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What's in A Title Page?

Title-Page Topics of Neo-Latin Epithalamia
Printed in Sixteenth-Century Denmark*

In 1987, when I started working on the Neo-Latin wedding poetry of sixteenth-century Denmark, a well-read colleague of mine recommended that I take a look at Stina Hansson's 1975 dissertation on the wedding and funeral poems of the seventeenth-century Swedish poet Lars Johanson Lucidor.¹ This was good advice to a young classical philologist with only limited experience in the field of literary genre studies. In fact, Stina Hansson's Lucidor book convinced me of the importance of combining philological-literary exegesis with the historical study of the intellectual and material contexts of the writings in question.² Whereas much of the later twentieth-century scholarship dealing with early modern literature either took the shape of word-for-word commentaries or proceeded nearly exclusively according to a 'literary sociological' approach ('who writes what to whom and in which social context'), in Stina Hansson's work one is offered close readings that are illuminated by in-depth studies of the poet's craftsmanship, taking into account book history, the history of textual transmission and reception, the history of education, and the history of rhetoric. An aspiring historian of rhetoric myself, familiarity with Stina Hansson's Lucidor book made me even more determined to base my study of the Danish Neo-Latin wedding poems on an historical and ideological examination of their background in the rhetorical tradition in general, and specifically in late-classical epideictic theory and practice.³

Early-modern occasional poetry appears to be a research topic that it is difficult to set aside completely. Thus, I've recently learned that Stina Hansson is resuming her work on seventeenth-century Swedish wedding poetry. As for myself, nearly twenty years after my first encounter with the material, I am now preparing an edition of the extant Neo-Latin wedding poems from sixteenth-century Denmark.⁴ As a tribute to Stina Hansson, I offer in what follows an overview of the results of my examination of the way in which these Renaissance epithalamia are presented to the readers on the very title pages of the booklets (or headings of the broadsides) containing the

poems. It is my hope that the analysis of this material, which is often overlooked in scholarship, might be of special interest to Stina Hansson, since it focuses on the (rhetorical and sociological) issue of *decorum*, which she has dealt with in various contexts and from various points of view in her scholarly work.

A brief presentation of the wedding poems

Neo-Latin wedding poetry is the second best represented genre in sixteenth-century Danish literature, only surpassed in number of extant copies by funeral poems and orations. Defining 'Danish wedding poetry' as poems written on the occasion of actual weddings by authors born in the Kingdom of Denmark, then including Norway, Iceland, and Skåne, as well as the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, leaves us with around 250 extant wedding poems, contained in around 60 printed booklets or broadsides (and a few manuscripts), from the period 1541 through 1600.⁵

The length of the wedding poems varies from a minimum of 2–4 lines to a maximum of around 300 lines; a typical poem consists of 30–50 lines. In imitation of classical Roman poetry, most of the poems are written in dactylic hexameters or elegiac couplets (an hexameter line followed by a pentameter line). These – the easiest of the classical meters – were the ones that school pupils were first introduced to in their grammar classes and, accordingly, they were the ones that the poetry-writing university students were most familiar with.⁶ However, among the extant poems there are also some written in lyric meters (the Sapphic stanza, for example), and even a few examples of polymetrical composition (that is, poems in which the meter varies from line to line). It clearly took an experienced or audacious writer to try his hand at these more complex meters.

The statistics that I have compiled on the basis of the extant material, show that something like half of the poems were written by university students, and that the main part of their addressees were members of the new and prospering middle class (school masters, university professors, clergymen, doctors, pharmacists). In fact, there seem to have been clear-cut rules as to who could write to whom. Thus, although there are examples of friends exchanging wedding poems in each other's honor, most of the extant poems are written by an author with a lower social position than the addressee, for example, members of a school class addressing their teacher or headmaster, or middle-class poets addressing noblemen or even royal patrons. As regards

patronage, however, my statistics indicate that only authors who had completed their university education and had already obtained a position in the church or at the university could address wedding poems to members of the royalty. At any rate, the composition of occasional poetry was, to be sure, a male domain: we do not know of any woman wedding poet of the period, and even though most of the epithalamia are dedicated to both the bride and the bridegroom, there are also examples of poems that do not give the name of the bride, and poems in which the bride is not mentioned at all.

Much of the information regarding the social status of the authors and the addressees, as well as the relationship they had to each other, is to be found on the very title pages of the printed books and in the elaborate headings of the broadsides. In addition, the title pages and headings usually announce the character of the poem(s) contained in the book or the broadside: thus, for instance, the main heading often makes mention of the specific epideictic subgenre according to which the wedding poem is composed.

In the following overview, I refer repeatedly to figure 1, which shows the title pages of two booklets containing epithalamia. Both were printed in Copenhagen, and for the sake of brevity I shall refer to them according to the years in which they were printed, that is, 1577 and 1599, respectively.⁷ The printed numbers given to the various title-page elements in figure 1 have also been used to structure the following account of my findings.

Title-page topics

1. Usually the *titulus*, or the main heading, is printed at the top of the title page. Some *tituli* are very general in their description of the contents of the poems, for example, the general *titulus*, “Epithalamion” (Wedding Poem), as found in 1599. Others refer specifically to the epideictic subgenre employed in the wedding poem(s), for example “Ecloga” (a pastoral poem that contains a dialogue between two shepherds on the subject of the wedding and the bridal couple), as found in 1577. In some cases, as 1599 exemplifies, the *titulus* is supplemented by the wording “nuptiis secundis”, indicating that the bridegroom, in this case Hans Pedersen (“Joannes Petri”), is remarrying.
2. Next follow **epithets in praise of the bridegroom**. These *epitheta ornantia* generally precede the bridegroom’s name and, if used to describe a middle-class bridegroom, they usually refer to his learning and social respectability. Thus, in 1599, Hans Pedersen is described as a venerable

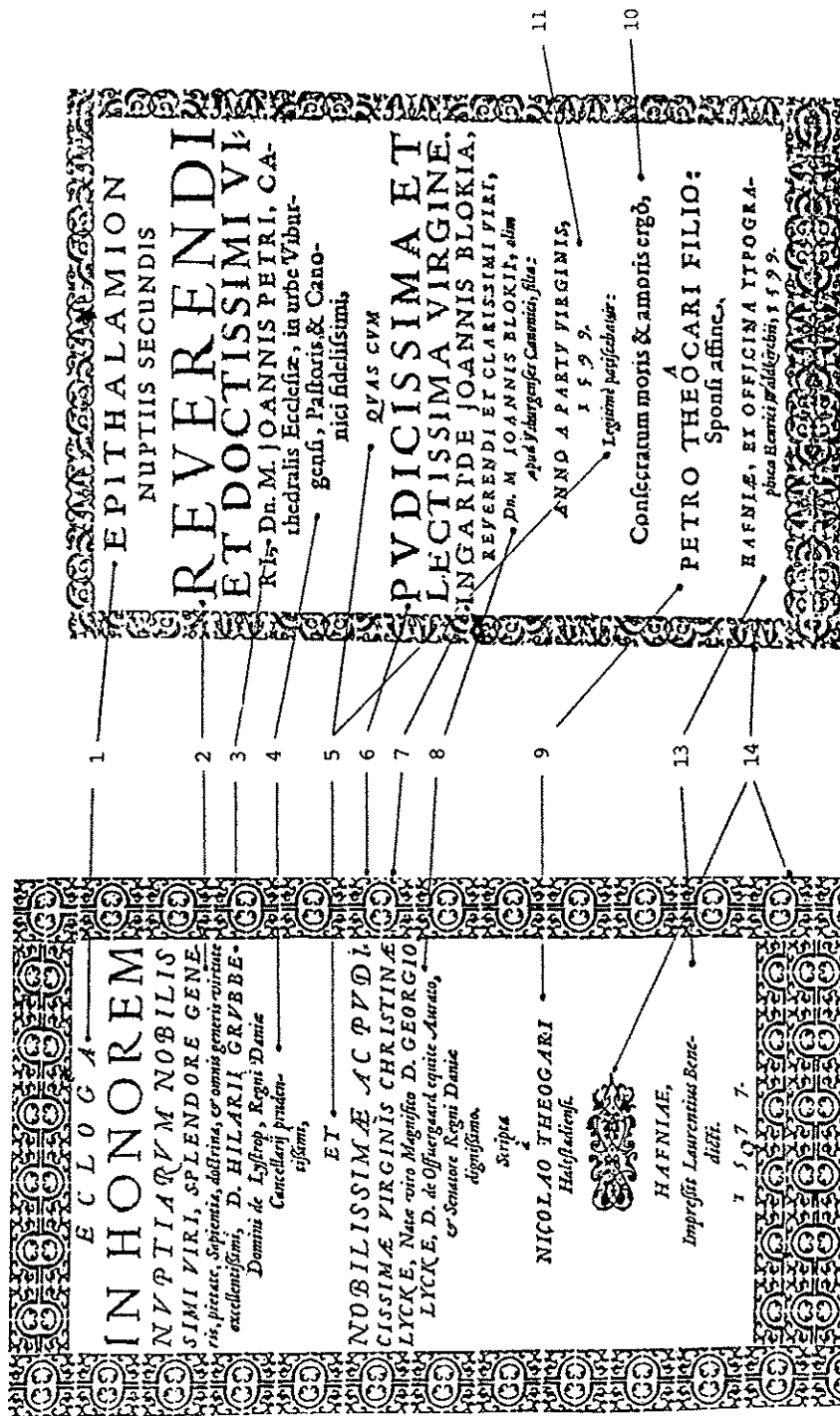


Figure 1.

and learned man (“reverendi et doctissimi viri”) and a devout priest (“Pastoris et Canonici fidelissimi”). A nobleman (cf. “nobilissimi viri”, 1577), on the other hand, is usually praised for all other virtues than that of learning. The title page of 1577 is an exception to this rule, in so far as it pays tribute to both the exceptional lineage and piety (“splendore generis, pietate”), *and* the wisdom and learning (“sapientia, doctrina”) of the noble bridegroom; but, then again, he was no less a man than the Chancellor of the Kingdom of Denmark, Eiler Grubbe. Compared to those commending bridegrooms from lower social strata, epithets in praise of royalty are in most cases briefer, sometimes limited to a single adjective, for example “inclytus” (“illustrious”) or “serenissimus” (“most serene”), the latter of which – in imitation of its use in Roman antiquity as an honorary title – associates the addressee with godlike qualities.⁸ However, the choice of epithets did not depend on the social status of the bridegroom only, but was also influenced by shifting literary fashion. Hence, the character and extent of the epithets clearly changed during the period from 1540 to 1600, from a generally modest and economical use in the 1540s and 1550s to a veritable *cornucopia* of epithets by the end of the century.⁹

3. **The title of the bridegroom** also precedes his name. Bridegrooms both from the nobility and from the middle class may be called “Master” (“Dominus”). Thus, in 1577, the nobleman Eiler Grubbe is called “Dominus”, with reference to his manor house Lystrup (“D[omini] Hilarii Grubbe, Domini de Lystrup”). In 1599, Hans Pedersen is referred to as “D[omini] Magistri”, these two titles indicating his position in the Danish church as well as his university degree (cf. number 4 below). With one exception, namely an anonymous wedding poem of c. 1541 to Princess Christine of Denmark and Duke Frantz of Lorraine (LN 61a), on the title page the bridegroom’s name is always mentioned before that of the bride.
4. After his name, **the bridegroom’s profession** is indicated. Eiler Grubbe of 1577 is the Chancellor of the Kingdom of Denmark (“Regni Daniae Cancellarii”); Hans Pedersen of 1599 is a pastor and canon of the cathedral of Viborg (“Cathedralis Ecclesiae, in urbe Viburgensi, Pastoris et Canonici”).
5. A simple **conjunction** or a more comprehensive verbal construction link together the names of the bridegroom and the bride, reflecting the conjunction of the couple at the actual wedding ceremony. Thus, whereas

in 1577 we merely read “and” (“et”), in 1599 the conjunction is formulated as “the marriage that Hans Pedersen was lawfully contracting with Ingrid Bloch” (“nuptiis [...] Joannis Petri [...] quas cum [...] Ingaride Joannis Blokia [...] legitime paciscebatur”). Other title pages exhibit conjunctive phrases such as “when he was joined in marriage with her” (“quando illi matrimonio iungebatur”, in an example from 1596, cf. LN 1513) or “contracting marriage with” (contrahentem matrimonium cum”, in an example from 1564, cf. LN 708).

6. The epithets in praise of the bride are closely linked to the social status of her family, that is, of her father. Thus, the listing on the title page of the honorary title(s), name, profession, and virtues of the bride’s father (cf. numbers 7 and 8 below) clearly serves as a kind of epithet to the bride in so far as it always reflects positively on her. Generally, all brides are described as chaste and modest, the epithet “pudica” (cf. “pudicissimae”, 1577; “pudicissima”, 1599) reflecting the Lutheran focus on chastity (“castitas”) as the virtue central to both marriage and celibacy.¹⁰ However, a widow entering her second marriage is characterized as worthy and respectable (“honestissima”), and her previous experience with marital matters is underlined by the term “matrona”, setting her apart from the immaculate “virgines” who dominate most of the wedding poems (cf. “virginis”, 1577; and “virgine”, 1599). Women of royalty were addressed as “Dominae”, and, like their male counterparts, were given the simple epithet “inclytæ”.
7. The name of the bride follows the epithets in her praise and is always preceded and specified by information about her father and his social position. Thus, on the title pages, a bride from a middle-class family is always addressed by her first name as well as (in a genitive construction) the full name of her father. In fact, 1599 offers an unusual example. Here we do find the usual genitive construction: “Ingaride [...] reverendi et clarissimi viri, D[omini] M[agistri] Joannis Blokii [...] filia”, that is, “Ingrid [...], the daughter of the venerable and illustrious man, Master Johannes Bloch”. However, in addition to this, the bride is first introduced as “Ingaride Joannis Blokia”, that is, “Ingrid Bloch, daughter of Johannes”. Thus, the bride’s first name is followed by the patronymic genitive “Joannis” as well as “Blokia”, that is, the feminine of her father’s Latinized, adjectival surname “Blokus” (cf. “Joannis Blokii” in the line following).¹¹ By contrast, noblewomen are always presented by both their first name and family name, as 1577 shows: “Christinae Lycke”

- (“Kirstine Lykke”), whereas royal women are addressed by their first name only.
8. The father of the bride is introduced with flattering epithets preceding his name and the description of his title and position, in the same way as the bridegroom. The relationship between the bride and her father is expressed either by a genitive construction, as exemplified in 1599 (“Ingaride [...] reverendi et clarissimi viri D[omini] M[agistri] Joannis Blokii [...] filia”, that is, “Ingrid, the daughter of [...]”), or by a verbal construction including the participle “nata” followed by the father’s name and titles in ablative, that is, “born to”, as exemplified in 1577 (“Christinae Lycke [...] Natae viro Magnifico D[omino] Georgio Lycke, D[omino] de Offuergaard”, that is, “Kirstine Lykke, born to [...] Jørgen Lykke”). If the father of the bride was deceased, this is indicated on the title pages by the addition of an expression of reverence, for example, “piae memoriae” (of pious memory).
 9. The author’s name (and in some cases information on his profession, title, and relation to the bridal couple) either directly follows the presentation of the father of the bride (as in 1577) or is inserted as the next-to-last piece of information on the title page or the broadside, right before the colophon (as in 1599). Generally, the size of the author’s ‘signature’ depends on the year of publication: following the general change in literary style from classicism to mannerism, the later the poem, the more extensive it was in every respect. This is clearly demonstrated by the contrast between the simple reference in 1577, “Written by Niels Thøgersen from Haltstad” (“[Ecloga] Scripta a Nicolao Theogari Haltstadiensi”), and the ornate signature in 1599, “Dedicated for the sake of custom and love by Peder Thøgersen, an in-law of the bridegroom’s” (“[Epithalamion] Consecratum moris et amoris ergo, a Petro Theocari filio, Sponsi affine”). As a rule, the author’s name is rendered in accusative or, as in 1577 and 1599, in ablative, according to the grammatical construction, and placed in the last part of the title page.¹² Often the contents of the title page form one long sentence, as 1577 and 1599 both exemplify. Thus, in 1577, the *titulus*, “Ecloga”, is the grammatical subject of the sentence that runs over the whole of the title page (the colophon not included, cf. number 13 below) and closes with “Scripta a Nicolao Theogari Haltstadiensi”.
 10. Some of the title pages, especially the more ornate ones from the latter part of the sixteenth century, include an explicit motivation for the

composition of the poems. Friendship and kinship are the two most referred to causes for writing. Thus, in 1599, the author, Peder Thøgersen, is said to have “dedicated the epithalamion for the sake of custom and love” (“Epithalamion [...] consecratum moris et amoris ergo”).

11. The date of the wedding is often mentioned on the title page, as in 1599, which gives the year but not the day of the ceremony: “In the year 1599 from the Virgin Birth” (“Anno a partu Virginis, 1599”).
12. *Chronosticha* (or *eteosticha*) is the Greek term for lines (*sticha*) that inform about the time (*chronos*, or the year: *etos*) of the wedding. They are generally constructed as elegiac couplets, in which all letters that can be read as Roman numerals (M, D, C, L, V, I) stand out in majuscules: the sum of these numerals added together indicates the year of the wedding. In Danish Neo-Latin poetry, this manneristic feature is almost exclusively found on title pages printed after 1585.
13. The colophon rounds off the title page and gives (a) the place where the book or broadside was printed (both 1577 and 1599 were printed in Copenhagen); (b) the name of the printer (1577: Lorentz Benedicht; 1599: Henrik Waldkirch); and (c) the year, and sometimes also the day and month, of the publication.
14. Ornaments are found on all broadsides and on many of the title pages of the booklets. They take the shape of vignettes (as in 1577, where a vignette graphically separates the name of the author from the text of the colophon) or consist of four bands, often made of rosettes, which form a square frame around the text (as is the case in both 1577 and 1599). The printers all made use of distinctive bands and vignettes that would characterize their publications.¹³ Reflecting an ideal of symmetry, the vignettes are centered on the title pages (exemplified in 1577). This is also the case with the whole body of the title-page text – which is, moreover, printed in letters of varying size, according not only to aesthetic and practical considerations, but also to the relative importance of the various parts of the message conveyed.¹⁴

Conclusion

In this paper I have illuminated some of the aspects that I believe need to be taken into account in order for us to rediscover the art of writing and printing sixteenth-century epithalamia. Some readers may find that my itemized

examination of the title pages offers a lot of trivial information that can at best be assigned to the category of material discussed in traditional ‘literary sociology’, and no more than that, but I would like to argue to the contrary.

First of all, my aim is not to merely give a description of *how* the texts look, but rather to offer a key to increase our knowledge about how texts like these *were supposed to* look. By way of a close-examination of the extant material, combined with a broad analysis of its historical, literary, rhetorical (...) context, we are able to deduce at least some of the rules and reasons that determined how a sixteenth-century title page – and a sixteenth-century wedding poem – was to be composed.

Second, we should not disregard the socio-political framework in which the authors wrote their poems. Thus, for example, in the sixteenth century, many women died in childbirth and many widowers remarried and had children at such an advanced age that they died before their daughters ever got married. These facts are reflected, not only in the specific phrasing on the title pages (“nuptiis secundis”; “piae memoriae”) but also in the rather subdued tone that characterize some of the wedding poems. As Stina Hansson’s work reminds us, it is indeed fruitful not to separate the study of social and literary *decorum*.

Third, and lastly, personal names, in their vernacular or Latinized versions, as well as expressions of interpersonal relationships, age, and social status, among much other ‘trivia’ mentioned on the title pages of the wedding poems, are, as is well known, a rich source for poetical invention.¹⁵ The period’s wedding poets reveled in plays on words, and few are the brides by the name of Margrethe or bridegrooms by the name of Peter that have not been favorably compared to this kind of pearl (Latin: *margarita*) or that kind of stone (Greek: *petros*). Far from discarding these as trivial matters, we need to realize that they are such stuff as sixteenth-century occasional poems are made on.¹⁶

Notes

* Thanks go to Russell L. Friedman for correcting my English and for adding the right flavor to the title of this paper.

1 Stina Hansson, *Bröllopslägrets skald och bårdens. En studie i Lucidors tillfällesdiktning* (Diss., University of Gothenburg, 1975). I am grateful to Karsten Friis-Jensen of the Center for Greek and Latin, University of Copenhagen, for drawing my attention to this book. My 1987 project resulted in a (hitherto unpublished, but see note 4 below) dissertation on *Neo-Latin Wedding Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Denmark*.

- 2 Another example of Stina Hansson's contextual approach is her study of the German/Dutch polymath Gerhard Johannes Vossius's brief rhetorical primer, *Elementa Rhetorica*, and its use in the schools of seventeenth-century Sweden: *Gerardus Johannes Vossius Elementa Rhetorica på svenska översatt och utgiven av Stina Hansson*, Litteraturvetenskapliga institutionen, Göteborgs universitet, Meddelanden nr 5 (Gothenburg, 1990).
- 3 On the Renaissance reception of late-classical prescriptions on the genre of wedding orations and poems, see Pernille Harsting, "More Evidence of Menander Rhetor on the Epithalamium: Angelo Poliziano's Transcription in the Statius Commentary (1480–81), Re-edited with a Discussion of the Manuscript Sources and Earlier Editions", *Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen-Âge Grec et Latin* 72 (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2001), pp. 11–34.
- 4 In the meantime, however, I have published a series of articles on the subject, including (a) "Epitalami latini della riforma in Danimarca (1536–1590): Imitazione classica e rappresentazione luterana", *Res publica litterarum* 15 (Kansas 1992) and *Studi Umanistici Picensi* 12 (Sassoferrato 1992), pp. 97–106; (b) "'Should One Marry?' On the Use of a Classical Rhetorical Theme in Early Lutheran Wedding Poetry", *Classica et Mediaevalia* 50 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1999), pp. 273–286; and (c) "Jacobus Jacobaeus Volfius: *Carmen in nuptias Jacobi VI Regis Scotiae et Annae* (1589), Edited with a Study of the Autograph Sources", *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 50 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), pp. 329–349. See also notes 6 and 9 below.
- 5 Most of the printed material is registered in Lauritz Nielsen, *Dansk Bibliografi 1482–1550* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1919) and *Dansk Bibliografi 1550–1600* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1931–1933); now best consulted in the revised four-volume version with supplements by Erik Dal (Copenhagen: Det kongelige Bibliotek & Det danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 1996).
- 6 Philip Melanchthon, who was the teacher of quite a few Danish students at the Lutheran university of Wittenberg and the main influence on the post-Reformation curriculum at the University of Copenhagen, recommended the writing of poetry as part of his classes in grammar and rhetoric. On Melanchthon's impact on the development of Danish Neo-Latin wedding poetry, see Pernille Harsting, "Melanchthon, epideiktisk retorik og lejlighedsdigtning i 1500-tallets Danmark" (Melanchthon, Epideictic Rhetoric, and Occasional Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Denmark), *Rhetorica Scandinavica* 24 (Regstrup: Rhetor, 2002), pp. 35–49 (cf. also note 9 below).
- 7 Both epithalamia are registered in Lauritz Nielsen, *Dansk Bibliografi 1551–1600* (cf. note 5 above), as LN 1585 ("1577") and LN 76 ("1599"). In the following, when mentioning a wedding poem registered by Lauritz Nielsen, I cite its LN-number for further bibliographical reference.
- 8 The positive form of the adjective, "serenus", was a traditional epithet of Jupiter's; the superlative form, "serenissimus", was a title given to the Roman emperors.
- 9 On the changes of the literary style as reflected in the period's epithalamia, see Pernille Harsting, "From Melanchthonism to Mannerism: The Development of the Neo-Latin Wedding Poem in 16th-Century Denmark", in Thomas Haye (ed.), *Humanismus im Norden. Frühneuzeitliche Rezeption antiker Kultur und Literatur an Nord- und Ostsee* [= *Chloe* 32] (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 289–318.
- 10 *Castitas* is one of the four ends or virtues of marriage (*bona conjugii*), commended by Catholics and Lutherans alike, despite their disagreement on marriage, which Luther defined not as a grace-giving sacrament but as a secular institution for the maintenance of temporal society; cf. also Harsting, "'Should One Marry?'" [pp. 273–286], p. 273.

- 11 This is one of many examples of imitation of classical Latin language and discourse in these Neo-Latin poems, and reflects the use of the adjectival family name, the *nomen gentile*, in Roman antiquity. It was in accordance with this naming custom that, for example, Marcus Tullius Cicero's daughter was called Tullia.
- 12 The only exception in my material is Hans Jørgensen Sadolin, who in his wedding poem of 1572 to King Frederik II of Denmark (LN 1409), underlines his eminent position as the royal Danish *poeta laureatus* by giving his own name in self-promoting nominative. Likewise, in an earlier wedding poem of 1556 (LN 1414), composed to his friend Hans Frandsen, Sadolin has his own name inserted at the top of the title page, immediately after the *titulus* and before the names of the bridal couple.
- 13 On sixteenth-century printers in Denmark, see Lauritz Nielsen, *Dansk typografisk Atlas 1482–1600* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1934).
- 14 Thus, in many cases the *titulus* and the personal names, as well as the epithets given to the bridegroom and the bride, are specifically emphasized, as 1577 and 1599 exemplify.
- 15 In *Das Gelegenheitsgedicht* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), Wulf Segebrecht offered an outstanding exposition of the issue of rhetorical invention, specifically relating to (pre-Romantic) wedding and funeral poetry, and including a "Poetische Tafel" (p. 137) that illustrates the numerous sources of invention and types of *loci*.
- 16 Pernille Harsting is a senior research fellow at the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium; email: <pernille.harsting@nnrh.dk>.