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A Country Masque for Hodge Trillindle and His Zweet Hort Malkyn: The Dramatic Elements of Thomas Ravenscroft's 'Enamoring' Section of the Harmonies from *A Briefe Discourse*, 1614

Background of the Composer and His Works

Music scholars appear to be nearly unanimous in their assessment of Ravenscroft's talents as a composer, with David Mateer, his biographer in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, describing him as "a man of great versatility, though of slender talent," (Sadie, ed. 15: 623-4) and an earlier biographer as "a useful man in his own age, if he was not exactly a brilliant one" (Pulver 405). More recent scholarship, however, underscores his importance to music:

Thomas Ravenscroft, music theorist, composer, collector, editor, and one-time chorister of St. Paul's Cathedral, is the single most important figure in the preservation of the meager repertoire of children's dramatic songs that have survived to the present day. Ravenscroft published four very eclectic collections of secular music between 1609 and 1614, each of which includes musical settings of contemporary dramatic lyrics. But it has recently been shown that the only plays for which he preserves unique settings of undisputed dramatic origin were acted by the children of Paul's between c. 1597 and c. 1604, the approximate years for which Ravenscroft was a member of the St. Paul's Cathedral Choir. Since the musical manuscripts actually used by the children's companies have apparently vanished into the mists of time, Ravenscroft's collections are extremely important. They not only add significantly to the extant body of late Renaissance theatrical songs, but preserve a unique musical record, sparse though it may be, of a once celebrated London dramatic company (Austern 212-13).

The earliest apparent mention of Thomas Ravenscroft is to be found in the records of Chichester Cathedral where Thomas 'Raniscroft' is listed as a chorister in 1594. His name appears next in a list of the choir members at St. Paul's Cathedral, London in 1598, although a similar list of choristers at St. Pauls in 1594 does not include him. Ravenscroft was still at St. Pauls in 1600 when Edward Pearce was the organist and choir director. Austern suggests Ravenscroft's tenure at St. Paul's continued until 1604 when he left for Cambridge (Austern 20). The precise date of his birth remains a mystery, due in part to his apparent status as a child prodigy, for in the prefatory poem to *A Briefe Discourse*, the author (R. LL.) describes Ravenscroft as a youth of twenty-two years of age, while a marginal note confirming this states that he received the bachelor of music when he was fourteen (Ravenscroft, *Discourse* "In Approbation"). Indeed, the University Book of Supplicats lists a 'Thomas Rangecraft' from Pembroke Hall as having taken that degree in 1605. Mateer suggests a birthdate of c. 1582, while Ian Payne in a later article attempts to show that Ravenscroft was born c. 1587 (707-9).

Ravenscroft dedicates *A Briefe Discourse* "To the Right Worshipful, most worthy Grave Senators, Guardians, of Gresham College in London," and notes his indebtedness for having received "first Instructions, Exercise, and Encouragement" in his music studies

“at that most famous College.” Both Mateer and Austern assume Ravenscroft retained his position at St. Pauls while pursuing his studies at Gresham College. Few details survive of Ravenscroft’s activities between the time spent at Cambridge and his appointment as music master at Christ’s Hospital (1618-22), but it is likely he maintained his association with the London theater. The year of his death is unknown, but the date generally accepted lies between 1630 and 1635.

In 1609, Ravenscroft published *Pammelia*, *Mysicks Miscellanie*, and *Deuteromelia*, the first a collection of 100 rounds and catches in English and in Latin, and the second a collection of seventeen catches and fourteen freemen’s songs for three and four voices in English. In these two collections, Ravenscroft serves primarily as a collector of popular songs and their texts by anonymous composers, but we assume the freemen’s songs are set by Ravenscroft. The subject matter of the texts in *Pammelia* varies from Latin sacred songs to lusty songs in English concerned with drinking, dalliance of various kinds, and characterizations of miscellaneous peoples and animals, while those in *Deuteromelia* are similar, but without any Latin texts or sacred subjects.

Melismata, Ravenscroft’s third publication, is similar to *Deuteromelia* in content, but arranges the nine rounds and fourteen part-songs into the five categories of Court Varieties, City Rounds, City Conceits, Country Rounds, and Country Pastimes, not unlike five categories found in *A Briefe Discourse*: Hunting, Hawking, Dancing, Drinking, and Enamoring. Further, like *A Briefe Discourse*, the part-songs all have descriptive titles apart from the text incipit, titles that suggest an effort to create continuity among the songs in the collection, i.e., numbers four and five of the first section are entitled “The Courtiers Courtship to his Mistress” (Will ye love me lady sweet) and “The Mistress to the Courtier” (Fie away, fie away). Finally, like his 1614 publication, nearly all of the part-songs in *Melismata* are consort songs which require a consort of viols to accompany the solo voice. The settings include five for the medius, four for the treble and three for the tenor voice. While only one song from *Melismata*, “The Scriveners Servants Song of Holborne,” can be found to have been performed in one of the children’s plays, Andrew Sabol suggests that several others may have performed, but their texts omitted in the printed version of the plays (Sabol 4-9).

Shortly after publication of *A Briefe Discourse* in 1614, Ravenscroft was appointed to the position at Christ’s Hospital, and his interest in the collection and setting of popular secular songs apparently ceased. In 1621, he published *The Whole booke of psalmes: with the hymnes euangelicall and songs spirituall*. with an enlarged edition published in 1633. It consists of 105 Psalm settings by various composers of his day, including fifty-five by Ravenscroft, and it is one of the most important psalters of the period.

The “Discourse” and the “Harmonies” of *A Briefe Discourse*, 1614

Ravenscroft no doubt assigned great importance to his fourth collection, for the prefatory material is lofty in tone and extensive in its verbiage. In addition to the three pages of dedication, there is an Apologie of six pages length which begins with a reference to Plutarch and contains additional references to the theorist Glareanus and composer/theorist Thomas Morley. The “Approbation of this Worke” follows, and Ravenscroft enlists the aid of Nathaniel Giles, Thomas Campion, John Dowland, John Davies, Martin Peerson,

William Austin, Thomas Pearce and others to sing his praises in verse. Following a preface of a half-dozen pages, the author presents his thesis that contemporary misuse of mensuration signs is causing "...Disrepute, and lowe Estimation [in] Musicke in these days" (*Discourse A*). Most scholars agree that Ravenscroft's argument is unconvincing, if not ambiguous, and find little of value in his treatise.

The music of *A Briefe Discourse* includes six works by John Bennet, two by Edward Pearce, and twelve by Ravenscroft that represent some of his finest effort. All but six require recourse to instrumental accompaniment-as always, a viol consort-and of this number, four are dances with lyric texts, obviously designed to be sung, played and danced. Of these, the unattributed "Urchin's Dance" and Bennet's "Elve's Dance" can definitely be assigned to the repertoire of songs from the children's dramas, and the other two dances are of the same style and voice disposition. While some scholars see stylistic elements from the madrigal in the four, four-part dances (Austern 217), the present author views the homophonic, four-square nature of the music to be a reflection of its association with the contemporary London theater, be it real or imagined. From the Stuart court masque to Shakespeare's plays, the satyrs, elves, and fairies that were said to populate "...our hallowed greene" were played by young boys singing in the treble and median voice-range in a musical style reflective of their diminutive stature and simple needs. Not infrequently, they probably played the instruments upon which they were taught music at St. Paul's Cathedral, the viol, as well as sundry other common instruments available to the boy actors.

The Music and Lyric Texts of the 'Enamoring' Section from *A Briefe Discourse*, 1614

Upon a cursory examination, one might first conclude that the eight selections representing the "Enamoring" section of *A Briefe Discourse* were written to be performed as a "jig-like cantata" (Mateer 623) or some other popular stage musical. But scholars have noted that number fifteen in the collection, Pearce's "The Mistris of her Servant," is found as a professional love song to Fontinell from Act V, scene ii of the anonymous, *Blurt, Master Constable*. Once again, Ravenscroft is indebted to the children's drama repertoire for some of his music. The dramatic continuity of the Enamoring section is further challenged by including two selections by John Bennet, the opening "Three Fooles," and "The Servant of his Mistress," which follows immediately. The balance and symmetry reflected in the musical styles of Bennet's "The Servant" and that of Pearce's "The Mistress," however, should be noted, as they make a perfect paired response to the prologue nature of the opening dialogue found in "Three Fooles." In their musical style, they represent the English consort song, with that by Bennet being more in the style of the lute song ayre set for viols, while that by Pearce has phrases of irregular and unpredictable length, as one would expect of the 16th-century consort song. The texts of both contain the usual Arcadian references found in madrigals and masque songs of the period.

Ravenscroft's "Their Marriage Zolemnized" follows. This selection-which is printed "Their Marriage Solemnized" in the index- is a refrain response to the preceding soliloquies, framing a treble solo that once again reflects the Arcadian style found in contemporary songs from the court masque of the Stuart period, particularly those written to be performed as part of a nuptial ceremony, as was often the case. The refrain is simple

and homophonic, with but a hint of imitation, while the solo section is in a typical light consort song style.

The next two selections introduce the two principle characters, Malkyn and Hodge (Roger) Trillindle, both of whom sing in the dialect native to Kent, the county southeast of London famous for its wool production and economic ties to Holland and other regions of the low countries. Malkyn and Hodge are the classic comic country bumpkin couple universally celebrated in verse, song, and drama. For a keener understanding of their individual characters, we have only to turn to Ravenscroft's earlier publications.

A five-voice round in *Pammelia* has the following lyrics:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Come follow me merily my mates, | hey hoe, have you now to Westminster, |
| lets all agree and have no faults | but before you come there, |
| Take heed of time, tune and eare, | because the way is farre |
| And then without all doubt, | some pretty talk lets heare. |
| wee need not fear | |
| to sing this catch throughout: | |

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
| Malkyn was a country maid, | Adew you dainty dames, |
| a country maid trick and trim, | goe whether you will for me, |
| tricke and trim as she might be, | you are the very same |
| she would needes to the Court she said | I took you for to be. |
| to sell milk and firmenty, | |

As her name would suggest, Malkyn is a comely milk maid whose ambition it is to go to court to sell her wares, perhaps with ambition to sell more than the dairy products she represents. The male narrator-the piece begins in f-clef⁴ leaving no doubt of the gender of the narrator-convinces her to stay a while for some "pretty talk," dismissing her more aristocratic counterparts in the process.

While the character of Hodge does not appear in any other songs by Ravenscroft, a similar nameless Kentish lad is to be found in "A wooing Song of a Yeoman of Kent's Sonne," number twenty-two of *Melismata*. The dialect in which the song is written is of particular interest, as it parallels that employed in *A Brieve Discourse*. The ballad also portrays the romantic, impatient and clownish yearnings of its narrator when he closes the first and last verses with "I cannot come every day to woo" (Baskerville, 194-97, 255) an expression found in other similar ballads (see for example, Richard Nicolson's madrigal cycle "Joan, quoth John," Morehen 75-100)

I Haue house and land in Kent,
And if you'l loue me, loue me now:
Two pence halfe-peny is my rent,
I cannot come euery day to woo.

Chorus

Two pence halfe-peny is his rent,
And he cannot come euery day to woo.

Ich am my vathers eldest zonne,
My mouther eke doth loue well;
For ich can brauely clout my shoone,
And ich full well can ring a bell.

Chorus

For he can brauely clout his shoone,
And he full well can ring a bell.

My vather, he gaue me a hogge,
My mouther, she gave me a zow;
I have a god-vather dwells there by,
And on me bestowed a plow.

Chorus

He has a god-vather dwells there by,
And on him bestowed a plow.

One time I gaue thee a paper of pins,
Anoder time a taudry lace
And if thou wilt not grant me loue,
In truth, ich die beuore thy vace.

Chorus

And if thou wilt not grant me loue,
In truth, ich die beuore thy vace.

Ich haue been twise our Whitson Lord,
Ich haue had ladies many vare;
And eke thou hast my heart in hold,
And in my minde zeemes passing rare.

Chorus

And eke thou hast his heart in hold,
And in his minde zeemes passing rare.

Ich will put on my best white sloppe,
And ich will weare my yellow hose,
And on my head a good gray hat,
And in't ich sticke a louely rose

Chorus

And on his head a good gray hat,
And in't ich sticke a louely rose

Wherefore cease off, make no delay,
And if you'l loue me, loue me now.
Or els ich zeeke zome other oder-where,
For I cannot come euery day to woo.

Chorus

Or els ich zeeke zome other oder-where,
For I cannot come euery day to woo.

Notes: Observe the use of v for f; z for s; ich for I and I'll; d for th, as in oder.

9. Clout my shoone, patch or mend my shoes.

10. Ring a bell, I.e., ring a church bell.

19 pins were given as presents.

20 taudry lace, a piece of lace bought at St. Andrew's fair.

25. Whitson Lord. At the Whitsun-ales, or festivals at Whitsuntide, a lord and lady of the ale were duly chosen.

27. In hold, in your keeping.

28. Sloppe, loose frock. (Skeat, Rev. Walter 1 43-47)

In number 17, Hodge presents his case to Malkyn, asking her to "...loave me (Zweet, Zweet, Zweet,) a little tyny vit [fit]," and to commit wedlock with him. During his soliloquy, he asks her to set aside her distaff and spindle, leaving little doubt of her agrarian status. The music is in the style of the tenor consort song, and contains some modest intervallic leaps suggesting Hodge is indeed able to live up to his name of Trillindle! Malkyn's response in number eighteen suggest she has some reservations about his intent, and notes that she will not believe him until she sees that his words and deeds, like "Beeanes and Bacoan," do agree. Again, the music is that of a typical treble consort song, with a single dramatic text, befitting the scene. Unlike the song sung by Hodge, that of Malkyn closes with a burden sung in dialect by the people of the village. They urge that everyone get "Grounds, Boagpipes, Harbs and Dabors" to lead them in a

festive wedding dance. Unlike the burden of number sixteen which is sung in the lofty Elizabethan English expected of the court, the burden of Malkyn's response to Hodge leaves no doubt about the social status and ethnic background of the "chorus" members.

The dramatic tension created by the solo songs of Hodge and Malkyn continues and increases in number nineteen. Hodge sings of his desire to swear an oath of love to Malkyn, but while attempting to do so, is continuously interrupted by her. After two unsuccessful attempts to swear an oath "by Iawhay," (Yahweh)¹, he finally completes his oath, and immediately asks her to do the same. She does, and the dramatic tension and clownish comedy come to an end. This consort song is a clever dialogue between the treble and tenor voices, and its meaning and intent are easily obscured by the Kentish dialect and virtuosic intervallic leaps in both voice parts, and especially that of the tenor. Malkyn's response, for example, "thowl't byte I zweare my wozen," could be transcribed either "thou'lt bite, I swear my wozen," or "thou'lt, by it I swear my wozen," with the present author preferring the former because of Malkyn's concern about Roger's "gaping" mouth. Wozen is a corruption of weasand, a term meaning esophagus, gullet, trachea, or windpipe.²

The last selection of the *Enamoring* section consists of two burdens sung by the local villagers, but separated by short solo sections sung first by Hodge and followed by Malkyn, confirming the "Borgen" proclaimed earlier. The villagers note that "A Borgens a Borgen, bee't good, bee it ill, A Borgens a Borgen vor weale or vor woe, zo ever led dis bleasing burden goe," a clever pun on the musical term meaning refrain. Unlike previous consort songs with burdens in *A Brieve Discourse*, this one is through composed. Although the melodic content of both is similar, Ravenscroft lengthens the return of the burden to add more weight to its position as the last selection of the section.

Ravenscroft's purpose in concluding *A Brieve Discourse* with a miniature musical stage work was probably not to provide a work intended for staged dramatic purposes, but rather, it was a vehicle to carry diverse selections by various composers, and yet provide some continuity to the music. The style of the *Enamoring* section owes as much to the contemporary Stuart court masque as it does the bawdy and energetic stage jigs of Ravenscroft's day. But each of these genres is indebted as well to the influences of the *Commedia dell'arte* that was played a significant role in the culture of Elizabethan England (Smith 170-200). Surely the use of dialect for the lovers - the opposite of what one customarily finds in the *Commedia dell'arte* - is noteworthy. But it must be remembered that a "country" dialect was but one of several means to help create humor on the stage. The use of a "prologue" to help set the scene was as common to London theater patrons as it was classical Greek audiences. And the abundant use of Greek mythological references in the dialogue was part of the schooling of all well-educated Elizabethans. Such references are abundant in the native version of the madrigal, as they were in the Italian madrigals. The *Enamoring* section clearly reflects the imprint of an author whose background in the London theater of his day was extensive.

¹ In his book, *English Madrigal Verse* (255), Edmund H. Fellowes erroneously transcribes the two interrupted occurrences of "by Ia-", "by Ia-whay" as "Ja-by." (see Ravenscroft, *Discourse*, 19R).

² See Shakespeare's *The Tempest* Act III, Scene ii, 191 where Caliban says "Or cut his wezand with thy knife".

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