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LET US REJOICE BY DRINKING AND TALKING BEAUTIFULLY: SYMPOTIC POETICS AS A FUNCTION OF CULTURE*

χαίρω δ᾽ εὖ πίνων καὶ ὑπ᾽ αὐλητῆρος ἀκούων,
χαίρω δ᾽ εὔφθογγον χερσὶ λύρην ὀχέων[1]

Ceremonial feasting is a cultural phenomenon present in almost all societies, both historical and contemporary. Various archaeological and anthropological evidence convincingly suggests that its primary function is ritual and religious.[2] Nevertheless, "feasts are events essentially constituted by the communal consumption of food and/or drink."[3] Feasting behaviour is also, in the famous words of the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-

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* The following article, together with three others by Maria Chantry-Łukasiewicz, Sylvie Laigneau-Fontaine, and Joanna Hobot-Marcinek, illustrates and elaborates on the role of sympotic poetics as a specific function within European literary culture. These papers were originally presented at a scientific session organised by the Centre for Multimodal Educational and Cultural Research at the Jagiellonian University in cooperation with the Polish Archaeological Institute in Athens, as part of the Heritage_lab meetings series on October 18th, 2023.

[1] Theognis 1.533-34: "I rejoice over drinking well and listening from the aulos player. / I rejoice holding a well-sounding lyre in the hands," trans. Douglas E. Gerber, in Tyrtaeus, Solon, Theognis, and Mimnermus, *Greek Elegiac Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*, ed. Douglas E. Gerber (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[2] Michael Dietler and Briand Hayden, eds., *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2001); Rocio Da Riva, Ana Arroyo, and Céline Debourse, eds., *Ceremonies, Feasts and Festivities in Ancient Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean World: Performance and Participation* (Münster: Zaphon, 2022).

[3] Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, "Digesting the Feast: Good to Eat, Good to Drink, Good to Think," in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives*, 1–20.

Strauss, "good to think with".[4] This takes on added significance when one considers the ancient Greeks, who elevated feasting to a social institution with educational, formative, and remarkably, intellectual dimensions. It is crucial to emphasise that Greek feasting behaviour is not only ancient but also a highly complex issue. One can refer to the Mycenaean feasts, the Homeric δαίς, or the social practices of the Archaic and Classical periods associated with terms such as συμπόσιον, δεῖπνον, ἔρανος, θοίνη, or εἰλαπίνη.[5] Interestingly, these terms appear in different historical and mythological contexts, adding further complexity to their cultural significance.

During the Archaic period, a model of social coexistence based on the dominance of ὁμοιοῖ 'equals' developed, specific to the aristocratic and oligarchic elites of the time. An integral part of this model was a symposium (συμπόσιον).[6] A unique tradition of literary games and disputes developed within the confines of this institution.[7] This tradition laid the groundwork for the development, during the Classical period, of a specific type of discursivity and dialogicity, referred to in this text as sympotic poetics. As a valuable literary convention, this tradition was taken up and refined by Roman and later New Latin authors. Consequently, over time, sympotic poetics became a universal function of European culture, contributing to the construction of elite conversations rich in literary references and allusions.

[4] Jonathan Culler, "Lévi-Strauss: Good to Think With," in *Rethinking Claude Lévi-Strauss*, ed. Robert Doran (Ann Arbor: Yale University Press, 2013), 6–13.

[5] James C. Wright, "The Mycenaean Feast: An Introduction," *Hesperia* 73, no. 2 (2004): 121–32; Louise Hitchcock, Robert Laffineur, and Janice L. Crowley, eds., *Dais: The Aegean Feast. Proceedings of the 12th International Aegean Conference,12e Rencontre Égéenne Internationale, University of Melbourne, Centre for Classics and Archaeology, 25-29 March 2008* (Lieège: Université de Lieège, 2008); "εἰλαπίνη seems to refer more specifically to a private, large-scale feast such as a wedding or a funeral," Cecilia Nobili, "Choral Elegy: The Tyranny of the Handbook," in *Elegy and Iambus: New Approaches*, ed. Laura Swift and Chris Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 51; Marek Węcowski, "Homer and the Origins of the Symposion," in *Omero tremila anni dopo*, ed. Franco Montanari and Paola Ascheri (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2002), 625–37.

[6] The category of the Ionian symposium and its origins, itself a complex problem (cf. Doric *syssition*), will not be considered here in the context of historical entanglement. For further details, see Marek Węcowski, *The Rise of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[7] David Fearn, *Greek Lyric of the Archaic and Classical Periods: From the Past to the Future of the Lyric Subject* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

THE ANCIENT GREEK SYMPOTIC POETICS

Drinking and revelry, accompanied by the sound of the lyre, at gatherings of friends, is a literary *topos* familiar to us from various ancient works, such as the stanzas of the "sweet Anacreontus", or the elegies of Theognis. In the verses of these poets, an atmosphere of playful, ludic festivity is interwoven with uninhibited carnality, eroticism, a sense of transience, and, perhaps less obvious to the modern reader at first glance, a desire to put the ephemeral experience of the feast brilliantly and tastefully into words. Theognis, in one of his elegies (1047–48), writes "Now let us rejoice by drinking and talking beautifully [καλὰ λέγοντες] / What is to happen hereafter the gods care for."[8] The effectiveness of this eulogy is inextricably linked to the increasing influence of wine. The temporality of sympotic poetry, rooted in the "here and now" and based in part on the use of indicative pronouns (such as νῦν 'now'), creates the effect of scenes unfolding before our eyes. The simulative quality of sympotic poetry was based on the performative gesture of participation that arose from the act of recitation or singing itself. This, combined with a basic strategy of reception, allowed listeners of the time to identify with the poetic "we" or "I". Thus, even as modern readers, the power of language used in a specific way draws us into the convivial mood of the stanza, unexpectedly transforming readers into συμπόται 'fellow-drinkers, boon companions'.

Considered here as a cultural phenomenon, and thus detached in time and genre from the ancient symposium, sympotic poetics derives from the performative function inherent in archaic Greek poetry. It is a poetics of engagement, a form of direct communication that constitutes a "pragmatic phenomenon" (*essenzialmente pragmatico*), and a collective concept closely linked to both oral and postmodern literature.[9] What determines the specificity of sympotic poetry, as it becomes an integral element of poetics, is the performance situation—the feast called συμπόσιον. This, in turn, imposes a certain material reality and a mode of behaviour, which, for the sake of simplicity, we shall refer to here as 'symposial'. This term refers to the social

[8] Theognis 1.1047-48: νῦν μὲν πίνοντες τερπώμεθα, καλὰ λέγοντες· ἄσσα δ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ ἔσται, ταῦτα θεοῖσι μέλει.

[9] Bruno Gentili, *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica: da Omero al V secolo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1984), 3; Sebastian Borowicz, "Homerus in schola czyli o pożytku z (nie)czytania w epoce ponowoczesnych technośrodowisk," in *Technopaideia. Zaawansowane technologie w edukacji – perspektywa humanistyczna*, ed. Sebastian Borowicz and Joanna Hobot-Marcinek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2024).

institution that was the Ionian symposium during the Archaic and Classical periods.[10]

The material dimension of the symposium is expressed through the appropriateness of the venue, typically a room in a private house called ἀνδρών,[11] the furnishings such as κλίναι, the set of dishes, the presence of wine, snacks, and the participants themselves—ἄριστοι, ἑταίραι, or musicians—with appropriate gestures associated with their activities, including libations. Participants were also expected to abide by the rules of the banquet, which included moral and religious principles and norms.[12] This was reflected, among other things, in the fact that gnomic wisdom was an important element of sympotic poetics.[13]

The archaic symposium as a social institution produced a kind of self-referential discourse that Luigi Enrico Rossi calls *spettacolo a se stesso* 'a spectacle unto itself', and Fiona Hobden *the metasymptotic dimension*.[14] "From self-authorizing assertions of gnomic wisdom to self-promotional spectacles of full sympotic immersion, to competitive challenges to drinking companions, metasympotic songs afforded symposiasts opportunities for self-styling, and for the styling of others too, and to negotiate their place within the sympotic group."[15] On the symposium,

> For now the floor is clean as are the cups and hands of all.
> One puts on the woven garlands;

[10] The adjective "symposial" here refers specifically to the institution of the symposium, as discussed by Marek Węcowski. For further insights into the distinction between the Ionic *sympósion* and the Doric *syssítion*, see Oswyn Murray, "The Symposion between East and West," in *The Cup of Song: Studies on Poetry and the Symposion*, ed. Vanessa Cazzato, Dirk Obbink, and Enrico Emanuele Prodi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 17–27; Murray, "The Culture of the Symposion," in *A Companion to Archaic Greece*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Hans van Wees (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 508–23; Marek Węcowski, "Towards a Definition of the Symposion," in *Ἐνεργεσίας χάριν. Studies Presented to Benedetto Bravo and Ewa Wipszycka by their Disciples*, eds. Tomasz Derda, Jakub Urbanik, and Marek Węcowski (Warsaw: Fundacja im. Rafała Taubenschlaga, 2002), 337–61.

[11] Beneath the Acropolis Museum in Athens, the remains of a house (the so-called House Θ) from the 5th century BC are preserved, including a room interpreted as an *andrṓn*.

[12] See Jan Skarbek-Kazanecki, "The Ancient Greek Symposion as Space for Philosophical Discourse: Xenophanes and Criticism of the Poetic Tradition," *Tekstualia*, no. 1 (2022): 3–24.

[13] Fiona Hobden, *The Symposion in Ancient Greek Society and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 25–34.

[14] Luigi Enrico Rossi, "Il simposio greco arcaico e classico come spettacolo a se stesso," in Rossi, κληθμῷ δ᾽ ἔσχοντο *Scritti editi e inedita*, vol. 2, *Letteratura* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 46–47; Hobden, *The Symposion in Ancient Greek Society*, 22–25.

[15] Hobden, *The Symposion in Ancient Greek Society*, 22–23.

> another passes along a fragrant ointment in a bowl.
> The mixing bowl stands full of cheer
> and another wine, mild and flower fragrant in the jars, is at hand—
> which says it never will give out.
> In the midst frankincense gives forth its sacred scent,
> and there is cold water, sweet and pure.
> Golden loaves lie near at hand and the noble table
> is loaded down with cheese and rich honey.
> An altar in the centre is covered all about with flowers
> while song and festive spirit enfold the house.
> But first glad-hearted men must hymn the god with reverent words and pure speech.[16]

Reading the above passage by the poet Xenophanes of Colophon (570/560–478/467 BCE), which activates various senses, we gain the possibility of placing ourselves *among* the participants of the feast.[17] The smells, the food, the table, the altar, and the hustle and bustle simultaneously produce an immersive experience, understood as a "virtual" setting, which is evident both in Xenophanes' poetry and in philosophical and philological reinterpretations of symposiality such as Plato's *Feast* or Athenaeus' *Feast of the Sages*. The materiality of the symposium, evoked by linguistic means, serves as a space for the creation and transmission of its inherent sympathetic mood. However, in our context, the terms "sympotic" and "sympoticity" have a more specific meaning, undoubtedly linked to the poetic essence of the feast. They signify the dynamics of a "beautiful conversation"—a discourse rooted in the convention of the agon, a rivalry that functions both as a play of dialogues and as an intellectual contest between the "best"— ἄριστοι and "sages", or *poetae oinopotai*. We can therefore situate sympotic poetics within the developing literary framework of the period. However, this exchange, as desired by the poet, had to conform to a specific moral framework.

> Praise the man who when he has taken drink brings noble deeds to light,
> as memory and striving for virtue bring to him.[18]

The elegiac form skilfully fulfilled this requirement, allowing "the members of the elite gathered at the symposium to define themselves, construct-

[16] Xenophanes of Colophon, *Fragments. A Text and Translation with Commentary*, ed. James H. Lesher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 26–27.

[17] See Douglas E. Gerber, ed., *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 129.

[18] Xenophanes of Colophon, *Fragments*, 29.

ing a specific group identity through the elucidation of professed values or the condemnation of lower social strata".[19] This literary activity during the banquets, an integral part of the symposium's performative practices, drew on principles inherent to oral poetry—specifically, convention, automatism, the interplay of associations, and a certain degree of creativity and adaptability.[20] The "symposium chain", consisting of questions and answers, began with an elegiac composition by one of the participants, which was then taken up (*déchesthai*) and modified by subsequent guests.[21] Often of a gnomic, didactic nature, it served to instruct the other participants.[22] This, in turn, placed symposia within the framework of an elite, aristocratic *paideia*, which aimed, among other things, to impart knowledge and perpetuate desirable social norms and behaviour (the metasympotic dimension). Another example of an ancient symposial literary game can be found in the *skólion*, a non-elegiac musical form involving a series of clever exchanges of words between revellers. Even when presented as a virtuoso performance by a renowned lyric poet, or reenacted by symposiasts in later generations, it was not an isolated artistic event, but rather a response to, or an invitation linked to, a previous utterance by another participant in the feast.[23]

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[19] Jan Skarbek-Kazanecki, *Wokół pojęcia díkē: poetyka i ideologia „sprawiedliwości" w tradycji Teognisa z Megary* (PhD diss., Uniwersytet Łódzki, 2022), 5. "The elegies of the Corpus Theognideum were to 'lie on the lips of many' (v. 240), i.e. to be sung by the symposiasts…; their purpose was to serve 'young men' (*néoi ándres*, v. 241) in communicative situations analogous to those presented in these works.… the poetic self in the Corpus Theognideum often uses gnomes and sentences-prompts of a more general nature. The collection also has many features in common with the Hesiodic tradition, even if only on the linguistic, compositional or rhetorical level" ibid., 34, 62 (my translation).

[20] Berkeley Peabody, *Winged Word: A Study in the Technique of Ancient Greek Oral Composition as Seen Principally Through Hesiod's* Work and Days (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 8; David Bouvier, *Le sceptre et la lyre. L'Iliade ou les héros de la mémoire* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2002), 230, 309.

[21] Derek Collins, *Master of the Game: Competition and Performance in Greek Poetry* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2004), 111–34; Hendrik Selle, *Theognis und die Theognidea* (Berlin: Brill, 2008), 226–27.

[22] Zoe Stamatopoulou, *Hesiod and Classical Greek Poetry: Reception and Transformation in the Fifth Century BCE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 7–10, 185–92; Magdalena Stuligrosz, *Gnoma w twórczości Pindara* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2002), 21–22: "The gnome occupies a special place in elegiac poetry, as evidenced by the term gnomic poetry, or poetry that was intended to be an end in itself, which is now used to refer to poetry composed largely of gnomes.… Gnomic poetry as a genre of elegiac poetry became widespread among poets whose heyday dates from the 6th century BC. Among the gnomic poets are Teognis, Solon, Phocylides, Symonides" (my translation).

[23] Marek Węcowski, *Sympozjon, czyli wspólne picie. Początek greckiej biesiady arystokratycznej (IX-VII wiek p.n.e.)* (Warsaw: Sub Lupa, 2011), 56. We find a parody of this custom in

The *skólion*, as a form of festive song, was an amateur performance. It underlined the participants' familiarity with poetic conventions, thus indicating their membership of the elite. At the same time, it demonstrated their ability to adapt well-known songs to suit the demands of the moment. Nevertheless, "in the free-floating atmosphere of the symposium, any composition—even snatches of choral poetry intended for large public audiences—could be re-purposed and sung within a net of allusive, socially positioned reference."[24]

Some of these poetic games were already written down as early as the Classical period, leading to the creation of *hypomnḗmata* or *apomnēmoneúmata*—collections of works that were later used at feasts (e.g., Attic σκόλια).[25] These literary practices, which emerged in the realm of literacy, would later shape the development of philosophical dialogue as a form associated with banquet conversation.[26] Literary sympotic games, which included gnomes, riddles,[27] elegies, σκόλια, or σκώμματα (poetic jokes and pithy remarks), were accompanied by various party games (παιγνία), including skill-based activities such as drinking wine on time and κότταβος, as well as picture games. The latter involved playing with images painted on vases; a notable example is a group of vessels (the so-called cups with eyes) produced in Attic workshops between 540 and 480 BCE,[28] their distinctive feature being the transformation of the vessel into the face (πρόσωπον) of a satyr. Specific features such as large, wide-open eyes, stylised ears, and a nose pointing straight ahead in a gesture of direct interaction—underline the concept of iconic animation, giving the vases specific attributes, such as the ferocity of the satyrs, and evoking emotional responses. When passed from hand to

Aristophanes' *Wasps* (v. 1222–1225, 1222–1249, 1299–1325) and *Clouds* (v. 1353–1379). Interestingly, the *skólia* belonged to the tradition of the so-called Seven Wise Men.

[24] Richard Martin, "Festivals, Symposia, and the Performance of Greek Poetry," in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, ed. Pierre Destrée and Penelope Murray (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 17–30.

[25] Gian Franco Nieddu, "Testo, scrittura, libro nella Grecia arcaica e classica: note e osservazioni sulla prosa scientifico-filosofica," *Scrittura e Civiltà* 8 (1984), 213–61; Wolfgang Rösler, "Trasmissione culturale tra oralità e scrittura," in *I Greci. Storia. Cultura. Arte. Società. 2. Una storia greca, II. Definizione*, ed. Salvatore Settis (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 707–23; Selle, *Theognis*, 387.

[26] Mario Untersteiner, *Problemi di filologia filosofica* (Milan: Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1980), 66–70.

[27] Aristophanes, *Wasps* v. 20–23, Athenaeus, *Deipnosphistai* 10.448b-449a.

[28] Guy Hedreen, "Involved Spectatorship in Archaic Greek Art," *Art History* 30 (2007): 217–46. The emergence of the production of this type of vases is perhaps linked to the development of the Athenian theatre and, consequently, to reflections on ways of seeing, or, more broadly, sight as an element of social imagery.

hand and tipped, the vases would momentarily cover the face of the participant in the game, changing their identity. As Alcaeus instructs, οἶνος γὰρ ἀνθρώπω δίοπτρον ("wine is a window onto man").[29]

THE MIDDLE AGES AND EARLY MODERN TIMES

In its post-ancient incarnations, sympotic poetics was detached from its original performance context associated with the aristocratic model of upbringing and was subsequently redeveloped in European culture as a stylistic cliché. Within the framework of medieval and modern social institutions, specific models of the Christian meal,[30] the courtly banquet,[31] the grotesque symposium,[32] and the scholarly table talk took shape, associated with preferred norms of politeness, as well as convivial and paraliterary forms of discourse.[33] The feast remained a part of elite culture, connected with specific forms of performativity and spectacularity, promoting temperance and ab-

[29] Alcaeus, fr. 333, in David A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric*, vol. 1, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[30] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 48: "The central Christian meal was not the carnival, not the bacchanal, not an exuberant revel expressing abundance and fertility. The central meal, the central liturgical act, was a frugal repast, evoking less the luxurious, proliferating richness of the natural world than the human life it supported. Indeed, Christ had said it was human life, was body and blood. From the very beginning the eucharistic elements stood primarily not for nature, for grain and grape, but for human beings bound into community by commensality."

[31] See the bizarre and extravagant *Feast of the Pheasant* (*Le Banquet du Voeu du Faisan*) and accounts of banquets such as the *Les mémoires de messire* of Olivier de la Marche (1425–1502) and the *Chronique* of Mathieu d'Escouchy (1420–1482), which mention the lavish entertainment staged during the meal, including various pieces of music performed—Ken Albala, *The Banquet Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

[32] For example, *The Feast of Cyprian* (*Coena Cypriani*), a work by an anonymous author dating from between the 6th and 8th centuries. Interestingly, this bizarre form persisted into the 17th century, as illustrated by a painting called *Banchetto grottesco* (1630–1640) by an anonymous Tuscan artist, currently housed in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence as the deposit of the Galleria Palatina e Appartamenti Reali, Palazzo Pitti.

[33] The adjective "convivial" comes from the Latin verb *convivere*, meaning 'live with others', 'live together'. "Ottaviano Rabasco in his *Il convito* of 1615 offers the most complete taxonomy of banquet types. Normally, the banquet was merely an extended elaborate form of dinner, held around noon, though he stipulates that it could be served earlier, two hours before noon, at ten o'clock or eleven o'clock if no breakfast or colezione was eaten first thing in the morning. Banquets could also be held in the evening, but normally the evening meal, supper or cena, was held a few hours before sleep, and so was smaller and lighter"—Albala, *The Banquet Dining*, xi. Cf. Rudolph Goclenius's *De luxu conviviali nostri seculi ganeae artificibus,origine, auctoribus et asseclis* (*On Luxurious Banquets*), published in Marburg in 1607.

stinence. This was expressed, among other things, in the drinking of wine mixed with water.[34]

Temperance may lead to moderation in all things, but when it came time to visualising this universal virtue, artists repeatedly returned again and again to images derived from the practice of dining. The motif of properly measuring and mixing wine with water was a typical attribute of medieval personifications of temperance, who were often shown either engaged in the act of mixing wine or simply holding the utensils of the task. The association also worked in reverse, with the small pot used to mix wine and water becoming known as a *temproir* or *tempoir*.[35]

The convivial discursiveness of the feast, characterised by nobility and refinement, also found its counterpart in the taverns where the *poètes maudits* lived their lives. In the *Summa confessorum* (*Summa de penitentia*), a handbook for confessors written around 1216, the English theologian Thomas of Chobham identified two types of *histriones*, or more precisely poets-jugglers: the virtuous ones, known as minstrels (*ioculatores*), who used musical instruments to entertain the public, composing songs about saints and princes and bringing comfort to the sick or the bereaved; and the damnable, referring to comedians who participated in public drunkenness and promiscuous gatherings, singing lascivious songs and inciting lewd acts.[36] This second category of poets, unfamiliar with Dante's *stilus tragicus*, included the Sienese Cecco Angiolieri (1260–1312), one of the "bad poets", who led a carefree, tipsy life and represented of the realist trend in thirteenth-century Italian poetry. It is worth noting that Dante initiated a new type of intellectual discourse in the unfinished philosophical treatise *Il Convivo* (1307–1309). Among Renaissance authors, the feast motif was also used by Giovanni Gioviano Pontano (*Actius and Aegidius*), Francesco Filelfo (*Convivia mediolanensia*), Angelo Decembri (*De politia litteraria*), Martin Luther (*Tischreden*) and Giordano Bruno (*Cena de le ceneri*). At the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, sympotical works such as Justus Lipsius's *Saturnalium sermonum libri duo* and *Antiquarum lectionum libri quinque* (Book III: *Convivium*) remained popular. The feast formula found its place in dialogues and treatises, including works such as *Convivium religiosum* and *Convivium profanum*,

[34] Christina Normore, *A Feast for the Eyes: Art, Performance, and the Late Medieval Banquet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[35] Normore, 106. See Four Cardinal Virtues, in *Somme le roi*, Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Ms 11041 fol. 65v.

[36] Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl, "Performance and Performers," in *De Gruyter Lexicon: Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 171.

which were part of Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Colloquia familiaria* (*Common Conversations*).[37] The emerging discursivity of the period was immersed in a Latin reinterpretation of the Greek simile, inspired by poets such as Catullus and Martial. The convivial dimension of the Renaissance supported this trend.[38] In the early modern age, the emphasis shifted to communality within associations, groups, companies, and clubs, where a form of intellectual or artistic engaged elitism was cultivated. The places around which such *compagnie d'humanisme* were organised included printing houses and the homes of contemporary humanists. In the conditions of a rapidly developing print culture, the literary games of the participants in the *société du banquet* were often published in the form of collections of epigrams.[39] It is difficult, however, to describe these gatherings as symposia in the traditional sense; they are rather an allusion to a complex cultural convention, involving the use and reworking of a certain sympotic coloratura.

AT THE PAINTERS' SYMPOSIUMS

In contrast to the tradition of the *convivium* (literally 'living together'), which was characterised by solemnity (*gravitas*) and learned conversation, there is the tradition of συμπόσιον (literally 'drinking together'). This tradition is associated with considerable wine consumption and a relaxed atmosphere, although not without the banqueting "solemnity" (σπουδαῖον) observed in antiquity.[40] An exceptional example of the transformation and development of sympotic poetics within the intellectual climate of the Baroque era is the so-called De Bentvueghels or Schildersbent group. This informal association of Dutch artists, studying ancient relics, was founded in Rome in 1623 by Pieter van Laer, Cornelis van Poelenburgh, and Bartholomeus Breenberghi. Through their efforts, the convivial atmosphere of the Flemish inn blended

[37] One can also mention: *Convivium poeticum*, *Convivium sobrium*, *Convivium fabulosum*; cf. other authors like Marsilio Ficino and his *De sufficientia, fine, forma, materia, modo, condimento, authoritate convivii*; Johann Wilhelm Stucki, *Antiquitatum convivialium libri III*, or Jules César Bulenger, *De conviviis libri quattour*.

[38] Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, "Des mets et des maux. Aspects et enjeux de la dévaluation de la table à la Renaissance," *Romanische Forschungen* 108 (1996): 396.

[39] Sylvie Laigneau-Fontaine, "Les banquets du sodalitium Lugdunense: un idéal de sociabilité à la Renaissance," *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 72, no. 3 (2024): 57–75.

[40] See Vanessa Cazzato and Enrico Emenuele Prodi, "Introduction: Continuity in the Sympotic Tradition," in *The Cup of Song: Studies on Poetry and the Symposion*, ed. Vanessa Cazzato, Dirk Obbink, and Enrico Emanuele Prodi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–16.

seamlessly with the post-antique sympotic tradition of Rome. Many members of the *Bentvueghels* were also *Bamboccianti* ('puppet-makers,' *Il Bamboccio* meaning 'clumsy doll' or 'puppet'), known for their predilection for low themes. An example is the genre painting *Roman Street Scene with a Young Artist* by Michiel Sweerts. Towards the end of the 17th century, Salvator Rosa, who was himself a Bambocciate artist, wrote in his Satire:

> There are those who, with the help of their paintbrush, dedicate themselves to depicting rogues, cheats, pickpockets, bands of drunks and gluttons, scabby tobacconists, barbers, and other "sordid" subjects. They depict a man looking for lice, scratching himself, selling boiled pears to an urchin, taking care of himself, giving tripe to a cat, playing, repairing a jug, or fixing clogs. Today, a painter doesn't consider his work significant unless it includes a depiction of ragged groups and carries a sense of vulgarity.[41]

The painters' symposiums, free from conventional restraints, combined elitism with behaviour characteristic of low culture, featuring with the staging of Bacchic scenes and role-playing games inspired by Greek myths. The society itself had the character of an artistic group, with rules of initiation mirroring those of the Bacchic mysteries. The amused masters are depicted in Philip Konnick's painting *The Feast of Bacchus* (1654), which is part of the collection of the Bredius Museum. The work depicts the initiation ceremony of a fraternity, featuring a jovial, almost naked, plump Bacchus perched atop a massive wine cask, raising a toast. He is surrounded by a group of costumed κωμασταί, Dionysian dancers, and the atmosphere is one of drunkenness, playfulness, and comic faces. In one corner, a partygoer arrives on a donkey, wearing an exaggeratedly high hat and mask. The horseman points to a document, that serves as a certificate of admission to the fraternity, for a new member dressed as a god. The parody of the Dionysian initiation and baptism simultaneously represents an authentic drunken ritual of this association. *Neos Dionysos* adopts an appropriate nickname, the so-called "bent name", such as *Biervliech* (Dirck van Baburen)[42] or *Ratel* (Jan Baptist Weenix).[43]

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[41] Salvator Rosa, *Satira terza* (*La pittura*), 11.235ff., in Giovanni Alfredo Cesareo, *Poesie e lettere edite e inedite di Salvator Rosa*, vol. 1 (Naples: Tipografia della Regia università, 1892), 232. Wendy Wassyng Roworth proposed 1650 as the year in which Rosa wrote his diatribe, replacing the traditional date of 1640–1645, see Roworth, "A Date for Salvator Rosa's Satire on Painting and the Bamboccianti in Rome," *Art Bulletin* 63 (1981): 611–17; David A. Levine, "The Roman Limekilns of the Bamboccianti," *The Art Bulletin* 70, no. 4 (1988): 569–89.

[42] Named for his great love of beer.

[43] Meaning 'rattle' because of a voice defect.

The Flemish artists were particularly fascinated by the Mausoleum of Constance situated on the Via Nomentana in Rome. Shortly before the founding of the group in 1620, a statue of a Capitoline *anus ebria*, described at the time as a "priestess of Dionysus", was discovered during restoration work in the Basilica of St Agnes outside the Walls adjacent to the mausoleum. Artists recognised the mausoleum as a shrine to Bacchus because of its characteristic mosaics depicting scenes from the grape harvest, and it soon became a meeting place for their gatherings and drunken initiations.[44] In 1720, Pope Clement XI banned the drunken initiation ritual, which led to the unfortunate dissolution of the brotherhood. Interestingly, various artists continued to meet in the Mausoleum of Constance throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, leaving their names and pseudonyms visible on the walls inside the building, including the inscription "Sierakowski, Szmuglewicz Poloni". The "bacchic" context of the building meant that, for a time, it served as the starting point for carnival parades heading towards the centre of Rome.

In Roland van Laer's drawing, *A Gathering of Pieter van Laer and His Friends* from 1625, the Bentvueghels are depicted in one of Rome's taverns.[45] On the wall that forms the background of the cheerful scene, there is a drawing portraying a procession of figures dressed as the Devil, Death with an hourglass (*Larva convivialis*) and an unfinished, grotesque profile of Bamboccio. The atmosphere of Trimalchiadic feasting and Horatian exhortation alternates with drunken laughter and the joy of the moment, reminiscent of the amusements of the *poètes maudits* mentioned above. As David Levine points out, "the Bamboccianti were actually pursuing a contrived form of painting that expressed meaning through irony,"[46] a characteristic that would later become prominent in the intellectual circle of Tadeusz Różewicz, made up of the artists of the Second Cracow Group.

[44] About the loose practices in the brotherhood, see Godefridus Johannes Hoogewerff, *De Bentvueghels* (Den Haag: s-Gravenhage by Nijhoff, 1952); David A. Levine, "Pieter van Laer's Artists' Tavern: An Ironic Commentary on Art," in *Hollaendische Genremalerei im 17. Jahrhundert. Symposium Berlin 1984*, ed. Henning Bock and Thomas W. Gaehtgens (Berlin: Mann, 1987), 169–91.

[45] Thomas Kren, "Chi non vuol Baccho: Roeland van Laer's Burlesque Painting about Dutch Artists in Rome," *Simiolus* 11 (1981): 63–80.

[46] Levine, *Pieter van Laer's Artists' Tavern*, 169.

THE MODERN ERA

Since the 17th century, the institution of the literary salon, and later the bourgeois salon, characterised by restraint, solemnity, and elitism, had flourished in Europe.[47] In the 19th century, the salons gave way to the editorial offices of periodicals, which served as forums for the discussion of literature and promoted a new reading culture linked to the development of the press. Sympotic poetics seemed to develop in parallel with these evolving institutions. An illustration of intellectual elitism combined with a certain freedom of behaviour can be seen in the famous *Eranos Circle* in Ascona, a town near the northern tip of Lake Maggiore, renowned for its robust red wine (Ticino). The Greek word *éranos* refers to a type of dining experience—a noble and elegant gathering where participants share food according to their preferences and engage in enriching conversation while eating at the same table. As a result, *Eranos* has become a symbol of intellectual gatherings in European culture. The sympotic poetics, as a form of specific intertextual and ironic discourse on *belles-lettres* and art, remains a vibrant aspect of contemporary European culture. Tadeusz Różewicz, for instance, employed the symposium motif extensively in his works. Together with his friends, he founded the famous informal sympotic group, which earned him the title of "father of the discourse" (πατήρ του λόγου) of 20th-century Polish literature.

CONCLUSIONS

This brief overview of symposium themes in European culture emphasises that sympotic poetics transcends its origins as an ancient literary convention. It is a distinctive form of intellectual discourse that combines the serious and the playful, the sublime and the banal. This is particularly evident in the modern version of the "feasts of the sages", where modern and postmodern "symposiasts" often move seamlessly from absurdity, irony, and humourless jokes to moments of seriousness or moral instructions, known in Greek as *hypothḗkai*.[48] However, these intellectual feasts are often banquets *à reburs*,

[47] Dena Goodman, "Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22, no. 3 (1989): 329–50; Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

[48] On *hypothḗkai* as a poetry of precepts based on gnomes, see Paul Friedländer, "Hypothekai, II. Theognis," *Hermes* 68 (1913): 572–603; Stuligrosz, *Gnoma w twórczości Pindara.*

as exemplified in Różewicz's poem "tempus fugit".[49] The intertextual games embedded in these feasts are subtle, demanding cultural "initiation", but they are also formative and gnomic, forging a link between contemporary poets and ancient sages. As Jan Skarbek-Kazanecki argues, following Fiona Hobden,

> participation in the symposium was, from the beginning, an opportunity for elites to present their philosophical views and to assert their authority in their intellectual and cultural milieu. From this philosophical perspective, the feasts familiar to us from the works of Xenophon or Plato, where guests engage in debates on topics such as the nature of beauty, can be seen as the development (or reception) of motifs deeply embedded in the culture of the elites of archaic Greece.[50]

It is precisely this discursive, modelling function of ancient sympotic poetics that modern culture has transformed into an effective tool. It allows European artistic elites to assert their distinctiveness, their uniqueness, and to formulate their convictions, often expressing their disappointments. On the one hand, the modern poet, as a quasi-symposiast, embodies prudence and thoughtful reflection (εὖ φρονέων), reminiscent of the elegiac lyricism of Theognides. On the other hand, the same poet is full of clownish jokes and ironic references, producing works such as *kup kota w worku* (*buy a cat in a bag*). The convergence of gravity and laughter unites ancient and modern poet-sages, yet the functions of these behaviours differ. Post-ancient sympotic poetics became a functional formula, giving rise to dialogical strategies for initiating debates about the visual arts or literature, a characteristic of European culture. In this way, a new convention was created that playfully combined philosophy, literature, and art, and the coexistence of writers, scholars, and artists was given socio-cultural sanction. The modern feasts of the Bentvueghels, the Lugdunense sodalitium, the meetings of philosophers and artists of the Eranos group, the Bloomsbury Set, or Różewicz's parasymposia are therefore not strictly symposia but rather sympotic-convivial. Such gatherings are founded upon the elitism inherent in Plato's *Feast*, Xenophon's *Feast*, or Athenaeus's *Feast of Sages* and also upon the element of drunken clowning.

Sympotic poetics, understood as a form of intellectual discourse expressed in intertextual games, whether through explicit or implicit borrowing

[49] Joanna Hobot-Marcinek, "Eremici i sympozjaści. Ryszard Przybylski i Tadeusz Różewicz — listy, wiersze, rozmowy," *Prace Polonistyczne* 77 (2022): 97–113.

[50] Skarbek-Kazanecki, *Wokół pojęcia díkē*, 158, f. 231; Hobden, *The Symposion*, 249 (my translation).

from the "old masters", is imbued with a specific, crotchety jocularity, irony, and a distinct note of pessimism and lack of faith in humanity. It is an expression of the existential attitude of the 20th-century elites. A symptomatic example of this can be found in the artistic circle of the poet Tadeusz Różewicz, where he alternates between the role of a post-modern clown and juggler and that of a "learned poet".

Sympotic poetics, as a specific mode of discourse encapsulated in literary form, is an integral part of the poetics of experience and cultural poetics, in line with the perspectives of scholars associated with cultural literary theory[51] or New Historicism.[52] At the same time, the textual record renders these literary discourses "independent" of the author and "challenging" to the audience. With their ability to simulate a conversation, these poetics involve the reader in the unfolding debate within the verses, drawing him or her into the intellectual circle of sympotic "jesters" and "nobles".

From a performative-pragmatic perspective, sympotic poetics is primarily a rhetorical-communicative strategy and practice. It offers contemporary "symposiasts"—poets, painters, or philosophers—the opportunity to activate their imagination without being constrained by the canons of an academic treatise. They create a work in motion; a piece that enters into a dialogue with the viewer, activating different contexts and stories, evoking scenes from life. This process results in an interactive creation that engages and involves the reader in a rhythm of logoreia induced by wine. We can say that sympotic poetics shapes literary conversations and expressions as a network of free intertextual references, but not without a certain discipline of argument. *Let us rejoice by drinking and talking beautifully!*

[51] Ryszard Nycz, "Antropologia literatury—kulturowa teoria literatury—poetyka doświadczenia," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2007): 34–49.

[52] Leslie Kurke, "Crisis and Decorum in Sixth-Century Lesbos: Reading Alkaios Otherwise," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 47 (1994): 67–92; Kurke, "Inventing the Hetaira: Sex, Politics, and Discursive Conflict in Archaic Greece," *Classical Antiquity* 16 (1997): 106–50; Kurke, *Coins*, *Bodies, Games, and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ian Morris, "The Strong Principle of Equality and the Archaic Origins of Greek Democracy," in *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 19–48; Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History: Words and Things in Iron Age Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

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LET US REJOICE BY DRINKING AND TALKING BEAUTIFULLY: SYMPOTIC POETICS AS A FUNCTION OF CULTURE

Summary

The article explores the concept of sympotic poetics in European culture as a distinctive form of discourse. This tradition originated in the Greek civilisation during the archaic period as a technique for socialisation within aristocratic culture and subsequently developed in Roman culture during the imperial period. Sympotic poetics thrived in medieval and modern Europe, where new forms of literary games, rooted in the intellectual traditions of antiquity, emerged. The article examines the beginnings of scholarly literary discussion and reviews selected examples of sympotic discussion practices in European culture.

Keywords: sympotic poetics; ancient symposium; party games; convivial literature

RADUJMY SIĘ PIJĄC I PIĘKNIE ROZMAWIAJĄC: POETYKA SYMPOTYCZNA JAKO FUNKCJA KULTURY

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy zagadnienia poetyki sympotycznej w kulturze europejskiej jako specyficznej formy dyskursu. Została ona ukształtowana w cywilizacji greckiej epoki archaicznej jako jedno z narzędzi socjalizacji w obrębie kultury arystokratycznej, a następnie rozwinięta w kulturze rzymskiej okresu cesarstwa. Rozkwit poetyki sympotycznej nastąpił w europie średniowiecznej i nowożytnej, kiedy wykształciły się nowe formy gry literackiej osadzonej w intelektualnej tradycji antyku. Artykuł skupia się na genezie uczonej dyskusji literackiej oraz omawia wybrane przykłady uprawiania dyskusji w duchu sympotyczym w kulturze europejskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: poetyka sympotyczna; sympozjon; gry literackie; literatura bankietowa