

The Function of the Symposium Theme in Theocritus' *Idyll* 14

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RECENT STUDIES of ancient Greek and Roman symposia have contributed greatly to contemporary understanding of the ancient social and political world.¹ This new view of the function of symposia has also illuminated the study of archaic Greek lyric poetry.² But interpretation of later Greek and Latin literature has been slower to reflect the sophisticated work being done on sympotic customs and culture.³ Theocritus' *Idyll* 14 provides an example of the value of paying closer and more informed attention to the handling of such themes and settings in Hellenistic literature, for although this is perhaps the most famous work of this period that features a symposium, scholars have overlooked its centrality to the thematic development and concerns of the poem itself.⁴

The first part of this paper offers an historical overview of Greek symposia in order to clarify the function of and innovation in the theme in Theoc. *Id.* 14. The second part shows

¹ For important recent collections of papers, see O. MURRAY, ed., *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposium* (Oxford 1990: hereafter '*Symptica*'); W. J. Slater, ed., *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor 1991).

² For fundamental articles see G. Giangrande, "Symptotic Literature and Epigram," in *L'Epigramme grecque* (= *Entretiens Hardt* 14 [Vandoeuvres-Geneva 1968]) 93-117; B. Gentili, "L'interpretazione dei lirici greci arcaici nella dimensione del nostro tempo: Sincronia e diacronia nello studio di una cultura orale," *QUCC* 8 (1969) 7-21, revised as "The Interpretation of the Greek Lyric Poets in Our Time," in S. Kresic, ed., *Contemporary Literary Hermeneutics and Interpretation of Classical Texts* (Ottawa 1981) 109-20.

³ For two excellent and informed discussions of sympotic literature see O. Murray, "Symposium and Genre in the Poetry of Horace," *JRS* 75 (1985) 39-50; and R. B. Branham, *Unruly Eloquence: Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1989) 104-23, on Lucian's *Symposium*.

⁴ F. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh 1972) 172f, briefly discusses the symposium setting of *Id.* 14 in connection with the "symptoms of love" genre within which he classifies the poem; J. Stern, "Theocritus' *Idyll* 14," *GRBS* 16 (1975) 51-58, expands on Cairns' approach by showing how *Id.* 14 tests love conventions against reality.

how the symposium of *Id.* 14 provides a forum for approaching social and political issues relating to the increased mobility and privatization of the Hellenistic age. These issues include the rôle of traditional social institutions in establishing community, the effect of privatization on gender discourse and behavior, the impact of friendship and love on self-identity, and the relations between patron and poet.

I. Historical Overview of Greek Symposia

Although the symposium as conventionally understood (small, private, aristocratic) seems to have arisen in the archaic age, its origins have been traced to large Homeric feasts.⁵ Murray provides an anthropological link: "the aristocratic sympotic life-style is a development from the Homeric warrior-feast under the influence of orientalising luxury; its origin is in the functional importance of the aristocratic warrior-group consolidated by mutual feasting in [the] dark age [of] Greece" ("Symposion" 51). To Athenaeus, whose *Deipnosophistae* is a fundamental source in the study of the ancient symposium, the connection between symposia and Homeric dining parties seemed obvious: he bases an important discussion of the formal elements of the symposium on "Homeric symposia."⁶

In the Homeric world, where the class of nobles and kings consisted of elite warriors, personal military obligations were established and reinforced through a system of reciprocal banquets held mostly in great halls to maximize the pool of potential allies.⁷ Noblewomen too could appear at these ban-

⁵ O. MURRAY has contributed greatly to our understanding of the history of the symposium to the Hellenistic age: see his *Early Greece* (Glasgow 1980: hereafter 'EG') esp. 197–203; "Symposion and Männerbund," in P. Oliva and A. Frolíková, ed., *Concilium Eirene* 16 (Prague 1983: "Symposion") I 47–52; "The Greek Symposion in History," in E. GABBA, ed., *Tria Corda: Scritti in onore di Arnaldo Momigliano* (Como 1983: 'Gabba') 257–72; "The Symposion as Social Organisation," in R. Hägg, ed., *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation* (Stockholm 1983: 'Hägg') 195–99; "War and the Symposium," in Slater (*supra* n.1) 83–103; see also S. HUMPHREYS, *The Family, Women and Death: Comparative Studies* (London 1983: 'Humphreys') esp. 16ff, 26ff, 43, 56f.

⁶ Ath. 185A–193C, including 177A–182C, transposed to the end of 187B since Casaubon.

⁷ Murray, EG 49f; in Gabba 259f; and in Hägg 197.

quets (e.g. Arete, Helen, and Penelope). Unlike activities featured at later symposia, extramarital sexual activity was not central, and intercourse with the servants could offend a host (as in the case of Penelope's suitors and the serving women). Instead, for after-dinner entertainment, bards would recite epic tales, sometimes cautionary for diners (e.g. the story of a host who eats his guests: Hom. *Od.* 9.287–98, 344–74), but generally supportive of aristocratic values.

In the archaic period, trade and colonization encouraged a new social and spatial mobility, and the development of affordable body armor and collective battle tactics expanded the warrior elite beyond the class of landed aristocrats.⁸ Further, the rise of the city-state encouraged such cooperative values as moderation and self-control (*sophrosyne*). Aristocrats took refuge from this broadly-based bourgeois respectability in small, private drinking parties that provided settings outside the public domain, in which aristocrats affirmed their class unity and exclusivity through luxurious (and immoderate) activities such as reclining on couches (an orientaling fashion),⁹ homosexual courtship, and drinking contests (e.g. *kottabos*).¹⁰ These parties were often followed by high-spirited, drunken revelry (*komos*), during which aristocrats would display their class difference from non-aristocrats by publicly assaulting them (*hybris*).¹¹ Symptotic table talk, musical activities, and sexual interaction (extramarital) also helped socialize young aristocrats:¹² hosts provided attractive flute-girls and cup-bearing boys to amuse the guests, and respectable women were excluded.

The eventual rise of tyrants and statesmen, supported by hoplite power, distressed an aristocracy accustomed to political dominance and class privilege. Symposia could provide fora for expressing opposition, as shown by Alcaeus' symptotic verse (332 Lobel and Page) celebrating a tyrant's overthrow:

⁸ Murray, *EG* 120–31.

⁹ See J. Boardman, "Symposion Furniture," in *Sympotica* 122–31.

¹⁰ Murray in Gabba 263f; in Hägg 198.

¹¹ See Murray in Gabba 268ff; in *Sympotica* 150.

¹² See e.g. Humphreys 17f, 28.

νῦν χρῆ μεθύσθην καί τινα πὲρ βίαν
 πώνην, ἐπειδὴ κάτθανε Μύρσιλος.¹³

Aristocrats claimed the birthright of exemption from social norms through drunken public revelry. Myrsilus' successor Pittacus, a moderate statesman, took measures against the arrogant sympotic community by doubling the penalties for crimes committed when drunk.¹⁴ The exuberant drinking poems written by Alcaeus, Pittacus' former friend, challenged the reactionary political values reflected in such legislation.

As for treatment of women at archaic symposia, black- and red-figure drinking vessels show that they became a traditional target of abuse; by means of such violence, symposiasts were allowed to affirm their male solidarity and sexual hegemony.¹⁵ An unusual development, however, was the admission of women to Pythagorean philosophical societies during the archaic period: these women were called *Pythagorikai* (D.L. 8.41) and presumably were allowed to dine with the male disciples. Perhaps Sappho's coterie of women offered an all-female version of sympotic culture.¹⁶

In classical Sparta, military dining-groups (*syssitia*) offered the closest analogue to symposia, from which they differed considerably: elite citizen-soldiers lived within a highly regimented system of mess-clubs, and each group dined together.

¹³ "Now we must get drunk
 and drink with all our might,
 since Myrsilos [the tyrant] is dead" (tr. Fowler).

Cf. the same reflex applied to Cleopatra's suicide in Hor. *Carm.* 1.37: *Nunc est bibendum*.

¹⁴ Arist. *Pol.* 2.1274b19, *Eth. Nic.* 3.5.8; D.L. 1.76. For Pittacus and Alcaeus see Murray, *EG*, esp.151f; in Gabba 268. Other tyrants and statesmen tried to weaken aristocratic power by holding public festivals that encouraged a larger sense of community and by patronizing sympotic culture: at Athens, for example, the tyrant Pisistratus sponsored the Great Panathenaea and the city Dionysia, and his son Hipparchus invited the lyric (sympotic) poet Anacreon to his court (Pl. *Hipparch.* 228c). A tradition of lavish symposia continued among tyrants: e.g. Dionysius I had rooms built in his palace to hold thirty couches (Ath. 541c; cf. 544c).

¹⁵ On the pictorial representation of sympotic violence against prostitutes and slave-girls, see R. F. Sutton, "Pornography and Persuasion on Attic Pottery," in A. Richlin, ed., *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (Oxford 1992) 11f.

¹⁶ See e.g. S. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London 1978) 219; Murray, *EG* 149; in Hägg 198.

Although recalling Homeric military banquets, the Spartan *syssitia* were small and exclusively male, and the food was purposely austere (Plut. *Lyc.* 12; Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 5, 7). This unusual development grew out of the Spartans' permanent state of war with the suppressed helots, for which Sparta had developed a rigidly structured, professional hoplite force that lived and dined together to maintain discipline.¹⁷

At Athens during the classical period, the rise of radical participatory democracy marginalized the aristocratic symposium: the state encouraged a larger sense of community through public festivals and town hall dinners. Comic plays, state-sponsored and publicly performed, mocked the symposium for its rôle in socializing young aristocrats (*cf.* Ar. *Nub.* 1353–90, *Vesp.* 1131–1537) and its link with violent, antisocial behavior, as shown by the plebeian Philocleon's refusal to attend a symposium (Ar. *Vesp.* 1253ff):

κακὸν τὸ πίνειν· ἀπὸ γὰρ οἴνου γίγνεται
καὶ θυροκοπήσαι καὶ πατάξαι καὶ βαλεῖν,
κάπειτ' ἀποτίνειν ἀργύριον ἐκ κραιπάλης.¹⁸

The Greek symposium as it developed in the archaic period had been a defining institution of aristocratic male culture, and pederasty was integral to the aristocratic expression of self-identity and class.¹⁹ In the fifth century, however, homosexual behavior associated with a privileged leisure class and exclusive sympotic activities began to wane,²⁰ and the popular imagination, as reflected in comedy (*e.g.* Ar. *Nub.* 961–1023), increasingly linked homosexuality with reactionary aristocratic politics.

In this sociopolitical environment, ambitious aristocrats might choose to distance themselves ostentatiously from the sympotic lifestyle. Thus Pericles, in aspiring to public office, is

¹⁷ On Spartan *syssitia* see Murray in Slater (*supra* n.1), esp. 93ff; *cf.* N. R. E. Fisher, "Drink, *Hybris* and the Promotion of Harmony in Sparta," in A. Powell, ed., *Classical Sparta: Techniques Behind Her Success* (Norman 1988) 26–50.

¹⁸ "Drinking is no good; it leads to breaking down doors, assault and battery—and then a headache and a fine to pay" (tr. based on Rogers).

¹⁹ On Greek pederasty and male bonding, see K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1978) 191ff; Humphreys 43; also J. N. Bremmer, "Adolescents, *Symposion*, and Pederasty," in *Sympotica* 135–48.

²⁰ See Murray, "Symposion" 50.

said to have avoided friends' parties and left a kinsman's wedding-feast before the sympotic drinking began (Plut. *Per.* 7). Others, however, continued to seek the fellowship and self-affirmation available outside democratic public life in the elite realm of symposia and gymnasia. Through sympotic communities, aristocrats could also find support for political action, ranging from fixed elections to revolution.²¹ The strong political aspect of the *demos*' suspicion of sympotic communities is evident in the placing of blame for the mutilation of the herms in 415.²² And by emphasizing Socrates' association with "young men with the wealthiest fathers and the most leisure" (*Ap.* 23C), Plato underscores how hostility against the sympotic elite contributed to Socrates' condemnation in 399.

In the fifth century, Greek symposia generally seem to have continued to ban respectable women. But some other than *Pythagorikai* had begun to congregate socially with men in circumstances perhaps approaching symposia: Aspasia, a Milesian settler who lived with Pericles, hosted intellectual gatherings, and Athenian women reportedly attended with their husbands.²³

In the fourth century, disillusioned by the failure of the Athenian Empire, many Athenians seem to have retreated into a world of private luxury and display, which included fancier houses with stylish dining rooms,²⁴ and an increase in sympotic activities may have resulted. Social mobility, concurrent with a rise in new wealth and expanded access to education, could sustain a more broadly-based sympotic culture. For the most part, however, symposia continued much as usual: unruly

²¹ For discussion of the rôle of 'personal ties' in political action (with attention to the oligarchic revolts of 411 and 404) see Humphreys 27f (also on ostracism); Murray in Gabba 269 (with reference to Thuc. 8.54.4). On Hyperbolus' ostracism through the collusion of Alcibiades and Nicias, see Plut. *Alc.* 13, *Nic.* 11. Note also the counterfeit *ostraka* against Themistocles.

²² See O. Murray, "The Affair of the Mysteries: Democracy and the Drinking Group," in *Sympotica* 149–61; in Gabba 269f.

²³ On Aspasia's association with intellectuals see Xen. *Oec.* 3.14, *Mem.* 2.6.36; Pl. *Menex.* 235E–236B, 249D; Plut. *Per.* 24; Ath. 569F; Σ *ad Ar. Ach.* 526. Aspasia may have been particularly familiar with sympotic customs, for she had allegedly worked as a *hetaira* and as an importer of *hetairai* (*Ar. Ach.* 524–29; Plut. *Per.* 24; Ath. 569F).

²⁴ On elaborate private homes in the fourth century, see Dem. 3.29; on dining-room floor mosaics from the fourth century and the Hellenistic period, see J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge 1986) 210–29.

symposiasts persisted in arrogantly claiming exemption from social norms by committing violent acts, and society continued its attempts to police such behavior through the court system, as shown by considerable litigation involving violent sympotic misbehavior.²⁵

An important new development was the rise of the philosophical symposium. Fourth-century philosophers regularly gathered young men for dinner parties (Ath. 186A-B). Epicurus, for example, restricts a dinner party to followers of Democritus (Ath. 187B),²⁶ and Antipater later required his guests to discuss only sophism (Ath. 186C). Plato's Socrates claims that only "second-rate and commonplace" symposiasts "too uneducated to entertain themselves" need such entertainment as flute-girls (Pl. *Prt.* 347C-D, tr. Guthrie); fourth-century philosophers advocated more refined sympotic manners, with subdued drinking, elevated table talk, and no music.²⁷

Fourth-century symposia normally continued to exclude respectable women, as the arguments against Neaera's claim to Athenian citizenship show: *i.e.*, if she attended drinking parties, she must have been a prostitute (Dem. 59.33). But two women are mentioned specifically among Plato's disciples, and they may well have attended philosophical symposia—especially since one of them, Axiothea of Phlius, reportedly dressed in men's clothing (D.L. 3.46). Although court cases show the persistence of traditional sympotic violence against women, this may also reflect a rise in public disapproval.²⁸

²⁵ *E.g.* Dem. 54.7ff, where Ariston accuses Conon of leading symposiasts to the marketplace, beating him severely, and then crowing over him in triumph.

²⁶ For ancient misinterpretation of Epicurean banquets as orgies, see D. K. O'Connor, "The Invulnerable Pleasures of Epicurean Friendship," *GRBS* 31 (1990) 170.

²⁷ Pl. *Prt.* 347E-348A, *Symp.* 176C-E. On drinking practices see also Pl. *Leg.* esp. 1.645D-E, 2.671B-674C. Aristotle and Xenocrates both wrote treatises on symposium manners (Ath. 186B), and Aristotle wrote another treatise on drunkenness (Ath. 464C, 496F). Theophrastus' *Characters* repeatedly mocks undesirable sympotic behavior. *Cf.* Xenophanes' earlier prescription for the well-ordered symposium (fr. 1 West). On Plato, see also M. Tecusan, "Logos *Sympotikos*: Patterns of the Irrational in Philosophical Drinking: Plato Outside the *Symposion*," in *Symptica* 238-60.

²⁸ Demosthenes tries to discredit Aeschines by relating how Aeschines and an associate had a slave woman beaten nearly to death for refusing to sing at a symposium: only another symposiast's intervention saved her life (19.196ff). In his rebuttal, Aeschines (2.158) acknowledges that such an incident, were it true, would cause public disgrace.

Alexander's conquests caused fundamental changes in Greek social and political life, with repercussions for the function of the symposium in Hellenistic society. While city-state autonomy faded, there was intense colonization and mobility. The many Greeks who went abroad could easily feel displaced, and symposia (and gymnasia) offered settings in which travelers and immigrants could re-establish a sense of community and self-identity. Because Greek was the language of Hellenistic courts and bureaucracies, non-elite Greeks might improve their status simply by migrating to a place in which they were in the minority. Accordingly, given the general increase in social mobility and wealth (stimulated by Alexander's looting in the East), a more broadly-based Greek population might have felt entitled to participate in Hellenistic sympotic culture.²⁹

Among Hellenistic kings there was a fashion for large, often flamboyant symposia that displayed their power and prestige.³⁰ Alexander and his father Philip had demonstrated to the successors a Macedonian style of drinking-party: rowdy, with heavy drinking, frequently violent, and usually ostentatious.³¹ But Hellenistic kings also hosted more refined, even scholarly symposia.³²

The usual flute-girls and *hetairai* continued to entertain at male-dominated symposia in the Hellenistic period.³³ But insofar as

²⁹ The socially mobile (e.g. colonizers, hoplites) had likely begun to try assimilating the sympotic culture, made public through pictorial art, as early as the archaic period—also an age of colonization and mobility. On the adoption of aristocratic customs by hoplites and others during the archaic period, see Murray, *EG* 209; in Gabba 265. For non-elite symposia see E. Pellizer, "Outlines of a Morphology of Sympotic Entertainment," in *Sympotica* 181.

³⁰ For examples of extravagant Hellenistic royal symposia see e.g. Ath. 195D, 196B, 540A–C.

³¹ For examples of drunken (homicidal) violence at Philip's and Alexander's symposia, see Plut. *Alex.* 9, 50f; for examples of luxurious display and ostentation at Philip's and Alexander's symposia, see Dem. 19.192–95; Plut. *Alex.* 54; Ath. 146C, 537E–540A. See also E. N. Borza, "The Symposium at Alexander's Court," *Ancient Macedonia III: Papers Read at the Third International Symposium Held in Thessaloniki* (Institute of Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki 1977) 45–55.

³² See Plut. *Mor.* 1095C–96A; O. Murray, "Aristeas and Ptolemaic Kingship," *JThS* 18 (1967) 337–71, esp. 346f; in Gabba 270f.

³³ For epigrams on (fictive) *hetairai* see *Anth. Pal.* Bk. 5.

Greek women were experiencing a rise in personal freedom,³⁴ the symposium may have become more accessible to respectable women as well. We lack information on symposia held by members of the lower class—likely not unknown in this age of social mobility—where one might expect some disregard for social conventions established by the aristocracy and middle-class (such as exclusion of respectable women). But we hear that the aristocrat Hipparchia, wife of the Cynic Crates, accompanied her husband to symposia (D.L. 6.97f); and Epicureans also admitted to their philosophical cult women³⁵ who would presumably have dined with the men.

II. Theocritus' *Idyll* 14

When scholars speak of Hellenistic sympotic poems, they are usually referring to epigrams (Murray [*supra* n.3] 44–50). But longer Hellenistic poems—Theoc. *Id.* 2–3, 7, 14, 29, for example, and Callim. *Aet. fr.* 178–85 (*Icus*)—also include the symposium theme. Of these, Theoc. *Id.* 14 most clearly illustrates how the theme can function as a forum for approaching issues of contemporary importance.

In brief, *Id.* 14 represents a conversation between two friends, Aeschinas and Thyonichus, who have not seen each other for some time. Thyonichus notes Aeschinas' negligent appearance, and Aeschinas explains by telling the story of an altercation with his girlfriend Cynisca at a symposium two months previous. The length of the account (half the poem) underscores its central thematic importance. Aeschinas was hosting an intimate drinking party: three male friends and Cynisca. By popular decision everyone was to toast his or her

³⁴ The expansion of economic and social rights for Hellenistic women included use of marriage contracts in Egypt, admission of women to philosophical cults, limited introduction of coeducational schools, and increased opportunities to attain civic honors and to win prizes in poetry and athletic contests. See e.g. C. Préaux, "Le statut de la femme à l'époque hellénistique, principalement en Égypte," *RecSocJBodin* 11.1 (Brussels 1959) 127–75; S. B. Pomeroy, "Technikai kai Mousikai: The Education of Women in the Fourth Century and in the Hellenistic Period," *AJAH* 2 (1977) 51–68, and *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra* (New York 1984) esp. 59–72, 83–121.

³⁵ See B. Frischer, *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley 1982) 61f.

favorite, but Cynisca refused, with a reaction to Aeschinas' other guests' jocular behavior that revealed why: she preferred Lycus, a neighbor's boy, to him. In anger Aeschinas struck her with his fist. She fled the symposium and has since then been consorting with his rival. Now the lovelorn Aeschinas, grown shaggy, thin, and pale, is considering enlisting abroad as a mercenary. Thyonichus sympathizes and recommends Ptolemy's service.

The symposium of *Id.* 14 reflects in its male guest list—an Argive, a Thessalian horse-trainer, and a soldier—the geographical diversity and occupational mobility of the Hellenistic world. Because symposia and gymnasia traditionally reinforced male solidarity and fellowship, a dislocated Greek male could try, through participating in such institutions, to restore his sense of Greek community and self. But the symposium of *Id.* 14 has the opposite effect of leaving its host filled with a sense of isolation and depression.

The basic components of Aeschinas' symposium were conventional, if modest: plentiful food and drink (two chickens, a suckling pig, Bibline wine, with onions and snails, 14–17) and traditional party activities (toasts, riddles, and song, 18–31). But the occupations of these particular symposiasts evoke the tradition of the military symposium, beginning with Homer's warrior banquets, continuing with Sparta's mess-clubs, and re-created on a grand scale in Alexander's drinking parties on campaign.

By introducing a woman into this traditionally masculine context, Theocritus is able to exploit the contrast between the social dynamics of male friendship rituals and initiation rites and the predominantly heterosexual emphasis in Hellenistic culture.³⁶ Before Aeschinas mentions the presence of Cynisca, he characterizes the symposium as a *potos hadys* ("jolly drinking party," tr. Gow). But the presence of Cynisca complicates the social dynamics of the occasion. When the other guests tease her for refusing to toast a favorite, her reaction reveals to

³⁶ Since the fourth century, literature and art had been turning increasingly toward heterosexual themes, as evident in Menander's romantic comedies and Apollonius Rhodius' complex representation of Medea's love for Jason, as well as in the dramatic rise in nude female statuary emulating Praxiteles' Cnidian Aphrodite. On heterosexuality in art see e.g. P. Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Berkeley 1990) 100ff; R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture* (London 1991) 79–83.

Aeschinas that she has transferred her affection to the neighbor's boy. In typical sympotic fashion Aeschinas reverts to violence³⁷ and strikes her twice on the temple with his fist (34f).

Group acts that transgressed the normative social code—especially aggressive verbal and physical behavior directed against women—could help unite symposiasts by affirming male solidarity and sexual hegemony. But in *Id.* 14, the other male symposiasts' collective teasing and Aeschinas' solitary violence separate him from the fellowship of the sympotic community: Cynisca responds to Aeschinas' blows by flight, robbing him of his self-esteem. Now, two months later, Aeschinas is still dysfunctional:

ἄμμες δ' οὔτε λόγῳ τινὸς ἄξιοι οὔτ' ἀριθμητοί,
 δύστανοι Μεγαρήες ἀτιμοτάτα ἐνὶ μοίρα.
 κεῖ μὲν ἀποστέρξαιμι, τὰ πάντα κεν ἐς δέον ἔρποι.
 νῦν δὲ πόθεν; μῦς, φαντί, Θυώνιχε, γεύμεθα πίσσας.
 χῶτι τὸ φάρμακὸν ἔστιν ἀμηχανέοντος ἔρωτος,
 οὐκ οἶδα.³⁸

Aeschinas' imagery reflects his loss of self and manhood. He sees Cynisca as a bull running free to the woods (43) and himself as a mouse caught in a pitch pot (51): she is dominant and autonomous, he is subordinated and constrained. In the Greek patriarchal world, men expected women who attended symposia (typically *hetairai*, other entertainers, and slaves) to satisfy their desires and comply with their demands. *Id.* 14 shows what can happen to a sympotic community when a woman challenges this hierarchical code (and leaves the party).

Casual encounters with prostitutes and *hetairai*, as depicted in Anacreon's lyrics and Asclepiades' epigrams, for example, would not endanger shared patriarchal values. The danger came when such women inspired lasting romantic love, distracting the lover from public business. Gow cites Cynisca's presence at the

³⁷ On the linkage of wine with violence, cf. Ath. 421A–D, 443C–444D.

³⁸ 48–53, tr. Gow:

"I am of no reckoning or account,
 like the wretched Megarians in the lowest place of all.
 If only I could fall out of love all would go as it should;
 but as it is, how can I? I'm like the mouse in the pitch-pot,
 as they say, Thyonichus, and what may be
 the cure for helpless love, I do not know."

symposium of *Id.* 14 as evidence of her status as a *heitaira*.³⁹ Dover rightly points out that "the social class to which Aeschinas belongs did not necessarily observe bourgeois proprieties."⁴⁰ I suggest that Cynisca is not a hired girl (or slave), for her action reflects no fear of her employer's (or owner's) wrath. But in any case, by introducing a woman who elicits obsessive love into the symposium of *Id.* 14, Theocritus disrupts the normative relations of gender subordination and dominance in the traditional symposium.

Use of this context in *Id.* 14 as a means of exploring violence between a man and a woman anticipates a similar practice in later Greek and Latin literature, especially Latin elegy, which often eroticizes sympotic violence,⁴¹ e.g. Prop. 3.8.1–4:

*Dulcis ad hesternas fuerat mihi rixa lucernas,
vocis et insanae tot maledicta tuae,
cum furibunda mero mensam propellis et in me
proicis insana cymbia plena manu.*⁴²

A further complication of sympotic social dynamics resulted from the inclusion of aristocratic women in Roman symposia.⁴³

In *Id.* 14 the symposium, far from providing male identity and fellowship, has left Aeschinas feeling isolated. Cynisca's presence (and the violence that ensued) disoriented him and separated him from his male companions. Thyonichus' comparison of Aeschinas' appearance to a Pythagorean (3–6: thin, unkempt, pale, and barefoot) underscores Aeschinas' continued alienation, for ascetic philosophers were often opposed to the

³⁹ A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus*² (Cambridge 1952: hereafter 'Gow') II 252 n.21.

⁴⁰ K. J. Dover, *Theocritus: Select Poems* (Basingstoke 1971) 189.

⁴¹ For the theme of sympotic violence, see e.g. Hor. *Carm.* 1.13.9–16; 3.19.15ff, 21.3; Petron. *Sat.* 74.8–13; Lucian *Dial. Meret.* 15; cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.27.1–8; Tib. 2.5.101–08. For erotic violence (not specifically linked with symposia) see e.g. Tib. 1.6.43–76, 10.53–66; Prop. 2.5.17–30; Ov. *Am.* 1.7. For discussion see esp. J. Griffin, "Of Wines and Spirits," in *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (Chapel Hill 1986) 84–87.

⁴² "It was a most delightful melee
we enjoyed last night under lantern light
when with choked cries of rage
& multiple maledictions
& reeling in the heat of wine
you shoved over the table
and flung the glassware at my head. (tr. McColloch)

⁴³ Murray (*supra* n.3) 48f, with attention to Hor. *Carm.* 2.12, 3.14.

normative sympotic community, as in Pl. *Tht.* 173D: "To take any interest in the rivalries of political cliques, in meetings, dinners, and merrymakings with flute girls, never occurs to them [ascetic philosophers] even in dreams" (tr. Cornford). In *Id.* 14, the Pythagorean's lack of footwear further emphasizes unsuitability for the sympotic community: Socrates himself puts on slippers to attend Agathon's drinking party (Pl. *Symp.* 174A).

If Aeschinas turns away from the symposium, now compromised for him as a source of male self-validation, where else can he reclaim himself, recover his manhood, reestablish his self-image? A regular option available to dissatisfied persons in the Hellenistic world was to start a new life elsewhere. Aeschinas resolves to forget his girlfriends by enlisting in a foreign legion:⁴⁴

πλευσεῦμαι κήγῶν διαπόντιος· οὔτε κάκιστος
οὔτε πρᾶτος ἴσως, ὀμαλὸς δέ τις ὁ στρατιώτας.⁴⁵

A few lines earlier, in a self-dramatizing and hyperbolic mode, Aeschinas has used disjunctions and negative superlatives to describe himself as jilted lover (48f); now in describing a soldier, his similar use of disjunctives and negative superlatives highlights his desire to change, to be unexceptional, to conform to the social norm. Thus through military life Aeschinas can not only rechannel his violence but also regain the male camaraderie lost when he dropped out of the sympotic community.

By having Thyonichus endorse Aeschinas' decision to go abroad, Theocritus is able direct the poem towards Ptolemy Philadelphus, Egypt's king and patron of arts:

εἰ δ' οὕτως ἄρα τοι δοκεῖ ὥστ' ἀποδαμεῖν,
μισθοδότας Πτολεμαῖος ἐλευθέρῳ οἷος ἄριστος.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ On the demand for mercenaries during the Hellenistic period, see e.g. Y. Garlan, "War and Siegecraft," in *CAH²* VII (1984) 354ff; see also P. McKechnie, *Outsiders in the Greek Cities in the Fourth Century B.C.* (London 1989) 79–100.

⁴⁵ 55f, tr. Gow:

"I too will cross the sea. Your soldier is not the worst of men, nor yet the first, maybe, but as good as another."

⁴⁶ 58f, tr. Gow:

"But if you are really so minded as to leave the country, then Ptolemy is the best pay-master for a free man."

An encomium of Ptolemy follows, motivated by Aeschinas' query about Ptolemy's other traits (60). For some readers the encomium represents the purpose of the poem; others regard it as a digression.⁴⁷ Its function becomes clearer when we relate it to the thematic concern of *Id.* 14 with sympotic culture. Gow (II 259 n.60) notes that "the panegyric which follows, though it answers Aeschinas's question, does not provide much information likely to profit him when he enlists as a private soldier." But the information could profit Aeschinas as host of a symposium, for the qualities Thyonichus praises in Ptolemy correspond to qualities approved in the male sympotic tradition: cultural sophistication, erotic discernment, and generosity:

εὐγνώμων, φιλόμουσος, ἐρωτικός, εἰς ἄκρον ἀδύς,
εἰδῶς τὸν φιλέοντα, τὸν οὐ φιλέοντ' ἔτι μᾶλλον,
πολλοῖς πολλὰ διδούς, αἰτεύμενος οὐκ ἀνανεύων,
οἷα χρῆ βασιλῆ' αἰτεῖν δὲ δεῖ οὐκ ἐπὶ παντί,
Αἰσχίνα.⁴⁸

The repetition of *hadys* (used at 17 to describe the symposium and at 61 to describe Ptolemy) suggests a link between the two. Further, Ptolemy's particular virtues offer a contrast to Aeschinas' unhappy experience as host. Aeschinas' most obvious problem was that, unlike Ptolemy, he did not recognize who loved him and who did not (62). Because he could not read signs of affection and disaffection, the revelation of Cynisca's disloyalty shocked him and caused a major disruption at the symposium.

Hasty and immoderate in his desires (10f), violent and quick to anger (34f), Aeschinas needs a new rôle model. On the scale of manhood in *Id.* 14—which ranges from the ascetic philosopher (5f) to the overpassionate lover—Ptolemy represents a complex

⁴⁷ On the encomium as the purpose of the poem, see e.g. G. Lawall, *Theocritus' Coan Pastorals: A Poetry Book* (Washington 1967) 122; on the encomium as a digression, see e.g. P.-E. Legrand, *Étude sur Théocrite* (Paris 1898) 139. Stern (*supra* n.4: 58) and F. T. Griffiths (*Theocritus at Court* [= *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 55 (Leiden 1979)] 110–13) both approach the encomium from within the fictive story but with a focus on the reality of Ptolemy.

⁴⁸ 61–65, tr. Gow, rev.:

"Kindly, cultured, amorous, as pleasant as may be;
knows his friend, and knows his enemy even better.
As a king should be, he's generous to many, and
doesn't refuse when asked; but you mustn't always be asking,
Aeschinas."

and moderate mean. Aeschinas' prolonged lovesick response to Cynisca's departure two months previous demonstrates his obsessive tendency to confine himself to a single plane of being: the marginal activity of love had become central for him and overwhelmed other business. Thyonichus' Ptolemy, on the other hand, has the capacity to play many rôles: as army paymaster, as lover (*erotikos*), as generous and cultured leader, as a man of discerning kindness (*eugnomon*). Perhaps in Egypt, then, following Ptolemy's example, the fictive Aeschinas can learn to balance a love life and a soldierly career.

Through Thyonichus' praise of Ptolemy, Theocritus also approaches the issue of the relationship between patron and poet. Like the fictive Aeschinas, Theocritus too has come to Egypt from abroad (Syracuse), with questions about Ptolemy; and he too would have been encouraged by reports of generous patronage.⁴⁹ Thyonichus' praise of Ptolemy does not exhort, but instead describes him with qualities appreciated by poets seeking patrons: kindly discernment, love of culture, and generosity.⁵⁰ By having Thyonichus also include amorousness (*erotikos*) among Ptolemy's qualities, Theocritus can flatter Ptolemy by showing confidence in his sophistication and tolerance. Further, Ptolemy's notable fondness for mistresses might also have encouraged an expectation that he would appreciate a good poem on the theme of heterosexual love and the sympotic tradition.⁵¹

⁴⁹ On Ptolemaic sponsorship of the Library and the Museum, with its resident community of scholars, artists, creative writers, and scientists, see e.g. R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford 1968) esp. 96ff. Theoc. *Id.* 17.112–16 pays special attention to Ptolemy's patronage of Dionysiac artists.

⁵⁰ The weight of the description (63f, half the encomium) and the inclusion of a prescriptive clause (64, οἷα χρῆ βασιλῆ, "as a king should be") place special emphasis on the quality of generosity, critical to successful relationships between patron and poet, paymaster, and mercenary. Cf. Theoc. *Id.* 17.106–16, 123–27.

⁵¹ Euergetes II describes several of Ptolemy's mistresses and sums up Ptolemy's sexual character as ἐπιρρεπέστερος ὢν πρὸς ἀφροδίσια (Ath. 576E–F). As for Ptolemy's enjoyment of heterosexual sympotic pleasures, Polybius reports (14.11) statues in Alexandria representing Ptolemy's cupbearer Cleino with a drinking-horn; so too Athenaeus states (425E–F, 576F) that houses were named after Ptolemy's mistresses, the actress Myrtion, and the flute girls Mnesis and Potheine. For further references, see A. Cameron, "Two Mistresses of Ptolemy Philadelphus," *GRBS* 30 (1989) 289f.

Within the fiction of *Id.* 14, the advice Thyonichus gives Aeschinas not to make too many requests of Ptolemy (64f) is strange: as a lowly mercenary, Aeschinas would not be in a position to ask Ptolemy for favors. But in presupposing an egalitarian social world in which such requests might be made, Thyonichus' advice may also represent Theocritus' ironic self-admonition not to make too many requests of his patron. Although Ptolemy's power was hierarchical, the fiction of more democratic social (and political) freedom continued to appeal to Greeks in the Hellenistic world. Insofar as traditional sympotic culture valued reciprocity and egalitarianism (guests drank equal amounts and participated equally in contests), the symposium theme of *Id.* 14 allows the poet to assume a stance of equality with Ptolemy. But by putting Ptolemy's praises in Thyonichus' mouth, Theocritus can both ironize the praise and flatter Ptolemy by displaying confidence in his appreciation of wit and irony.⁵² Friendship traditionally played a central rôle in a poet's representation of his relationship with his patron, as shown, for example, by Pindar's artful approaches to his patrons. So too in *Id.* 14, Thyonichus notes that Ptolemy knows his friends (62), and the poem displays Theocritus' worthiness to be counted a friend (sophisticated, witty, able to create poetry that can both flatter and amuse). Thus the focus of *Id.* 14 on the symposium, with its tradition of social equality, enables the poet to approach a patron-king by projecting the theme of friendship from Aeschinas and Thyonichus' privatized fictional world to the public and historical realm of Ptolemy's Egypt.

Following the encomium of Ptolemy, Thyonichus offers Aeschinas a realistic, soldierly model for emulation:

ὥστ' εἴ τοι κατὰ δεξιὸν ὤμον ἀρέσκει
 λῶπος ἄκρον περονᾶσθαι, ἔπ' ἀμφοτέροις δὲ βεβακῶς
 τολμασεῖς ἐπιόντα μένειν θρασὺν ἀσπιδιώταν,
 ᾧ τάχος εἰς Αἴγυπτον.⁵³

⁵² For an example of Ptolemy's playfulness see Ath. 493E–494B.

⁵³ 65–68, tr. Gow:

“So if it's your fancy to clasp your cloak-end
 on the right shoulder, and if you can stand firm
 on both your feet to meet a stout man's charge,
 then off with you to Egypt.”

This description recalls the sturdy soldiers described by the archaic poets Tyrtaeus (10.31f West, ἀλλά τις εὖ διαβάς μενέτω ποσὶν ἀμφοτέροισι στηριχθεὶς ἐπὶ γῆς) and Archilochus (114.4 West, ἀσφαλέως βεβηκῶς ποσσὶ, καρδίας πλέως), and suggests the archaic ideal of a broadly-based egalitarian military fellowship, as explored in lyric poetry associated with the archaic sympotic tradition.⁵⁴ The symposium of *Id.* 14 exploits the link between military and sympotic cultures by including a soldier and a Thessalian horse-trainer (whose skills would be valued in an army); further, the host himself later resolves to enlist, and his friend Thyonichus knows about soldiering and its opportunities. The strong association between military and sympotic culture (beginning with the Homeric warrior banquet) shows that Aeschinas' new soldierly life need not preclude symposia: wine can hearten soldiers at war (Ath. 429A, 433B-C, 442C), and drinking parties can offer contests of 'military skills' (e.g. drunken combat).⁵⁵

By ending the poem with Thyonichus' final admonition to "seize the day," a persistent theme at drinking parties, Theocritus underscores the thematic centrality of the symposium:

ἀπὸ κροτάφων πελόμεσθα
πάντες γηραλέοι, καὶ ἐπισχερῶ ἐς γέννυν ἔρπει
λευκαίνων ὁ χρόνος· ποιεῖν τι δεῖ ἅς γόνυ χλωρόν.⁵⁶

III. Conclusion

Hellenistic poets wrote during a period of social and hegemonic change. Symposia offered rich settings in which to

⁵⁴ See E. Bowie, "Miles Ludens? The Problem of Martial Exhortation in Early Greek Elegy," in *Symptotica* 221-29.

⁵⁵ See Murray in Slater (*supra* n.1) 83-87.

⁵⁶ 68ff, tr. Gow, rev.:

"We're all growing gray from the temples,
and the snows of time creep down the cheek-bone
hair by hair. We should be doing while the limbs are supple."

The *memento mori* theme emerges as a central motif in Roman sympotic poetry as well, e.g. Hor. *Epod.* 13.3-6:

*rapiamus, amici,
occasionem de die, dumque virent genua
et decet, obducta solvatur fronte senectus.
tu vina Torquato move consule pressa meo.*

explore the conditions of their mobile world as well as the institutions that helped maintain Greek privilege. Scholars have established that in most Hellenistic urban settlements, traveling freeborn Greek males could find in gymnasia a setting in which to reestablish membership in a privileged class.⁵⁷ But the question of how symposia—traditional ritualized drinking parties—increasingly enabled mobile Hellenistic Greek males to regain a sense of self, privilege, and social connectedness, has been largely overlooked.

In the seventh and sixth centuries, symposia, linked traditionally with the propertied and leisured class, helped reinforce the self-identity and class membership of male aristocrats, first as members of the ruling class, then also as subversive groups opposed to what they perceived as a usurpation of power by tyrants and statesmen with more broadly-based support. But during the fifth century, due principally to the rise of participatory democracy, particularly at Athens, the symposium (and the lyric poetry and homosexual bonding associated with it) had declined in popularity. Alexander's conquests in the fourth century initiated a new age of colonization and mobility, with effects not unlike those of the great age of colonization that preceded the rise of fifth-century democracies; Hellenistic Greek poets, seeking to understand the changes in their world, naturally turned for inspiration to the lyric poets of the seventh and sixth centuries: and here they found the sympotic and erotic values much of their poetry reflects.⁵⁸

Since Giangrande's seminal article (*supra* n.2) focused attention on the Hellenistic sympotic epigram, discussions of the influence of Hellenistic sympotic literature have stressed this genre. Thus Murray (*supra* n.3: 44f) bases his distinction between Hellenistic and Roman sympotic poetry on the claim that "the Hellenistic epigram belongs to a world divorced from public life: it pays no attention to war or politics, and no attention to patronage or inequalities within the poetic group"; he asserts that "later [Greek] sympotic poets [after Alcaeus]

⁵⁷ See e.g. S. Price, "The History of the Hellenistic Period," in J. Boardman *et. al.*, edd., *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (Oxford 1986) 322f; Green (*supra* n.29) 319.

⁵⁸ See the numerous Hellenistic epigrams, particularly fictional tomb and statue inscriptions, that focus on archaic poets: e.g. on Anacreon see Theoc. *Ep.* 15; Leonidas of Tarentum 31, 90; Dioscorides 19; Antip. Sid. 16–17 (all citations after Gow and Page).

simply ignore the public sphere.” But our discussion of Theocritus’ *Idyll* 14 has shown that the symposium could indeed offer Hellenistic poet a setting in which to approach such public issues of contemporary importance as mobility, colonialism, gender relations, and patronage.⁵⁹

TRINITY UNIVERSITY, SAN ANTONIO
March, 1993

⁵⁹ I would like to thank the anonymous referees for their careful comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to the John Rogers Faculty Fellowship for the freedom it provided to pursue the research that led to this paper.