

FEATURES OF THE LATIN
EPITHALAMIES OF
18TH CENTURY LITHUANIA

Summary

Genre of the wedding poetry, developed in the ancient Greece, manifested itself as two kinds of the wedding hymns, i.e. hymeneals and epithalamies. However, these two generic varieties became unified in a short while, and the compositions dedicated to weddings were more frequently termed as epithalamies.

The majority of authors writing poetics and rhetorics of the modern times used to discuss epithalamy, although hymeneal was often mentioned as well. Julius Caesar Scaliger, having discussed both varieties in his poetic, did not highlight their differences. Poetic by Jacobus Pontanus-Joannes Buechlerus, which had clearly been influenced by Scaliger's theory, essentially only discussed epithalamy, although the term hymeneal (*hymenaeus*) was used in parallel synonymously, yet without any theoretical explanations. Matthias Casimirus Sarbievius, who had attributed the wedding poetry to the so-called *silvas* (*silvae*), gave theoretical definition of epithalamy and discerned two more generic varieties, i.e. oaristias (*oaristiae*) and hymeneals. Josephus Juvencius briefly defined only epithalamy in his poetic. Authors of the popular rhetorics Charles Paiot and Dominique de Colonia presented detailed descriptions of the prosaic variety of epithalamy, i.e. the wedding speeches, in their works. It should be noted, that in treatises by Filip Nereusz Golański and other theoreticians of the Age of Enlightenment no genre of the wedding poetry is mentioned at all.

Researchers of the antique literature usually discern two kinds of epithalamy, i.e. the lyrical and the epic one. The latter is further subdivided into the mythological-narrative and the rhetorical-panegyric varieties.

The pattern of the epic epithalamy is popular in the 16th century literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The epithalamic compositions used to adopt forms of epigrammatic poetry as well.

The baroque epithalamies of the 17th century are characterized by an exceptional variety. Among them, traditional compositions following the antique generic pattern used to be created, and also, prosaic panegyric epithalamies, odes, dithyrambs, epic poems, dramatic epithalamies, artificial, epigrammatic poetry used to be published. Elogy became increasingly popular.

The 18th century epithalamic compositions clearly followed the thriving tradition of the prosaic variety of the 17th century. Imitations of the 17th century experience can also be pointed out in the titles of the compositions dedicated to weddings. Here, long descriptive titles usually predominate, comprising certain meaningful elements which allow attribution of these compositions to the genre of epithalamy, e.g. the “epithalamic speech” (*oratio epithalamica*), the “nuptial greeting” (*gratulatio nuptialis*), “for the happy day of hymenaeus” (*ad festivos hymenaei soles*), etc.

The review of publications printed by the Vilnius Academy press allows us to assert that the majority of the epithalamic publications consist of the prosaic panegyric epithalamies, i.e. the wedding speeches. Their texts are frequently interspersed with quotations from prose or poetry and elogic insertions. Elogy itself also embodied a popular form of nuptial greetings, although the group of these publications is not so numerous as the previous one.

It should be noted, that no poetical epithalamies have been found in the repertoire of the Academy press publications. Thus, as the only available example of the wedding poetry, an epithalamic poem by piarist Antanas Mikuckis, dedicated to the wedding of Jurgis Potockis, can be regarded. This poem was included into the anthology of the occasional poetry by piarists, published in the Vilnius Piarist press in 1779. This particular poem by Mikuckis should also be regarded as the latest composition of this genre (although the definite date of its creation is unknown, it is clear, however, that Potockis' wedding took place in 1773, and the anthology was published in 1779).

The epithalamic compositions of the 18th century are fairly distanced from their antique predecessors. The encomia of the newlywed couple and their relatives occupy central place in these compositions. The final parts traditionally contain wishes to attain offspring; but also exhortations to work for the good of the Homeland, to honor the glorious name of the ancestors sound with special relevance here. Refrain is no longer used, neither descriptions of the wedding party or the presents can be found here, nor any obscene details. Some compositions are still characterized by the stylistic features of the antique epithalamies (e.g. personages from the antique mythology are employed, retaining the traditional semantic connotations), while in the others the traditional mythological personages are as much as mentioned. These changes have been brought forth by the aesthetic of the Age of Enlightenment as well as by the altering social priorities, endowing greater relevance to the civic values.