

Mars Destroys, Love Mends

Wedding Poetry During the Great Northern War

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Summary

Wedding poetry was an important genre in early modern literature and a way to congratulate and praise a newlywed couple on their wedding day. During the first decades of the eighteenth century, war emerged as a central topic of wedding poems in the kingdom of Sweden. By applying the concept of *repertory poetry*, referring to poetry as a system based on the circulation of literary material, I examine how the war was discussed in wedding poems and how poems articulate common understandings and personal experiences of war, military occupation, and life as a refugee.

Keywords

Occasional poetry, wedding poetry, Great Northern War 1700–1721, Great Wrath 1714–1721, repertory literature

Introduction

During the early modern period, it was customary to congratulate newlywed couples with wedding poetry.¹ The habit of writing and printing wedding poetry became more common in the kingdom of Sweden during the seventeenth century, and the tradition continued up until the late eighteenth century (Hansson 1975, 77; Hansson 2011, 26–28). Wedding poems were published in small booklets, which could be sent to the couple or distributed at the wedding. Sometimes poems were sung or recited during the wedding festivities, which means that wedding poetry was also a form of entertainment (Hansson 1999, 219–20; Ridderstad 1980, 28–31).

When Johan Wargentín, an official at the Court of Appeal in Turku (Åbo), married his fiancée Margareta Elisabetha Malm in March 1712, they were congratulated with a wedding poem, as was customary. This poem is different from the merry wedding poems that had been typical in the previous century. Instead of describing the happy couple and an exuberant celebration, the poem describes how joy is fading like the leaves from a withering tree while everyone is languishing in grief. The reason for the mournful tone is given in a later stanza:

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Jagh stadnar, skåder nu then jämmer landet trycker:
 För dörren döden står med hoot af brand och swärd:
 Uti vårt granskap han båd Far och Son bortrycker
 Ja späda späne-barn i Atrops garn blij snärd.
 (To Wargentín & Malm)

I halt and watch the grief which burdens the country:
 Death stands at our door with threats of flames and swords:
 In our neighbourhood, he snaps away fathers and sons
 Indeed, tiny infants are caught in Atropos's threads.²

In 1712, when this poem was written and printed, Sweden was fighting the Great Northern War against a coalition formed by Russia, Denmark, and Saxony. The war started in 1700 and continued for twenty years. Initially the war went well for Sweden, but after the disastrous battle of Poltava in the summer of 1709, Russia was able to take over Swedish provinces in Ingria, Livonia, and Estonia (Frost 2000, 229–31; Karonen 2020, 309–15). Between 1714 and 1721, the eastern part of the Swedish kingdom, today's Finland, was occupied by Russia. The period of occupation is known as the Great Wrath (Fin. *isoviha*, Swe. *stora ofreden*). During the Russian occupation, 8,000–10,000 people were taken captive and forced into slavery in Russia, while approximately 20,000–30,000 inhabitants fled to Sweden. Finland's population at the time was at the most 350,000 (Karonen 2020, 318–20; Aminoff-Winberg 2007, 95–103).

Sweden had been involved in military conflicts for most of the seventeenth century, through which the kingdom had been able to expand and take control of territories around the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea. However, earlier wars were seldom commented upon in occasional poetry. Unlike the wars of the seventeenth century, which were fought on foreign territory, the Great Northern War brought war and conflict closer to the people living in eighteenth-century Sweden and Finland, and this had consequences for the poetry of the period (Hansson 2011, 362–64; Lilius 1994, 45–55).

This article discusses ways of writing about war in wedding poetry published in the kingdom of Sweden between 1700 and 1722. By applying the concept of *repertory poetry*, referring to early modern poetry as a poetic system based on the circulation of common, conventional poetic material, I analyse how questions of war and military occupation were addressed in wedding poetry during the early eighteenth century, and how the repertory of war changed during the period.

Wedding poetry and other forms of occasional verse were deep-rooted in early modern society. Occasional poetry had social and ceremonial functions, and it was closely associated with the rhetorical genre of epideictic oratory or *genus demonstrativum*, the rhetoric of praise or blame (Hansson 1975, 39; Hansson 2011, 18–21). Occasional verse expresses not so much personal opinions but rather what is culturally prevalent and appropriate. It was a tool by which the upper strata of society formulated and communicated ideas about their identity and role in society (Gustafsson 1967, 111–14; Lindqvist 2002, 19–22; Ridderstad 2005, 516).

The primary purpose of wedding poetry was to congratulate and praise the couple, not to comment on topical matters. However, gratulatory poems in the seventeenth century

² Atropos was the one of the three fates who ended a person's life by cutting the thread of life at death (March 2015, 179).

might sporadically refer to wars, fires, famines, or other noteworthy events, but it is not until the early eighteenth century that war becomes a central and fixed topic in wedding poems (Korhonen 2004, 188–89; Hansson 2011, 362). Besides wedding poetry, the war is also discussed in new year's poems, called *strena*, which share some common features with wedding poetry (Lindgärde 2020, 298–312).

Literary representations about the Great Northern War have previously been studied as a form of war propaganda. Poems and broadside songs were published in an attempt to mobilize the support of the people (Larsson 2009, 120–27; Dahlberg 2014, 50–65; Marklund 2006, 23–26). Even though wedding poetry took part in public discussions about the war and its effects, wedding poems were not primarily propagandic texts. They were, for a start, not widely distributed: it has been estimated that approximately only a hundred copies of an occasional poem were printed (Ridderstad 1980, 31). However, all forms of literature aimed to persuade and affect the audience, given the rhetorical nature of literature at the time. Among its limited audience, occasional poetry was an important forum for articulating and disseminating socio-cultural values (Gustafsson 1967, 114–115; 119; Öhrberg 2001, 135; Öhrberg 2020, 135). Since occasional verse was so tightly connected to social structures, norms, ideals, and the early modern way of life, it can also serve as an indicator of change (Öhrberg 2012, 99; Olden-Jørgensen 2020, 573). Wedding poems can therefore be studied to gain insights into how its central topics were understood and discussed in society at the time, and how ideas and conceptions changed.

Studying early modern wedding poetry

The dominant mode of writing poetry during the early modern period was that of *repertory literature*, which means that the production of literary texts was based on the circulation of collective poetic material, as opposed to the *original literature* of the post-Romantic period.³ Early modern occasional poetry operates with a regular set of forms and contents and a standard literary repertory, which contains forms, subjects, and literary means viable for literary communication.

The forms and contents in the repertory, deriving from the genres of the Western literary tradition and rhetoric, biblical literature, Christian culture, and Greek and Roman antiquity, were long-established and generally accepted. The author's task was to choose and combine the subject matter, poetic metres, rhetorical devices, and ways of presentation most suitable for the event and the addressees (Hansson 2000, 55–59; Hansson 2011, 15–21). Central topics in eighteenth-century wedding poems include, for instance, the advantages and meanings of marriage, as well as marital life and virtues.

Authors of wedding poetry sometimes comment on the difficulty of composing verse when the forms and contents available all seemed worn out and old fashioned. Such metapoetic remarks had been a part of the repertory of occasional poetry since antiquity (Baumgartner 2022, 10–11). However, eighteenth-century criticism of repertories also illustrates how repertory literature was slowly coming to an end (Hansson 2011, 475–77). Repertorial changes in wedding poetry reflect the pressure for change from both inside the literary system and from society at large (Baumgartner 2022, 22–24). To study these changes, I describe recurring elements connected to the topic of war, place them into a

³ The concept of repertory literature was first coined by Horace Engdahl (1986, 37–38), and has since developed into a comprehensive approach to study the poetic practices of the early modern period in the work of Stina Hansson. On the concept of repertory poetry, see Hansson 1993, 45–49; Hansson 2000, 11–13; Hansson 2011, 15–18.

historical and socio-cultural context, and analyse what kind of cultural meanings these elements convey.

The research material for this article consists of 26 publications from the National Library of Finland's collection of occasional poetry, written and published during the period 1700–1722 (see Table). All publications of wedding poetry with one or several poems referring to war or military occupation have been included in the research material, excluding panegyrics to monarchs and royalty. The total number of wedding prints from the period 1703–1722 is 200, which means that 12.56 per cent of the wedding poems from the period refer to war as a topic.

According to Stina Hansson, who has studied the collections of wedding poetry at Uppsala University Library, the number of poems with war as a major topic is around 5 per cent in the poems printed during the 1720s (Hansson 2011, 362–63). Hansson's study on the repertory of early modern wedding poetry is based on material from selected decades, including the 1720s but not the period 1700 to 1719. This means that the poems written and published during most of the Great Northern War are not included, and her percentages are not directly comparable to mine. However, Hansson's study does show that the topic of war remained a part of the literary repertory of wedding poetry for many years after the war had ended.

As Table shows, most poems in the research material are written in Swedish. One is in Finnish, and one print includes poems in Latin. Latin was a popular language in occasional poetry throughout the seventeenth century, but vernacular languages, such as Swedish, German, or Finnish, started to be used more towards the end of the century. Very few brides were able to read Latin since women did not have access to education, which is a likely reason for the popularity of vernacular languages in wedding poetry (Hansson 2011, 462; Lilius 1994, 102–16).

Wedding poems were a part of the culture of the educated elite. The largest group of addressees are civil officials: several of the bridegrooms were employed by the district court in Turku. Addressees also include clergymen, teachers, tradesmen, and army officers. Writing occasional poetry was an activity that was usually taken up by young men during their time at university, and consequently, wedding poetry offers a predominantly male view on marriage.⁴ Questions of gender are still of importance when studying wedding poetry, since the poems actively take part in expressing ideas about the roles of men and women in marriage and society.

Mythological and religious representations of war

Wedding poems from the seventeenth century often refer to warfare by evoking the character of Mars, the Roman god of war. A poem to Johan Fredrik Bagge and Elsa Magdalena Spieker describes the chaos caused by the war god:

Hur står i landet till? är nu tid på sig giftas?
 När Mars ett blodigt krig ibland oss mände stifta
 Här annat intet hörs än skott och dunderslag
 än buller roop och gny som vore Domedag.
 (To Bagge & Spieker)

⁴ On occasional poems by women authors and constructing gender in occasional poetry, see Öhrberg 2001, 37–54, 76–77.

What is the state of the country? Is now the time to marry,
 when Mars is waging a bloody war among us
 And nothing else is heard than gunshots and thunder,
 noise, shouts, and cries like it would be doomsday.

The state of war is described metonymically by the sounds of battle: the shouts, cries, and gunshots. In a poem to Henrich Bång and his bride Maria Callia, the terrible sound of war makes all hearts tremble with fear, but it does not scare Venus, who despite the horrors of war continues to lead people into matrimony.

Mars is usually set against Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, and the pairing and counter-pairing of Mars and Venus is based in mythology and classical literature (March 2015, 299). In early modern wedding poetry, the characters were detached from their traditional mythological and narrative contexts and used metonymically or as allegorical figures to allude to war and love.

Characters of Greek and Roman mythology were popular in European literature and occasional poetry during the early modern period, but they started to lose their popularity at the turn of the eighteenth century (Hansson 2011, 306–10; 473–74). During the Great Northern War, other ways of writing about war started to emerge. Notably, the war started to be addressed not as something distant and abstract, personified by a character from Roman mythology, but as a historical event that the authors and addressees had experiential knowledge about.

The first mention of the Great Northern War in the National Library of Finland's collections of wedding poetry appears in a poem to Erich Loskiöld and Christina Gezelia, who married in 1703. The poem is a pastoral poem, which relates the conversation of three shepherds.⁵ A shepherd called Alexis is worried because of the latest rumours, according to which 'the enemy is going to drop anchor here, God forbid!' The discussion moves on to other topics and war is not mentioned in the poem again. Momentarily, a glimpse of reality breaks into the secluded pastoral fiction, usually untouched by the rigours of war.

Many wedding poems use the motif of the sword to convey the fear of the approaching war. In Johan Wång's poem to Andreas Ignatius and Margareta Sophia Godenhielm, the sword of war is characterized as a sword of revenge (*hemda-svärdet*). The expression implies that the war is seen as revenge, as God's punishment for the sinfulness of the people. This was the common understanding, disseminated by state authorities and the Lutheran church. War, diseases, and bad harvests were national inflictions, sent by God as punishment for the immorality and ungratefulness of the people (Larsson 2009, 115–20; Ullgren 2008, 2–25). A poem addressed to two wedding couples, Henrik Rungen and Catharina Nischa and Simon Nylander and Margareta Vaicko, explicitly connects the trials of the ongoing war to the fall of Adam and Eve. According to the poem, the Great Northern War is 'the embryo' of the fall of man, a direct result of the events described in the book of Genesis.

In a poem to clergyman Andreas Chydenius and Maria Fellbohm, the sinfulness of the people is the reason not only for the war but also for other tribulations of the time, such as the exile of King Charles XII and the plague that was spreading along the coasts of the Baltic Sea, which reached Finland at roughly the same time as Chydenius and Fellbohm were married in the autumn of 1710 (Aminoff-Winberg 2007, 27–29; Ullgren 2008, 259–61).

5 Pastoral poems are dramatic or narrative poems where herdsmen act as central characters. Idyllic nature, love, friendship, and the harmonious life in the countryside are important themes in pastoral poetry. On pastoral elements in wedding poetry, see Castrén 1907, 122–23.

Many authors of wedding poetry embrace the idea of sin as the root of all difficulties. Since the explanation for the crisis was to be found in Christian doctrine, that was also where the means to solve the crisis could be found. Honest and true repentance and regular prayers were suggested as a solution and a way out of the depressing state of the country (Ericsson 2002, 91–103).

Instructive, didactic, and even moralizing tones of address became common in wedding poetry during the early eighteenth century. In rhetorical terms, the shift can be described as a shift from *genus demonstrativum*, the rhetorical genre that occasional poetry mostly relied on, to *genus deliberativum*, the genre of advisory speech (Hansson 2011, 374, 474–75). In the poem to Chydenius and Fellbohm, Christ is a central character in the poem and a personification of Christian virtues, whose presence ‘at the table, in the bed and the chamber’ is necessary in a harmonious marriage. The wedding poem to Andreas Ignatius and Margareta Sophia Godenhielm stresses the importance of repentance and amendment ‘in times like these, when everyone suffers and is troubled by sad thoughts’.

Early eighteenth-century wedding poems draw on Lutheran ideas about virtue and ethics when they stress the importance of faith in God as the principal virtue (Lindqvist 2002, 72). Traditionally, the addressees of wedding poetry were praised for virtues that were considered ideal for the addressees’ social status, age, and gender (Hansson 1975, 92–95; Öhrberg 2001, 148–49; Mattsson 2003, 22–30). However, wartime poems develop an interest in general virtues that both bridegrooms and brides are encouraged to aspire to, like resilience and trust in God. Enduring the hardships of war is interpreted as a manifestation of the Christian virtue of faith.

Wartime marriage questioned

Wedding poems address the fact that wartime is not the optimal time to marry. ‘How can a heart feel happiness, when the prevailing sorrow does not seem to allow it?’ asks the speaker in the poem to Rungen and Nischa and Nylander and Vaicko. In a poem to Magnus Forsteen and Margaretha Arkenholtz, the question concerns specifically marriages taking place in Helsinki (Helsingfors). The town had been attacked by the Russian fleet in May 1713, followed by attacks on other coastal towns along the Gulf of Finland. Wedding poetry as a genre seemed to require a cheerful style, which was at odds with the general atmosphere of the time and could be perceived as an offence to decorum (Sjöberg 2020, 110–11, 120).

The appropriateness of wartime weddings is questioned also in the title of a poem written for Anders Monseen and Maria Elisabet Laureus (*Är thet rådligt giffta sig, thenna tijd?*). Their wedding poem is a dialogue between the bridegroom, who is hesitant about marriage, and a fictive character called Agamos. The topic of war is introduced by Agamos, who uses it as an argument to support his critical view towards marriage.

Thenne tijd oss Swärdet hänger, Öfwer halsen at thet dänger
 Uti hela Kroppen wår, Och alt in til hiertat går
 Thenna tijd som alla raga, Uthaf fruchtan och sig laga
 Til at undgå Ryssens hand, Uth på flyckt til främmand land
 Skulle thet ej bättre wara, At man thetta skulle spara
 till en bättre tijd och så, Pauli Råd gee acth uppå.
 (To Monseen & Laureus)

Now the sword dangles over our neck,
 smashes our whole body and pierces our heart.
 Now everyone trembles out of fear and prepares themselves
 to get out of the hands of the Russians, seeking refuge in foreign countries.
 Would it not be better to leave this
 to a better time, and by doing so, follow Paul's advice.

In this poem, the war is not the only reason to stay unmarried. Agamos refers to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, which recommends that widowers should not remarry. In this case, the bridegroom is a widower entering a second marriage.

The advantages and disadvantages of marriage were frequently discussed in wedding poems (Hansson 2011, 118–22; Olsson 1970, 50–75). Discussions concerning marriage were common in rhetorical exercises, in which students were trained to make arguments *pro* and *contra*. Marriage was typically suggested as a topic for this exercise (Castrén 1907, 109; Sarasti-Wilenius & Laine 1997, 232; Olsson 1970, 62–63).

In the late seventeenth century, argumentative poems focused on discussing the appropriateness of certain types of marriage, most notably clerical marriages (Hansson 2011, 118–21; 202–04). Clerical marriages continued to be discussed in wedding poetry for a long time, even though it was hardly a controversial topic: marrying was central, even necessary, for clergymen in Lutheran Sweden (Stadin 2004, 170–79). The actual target of criticism in these poems is therefore not the practice of clerical marriage, but the Catholic Church (Hansson 2011, 478). The criticism against Catholicism is obvious also in the wedding poem to Wargentín and Malm, where the author ironizes over men who cannot decide whether to marry or not. Their hesitation comes across as *monkly*, i.e., unmanly.

Remarrying after the death of a spouse was also not considered improper. Women could choose to remain unmarried if they were able to secure their income as widows, but men and especially fathers of young children needed a wife to run the household and were expected to remarry (Stadin 2004, 88–93). This is also how the bridegroom in the poem to Monseen and Lauraeus explains his decision to remarry to Agamos: He who can manage running a household without a spouse can willingly remain unmarried.

Even if second or third marriages were common, the ideal marriage was a lifelong one. Widows and widowers were supposed to mourn their spouses, and portrayals of mourning widows and widowers can be found in early modern occasional poetry as well (Bastman 2021, 62–68). Wedding poems often acknowledge and show respect to the first spouse, as in the poem addressed to Olof Gavelius and Brita Brenner. The bride was a widow remarrying, and accordingly, the poem opens with a depiction of a harp tuned to play in a mournful key and the gods and muses of music and poetry dressed in dark veils. In this poem, the sorrow has a double origin and refers both to the general desolation of living in a state of war and to the personal grief of the addressee, who had lost a spouse. Wedding poems written to celebrate second marriages need to balance sorrow and joy in an appropriate way, in accordance with decorum and the idealizing ethos of occasional poetry. The same kind of consideration was required of wedding poems written during the war.

Wedding poetry's arguments about whether one should marry or not illustrate how the established repertoires changed and were modified over time. The existing repertory could be used to introduce new and more current topics. General arguments about whether one should marry or not as well as more specific discussions about clerical marriages or second

marriages turned into arguments about the appropriateness of marrying during wartime. The argumentative pattern is the same, but the reason why marriage is questioned is a new one.

In defence of wartime marriage

In the wedding poem to Jacob Gavelin, an exiled clergyman from Vaasa (Vasa), and Margareta Capsia, economic uncertainty is mentioned as a reason for questioning wartime marriage. The poem points out that it can be difficult even to provide for oneself, let alone a family.

Här undras gierna på at nu i ofrids tider
 Och när man öfwer alt så gräslig skada lider
 Folck gie sig likwäl hoop at bygga huus och boo
 Tå En för Ensamt lif sin utkomst ey kan troo.
 (To Gavelin & Capsia)

It is often wondered that now in times of trouble and turmoil
 When people everywhere are suffering tremendously
 Some folks still go together to build a household and a home
 When not even one man can be sure of one's living.

Even though mutual love and friendship were valued as central features of a happy marriage in early modern times, marriage was an economic agreement as well (Kietäväinen-Sirén 2015, 130–33; Stadin 2004, 56–58). The economic responsibilities it included could cause worry. The poem to Johan Wargentin and Margareta Elisabet Malm ridicules men who do not have the courage to go through with their plans of marriage. Agonizing about livelihood and money is represented as a sign of a lack of trust in God, since both the idea of marriage and the yearning for companionship are, according to the author, inspired by God.

If hesitation before marriage was understood as unmanly, marrying despite the turmoil of war is explicitly said to be manly in a poem written in 1714 to Erich Gerdzlovius and Christina Maria Berger. Tying the knot in troubled times expresses trust in God, in marriage as an institution, and in the future.

Här under ligger ock then rätta Manna arten.
 Bli giffit i godan tijd thet kostar intet på.
 Thet är I sanning meer mitt under olykz farten
 Rätt oförskräckter til thet Ächta ståndet gå.
 (To Gerdzlovius & Berger)

Here lies the art of true manliness:
 marrying in a good time does not cost a man anything.
 But marrying in times of trouble, that is something,
 entering undauntedly into the married estate.

In wedding poetry, marriage as an institution is portrayed as a builder of society and bearer of continuity, which is of major importance in times of crisis. Marriage aims at reproduction, and without marriage, there would be no nation and no people to defend it. In the

poem to Monseen and Laureus, the bridegroom replies to Agamos's critique by pointing out that had previous generations been too cautious in marrying, there would be no one to defend Swedish territory or manage the fields and farms. Restraining from marrying because of the war will, according to the logic of the writers of wedding poems, lead to a fatal shortage of population. The emphasis on reproduction in wedding poems is a part of the same discourse which foregrounds masculinity and fatherhood as central patriotic elements in the early modern society (Marklund 2006, 32).

From the point of view of both society and the individual, reproduction in marriage was vitally important. Allusions to sexual relations between spouses and reproduction are conventional elements in wedding poetry. Marriage almost becomes synonymous with the production of human life or, when contrasted to the destructive forces of war, with life itself. The connection between the losses of war and the need for population growth appears in wedding poetry already during the seventeenth century (Castrén 1907, 106). In the poem to Christiern Gisselkors and Brita Lithovia, the speaker declares:

Naturen wil så haa at man sig doch bemöder
Här hemma rätt op hwad Mars i fält utöder.
(To Gisselkors & Lithovia)

Nature compels one to set right, here at home,
what has been destroyed by Mars in the battlefield.

Wartime marriage could be defended by referring to its social significance, but it could be defended on personal and emotional grounds as well. In wedding poetry and in early modern culture in general, love was seen as a particular kind of friendship between a man and a woman characterized by reciprocal trust, affection, and admiration (Kietäväinen-Sirén 2015, 146–49; Stadin 2004, 49–56). In occasional poetry, the legal, economic, and practical aspects of marriage were seldom addressed, and instead, marriage was referred to as a relation offering companionship, friendship, and emotional support. Authors of wedding poetry made use of these ideas in their defence of wartime marriage and emphasized the importance of companionship in difficult times. According to a poem addressed to Johan Fredrik Bagge and Elsa Magdalena Spieker, life is easier when two people share its joys and hardships. The help and comfort offered by a spouse is particularly important in difficult times.

War and military occupation

The only poem written in Finnish included in the material is a poem to Henrik Rungen, a tradesman from Turku, and Catharina Nischa. The author presents himself as 'a sorrowful son of Finland, banished from his home country', and was, like the groom, living as a refugee in Sweden when the poem was published in 1717.⁶ A central topic in the poem is the military occupation that had forced the bridegroom and the author to leave their home country. The poem starts with a description of the Great Wrath:

⁶ The author uses his initials N.M., and has been identified as Nicolaus Gabrielis Mathesius, a chaplain from Ostrobothnia who was living as a refugee in Sweden with his family. On the author, see Väänänen 2011.

Cosca julman Juutin juonet
 Ahdistavat angarasti
 Venäjän verinen miecka
 Surma suulla välckynepi
 Suomi päässyt sonneistansa
 Häme häijyxi hävinnyt;
 Savo saatu surman alla
 Rautalammi rauvennunna;
 Endäs Pohja poljettuna
 Caicki caattu callellensa
 Juhdat juuttunut ajosta;
 Hepo cuollut kytin alla
 Coto kylmille jätetty
 Macunda mahoxi tehty.
 Eipä aica andais naida
 Cuulustella cumpanita;
 Olis aica ilman olla
 Culutella yötä yxin.
 (To Rungen & Nischa)

When the schemes of the cruel Jutes
 oppress us harshly,
 The bloody sword of Russia
 gleams with murder on its blade,
 Finland has lost its oxen,
 Häme horribly destroyed,
 Savo under massacre,
 Rautalampi scattered;
 What about Pohja, all trampled over,
 Everything overthrown and twisted,
 Beasts stuck while driving;
 horses dying during the ride,
 the whole region made barren.
 Time does not let one marry
 or seek a partner.
 It is time to be alone,
 Spend the night in loneliness.

Like most early modern occasional poetry in Finnish, the poem is composed in the traditional oral metre of Finnish folk poetry, the so-called Kalevala metre. The wedding poem to Rungen and Nischa also uses structures typical of Kalevala metric poetry, like semantic parallelism, which refers to the repetition of the meaning of a sentence in the following line (Kallio 2017, 17–20; Leino 1986, 129–35), and formulaic expressions. Such an expression is for instance *julman Juutin juonet*, ‘schemes of the cruel Jutes’, which identifies the Danes, a historical adversary of Sweden, as an enemy in the conflict. Even though Denmark did take part in the coalition against the Swedish kingdom, the foe more often mentioned in wedding poems is Russia. The barbarity and cruelty of the Russian troops was a favourite topic in Swedish propaganda, since fear of the enemy was supposed to strengthen the morale of

the troops (Aminoff-Winberg 2007, 186–89; Larsson 2009, 129). Wedding poems refer to the cruelty of the enemy in a way that is affected not only by propaganda but also circulating rumours and oral narratives (Tarkiainen 1986, 304–05; Vilkuna 2005, 151–531). In the poem to Rungen and Nischa, the repetitive features of oral poetry also affect the depiction: the use of parallelism makes the sequence describing the occupation resemble a list or an inventory of the cruelties that the people of the eastern parts of the Swedish kingdom had to endure.

Despite being composed according to traditional poetics, the poem does in fact offer a historically accurate description of events that occurred during the occupation. The wedding poem refers for instance to the expropriation of cattle and draught animals and the taxing and robbing of households. Other lines in the poem describe the war of annihilation. Areas of strategic importance were ravaged and made unfit for habitation by destroying farmland, burning villages, and killing or capturing its inhabitants (Vilkuna 2005, 53–59, 66–77). The poem describes how Ostrobothnia has been burned down and the homes and farms are deserted.

Nevertheless, the wedding poem to Henrik Rungen and Catharina Nischa has a rather distanced approach to the topic. The Finnish regions of Häme, Savo, and Pohja(nmaa) are portrayed as victims, not the actual people. At the same time, the cataloguing manner of representation, which is a result of the parallelism inherent in Kalevala metric poetry, reinforces the effect of the poem by projecting the image of a nationwide catastrophe. In reality, conditions varied in different parts of the country and during different phases of the occupation (Jutikkala & Pirinen 2003, 214; Larsson 2009, 263–65).

Still, violence towards civilians was common. Torture, massacres, and sexual violence, well documented in the historical sources (Vilkuna 2005, 59–67, 79–92), are not mentioned in the poem to Rungen and Nischa. Even though the style and mode in which war was discussed in wedding poetry did become more realistic by the 1720s, some topics could obviously not be addressed.

Refugees in a foreign land

The advancement of the Russian army was preceded by a flow of refugees from Ingria and the Baltic. They carried with them news and rumours which caused fear and panic among the people. When King Charles XII urged civilians to leave, it led to a massive flight to the west (Jutikkala & Pirinen 2003, 210; Aminoff-Winberg 2007, 47–52, 197–201). Many of the authors and addressees of early eighteenth-century wedding poems were refugees living in Sweden during the years of the occupation.⁷

Fleeing from war is mentioned in wedding poems early on in the war. Christiern Gisselkors, who had been the conrector of the trivial school in Nyenschantz (Swe. Nyenskans) in Ingria, had left the town when it was captured by Russian forces in May 1703 and moved to northern Finland. In a poem to Gisselkors and his bride Brita Lithovia, Johannes Sipelius describes with admiration the groom's fearlessness in the face of danger. Sipelius's wedding poem was written and published in 1706, before the author together with thousands of others fled to Sweden at the beginning of the Russian occupation in 1714 (Väänänen 2011).

⁷ Besides Henrik Rungen, the following addressees can be found in the registers of Finnish refugees who received support while staying in Sweden: Maria Fellbom, Anders Monseen, Magnus Forsteen, Benedictus Krook, Abraham Paleen, Johan Wargentin, and Anders Ignatius. Of the authors, Johan Wång, Johan Sipelius, Johan Haartman and Johan Arckenholz appear in the refugee rolls. See Aminoff-Winberg 1995.

The tone changes in later poems. Johan Wång fled from Viipuri to Helsinki and was imprisoned by Russian troops for four months before being able to continue to Sweden (Kotivuori 2005). In his poem to Andreas Ignatius and Margareta Sophia Godenhielm, both of whom had left Finland in 1713, Wång gives a very desolate picture about life as a refugee. Fleeing from war is a misery, and trust in God is a major consolation during difficult times, a 'strength in the soul', as it is put in the poem.

Refugee life is central also in the wedding poem to merchant Andreas Murberg, from the south-western Finnish town of Tammisaari (Ekenäs), and Agneta Uhonia. The pair married in Stockholm in 1718. In this poem, being a refugee is associated not only with leaving one's home behind but also with uncertain living conditions and being dependent on other people's good will.

Gudz godhet gör at wi ei swälta här til döda
 Men få som flychtingar likwäl nödtorfftig föda.
 Fast våra synder oss utdrifwit ur vårt land
 Bör man doch prisa högt Gudz godhetz milda hand.
 Ty den har öpnat sig at lindra nöd och smärta
 Den har ock öpnat här vår nästas hand och hierta
 At öfwa kärlekswerk och oss bewisa godt.
 Fördenskul prise Gud hwar en som det har fådt.
 (To Murberg & Uhonia)

By God's grace, we will not starve to death
 but receive, as refugees, the necessities of life.
 Even though our sins have driven us out of our country,
 we must praise the goodness of God's gentle hand.
 It has opened up to alleviate pain and hardship,
 it has likewise opened the hands and hearts of our neighbours,
 to do deeds of love and to show us some goodness.
 That is why everyone who has received kindness should praise God.

In the wedding poem, help comes from God's hand, and God has inspired people to do good. Philanthropy is portrayed as a sign of God's goodness. Caring for the ones he punishes is the ultimate evidence of God's goodwill.

Conceptions of God's providence plays a great role also in the poem to Jacob Gavelin and Margareta Capsia, who married in Stockholm in June 1719.

Gud lagar så at folck från längst aflägsna länder
 måst äntligt råkas at här gie hwar annan händer
 men handen ey allen ty hiertan bli ock Ett
 Som man nu här i dag kan finna wara skiedt.
 (To Gavelin & Capsia)

God makes so that people from far away countries
 have to meet and give each other a hand
 but not only hands, but also hearts become one
 like we have witnessed happening here and now.

The poem to Gavelin and Capsia plays with the different meanings of giving someone a hand. The gesture can be interpreted as an offer of help as well as a greeting, but it also signifies a union or a relationship. In the poem, not only hands but also hearts unite:

Ett feigde-swärd måst ock ibland en ordsak wara
 Att twenne hiertan bli i kärlek sammanpara.
 Then Ensam flytt får ey här komma En igen;
 Ty under flychten har han fått af Gud en wän.
 (To Gavelin & Capsia)

Sometimes, a foe's sword can be the reason
 why two hearts are united by love.
 The one who has come alone will not be lonely anymore,
 because under the flight, God has given him a companion.

By using the motif of the sword in this context, the author plays with opposites, since the sword is usually thought of as something that separates rather than unites. Seeking refuge was usually represented as a burden, but the poem to Gavelin and Capsia shows that even forced mobility could sometimes have positive outcomes in the personal life of the addressees.⁸

Conclusion

Writing about war in wedding poetry became more common and more diversified during the first decades of the eighteenth century. Mars as the embodiment of war was no longer the only or the most common way of referring to war, even though mythological representations did not disappear entirely.

A poem to Henrich Hacks and Ida Christina Stahl, married in Stockholm in 1722, a year after the peace treaty of Uusikaupunki (Nystad), describes how two decades of war came to an end. Mars has had enough of bloodshed and battles and starts turning his mind to peace and the 'fruit of peace', love. Another poem published after the end of the war, to Johan Ahlgreen and Elisabeth Wittfoth, urges Mars to stop fighting and the soldiers to put down their weapons. When the reign of the war god ends, it is time for young people to put the past behind them – to 'forget the pain of being a refugee' – and to unite themselves in marriage as God and nature intended.

How did war become a central topic in wedding poetry during the early decades of the eighteenth century?

This question can be phrased as a question of how new topics were introduced into the repertory of early modern occasional poetry. The modification and variation of conventional topics were basic procedures in early modern literature. Hence, new elements in the literary repertory often developed from old ones. Wedding poems for widows and widowers illustrated how one could write about feelings of sadness changing into happiness. The same strategies could be used when describing the ambiguity of feeling joy at a time generally considered disastrous. The traditional argumentation *pro* and *contra* marriage could

⁸ Margareta Capsia, who came from a merchant family in Stockholm, was trained as an artist and became a respected and productive painter of altarpieces and portraits when the couple returned to Finland after the war (Mäkelä-Alitalo 2008).

be adapted and developed into a question about the difficulties and benefits of marrying in wartime.

The capability to endure wartime hardships is adopted as an indicator of the virtuousness of the addressee and a sign of true Christian faith. Even though steadfastness in the face of hardships and an unwavering faith in God and the future are primarily associated with bridegrooms, they are not exclusively male virtues nor explicitly connected with a certain social group. They are rather depicted as universal Christian virtues as part of the spiritual discourse that dominated in many wedding poems during the early eighteenth century.

In their defence of marriage, wedding poems emphasize the meaning of marital love. Mutual love between a husband and wife was understood as a central virtue for both men and women already in seventeenth-century occasional writing. In early eighteenth-century wedding poetry, love in marriage is not represented as a virtue as much as it is used as an argument for marrying during wartime or as a survival strategy. Wartime poems focus on marriage as a form of companionship where the burdens and sorrows of war and refugee life are shared.

The modification of the repertory of wedding poetry was furthered by the fact that the Great Northern War and the Great Wrath affected in an irrevocable way people of the social classes who were authors and addressees of wedding poetry. In Finland, nearly all the educated elite left the country, which is also illustrated in the research material. The addressees are referred to not only as representatives of their class, profession, or social status, but as Finns or Finnish refugees.

The need to depict the conditions of wartime marriage in a more life-like way led to a step away from mythological and abstract portrayals of war and an orientation towards more factual contents and realistic modes of description. At the same time, the value of experience in poetry was reconsidered. Wedding poems written during the Great Northern War cultivated ways of approaching the topic of war in which collective and personal experiences about war, military occupation, and refugee life play a significant role.

Table War in wedding poetry 1700–1722. Collection of Swedish Era Literature, National Library of Finland

Year	Title	Addressees	Place of wedding	Author(s)	Poems in print	Languages
1703	<i>Herde-glam</i>	Erich Loskiöld & Christina Gezelia	Turku, Finland	Anonymous	1	Swedish
1706	<i>Då [] Christiern Gisselkors och [...] Brita Lithovia firade sin bröllops-fäst</i>	Christiern Gisselkors & Brita Lithovia	Liminka, Finland	J.W. (Johan Wång); S.F.; Lorentz Lithovius; J.S. (Johannes Sipelius); Z. Forbus	5	Swedish (3), Latin (2)
1709	<i>På... Henrich Bångz och... Maria Callias heders-dag</i>	Henrich Bång & Maria Callia	Rauma, Finland	Henr. Paulin, Jacob Polviander, And. Polviander, Hen. Callia	4	Swedish
1709	<i>Brud-fackla</i>	Erich Curling & Elisabet Möller	Taivassalo, Finland	Joh. Sperman, Samuel Möller, E. Edner	3	Swedish
1710	<i>Astrild blind och försiktig</i>	Johan Fredrik Bagge & Elsa Magdalena Spieker	Turku, Finland	Elaus Buhrman	1	Swedish

Year	Title	Addressees	Place of wedding	Author(s)	Poems in print	Languages
1710	<i>Då [...] Andreas Chydenius, pastor i Rimito, med [...] Maria Fellbohm sin hedersdag fjrade</i>	Andreas Chydenius & Maria Fellbohm	Merimasku, Finland	Petro Scheduling	1	Swedish
1710	<i>Fast Mars än bullrar grymt med mord och brand i fält</i>	Gustaf Ruutenhielm & Eva Tandfelt	Sysmä, Finland	Jonas Streng	1	Swedish
1710	<i>Är thet rådligt giffra sig, thenna tijd? Hur' tyckes tig?</i>	Anders Monseen & Maria Elisabet Laureus	Merimasku, Finland	Johan Haartman	1	Swedish
1711	<i>På [...] Magnus Forsteens, samt [...] Margaretha Arkenholtz heders-dag</i>	Magnus Forsteen & Margareta Arkenholz	Helsinki, Finland	Joh. Wång	1	Swedish
1712	<i>Tå [...] Benedictus Krook samt [...] Catharina Printz fullkomnade theras ächta förbund</i>	Benedictus Krook & Catharina Printz	Pyhtää, Finland	M.A.	1	Swedish
1712	<i>Den [...] herren Johan [...] Kijander Anna Elisabetha Södermarck, under sin hedersdagz</i>	Johan Kijander & Anna Elisabetha Södermarck	Rantasalmi, Finland	A.A., Samuel Wilh. Falch	2	Swedish
1712	<i>Friggas förmohn, under Martis buller</i>	Abraham Paleen & Margaretha Catharina Tigerstedt	Turku, Finland	Anonymous	2	Swedish
1712	<i>När Särigen oss qwälhd Då himen wet wähl Ett råd at finna Så Särig skal swinna</i>	Johan Wargentini & Margareta Elisabet Malm	–	Pseudonym Fast i simple dicht doch i God Mening	1	Swedish
1713	<i>Då lieutenanten af Nyslåtz läns ord. infant. och öfwerste Stiernskantz [...] regemente [...]</i>	Fabian Schmidfeldt & Elisabetha Tawaststjerna	Mikkeli, Finland	Anonymous	1	Swedish
1713	<i>Gifta sig i onda dagar</i>	Andreas Ignatius & Margareta Sophia Godenhielm	Stockholm, Sweden	Johan Wång	1	Swedish
1713	<i>Bröllops Facklor</i>	Andreas Ignatius & Margareta Sophia Godenhielm	Stockholm, Sweden	J. Amnelius, J. Wallenius	2	Swedish
1714	<i>I Berget är förswårt slå Gerdzlestörar in</i>	Erich Gerdzlovius & Christina Maria Berger	Gefle, Sweden	Johan Haartman	1	Swedish
1716	<i>Frögd och lycka</i>	Olof Gavelius & Brita Brenner	Stockholm, Sweden	Lindsteen	1	Swedish
1716	<i>När alla hiertan satte blij af kärleeks eld i brand</i>	Jacob Monthell & Christina Stridsberg	Lund, Sweden	Jacob Frese	1	Swedish
1716	<i>Älskogs nödwändighet</i>	Carl Ramklou & Christina Eckerman	Stockholm, Sweden	Johan Arckenholtz	1	Swedish

(Continued)

(Continued)

Year	Title	Addressees	Place of wedding	Author(s)	Poems in print	Languages
1717	<i>Cunniotettavan [...] Henrik Rungenin [...] Nin myös [...] Catharina Nischa Morsiamen häissä</i>	Henric Rungen & Catharina Nischa	Stockholm, Sweden	N.M. [Nicolaus Mathesius], Johan. Bergius	2	Swedish (1), Finnish (1)
1717	<i>Ächta-folcks frögd och förnöjelighet</i>	Henric Rungen & Catharina Nischa, Simon Nylander & Margareta Vaicko	Stockholm, Sweden	Anonymous	1	Swedish
1718	<i>Gud är GOD och godt är alt Hwad hans godhet har befalt</i>	Andreas Murberg & Agneta Uhonja	Stockholm, Sweden	A. Ruth	1	Swedish
1719	<i>Tå [...] Jacob Gavelin Ingick Ett Christeligt Samt i HErranom wälbetänckt ächtenskap med [...] Margareta Capsia</i>	Jacob Gavelin & Margareta Capsia	Stockholm, Sweden	Anonymous	1	Swedish
1722	<i>När Mars i Norden länge rasat at Fröja wist sig litet hopp han för sig sielf har äntlig fasat och lemnar henne bättre lopp</i>	Henrich Hacks & Ida Christina Stahl	Stockholm, Sweden	J. Collner	1	Swedish
1722	<i>Fägne-rijm</i>	Johan Hidrich Ahlgreen & Elisabeth Wittfoth	Turku, Finland	Pseudonym Brudgummens Wän	1	Swedish

Research material

Collection of Swedish Era Literature, National Library of Finland:

Astrild blind och försiktig. To Johan Fredrich Bagge & Elsa Magdalena Spieker 1710.

Brud-fackla. To Erich Curling & Elisabet Möller 1709.

Bröllops Facklor. To Andreas Ignatius & Margareta Sophia Godenhielm 1713.

Cunniotettavan [...] Henrik Rungenin [...] Nin myös [...] Catharina Nischa Morsiamen häissä 1717. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028359>

Den ährewördige [...] Johan Kijanderi samt [...] Anna Elisabetha Södermarck, under sin hedersdagz [...] begående, i Randalalmi församling på Strandöö rusthåld den 23 sept. a:o 1712.

Då [...] Andreas Chydenius, pastor i Rimito, med [...] Maria Fellbohm sin hedersdag fjirade 1710.

Då [...] Christiern Gisselkors och [...] Brita Lithovia firade sin bröllops-fäst 1706. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00027586>

Då lieutenanten af Nyslätz läns ord. infant. [...] regemente [...] To Fabian Schmidfeldt & Elisabetha Tafwaststierna 1713.

Fast Mars än bullrar grymt med mord och brand i fält. To Gustaf Ruutenhielm & Eva Tandfelt 1710.

Friggas förmohn, under Martis buller. To Abraham Paleen & Margaretha Catharina Tigerstedt 1712.

Frögd och lycka. To Olof Gavelius & Brita Brenner 1716.

Fägne-rijm. To Johan Ahlgreen & Elisabeth Wittfoth 1722.

Giffa sig i onda dagar Thet en rättsint eij beklagar. To Andreas Ignatius & Margareta Sophia Godenhielm 1713. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028541>

Gud är GOD och godt är alt Hwad hans godhet har befalt. To Andreas Murberg & Agneta Uhonja 1718. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028403>

- Herde-glam*. To Erich Loskiöld & Christina Gezelia 1703. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00025891>
- I Berget är försvårt slå Gerdzlestörrar in*. To Erich Gerdzlovius & Christina Maria Berger 1714, <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028337>
- När alla hiertan satte blij af kärleeks eld i brand*. To Jacob Monthell & Christina Stridsberg 1716.
- När Mars i Norden länge rasat*. To Henrich Hacks & Ida Christina Stahl 1722. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028680>
- När Sårigen oss qwälhd Då himen wet wähl*. To Johan Wargentin & Margareta Elisabetha Malm 1712. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028382>
- På [...] herr Henrich Bångz, och [...] Maria Callias, heders-dag, som fjrades i Raumo den 11. november, 1709.*
- På [...] Magnus Forsteens, samt [...] Margaretha Arkenholtz heders-dag* 1713.
- Tå [...] Jacob Gavelin Ingick Ett Christeligt Samt i HErranom wälbetänckt ächtenskap med [] Margareta Capsia* 1719. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028717>
- Tå lector extraord. [] mag. Benedictus Krook samt [] Catharina Printz den 2 september åhr 1712 [] fullkomnade theras ächta förbund i Pytis prästegård.*
- År thet rådligt giffta sig, thenna tijd? Hur tyckes tig?* To Anders Monseen & Maria Elisabet Laureus 1710. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028376>
- Ächta-folcks frögd och förnöjelighet*. To Henrik Rungen & Catharina Nischa and Simon Nylander & Margareta Vaicko 1717.
- Älskogs nödwändighet*. To Carl Ramklou & Christina Eckerman 1716. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2020-00028523>

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