

might be accused of the same "crime" as his recent victim, Dr. Vaughan.

In his twenties, again at the advice of his father, Symonds married, and eventually fathered four daughters. He never had any passion for his wife. Fortunately, she loathed sex and pregnancy, and soon they were living in separate parts of the house, while Symonds continued to pursue young men as soul mates.

Serious illness made Symonds incapable of any real career, so he turned to literature as an avocation. He pursued another schoolboy named Norman Moor in an ardent Platonic fashion, which eventually culminated in their spending six nights in bed together, nude and kissing, but without doing anything which would offend the laws of the time.

Several things happened in a short space of time, which decisively altered Symonds' life. His father died, he moved to Switzerland for the sake of his health, he had his first "base" homosexual interaction with a nineteen-year-old soldier, his literary output increased substantially, and his health improved. This would perhaps indicate that the beloved father was in fact an obstacle to Symonds' self-actualization.

In any case, he quickly got the knack of making close and passionate friends among the Swiss peasants and Italian gondoliers, and discovered that it was quite possible for two men to share their sexuality, in moderation, without being immediately damned and thrown into jail.

Symonds became one of the foremost men of letters of his time, famed for his reviews, essays, books of art history, and expositions of poetry. He became a cultural arbiter for the Victorian era, and also published several volumes of bad poetry.

Unknown to most of his contemporaries, however, Symonds was pursuing a second career. As he grew more accustomed to his own homosexuality and discovered Walt Whitman, he produced the pioneering essay *A Problem in Greek Eth-*

*ics* (1883), published in an edition of 10 copies. As he grew older and read the works of such pioneers as Krafft-Ebing, he realized that he was not alone and wrote the larger essay *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891), issued in 50 copies. He also began a collaboration with Havelock Ellis, which resulted in the publication of *Sexual Inversion* after Symonds' death. (The family made trouble about the book, and demanded that Symonds' name and life history be removed from the English edition.)

Symonds also committed his memoirs to a distant posterity. The sealed memoirs were handed to his literary executor, H. F. Brown, and were willed to the London Library by Brown on his demise in 1926, with instructions to withhold them from publication for fifty years. They finally appeared in 1984.

As Symonds' respectable Victorian persona retires into obscurity (he is mostly remembered for his enormous *Renaissance in Italy*), his fame as a homosexual theorist and apologist takes up the failing torch and secures for him a new and perhaps more lasting reputation. He has certainly been a major influence in the cause of social and legal reform, and, with the sad exception of Dr. Vaughan, a valuable ally for homosexual men everywhere.

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## SYMPOSIA

In ancient Greece, symposia were convivial meetings for drinking, conversation, and intellectual entertainment; they were all-male, upper-class drinking parties that beginning ca. 600 B.C. were held following the evening meal.

After pouring libations to the gods, the guests—usually ten or twelve—began to drink wine diluted with various amounts of water. Often garlanded and

perfumed, they reclined usually two together—often *erastes* (lover) and *eromenos* (beloved)—on couches propping themselves up on one arm while servants brought round the calyx, the common drinking cup filled with watered wine. Though some did not drink, others became riotous. Besides drinking and conversing, they told riddles and fables and sang drinking songs (often ribald and pederastic) and recited verses, whether archaic (the most popular being those of **Theognis**) or of recent composition. **Athenaeus** preserved a collection of scolia, as the drinking songs were known, from the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. Each sang in turn when he was passed the myrtle branch. Having wrestled nude with his boy in the gymnasium, a gentleman might recline with him in the evening on a couch at a symposium sipping wine together and exchanging glances and singing love songs. Flirtation was the rule, and sometimes kisses and embraces. Going farther in public with one another was considered indecorous, although young girl and boy slaves were often pinched and pummeled, and attending musicians, often slaves themselves, were available and often fondled and groped by intemperate guests, and *hetairai* (female companions) often attended. But ladies, after 600 B.C., were shut away in the gynaecea (women's quarters), and children were formally excluded from these parties. They were held in the men's chamber that each greater house possessed, often furnished with stone couches upon which pads and pillows were placed. One of the more popular games was *kottabos* (winethrowing) in which, reclining on their left elbows on the couches, the guests threw the last drops of wine from the *calyx* into a basin set in the middle of the room without spilling any.

In the seventh century, first at **Crete**, then at **Sparta**, lawmakers founded men's houses (*andreia*), where upper-class males messed together. The institution

was imported to Athens and the rest of Greece after 600 B.C., along with **gymnasia**, **pederasty**, and the seclusion of women, but in Athens the eating clubs, often bound together by pederastic relationships, met only occasionally for dinner parties and symposia, many of which became very intellectual. Some ended in *komoi*, drinking processions revelling through the streets to serenade an *eromenos* outside his house. Heroes and others whom the state wished to honor, such as the descendants of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, were dined at public expense in the Prytaneum, but most upper-class men outside of Crete and Sparta, normally dined *en famille*. The symposia fulfilled the need of educated Greeks for relaxation and stimulation, as restaurants and night clubs did not exist. They could, however, also degenerate into drunken orgies that brought out the mutual hostility of the participants.

**Plato**, **Xenophon**, and many others set dialogues in symposia, which became a recognized literary form that allowed the author to ramble over his choice of barely related themes. Prominent in this genre is the *Deipnosophistae* of **Athenaeus**, who had a most artificial arrangement, with 40 guests and a three-day banquet. **Vase paintings** preserve a vivid picture of the proceedings at such affairs. Crude Roman imitations of the Greek banquets were satirized, more in literary form, by **Petronius** in the *Cena Trimalchionis*, the banquet episode of the *Satyricon*. Christian hostility to such centers of pederasty and intellectual analysis, as well as the loss of wealth and leisure beginning with the third century, led to their decline. In the late fourth century **Libanius** complained that at Antioch banquets had degenerated, citing an egregious case in which a father regularly prostituted his son.

A survival of the symposium is the Jewish Passover meal, where the guests are formally required to recline in the

manner of upper-class Greeks, proving that they are no longer slaves after being delivered from bondage in Egypt. Also, a ceremonial part of the meal is the *aphikomani*, from Hellenistic Greek *epicomon*, the final course of the banquet.

English colleges created their own, more sedate versions of the symposia. The common room and dining hall arrangements with sherry, port, and other wines, where a variety of opinions are expressed, parallel those of antiquity. Tutorials, though one-on-one, traditionally end with the quaffing of a glass of sherry.

William A. Percy

### SZYMANOWSKI, KAROL (1882–1937)

Polish composer. The son of Polish landed gentry, Szymanowski was born in Tymoszwka, in eastern Poland (now part of the Soviet Union). He began to play the piano and compose at an early age, and while at the Warsaw Conservatory quickly acquired a reputation as a composer of talent, and a follower of modern musical trends.

Szymanowski's wide travels (he visited America in 1921) brought him into contact with many European artistic trends. This is reflected in his evolving and somewhat eclectic style, which moves from a Chopin-Scriabinesque early period, through a more Germanic chromaticism, to an impressionist period. His final compositions reflect Polish folk traditions and are more Bartokian in style.

Evidence of Szymanowski's sexual preference is largely indirect but nonetheless telling. He remained unmarried,

and once jokingly remarked that the only woman in his life was his mother. Correspondence with several close male friends is extant, although not published in its entirety [no similar correspondence with women exists]. Contemporaries of the composer make reference to his fondness for men. B. M. Maciejewski, in *Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Music* (London, 1967), states that it was common knowledge throughout European cultural circles that Szymanowski was homosexual. The Polish biographer Stefania Lobaczewska is more circumspect, stating only that Szymanowski was regarded in his youth as *zepsuty* (decadent, immoral) and that his music is marked by a strong erotic drive.

The most direct evidence is the composer's two-volume novel, *Efebos*, written in 1917. It is described by the composer as an *apologia pro vita sua*. The hero of the novel is a divinely beautiful young man in whom are united physical and divine love. Unfortunately, all but the introduction to the novel was destroyed during the bombing of the Polish National Archives at the beginning of World War II. Contemporary accounts describe it as the composer's theory of Greek love.

Szymanowski's musical output spans the gamut from solo piano works (three sonatas, preludes, studies, mazurkas) to songs for voice, orchestral works, symphonies, concerti, ballets, and opera (*King Roger*, premiered in the United States only in 1988). Szymanowski was director of the Warsaw Conservatory from 1927 to 1931, and was a strong advocate for contemporary music in prewar Poland. At his death, he was widely heralded as Poland's greatest composer since Chopin.

Peter Gach