

Weddings and the Return to Life in the Book of Revelation

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Abstract:

The wedding celebration that concludes the book of Revelation alludes to the previous death not only of the bridegroom ("the Lamb that was slain) but also of the martyrs, who appear both as wedding guests and, collectively, the bride. The familiar event of a wedding serves as a foundation for articulating a vision of the future that is posited as both previously promised and sharply different from the present. The book's nuptial finale draws on the conventional associations of weddings with regeneration and happy endings, but by linking it with the deaths of the martyrs and juxtaposing it against the destruction of "Babylon," it also evokes tropes of weddings gone tragically awry. These valences, which resonate throughout the book's web of images, allow the vision to unify themes of witness and endurance of suffering with those of life of the righteous in the eschaton. Reading Revelation's language of destruction and its language of marriage in light of one another highlights its presentation of the contrasting fates of the wicked and the fateful, both of them meeting fates that the text envisions as just.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The climax of Revelation juxtaposes spectacular violence and a spectacular wedding, both of which are culminations of themes present throughout the book. Violence is manifest in the repeated evocations of the Lamb whose killing has been emphasized previously ([Rev 5:6](#), [12](#); [7:14](#); [12:11](#); [13:8](#)), and also in the references to those who have been “beheaded for their testimony to Jesus” ([Rev 20:4](#); cf. [12:17](#); [19:10](#)) and otherwise had their blood shed ([17:6](#); [18:24](#); [19:2](#)). Their mention here recalls others who are described as having suffered as witnesses (e.g., [1:10](#), [13](#); [6:9–11](#); [11:2–10](#); [12:11](#), [17](#); [13:5–7](#); [16:6](#)). These figures experience resurrection during the narrative’s climactic confrontation, at which time “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God . . . came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years” ([20:4](#)). The resurrection of the faithful receives further emphasis in the description of the New Jerusalem’s divine throne room, in which “[God’s] slaves will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads . . . and they will reign forever and ever” ([22:3–5](#)). It is from this throne room that flows “the river of the water of life . . . on either side [of which] is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations” ([20:1–2](#)). The setting right of their deaths is accomplished by resurrection, a resurrection which, I shall argue, carries a distinctly nuptial tone.

The situation in the New Jerusalem is mirrored by the one of “Babylon.” It is also connected to it: a wedding acclamation follows

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immediately ([19:6–10](#)) upon the punishment of “Babylon,” that is, Rome and her vassal kings (17:1–19:5), just as the bride’s arrival and the marriage banquet ([21:1–22:5](#), [14–17](#)) follow immediately upon the defeat ([Rev 19:11–21](#)) and judgment ([Rev 20](#)) of the satanic forces. Revelation embeds the wedding theme more deeply than is necessarily apparent to modern readers, using references that would have been plain to its initial audience: the song acclaiming the impending wedding of the Lamb and his bride ([19:6–8a](#)); the detailed description of the New Jerusalem’s clothes and preparation ([19:7–8](#)) and adornment ([21:19–21](#)); the celestial Jerusalem’s highly visible procession toward the Lamb ([21:2–4](#)); and invitations to the wedding feast ([19:9](#); [22:17](#)). A few authors have recently begun to devote some attention to this theme (notably: Miller 1998; McIlraith 1999; Zimmerman 2003; Tavo 2006, 296ff.; Huber 2007, 127–78). In partial keeping with some of them, notably Zimmerman (2003), I suggest that Revelation’s repeated references to multipurpose festival accoutrements, especially crowns and the bestowing of new clothes, acquire a nuptial resonance as the text’s imagery of victory and celebration coalesce in the nuptial finale.¹

¹ Two caveats are necessary before proceeding in this discussion. First, my focus is on Revelation’s bridal figure, which is a shifting collective of the faithful. Revelation’s nuptial imagery, like ancient wedding imagery generally, tends to emphasize the bride and treat the bridegroom’s nuptial role only incidentally. Gendered transformations are very much connected to the Lamb, as Stephen D. Moore (1995) and Christopher Frilingos (2003) have both notably explored in depth. As Revelation’s fundamental nuptial dichotomy is between the bride and the anti-bride, however, the gendered transformations of the Lamb form a separate subject of inquiry that I have not attempted to incorporate systematically here. Second, ancient nuptial imagery operates on an implicit set of gender, sexual, and status norms. My aim here is to illuminate how Revelation’s narrative of resurrection participates in this nuptial imagery, not to reiterate the findings of a vast literature on gender and sexuality in antiquity.

II. VIRGIN BRIDES

Revelation presents the nuptial reward of the faithful as recompense for the suffering they are exhorted to endure. Similar constructions are not uncommon in biblical and classical narrative, where marriage can be the key result of athletic or military victory as it is in Rev 20–21. Other examples include David’s marriages to both Michal ([1 Sam 18](#)) and Abigail ([1 Sam 25](#)), the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope in last quarter of the *Odyssey*, the victories of Perseus and Theseus, Aeneas’s marriage to Lavinia in book 12 of the *Aeneid*, and the winning of Atalanta’s hand (see further Schear 1984; Glass 1987; Archer 1990, 194; Satlow 2001a, 163–64; Campbell 2003, 110–11; Brodsky 2006, 91–103; Hersch 2010, 114–22). Visual art can draw this association through elements shared by the celebrations of marriage and victory, such as crowns and wreaths, acclaiming musicians and crowds, festive decorations, and chariot processions. Such associations have been explored at length in Athenian vases by Oakley and Sinos (1995, 44–45) and E. A. Mackay (1995, 299–301). Revelation’s juxtaposition of massive violence and extravagant wedding celebrations would have been familiar as well. Odysseus’s slaughter of Penelope’s suitors, the massacre of the men of Shechem’s city by the sons of Jacob ([Gen 34](#)), and Samson’s blood wedding ([Judg 14](#)) are only a few such instances. In many of these cases, the juxtaposition is presented as poetically just: the wicked and the faithful have been earning their respective recompenses over the course of the narrative. Revelation expands this justice by resurrecting the fallen faithful for their wedding.

When Babylon falls, those who were responsible for the slaughter of the witnesses receive their wages, and in the wedding that follows, the faithful receive theirs. The justice of this outcome, in Revelation’s logic, emerges in tracing the appearances throughout the vision report of groups of martyrs. Three are of special note: the martyr souls under the altar who cry out for vengeance and “were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of both their fellow slaves and of their brethren, who were soon to be killed as they had been killed themselves, would be

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complete” ([Rev 6:11](#)); those “who have come out of the great ordeal and have washed their robes and made them white in the Lamb’s blood” ([Rev 7:14](#)); and above all, the hymn-singing “144,000 redeemed from the earth [who] have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins [παρθένοι]” who “have been redeemed from humanity as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found: they are blameless [ἄμωμοί]” ([Rev 14:1–5](#)). The situation of the first two groups is appropriate for a resurrection that occurs at a wedding, given that the literary figures and visual conventions are based on actual practices. The bride’s bath and the special vessel (λουτροφόρος) used for it are regular subjects on Greek ceramics (especially λουτροφόροι), while Latin elegiac poetry in particular refers to the bride’s wardrobe, with the bridal veil and sometimes shoes serving as metonymy for the bride in Greek and Roman visual art and in Latin poetry.² New clothes and special baths were, however, also characteristic of a number of transitions and ceremonies (e.g., baptism, *toga virilis*, burial). They gain a nuptial cast in Revelation in part because it is with a wedding rather than, for example, a baptism that the narrative concludes. This cast takes on a stronger tint given their similarity to the 144,000 who are called παρθένοι, a designation contributing to the sense of consummation in the resurrection at the book’s conclusion.

Throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, first-time brides, but not first-time grooms, were expected never to have had sexual intercourse before their weddings. The observances of the wedding chamber itself (e.g., other women “bedding down” the bride) focused solely on the bride’s initiation into sexual activity. This was a significant enough part of observances that the epithalamium, literally “[a song] for the bridal chamber,” originally was a genre exclusive to this occasion. By the turn of the eras, it had broadened

² On the bride’s wardrobe and its representation, see Bennett and Tyrrell 1991; Oakley and Sinos 1995, 6–8, 16–21, 25–26; Vérilhac and Vial 1998, 304–12; La Follette 2001; McNeil 2005; Hersch 2010, 94–112; Hersch 2009. On the bridal bath, see Rehm 1994, 14, 30–32; Oakley and Sinos 1995, 15–16, 43–47; Vérilhac and Vial 1998, 293–97; Smith 2005, 1–9.

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to mean a wedding song of any kind, but as Sissa (1990), Alberici and Harlow (2007), and Hanson (2007) observe, authors as diverse as medical writers, satirists, and political moralists mark female, and only female, sexual debut.³ In fact, [Rev 14:4](#) may be the earliest instance of a masculine form. Its only potential competitor, Joseph and Aseneth, addresses the strangeness of it directly. While the text repeatedly designates Aseneth a *παρθένος* without any comment, characters explain their application of the term to Joseph. Aseneth's father Pentephres tells her that "Joseph is a man who worships God, self-controlled [*σώφρων*], and a virgin [*παρθένος*] like you today" ([4:9](#)).⁴ As Joseph himself later explains, "it does not befit a man who worships God to sleep with his wife before the wedding" ([21:1](#)). The exceptional character of male virginity persisted, such that in Achilles Tatius's third-century CE romance *Leucippe and Clitophon*, the eponymous hero assures his faithful beloved that "I have imitated your virginity, if there can be any virginity in men (*με παρθενίαν μεμιμημένον, εἴ τις ἔστι καὶ ἐν ἀνδράσι παρθενία*)" ([Leucippe and Clitophon 5.20.5](#)).⁵ Longus's romance *Daphnis and Chloe* is also among the handful of narratives concerned with male "chastity," but retains the conventional view of virginity as female. When Chloe attains nubility, her foster mother advises Chloe's foster father "to give Chloe in marriage [*ἐκδιδόναι*] and not to keep a girl [*κόρη*] of her age at home much longer. After all, any day now she might terminate her virginity [*τὴν παρθενίαν ἀπολέσαι*] while she is out with the flock and make a man [*ἄνδρα ποιήσεται*] out of a shepherd boy in exchange for apples or roses" ([Longus, Daphnis and Chloe 3.25.1–](#)

³ See also Zeitlin 1996, 234–36; for a related phenomenon in rabbinic contexts, see Langer 1995.

⁴ All translations of Joseph and Aseneth are from Burchard 1985; the Greek text is from Burchard 2003. The embedded hyperlinks direct to the older translation of [Brooks \(1918\)](#).

⁵ All translations of *Leucippe and Clitophon* are either from or adapted from Gaselee 1969; the embedded hyperlinks direct to the earlier Loeb edition, [Gaselee 1917](#).

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2).⁶ The text presents sexual debut as a loss (that of virginity) for females, but an entry for males (that into adulthood). Artemis was the companion and special protectress of *παρθέναι*, not *παρθένοι*, and virginity was a state that she inhabited along with Athena and Hestia, but none of her many brothers. The period of life between early childhood and full adulthood was ritually and culturally marked for girls in a way that it was not for boys. Virginity was the characteristic of girls serving in the early classical cults of Artemis and other deities, and these religious activities were connected to their social position as *παρθέναι*, as Ken Dowden (1989) explores in depth, and Cole (1984), Kouki (1993), Lonsdale (1993, 170–76), Larson (1995, 116–21), Too (1997), and Ingalls (2000) also investigate. There seems to have been nothing comparable for boys. Poetry such as Erinna’s and Sappho’s elegizes, or eulogizes, the play and other activities of *παρθέναι* in a way that no extant poetry does for boys. Notably among many others, Rosenmeyer (2004) observes that this is the case from the archaic Greek period through its classical Latin echoes (see also Lonsdale 1993, 193–201 and Derderian 2001, 117–20).

In literature and myth, the premature deaths of *παρθέναι* are lamented with a prominence that belies the limited representation of female characters in literature generally. The victims of sacrifice in this literature are usually maidens whose deaths are often represented as substitute weddings, a phenomenon that Dowden (1989), Larson (1995, 101–09), and Launderville (2010, 246–53) explore widely; others have contributed individual case studies.⁷ Iphigenia and the daughter of Jephthah ([Judg 11:29–40](#)) are the two most famous, among many examples. Ancient narratives that depict

⁶ All translations of *Daphnis and Chloe* are either from or adapted from Morgan 2004; the embedded hyperlinks direct to the earlier Loeb edition, [Thornley, Edmonds, and Gaselee 1916](#).

⁷ See, for example, Rehm (1994, 43–58) on the *Agamemnon*; Connelly (1996), Lyons (1997, 137–43) on Iphigenia and Polyxena; Thompson (2001, 104–11, 114–16) on Jephthah’s daughter; and Roselli (2007); Kamrada (2009, 80–85).

human sacrifice without explicit condemnation often present maidens on the threshold of marriage as its victims, willing or otherwise. Again, the daughter of Jephthah is the clearest example in the Hebrew Bible. Later Jewish and early Christian authors, as Thompson (2001, 104ff.) details, emphasize the similarities between her story and those of Iphigenia and Polyxena, both of whom are led to the altars of their deaths under the guise of being led to their marriages. Parallel figures were not lacking. Larson (1995, 101–12) lists Herakles’s daughter Macaria, Aglauros, the Hyperborean maidens, the Koronides, the Hyacinthides, Androcleia and Alcis, the daughters of Erechtheus, and the daughters of Leos (see also Seaford 1987; Rehm 1994, 43–58; Knapp 1997, 69–85; Lyons 1997, 137ff.). Such *παρθέναι* could become the subjects of what Larson (1995) identifies as “heroine cults,” with sanctuaries and other sites at which brides-elect dedicated locks of hair or offered lamentations before their marriages. This is part of a larger discourse in which the end of a girl’s or young woman’s status as a *παρθένος* is viewed as a kind of death, with marriage, if it occurs, constituting an immediate return to life.⁸ This is a systematic, almost mythological discourse, visual and verbal, on a phase of female life that has no parallel in male life. Virginité is a state that men and boys do not inhabit.

By designating its “144,000 who have been redeemed from the earth” as *παρθένοι*, therefore, Revelation ascribes a status deeply marked as feminine to these figures who are “blameless” and the “first fruits” of God and the Lamb ([Rev 14:5](#)). This terminology and the sacrificial setting reinforce their connection to virgins of the usual, female kind. The fact that it is *with women* that these *παρθένοι* have not defiled themselves reinforces their status as in some sense “actually,” and not only grammatically, male. Ancient Mediterranean socio-sexual mores conceived of a number of ways of defiling oneself sexually, but the overwhelming concern that its texts reflect with female sexuality is illicit activity with men. Although a handful of almost exclusively male authors, including Martial and Ovid, display

⁸ Further discussion below. See also Dowden 1989; Lyons 1997, 143–49, 154–57; Derderian 2001, 77–81, 145–57.

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an awareness of sex between women, most do not acknowledge it. This near silence is a rhetorical trope—women in ancient Mediterranean societies were having sex together, and men demonstrably did know about it.⁹ The very quietness of the sources, however, indicates a culturally entrenched assumption that it would be men who defiled themselves with women or, just as easily, with men, and that women who defiled themselves sexually would do so with men. The grammatical gender of *παρθένοι* and the emphasis on sexual defilement *with women* doubly reinforce the maleness of the 144,000, even as the root term *παρθένος* associates them strongly with a female realm. The bride in Revelation, consisting of others who were killed and came back to life, is a collective whose “maleness” comes into focus in its very “feminization” into the figure of a bride especially characterized by *παρθενία*. Its groom, the Lamb who was slain and returned to life, is a military victor who has made a total and permanent conquest of the enemy: a masculine figure indeed.

The sacrificial quality of this nuptial imagery, while consonant with larger discourses, is distinctive within the New Testament. The imagery itself, however, is not. Rather, it draws on the Hebrew Bible’s analogical language of God : Israel :: husband : wife. Such imagery occurs notably throughout Deutero-Isaiah and the first five chapters of Hosea, as well as in Jer 2–5, [31](#); [Lam 1](#); and [Ezek 16, 23](#). Although prophetic texts use this rhetoric most heavily, it also occurs in some wisdom texts (e.g., [Ps 19:4b–6](#); [45](#); [Cant 3:6–11](#)). It also justifies laws governing the relationship between God and Israel. Winiarski (2006, 43), for example, argues that the prohibition against making and venerating icons ([Exod 20:5–6](#))

construes Israel as the bride of God [and] further secures his exclusive status as the husband of Israel . . . Yahweh’s stated rationale for prohibiting [this] is his jealous nature, the quality of a human husband: “for I the Lord thy God am a jealous

⁹ For some very focused work on this body of evidence, see Brooten 1996, esp. 42–72.

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(Hebrew: *qanna*) God.” Here we may observe erotic passion animating the *quid pro quo* legalism of the contract.

Such images reflect a social system in which husbands had the upper hand in marriage both figuratively and, in wedding ceremonies, literally. This social system remained in place into and centuries beyond the later Second Temple period. However, the marital metaphor that reflected this system did not remain, instead becoming marginalized or transmuted in late biblical and many pseudepigraphical texts. Michael Satlow (2001b, 17) even concludes that, with the exception of Jesus followers, “no Jew writing in Greek uses this metaphor [even though they] do use marriage as a metaphor . . . that describes other things.” Suggesting a number of theological and social reasons for this shift away from it, he observes that where the marriage metaphor does occur in early Jewish literature from outside the Jesus movement, it is reoriented to preserve a masculine status for Israel, that of son or son-in-law to God as father or father-in-law. The end of the Second Temple period saw an intensification rather than a reversal of the rejection of the metaphor. Whereas Greek-speaking Jewish authors in the former period largely ignored the metaphor, their rabbinic successors actively distance it from their vision of the relationship between God and Israel. Thus Satlow (2001a, 50–51) observes that

the midrashim tend to use the marital metaphor to illustrate God marrying off a son or daughter rather than God actually marrying A few parables that advance the metaphor that Israel “married” God’s daughter, Torah [or the Sabbath] In the very few places outside the later homiletical works that the image of God’s “marriage” to Israel does appear, it is transformed. A midrash on [Hos 2:18](#), for example, changes [its] meaning . . . into a teaching about the conduct of a human couple The Babylonian Talmud presents a series of exegeses [of the name Gomer] that emphasize her promiscuity, but do so in a fashion that completely obliterates the fact that she represents Israel . . . God has become Israel’s *father* rather than *husband* . . . Israel is the child of adultery rather than the adulteress.

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But though the metaphor appears to have died in early Jewish literature, it returned to life in New Testament and other early Christian writings. The figuring of “generic” and implicitly or explicitly male groups as brides resumed, however, in more than one religious milieu of the Roman period. In the New Testament, Matthew likens believers not only to male wedding guests ([Matt 22:1–12](#)) but also to female wedding attendants ([Matt 25:1–13](#)). In the midst of discussing the behaviour of actual husbands and wives, Ephesians blurs these literal husbands into eschatological brides:

He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does the church, because we are parts of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. ([Eph 5:28–32](#))

Elsewhere, the second-highest grade of Mithraic initiation was *νύμφος*, “[male] bride,” a construction that might be seen as parallel to *παρθένοι*, “[male] virgins,” in [Rev 14:5](#). Direct information about this grade is all but nonexistent, consisting only of inscriptions of the bare name, a painting from the Santa Prisca catacomb, and the relatively late glosses of Firmicus Maternus and Jerome. This small body of evidence does at least indicate that the term really meant “male bride.” Richard Gordon (1996, 50), for example, notes a wall painting from the Santa Prisca catacomb in which “occurs a representation of the *Nymphus* with his face covered by a veil; [elsewhere] on the same wall, the *Nymphus* hold[s] a *flammeum* [bridal veil] in his hands” (see also Turcan 2000, 87). How Mithraists interpreted it is another question. Gordon (1980, 49) hypothesizes “a sort of marital androgyne, a fusion of male and female at the point of marriage,” and elsewhere he suggests that “a parallel use of marital paradox in an esoteric context is the phrase ‘I am the bride and bridegroom’ in one of the revelation tractates from Nag Hammadi, [The Thunder, Perfect Mind](#) (VI, 2: lines 27 = 39)”

(Gordon 1996, 113 n. 53). Robert Turcan (2000, 87) offers the more straightforward reading that “the rank of *Nymphus* suggests a kind of marriage or *hieros gamos* between the god and the initiate.”¹⁰ Whatever *νύμφος* may have “meant,” however, it was not the ultimate Mithraic grade. That was *πατήρ*, and the initiate who attained it, it would appear, was shedding the previous feminized state in favour of a position of authoritative masculinity. This does not seem to be the case in Revelation, where the male bride remains a bride in the eschaton. Revelation’s nuptial language, then, is part of a larger rhetoric within which it distinguishes itself by keeping its men brides, where Ephesians makes such men into husbands, and Mithraism into fathers.

III. WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

The constituent members of the eschatological bride are different from real brides, not only because at least some of them are male but also because many of them died before the wedding, having been beheaded or otherwise slaughtered for their testimony. The wedding of “Jerusalem” itself follows immediately upon the spectacular demise of and lamentation for “Babylon.” The juxtaposition is significant and is part of larger rhetorics. New Testament nuptial imagery, including Revelation’s, can be interwoven with loss and violence, as in the case of John the Baptist. The Synoptic Gospels have Jesus saying that his disciples dine while John’s fast because “the wedding guests cannot fast while the groom [*ὁ νυμφίος*] is with them, can they? The days will come when the groom is taken away [*ἀπαρθῆ*] from them, and then they will fast on that day” ([Mark 2:20](#); cf. [Mark 2:18–20](#) // [Matt 9:14–15](#) // [Luke 5:33–35](#) // [John 3:27–30](#)). In the parallel in the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist (who in the Synoptic Gospels is “beheaded for his witnessing”) insists that Jesus and not he is the messiah, a confirmation expressed through the melancholy proclamation: “the groom is the one who has the bride [*ὁ ἔχων τὴν νύμφην νυμφίος ἐστίν*]. But the groom’s friend [*ὁ δὲ φίλος*

¹⁰ My translation; French original: “Le titre de *Nymphus* suppose une sorte de mariage ou *hieros gamos* entre le dieu et l’initié.”

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τοῦ νυμφίου] is the one who stands and hears him and rejoices greatly at the groom's voice . . . He must increase, but I must decrease" ([John 3:29-30](#)).

Juxtapositions of weddings and funerals such as these were ripe for dramatic irony, which was the stronger for similarities between the two sets of observances. A wedding was represented as (and was) the bride's leaving her paternal household and her maidenhood to enter her marital household in the new role of wife. The funeral was represented (and was) similarly the deceased leaving his or her domicile in the city and position in its living community for a new residence in the necropolis and a place in the community of ancestors. There were practical similarities as well: "judging from the surviving literature, Roman authors themselves, like their Greek predecessors, decided that the wedding was most like a funeral" in part because they were among the only public processions that neither led to a public sacrifice nor exclusively honoured a set deity (Hersch 2010, 228). The centrality of female actors seems to have been another similarity. Male actors did have prominent roles at funerals: adult men carried the bier and delivered funeral orations, and a dead man was certainly the subject of his own funeral. Nonetheless, many funerary tasks were designated as women's work. The washing, anointing, and dressing of the corpse; the singing of laments; and in Rome the "kissing up" of the dying breath, if it was possible, were all supposed to fall to female relatives of the deceased (see Derderian 2001, 24-52; Cairns 2009; Corley 2010, *passim*). This is evident in the tendency of prophetic literature to attribute laments (or taunts) for fallen cities not only to masculine figures such as kings but also to grammatically masculine general populaces that presumably include women (e.g., [Isa 14:16-17](#); [Jer 51:34-35](#); [Micah 2:3-4](#)), to mourners designated as "daughters," mothers, or other female figures (e.g., [Isa 16:2-4](#); [23:4](#), [12](#), [15-18](#); [47](#); [Jer 48:3-6](#); [Lam 1-2](#); [Micah 4:8](#), [13](#)), or to men likened to widows or other mourning women (e.g., [Micah 4:9-10](#)). Revelation, however, follows the lament over Tyre in [Ezek 27](#) by attributing the lament for Babylon to grammatically masculine monarchs (οἱ βασιλεῖς, [Rev 18:9](#)),

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merchants (οἱ ἔμποροι, [Rev 18:11, 15](#)) and “all shipmasters and all seafarers, and sailors” (πᾶς κυβερνήτης καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων καὶ ναῦται, [Rev 18:17b](#)). These are roles in which literary and visual sources acknowledge female participation either much more rarely than male participation (monarchs) or not at all (merchants and seafarers—even if women did sometimes practice these professions in reality). No grammatically female subjects or typically feminine roles (e.g., virgins, mothers, weavers) appear in the chorus. Babylon is lamented by at least some men and no identified women. This parallels the equally striking fact that the saints whose “righteous deeds” constitute the fine linen (τὸ γὰρ βύσσινον τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, [Rev 19:8b](#)) of the bride’s clothing are grammatically masculine. This, too, stands out for the fact that weaving and sewing seem overwhelmingly to have been “women’s work” throughout antiquity. They are consistently represented as quintessentially feminine tasks, from the positive depictions of Penelope in the *Odyssey* and the woman of valour in [Prov 31:10–31](#) to the veneration of Athena and Minerva as goddesses of wisdom and weaving, from Xenophon’s hard-working housewife to the image of Lucretia and the commemoration of Turia to early Christian and early Jewish enumerations of the duties of every wife (see Scheid and Svenbro 1996, esp. 56–72, 83–107; Peskowitz 2001; Lang 2004; Bundrick 2008; Cottica 2014; Lovén 2014).

Revelation’s climactic wedding and funeral observances thus share the distinction of being made by at least some men, or in the case of the lament, mostly or even all men, instead of by women, as would be expected. The unusual gender script, not the proximity of the events, is distinctive. Weddings and funerals corresponded not only in being women’s work but also in many details. Acknowledgments of the similarities abound in ancient literature, perhaps most explicitly in Artemidorus (second century CE):

To dream that one is dead, that one is being carried out for burial, or that one is buried . . . signifies marriage for a bachelor. For both marriage and death are considered *teloi* in a person’s life. So if a sick person dreams of marrying, it

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portends death, because the same things happen to someone wedding and to someone dying: that is, for example, a procession of friends both male and female, wreaths, spices, unguents, and written records of their possessions [i.e., in wills and marriage contracts]. ([Oneir. 2.49](#); see also [2.61](#); [2.65](#); and [4.30](#); trans. White 1990, 143 [adapted])

Such commonalities underlie what Seaford (1987) calls the “tragic wedding,” which was a staple of fifth-century Athenian drama and the traditions, existing and subsequent, in which it participated. Alcestis, Antigone, Glauce, Iphigenia, Persephone, and Polyxena are all famous examples and subjects of extensive discussion (e.g., Dowden 1989; Rehm 1994; Ormand 1999, 25–28, 90–98, 153–61; Derderian 2001, 145–58). Wedding/funeral conflation drew heavily on this repertoire of shared elements. Hersch (2010, 165) draws special attention to torches, which “stood as metonymy for the wedding in both Greek and Roman literature” and the fact that the “juxtaposition of the torch of the funeral and the torch of marriage, so common in Greek literature, was eagerly imitated and expanded by Roman authors . . . [they] represented the bookends of an adult’s married life.” The theme is also present in epigraphy. The memorial for nineteen-year-old Julia Sidonia, for example, describes her as someone “whose threads the Fates broke before the day that Hymen’s torches were lit at the wedding . . . Lucina [the goddess of childbirth] wept for the quenched fire of her torch, for she was a virgin and also her parents’ only child” ([CLE 1997](#); trans. Courtney 1995, 181 [adapted]). Revelation reverses the tragic formulation by having the heavenly chorus sing of Babylon’s pyre as a prelude to announcing Jerusalem’s bridal arrival ([Rev 19:1–10](#)).

While the cosmic scale in which Revelation uses this rhetoric is distinctive, the juxtaposition itself is not. Indeed, the lament over Babylon bewails the fact that “the voice of the bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more” ([Rev 18:23](#)), quoting a scriptural formulation that Jeremiah especially favours (e.g., [Jer 7:34](#); [16:9](#); [25:10](#)). As in the case of torches, this bit of irony is a commonplace in non-biblical literature as well, for example, “Hymen did not

attend your wedding to preside at the feast . . . Black-robed Hades interrupted [as he did for Persephone] and the cruel fates beside him changed a dirge for the dead” ([Anth. Graec. 7.188](#), attributed to Antonius Thallus; cf. [Anth. Graec. 7.547](#)).¹¹ Burial itself could express related sentiments. Martin-Kilcher (2000, 71), surveying thirteen rich and well-preserved graves of adolescent girls from the western Roman Empire, identifies an almost standard assemblage of nuptial items that she terms the “non-attained marriage” (see also Denzey 2008, 2–11, 17–20; Harlow 2012). Sgourou and Agelarkis (2001, 340–42) have made similar findings in fifth- through second-century BCE Thasos, where the burials of adolescent girls, like those that Martin-Kilcher considers, often included crowns similar to brides’ and in which the “intermediate age of the deceased between childhood and adulthood was further emphasized by the placement of characteristic items of female adornment [typical of postnuptial gifts] . . . next to the toys [normally dedicated to Artemis before marriage]” (see also Strömberg 1993, 39–51, 100–07). Families who could not afford elaborate burials for their daughters (and probably could not have afforded elaborate weddings) could still commemorate their losses as especially painful by evoking the “non-attained wedding” in more modest funerary inscriptions.¹²

¹¹ All translations of *Anthologia Graeca* are adapted from Paton 1916–1919; the embedded hyperlinks direct to the same edition.

¹² Thus one from Ptolemaic Kanarae ([SEG 1.567.3–6](#) = [Inscr.Métr. 83.3–6](#)) has the deceased proclaiming, “My father provided for me for twenty years. I did not even attain the bridal chamber. I never lay on its couch, and there was no knocking on the cedar doors by girls my age all through the night” (trans. Lattimore 1962, 192 [adapted]). A first- or second-century CE Sinope epitaph muses that “stone blooms bright no less than gold, and shows even brighter if it is robed in a virgin’s modesty [*παρθενίης αἰδοῖ*]” ([IG 1.172](#) [= [ISinope 172](#)]; trans. French 2004, 125 [adapted]). An inscription from the Vigna Randanini catacombs, dating from the third or fourth century CE, states simply that “Parcharius the *gerusiarch* [of the Jewish community] set this up for his daughter Dulcitia, a virgin [*παρθένος*] and a bride-elect [*μελλονύμφη*]” ([CIJ 1.106](#) [= [JWE 2.321](#)]; trans. Noy 2005, 2:268–69 [adapted]).

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Not all virgins' epitaphs lament their failure to marry, of course, and it was not unheard of for dead youths to be commemorated with evocations of the "non-attained wedding." Perhaps most notably, but not alone among the Athenian tragedies, the eponymous heroine of Sophocles's *Antigone* does not meet the only nuptial demise in the play. Instead, her fiancé, upon discovering her execution/suicide, remains determined to be united to her and so "weds" her with his own suicide on the spot ([1231–1242](#)). Euripides's *Trojan Women* is even more explicit in applying typical bridal language to a dead bridegroom. There, Hecuba laments as she dresses the body of her grandson Astyanax for burial: "I put upon you the glory of Phrygian robes, things that you should have worn at your marriage to some pre-eminent Asian princess" (1218–1220 [= [1219–1221](#) in Way 1912]; see Wyles 2011, 79). A few epitaphs use similar vocabulary akin to that found in these literary examples,¹³ and a handful of epitaphs also liken youths to Persephone, just as many liken maidens. Perhaps the most striking example is a late first-century BCE inscription from Naucratis: "The bridal couch [*νύμφας*] was not scented with saffron for you; they did not bring you to it and to the bride's chamber [*θάλαμον*] fragrant with desire, Heracleides son of much-revered Chaeremon, but they took you as if in a [wedding] chariot to the abode of Lethe" (*IBM* 1084.1–4 [= *Inscr.Métr.* 67]; trans. Lattimore 1962, 193 [adapted]). Even as he is likened to Persephone, however, Heracleides's position in the masculine role of groom remains unchanged. He is seen as travelling to the underworld without any named companion rather than being abducted by a groom, as Persephone was.

But even expressions of grief such as these that kept dead young men in the position of grooms were the exception, not the rule. Overall, the "non-attained wedding" was common in literary and

¹³ A second-century CE inscription from Thasos, for example, commemorates a boy who "did not see the bridal chamber [*νυμφικῶν*] he was approaching, the wedding [*γάμων*] that begets desire" (*EG* 208b.12–13 [= *IG* 12.8 441.12–13]; trans. Lattimore 1962, 193 [adapted]). See also *CIJ* 1.148 (= *JWE* 2.253); trans. Noy 2005, 2:221–23).

epigraphic commemorations for maidens and much rarer in those for youths. Revelation's presentation of its male martyrs being resurrected in a glorious wedding is thus not unprecedented, only unusual. What is almost unique is the fact that its martyred men are not the groom but rather the bride, for whom lamentations of this kind were much more to be expected.

IV. SACRIFICIAL BRIDES

If the reference to the 144,000 as *παρθένοι* in [Rev 14:4](#) is strikingly feminizing, the description of them in the same verse as *ἄμωμοί* is more subtly so. One of the few other uses of this term in the New Testament occurs in [Eph 5:25-27](#): “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleaning her with the washing of water [*ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθάρισας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος*] in spirit, so as to present the church to himself in splendour . . . so that she may be holy and without blemish [*ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος*].” Here, too, is more wedding imagery than necessarily meets the modern eye. An essential prenuptial observance in the eastern empire was the bath (*λουτρόν*) of the bride in water drawn from a specially designated source and with particular attendants and songs. For wealthier brides in the cultural sphere of classical Athens, this involved a new water jug that was appropriately decorated and later displayed in her marital home and often buried with her after her death. The unblemished state that washing achieved was equally associated with sacrificial victims, which is appropriate for the virgins who are “purchased from the human race as first fruits [*ἀπαρχή*]” ([Rev 14:4](#)). Paul uses *ἀπαρχή* literally,¹⁴ and in Revelation its connection with *ἄμωμος* makes the connotation clear. This is the term that the LXX regularly uses to designate a physically perfect sacrificial animal, as repeatedly in [Lev 4](#) and [Num 29](#). While Revelation quotes Hebrew and not Greek texts, the association was widely accepted, also appearing in

¹⁴ [Rom 11:16](#): “If part of the dough offered as *ἀπαρχή* is holy [*ἁγία*], then the whole batch is holy.”

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Colossians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter.¹⁵ The terminology also strengthens the relationship between the virgins of [Rev 14:1–5](#) and the martyrs of [6:9–11](#), whose spotlessness also links them to the Lamb, that is, the blood sacrifice that obviates all others. If they “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” prior to the eschaton’s completion, their blood is at risk of being offered to Babylon, as David May (2009) illuminates in detail.

None of these would necessarily create nuptial associations on their own, but they are identifiable as a thread that Revelation unites in its nuptial eschaton. The likening of bridal and sacrificial figures is another rhetorical commonplace, as seen above, and not only because prenuptial offerings could include both vegetal and blood sacrifices. Because first-time brides were putting to death their maiden status and all it entailed, they could be likened to domestic animals killed in sacrifice or wild ones killed in hunting. The initiations of girls into the nubile state of maidenhood seem to have reflected this clearly, as Cole (1984, 238–43), Dowden (1989, *passim*), Spaeth (1996, 51–60), Faraone (2003), and Ferrari (2003) all observe of earlier ancient Greece.

Similarly, [Judg 11:36–40](#) offers the story of Jephthah’s daughter as an explanation of why “there arose an Israelite custom that for four days every year the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite” ([11:40](#)). In the Greek cultural sphere, it was not unheard of for heroes, rather than heroines, to become recipients of maidens’ prenuptial offerings. Euripides alludes to such a practice in the *Hippolytus*, wherein it is for the tragedy’s eponymous hero that “girls before their weddings

¹⁵ [Col 1:22](#): “[Christ] has now reconciled you in the body of his flesh, so as to present you holy and ἀμώμους and irreproachable before him;” [Heb 9:13–14](#): “For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of a heifer’s ashes, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is made pure, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself ἁμωμον to God”; [1 Pet 1:18–19](#): “you were purchased from the empty ways inherited from your ancestors not with perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect and ἀμώμου.”

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[κόραι γὰρ ἄζυγες γάμων] will cut their hair, and you will harvest the deep mourning of their tears for the span of ages. The practiced skill of poetry sung by maidens [παρθένων] will forever make you its theme” (1425–1429).¹⁶ If Pausanias is to be believed, this was actually the case in Corinth (*Descr.* 2.32.1). But as in the case of lamentations for dead youths’ “non-attained weddings,” these were the exceptions, not the rule. Even if the recipients of these offerings were youths, moreover, the donors were always brides-to-be. If future grooms ever participated, there is no hint of it in the evidence.

While marriage is a rare, although not nonexistent, context for the poeticization of youths’ deaths, war is a common one. Claire Jamset (2004, 95) notes in her examination of the *Thebaid* and the *Aeneid* that many warrior-youths’ deaths “could be read as a narrative of perverse defloration” and contain “such powerful elements of elegiac language that a strongly eroticized picture of these doomed youths emerges.” She notes in particular the designation of such characters as boys or youths (*puerī*) rather than men (*virī*), sexually redolent descriptions of the penetration of their bodies by the weapons that cause their deaths, and the use of a complex of colour language and flower imagery that in epithalamia and nuptial elegies is characteristic of brides. The themes that she identifies in these early Roman imperial epics have ancient roots, at least in their basic form. Theseus is one of a gender-balanced group of young people offered as a tributary sacrifice, and some of the earliest Greek literature likens young men’s deaths in combat to sacrifices that substitute for marriage. Steinrück (2008, 14–15), drawing on the work of Pierre Vernant, notes that

the *Iliad* promotes the ideology of beautiful deaths [for youths]. Not only does the *Iliad*’s aesthetic admit the description of beauty only when something is destroyed, but

¹⁶ All translations of Euripides’s *Hippolytus* are adapted from Kovacs 1995; the embedded hyperlinks direct to the same edition available at the [Perseus site](#).

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in addition, the death of a (typical) unmarried young man is also called “beautiful” . . . Tyrtaeus in Sparta and Callinus in Colophon [both 7th cen. BCE] adopt this pattern for elegies . . . young men, Tyrtaeus says, may be handsome in the eyes of married women and impressive in the eyes of married men, but become beautiful only in battle death. Both Callinus and Tyrtaeus point out that death is the means of obtaining from the city what young, superfluous men are most short of: glory and love.

The forms and social meanings that Steinrück argues this imagery carried in archaic literature obviously evolved, but what is significant here is that the positively appraised violent death of a youth had literary associations with a kind of substitute wedding from the outset of classical literature and proved enduring in form. Similar evocation may be present in biblical laments for young warriors such as Jonathan, whose life was so entangled with David’s marital and martial adventures, and whose death David laments with the declaration that “your love was wonderful to me, surpassing the love of women” ([2 Sam 1:26](#)).¹⁷ This is all the more significant for Revelation if we understand its 144,000 *παρθένοι*, as Eugene Boring (1989, 169) suggests, in light of biblical demands (e.g., [Deut 20:1–9](#); [23:9–10](#); [1 Sam 21:5](#); [2 Sam 11:8–11](#)) of celibacy for those in “God’s army . . . during their time of service . . . [and] John pictures the church as the army of God—the very word ‘thousands’ conjures up military units” (see also Beale 1999, 738–39; Smalley 2005, 357–58; Boxall 2006, 203–04). Yet this masculine, martial identity is subsumed into the designation of *παρθένοι* and the overriding image of believers as the bride of the Lamb.

V. BLOOD WEDDINGS

The symbiosis of wedding and funeral in Revelation is not limited to the bridal identification of male martyrs. The placement of Babylon’s spectacular destruction (spectacular in the literal sense of the term)

¹⁷ On the lament over Jonathan, vexed as its interpretation has proven, see Peleg 2005; Rowe 2009.

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immediately before Jerusalem's spectacular wedding (spectacular in the figurative sense) is another dimension of it. Just as individuals' marriage and burial rites could share close associations, the public aspects of a wedding could lend themselves to wider-scale violence, at least in principle. Narratives of the abduction of brides and the resulting violence between men (e.g., [Judg 21](#); the Sabine women; the *Iliad*) were well known. More relevant to Revelation is the theme of massacres of wedding guests, especially groomsmen. Such events were presumably infrequent in reality, but the paucity of scholarship on depictions of them can mask their prevalence in narrative literature and related visual art. The most famous example is Odysseus's slaughter of Penelope's suitors, the unsuccessful among whom would have been guests at the winner's wedding. This incident occupies six full books (17–22) of the *Odyssey*, and it was a perennially popular subject in Greek vase painting. It proved more of a precedent than an isolated instance in literature, where would-be grooms and their peers meet bloody deaths with a certain regularity. In her study of this theme in Matthew's Gospel, Blickenstaff (2005, 32–33) draws on texts including *Cyropaedia*, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, and the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* to argue that

the trope of the endangered bridegroom is common in ancient biographies, historical accounts, and novels, which lends support to my thesis [that it] is as closely associated with violence as with joy. That [the bridegroom in [Matt 25](#)] dies before his wedding feast, although he is expected to return to celebrate it, places him in good company with other tragic bridegrooms. In some accounts the entire wedding party is disrupted by violence and death . . . Given these literary examples, the bridegroom's violent death, or the appearance of violent death, is almost an expectation.

Blickenstaff numbers among the Hebrew Bible's "endangered bridegroom" figures Lot's would-be sons-in-law ([Gen 19:1–29](#)), Moses in Zipporah's "bridegroom of blood" incident ([Exod 4:18–26](#)), and the murder of Uriah (2 Sam 11–12). Nabal's demise ([1 Sam 25](#))

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and the seven grooms of Sarah the daughter of Raguel ([Tob 3](#), 6–8) could be added to this census. She notes Samson’s slaughter of thirty of his own wedding’s guests ([Judg 14](#)), the bride price for Michal ([1 Sam 18](#)), and the violent intrigues of the book of Nehemiah as examples of wedding massacres. Revelation’s distinctive contribution to this tradition is making the individual male brides, rather than young male suitors, the victims of this violence. Its resurrection of them into a corporate bride in the eschaton is equally remarkable.

While a wedding massacre might seem to be an unfortunate event, Revelation is one of several texts to present such violence as justified and appropriate. The *Odyssey*, for example, does not unambiguously condemn the killing of Penelope’s suitors and follows the bloodshed with a long-desired marital reunion. [Gen 34](#) presents Jacob’s sons as having a legitimate grievance against Shechem, even if their taking of revenge on all his city is considered excessive. The first book of Maccabees presents a wedding massacre in wholly positive terms:

It was reported to Jonathan [Maccabee] and his brother Simon, “The family of [your enemy] Jambri are having a great wedding [*ποιοῦσιν γάμον μέγαν*], and are conducting the bride [*ἄγουσιν τὴν νύμφην*], a daughter of one of the great nobles of Canaan, from Nadabath with a large escort.” Remembering how their brother John had been killed, they went up and hid under cover of the mountain. They looked out and saw a tumultuous procession and much baggage; and the bridegroom [*ὁ νυμφίος*] came out with his friends and his brothers to meet them with many tambourines and musicians and many weapons. Then [Jonathan and Simon] rushed on them from the ambush and began killing them. Many were wounded and fell, and the rest fled to the mountain; and they took all their goods. So the wedding was turned into mourning [*μετεστράφη ὁ γάμος εἰς πένθος*] and the voice of their musicians into a funeral dirge. After they had fully avenged the blood of their brother, they returned to the marshes of the Jordan. ([1 Macc 9:37–42](#))

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Since the perpetrators of this event are the protagonists of the text, the violence is presented as a form of justice rather than as a calamity. Josephus takes the same view of this supposed event as 1 Maccabees, recounting it in greater detail and making explicit his moral evaluation ([Ant. 13.1.20–21](#)). The Gospel of Matthew has a more complicated attitude toward the nuptial violence that it presents. Here, as in the other Synoptic Gospels, the groom's being "taken away" (*ἀπαρθῆ*, [Mark 9:15](#)) is presented as unjust and lamentable. On the other hand, the response to this unjustified violence toward the groom is just violence in retribution, as in the parable of the Great Supper ([Matt 22:1–12](#)). Similar public misfortune occurs in the Matthean parable of the ten bridesmaids, where the five negligent ones are shut out of the wedding banquet ([Matt 25:1–13](#)), just as "the dogs, sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" ([Rev 22:15](#)) are shut out of it in Revelation.

VI. DOUBLE TRANSFORMATIONS

But if the transformation of a wedding into a funeral or worse is a recurrent theme in tragedy, romances often feature a double inversion in which a bride- or groom-elect becomes a corpse that later turns out only to appear to have been a corpse. First the voice of the bridegroom is turned to weeping and hymns into laments, and then the laments become hymns and the bridegroom rejoices still more. Marriage torches that were repurposed for pyre or entombment become marriage torches again. In *Leucippe and Clitophon*, a father laments a son who has died in a riding accident:

When, my child, will your wedding be? When shall I arrange your wedding, horseman and bridegroom? Forever a fiancé [*νυμφίε μὲν ἀτελής*], horseman without fortune. Your bridal chamber, child, is the grave, your wedding a death, your nuptial song [*ὑμέναιος*] these wailings. I hoped to kindle a different fire from this, my child, but envious Fortune has extinguished it and you together, lighting instead for you torches of evil. Ah, what a cruel torch-bearing this is! Your marriage torches [*ἡ νυμφικὴ*] have become a pyre. ([1.13.4–5](#))

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The youth lamented here actually is dead; the comedy is in the fact that the marriage his foolish father arranged for him was such a bad match that his death could only be considered fortunate. It is the eponymous lovers who appear to have died and then discover each other alive and marry later in the narrative, as also occurs in the *Ephesian Tale* and *Callirhoe*. Here the salient point is the way in which the torches, which were essential to nuptial processions in practice, visual art, and literature (e.g., [Matt 25:1-13](#); the epitaphs above), carry dual meaning. So do the songs, which here as elsewhere transform between hymns in the classical sense and dirges.

Revelation unites the key elements of music and illumination in the segue from Babylon's demise to Jerusalem's arrival. The songs are not necessarily evident in translation but are metrically apparent in the Greek. If the 144,000 male virgins are to be associated with the wedding guests and/or bride, the musical quality is all the more apparent, that is, "the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing their harps, and they sing a new song . . . no one could learn that song except the 144,000" ([Rev 14:2-3](#)). It is with this in mind that we can not only approach Adela Yarbro Collins's (1980) question of whether [Rev 18](#) is a "taunt-song or dirge," but also extend it to the beginning of the next chapter:

"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his slaves . . . Hallelujah! The smoke goes up from her forever and ever" Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like mighty claps of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ([Rev 19:1b-3, 6-8](#))

The answer to Yarbro Collins's question would seem to be "both." The hymnal emphasizes that the smoke of Babylon's burning is heavenly incense. In Matthew, the foolish virgins forget their oil and the wicked would-be guests refuse the wedding invitation. Revelation, as Nwachukwu (2005, 231–38) implies, assumes that those invited to be the guests and/or bride in the eschatological wedding are coming, prepared, and wearing their wedding garments. Insofar as the text at this juncture is concerned with those who turned down the invitation or have not washed their garments in the Lamb's blood, or received robes from him—they are "outside, the dogs and sorcerers and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and does falsehood" ([Rev 22:15](#)). Those inside the city and those outside it operate, like Babylon and Jerusalem themselves, as a contrasting pair: the fate of the one group throws the fate of the other into sharper relief. In Matthew, the lax virgins forget their oil. In Revelation, the heavenly city "has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" ([Rev 21:22](#)). But if external lighting is still desired, "the smoke goes up forever and ever" ([Rev 19:5](#)) from the burning of the self-deluded whore.

VII. CONCLUSION

Revelation's concluding wedding unifies its vision of eschatological rewards for faithful witnesses. In doing so, it deploys conventional imagery of weddings, especially tragic weddings, in at least two unconventional ways. First, the martyr figures who finally receive justice at the climax of the text are not restored, as might be expected, to the status of honourable masculinity. The text keeps these figures subordinate to Christ by making them the female partner(s) in a male-dominant marriage regime, feminizing them first by referring to them as *παρθένοι* and then, in their resurrection, attributing the production of bridal clothing to their works. Unlike the threatened bridegrooms of romance novels such as the *Ephesian Tale* and *Daphnis and Chloe*, they do not end up assuming the status of husbands, that is, free men with the figurative and literal

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“upper hand” in the new, household-establishing marriage. Rather, they are resurrected to a threshold of becoming wives, wives who are likened collectively to a city that they do not rule.

Second, the celestial celebration of Babylon’s prenuptial demise subverts expectations that such an event would provoke lamentation. The fact that only the partners in her wickedness lament it, while the heavenly community rejoices, magnifies the condemnation that Babylon receives and emphasizes the justness of her fate. The juxtaposition and mirroring of the two events—Babylon’s destruction and Jerusalem’s wedding—weaponizes the discourse of the tragic or violent wedding. While texts from the *Odyssey* to the Gospel of Matthew treat the events in violent wedding narratives as at least somewhat troubling, Revelation distinguishes itself by glorying in it. It is this weaponized deployment of the blood wedding trope, as well as the martyrs’ own feminized virtue, that establishes their resurrection into the eschatological bride figure as fully just.

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