice. Donne says that the fire is capable of melting the arctic ice cap, "The passage of the West or East," if some Prometheus could give it to the sun. This fire is "The fire of these inflaming

eyes, or of this loving heart," the eyes and heart of the bridal couple. "Heart" is singular every time it is used in variations of this line, the refrain, even when it refers to both the bride and bridegroom. If this lack of agreement is intended to symbolize the union and inseparability of the pair, it is ironic that the final stanza concludes with "two loving hearts."

The second stanza, "Equality of persons," states explicitly what is implied in the phoenix conceit of the epithalamium for Elizabeth and Frederick, that this is a marriage between equals. The bridegroom is said to be beautiful and to have as much capacity for love and as much ability to arouse passion as the bride. The manliness of the bride is described in lines which have a dual meaning:

> If by that manly courage they be tryed,
> Which scornes unjust opinion; then the bride
> Becomes a man.
> (Lines 122-124).

The obvious reference here is to the Lady Howard's courage in facing whatever opinions others may have held of her because of her recent divorce. The second meaning stems from "courage," which was used by Donne in his second epithalamium to mean sexual desire or prowess. Thus the sexual roles are reversed, giving rise to equality. A question near the end of the stanza

("Should chance [the unfortunate marriage at an early age to Essex] or envies Art / Divide these two whom nature scarce did part?" is in reply to the "unjust opinion."

In stanza three, "Raysing of the Bridegroom," the "cheerfull Bridegroome" is described as surpassing the sun, and Donne urges him to come and show his brillance to the bride. The opening lines of this stanza are somewhat ironic: "Though it be some divorce to think of you / Singly, so much one are you two." Lady Howard and Somerset had been having an affair long before her first marriage was dissolved, and for Donne to use "divorce" at the same time he is implying that the couple has been thought of as one for some time shows either a bad choice of words or intended irony.

In stanzas four and five, "Raising of the Bride" and "Her Apparrelling," the bride is told to cover her hair with ashes to dull its radiance and to shed tears to put out the flame in her eyes that the public might look on her beauty in safety. "Man who can the Sun in water see," but cannot look upon the sun, cannot look upon the bride, half of the flaming pair, in her natural state.

"Going to the Chappell," stanza six, has the couple coming from their "Easts," rising and appearing as two suns. The appearance of two suns in the procession is only an illusion,

as if the sun's rising were being seen through a grove of trees. Donne with this simile again implies that the pair is already united. The church makes the union official, and the priest is asked to bless the pair with the blessings of angels. "The Benediction," stanza seven, is the first time in the poem that the couple is definitely separated into a pair, "Blest payre of Swans." If the reading is correct and Donne has shown this couple as a single entity before the marriage ceremony and as a pair after it, he appears to be criticizing Somerset and Lady Howard with concealed irony. The refrain supports this theory. It has already been suggested that Donne may have implied something with the use of "heart" and "hearts," and a change in the refrain at stanza six, the church ceremony, may imply even more. The emphasis in this poem is on physical attraction and passion, and the refrain in the first five stanzas includes "inflaming eyes" and "loving Heart." From stanza six through stanza ten, after the pair has been joined by the church and separated by the poet, "inflaming" and "loving" are omitted from the refrain.

Stanza seven, "Feasts and Revells," is a conventional stanza expressing impatience at the lengthy celebration which is preventing the consummation of the marriage. Donne wishes that the earth would move under the dancers' feet so that the dancers would come down some place other than the place where the

celebration is going on, thereby putting an end to the celebration.

In stanza nine, "The Brides going to bed," Donne chides the bride for remaining with the revellers and tells her that she must go to bed and prepare an entertainment for her husband. In stanza ten, "The Bridegroomes comming," Donne uses a curious comparison. The bride is likened to a fallen star, and the bridegroom, seeing it fall, runs to the spot and finds a starfish and looks upon it as something "strange." But the bride surrenders to the groom and the strangeness ends as the couple give freely to each other.

The final stanza, "The good-night," compares the couple to a lamp in "Tullias tombe" burning for a century and a half. Then Donne asks that the fire of this couple burn longer than this lamp and be eternal. He concludes by asking that love make "One fire of foure inflaming eyes, and of two loving hearts."

Donne did not reach the peak of excellence that Spenser did with his nuptial verse, but he did contribute to the genre much that was original and interesting. His first epithalamium was a parody which contained in part a criticism of Spenser's poem. His second one introduced into the genre the concept of a marriage of equals, an anachronistic element in his time.

His final epithalamium is one of the most unusual poems in the genre, containing concealed ironic criticism of a couple Donne is supposedly praising.

CHAPTER V

BEN JONSON AND ROBERT HERRICK

Between the composition of Donne's first and second nuptial poems, two epithalamia were written by Ben Jonson in 1606 and 1608. The earlier of the two, "Glad time is at his point arrived," was part of a masque written for the wedding of the Earl of Essex on January 5, 1606, to Lady Frances Howard, the bride of Donne's third epithalamium. The poem follows the traditional pattern of a classical epithalamium and is closely modelled on carmen 61 of Catullus. Unlike most English epithalamia it contains only classical references. The invocation to Hymen, the amoeban choruses, the calling forth of the bride, the bedding of the bride and bridegroom by the _pronubae_, the prayers to Juno, Hesperus, and Cynthia for children who will prove their mother's faithfulness, and the wishes for long life are all to be found in Catullus. One classical element is missing, and its absence is interesting in light of what happened to this marriage seven years later; the bride is not praised in the usual epithalamic manner for her beauty, virginity, modesty and faithfulness. Jonson's only word

of praise is "tender."

Jonson's second epithalamium was written for the wedding of the Viscount Haddington and the daughter of the Earl of Sussex on February 9, 1608. It is the conclusion of The Haddington Masque. This poem has one of the longer refrains of English epithalamia, it being almost half the length of each stanza. The final line is repeated exactly throughout the poem. Of the last five lines of each stanza, thr first four are altered in every stanza, maintaining only those words which are underlined in the following passage:

> Are, now, wag'd to his warre
> And what they are,
> If you'll perfection see,
> Your selves must bee.
> Shine Hesperus, shine forth, thou wished starre.[1]
> (Lines 7-11)

This poem, like Jonson's first epithalamium, is closely structured in the classical tradition. Most of the events of the wedding day are absent, for this poem is a true epithalamium intended for performance at the entrance to the bed chamber. The amoeban chorus is called on by Jonson to praise Hymen and the marriage in the poem's opening lines, and most of what follows can be traced to Catullus.

There are two parts of the Haddington poem which show

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[1]Ben Jonson, The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, edited by William Hunter (New York, 1963), p. 352. In the other six stanzas, "his" in line seven is replaced by "Hymens." In the third line from the end, the word "wee" appears in some stanzas instead of "see."

the influence of Spenser and possibly Donne. Jonson refers to the pending sexual consummation in much the same way that Spenser alluded to it in his poem:

> Loves common wealth consists of toyes;
> His councell are those antique boyes,
> Games, laughter, sports, delights,
> That triumph with him on these nights.
> (Lines 34-37)

In an address to the bride, Jonson translates in part a Latin poem by Daniel Heinsius[2] (the translated portion has been placed in parentheses in the example), and Heinsius must naturally be cited as the primary source for this instruction to the bride. However, the similarity of these lines to the refrain of Donne's first epithalamium, "To night put on perfection and a woman's name," should also be noted.

> To morrow, (rise the same
> Your mother is), and use a nobler name.
> Speed well in Hymens warre,
> That what you are,
> By your perfection, wee
> All may see.
> Lines 50-54)

Like John Donne, Jonson abandoned this genre for a long time, twenty-four years to be precise, before he wrote another nuptial verse. His third poem was written for the wedding on

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[2] Jonson, p. 352.

June 25, 1632, of Hierome Weston and Lady Frances Stuart. This epithalamium is unlike his two previous nuptial poems in several ways. It is not part of a masque, and it does not follow classical models. Judeo-Christian elements are present to the almost total exclusion of classical mythology. Throughout the long poem of twenty-four stanzas and one hundred-ninety-two lines, strong influences of Spenser and Donne are present, while any classical influences are merely those belonging to the whole of the tradition and not specific borrowings, as in Jonson's other epithalamia.

The Weston epithalamium is unified, as in two of Donne's epithalamia, by a central image. The image, the sun, is the same as in Donne's final nuptial poem, but the use of it is different. Jonson addresses the entire poem to the sun, and by so doing is able to describe the wedding events without writing a descriptive epithalamium in the manner of the later Latinists, and at the same time he avoids using the <u>precentor</u> employed by most English epithalamists. Because the wedding the poem celebrates took place near the time of the summer solstice, the emphasis on the sun is natural.

The opening lines, asking the sun to stay and see the glorious light of the wedding, are a variation on stanza five of Donne's epithalamium for Elizabeth and Frederick:

Thou can't not meet more Glory, on the way,
    Betweene thy Tropicks, to arrest thy sight,
        Then thou shalt see to day.
                (Jonson, lines 3-5)

But oh! what ails the sun, that hence he stays
    Longer to day then other days?
    Stays he new light from these to get,
And finding here such stars is loth to set.
                (Donne, lines 57-60)

As the procession to the church begins, there are several indications of Spenser's influence. As the procession moves by the side of the river, bells upon the Thames ring calling to mind Spenser's "Prothalamion." Line 41, is very similar to a line in Spenser's "Epithalamion" which Donne parodied:

See, how she paceth forth in Virgin-white.
                (Jonson, line 41)

In several places Jonson disavows connection with certain other sources. In an obvious reference to Donne's second epithalamium, Jonson says that he will not belittle this fine couple by comparing them to an unusual bird:

Force from the Phoenix then no raritie
  Of Sex, to rob the Creature; but from Man
The king of Creatures; take his paritie
  With Angels, Muse, to speake these. . .
                (Lines 81-84)

Ironically, Jonson, the classicist, places Catullus outside the realm of this poem:

Christians know their birth
Alone, and such a race
We pray may grace
Your fruitfull spreading Vine,
But dare not aske our wish in Language <u>fescennine</u>.
(Lines 156-160)

Like Donne and Spenser, Jonson urges the sun to depart and bring on night for the couple, but, unlike the sun in the poems of Spenser and Donne, the sun here remains with the couple almost to the end of the poem. In the next to the last stanza, Jonson, praising the bridegroom's family tree, says that Mr. Weston's virtuous family tree has grown so large, that it is enough to shade the couple from the sun, thereby eliminating the need to wait for the coming of night to bring the wedding to its climax.

Jonson's three epithalamia contain little that is original; and, like most English verse in this genre, they fail to do more than re-work old material. Robert Herrick, the disciple of Jonson, did more with the form than his master, and, though his poems do not reach the heights of Spenser, or even Donne, his contributions to the form deserve some examination. Herrick wrote seven poems that can be called epithalamia, all different in style and content. All were published in <u>Hesperides</u> in 1648, though the dates of those poems written for specific marriages show that the poems were written between 1618 and 1639. Along

with Jonson's nuptial poem of 1632, they are the last important English Renaissance epithalamia. By the time they were written, the genre was in the hands of mediocre poets, and Herrick's epithalamia represent the end of this literary tradition in England.

The earliest of Herrick's epithalamia are also his longest, for his later poems in the genre grow progressively shorter. The first two nuptial poems of Herrick are also his best. The shorter, later poems are light, witty one-stanza lyrics without the scope and breadth of the earlier poems.

The poem "An Epithalamie to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Ladie" was written for their wedding in March, 1618. The title is somewhat misleading in that most of the poem is addressed to the bride as she hesitates to enter the bed chamber. The first seven stanzas urge the bride to cease her delaying. Each ends with the refrain

> Then away; come *Hymen* guide
> To the bed, the bashfull Bride.
> (Lines 9-10)

Herrick tells her in stanza two that she will esteem her maidenhead more after she has lost it, and in stanza three he says that she must not weep and be bashfull lest she put out the fire of love. In stanza five, classical gods are called on to lead the bride to the bed chamber. Stanza six contains

references to three sources of light: the torch of Hymen leading the procession, the torch of the bridegroom wasting away because the bride is delaying, and a group of torches, five in number, which represent fertility.[3] In stanza eight the bride finally expresses a willingness to enter the chamber, and the refrain is dropped.

In stanzas nine through thirteen various marriage customs are described and two gods are prayed to. The bride ties pieces of wool to the door to ward off evil spirits before entering the bed chamber. Venus is asked to direct the undressing of the bride, and, in lines similar to Spenser and Sidney, evil nocturnal sounds and animals are asked to stay away from the couple; also, Juno is asked to keep the couple from sleeping. The virgins are told not to weep because their time for marriage is near, and the young boys are told to gather nuts to scatter about.

Stanza thirteen contains a prayer for sexual strength that will crown the family line with children. The lines are worthy of Donne in their ambiguity, with "Stem," "Circle," and "Diadem" having sexual connotations as well as meanings which refer to

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[3]Crashaw in "Come Virgin Tapers of pure waxe" also uses five torches to symbolize fertility.

their offspring:

> O! give them active heat
> And moisture, both compleat:
> Fit Organs for encrease,
> To keep, and to release
> That, which may the honour'd Stem
> Circle with a Diadem.
> (Lines 125-130)

Stanza sixteen opens with lines that may refer to a theme found in the epithalamia of Spenser and Donne:

> On your minutes, hours, dayes, months, years,
> Drop the fat blessing of the spheares.
> (Lines 151-152)

The possible connection with Spenser is strengthened by the appearance of the *Horae* in stanza five, the only other use of the *Horae* in English epithalamia being in Spenser. Stanza seventeen concludes with a prayer for long life that is similar to the prayer for life in Sidney's poem.

Herrick's second wedding poem, "A Nuptial Song, or Epithalamie, on Sir Clipseby Crew and his Lady," written in 1625, is the one English epithalamium outside of direct translations that comes closest to Catullus. Admittedly some parts of the poem are similar enough to carmen 61 of Catullus to almost be a translation:

> *Himen*, *O Himen*! Tread the sacred ground
> Shew thy white feet, and head with marjoram crown'd:
> Mount up thy flames, and let thy Torch
> Display the bridegroom in the porch.
> (Lines 31-34)

This poem also shows the influence of Spenser and Donne. The stanza quoted in part above is stanza four, and, prior to this stanza, Herrick lavishes praise on the bride as she appears out of the East, proceeding to the home of the bridegroom. Herrick compares the bride to the evening star, the sun, a saint, and a phoenix. In stanza eight, Herrick refers to the length of the day, "This the short'st day, and this the longest night." Herrick must be referring to the joys and labors of the night because the wedding took place on July 27, 1625, not in the winter solstice. The poem concludes with the usual bedding of the bride, the consummation, and the prayers for offspring.

The Clipseby Crew epithalamium is rich in its imagery, with many allusions crowded into every stanza. Roger B. Rollin, in his study of Robert Herrick for the _Twayne's English Authors Series_, has done a lengthy explication of this poem and says that it is an excellent statement of Herrick's view of love:

> In the course of this development the occasion itself has been transcended by the sweep of futurity, and sensuality and sexuality have been translated -- through ceremony and sensitivity -- into nuptial virtue. Within the framework of marriage [love] has become a key to pleasure, to moral living, and to the future.[4]

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[4]Roger B. Rollin, _Robert Herrick_ (New York, 1966), p. 120.

In the poem's opening stanzas, the bride comes to her bridegroom beautiful and pure, but without the aspect of a woman. Following the consummation, the poem ends with an expanded, universal vision of a pregnant woman bearing within her "two nations," an allusion to Rebekah, surrounded by the heavenly bodies of the universe.

Herrick's other nuptial poems are short. "A Nuptial Verse to Mistress Elizabeth Lee, now Lady Tracie," written in 1630, praises the bride for not delaying and concludes with a reference to her loss of virginity:

> Fall down together vanquisht both, and lye
> Drown'd in the bloud of Rubies there, not die.
> (Lines 15-16)

"The Entertainment: or Porch verse at the Marriage of Master Henry Northy, and the most witty Mistresse Lettice Yard," written in 1639, is a twelve-line prayer which asks that the couple may "Fish-like, encrease then to a million." The dates of his other three nuptial poems are not known. "The good-night of Blessing" is a benediction poem, blessing the marriage bed and praying for children. This little poem contains a reference to the continuing cycle of life, the theme so important to Spenser and Donne:

> And ere long, a Boy Love send ye
> Curl'd and comely, and so trimme,
> Maidens (in time) may ravish him.
> (Lines 6-8)

"Connubii Flores" is a poem which expands the traditional amoeban chorus. In addition to stanzas performed by choruses of youths and maidens, there are choruses of priests, old men, shepherds, and matrons. "The delaying Bride" chides a bride for remaining with the wedding guests instead of hurrying to her bed and her bridegroom.

Herrick's nuptial verse, unlike most of the poems explicated, except that of Sidney, is not concerned with events of the wedding day, but only with the bedding of the couple. In this respect, Herrick comes closer than other English writers to the Greek originals. In this verse, Herrick always assumes the traditional role of the _precentor_.

Herrick closed the epithalamic tradition in Renaissance England. That he should come at the end of the genre is perhaps ironic, in that he had brought the genre closer to its classical models than other English poets had done. Epithalamia have been written since Herrick, but, for the most part, they are not closely related to the classical genre or to the English Renaissance epithalamia.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

By the time the English Renaissance reached its height in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, English writers had developed a strong interest in genre poetry. It is therefore not surprising that after the two-thousand year old epithalamic genre had been introduced into England by Sidney and Spenser, it spread rapidly among many poets. The introduction of the genre by Sidney was a chance occurrence; if he had not been imitating Montemayor and Gil Polo, he might not have written the epithalamium in *Arcadia*. Spenser, however, had considered writing in the form several years before he wrote his nuptial poem. He was familiar with the genre through his knowledge of French Renaissance poetry; and when his own wedding provided him with the opportunity to compose a poem to celebrate the occasion, his choice of the epithalamic genre for the poem was obvious. For several years following the publication of Spenser's "Epithalamion," English poets wrote epithalamia for many weddings.

The epithalamists of the English Renaissance form a type of school. Their nuptial poems, as this study has shown, are closely related to one another, being bound together primarily by the influence of Catullus. The Renaissance epithalamists were also influenced by each other's work; echoes of Spenser and Donne are found in many English epithalamia. Since the time of the writing of Herrick's poems at the end of the Renaissance, only a small quantity of epithalamic verse by good poets has been written. Andrew Marvell in 1657 wrote two songs for the marriage of Lord Faunconberg, one a dialogue between Endymion and Cynthia, and the other a song by a trio of shepherds. These poems bear no resemblance to the epithalamic tradition. John Dryden wrote a three-stanza epithalamium in 1673 for _Amboyna_, compressing a description of the events of the wedding day into twenty-four lines. Dryden also translated the eighteenth idyll of Theocritus. The next epithalamium of note is a posthumous fragment of Shelley. Shelley's poem is a beautiful attempt to describe the feelings of the couple as they come together in sexual union. His poem, too, is outside of the classical tradition. Tennyson concludes _In Memoriam_ with an epithalamium written from the view-point of the bride's father. In more recent times, the classical epithalamic tradition has

enjoyed a small revival in poems by A. E. Houseman, W. H. Auden, and H. D., but the English epithalamium which is part of a long-standing, classical tradition is a poem that belongs to the Renaissance.

A question arises, which cannot be fully answered, about why the epithalamic genre should have played the kind of role that it did in the English Renaissance, and then later should lose the small amount of importance it had enjoyed. The answer probably lies within the genre itself; by the very nature of the occasion it is connected with, the epithalamic genre often encourages poets to go beyond the bounds of good sense and taste and be excessive in their praise for a bridal couple. These excesses lend themselves to parody and eventual pejoration of the form. The Greek playwrights parodied the form, and their parodies are almost all that is left of Greek verse in this genre; indecent French parodies brought an end to the writing of epithalamia in France; and Donne parodied the genre's English masterpiece almost as soon as it was written. Since the Renaissance, the genre has been parodied often in English: from Richard Duke's satirical "Epithalamium upon the marriage of Captain William Bedloe" in 1679 and Francis Fawkes's "Epithalamium on the Marriage of a Cobler and a Chimney

Sweeper" in 1701 to Ronald Gross's "Epithalamium" in his Pop Poems of 1967. With the form being so frequent an object of parody, few good poets after the Renaissance have chosen to celebrate a wedding with an epithalamium.

Few, if any, marriages are on a grand enough scale to justify the superlatives common to epithalamia; and when epithalamia are written for weddings other than noble marriages, some factor other than lavish praise is necessary to keep the poem from sounding somewhat foolish. It was, of course, weddings of the English Court which provided the occasions for the composition of most English Renaissance epithalamia. With the rise of the middle class and the decline of the exalted status of English nobility, it became increasingly difficult to write an epithalamium that sounded sincere and proper.

Spenser's "Epithalamion" may also provide an answer to the question of how the form survived in England at a high point as long as it did. Spenser's poem with its beauty and grandeur was known and admired in England and was able to withstand satirical thrusts made against it. His poem gave respectability to the form and allowed poets to write epithalamia for several decades before the form's limitations became too obvious. Herrick's several nuptial poems show clearly the decline of the

genre. His first two epithalamia were written in the second decade of the seventeenth century and are in the same general style and manner of Spenser, Jonson, and Donne, but his five later nuptial poems, written after 1630 are only brief echoes of the genre.

One more question is raised by these foregoing thoughts: if the epithalamic genre has inherent in it certain elements that tend to limit and defeat serious attempts to employ it successfully, then what is it that has created the handful of fine poems in the genre. In addition to the obvious answer of each poet's creative genius, there is something which is perhaps more concrete. Each outstanding poem in this study is marked by the poet's bringing in some element from outside the genre to include in his epithalamium. Carmen 61 was written by Catullus for close friends, and the wide range of his native passion was used to honor the wedding and the friendship. Spenser was writing for his own wedding, and while this alone would have been inspiration enough for a poet of his stature and inclination to create a good poem in the classical genre, Spenser looked beyond his marriage and created a poem based on a universal theme, that of the hope man can derive from the cycical nature of the universe. Donne, in all three of his

nuptial poems, was writing something more than praise of each of the wedding couples. In his first epithalamium, he was parodying Spenser's "Epithalamion" and criticizing it by pointing to its weaknesses, particularly its artificial description of the consummation. In his second poem, he was writing of the equality of partners in marriage, an unusual theme for his time, motivated perhaps by political necessity. His final poem covertly criticises the couple that the poem outwardly praises, a clever and witty feat. Seldom, if ever, has a poet been able to write a really good epithalamium when his only purpose has been to praise a marriage, or when his only inspiration has been to fulfill a commission.

The epithalamic genre eludes a precise definition. Few English epithalamia are verses to be read or sung as the bridal couple enters the bedroom and thus are unlike their Greek counterparts. There is no set stanza form for epithalamia, and there are as many stanza forms in English epithalamia as there are epithalamia. The only general similarity in structure is the refrain, but even this is not used in all English epithalamia. In content, there is also wide variation, but here there is a controlling factor. All English Renaissance epithalamia follow one of two classical patterns: they are modelled in some

way on one of the Catullian epithalamia and celebrate the events of the wedding day in chronological order, or they are pastoral-benedictions in a tradition going back to Theocritus. Most English Renaissance epithalamia are indirectly patterned after Catullus because Spenser followed Catullus in his "Epithalamion," a poem that had some influence on almost all later Renaissance nuptial verse in England. It is impossible to go beyond these general statements to a more precise definition, because each epithalamist has used the form in his own way. Though many parallels can be seen between individual epithalamia, particularly those of the English Renaissance, these parallels do not lead to a definition of the form. The only element common to all English Renaissance epithalamia is the general pattern set by the genre's classical models.

APPENDIX

ENGLISH EPITHALAMIA: 1580 TO THE PRESENT

This appendix is a revision of the lists in the Robert Case anthology, *English Epithalamies*, adding forty-two poems and deleting all translations from other languages.

Date of Composition or Dates of Poet	Poet	Title or First Line
1580	Sir Philip Sidney	"Epithalamium" from *Arcadia*
1594	Edmund Spenser	"Epithalamion"
1595	John Donne	"Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne"
1596	Edmund Spenser	"Prothalamion"
1598	George Chapman	"Epithalamion Teratos"
1599	Thomas Dekker	"A Bridal Song"
1606	Ben Jonson	"Epithalamion" from *The Masque of Hymen*
1607	Thomas Campion	"Now hath Flora robbed her bowers"
1608	Ben Jonson	The conclusion of *The Haddington Masque*

1609	Nathaniel Field	Song from A Woman Is a Weathercock
1612	Anonymous	"Welcome, black night, Hymen's fair day"
1613	John Donne	"Hail! Bishop Valentine, whose day this is"
1613	Thomas Campion	The conclusion of The Lordes Masque
1613	George Chapman	"A Hymn to Hymen"
1613	Thomas Heywood	"A Marriage Triumphe"
1613	Sir Henry Goodere	"Epithalamion of the Princess' Marriage"
1613	Henry Peacham	"Nuptial Hymns"
1613	Francis Beaumont	The conclusion of The Masque of the Gentlmen of Gray's-Inne and the Inner Temple.
1613	George Wither	"Valentine, good morrow to thee"
1613	John Donne	"Thou art reprieved, old year, thou shalt not die"
1613	George Chapman	"Parcarum Epithalamion"
1613	Thomas Campion	Song concluding the masque for the Earl of Somerset
1614	Christopher Brooke	"An Epithalamium"
1615	Richard Braithwaite	"All hail to Hymen and this marriage day"
1615	Richard Braithwaite	"In and Out"

1615	Samuel Daniel	Song from Hymens Triumph
1617	Robert Herrick	"An Epithalamie to Sir Thomas Southwell and His Lady"
1619	Beaumont and Fletcher	Songs from A Maid's Tragedy
1620	John Fletcher	"Come away, bring on the bride"
1620	Sir John Beaumont	"Severe and serious muse"
1621	Joshua Sylvester	"Epithalamion"
1625	Sir John Beaumont	"The ocean long contended --but in vain--"
1625	Anonymous	"On Dr. Corbet's Marriage"
1625	Robert Herrick	"A Nuptial Song on Sir Clipseby Crew and His Lady"
First half of 17th century	Anonymous	"Downe too farre usurping day"
17th century	Anonymous	"Rejoice, ye woods and fountains"
1609-1642	Sir John Suckling	"A Ballad Upon a Wedding"
1629	Francis Quarles	Poems from Argalus and Parthenia
1630	Michael Drayton	"Prothalamion"
1631	Sir R. Hatton	"Hymen hath together tyed"
1632	Ben Jonson	"Though thou hast past thy summer-standing, stay"

1632	Thomas Goff	Song in The Courageous Turk
1633	Philip Massinger	Song in The Guardian
1633	Phineas Fletcher	"An Hymen"
1634	William Cartwright	"A Song at a Window, Congratulating (As They Think) Mr. Meanwell's Marriage"
1635	Thomas Randolph	"An Epithalamium"
1635	Thomas Randolph	"An Epithalamium to Mr. F. H."
1635	Thomas Randolph	"The Milkmaid's Epithalamium"
1635	Joseph Rutter	"Hymen, god of marriage-bed"
1636	Anonymous	"An epithalamium in Sir Thomas Phillipps' MSS. 4001
1636	Thomas Carew	"On the Marriage of T. K. and C. C: The Morning Stormy"
1637	Thomas Carew	"Break not the slumbers of the bride"
1637	Thomas Nabbes	"Descend thou fairest of all creatures"
1637	Thomas Nabbes	"Up, grey-eyed morning, comb thy golden hair"
1639	Henry Glapthorne	"Epithalamium"
1639	Robert Herrick	"The Entertainment: or Porch-Verse"

1639	Robert Herrick	"The Good Night or Blessing"
1639	Robert Herrick	"The Delaying Bride"
1639	Robert Herrick	"A Nuptiall Verse to Mistress Elizabeth Lee Now Lady Tracy"
1640	Robert Herrick	"Connubii Flores"
1640	John Tatham	"An Epithalamium on the two happie paire, Thomas B. Esquire, the younger, and his faire bride"
1640	John Tatham	"An Epithalamium on the happie Nuptials of his much respected friend"
1641	William Cartwright	"On the Marriage of the Lady Mary to the Prince of Orange His Son"
1646	James Shirley	"Oh, look anon, if in the seeded sky"
1646	James Shirley	"Adorn the altar, many come to-day"
1646	James Shirley	"Paranymphi"
1647	Robert Baron	"Mirth and nuptial joys betide"
1647	Henry Vaughan	"To the Blest and Most Accomplished Couple"
1648	Thomas Jordan	"So at the first the soul and body met"
1650	Robert Baron	"Epithalamium"

1652	H. H.	"An Epithalamium on the Happy Marriage of Lady Frances Seymour and Lord Molyneux"
1652	James Howell	"What object's that which I behold"
1653	Richard Brome	"Hymeneall Song" from <u>The City Wit</u>
1656	Sir William D'Avenant	"A lover is a high and mighty thing"
1656	Abraham Wright?	"Upon the Nuptials of John Talbot, Esq., and Mistress Elizabeth Kite"
1657	Andrew Marvell	"The astrologer's own eyes are set"
1658	Sir Aston Cokain	Song in Act II of <u>Trappolin</u>
1662	Sir Aston Cokain	Songs in <u>Ovid</u>
1660-1667	Thomas Jordan	"An Epithalamium on the Names and Nuptials of Mr. Wm. Drayton and Mrs. Grace Drayton"
1660-1667	Thomas Jordan	"An Epithalamium on the Noble Nuptials of Mr. Will. Christmas"
1660-1667	Thomas Jordan	"A mock Epithalamium composed for the Nuptials of an illiterate Brewer and his Bride"
1673	John Dryden	"The day is come, I see it rise"
1677	John Oldham	"Upon the Marriage of the Prince of Orange with the Lady Mary"

1679	Richard Duke	"Epithalamium upon the Marriage of Captain William Bedloe"
1680	Nathaniel Lee	"An Epithalamium" from *Caesar Borgia*
1681	John Crowne	"The Song at Atreus his Banquet" from *Thyestes*
1684	J. H.	"Song in the Masque, Bk. V. of *The Grecian Story*, being an Historical Poem"
1702	Richard Steele	Song in *The Funeral*
1702	William Wycherley	"An Epithalamium on the Marriage of Two very Ill Natur'd Blacks"
1707	George Granville	Songs in *The British Enchanters*
1709	Robert Gould	"Mirtillo and Amynta"
1711	Susannah Centlivre	Song in *The Perplexed Lovers*
1714	Samuel Jones	"On his friend's Marriage"
1714	John Hughes	"Serenata for two voices"
1717	Lawrence Eusden	"Poem on the Marriage of His Grace the Duke of Newcastle"
1719	Anonymous	"An Epithalamium on the Marriage of the Honourable Charles Leigh"
1719	Anonymous	"Epithalamy on the Marriage of the Right Honourable The Lady Essex Roberts"

1720	Anonymous (Text set by Mr. Frank)	"The night is come that will allow"
1723	Allan Ramsay	"Epithalamium"
1728	Allan Ramsay	"A Postoral Epithalamium"
1690-1762	Lady M. W. Montague	"Epithalamium (satirical)"
1692-1742	William Somerville	"Canidia's Epithalamium"
1729	James Thomson	"A Nuptial Song"
1734	Ralph Sedgwick	"Epithalamium on the Marriage of the Prince of Orange and the Princess Anne"
1736	The Rev. Wm. Thompson	"Epithalamium on the Royal Nuptials"
1703-1764	Robert Dodsley	"Epithalamium"
1721-1777	Francis Fawkes	"An Epithalamic Ode"
1721-1777	Francis Fawkes	"Epithalamium on the Marriage of a Cobler and a Chimney-Sweeper"
1772-1770	Christopher Smart	"Epithalamium"
1756	Thomas Blacklock	"An Irregular Ode sent to a Lady on her Marriage Day"
1761	John Langhorne	"Hymeneal on the Marriage of his present Majesty"
1761	James Scott	"A Spousal Hymn addressed to his majesty on his Marriage"

1763	The Rev. S. Davies	"Epithalamium"
1763	Mr. Parrat	"Ode to Cupid on Valentine's Day"
1774?	R. Covil	"An Epithalamium"
1774	Prof. Wm Richardson	"Epithalamium on the Marriages"
1774	The Rev. James De-La-Cour	"The Courtship of Zephyrus and Flora"
1792-1822	Percy Bysshe Shelley	Fragment supposed to be an epithalamium to Francis Ravaillac and Charlotte Corday
1816	Peter Pindar	"The R--l Nuptials!! or Epithalamium Extra-ordinary!!"
1792-1866	John Keble	"Holy Matrimony"
1794-1869	William Carleton	"Sir Turlough; or the Churchyard Bride"
1825	Thomas Lovell Beddoes	"Bridal Song to Amala" from _Death's Jest Book_
1825	John G. C. Brainard	"I Saw Two Clouds at Morning"
1802-1839	Winthrop M. Praed	"The Newly Wedded"
1831	Henry Alford	"The Bride"
1834	John Moultrie	"Epithalamium"
1814-1845	Thomas Osborne Davies	"O, the Marriage"
1850	Alfred, Lord Tennyson	The close of _In Memoriam_
1860?	Gerard Manly Hopkins	"At the Wedding March"

1863	Jane Robinson	"Epithalamium in honor of the Marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales"
1865	Sidney Lanier	"Preyer at a Wedding"
1866?	Gerard Manly Hopkins	"Hark, hearer, hear what I do" (fragment)
1865-1904	Laurence Hope (Mrs. Malcom Nicolson)	"The Bride"
1881	Ellen M. Hutchinson Cortissoz	"The Bride's Toilette"
19th Century	William Barnes	"Jeane's Wedding Day in Mornen"
1890	Edmund Gosse	"Epithalamium"
1892	Richard Gallienne	"Epithalamium"
1893	Arthur Symons	"Sister, the bride-bed waits"
1913	D. H. Lawrence	"Wedding Morn"
1884-1915	James Elroy Flecker	"Smile then, children, hand in hand"
1918	Hugh McCrae	"A Bridal Song"
1920	Witter Bynner	"Epithalamium and Elegy"
1920	John Hall Wheelock	"Hippopatamothlamion"
1922	A. E. Houseman	"He is here, Urania's Son"
1924	Donald Davidson	"Come now, though muses are not left to sing"
1924	Walter James Turner	"Epithalamium"

1925	H. D.	"Hymen"
1933	Leo Kennedy	"This body of my Mother"
1935	W. H. Auden	"The Bride in the 30's"
1935	Nigel Heseltine	"So parc has a gate!"
1939	W. H. Auden	"Epithalamium for Guiseppe Antonio Borgese and Elizabeth Mann"
1916- ?	Terence Tiller	"Wind in the street, and sadness of unknown walkers"
1940	Yvor Winters	"The Marriage"
1941	Ralph Gufstafson	"Epithalamium in Time of War"
1943	Dylan Thomas	"On the Marriage of a Virgin"
1943	A. R. D. Fairburn	"We Have Found Our Peace"
1945	Roy McFadden	"So you are married girl"
1957	Vassar Miller	"Crept side by side beyond the tresh"
1957	Dachine Ranier	"Epithalamium for Cavorting Ghosts"
1957	Louise Bogan	"For a Marriage"
1961	Ronald Gross	"Epithalamium"
1970	Judson Jerome	"Epithalamium"

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