



In the Shadow of the Queen: The Early English Epithalamium and the Female Monarch

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Perhaps the most significant aspect of the sixteenth-century English epithalamium is its scarcity. The form was prevalent elsewhere in Europe,¹ and evidence drawn from ballads, prose works, and drama suggests a wide-spread awareness of epithalamic elements in popular English culture.² Additionally, two influential poetics manuals from the period, J. C. Scaliger's *Poetices Libri Septem* (1561) and George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), contain detailed sections on the form and instructions for its production. In spite of this, very few English poets, with the prominent exception of Edmund Spenser, tried their hand at wedding poetry until after Elizabeth's death in 1603, when a veritable explosion in the genre occurred. In fact, some Elizabethan writers almost seem to deliberately avoid epithalamic material. John Studley, a student at Trinity College in Cambridge who published translations of Seneca's *Agamemnon* and *Medea* in 1566, actually replaces the choral epithalamium in the first act of *Medea* with a verse he wrote himself. By way of explanation, Studley offers this: '...I chaunged the fyrste Chorus, because in it I sawe nothyng but an heape of prophane storyes, and names of prophane Idoles: therfore I have altered the whole matter of it' (125-26).³ Studley's reaction to Seneca's epithalamium seems oddly overblown, especially considering that much of Seneca's play (which is about a murderous woman with supernatural powers) could be considered 'prophane.' Whatever his motive, Studley's response points to a curious cultural unease about the form.

¹ For European examples of epithalamia see Virginia Tufte, *The Poetry of Marriage: The Epithalamium in Europe and its Development in England* (Santa Monica: Tinnon-Browne, 1970).

² By 'epithalamic elements' in popular culture, I refer to the practice of 'chambering' or the singing of bawdy ballads at weddings. See David Cressy, *Birth Marriage & Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford UP, 1999), especially pp. 350-376. Also included in this reference are epithalamic resonances in Elizabethan drama.

³ *Medea*. Trans. John Studley. London 1566.

It is possible that tensions surrounding the epithalamium in Elizabethan England stem from the ideological patterns carried by the form itself. Examples of epithalamia written prior to Elizabeth's reign, including those written for the marriages of Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart, indicate a variety of responses to the situation of female rule, particularly in the way they depict the sexual negotiation of power between the bride and groom; the few non-Spenserian texts written during Elizabeth's reign tend to obscure this aspect of the form. I propose that poets who chose to write epithalamic poetry during Elizabeth's reign inserted themselves into a complicated web of cultural debates that surrounded the Queen: impatience for marriage and succession, assumptions about gender and authority, anxieties about female rule. As Elizabeth aged and her subjects and courtiers gradually realized that she would never marry, wedding poetry could be seen to counter the ideology surrounding the 'cult of virginity' propagated by Elizabeth and her court.⁴ The decision by a prominent poet—particularly one with political ambitions—to write an epithalamium in the political climate of later sixteenth-century England was, I therefore suggest, a daring one.⁵

As Louis Montrose has argued, English subjects of Elizabeth I constructed a complex 'political imaginary' through which they perceived and understood their culture.⁶ Having two successive female monarchs caused issues of gender and authority to come to the fore, and the lack of a public forum through which to question and contest their situation complicated matters for conscientious or disgruntled subjects. Elizabeth did not appreciate unsolicited counsel, but her subjects found indirect ways to express themselves through assorted cultural media, including poetry. Since poetic forms are themselves ideological, one of the ways to access this encoded discussion is to examine the interplay between the general expectations carried by a particular poetic form and

⁴ The work of Frances Yates, and that of her student Roy Strong, has done much to establish the idea of a 'cult of virginity' that emerged particularly in the later sixteenth century that was carefully constructed through portraiture and pageantry. See for example: Frances Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), and Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), and *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987). More recently, Louis Montrose has challenged the notion of a seamless or monolithic image of the Queen successfully controlled by the Elizabethan government. See for example 'Idols of the Queen: Policy, Gender, and the Picturing of Elizabeth I', *Representations* 68 (1999), 50-101.

⁵ My findings on the early English epithalamium augment Montrose's claim that Spenser's decision to publish the *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* in 1595 suggests a complex (if not subtly antagonistic) relationship between the poet and royal authority. See 'Spenser's Domestic Domain: Poetry, Property, and the Early Modern Subject' in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. by M. de Grazia et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), pp. 83-130.

⁶ See Montrose, 'Spenser and the Elizabethan Imaginary', *ELH* 69: 4 (2002), 907-46.

the innovations made by the poet to that form.⁷ My contribution here is to outline the collective beliefs embedded in the epithalamic form by studying classical and early sixteenth-century examples. Examining the cultural and historical context of the form suggests that poets who worked in this mode, particularly those who dedicated their poetry to royal couples, participated in the ongoing debates about gynecocracy.

I. Classical Traditions

From the earliest classical examples, epithalamia have been written as part of the public celebration of royal or aristocratic marriages.⁸ Catullus's *Carmen* 61, for example, the poem most frequently alluded to by later writers including Spenser, was written to celebrate the marriage of Manlius Torquatus, a man who probably served as a praetor in 49 BCE.⁹ Similarly, Claudian, whose epic epithalamium also shaped the genre, wrote a poem in honor of Emperor Honorius's wedding in 398 CE.¹⁰ Peace between nations or political alliances as symbolized by the marriage of two powerful families were familiar themes.

Also elemental to the form as it is inherited from the classical tradition is the association of epithalamic poetry with the originary mythos of early Rome. In Catullan verse, the tender young virgin is ripped from her mother's arms and offered to the groom in an act that the lyric connects with the rape of the Sabine women, a founding moment of ancient Rome. However, classical epithalamia, which were intended to be sung outside the bridal chamber while the virginal new wife was being deflowered, also contain an erotic component—with an underlying reference to a gendered imposition of dominance. As the virgin submits her body to her husband, she relinquishes her socially

⁷ Both Raymond Williams (*Marxism and Literature*, Oxford UP, 1977, pp. 186-191) and Frederick Jameson (*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithica: Cornell UP, 1981), have made the argument that form is ideologically situated, shaping and being shaped by the relationship between 'collective modes' and 'individual projects'—in other words, the interaction between the artist or poet and the assumptions of her/his audience (Williams, p. 190). Jameson's argument has a different shading. For Jameson, there exists an 'ideology of form' in which the 'dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended' (p. 98). I proceed from the central notion that form is dynamic and ideological, and that a careful reading of a certain form that is itself historicized can provide a glimpse of this intersection between culture and artist.

⁸ The most detailed history of the epithalamium is Virginia Tufte's *The Poetry of Marriage*.

⁹ Manlius Torquatus was also praised by Cicero, indicating his social prominence.

¹⁰ See Tufte, pp. 60-64.

empowered position as a desirable, available maiden and accepts a new role as wife.¹¹ Such a transition is not always readily accepted. The polemic between chastity and marriage is the subject of Catullus's *Carmen* 62, which offers a solution to the problem in mathematical terms. The bride is told that her virginity belongs only partially to herself; the greater share belongs to her parents.¹² In turn, the bride's parents forfeit their portion to the groom as dowry. The bride, therefore, should not fight, but instead obediently relinquish her virginity and establish herself in marriage. The Roman bride has essentially been forced first by filial and then by wifely duty to submit to her husband.

The reluctance of the bride to approach the bridal chamber, where her eager groom awaits, is also a component of *Carmen* 61. The bride is repeatedly urged, '*Prodeas nova nupta*,' [come forward new bride], and then a case is made for the character—and sexual continence—of the groom.¹³ The narrator, who plays the role of a master of ceremonies essentially speaking for the community, rather impatiently pushes the reluctant virgin into the waiting arms of her husband—a man recommended because he has refrained from adultery and avoided scandal. While a Roman double standard is clear, it is mediated by touching images of connubial bliss: a husband's desire to sleep against his wife's breasts, the supple vine wrapping itself around a nearby tree. Epithalamic poetry encodes the struggle associated with the loss of virginity and the assumption of a new social role. However, the poetry also conveys the sense that this transition is whole-heartedly favored by the community; in such a rite of passage, the bride's submission is inevitable; refusal is unthinkable. The wedding song, with its festive, communal overtones and its promise of a loving sexual partnership, obscures the tension associated with the bride's initial sacrifice. What she gives up in agency, she

¹¹ The tension surrounding the loss of virginity is represented in both Sappho and Catullus, who compare the virgin to a hyacinth. In Sappho's fragments, the flower is trampled as a metaphor for the loss of a certain beauty and social status; in Catullus (*Carmen* 61) the opposite point is made as the flower stands in a rich man's garden, a prize, but isolated from society and from usefulness.

¹² Catullus quotations are taken from *Catullus*, edited and translated by G. P. Goold (Duckworth, 1983). This passage is as follows: *Virginitas non tota tua est, ex parte parentum est, / tertia pars patrisc, pars est data tertia matri, / tertia sola tua est: noli pugnare dōbus, / qui genero sua iura simul cum dote dederunt. / Hymen o Hymenaeae, Hymen ades o Hymenaeae!* [Your virginity is not all yours, but partly your parents': / a third is your father's, a third is allotted to your mother, / and only a third is yours: fight not with two who have given / their rights together with the dowry to their son in law] (62-65).

¹³ *Non tuus levis in mala / deditus vir adultera, / probra turpia persequens, / a tuis teneris volet / secubare papillis, / lenta sed velut adsitas / viris implicat arbores / implicabitur in tuum / complexum. Sed abit dies: / prodeas nova nupta.* [Not lightly given to some evil / paramour or following shameful / paths of dishonor / will your husband wish to lie apart / from your tender bosom/ but, as the pliant vine / entwines the trees planted beside it, / so will he be entwined in your / embrace. But the day slips by: / Come forth, O bride] (97-106).

gains again through social acceptance and the hoped-for companionship of a tenderly devoted husband. One of the important ideological elements inherent in the form, therefore, is that the sexual drama of the bridal deflowering is neither simple nor one-sided. The resolution of the domestic struggle is an uneasy accord between the couple that rests precariously on the continued fondness and faithfulness of the husband and the lasting obedience and submission of the bride. The conflict associated with the loss of virginity is overshadowed by the festive, communal celebration of reproduction.

II. The Sixteenth-Century Epithalamium and the Problem of Female Rule

Themes of uncertain concord and the political, erotic, and social resonances evident in the classical poetry are carried into the sixteenth century. However, early examples of epithalamia from England and Scotland indicate that the classical motifs were being shaped to respond to contemporary issues, specifically the intensifying debates about gynecocracy. With the publication of *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), John Knox vehemently voiced the view that '[T]o promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire above any realme, nation, or citie, is repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance, and finalie it is the subversion of good order, of all equitie and justice'.¹⁴ Knox's treatise, which inspired a number of publications that refuted him, stimulated the cultural debates on the subject of women's role in public life—controversies that, though inspired by the rule of Mary I of England and Mary Queen of Scots, continued throughout Elizabeth's forty-five year reign.¹⁵

What is of interest here is that these controversies were conducted using a rhetoric of gender and marriage, forging a link between the political and the domestic domains that resonates with epithalamic language. Cultural assumptions about gender fueled both sides of the issue; however, each position used these assumptions differently. While Knox's point of view was probably shared by many, it is probable that the dominant perspective was more complex. John Aylmer's response to Knox, *Harborrowe for faithfull and trewe subjects*, written in 1559 and intended to defend female monarchy,

¹⁴ *The English Scholar's Library of Old and Modern Works Edition*, Volume 1 (New York: AMS Press, Inc), 1967, p. 11.

¹⁵ In 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth Century British Political Thought,' Constance Jordan outlines the gynecocratic debates, concluding that arguments in favor of women's rule depended upon ideology about the 'nature of woman' as a 'persona mixta,' equal to man on a spiritual plane, but subordinate on a physical one. Jordan analyzes both Knox's *Blast*, and the rebuttals of Aylmer, John Leslie, and David Chambers. See *Renaissance Quarterly*, 40.3 (1987), 421-451.

nevertheless conveys some of these complexities. As A.N. McLaren has demonstrated, Aylmer's treatise articulates a theory of 'mixed monarchy,' in which 'the wisdom of the many' both limited and 'imparted grace to a female prince.'¹⁶ According to McLaren, Aylmer's formulation is neither 'unnatural' nor against God, as long as it is tempered appropriately by a Parliament and a council—presumably made up of Englishmen.¹⁷ As McLaren conveys, the contest for 'headship,' often understood by Elizabethans within the context of marriage and domesticity, becomes a way of imagining political power within the contexts of these debates over female rule. Knox had unequivocally stated that 'God hath made man to be heade... He hath ordained man to be superior ... then is the bodie in best proportion, when it has the best governor. But woman can never be the best governor... [b]ecause in the nature of all woman lurketh suche vices, as in good governors are not tolerable' (25). Aylmer refutes Knox by asserting: 'You say God has appointed her [woman] to be subject to her husband...therefore she may not be the head. I grant that, so far as pertaineth to the bonds of marriage and the office of a wife, she must be a subject: but as a magistrate she may be her husband's head.' While Knox construes the divinely dictated, gendered order to include queens, Aylmer's response draws on the two bodies of the queen, indicating that while one submits, the other need not.¹⁸ Aylmer's position relies on the multi-dimensional understanding of gender and monarchal authority that often characterized Elizabeth's own speeches, suggesting that while the corporal body of a queen can be 'weak' and 'feeble,' and submit to marriage, the political body need not relinquish control.¹⁹ The rhetoric of marriage and the body

¹⁶ A. N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I: Queen and Commonwealth, 1558-1585* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996). McLaren argues that Aylmer's motivation for defending Elizabeth's rule was not self promotion; he wanted to preserve the imperial crown which he believed was linked with English Protestant identity (p. 4).

¹⁷ Amanda Shephard, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England* (Staffordshire: Keele University Press, 1994) and Carole Levin, *"The Heart and Stomach of a King": Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: U of Penn Press, 1994), interpret Aylmer's complex political position as reflective of an ingrained gender bias. Levin characterizes Aylmer's position as 'in the end... almost as limiting to the power of a woman to rule as Knox' (p. 11). Levin concludes, 'Aylmer's vision of an ideal woman ruler was someone who was modest, who wore simple dress, listened to advice, and married' (p. 12).

¹⁸ This rhetoric of multiple queenly bodies is a common element in the treatises that defend female rule, while detractors focus primarily on the corporal (and therefore female) body of the Queen. See Constance Jordan.

¹⁹ Elizabeth repeatedly deployed a speech rhetoric in which she acknowledged the weaknesses associated with her gender, and then dismissed them, often by assuming masculine traits. The most well-known of these is the Tilbury speech in which she states: 'I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king' (*Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. by Leah Marcus, Jaqueline Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. The Tilbury speech is on p. 326).

was important to critics and apologists alike because power was imagined in terms that were both gendered and sexualized. The need to establish succession necessitated that the queen marry, have sexual intercourse, and produce an heir; a fact that had to be reconciled with the idea that a queen could be ‘mastered’ in bed without relinquishing political authority--something that, unfortunately for Elizabeth, her sister Mary had been unable to accomplish.

In order to wholly accept a female monarch, early modern English men and women would have to resolve an imaginative disjunction between a queen’s civic and conjugal roles.²⁰ Because the epithalamium operates as a public celebration of the sexual consummation of a marriage (presumably a private act), the form insists on merging the public and the private, specifically countering the ideology upon which gynecocracy rests. As in Catullus, the focus is on the bride’s *one* body—and on the establishment of domestic authority that is imprinted upon it during consummation. This makes the epithalamium a particularly loaded form when applied to the royal marriages of reigning queens. Early modern cultural assumptions about gender dovetail into the political and erotic patterns carried by the epithalamic form, making it possible to trace the complex ways in which the inescapable fact of the female body insistently problematizes, or characterizes, the issue of female rule. Poets who wrote epithalamia—especially for the marriages of queens—engaged, whether they intend to or not, in the debates over the suitability of women to rule.

Significantly, of the few examples of epithalamia that would have been circulating in early modern England during this period (prior to Spenser’s *Epithalamion*), two were written for the marriages of ruling queens.²¹ The first is the lengthy (729 hexameters) epithalamium published by Hadrianus Junius (i.e. Adriaen de Jonghe 1511-75), a Dutch humanist, honoring the 1554 wedding of Mary Tudor to Philip II of Spain, titled *Philippeis, sev, in Nuptias Divi Philippi ... et Heroinae Mariae*.²² This poem, written in Latin, has received very little critical attention and has yet to be published in an English translation. The reason for this is probably the poem’s lack of elegance, but as one of

²⁰ In “‘Perfect hole’: Elizabeth I, Spenser, and Chaste Productions” (*ELR*, 2002, 31-61), Kimberly Anne Coles questions whether such a reconciliation would even be possible given the fact that early English culture ‘held the wife’s obedience to the husband to be a theological obligation’ (35). Coles interprets Alymer’s insistence on ‘teasing apart’ the ‘pubic and private realms’ as itself exposing the ‘vulnerability’ of gynecocracy (36).

²¹ There is another royal epithalamium in Latin for the 1589 marriage of James VI and Anne of Denmark. I did not include a discussion of this text here because it does not deal with reigning queens.

²² PHILIPPEIS, SEV, IN NVPTIAS DIVI PHILIPPI, AVG. PII, MAX. & HEROINAE MARIAE VG. FELICIS, INVICTAE, Regnum Angliae, Franciae, Neapolis—Carmen Heroicum HADRIANO IVNIO Hornano *Medico Auctore*. LONDINI. 1554.

the few extant epithalamia from the period, the Junius poem should not be overlooked. When placed in the context of the discourse on female rule, an anti-gynecocratic slant manifests in spite of Junius's probable desire to ingratiate himself with the monarch.

From the time of Henry VIII's reign, Junius had repeatedly attempted to establish a career in England by attaching himself to influential people. During his initial sojourn, Junius served as a tutor to the children of Henry Howard, earl of Surrey and son of Thomas Howard, third duke of Norfolk.²³ When Surrey was executed for treason in 1547, Junius moved to London, where he attempted to gain favor with the young Edward VI through his literary work.²⁴ By 1550, Junius was acquainted with the influential men who educated the king, including Walter Haddon, Nicholas Wotton, and William Cecil. Because of his support for King Edward, and for his public affirmation of supremacy, Junius's books were placed under a papal ban; his career was severely damaged as a result.²⁵

After Edward's death, Junius was forced to remake himself. It was in this spirit that he composed *Philippeis* for the marriage of the newly crowned Mary Tudor to Philip II. Through an analysis of Junius's correspondence from the period, Chris Heesakkers has suggested that Junius's desire for self-promotion at least partially inspired his epithalamium.²⁶ Heesakkers reports that Junius traveled to England for the wedding, possibly with the hope of delivering the poem to the royal couple in person, but there is no evidence to suggest that he ever did so (328). Nevertheless, as Heesakkers points out, Junius 'invested his *Philippeis* with the dignity of ambassador of the supranational Republic of Letters or Republic of Poetry,' writing in the dedication, '*Vos itaque felicissimi principes poemation istud, cui Philippeidi nomen indidimus, velut Republicae literariae Poeticesue nomine ad vos venientem ac gratulabundam legationem, benigna fronte suscipite.*'²⁷ Junius was certainly convinced of the ability of his poetry to unify

²³ The details of Junius's English careers are documented in Margaret Aston, *The King's Bedpost* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 176-89.

²⁴ Aston, pp. 180-181

²⁵ For further information, see Aston, p. 182.

²⁶ See Heesakker's contribution to *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Abulensis*, 'The Ambassador of the Republic of Letters at the Wedding of Prince Philip of Spain and Queen Mary of England: Hadrianus Junius and his *Philippeis*,' In Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, August 4-9, 1997. Published by the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Tempe AZ, 2000, pp. 325-32. I am further indebted to Professor Heesakkers for providing me with valuable assistance in deciphering the poem that has not yet been translated into English.

²⁷ Translated by Heesakkers as 'You, most fortunate princes, will accept with a benevolent smile this small poem, which we entitled *Philippeis*, as if it were the embassy, coming to you to congratulate you on behalf of the Republic of Letters or the Republic of Poetry' (p. 329).

nations; and with its classical resonances, the epithalamium would have been particularly useful in this mode. Junius apparently hoped that his poem would do more for him than it actually did. He had the poem published at his own expense, but he received only thirty-six gold crowns for his pains—a sum that did not cover the publishing costs.²⁸

Written in the Claudian style, Junius's epithalamium draws heavily on classical writers, including Ovid, Lucan, and Virgil. It is titled significantly to flatter and favor Philip, who is featured far more prominently than anyone else, even Mary Tudor. In addition to Philip's place in the title of the work, the poem opens with a song for Philip's strength (line 16), and a few lines later, Mercury pays a visit to Philip to advise him of his upcoming marriage (line 168). The poem dwells on Philip's journey to England (line 287), and it ends with a congratulatory message for the King (lines 698-718). Junius also adds an epilogue addressed '*Ad Philippum Regem Inuictiss,*' which ends with the statement: '*Summarum hoc uni tibi conspiratio dotum, / Munus tractandi sceptrā Britannā dedit*' [To you alone has the harmony of the universe given this gift, / The duty to manage the British scepter'].²⁹ Junius's attentions toward Philip could be explained by the fact of his nation of birth: Junius was a Dutchman who would soon find himself Philip's subject. However, it could also be the case that Junius, who had led a troubled life in England, doubted Mary's abilities as a Queen, and preferred to think of Philip as wielding the scepter.

The sections of the poem that discuss Mary focus not on her greatness as a ruler, but on her transition from virgin to wife. After some introductory lines, the poem describes European countries plagued by war. It is because of this situation that the Olympian gods meet and propose that Mary take a husband in order to ensure regional peace. At line 100, it is decided by the gods that for Mary, Hymen must take the place of Pallas (or Minerva) in order for faith and peace to be reclaimed. Through this reference, Junius alludes to the efforts of the virgin to protect her chastity (as in Sappho and Catullus), focusing attention on Mary's corporal, virginal body, and not her political one. Political peace can only be achieved if Mary's physical body submits to marriage and promptly produces an heir. Later in the poem (around line 233), Urania visits Mary in her chamber and argues for the match with Philip, claiming that Fate intended something else for her besides virginity (*Fata parant aliud*). Here again Junius's focus is on Mary-as-*virgo*, not *regina*; the poem's epithalamic logic pushes her towards a seemingly inevitable marriage with Philip, who, by contrast, is portrayed as a powerful ruler.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 332.

²⁹ I am grateful to Vince Tomasso for his preliminary translation of this poem.

Junius's use of classical allusion inscribes a sexual hierarchy that places Philip in physical and political control and replaces Mary's political authority with images of her as a virgin destined to submit. The epithalamic form carries the ideology that marriage is a socially preferred state; Junius's innovations suggest that, from his point of view, it would also be politically beneficial for a queen to be married—and to produce an heir without delay. Heesakkers comments that the poem's repeated insistence on reproduction (in separate addresses, personifications of Britannia, Hispania, Hibernia, and Belgica each wish Philip and Mary offspring within the year) shows 'a lack of subtlety and good taste toward the princely couple from a modern point of view.'³⁰ He does acknowledge, however, that such a sentiment befits an epithalamium—which is, I think, exactly the point. Because it is an epithalamium, the wish for speedy reproduction would not be considered impertinent political commentary; it would instead be embraced as part of the festive, celebratory nature of the form. The political sentiment encoded in the epithalamic form—that authority rests with the male and the primary function of a queen is to produce children—therefore would be pushed into the subtext. The form both advances and mediates Junius's implicit criticism of female rule and anxiety about succession. Through classical allusion, and the privileging of Philip, the epithalamic form advances Junius's critique; however, the form also obscures that meaning by couching it in festivity and flattery.

The epithalamium by Scotsman George Buchanan, written (also in Latin) for the marriage in 1558 of Mary Stuart and Francis of Valois, similarly operates both overtly, as a public declaration of support for the marriage, and more subtly to express tensions associated with female rule. Buchanan's poetry and prose, highly regarded in all of Europe, circulated widely in England from the sixteenth century.³¹ He was a well-known political theorist who used neo-Latin poetry to comment on current social and political issues and figures. A staunch Protestant, Buchanan supported the Reformation, and looked to England for models of spiritual and political morality.³² In spite of the fact that Buchanan apparently relied upon Elizabeth I for political asylum, his position on the issue of female rule was publicly contested.³³ Amanda Shephard has described the polemic surrounding Buchanan's *History of Scotland* (published in 1582, many

³⁰ Heesakkers, p. 331.

³¹ 'Introduction' to *George Buchannan: The Political Poetry*, ed. Paul J. McGinnis and Arthur H. Williamson, *Scottish Historical Society*, Ser. 5, Vol. 8 (Edinburgh: Printed for the Scottish History Society by Lothkin Print, 1995).

³² *Ibid*, page 6.

³³ Buchanan's *History of Scotland* is frequently cited as aligned with Knox in its vociferous opposition to female rule. However, when he wrote the epithalamium in 1558, it is probable that his anti-gynecocratic attitudes were nascent if not fully formed.

years after the epithalamium), which she determines functioned on several levels to critique rule by women.³⁴ Buchanan's selection and presentation of events was criticized by his contemporary Henry Howard, who accused Buchanan of embellishing historical evidence in order to support the abdication of Mary Stuart. In the *History*, Buchanan contends that Scotland had traditionally used a system of 'elective monarchy' by which a candidate was selected from among the king's relatives.³⁵ Under such a system, women presumably would be excluded from consideration for succession. Buchanan apparently wanted to prove that female rule should not be tolerated in Scotland. The evidence that Howard cites to expose Buchanan is convincing—though not unequivocal—in ascertaining how Buchanan felt about gynecocracy. However, we can conclude from Howard's accusation that Buchanan and his contemporaries were well versed in the use of various devices to distance themselves from positions that might be considered politically dangerous. I suggest that Buchanan's epithalamium, like Junius's, functions in a similarly hooded fashion to subvert the authority of Mary Stuart. It is further probable that since Mary was only fourteen when she married for the first time, Buchanan also wished to undermine the Queen's mother and advisor, Marie de Guise.

Buchanan's epithalamium, though written as was Junius's in the Claudian style, follows Catullus in some significant ways. For example, in addition to the conventional praising of the gods, nature, and the bride and groom, Buchanan's narrator serves as a master of ceremonies, addressing the groom, the bride, and the gods in turn. However, significantly, only 50 of the 287 lines of the poem are addressed to the ruling queen; the rest are directed either to Francis, to the gods, or to both bride and groom. Since this partiality to the groom is not part of the tradition, it probably reveals a bias in favor of Francis. Furthermore, the sections that are addressed to either Mary or to the couple are the most erotically charged, concentrating the audience's attention on Mary as a corporal being rather than a political one. The following lines, addressed to both bride and groom, remind the couple of the social investment in their 'private,' sexual life:

Soon it will be time for you to embrace, to exchange kisses, and not just kisses
either.

But do what you will, be moderate, share the happy day with us,

You will have to yourself all the joys of night.

But in fact you won't have them all to yourself:

It is right that we too should share joyfully in the joys belonging to you/

³⁴ See Amanda Shephard, *Gender and Authority*, pp. 155-58.

³⁵ Quoted in Shephard, p. 155.

We have shared the same wishes, offered sacrifice at the same altars.
(130)^{36 37}.

The emphasis here is on sharing in the 'joys' of the marriage bed; the repeated use of the pronoun 'we' (the 'mus' ending in the Latin) registers the communal stake in this wedding's consummation. While such a social element would be appropriate to the form, in its context as an epithalamium for a royal couple that also will produce a strategic political alliance between France and Scotland, it amplifies a connection between the sexual union of the bride and groom and the public well-being. The peace of two nations depends upon not only a successful marriage, but also one that will produce an heir to maintain that accord.

In the only other section to be addressed to Mary, Buchanan's narrator offers explicit advice to her on how to mediate between her role as queen and her role as wife. Because this passage is also erotic, however, there again seems to be more stress on Mary's corporeal role as wife than on her authority as Queen:

. . . And lesser than his father alone, should yield to you the scepter of royalty,
and declare you with tender countenance his [co-equal] lady,
Yet acknowledge your station in life as a woman, and accustom yourself to your
husband's authority,
Putting your royal authority aside to this extent.
Learn to bear the [marital] yoke, but together with a beloved husband,
Learn to be subject to your husband's direction,
The victor in times to come by being so.
Behold the ocean, how it rages sending its waves against the rocks, and how it
smashes the cliffs with swelling anger.
It beats on the headlands, and undermines the foundations of the world with its
incessant storms,
Wearing away the eroded boulders [by its ineluctable force].
But when the land surrenders to the sea, and invites the god to the sweet
hospitality of the sandy beach,
See how he abates his powers, and, lesser than himself,

³⁶ Quotations from *George Buchanan: The Political Poetry*, ed. by Paul J. McGinnis and Arthur H. Williamson (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1995).

³⁷ *Mox etiam amplecti, mox et geminare licebit / Basia, mox etiam non tantum basia: sed tu, / Quamlibet appropere, anmio moderare: beauctum / Nobiscum partire diem, tu gaudia noctis / Solus tota feres: quanquam neque gaudia noctis / Solus tota feres: et nos communiter aequum est / Laetitiam gaudere tuam: communia vota / Fecimus, et sacras pariter placavimus aras.* (65-74)

Peacefully rejoices to approach, as it were, the marriage bed, not disturbed, and
 not with a raging countenance,
 Not threatening with foam and fury, but with a serene demeanor,
 Laps the unobstructed shore, and, as it were, stealing little kisses,
 The little waves slipping backwards and forwards in their unceasing movement,
 The water playfully takes possession of the land. (140-141)³⁸

In this passage, the poet depicts a model of domestic power in which the negotiations between husband and wife involve both corporal and political issues. The poet recommends that the Queen yield her ‘royal authority’ in the present and accept a submissive role as a ‘woman,’ so that she might eventually become ‘the victor.’ However, it is never made explicit when—if ever—she might expect to become her husband’s champion. The language operates to gently subdue her, to encourage her to relinquish her claim to the ‘head,’ and become instead all body, ‘subject’ to her husband’s command. Buchanan’s language softens the impact of the implicit, gendered power structure, imagining a reciprocal, but distinctly hierarchical, partnership. The erotic play in this passage, metaphorized as the lapping of waves against a shore, implies a dynamic of mutuality that gradually allows for a masculine victory as the beach gives way to the water. Signs of struggle are evident in the poet’s mention of erosion and the ferocity of the sea. The force in this metaphor lies with the groom; Buchanan’s original Latin has the verb ‘*arrepit*,’ (accurately translated by McGinnis as ‘takes possession of’) which derives from *rapere*—with all of its violent connotations. However, it seems central to Buchanan’s model that in ‘the marriage bed’ masculine force should be kept under control, and that ‘a serene demeanor’ should prevail. The marital ideal presented by Buchanan suggests a mutual responsibility for domestic accord that is nevertheless dependent on female submission and masculine control. In its royal context, Buchanan’s epithalamium registers a distinct position on gynecocracy: there is no room for female authority to exist in its own right; it would only exist in relation to masculine ‘direction.’

³⁸ *Et solo genitore minor, tibi Regia sceptra / Submittat, blando et dominam te praedicet ore, / Sexum agnosce tamen, dominaeque immunis habenae / Hactenus imperio jam nunc assuesce jugali: / Disce jugum, sed cum dilecto conjuge, ferre: / Disce pati imperium, victrix patiendo futura. / Aspicias Oceanum saxa indignatus ut undis / Verberet, et cautes tumida circumfremat ira: / Rupibus incursat, demoliturque procellis / Fundamenta terens, scopulisque assultat adesis: / Ast ubi se tellus molli substravit arena, / Hospitioque Deum blande invitavit amoen, / Ipse domat vires, placidusque et se minor ire / In thelamos gaudet non torvo turbidus ore, / Non spumis fremituque minax, sed fronte serena / Littus inoffensum lambit, sensimque relabens / Arrepit facilis cerni, et, ceu mollia captet / Oscula, ludentes in littore lubricat undas. (235-252)*

In the next few lines of the poem, Buchanan borrows the Catullan ivy motif in order to stress the importance of female obedience. In Catullus, the verse reads as follows:

Just as the supple vine
Entwines the tree planted near
He will be entwined
By your embrace. (*Carmen* 61, 102-05)³⁹

The relationship between the vine and the tree in Catullus conveys a peaceful if delicate balance. Buchanan chooses to expand this motif, describing a different association:

Behold! The ivy with tender leaves grows to a lofty height, and little by little
insinuating itself, circles the oak in a spiral embrace,
And though a clinging vine stands out thereby, and likewise advances its head
amidst the stars.
A stern and commanding presence is mollified by means of obedience,
And love is acquired and kept by means of obedience. (253-58)⁴⁰

In Buchanan's poem, the ivy and the tree compete, with the ivy obtaining its height by 'insinuating itself' around the oak. The relationship that Buchanan expresses is one of balance through a type of manipulation—the oak might be stronger, but the ivy can use this to its advantage so that it too can advance. The last two lines of this section, however, and the repetition of 'obedience' (from *obsequi* meaning to yield to or to obey) emphasizes that it is only by yielding that this advantage can be accessed. Buchanan revises the Catullan motif to express a balance of domestic power in which female power does exist, but it is enabled only through its relation to the male.

III. The Elizabethan Epithalamium

With the death of Mary Tudor and the accession of Elizabeth I, England experienced its second successive queen regnant, and with Mary Stuart on the throne in Scotland, the sixteenth century had an unprecedented number of women in power. Debates concerning the appropriateness of female rule continued to rage, especially in the early part of Elizabeth's reign, fueled by an insecure political situation. A further

³⁹ *Lenta sed velut adsitas /vitis implicat arbores, /implicabitur in tuum/ complexum* (Catullus 61, 102-05).

⁴⁰ *Cernis ut infirmis hedera enitatur in altum / Frondibus, et molli serpens in robora flexu / Paullatim insinuet sese, et complexibus haerens / Emicet, et mediis pariter caput inserat astris. / Flectitur obsequio rigor, Obsequioque paratur, / Et retinetur amor.* (253-58).

complication for Elizabethans would have been the political debates about the Queen's own marriage—debates that were often conducted using a rhetoric that had epithalamic resonances. Politicians and clergymen who wished to persuade the Queen to marry argued against the Pauline glorification of virginity and celibacy; they advocated procreation and promoted an ideal that linked marriage with chastity and emphasized a pleasurable, companionable married life.⁴¹ Since epithalamia intersect each of these areas, it is possible to suspect that aristocratic poets risked being accused, as Buchanan was for his *History*, of using a form selectively to make a political statement against rule by an unmarried woman. Nevertheless, besides Edmund Spenser, at least two Elizabethan writers, Thomas Pound and Sir John Davies, produced epithalamic poetry during Elizabeth's reign.⁴² In these examples, the writers employ various strategies—at times to underscore, and at other times to mediate—the potentially controversial political ideology carried by the form.

Thomas Pound, a member of the Inns of Court during the 1560s, produced and participated in a variety of entertainments for his colleagues and other members of the nobility. He also apparently wrote and performed the role of Mercury before the Queen during the festivities at Kenilworth Castle in 1566.⁴³ As Michayel Pincombe points out, however, Pound is better known 'as an unyielding recusant, who spent more than half his long life in various gaols up and down England for his adherence to the Roman Catholic faith,' to which he apparently converted early in 1570 (350). Pound's two recitative wedding masques⁴⁴ were apparently produced for actual marriages prior to his conversion: 'The Montague Oration,'⁴⁵ for the marriage of the Earl of Southampton to the Lord Montague's daughter in 1565; and 'The Sussex Oration,'⁴⁶ for the marriage of

⁴¹ Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (New York: Routledge, 1996), Chapter 8.

⁴² There are a few additional English epithalamic texts including one produced by Sir Philip Sidney for the eclogues of book 3 of *The Old Arcadia*. Sidney's text is deeply embedded within his pastoral fiction, and as such, it operates differently than the epithalamia by Pound and Davies examined here. There is also an early epithalamion by John Lydgate (1422) written for the wedding of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and Jacqueline, Countess of Holland, Zealand, and Hainault.

⁴³ Michayel Pincombe's 'Introduction' to *Two Elizabethan Masque-Orations by Thomas Pound*, which he transcribed. *Bodleian Library Record* 12 (1987), 349-80.

⁴⁴ The recitative form of masque includes a speech which is performed as a prelude to an elaborate dance by elaborately costumed masquers. See Michayel Pincombe's note on p. 351.

⁴⁵ The full title of the oration as transcribed by Pincombe is as follows: 'The cotype of An oration Made and pronounced by Master pownde of lyncolnes Inne with A brave Maske owt of the same howse all one greatte horses Att the marriage off the yonge erle of South hampton to the lord Mountagues dawghter Abowt shrouetyde. 1565.'

⁴⁶ The full title is 'The cotype of an oration made and pronounced by Master pownd of Lyncolnes In with a Maske att the marriage of the earle of Sussex syster to Master myldmaye off lyncolnes Inne. 1566.'

the Earl of Sussex's sister to 'Master Myldmaye' in 1566. Pound's orations, though not epithalamia in the strictest sense, share a number of features with the classical and early sixteenth-century models. In addition to being part of the nuptial festivities, these include references to Hymen, Minerva, and Venus as well as a host of other mythological figures characteristic of epithalamia by Catullus and Claudian, verses that describe and compliment the bride and groom, and express a wish for procreation. These thematic similarities warrant the consideration of Pound's orations as epithalamic texts. Pound's introduction of the goddess Diana, however, suggests specifically Elizabethan tensions, linked to debates and discourses surrounding Elizabeth and her court.

On one level, the figure of Diana in Pound's orations symbolically engages the virgin's reluctance to acquiesce—physically and socially—to her new role as wife. Additionally, however, the use of a figure like Diana, who would be viewed as the spokeswoman for sexual purity, also suggests a connection to the Elizabethan marriage debates.⁴⁷ In 1565 and 1566, when Pound's orations were performed, Elizabeth's court was divided about the proposal of Charles, Archduke of Austria; Pound's orations possibly address these negotiations. Susan Doran makes the case that Pound's Sussex oration, which features a speech by Juno advocating marriage over chastity followed by Diana's reluctant agreement, should be viewed as one of the 'dramatic productions' that were presented as part of the 'general pressure on the queen to marry'.⁴⁸ Doran posits that many subjects favored the Habsburg marriage, and that aristocratic entertainments that depicted 'the goddess Diana representing virginity' being 'trounced by Venus or Juno, the goddess of marriage' reflected support for the union (264). While I agree with Doran that masques and entertainments like Pound's orations are not without a political content, I suggest that Pound's deployment of the figure of Diana in *both* orations (Doran examines only the Sussex) complicates the message. Instead of clear support of marriage at the expense of chastity symbolized by the triumph of Juno over Diana, we see a much less consistent representation of matrimony; the figure of Diana operates variously, at times in seeming support of marriage, and at other times a disruptive force.

⁴⁷ Evidence has shown that as early as 1560 Elizabeth was associated with the goddess Diana. For example, in *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority Gender and Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), Louis Montrose suggests that the now famous painting attributed to Frans Floris (ca. 1560) of Diana with her hunting dog (and the crescent moon crown) owned by William Cecil could well have been construed as 'Elizabeth-as-Diana,' an 'oblique compliment to the Virgin Queen' (pp. 94-95).

⁴⁸ Susan Doran, 'Juno Versus Diana: The Treatment of Elizabeth I's Marriage in Plays and Entertainments, 1561-1581', *The Historical Journal*, 38.2. (1995), 257-74 (p. 265).

In my view, instead of taking a side in the political debates over the Habsburg marriage, Pound seems to be avoiding taking such a position.

In 'The Montague Oration,' Diana makes an unprecedented appearance to bless the union: 'dyana never honored / A weddinge thus before /but that she hath some cause she sayth / to favoure this the more' (174-77). The presence of Diana is unusual, as Pound's verse emphasizes; she does not, for obvious reasons, appear in classical epithalamia. The innovative use of Diana to advocate married chastity suggests a link between Pound's orations and the Protestant positions arguing for the Queen's marriage: a unification of ideals of chastity with those of marriage. But Diana's vision of marriage as expressed here does not involve sexual intimacy. She suggests that consummation ought to be delayed for the space of 'at least a year' so that the two would physically remain virgins. Juno, on the other hand, in 'The Sussex Oration' advocates a definitely sexual sort of married chastity: 'for wedlocke I lyke best / it is the honorablest state / it passeth all the rest / my jove saith she doth know this joye / this bodye is his owne / And what swete use I have of his / to men may not be knowen' (366-73). Though Juno and Diana seem to have different attitudes about the role of sexual intimacy in married chastity, an idea of purity in both cases is linked with fulfillment in marriage. Both goddesses would seem to agree that marriage (even, perhaps, of queens) is a state superior to single life. However, this message is complicated when Diana appears again in 'The Sussex Oration,' directly following Juno's speech, offering a sullen counterpoint to Juno's celebration of the physical joys of marriage:

Ah what A losse have I
One of the flowers of all my traine
And Apple of my eye
My treasure of true chastytye
My sparke mi starre in dede
My Radclyffe oh my noble nymphe
A wyffe must now procede
Oh what A dyamound I forgoo
Ah my dere hartes deligt
Alas the iewell she shall lose
Her weddyng daye att night
But she was borne yet therto
And I must be contente
Her mache is good and she can have
No cause for to repent. (495-509)

Like Juno, Diana focuses on the physical aspects of marriage, but she laments, rather than celebrates, the loss of her 'noble nympe's jewel' and seems resigned to the married fate into which her protégé was born. Significantly, it is this reluctant perspective of Diana's, not Juno's more sanguine one, with which Pound leaves his audience.

As the oration continues, Diana offers a surprising gift to the bride: Diana's 'naked picture to peruse . . . to hange all ways before her eyes / which ever honourde me / not everye one should see me so / that could acteon [sic.] tell / whose shape I chaunged for spying me / thus bathinge in A well' (520-29). The significance of such a present from a notoriously shy deity is somewhat enigmatic. Pound's Diana rewrites the Ovidian myth of Actaeon by allowing her body to become the object of the bride's gaze. This seems to be an attempt to maintain, rather than sever, the homosocial (and possibly homoerotic) relationship between the goddess and her nymph, effectively disrupting the smooth transition of bride to a wife. Pound's use of Diana in this epithalamic masque interrupts the progression towards consummation that Juno advocates, confusing the message about marriage, and by extension, the work's political content.

While Pound's wedding masque orations obscure political commentary, Sir John Davies's *Epithalamion*, written for the marriage of Lord Burleigh's granddaughter Elizabeth Vere to the Earl of Derby in January of 1595, avoids controversial territory altogether. The *Epithalamion*, like much of Davies's poetry, was written for the amusement of powerful people. Two of his poetic works, *Hymnes of Astraea* and *Nosce Teipsum*, were dedicated directly to the Queen, and Davies's early work, the *Orchestra* (1596), was also eventually 'adapted to serve as an entertainment for the Queen' (Krueger xxxii).⁴⁹ As a member of the Inns of Court, and an aspiring young lawyer, Davies clearly sought advancement through his writing. To that end, he created poetry and pageantry that reflected the goals of the Elizabethan regime: England is presented in his works as strong, well-ordered and harmonious, headed by a monarch of unquestioned authority and unparalleled beauty. Roy Strong has argued that, from as early as 1594, Davies's poetry and entertainments provide a strong sense of the 'idea of the English court in the final years of the Eliza-cult, projecting an utterly coherent image of the Queen, giving vitality, elegance and life by drawing together all the complex mythological threads which for over forty years had created the image of the Virgin Queen' (46-7). Strong observes that in Davies's work, specifically his twenty-six acrostics titled *Hymns to Astraea*, Elizabeth appears as the goddesses Diana, Venus, and

⁴⁹ Davies quotations taken from *The Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. by Robert Krueger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

Virgo merged into one—'ever young and ever beautiful' (47), capable of provoking desire, but nevertheless inviolate. I would emphasize the political expediency of representing England, and England's monarch, as Astraea or Virgo: unpenetrated and untouchable, an ideology that also appears prominently in other portraiture and poetry from the period.⁵⁰

In *Orchestra*, Davies develops the conceit of dance as representative of an ordered, well-governed society, harmoniously expressed through music and convergence, which Strong terms a 'dance of state' (53).⁵¹ In the *Epithalamion*, such images become political, converging with a representation of marital harmony that transcends the body. The final phase in the Elizabethan regime's ideology would no longer engage the theory of the queen's two bodies; instead, a unified image emerges of the monarch as perpetually virginal and unchallenged politically.⁵² In Davies's poem, no trace remains of the virgin's struggle to retain her maidenly status, nor is there a gendered competition for supremacy between head and body. In fact, in Davies's poem, gender difference is itself erased. The imagery of music and dance that Davies draws from in later works to extol Elizabeth and her government appears in this poem, helping to present marriage as devoid of struggle or conflict—a perfect and unproblematic merging of two people. Davies's *Epithalamion*, therefore, revises earlier, more conflicting examples of the epithalamic form to create a work that stresses concord and order without contention.

Davies's *Epithalamion* contains a number of differences from earlier examples of the form. The most conspicuous variance is the absence of Hymen or any other gods or goddesses, a move which keeps Davies from entering, as for example Pound does, into political debates on gender and marriage. Instead, Davies constructs the poem around the nine muses, each of whom speak a verse, and an introductory verse presented by a narrator. The opening verse introduces the theme of a transcendent 'love' that is connected not only with honor and virtue, but with music and harmony:

Love not that Love that is a child and blynde,

⁵⁰ Strong mentions the sieve portraits and the Rainbow portrait as examples of the queen as represented as a Virgin, with her hair flowing about her shoulders.

⁵¹ It is important to note that Davies's *Orchestra* is not without its ironies: a courtier, for example, tries to seduce a queen while her husband is away.

⁵² In court entertainments like the *Four Foster Children of Desire* (1580), for example, monarchical power was staged as an unsuccessful assault on an impenetrable fortress representative of chastity. However, this plot line could also be exploited by courtiers to register points of view contrary to those of the monarch. By eliding the conflict over the preservation of chastity, Davies circumvents the possibility for a controversial reading.

But that Heroicke, honorable Love
 Which first the fighting Elements cominde,
 And taught the world in harmony to move:
 That God of Love, whose sweet attractive power
 First founded cities, and societyes,
 Which linkes trewe frendes, and to each paramour
 That virtewe loves, a virtewous Love affies.
 This Love hath caused the Muses to record
 Their sweetest tuens, and most celestially,
 To you sweet Lady, and to you great Lorde,
 In honor of your joyfull nuptiall.
 And to their tuens this prayer they still apply,
 That with your dayes your joyes maye multiplie. (1-14)

Davies draws a distinction between the ideal of love that the muses will proclaim in the poem and the 'blynde' love of Cupid, which is associated with a physical or erotic love. Instead, what is emphasized is a kind of creative power, significantly linked not only with harmony and music, but also with social unity, friendship, and the cosmos. Each of the muses elaborates on this theme, offering a different perspective on the couple's unity. The erotic elements of the classical poetry are replaced in Davies's poem by this ideal of mutuality. The verse sung by the muse Erato communicates this shift:

And I the wayting mayde of bewtyes Queene,
 Which oft am wonte to singe of wanton Love,
 Since I these sacred nuptials have seene,
 An other godhead in my brest doth move;
 For now I singe of bewty of the minde,
 Which bewtifies the fayrest outward bewty,
 And of a passion which is never blinde,
 But waytes on virtewe with respectful dutye.
 O sacred Love, wher one loves only one,
 Where each to other is a mirror fayre
 Wherein the selves are each to other shone:
 Such is your sacred love, illustrious payre.
 Whose fyre like vestas flame shall never dye.
 But with your dayes your joyes shall multiplie. (85-98)

As in the opening verse, Erato reports herself transformed by the 'sacred nuptials,' so that she no longer concerns herself with physical or wanton love, but with a 'bewty of

the minde' which transcends such love and joins the married couple together. Because such love transcends the body, gender difference does not manifest itself; instead, the loves merge together, reflecting each other as mirrors.

In the verse by Euterpe, the muse of lyric poetry, Davies includes an allusion to the Catullan motif of the vine and the tree that I discuss above in relation to Buchanan's epithalamium. Unlike either Catullus or Buchanan, however, Davies's deployment of that allusion conveys neither an erotic suggestion nor a sign of struggle. Instead, he emphasizes a 'sympathye of Love' that works to defuse such suggestions:

Longe may you Joye such sympathye of Love
As doth between the Elme and the Vine remayne,
Or betwine palme trees, twinns, and turtle doves,
Wher in one Lyfe doth live the Lives of twayne.
Longe live you in each other mutually,
That with your dayes your Joyes maye multiplie. (65-70)

Here, the elm and the vine do not bend around each other as they do in Catullus or compete for the light as they do in Buchanan. The relationship between them is instead one that is equated with a list of other pairs that have a special connection between them. Davies's innovation overwrites the earlier relationships that are specifically gendered and implicitly hierarchical, with one that derives its power from mutuality.

Davies's *Epithalamion* presents marriage as a state that transcends the body, and therefore avoids association with controversial discourses about female rule or succession. While Pound's oration obscures the epithalamic form's erotic energy, Davies's text converts the traditional epithalamic focus on consummation into something spiritual, in keeping with the ideology of the Elizabethan regime that sought to present the coherent image of the Queen that Davies would help to develop in later work. In their efforts to evade or obfuscate the subject of consummation, the Elizabethan poets seem to be working against the precedents set by both Junius and Buchanan whose poetry functions to devalue female political authority, linking the brides in both cases more firmly with the material concerns of consummation and succession. All of this points to the conclusion that Elizabethan epithalamia are scarce among the ruling classes because of the ways in which epithalamic motifs would have resonated with political debates concerning gynecocracy and succession. To work in this mode, a poet interested in winning the favor—and perhaps also the financial support of the Queen—would have to be careful, as both Pound and Davies were, that

their presentation somehow evaded the politically loaded issue of consummation so central to the epithalamic form.

Although Spenser's *Epithalamion* has received far more critical attention than any other epithalamic work, it owes much to its predecessors and contemporaries. When considered in light of the classical and contemporary contexts that define the epithalamium, Spenser's decision to work in this mode appears more politically motivated than has generally been supposed. Perhaps arguing against the general trend in Spenser scholarship, Louis Montrose has posited that in much of Spenser's poetry, including the *Epithalamion*, the poet transcends his humble 'poor scholar' origins and fashions himself into a subject of exalted status.⁵³ With regard to the shorter poems, including the *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*, Montrose argues that they claim a central place in the Spenserian canon because they function 'by foregrounding the publicly inconsequential subjects of the poet's autobiographical fictions and investing them with the rhetorical energies hitherto reserved for his encomia of the monarch; and furthermore, by calling attention to this very process of displacement.'⁵⁴ As Montrose notes, in the *Epithalamion*, Spenser breaks with tradition and presents himself as the poet-bridegroom, a move that elevates his own perspective, as well as his own nuptials, to royal proportions. Montrose concludes that 'in the *Epithalamion*, Spenser draws attention to his appropriation for a personal and bourgeois occasion of a celebratory genre normally reserved for the politically and dynastically significant marriages of members of royalty and the aristocracy.'⁵⁵ In doing so, Spenser rhetorically elevates his own social position, honor, and artistic excellence to one equal in importance to the ruling elite.

An understanding of the ideology of the epithalamium, as well as its traditional use as a means for self promotion and political critique, suggests that Spenser used the form not only to clarify and advance his own position as a professional author, but also to respond to a variety of shifting cultural and political concerns. My work extends Montrose's analysis by providing a specific context for this particular literary form. When Spenser decided to publish the *Epithalamion*, he selected a form that had been previously used by Junius and Buchanan to covertly undermine female rule by focusing attention on the corporal body of the ruling queen and ignoring her political one. Furthermore, while his contemporaries, Pound and Davies, treat the subject of consummation obliquely, Spenser's *Epithalamion*, as many critics have noted, is

⁵³ See Montrose, 'Spenser's Domestic Domain: Poetry, Property, and the Early Modern Subject', pp. 83-130.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 95.

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 114-115.

organized around the twenty-four hours of the wedding day and night; the poem, therefore, *culminates* with the sexual consummation of the union in stanzas twenty-one and twenty-two. While Spenser avoids any obvious political commentary by presumably writing about his own wooing, winning, wedding, and bedding of Elizabeth Boyle (whom he married in 1594) instead of a royal or aristocratic marriage, his choice of form itself, when compared to the use of the form by his predecessors and contemporaries, appears to be politically significant.

By 1601, towards the very end of Elizabeth's reign—perhaps when the reality of the queen's aging body was increasingly at odds with the ideology of the Virgin Queen propagated by her regime—the epithalamium appears to have enjoyed an intensified popularity. Examples of the form by John Donne and Ben Jonson (each of whom wrote three epithalamia), perhaps inspired by Spenser's poetic achievement, helped to catapult the form into a literary trend that exploded after Elizabeth's death in 1603.⁵⁶ While the focus of the present essay is on the poems that predate Spenser, the political context established by those early poems (and probably informed Spenser's work) suggests that this often overlooked or trivialized form, particularly as it appears in circulation near the end of the Queen's reign, should be reconsidered as potentially politically charged.

⁵⁶ See Tufte, *The Poetry of Marriage*, especially pp. 231-258.