

Renascence Editions

Edmund Spenser's *Prothalamion*

A Note on the Renascence Editions text:

This HTML etext of the *Prothalamion* is based upon that found in *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Edmund Spenser* [Grosart, London, 1882] by R.S. Bear at the University of Oregon. Two typographical errors in the third stanza have been emended. The text is in the public domain. Markup and gloss copyright © 1996 University of Oregon; this version is distributed for nonprofit use only.

Prothalamion

Or

A Spousal Verse made by

Edm. Spenser.

IN HONOVR OF THE DOV-

ble mariage of the two Honorable & vertuous
*Ladies, the Ladie Elizabeth and the Ladie Katherine
Somerset*, Daughters to the Right Honourable the
Earle of *Worcester* and espoused to the two worthie
Gentlemen *M. Henry Gilford*, and
M. William Peter Esquyers.

Notes

Notes will appear in this space when their links are activated from within the texts (left window) in frames mode.

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AT LONDON.
Printed for *VWilliam Ponsonby*.
1596.

1



Alme was the day, and through the trembling ayre,
Sweete breathing *Zephyrus* did softly play
A gentle spirit, that lightly did delay
Hot *Titans* beames, which then did glyster fayre:
When I whom sullein care,
Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay

In Princes Court, and expectation vayne
Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,
Like empty shaddowes, did afflict my brayne,
Walkt forth to ease my payne
Along the shoare of siluer streaming *Themmes*,
Whose *rutty* Bancke, the which his Riuer hemmes,
Was paynted all with *variable* flowers,
And all the meades adord with daintie gemmes,
Fit to decke maydens bowres,
And crowne their Paramours,
Against the Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete *Themmes* runne softly, till I end my Song.

2

There, in a Meadow, by the Riuers side,
A Flocke of *Nymphes* I chaunced to espy,
All louely Daughters of the *Flood* thereby,
With goodly greenish locks all loose *vntyde*,
As each had bene a Bryde,
And each one had a little wicker basket,
Made of fine twigs *entrayled* curiously,

In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket:
 And with fine Fingers, cropt full feateously
 The tender stalkes on hye.
 Of euery sort, which in that Meadow grew,
 They gathered some; the Violet pallid blew,
 The little Dazie, that at euening closes,
 The virgin Lillie, and the Primrose trew,
 With store of vermeil Roses,
 To decke their Bridegromes posies,
 Against the Brydale day, which was not long:
 Sweete *Themmes* runne softly, till I end my Song.

3

With that I saw two Swannes of goodly hewe,
 Come softly swimming downe along the Lee;
 Two fairer Birds I yet did neuer see:
 The snow which doth the top of Pindus strew,
 Did neuer whiter shew,
 Nor *Jove* himselfe when he a Swan would be
 For loue of Leda, whiter did appeare:
 Yet *Leda* was they say as white as he,
 Yet not so white as these, nor nothing neare;
 So purely white they were,
 That euen the gentle streame, the which them bare,
 Seem'd foule to them, and bad his billowes spare
 To wet their silken feathers, least they might
 Soyle their fair plumes with water not so fayre,
 And mar their beauties bright,
 That shone as heauens light,
 Against their Brydale day, which was not long:
 Sweete *Themmes* runne softly, till I end my Song.

4

Eftsoones the *Nymphes*, which now had Flowers their fill,
 Ran all in haste, to see that siluer brood,
 As they came floating on the Christal Flood:
 Whom when they sawe, they stood amazed still,
 Their wondring eyes to fill:
 Them seem'd they neuer saw a sight so fayre,
 Of Fowles so louely, that they sure did deeme

Them heauenly borne, or to be that same payre
 Which through the Skie draw *Venus* siluer Teeme:
 For sure they did not seeme
 To be begot of any earthly Seede,
 But rather Angels or of Angels breede:
 Yet were they bred of *Somers-heat* they say,
 In sweetest Season, when each Flower and weede
 The earth did fresh aray:
 So fresh they seem'd as day,
 Euen as their Brydale day, which was not long:
 Sweete *Themmes* runne softly till I end my Song.

5

Then forth they all out of their baskets drew,
 Great store of Flowers, the honour of the field,
 That to the sense did fragrant odours yeild,
 All which vpon those goodly Birds they threw,
 And all the Waues did strew,
 That like old *Peneus* Waters they did seeme,
 When downe along by pleasant *Tempes* shore
 Scattered with Flowres, through *Thessaly* they streeme,
 That they appeare through Lillies plenteous store,
 Like a Brydes Chamber flore:
 Two of those *Nymphes*, meane while, two Garlands bound,
 Of freshest Flowres which in that Mead they found,
 The which presenting all in trim Array,
 Their snowie Foreheads therewithall they crownd,
 Whil'st one did sing this Lay,
 Prepar'd against that Day,
 Against their Brydale day, which was not long:
 Sweete *Themmes* runne softly till I end my Song.

6

Ye gentle Birdes, the worlds faire ornament,
 And heauens glories, whom this happie hower
 Doth leade vnto your louers blisfull bower,
 Ioy may you haue and gentle hearts content
 Of your loues *couplement*:
 And let faire *Venus*, that is Queene of loue,
 With her heart-quelling *Sonne* vpon you smile,

Whose smile they say, hath vertue to remoue
 All Loues dislike, and friendships faultie guile

For euer to assoile.

Let endlesse Peace your steadfast hearts accord,
 And blessed Plentie wait vpon you[r] bord,
 And let your bed with pleasures chast abound,
 That fruitfull issue may to you afford:
 Which may your foes confound,
 And make your ioyes redound,
 Vpon your Brydale day, which is not long:
 Sweete *Themmes* runne softlie, till I end my Song.

7

So ended she; and all the rest around
 To her redoubled that her vndersong,
 Which said, their bridale daye should not be long.

And gentle Eccho from the neighbour ground,
 Their accents did resound?

So forth, those ioyous Birdes did passe along,
 Adowne the Lee, that to them murmurde low,
 As he would speake, but that he lackt a tong
 Yeat did by signes his glad affection show,
 Making his streame run slow.

And all the foule which in his flood did dwell
 Gan flocke about these twaine, that did excell
 The rest, so far, as Cynthia doth shend

The lesser starres. So they enranged well,
 Did on those two attend,

And their best seruice lend,
 Against their wedding day, which was not long:
 Sweete *Themmes* runne softly, till I end my song.

8

At length they all to mery *London* came,
 To mery *London*, my most kindly Nurse,
 That to me gaue, this Lifes first natiue sourse:

Though from another place I take my name,
 An house of auncient fame.

There when they came, whereas those bricky towres,
 The which on *Themmes* brode aged backe doe ryde,

Where now the studious Lawyers haue their bowers
 That whylome wont the Templer Knights to byde,
 Till they decayd through pride:
 Next whereunto there standes a stately place,
 Where oft I gayned giftes and goodly grace
 Of that great Lord, which therein wont to dwell,
 Whose want too well, now feeles my friendless case:
 But Ah here fits not well
 Olde woes, but ioyes to tell
 Against the bridale daye, which is not long:
 Sweete *Themmes* runne softly till I end my Song.

9

Yet therein now doth lodge a noble Peer,
 Great *Englands* glory and the Worlds wide wonder,
 Whose dreadfull name, late through all *Spaine* did thunder.
 And *Hercules* two pillors standing neere,
 Did make to quake and feare:
 Faire branch of Honor, flower of Cheualrie,
 That fillest *England* with thy triumphes fame,
 Ioy haue thou of thy noble victorie,
 And endlesse happinesse of thine owne name
 That promiseth the same:
 That through thy prowesse and victorious armes,
 Thy country may be freed from forraine harmes:
 And great *Elisaes* glorious name may ring
 Through al the world, fil'd with thy wide Alarmes,
 Which some braue muse may sing
 To ages following,
 Vpon the Brydale day, which is not long:
 Sweete *Themmes* runne softly till I end my Song.

10

From those high Towers, this noble Lord issuing,
 Like radiant *Hesper* when his golden hayre
 in th'*Ocean* billowes he hath Bathed fayre,
 Descended to the Riuers open vewing,
 With a great traine ensuing.
 Aboue the rest were goodly to bee seene
 Two gentle Knights of louely face and feature,
 Beseeming well the bower of anie Queene,

With gifts of wit and ornaments of nature,
Fit for so goodly stature:
That like the twins of *Love* they seem'd in sight,
Which decke the Bauldricke of the Heauens bright:
They two forth pacing to the Riuers side,
Receiued those two faire Brides, their Loues delight,
Which at th'appointed tyde,
Each one did make his Bryde,
Against their Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete *Themmes* runne softly, till I end my Song.

FINIS.

Notes

Prothalamion

-- "before a marriage.". This poem was written on the occasion of (and probably read or performed at) the double wedding of the daughters of the Earl of Worcester, circa 1595.

Notes

Zephyrus

-- wind; in particular the West Wind.

Notes

Titans

--proto-gods of Greek mythology; in this case Helios, son of Hyperion: god of the sun.

Notes

rutty

--here "rut" = "root"; hence "root-covered."

Notes

variable

--the multicolored flowers.

Notes

Flood

--the river Thames.

Notes

vntyed

--"the custom was for brides to wear their hair loose at weddings." --Richard Sylvester, The Anchor Anthology of Sixteenth Century Verse.

Notes

entryled --braided.

Notes

flasket

--a basket, wider than a fruit basket, very shallow, for gathering flowers.

Notes

feateously
--nimply.

Notes

vermeil

--crimson.

Notes

Pindus

--mountain home of the Muses in Greece.

Notes

Leda

--visited by Jupiter, who appeared to her as a swan.

Notes

Somers-heat

--Elizabeth and Katherine *Somerset*.

Notes

Peneus

--river near mount Pindus, seat of the Muses.

Notes

couplement

-- joining together (in marriage).

Notes

Sonne

--Cupid.

Notes

dislike

--a disdain for romantic love, or the humanistic ideal of love, or all three together: see *Loves Labours Lost*.

Notes

assoile

--remove.

Notes

>**undersong**

--a short chorus, usually consist of but a line or half line of verse, rhyming with the lines sung by the lead.

Notes

Cynthia

--the Moon; also, Queen Elizabeth, who outshines all her court.

Notes

brickly towres

--visible from that spot was one of the Inns of Court, the Temple, dating back to the Knights Templar.

Notes

all Spaine

--a reference to the raiding exploits of Essex.

Notes

pillors

--rocky prominences at the straits of Gibraltar: the "Pillars of Hercules."

Notes

twins of Jove

the Gemini, Castor and Pollux.--

Notes

Bauldricke

--a belt for carrying a scabbard and other articles of war, often studded with semiprecious stones; here, the zodiac.
