قصائد الزفاف في شعر عصر النهضة الإنكليزي: دراسة حالة لأشعار الشاعر روبيرت هيريك

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الملخص

قصيدة الزفاف (أو أغنية الزفاف) كما جاء في معجم أوكسفورد الكبير هي: "أغنية أو قصيدة تقال بمناسبة زواج ما في مدح العروسين، والدّعاء لهما بالمحبة والازدهار". أما أصل التسمية فهي من اللغة اليونانية. على أنها "أغنية تكتب بمناسبة زواج أحدهم". كان هذا النمط من الشعر شكلا شعرياً رائجاً في عصر النهضة الإنكليزي. وقد ازدهرت أغاني الزفاف أيضًا لأنها تؤدي وظائف اجتماعية حيوية من خلال التركيز على العقائد العامة للمجتمع بمكوناته المختلفة، كما أسهمت بالترويج لفكرة السلم الاجتماعي وهو أن الاضطرابات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية والدينية في القرن السابع عشر لم تكن لتشكل أي تهديد للوضع القائم في ذلك الزمان.

يدّعي بعض النقاد أن هذا النوع من الشعر الغنائي لم يحظ بقدر كاف من الدراسة. هذه هي الحال على نحو خاص في حالة الشاعر (روبرت هيريك)الذي تم تجاهل قصائده في الزواج والتي عدّها هؤلاء النقاد "غير أصلية" أو "فردية". في حين افترض نقاد آخرون مسبقًا أن اسم الشاعر هيريك مرتبط بالعالمي" أو "الأسطوري".

في هذه الورقة يحاول الباحث أن يوضح أن قصائد الشاعر هيريك في الزواج هي إلا تعبيرات صادقة وموثوقة تعكس حقيقة الزمان والمكان التي كتبت فيه. ويتكيف الشاعر مع بعض المعايير العامة من أجل توضيح مواقفه وآرائه بهدف التوصل إلى تبديد المخاوف التي كانت شائعة في مجتمعه، والتعليق على مراسم الزفاف الخاصة التي كان يتم الاحتفال بها. وتمثّل قصيائده أفراح عصر النهضة وهي من أشهر القصائد في هذا المضمار.

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The Epithalamion in English Renaissance Poetry: A Case Study of Robert Herrick's Nuptial Songs

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Abstract

Epithalamion (also Epithalamium) from the Greek for "at the bridal chamber" is “a nuptial song or poem in praise of the bride and bridegroom, and praying for their prosperity (OED sv 'Epithalamion'). A poem written to celebrate a specific marriage of a bride and a groom. Epithalamion was one of the popular forms in Renaissance England. The epithalamion also flourished because it performed vital societal functions. It created the illusion that the social, economic, political and religious upheavals of the seventeenth century posed no threat to the status quo of the community.

This form of lyric poetry has received the least attention of study. This is particularly so in the case of Robert Herrick. Perhaps Herrick's marriage songs are so often overlooked because they are believed, among other reasons, to be "un- authentic" or "individualistic". Similarly, because the epithalamic genre should not depict the real but only the ideal, other critics presuppose that Herrick's epithalamia are not context-bound or historical but "universal" or "mythological."

This article attempts to illustrate that Herrick's epithalamia are *sincere*, *credible* and truly representative of both the time in which they were composed and their writer. To ignore the socioeconomic, the religious, and the political pressures which acted upon Herrick, as well as the poet's own beliefs and preoccupations, is to ignore information necessary to a fuller appreciation of his wedding poetry. Herrick adapts certain generic norms in order to illustrate his own attitudes and opinions; to communicate or to resolve anxieties characteristic of his society, and to comment on the particular wedding ceremonies being celebrated. These epithalamia are typical of the renaissance age.

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Introduction

Epithalamion was in vogue during the Renaissance, whereby the most respected rhetoricians of the time like Julius C. Scaliger and George Puttenham encouraged poets to write marriage songs according to provided guidelines especially that of the Greek and Roman times because the very nature of the epithalamion "lends itself to the synthesis of classical and Christian concepts" so that Renaissance authors write delightful and interesting poetry and excel in the classics.[1]

Critics such as M. Byron Raizis claim that "the genre of lyric poetry that has received the least attention is probably the epithalamion".[2] This is especially true in the case of Robert Herrick. Herrick wrote two epithalamia, "A Nuptial Song Or Epithalamy On Sir Clipseby Crew And His Lady" and "An Eithalamy to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Lady". These two marriage songs are so often overlooked because they are believed to be restricted not only by the confines of the patronage system, but by the nature of the genre itself: because his wedding poetry is subject to the demands of the patronage system, many critics assume that it can in no way reveal an "authentic" or "individualistic" Herrick. Furthermore, because critics presuppose that the epithalamion does not or should not depict the real but only the ideal, they are led to conclude that Herrick's epithalamia are not context-bound or historical but, instead, "universal" or "mythological."

As a result of these assumptions and presuppositions, the few critics who do study Herrick's epithalamia either completely misinterpret them or confine them to limited comparative studies. Herrick's "… has appeared to centuries of readers and distinguished critics, as a hyperbolic encomium to the notorious couple" in either of his epithalamia.[3]

Herrick's epithalamia as a matter of fact should not be placed within a tradition nor that classical and Renaissance conventions should be disregarded, but rather that the epithalamia should be examined in terms of context. Attention must be called to the ways in which Herrick transcends the genre through deviations from and alterations of the adopted conventions.

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[1]. Tufte, Virginia, 1970- The Poetry of Marriage: The Epithalamion in Europe and Its Development in England. University of Southern California Studies in Comparative Literature. Los Angeles: Tinnon-Brown. (p.3)

[2]. Ibid. (pp.87-88)

[3]. Pinka, Patricia G. 1993- "Donne, Idios, and the Somerset Epithalamion."Studies in Philology" 90. 1.(pp. 58-73).

Herrick's epithalamia are part of a very long and universal literary tradition, which is believed to have begun as early as Hesiod in the eighth century B.C. and extends into the twentieth century with writers such as A.E. Housman, James Joyce, W.H. Auden, Edith Sitwell, and Dylan Thomas. Paradoxically, before we can appreciate the individuality of Herrick's wedding poems, we must appreciate their indebtedness to that pervasive tradition. In other words, in order to understand how Herrick adapts certain epithalamic conventions in his poetry, it is important to learn what these conventions are. However, it is also important to remember that the epithalamion began as a folk song rooted in contemporary wedding customs; that is, it was based originally on the actual events and rituals of the wedding day. Even though, as Virginia Tufte points out, "the nuptial poet soon began to derive inspiration as much from literary works as from the particular situation".[1]

Through an examination of seventeenth-century fears, ideologies, and tensions, in conjunction with Herrick's epithalamia, it becomes clear that Herrick does more than simply regurgitate classical and Renaissance generic conventions; rather, he uses, disregards, and adapts certain epithalamic norms in order to communicate, suppress, and resolve anxieties characteristic of his society.

The vogue the nuptial song enjoyed in the seventeenth century may be partly attributed to the success of Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion*. Spenser was the first major epithalamist to write a wedding song. He developed, modified and broke with the (classical) traditions.

The genre is noteworthy for its blending of narrative, descriptive and lyric elements, as well as for its reminiscence of the folk festivals in which the type seems to have taken its first rise. It is a marriage ode, a masque of hymn in which the pictorial, musical, and dramatic features constitute one composite whole. However, the epithalamion also flourished because it performed vital societal functions.

Additionally, the fact that the epithalamion's identification with and supposed idealization of the upper class made it an exceptionally effective poem of patronage. This, in turn, contributed to its popularity. Renaissance society was based upon the concepts of order and hierarchy through a number of other classical conventions, the epithalamion also creates an illusion of earthly and cosmic harmony.

Wedding poetry links the human, natural, and universal realms through the summoning and the affirmation of the presence of human,

[1]. 1., (p.129)

mythological, and natural figures, begun by Sappho. The use of nature comparisons and the pastoral setting, exemplified by Theocritus's "Idyll 18"; the assertion that procreation is in accord with nature; the parallels between the movement of heavenly bodies such as the sun and stars and the movement of the events of the wedding day and night, manifest in Spenser's *Epithalamion;* and "numerological patterning establishing parallels between poetic, human, and natural rhythms."[1]

Additionally, epithalamia promote societal, earthly, and cosmic harmony through the suppression and resolution of evil forces which pose a threat to the unity of both the couple and the society. The triumph of order over the discordant elements which oppose the happiness of the couple and the nation is seen everywhere in Renaissance epithalamia at the hands of great poets of the age such as Spenser, Jonson, Crashaw, Donne and others.

Biblical scholars think that the first wedding poetry written in Christian traditions, is believed to be *The Song of Solomon* and the *45th Psalm*.

Marriage had always held a fundamental importance in England, for as Lawrence Stone writes, "among the upper and middling ranks it was primarily a means of tying together two kinship groups, of obtaining collective economic advantages and securing useful political alliances".[2] As a result of the Reformation, marriage took on greater significance.

As mentioned earlier, through the conventions and norms they inherited from the epithalamic tradition, writers of marriage songs attempted "variously to repress, reinterpret, and resolve the dangers and fears associated with wedlock".[3] For example, the marriage song functioned to abolish the ever-present fear of sexuality in a number of ways:

Marriage itself of course serves in many cultures to channel sexuality into a form that promotes cultural norms rather than threatens them: children are produced and provided for, sex is regulated, and so on. Similarly, the authors of both Stuart and earlier epithalamia typically tame and civilize desire: they transform it from the anarchic lust that can threaten the couple and their culture to the love that produces harmony in this generation and generates heirs for the next.[4]

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[1]. Dubrow, Heather, 1990- A Happiest. Eden The Politics of marriage in the Sturat Epithalamiun. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP. (p.36)

[2]. Stone, Lawrence, 1977- The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. (p.5)

[3]. Ibid. (p.84)

[4]. 5, (p.1)

Through the conventional epithalamic images of a unified community happily celebrating a wedding of marriage as a source and symbol of a united and properly functioning society, epithalamists asserted that marriage was definitely a public happening sanctioned by parents rather than a private exchange of vows; thereby eliminating the fear of clandestine or secret marriages. The Stuart epithalamion responded also to the question about the sacredness of marriage.

Writers of marriage songs, unable to accept wedlock as purely secular, attempted "to place marriage in a divine scheme that includes Christianity but reaches beyond it to a universal religion,"[1] as reflected in Herrick's wedding poems. Therefore, no member of society would be alienated: all members could share in the celebrations.

Furthermore, St. Thomas Aquinas, who perpetuated "the Aristotelian concept of woman as a misshapen or half-formed man," claimed that woman is physiologically inferior to man as well. As a result of her inferiority as a child, the woman is subject to her father; and as an adult she is subject to her husband. Once married, the husband controls all aspects of his wife's existence and – he may not terminate her life; he may use corporal punishment to correct her when she disobeys.[2]

In general, through resolution, reinterpretation, and simple repression or denial, seventeenth-century writers of the epithalamion crafted "a mythic vision of wedlock". This means the wedding song is "less a rendition of actual events surrounding weddings than a story that the culture wishes and needs to tell about itself" (Dubrow, *Eden* 41). For this reason, the critic who expects to find happiness and unity tends to view wedding poetry as "not authentic" or "insincere." But, as a matter of fact, to dismiss seventeenth-century wedding songs as "not credible" is a mistake, Herrick's marriage songs, for example, illustrate much more about their context than critics have contested.

Throughout the classical tradition, the epithalamion most often celebrated royal or noble weddings – since ancient antiquities, Statius and Claudian, for example, commemorated the weddings of emperors and aristocrats; and throughout the Renaissance, rhetoricians insisted that the marriage song should be written as a panegyric of "high wedlock," which "portrays eminent characters and notable events," and in the "grand style,"

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[1]. Miller, Paul, W. 1970- "The Decline of the English Epithalamion." Texas Studies in Literature and Language 12: 405-16 (p.410)

[2]. George, Charles H. 1961- The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation. Princeton: PUP, (p.263)

which "contains the qualities of dignity and sonorousness".[1] The genre's identification with the upper class took on special significance for seventeenth-century poets who wished to benefit from a complex system of patronage. Generally, for these epithalamists, "the weddings which [were] distinguished enough to be celebrated in verse [were] the weddings of people wealthy enough to reward the poet and prominent enough socially and politically to justify, so to speak, his encomia".[2]

Through the creation of the marriage song, the epithalamist marks himself, as Herrick does in both his wedding poems, a "social participant in the elaborate courtly ceremonials rather than as a poet composing deferential complimentary verse on the fringes of that social world".[3] In addition, through his role as an accomplice, the poet formulates the illusion that he commemorates the union out of candid enthusiasm rather than pure self-interest.[4] The poet here becomes a participant master-of-ceremonies according to classical conventions;[5] "for in the fictive world of the poem … [the poets] themselves guide the events of the wedding".[6] The invocations to specific individuals involved in the wedding, including the bride and groom themselves, can be perceived to be either commands or requests allowing the poet "to assert his authority while providing his patron with the illusion that the author is admitting his subordination".[7]

Herrick's epithalamia are representative of both the time in which they were composed and their writer. Although he draws upon and strictly adheres to a vast stockpile of conventional features, themes, and topics used by both classical poets and Renaissance contemporaries, Herrick adapts certain generic norms in order to illustrate his own attitudes and opinions, to communicate or to resolve anxieties characteristic of his society, and to comment on the particular wedding being celebrated. There are poems that clarify; others resolve the tensions associated with Stuart marriage poetry, and some more exemplify and consciously explicates the problems associated with the patronage system and with the Stuart court.

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[1]. Sheehan, James Clement, 1971- "Form and Tradition in English Epithalamion, 1595-1641." Diss. U of Michigan, (pp.9-10)

[2]. Greene, Thomas McLernon, 1954- "The Epithalamion in the Renaissance." Diss. Yale University, (p.218)

[3]. Marotti, Arthur F., 1986- John Donne Coterie Poet. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, (pp.271-2)

[4]. 5, (pp.138-39)

[5]. 1., (p.9)

[6]. 5, (pp.139-40)

[7]. Ibid. (pp.146-7)

Of course Herrick's celebrities and hosts are not his patrons, but rather, they were his friends; besides, he was rich enough not to receive any endowments from any patron.

"Herrick celebrates both his own love and the love of others".[1] Clergyman and poet, Robert Herrick was born in London in 1591, the seventh child of Nicholas Herrick, a wealthy goldsmith. It is uncertain where he was educated, but certainly, he mastered the Latin classics.

Herrick's name, as he reminds us, rhymes with lyric, and in his own estimation his lyrics were little stars. Like daughters of Hesperus, the evening star, they lighted the heavens and his life. Or he thought of them as golden apples in a "sacred grove". As a lyric poet, he was distinguished, and some of his love songs, for example, 'To Anthea' and 'Gather Ye Rose-buds' are considered exceptional.

Though he was s disciple of Ben Jonson, but his poems have a complete polish only seldom found in his master’s. As F. R. Leavis notes, like other Cavaliers, he is an “agreeable” writer, “urbane, mature, and civilized”; indeed, he owed debt to Jonson, but his real masters were the Latin classics. Swinburne calls Herrick the “greatest songwriter ever born of English race”. [2] He had some of the charm of Andrew Marvell’s, but only a little of his latent violence and lacking its intellectual qualities. But unlike Marvell, Herrick gave up seeking the aristocratic patrons who drew writers - like Marvell himself- into the turbulent politics of the day. For Herrick, the natural order is rural. History broke in on Herrick’s life with the Rebellion, and like other Cavaliers he was cut to the quick by the execution of his kin, but as a poet he was remote from affairs: pastoral in every sense. [3]

His best form of poetry was the epigram in which he excelled all other poets of his time. Probably, he is famous for his epigrams in a way Shakespeare was at sonnets. Herrick’s language is too far from the language spoken in the Devon parish, it is also not the language of the merchant class from which he came. His is the language of the wits, old fashioned even for the times. It is *clear*, but that’s not to say conversational. This alerts us to certain verbal qualities: a concentration on sound, even at the expense of sense. Figurative language, delightful conceit, revived conventions: these are parts of

[1]. Schmidt, Michael, 1998- Lives of the Poets: Weidenfeld & Nicolson: Great Britain, (p.242)
[2]. 20, (p.242).
[3]. Ibid, (p.239).

Herrick's small, intimate poetic arsenal, developed far from the urban commotion that surrounded Ben Jonson's poetry, his master. In his poems he employs transitive verbs, suggesting movement if not action, and Herrick rejects the Spenserian manner *tout court*. He also rejects the refined Arcadian landscape. Literal experience underlies his pastoral. One might regard it more properly as rural, for nymphs and shepherds are replaced with figures very like his parishioners.

At the opening of *Hesperides* he posits his "Argument" and list his subjects:

I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers,
Of April, May, of June, and July-flowers.
I sing of May-poles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,
Of bride-grooms, brides, and of their bridal cakes [my emphasis].
I write of youth, of love, and have access
By these to sing of cleanly wantonness…

Taken as a whole, Hesperides is a very marriage-minded work. A large number of Herrick's poems (about 158) deal with specific mistresses. Biographers identify flesh-and-blood ladies. How they relate to the poet is worth noting. Wives and daughters of family or friends make the list, plus cousins and parishioners, all safely out of bounds, "Blushing prettily, they smell good, and Herrick handles and smells them". He is a classical to such a degree that most of his poems are pagan in attitude. His "many fresh and fragrant mistresses", pre-eminently Julia, but also Anthea, Perila, Electra, Lucia, Corinna, Amarilla and others, are not virginal, are not Dante's Beatrice or Petrarch's Laura. They are courtable girls without metaphysical pretension. The man who liked little girls thought latent better than fledged, the way violets, spring's "virgins," are better than roses. Chaste "i'th' bud," these showy flowers exfoliate as they get older, growing to a much-too-muchness.

When he celebrates a wedding, it is to enjoin the couple (notably his dear college friend Sir Clipseby Crew) to enjoy lawful bliss. He urges consummation in those amazing pillows, his theme: *carpe noctem*. Frankness within a refined, conventional style gives it authority.

Youth, love, and that wonderful phrase "cleanly-wontonness"; weather, luxuries, ephemerality, myth, fairyland, dreamland, heaven and hell: the "argument of his book" accurately announces its contents. Some poems address a single or imagined hearer; sometimes he talks

with himself, or with “prew” (prudence, his housekeeper). His words emerge from a shared solitude, as though to answer a rural silence. There is no public authority about them. His lived pastorals, enhanced with classical allusion, includes a good deal of practical wisdom and meticulously close observation. Although he was a clergyman, it is striking that his poetry is almost totally hedonist and carnal.

It is difficult, however, to see wherefrom Herrick derived his ideas, but he must have been indebted, whether directly or indirectly, to Renaissance models on Roman marriage conventions, costumes and symbols. Herrick must have read Spenser’s *Epithalamion*. Though there are some similarities between Spenser and Herrick in this context, it seems that Herrick must have leant more heavily on Jonson and the accounts of the Roman wedding. Nonetheless, Herrick’s two epithalamia reflect, in one way or another, his own character and his attitudes towards life.

Like any other epithalamist, perhaps, Herrick speaks and acts like an advocate for society assuming the couple to be lucky, and that they are acting wisely to have chosen to marry; wishing them the common social blessings of happiness.

And, beauteous bride, we do confess y'are wise
In dealing forth these bashful jealousies:
In love's name do so; and a price
Set on yourself by being nice (Epithalamy Clipseby Crew, (51-54)

Of the two songs, "An Eithalamy to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Lady" is much easier and less “hieroglyphick”, and tends, however, towards singleness, simplicity, and meaning. Images presented are clear and decorous that they almost draw no attention and, perhaps, do not allude to any significant implications. Images and symbols are typically conventional; in both, he is both an observant and an active participant.

In his "A Nuptial Song Or Epithalamy On Sir Clipseby Crew And His Lady" we are more conscious of a sensuality which is at once powerful, and all-pervasive. Here, we come across his delight in glittering surfaces, in varying textures, and his emphasis on the senses and acquiring lively joy and pleasure. Herrick’s motive is to derive intense satisfaction from contemplating softness and smoothness—qualities on whom he often dwells,

And to your more bewitching, see, the proud
Plumpe Bed beare up, and swelling like a cloud,
Tempting the two too modest; can
Yee see it brusle like a Swan,
And you be cold
To meet it, when it woo's and seemes to fold
The Armes to hugge it? throw, throw
Your selves into the mighty over-flow
Of that white Pride, and Drowne
The night, with you, in floods of Downe. (Clipseby Crew 81-90)

In this stanza, without describing the charms of the bride or referring in any detail to the act of love, he makes almost obvious the quality of the marriage bed, and thus by implication, suggests the delicious nature of the amorous play to be enjoyed there by the youthful bridegroom, and the fragrant bride.

The poem also concerns itself, like most of Herrick's poetry, with the life of the seasons, the phenomena of changing but changeless Nature, the heavens, the flux and reflux of organic life, the birth, passing, and resurrection of beauty. The obsession in the poet, here, is with the contrast between change, permanence and with "*carpe diem*".

In his poem "A Nuptial! Song, or Epithalamie, on Sir Clipseby Crew and his Lady" (1625), Herrick uses the image of mythology, for example he uses the phoenix to emphasize the bride's cravings and desirability (Although the use of the phoenix was not popular in Renaissance marriage songs. Herrick as a symbol of sexual love.):

See where she comes; and smell how all the street
Breathes vineyards and pomegranates: O how sweet!
As a fir'd altar is each stone,
Perspiring pounded cinnamon.
The phoenix' nest,
Built up of odours, burneth in her breast.
Who, therein, would not consume
His soul to ash-heaps in that rich perfume?
Bestroking fate the while
He burns to embers on the pile. (21-30)

Also present in almost all of these marriage poems is fire, heat, light, and sun imagery. References to flames and ashes go hand-in-hand with the use of the phoenix and are often used to communicate the beauty and the carnal desires of one or both marital partners. Furthermore, there

are many references to the sun (and to the east, which is usually indicative of the time of day and the season of the year and is used often as a symbol for the monarch. It is also a symbol to the source of light and wisdom. References to stars are numerous in seventeenth-century epithalamia as well as in Herrick's Nuptial poem for Clipseby Crew where the bride is compared to a star (4-5).

The sixteen turbulent stanzas of Epithalamy On Sir Clipseby Crew urge the claim of the body, blooming and blown, treading, smelling, pounded, perspiring, frying, burning to meet the lover: plumped-up like a swan or the bridal bed. Every stanza consists of five rhyming couplets descending in line length from five feet to two. Even the poet's use of the couplet alludes to the wedded pair the song is celebrating.

In the Southwell epithalamium, Herrick instructs a group of lamenting bridesmaids to leave the nuptial chamber:

Virgins, weep not; `twill come, when,
As she, so you'l be ripe for men.
Then grieve her not, with saying
She must no more a Maying:
Or by Rose-buds devine,
Who'l be her Valentine.
Nor name those wanton reeks
Y'ave had at Barby-breaks.
But now kisse her, and thus say
Take time Lady while ye may.
(111-20)

"Now barre the doors," Herrick demands in the next line--the bride is separated from her circle of female friends and enclosed with her husband for the consummation of their marriage. He similarly depicts the reluctant bride as surrounded by lamenting female attendants in the Crew epithalamium.

Personal at its core, Herrick's Nuptial Songs keep an eye on history: during the Stuart period, marriage was meant to be understood as an institution necessary for social stability. The family was regarded as a microcosm of the divinely-ordained patriarchal kingdom; the marital household was perceived as the ultimate basis of political order. Women were socially constructed as sexually voracious creatures who must be controlled by fathers and husbands. Female chastity--virginity before marriage, sexual fidelity after marriage--was

the foundation of a woman's social value, for without chastity, men could not guarantee the legitimacy of their legatees and inheritors.[1]

Throughout *Hesperides*, Herrick enjoins women to assume a socially sanctioned code of sexual behavior. He encourages virgins that they should look forward to getting married. However, Herrick in poems about himself suggests sometimes that he has remained unwed as a stratagem of self-defense:

A bachelor I will
Live as I have liv'd still,
To crucify my life (No Spouse but a Sister, Lines: 1-4).

Although Herrick allows his male personae to denigrate and avoid marriage, female characters in *Hesperides* are not given such latitude. Like the licentious woman, the unmarried woman was perceived to endanger the social hierarchy of early modern England. The historian Bridget Hill comments, "Spinsterhood … was seen as a latent threat against the whole structure of domestic authority".[2] Within this context, it is significant that women in Herrick's poetry display great reluctance to marry: Herrick's virgins must be cajoled - or forced if needed- into fulfilling their societal duty. In *Hesperides* Herrick transforms obstinately unwed women into becoming brides/wives.

As New Historicist critics have established, the poet's speaker very often assumes the role of a pastor who arranges the execution of rituals orchestrated to confirm communal identity and social hierarchy. The priest here encourages his community to observe traditional holidays, and enjoins a recalcitrant woman to adopt properly feminine behavior. Herrick as such combines his project of religious ceremonialism with a concern that focuses upon a woman who resists the social imperative to marry. In "Corinna's going a Maying," for example, Herrick's speaker endorses communal participation in the traditional May Day celebrations:

"Come, let us goe, while we are in our prime; / And take the harmlesse follie of the time". Covertly, if Corinna is to fulfill her communal obligations, "going a Maying" will consequently lead her to "goe marry."

[1]. Fletcher, Anthony and John Stevenson, eds 1985- Order and Disorder in Early Modern England. Cambridge U. Press, 1985, (pp.196-217).

[2]. Hill, Bridget, 1987- "A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery," *Past and Present* 117, (p.119).

Women in *Hesperides*, it seems, must be coached if they are to become brides, and Herrick often stands on the sidelines at weddings to prompt his protégées until they are finally bedded by husbands.

In his epithalamia Herrick accuses one of the brides of tarrying in her bridal toilette. He chides her into speedier action because he believes that delays betoken her immodest coyness and that she must hurry to appear chaste. This gendered tension between reluctant women and a male impresario becomes most overt in the epithalamia celebrating the weddings of "Sir Clipseby Crew" and "Sir Thomas Southwell":

And beautious Bride we do confess y'are wise,
In dealing forth these bashful! jealousies:
In Lov's name do so; and a price
Set on your selfe, by being nice:
But yet take heed;
What now you seem, be not the same indeed.
(Epithalamy On Clipseby Crew, 51-56)

Herrick casts the woman's reluctant behavior as a cynical. He might also be enjoining the bride that she cannot allow her antipathy to be genuine.

Earlier in *Hesperides*, Herrick similarly rebukes Margaret Fuller for delaying her "Bridall-Rites" with Sir Thomas Southwell, and the poet instructs her "neerest kin" to "force her" over the threshold of her new home (Lines: 81-82). Herrick positions the Southwell poem (written in 1618) as the first epithalamium in *Hesperides*.

The Southwell epithalamium concludes with a beatific vision of the newly married as an senior couple, "two ripe shocks of corn," who will die happily together (58, 170). [(i)] Margaret Fuller's reluctance to marry Thomas Southwell appears to signify her prescience, and Herrick's chidings of her hesitancy stand revealed as misguided officiousness. Herrick provides a rationale for Margaret Fuller's hesitancy even as he reproves her for it: the speaker utilizes Herrick's magisterial authority.

In addition to hesitant brides, Herrick's epithalamia are also populated by women who collectively bemoan rather than celebrate their friends' weddings. The marriage songs of *Hesperides* thus evoke the tense dialogue of the Roman poet Catullus 62, in which a chorus of maidens voice their dread of marriage only to be silenced by a chorus

of youths who argue that women should obediently get married whether they wish to or not.[1]

Like all the hesitant brides and weeping bridesmaids in Herrick's epithalamia, the attendants have not internalized a festive perspective on wedding, and Herrick's impresario-speaker must use his society's gender roles on them. Yet, in depicting how these reluctant women are constrained to participate in marriage, the poet creates disquieting images of fear and intimidation--and female resistance to male authority.

Herrick places great importance on the control of women within marriage, and aligns this assertion of male authority with Anglican ceremonialism. However, even as Herrick exhorts virgins to marry, he reveals the unease with which women assume their proper social roles as wives, and he undercuts his male proponents of marriage.

To conclude one can say that Herrick wrote more secular poems than, the age's preeminent secular poet, Dofnne; less poems of devotion than Herbert. In both collections of poetry, the *Hesperides* and *Noble Numbers* he wrote more than 1400 poems which constitute Herrick's achievement which put him in the ranks among the most prodigious poets.

So generous, so pagan a poet at Dean Prior, he was an anachronism, the last Cavalier, the man in whom the Elizabethan tradition of song-writing reaches – too late – its perfection. In the nineteenth century his verse was revived. In this century, his work and that of other Cavaliers has been overshadowed by the Metaphysicals. Herrick is charming, he speaks in many tones of a range of human experience. He does not get lost in Arcadia, is free too if the extremes of attitude, the posturing, which mar much metaphysical verse.

As a matter of fact, taken as a whole, *Hesperides* is a very marriage-minded anthology. As Roger Rollin observes, in "The Argument of his Book" the poet mentions marriage three times --"I sing . . . / Of Bridegrooms, Brides, and of their Bridall-cakes"--before he announces that he will also "write of Youth, of Love". [2] This impulse to set "Love" within the context of marriage leads Herrick to revise traditional modes of amatory poems. Herrick revises the

[1]. Goold, G. P. ed. 1988- Catullus, Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris, 2nd ed., The Loeb Classical Library. Harvard U. Press, (pp.90-91).

[2]. Rollin, Roger B.,- 1992 Robert Herrick, ed. New York: Twayne, 1992, (p.5)

obligations of the *carpe diem* mode to reflect his emphasis on marriage--"Then be not coy, but use your time; / And while ye may, goe marry" ("To the Virgins,13-14).

Robert Herrick endowed the genre with two basic songs, "An Epithalamie to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Ladie" and "A Nuptial Song, or Epithalamie, on Sir Thomas Crew and his Lady". After John Dryden the epithalamion was tossed into oblivion for about half a century to come.

Luckier than some, Herrick gets his due in all the anthologies. But, unluckily enough, his poetry hasn't much appealed to teachers and New Critics.

In short, Herrick was one of the most paradoxical characters of the century, for he is sometimes considered the most Epicurean of the Renaissance poets, a title surely well deserved, but also in utter contrast with his profession as a clergyman—that should perhaps have made him more inclined to Stoicism.

Herrick's "A Nuptial Song or Epithalamy On Sir Clipseby Crew and His Lady" is generally regarded as one of the great epithalamion in English poetry. Whatever Herrick means to tell us, his poem, like Spenser's, ends "in hope," but the future has yet to be written.

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