Abstract

Around 290 AD Methodius of Olympus wrote the most famous of his many dialogues, a Symposium along the lines of Plato, conducted by women on the subject of chastity. In this dissertation, I analyze the ways in which Methodius, through this dialogue, both participates in and changes the literary systems of his time. Each chapter looks at a different genre with which Methodius interacts in the Symposium: the philosophical dialogue, the symposium proper, the rhetorical set-speech and the poetic tradition of hymnody. I conclude that within each of these generic networks, Methodius shifts the focus from the past onto the future in his competition for the hearts and minds of his readers, positioning himself against a Second Sophistic aesthetic of nostalgia.

My first chapter deals with Methodius’ use of the dialogic genre, concluding that Methodius has a genuinely dialogic intent, creating a mimetic world that is meant to increase the desire of the readers. He connects this to the broader role of the developed imagination as a necessary skill for the Christian to live a life correctly oriented to the future. In the second chapter I show how, compared to other Imperial-era Symposia, Methodius ignores the trend towards compilation and nostalgia (influenced by Xenophon), and instead claims descent from the more focused debate in Plato’s Symposium. Furthermore, he claims to supersede his Platonic model by moving the Symposium’s time and place, pointing not to a party shared by philosophers of the previous generation, but to a future banquet yet to come after death. The third chapter treats Methodius’ relationship with competitive, rhetorical display speeches. The expected rivalry between speakers is minimized, and the danger of competition is smoothed into the idea of variation within a harmonic whole. My fourth chapter examines the hymn that ends the Symposium. While functioning as a closural device, it is a closure that constantly moves forward
instead of looping back incessantly. The alphabetic stanzas and the blend of various voices make it a compelling model of the ordered, hierarchical polyphony present in so many other aspects of Methodius’ dialogue.
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Introduction:

Methodius of Olympus’s *Symposium* and its Literary Context

On a mountaintop stands a garden pleasantly peopled with women. They have made the journey thither in small groups or singly, struggling up a dangerous mountain path beset by wild beasts. They have gone through trials, even perhaps the ultimate trial, death. With all that behind, a pastoral world welcomes them: a garden overseen by Arete (Virtue), the daughter of Philosophia, a dinner set out under a plane tree, a central fountain bubbling over clear water as gently as oil, a scene filled with light and order. “You seem to be describing the vision of one abiding in the bliss of a new Eden,” ¹ comments Eubulion, when she hears the description related to her by her friend Gregorion, exactly when we readers are also wondering where we are and what exactly is going on.

It turns out, perhaps rather unexpectedly, that we are in the late third century AD, in a Christian philosophical dialogue set in a misty period outside of normal time. ² We are about to listen to a rhetorical competition among ten female ascetics. The hostess proposes that the guests make extemporaneous encomia on the theme of chastity. After the contest, one of the virgins, Thecla, is judged to have performed the best and is awarded the leafiest crown before she leads the rest of the virgins in a hymn to Christ the Bridegroom. As they conclude their hymn, the scene fades back out to Eubulion and Gregorion, the eager listener continuing to question her lucky interlocutor who witnessed such a momentous event.

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¹ Prelude, Musurillo 1958, 41.
² Patterson 1997, 70-71. A discussion of the temporal positioning of the dialogue will be one of the primary topics of the second chapter.
The opening sections of the dialogue make it unambiguous that its author, Methodius of Olympus (d. 311), wishes to place his Symposium in direct comparison to, and relationship with, Plato’s Symposium. The strong lexical echoes with Plato place generic markers at the very entrance to the work, but those generic expectations are quickly confused. Initially led to believe that we were entering into a Platonic space of sympotic play, our balance is thrown off as we look around to find ourselves Christian and entirely sober. What is such a text doing at the end of the third century? What was the ambient literary culture that led Methodius to write such a strangely beautiful text, which was to be almost entirely relegated to the backwaters of scholarship soon after he wrote it? How is he both inhabiting and changing the literary expectations of his readers, and what cultural work is he doing with his literary forms?

I hope that this dissertation will shed light on Methodius’ hitherto too dimly lit Symposium, by fitting it more securely into the wider literary context of the rhetorical flourishing of the second and third centuries, while at the same time contributing to a richer understanding of the literary movements of the third century. Not only do I wish to see how Methodius’ literary projects look different when placed in his predominantly pagan context, but I also wish to see how the pagan literature surrounding Methodius looks different when placed next to his work, thereby contributing to the much needed larger project of integrating the study of Christian texts more seamlessly into the field of Classics.

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3 Lazzati 1937 introduces a helpful terminological distinction to sort out the structure of the beginning of Methodius’ Symposium. He calls the first pages, where Gregorion’s narration of the episode to Eubulion is set up, the “first prologue,” and the beginning of the tale of the symposium itself, which Gregorion has heard from Theopatra, the “second prologue.” The first prologue closely parallels its Platonic model, even on the lexical level. The second prologue, with the description of the setting and participants that are startlingly different from Plato, is when Lazzati sees Methodius beginning to add his original content to a received form.

4 See Farges 1929, 47-51 for comparative tables of the opening paragraphs of the Platonic and Methodean Symposia. These are reproduced in Bracht 1999, 178 n. 12. See also Jahn 1865, vol. 2 for all of the Platonic parallels.
Methodius

“Methodius is something of a mystery man.” (McGinn 2009, 98)

Before turning to an investigation of Methodius’ literary output and its placement in the literary networks of the third century, it will be helpful to go through the evidence we have of Methodius himself. Perhaps because of Eusebius’ complete, and probably pointed,\(^5\) silence about his near-contemporary Methodius, we are still in the dark about almost all major aspects of his life: where he lived, where his bishopric was, and if and when he was martyred. Our lengthiest piece of evidence comes from Jerome’s *De Viris Illustribus*, section 83.

Methodius, Bishop of Olympus in Lycia, and later of Tyre, in a limpid and elegant style composed works, *Against Porphyry* and *The Symposium of the Ten Virgins*; an important work, *On the Resurrection* against Origen, and another against the same author, *On the Pythoness*; a work, *On Freewill*; also a *Commentary on Genesis*; one *On the Song of Songs*, and many other works which are read eagerly by a wide public. Towards the end of the last persecution, or, as others assert, under Decius and Valerian, he received the crown of martyrdom in Chalcis in Greece. (Halton 1999, 116)

Methodius, Olympi Lyciae, et postea Tyri episcopus, nitidi compositique sermonis, adversum Porphyrium confecit libros, et Symposium decem virginum, de resurrectione opus egregium contra Origenem, et adversus eundem de Pythonissa, et de Autexusio; in Genesim quoque et in Cantica canticorum commentarios; et multa alia, quae vulgo lectitantur. Et ad extremum novissimae persecutionis, sive, ut alii affirmant, sub Decio et Valeriano in Chalcid Graeciae, martyrio coronatus est.

In addition to Olympus and Tyre, other attested bishoprics are Patara and Phillipi.\(^6\) Methodius himself mentions Olympus in Lycia and Patara in his works,\(^7\) so one could imagine that later biographers adduced his origin from his own writings.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) Since Eusebius was a tireless champion of Origen and Methodius a notorious critic (at least later in life).

\(^6\) *De Resurrectione* II.23.1-5 for Olympus, *De Resurrectione* I.1.1 for Patara.

\(^7\) Patara is the setting of the dialogue *On the Resurrection*.

\(^8\) Jerome is explicit that mining an author’s own works for biographical information is a key element in his literary history. Preface §3, *De Viris Illustribus* (Halton 1999, 1).
As Patterson has shown, while Jerome may be the best source of Methodius’ biography, he is not quite the earliest. Jerome quotes to Rufinus, as a protreptic to encourage his own change of attitude, a statement from the *Apology for Origen*, a mostly lost work by Pamphilus, to the effect that Methodius had formerly been a supporter of Origen, who had come later in life to realize his error and to write against him.\(^9\) Since Pamphilus’ death was witnessed and recorded by Eusebius in 309AD, we know that Methodius was already an established author by that time.

Despite the difficulties Jerome had with dating,\(^10\) the scholarly consensus is that Methodius was born sometime in the mid-third century, began his literary career in the 270’s or 280’s, wrote the *Symposium* around 290, and died in the Diocletian persecution in 311. In addition to the *Symposium*, which is the only work to survive wholly in its original Greek, there also survive in entire Slavic translations and in fragmentary Greek originals the dialogues *On Freewill, On the Resurrection* (both mentioned by Jerome), *On Leprosy* and *On Creatures* (not mentioned by Jerome), as well as two letter-treatises also not mentioned by Jerome, *On Food* and *On the Leech*. Works that are entirely missing from the manuscript tradition although attested by Jerome are *Against Porphyry, On the Pythoness, Commentary on Genesis* and *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Such a decimation is surprising considering Jerome’s claim that Methodius’ works were still quite popular in the 390’s when he was writing his biographies (*et multa alia, quae vulgo lectitantur*).

**The Second Sophistic**

\(^9\) *Contra Rufinum* 1.11. For a discussion of this evidence, see Patterson 1997, 15-16. In addition to the two works that Jerome mentions that Methodius wrote explicitly against Origen, one also wonders about the content of the lost *On the Song of Songs* and how that would relate to Origen’s famous commentary on the Old Testament book.

\(^10\) Methodius could not have written a reply to Porphyry’s work, which is typically dated to c. 270, and also have died in the Decian persecution of 251.
Not only is Methodius’ work difficult to access because of its fragmentary nature and (for some of the texts) the lack of critical editions, but Methodius’ dialogic works have also been neglected by Classicists for a more systemic reason. Methodius is just one of a collection of writers surprisingly overlooked by Classicists who are interested in Imperial Greek literature: those who happen to be Christians. The second and third centuries AD are full of people who are not talking to each other in the secondary literature. Instead, there are all too often two distinct fields of study running parallel through the Greek literature of the Roman Empire, with the impassable yellow dividing line being religious allegiance instead of time period or literary context. On one side, the study of Christian writers of this period has predominantly found its home in the field of the History of Theology, which looks to them as predecessors to the more mature theological developments of the fourth century. On the other side, the flowering of pagan Greek literature under Roman rule, and more specifically the field known as the Second Sophistic, has recently come to be a major subject of inquiry among Classicists as a movement uniquely concerned with elite rhetorical display and imitation of the past. Much of the latter

11 The problem of critical editions of the Old Church Slavonic texts are beginning to be addressed by Katharina Bracht and Anna Jouravel, who will soon be publishing critical editions of the Slavonic texts, starting with the *De Lepra*.
12 The division is scripted into that most important tool, the lexicon. Jones’ 1925 introduction to the *Liddell and Scott* explains that it will not include any post-biblical Christian texts: “After due consideration it has been decided to exclude both Patristic and Byzantine literature from the purview of the present edition. It would have manifestly been impossible to include more than a small and haphazard selection of words and quotations from these literatures, which would therefore have had to be treated quite differently from the remains of Classical Greek….” (quoted in Lampe *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, v.). Such considerations did not, however, keep him from including citations from third and fourth century AD pagans, such as Porphyry and Libanius. Lampe’s *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, in its turn, makes a similar exclusion of contemporary pagan authors: “Nor can this lexicon find room for the contributions which contemporary pagan authors, especially in the field of philosophy, would sometimes make to the study of Christian thought, or for reference to the writings of Philo, of which the Fathers, particularly at Alexandria, made so much use” (Lampe ix).
13 See the patrology handbooks of, for example, Quasten 1950, Altaner 1958, and Moreschini and Norelli 2005.
scholarship is deafening in its absence of Christian writers. Two narratives, one looking backward, and one looking forward, fail to notice that they are occupying the same space.

A term first named by Philostratus (170-250 AD), who wrote a series of short biographies in the mid-third century called *The Lives of the Sophists*, the Second Sophistic typically refers to the flourishing of Greek rhetorical practice under Roman rule. While few scholars of the period wish to restrict the “Second Sophistic” only to those practitioners of rhetoric enumerated by Philostratus, nevertheless there is no agreement on precisely how far the net should be thrown, each scholar left to make their own uneasy definition. One of the most prominent scholars of the field, Tim Whitmarsh, rightly cautions that there is “no strong consensus among modern scholars as to what the Second Sophistic is, beyond a vague sense that it is localized in the Greek culture of the first three centuries CE” (Whitmarsh 2005, 4). He himself varies in his definition of the movement, in places seeming to say that it covers (or at least influences) anything in the first three centuries of Greek literature under Roman rule, while at other times limiting it to more specific rhetorical contexts. Neither with Whitmarsh’s somewhat broad definition, nor in the panoramic “sweep-shots” when he looks more generally at sophistic-inspired works, is there a single Christian author referenced in either of his fundamental works on the period, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire* (2001) and *The Second Sophistic: An Introduction* (2005). Another important author in the field, Graham Anderson, seems to have a wider purview,

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14 “This is a book about the Greek literary culture of the period from the mid-first to the early third century of the common era (CE), the revival of Classicizing ideals that modern scholars often call the ‘Second Sophistic’.” (Whitmarsh 2001, 1)

15 “What this book hopes to show, however, is the absolute centrality of display oratory to elite Greek culture in the first centuries of our era...Although my scope is focused more sharply on oratory, then, I hope that the sweep-shots will be satisfyingly panoramic.” (Whitmarsh 2005, 1)
showing some interest in including Christians.\footnote{\textit{In the course of rehearsing the lives of these men, [Philostratus] concentrates on the period of the Early Roman Empire; and it is the one and a half centuries before his own time, from the end of the first century AD to that of the early third, that has most commonly come to bear the title ‘Second Sophistic’. In practice Philostratus begins his gallery of sophists far too late, and the Second Sophistic as he conceives it continued long after his own time. But he has given an identity, perhaps an arbitrary or even spurious one, to something that flourished, notably in the Greek world, in the early Roman Empire, and it is that something which we must try to characterize.”} (Anderson 1993, 13)} However, Christian authors receive only ten of the 250 pages of his \textit{The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire} (1993), relegated to a sub-section of the chapter called “Piety and Paideia: the sophist and his gods,” instead of being integrated throughout the work.

The utility of specific definitions is often tested by looking at some outlying pagan writers who trouble scholars and their definitions, such as Philostratus himself, Lucian, and the “sophistic” novelists. Lucian and Philostratus wrote in a variety of genres, beyond the performative speeches which are typically considered the arena of a sophist, while certain novels, not strictly sophistic texts themselves, seem intimately indebted to elements of sophistic literary development. In addition, the question must be answered of what role should be assigned to the non-oratorical authors of the period who nonetheless interact with many elements of the sophistic world, such as Galen.\footnote{See von Staden 1997 for a persuasive argument for the inclusion of Galen on our list of sophists of the Second Sophistic.} An attempt to use a more restricted definition for the Second Sophistic proper, referring only to rhetorical practitioners mentioned in Philostratus or very close to them, while substituting a different term, such as the “Greek Renaissance”, for the wider collection of texts, did not catch on in the scholarship.\footnote{See Bowersock 1974, Walker and Cameron 1989, Reardon 1984, and Anderson 1994, 8.} The problem with alternative terms like “Greek Renaissance” is that they are hopelessly broad. Bowersock is right to say, although he does not seem to think this is a fault, that “when [the account of the Greek
Renaissance] is done, the story will extend far beyond the chronological limits of the Second Sophistic: it will lead directly and inevitably into the Byzantine Empire” (Bowersock 1974, 1). A similar move, which strives to supplant the use of Second Sophistic as a *temporal* term with the broader “Imperial Greek Literature” (of which the Second Sophistic forms a mode), has become popular more recently. While I will sometimes use Second Sophistic to point to a cluster of characteristics shared by some literary practitioners of this period, I will prefer to use the term “Imperial Greek literature” for the broader literary culture of this time, home to many competing voices, which leaves open questions of genre. Some scholars have recently experimented with new terms that are expansions upon the term “Second Sophistic.” For instance, the term “Third Sophistic” has been suggested for the rhetorical flourishing of the fourth century (bringing to completion the process already intimated by Bowersock).¹⁹ The most recent foray into new nomenclature is the term “Postclassicism,” which is useful insofar as it refers not to a specific time period, but rather to a literary positioning, a viewing of oneself and one’s literary activity as “belated.” Since this has long been acknowledged as a particularly strong feature of some forms of Imperial Greek writing (the Second Sophistic in particular), postclassicism is a useful term to add to the story, and one which Tim Whimarsh has played with in his most recent book on the literature of this period. For the purpose of this dissertation, postclassicism is a term primarily useful in contrast. One of my main contentions will be that Methodius, distinct from many of his contemporary thinkers, is not “post”-classical, but rather, “pre”-eschatological, a change in preoccupation that has wide-ranging literary repercussions. Rather than staging belatedness, Methodius stages anticipation.

¹⁹ E.g. Quiroga 2007, van Hoof 2010, and most recently Fowler 2014
Other modern scholars, who wish to keep the term as a temporal and not a stylistic one, are calling for a broadening of the purview of the Second Sophistic, to not see it as a term strictly defined by the practice of display rhetoric. Jas’ Elsner makes a plea to include genres such as ekphrasis, biography, epistolography and dialogue, looking at the corpus of Philostratus as an authoritative list of Second Sophistic genres.\textsuperscript{20} Ewen Bowie also repeatedly reminds us of the evidence we have of even “canonical” (i.e. mentioned by Philostratus) sophists writing in genres such as history, tragedy, epistolography, and even epic.\textsuperscript{21} With the description of the time period and/or genre of the Second Sophistic so amorphous, the absence of Christian writers in most of the books written in this field becomes even more striking.

However, there are signs that this trend has begun to change, especially within the last five years. For instance, Tim Whitmarsh, in his 2013 book \textit{Beyond the Second Sophistic: Adventures in Postclassicism},\textsuperscript{22} acknowledges the frequent gaps in the comprehensiveness of past Second Sophistic scholarship, including his own. But while he begins to address the Jewish material in his most recent work, he has not yet delved into the Christian material. Two recent

\textsuperscript{20} “One problem with an artificially narrow definition of the Second Sophistic in terms of rhetorical culture and the activities of the sophists has historically been an over-reliance on the declamatory model offered by VS [Lives of the Sophists].” (Elsner 2009, 17) While Elsner’s reminder that sophist authors like Philostratus wrote in genres besides oratory, he still makes Philostratus constitutive of the Second Sophistic, only now by looking at Philostratus’ output as a whole and not just the activities of the characters in his \textit{Lives of the Sophists}.

\textsuperscript{21} Bowie 1989 is an extremely helpful overview of the surviving poetic output of the sophists. For other genres see Bowie 2009, 25-28.

\textsuperscript{22} “Standard accounts of postclassical Greek literature (I include my own earlier work) have, for example, little room for Jewish or Christian literature (although here the tide is beginning to turn). They scarcely acknowledge the competitor traditions that were contemporaneously devising, reimagining, and commentating on literary canons (viz. rabbinical Hebrew or Christian Syriac). They present the Hellenistic era as dominated by poetry and the imperial era by prose, usually by simply failing to refer to the full range of surviving material…No wonder the stereotype of imperial Greeks as flouncy, elitist orators persists, when texts that present an alternative image are not pictured, How different our conception of the period would be had Philostratus not survived.” (Whitmarsh 2013, 4-5)
publications are excellent examples of the new trend to fill in this gap, Kendra Eshleman’s 2012 *The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers and Christians* and Jason König’s 2012 *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture.* Both of these books show how enriched the conversation becomes when the two groups of literature are looked at side-by-side. For instance, Eshleman’s book reveals the surprisingly similar mechanisms of community formation used by both sophists and bishops in their respective intellectual communities. Not only does Philostratus illuminate Polycarp, but the added evidence from the Christian material also serves to thicken and bolster our knowledge about the social world traditionally thought of as the sole possession of the pagan members of the Greek-speaking Roman Empire.

**Literature in the Late Third Century**

“The third century proved to be the worst period in the long history of Rome...Neither in Greek nor in Latin was there literary composition of artistic merit.” (Kennedy 1994, 242)

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23 Both of these works were published in the Cambridge series *Greek Culture in the Roman World*, a series which is itself an important player in the broader periodization shift. Also important to mention is König’s earlier work which also incorporates Christian material side-by-side with non-Christian material of this period (König 2009, 8).

24 It is worth including the longer quote: “The third century proved to be the worst period in the long history of Rome: a time of barbarian invasions deep into the empire, administrative collapse, wars between claimants for the throne, military autocracies, civil unrest, natural disasters, and economic chaos. Schools of rhetoric in the cities of the empire continued as best they could. Apsines and Cassius Longinus, among writers on rhetoric discussed in the previous chapter, were both active in this period; sophists continued to declaim, though opportunities to travel and acquire fame throughout the cities of the empire were reduced. Neither in Greek nor in Latin was there literary composition of artistic merit. Only in philosophy was there significant achievement, for this is the period in which Plotinus and his successors, including Porphyry, created the complex, mystical, sometimes even magical, system of Neoplatonism with its doctrine of the transcendent One and its hierarchies of being, an otherworldly philosophy that found converts in the disillusioned and depressed. It is also the period in which Christianity,
Moving from the terminological discussion of the periodization of the Second Sophistic, I would like to focus particularly on how Methodius’ work relates to wider literary developments in the mid- to late-third century, and how those literary developments were impacted by historical changes. More than any other period of the Roman Empire, this is a complicated and confused time. The third century marks an important shift in the political situation, many say the important shift, from the Classical period to Late Antique modes of rulership. While the third century began with admirable stability under Caracalla (198-217), it barely avoided ending in total chaos. During the “Crisis of the Third Century” there were 50-60 different men, almost all of them soldiers in the field, who claimed the title of emperor between 235 and 285. Finally, with the conquests of Aurelian (270-275), and, more importantly, with the consolidation under Diocletian (284-305), order was once again reestablished in the Empire. But order was only reestablished under the revised ruling system of the Tetrarchy, and soon after Diocletian’s rule, Constantine ascended to the throne, ushering in a new period where Christianity entered the political world in a powerful way. The Empire did not survive the Crisis without being radically changed.

If the third century experienced a seismic shift in the political world, it saw an equally important shift in the literary world. It opens on a stage peopled with characters met in the pages of Philostratus’ Lives of the Sophists. It ends dominated by the legacy of three mid-century figures who prove to be particularly important to the development of literature in general, and the

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25 The accession of Diocletian in 284 A.D. is typically placed as the starting point of the “Later Roman Empire” (Cameron 1993, 2).

26 One should note Watson’s hesitation at seeing this period as making all the important changes simply because our historic sources for this period are so limited (Watson 1999, 1-20).
story this dissertation tells in particular. Philostratus himself died around 250 AD. At almost exactly the same time in Caesarea in Palestine, Origen of Alexandria died as a result of injuries sustained during anti-Christian torture. Twenty years later in Rome, Plotinus succumbed to illness. The three spheres of rhetoric, theology and philosophy have towering figures who died in the mid-third century, at just the time when Methodius was born and lived out his childhood. Far from being entirely separate realms, these three branches interlace and bleed into one another. Methodius of Olympus deals with the legacy of these three men and these three spheres.

The legacy of Origen overshadowed almost all of the Christian Greek writers of the later third century. Origen’s two Alexandrian successors, Dionysius (bishop of Alexandria in 248-265 AD) and Pierius (d. 309 AD), were both followers of Origen’s thought, Pierius going so far as to be called a “Second Origen” (Jerome De Viris Illustribus 76). Gregory Thaumaturgus (213-270 AD), evangelizer of Cappadocia, was famously Origen’s pupil in Caesarea, as he relates in the speech that he gives at the end of his time with his teacher. Perhaps most important for Origen’s posterity is his student and literary executor in Caesarea, Pamphilus (d. 309 AD), who along with his student Eusebius (263-339 AD) saw to the preservation and defense of Origen’s writings. Finally, Methodius himself was evidently first a proponent of Origen’s theology and then an antagonist, but never a neutral interlocutor. In the realm of Neo-Platonic philosophy, Methodius is famous for writing a work against Plotinus’ most important pupil, Porphyry, who had himself penned a work Against the

27 “Greek theology of the late third and early fourth centuries, until the time of the Council of Nicea (325), was generally dominated by Origen’s powerful synthesis. Then, as to a lesser degree ever since, one was either an admirer and defender of Origen or one was a critic; one could hardly be neutral, or unaware of his achievement.” (Daley 1991, 60)

28 The only English monograph of Methodius, Patterson 1997, takes as its main topic Methodius’ changing relationship with Origen.
Beyond a particular engagement with his contemporary Porphyry, philosophy plays a key role in the construction of Methodius’ authorial persona as a writer of philosophical dialogues in the style of Plato. The relationship between rhetoric and philosophy is a tempestuous one in this period, like many others.

This dissertation will primarily focus on the third area, on Methodius’ relationship with the world of Philostratus. If the theological world of the Christians is responding to Origen, and if much of the philosophical world is responding to the innovations of the Neo-Platonists, the literary world is responding to the efflorescence of rhetorical display memorialized by Philostratus. Sophistic writing seeps into a variety of genres which are no longer specifically rhetorical, and Methodius’ *Symposium* is a prime example of this trend. While focusing on the literary world, neither the theological nor the philosophical can be safely ignored. One branch cannot entirely be separated from the other two, and both Methodius and this dissertation attempt to move fluidly among them.

The interconnectedness of these worlds is clear in the close relationship among some of their students. During this period, writers clustered in certain cities, many of them traditional

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29 Neither of these survive, although there are many fragments of Porphyry’s famous work. Harnack is the most important editor of his fragments, and since his work there have been some revisions and debates (especially concerning the Porphyrian source for the extracts found in Macarius’ *Apocriticos*). For a recent overview of the debate, see Magny 2014, specifically 10-12.

30 For this period in particular, see Sidebottom 2009. “In the Greek cultural renaissance of the first three centuries AD, usually termed the Second Sophistic, the two leading intellectual roles were that of sophist and philosopher.” (69) His thesis is that the two roles were clearly differentiated. “No one could present himself unambiguously as both sophist and philosopher because the separate and opposed symbolic roles had been created by the Greek elite to represent itself, its ideals and their inherent tensions.” (70) This is not to say that labels could not be applied by outsiders to make rhetorical points. For a slightly different version of this story, see Bowersock 1969, 11-12 and Bowersock 2002.

31 E.g. Chapter 5 “The Second Sophistic and Imperial Greek Literature”, esp. 86-89 in Whitmarsh 2005, which looks at the sophistic influence on the novels.
centers of learning, such as Athens, Alexandria and Rome. However, precisely at the time when Methodius was active, the Crisis of the Third Century, the long-held security of some of these cities was becoming precarious. For instance, Athens was sacked in 267 AD in the Herulean invasion and never fully recovered economically.\(^{32}\) Eunapius tells about two literary men who died during this time: Proterius and a certain Hilarion, a personal friend of Eunapius, who was captured by the Goths and beheaded outside of the city gates (Eunapius 482).\(^{33}\) In such a context, it seemed possible to found new intellectual centers, perhaps farther from the traditional bases in the Hellenic world.

The most spectacular example of this is Queen Zenobia’s (limitedly successful) bid to make Palmyra in the Syrian desert an intellectual center in the mid-third century. She succeeded in wooing Longinus, Porphyry’s teacher and once-thought author of *On the Sublime*, to move from Athens to Palmyra and become one of her major advisors. Libanius records that Longinus wrote an oration called the *Odaeathus*, which was the name of Zenobia’s deceased husband.\(^{34}\) The move ended up costing him his life when Palmyra was defeated by Aurelian in 273.\(^{35}\) In fact, the only two pagan rhetoricians whose names and writings we know with some certainty from the mid-century are both associated with Zenobia’s break-away kingdom, and both were

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\(^{32}\) After the Herulian invasion of Athens in 267 AD, while some scholars like Longinus took it as an opportune moment to find other employment, many others choose to stay in Athens. Eunapius preserves information about Paulus and Andromachus in the 260-270’s, for instance (Vit Soph 482-483). For this time period in Athens, see Watts 2006, Chapter 2 “Athenian Education in the Second Through the Fourth Centuries”, especially p. 38ff. Alexandria had a different story during this time period, and experienced much greater political stability.

\(^{33}\) “Nevertheless, even Hilarius could not escape his share in the general disasters, for he was captured outside Athens (he was staying somewhere near Corinth), and together with his slaves was beheaded by the barbarians.” (Eunapius Vit. Soph. 482, trans. Wright, Loeb 467)

\(^{34}\) Brisson and Patillon 1998, 3103-3104

\(^{35}\) *Life of Plotinus*, section 13. For an overview of the evidence for Longinus’ biography, see Brisson and Patillon 1994, 5218-5230. Much of our information about Longinus is preserved by Porphyry in his *Life of Plotinus*, where Plotinus praises Longinus for his literary ability, while simultaneously belittling him as a philosopher (Menn 2001).
formerly rhetorical teachers in Athens. Callinicus is the name of the other, whose only surviving literary legacy is a list of lost works.

A parallel example of a literary center created at the time is the young Christian school and library in Caesarea Maritima in Palestine, headed by Pamphilus and founded to continue the work of Origen, who had ended his days in that city. Caesarea, like Palmyra, was a city with rich interaction between Greek and Semitic culture. Pamphilus catered to many students, including Eusebius, the famous church historian and politician, and Epiphanius of Lycia, the star martyr in Eusebius’ account of the persecution in Palestine during which Pamphilus himself was killed. What began as a book collection to primarily preserve the writings of Origen, turned, under the able hands of Eusebius, into a huge center of Christian book production which Jerome claims rivaled the library of Alexandria. Within one generation, a new intellectual center had sprung up.

Palmyra and Caesarea, two new flourishing intellectual centers, were themselves directly connected through two people who play a role in the third-century rhetorical network, Paul of Samosata and Gregory Thaumaturgus. Gregory’s Address to Origen, most likely delivered in

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36 In a slightly earlier period, one of the works preserved among the works of Aelius Aristides seems to be an encomium of Philip the Arab (ruled 244-249 AD) and so should also be adduced as a witness to rhetorical practice during the mid-third century (Kennedy 1994, 242).
37 In addition to a number of rhetorical titles, Callinicus also wrote a history of Alexandria in 10 books, dedicated to Queen Zenobia under the name of Cleopatra. This information is preserved in the Suda (Kappa 231). See Stein 1923 for more information.
38 In addition to the Martyrs of Palestine, which does survive, Eusebius also wrote a lost Life of Pamphilus, which would undoubtedly have cast even more light on this community if it had survived. Grafton and Williams 2006 provides an especially clear and illuminating investigation into what we can retrieve of Pamphilus’ school.
39 For an analysis of the process of the library from Origen to Pamphilus to Eusebius, see Grafton and Williams 2006, Chapter 4 “Eusebius at Caesarea: A Christian Impresario of the Codex”, especially 207-212.
40 The debate continues about whether the author of this work should be identified with Gregory Thaumaturgus, as he is in the manuscript tradition, or is the work of a different student of Origen.
the 230’s, includes a lengthy autobiographical account of the author’s education progress from
teachers of rhetoric in the provinces,\textsuperscript{41} to the beginnings of a law career in Beirut, the celebrated
center of legal studies, to the final abandonment of those plans in order to follow the Christian
philosopher Origen in Caesarea.\textsuperscript{42} Gregory couches a description of Origen’s educational
methods in a rhetorical work, which itself brilliantly displays evidence of his schooling. In
Origen’s school, Gregory claims, he was taught the prominence of truthfulness over beauty of
expression, and explicitly rejects any rhetorical emphasis on a primacy of form.\textsuperscript{43} After first
training Gregory in philosophical dialectic, Origen led him through physics, geometry and
astronomy, before moving on to ethics and culminating in theology, which included both the
study of pagan philosophers and the explication of the Scriptures. Gregory Thaumaturgus speaks
of Origen’s school as a philosophical one, which he chose in preference to studying further under
a rhetor or under a legal professional. Evidently, certain Christian families in the third century

\textsuperscript{41} “It seemed good to my mother, the only one of my parents left to care for us, that, when we
had been educated in the other subjects, like children who were not ignobly born and nurtured,
we should also study with a rhetor, since we were to be rhetors. And in fact we did study with
one, and would have become rhetors ourselves before long, said the experts at the time…”
(section 56, Slusser 1998, 100). “Even when I was a boy learning public speaking from a rhetor,
I was unwilling to tolerate eulogizing and delivering an encomium about anyone which was not
true” (section 130, Slusser 1998, 112).

\textsuperscript{42} “This man [Origen] by himself was the first who persuaded me to pursue the philosophy of the
Greeks too, convincing me by his own moral behavior to listen to and assimilate moral doctrine,
though I would not have been convinced had it been up to the other philosophers, wrongly (I
again admit), but very nearly to our misfortune” (section 133-134, Slusser 1998, 113).

\textsuperscript{43} “That is why he taught us to investigate not just the externals which strike one immediately,
which are sometimes deceptive and dishonest, but also the inner realities, and to sound each
thing lest it ring false; and when we learned to trust ourselves on those things, then to deal with
the externals and reach an opinion on each. Thus the part of our soul which judges concerning
words and arguments was trained in reasonable fashion, not according to the judgments of
elegant rhetors as to whether something is Greek or barbaric in its expression, for that is an
insignificant and unnecessary thing to learn” (Section 105-107, Slusser 108).
made great sacrifices in order to secure an advanced education for their sons along traditional channels, even when those sons decided to use their education for different purposes than their parents intended.

After studying with Origin in Caesarea, Gregory returned to his native Pontus where he became a bishop in the mid-third century. He was called in as one of the bishops to decide the case of Paul of Samosata, once bishop of Antioch, who was reputed to be the partisan of the same Queen Zenobia that Porphyry’s teacher Longinus now advised in an official capacity (Eusebius HE 7.28.1). Paul of Samosata was bishop of Antioch and famous for a particularly rhetorical style of speaking. In a circulated letter written by his enemy Malchion (himself a teacher of rhetoric in Antioch in the 260-270’s, a position which fifty years later would later be occupied by as a famous rhetorician as Libanius) and preserved by Eusebius, he was damningly labeled a “sophist and a charlatan”.

“Also, he smites his hand on his thigh and stamps the tribunal with his feet; and those who do not applaud or wave their handkerchiefs, as in a theatre, or shout out and jump up in the same way as do the men and wretched women who are his partisans and hearken in this disorderly fashion, but who listen, as in God’s house, with orderly and becoming reverence,—these he rebukes and insults. And towards the interpreters of the Word who have departed this life he behaves in an insolent and ill-bred fashion in the common assembly, and brags about himself as though he were not a bishop but a sophist and charlatan (καθάπερ οὐκ ἐπίσκοπος ἀλλὰ σοφιστὴς καὶ γόης).” (HE 7.30, trans. Oulton, Loeb Vol. II, p. 219)

Not only is Paul accused of shoddy theology, but his presentation style is also brought under fire.

Malchion uses the term “sophist” as a slur against a rival, an accusation that Paul’s desire for

44 His biography is preserved in Jerome. “Malchion, a most eloquent priest of the church of Antioch, a city in which he taught rhetoric with great distinction, held a disputation, with stenographers taking notes, against Paul of Samosata, who as bishop of the church of Antioch had cultivated the teaching of Artemon. This dialogue is extant to the present day.” (Jerome On Illustrious Men, section 71, Halton (ed.), 103). See too, Eusebius HE 7.29-30.
glory has overcome his Christian piety—perhaps a surprising accusation from someone who is himself a professional teacher of rhetoric.  

Eusebius, the most famous product of the school of Pamphilus in Caesarea, in addition to having the text-critical skills of a consolidator, also had training as a rhetorician. He himself gives evidence of his rhetorical training in his two extent speeches, *In Praise of Constantine* (336 AD) and his speech in praise of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (335 AD, appended to the *In Praise of Constantine*). These two works are the next pieces of surviving oratory after the speeches Methodius scripted for his virgins, and an important link in the chain of evidence of continuing rhetorical education.

An additional piece of evidence of the interconnectivity of the literary world of pagans and Christians is the (pseudo?) Eusebian *Against Hierocles*, a detailed response to a (lost) work written by a certain Hierocles claiming that Jesus is not as spectacular a holy man as Apollonius of Tyana. The *Against Hierocles* systematically addresses Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* section by section in order to undermine the power of Philostratus’ hagiography. It is a fascinating piece of evidence that at least one Christian in the early fourth century was directly interacting with the corpus of Philostratus, and therefore with certain elements of the “canonical” Second Sophistic.

45 See Burrus 1989 for a discussion of the rhetorical stereotypes used in this passage.
47 The attribution of the *Against Hierocles* to Eusebius of Caesarea was recently questioned by Hagg 1992). The 2006 translation by Christopher Jones in the Loeb series accepts Eusebian authorship: “To attribute the work to an unknown author, still more to an otherwise unknown contemporary also called Eusebius, strains credulity beyond the limit” (Jones 2006, 152).
48 Lactantius is the other importance witness to Hierocles’ work, which was called *The Lover of Truth* (*Divine Institutes* 5.3.23).
Such links show that the intellectual world of the third century was alive, active, and connected pagans (Longinus, Porphyry, Zenobia) with Christians (Paul of Samosata, Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgus). These groups were not living in separate worlds, but were rubbing shoulders in such a way that would only increase in the fourth century. The intellectual world contained both old centers (Alexandria, Rome, Athens) along with some budding new centers (Caesarea and Palmyra).

**Lycia in the Rhetorical Networks of the Third Century**

A couple of decades later, Methodius tries to do for the southern coast of Lycia what Zenobia did for Palmyra and Pamphilus for Caesarea, to insert Lycia into the intellectual network both by advertising the high-level intellectual life there and also establishing literary connections with other major centers and thinkers, such as Eusebius and Porphyry. In the preface to one of his dialogues, *On Free Will*, Methodius speaks of the group that surrounds him in Lycia as a particularly rich audience for his philosophy, and there is no reason to suspect the veracity of his claim. Methodius’ breadth of quotation from Plato alone, and his close knowledge of the writings of Origen, are enough to show that his Lycia is not inaccessible to the streams of culture in the Eastern Provinces of the Roman Empire.

Although Jerome mentions Philippi in northern Greece as one of Methodius’ possible bishoprics, the typical designation of his home is one of the towns in southern Lycia, either Olympus or the much more important town of Patara. This is underlined by the insistent Lycian setting of his dialogues. *On the Resurrection* takes place in Patara, whither the main interlocutors, Methodius-Eubulius and Proclus, have traveled from a nearby town. But even in a

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49 Other sees mentioned in the tradition are Phillipi, Tyre, Patara, Myra and Side. For a clear and persuasive explanation of these as variants of the true tradition of Methodius being from Olympus, see Bracht 2001.
dialogue like the *Symposium*, which is not set in a known terrestrial place,\(^5^0\) Methodius lets Lycian details slip. For instance, no scholar has yet commented that there is a Lycian reason that Methodius has Thecla recite five lines of dactylic hexameter, a cento comprised predominantly from *Iliad* 6, and modified at the end to suit a new Christian context.\(^5^1\) The Homeric passage that Methodius chooses for Thecla must have had a particular charge for her hearers—it is the one section of the *Iliad* that focuses on the local Lycian hero, Bellerophon. In fact, the Chimera that Bellerophon fights has a real-world counterpart in the “eternal fire” that emerges from the mountain above Olympus—a natural phenomena that is still burning and called the Chimera today. In *On the Resurrection*, one of the interlocutors refers to this “eternal fire”, eliciting the fact that it does not burn up the nearby bushes as evidence for the possibility that the body persists through death (*De Resurrectione* II.23.1-5). Methodius probably knew this “local” passage of the *Iliad* better than any other part, and it makes sense that he would naturally turn to it when the time came to script a bit of heroic verse for Thecla to recite. The local Lycian audience would undoubtedly have appreciated it too.

If no other setting makes as much sense for Methodius as Lycia, it then begs the question of what the intellectual life of third century Lycia might have been. After all, Lycia had experienced a series of devastating pirate raids between 250-265 AD, most certainly within the memory of Methodius and his circle. Specifically, there is evidence of two barbarian raids along the Lycian coast between 250-265 AD, which caused a contemporary writer, the author of the 13\(^{th}\) *Syballine Oracle*, to lament.

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\(^{5^0}\) For the argument for the allegorical setting of the *Sympoium*, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

\(^{5^1}\) This short poem will be analyzed in Chapter 3 when look at Thecla’s characterization of the virgins as heroes.
O Lycia, Lycia, the wolf comes to lick blood, when the Sannoi shall come together with city-destroying Ares, and the Carpi shall come to do battle with the Ausonians.

ὦ Λύκιοι, Λύκιοι, λύκος ἔρχεται αἵμα λιξήσαι,
Σάννοι ὅταν ἐλθοῦσι σὺν Ἀρηὶ πτολιπόρθω,
καὶ Κάρποι πελάσωσιν ἐπ’ Λύσονισι μάχεσθαι.52

The Sannoi and Carpi were the Gothic tribes from the northern coast of Asia Minor (near Trebizond) that also sacked Ephesus during the same raids. Gregory Thaumaturgus, after he returned to Pontus from studying philosophy with Origen in Caesarea, dealt pastorally with the repercussions of these barbarian attacks for his own flock in Cappadocia.53 The politically instability of third century Lycia, like much of the third century world, did not keep Methodius from establishing an intellectual community, even if this community was poised on the brink of violence. Lycia could apparently in this time support high-level rhetorical and philosophical production of the type we see inside of Methodius’ dialogues, and that allowed for the existence of an author such as Methodius himself.

One scholar who has tried to imagine the intellectual context of Methodius’ literary production is André Vaillant, who edited the Slavonic original and provided a French translation and commentary on Methodius’ dialogue On Free Will. He believes that the evidence from the preface shows that Methodius is the head of a Christian school in Lycia. Repeatedly emphasizing the sophistic context, Vaillant believes that On Free Will is a meletê of historical positions that are no longer contemporary at the time of Methodius. It is a dialogue set in the

52 ll. 139-141, Potter 1990, 174-175. For a historical commentary on these lines, see Potter 1990, 310-314.
53 His Canonical Epistle deals with such issues as raped Christian women and the appropriation of property during the raids. For a translation, see Sleusser 1998, 147- 151. “Other people deceive themselves that it is merely as replacements for their own lost possessions that they appropriate others’ belongings that they find: since the Borades and Goths made war on the so they may be Borodes and Goths towards others.” (Sleusser 1998, 149)
past. Although written at the end of the third century, Vaillant thinks it sounds like it should have been written a century earlier, when Gnostics and pagans were still dangerously important interlocutors.\(^{54}\)

I agree with Vaillant that we can reconstruct something of Methodius’ intellectual world, and think further that there is even better internal and external evidence for this reconstruction than that marshaled by Vaillant. I have already shown the intellectual interconnectedness between the new literary centers and the old ones: all of the writers for whom we have evidence cluster around a few cities and have known contact with each other.\(^{55}\) But there is evidence that Methodius was himself an integral part of these networks.

A completely overlooked piece of evidence for the intellectual life of the cities of Lycia during this century comes from Eusebius’ *Martyrs of Palestine*, which also serves to show the connection between Methodius’ world of Lycia and Eusebius’ world of Caesarea. In this collective hagiography and history, Eusebius relates the martyrdoms that he himself witnessed in Caesarea Maritima, which includes the martyrdom of his teacher, Pamphilus. One of the martyrs who receives a fairly fulsome biography is Epiphanius, a rich lad from “one of the most illustrious families in Lycia, famous also for their extensive worldly wealth.”\(^{56}\) Before he was twenty years old, he was sent by his family to complete his higher education in Beirut

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\(^{54}\) Vaillant makes further interesting, but highly speculative conjectures about this “school.” Using evidence from the *Dialogue of Adamantius* that incorporates parts of Methodius’ *On Free Will*, Vaillant speculates that the *Dialogue of Adamantius* was written by a student of Methodius in his “school” and then corrected by Methodius himself, which explains the fact that two different types of vocabulary that exist of the dialogue. Certain stock topics are being developed for a distinctly Christian version of melete. “Mais le *De autexusio* et le Dialogue d’Adamantius ne sont-ils que des exercices litteraires et philosophique, des ἐπιδείξεις sur des themes deja classiques a la fin du IIIe siècle, sans rapport avec les discussions nouvelles a l’interieur du christianisme?” (Vaillant 1930, 649)

\(^{55}\) For an overview of academic travel in this period, see Watts 2006, 7-10, and Watts 2004.

(presumably to study law), but, like Gregory Thaumaturgus the generation before, was distracted from this way of life into studying with a Christian. Once he completed his education, he returned to Lycia, and it was only his discontent with “the manners…dissimilar to his own” that led him to leave once more, this time ending up in the school of Pamphilus in Caesarea along with Eusebius. This evidence shows that there seems to have been an active enough intellectual life in Lycia during the third century that Epiphanius had received sufficient education to prepare him for an advanced degree in Beirut, as well as being an enticing enough place for him to return even after his education abroad. His discontent with Lycian culture is not labeled as intellectual, but moral.

The shorter recension of the *History of the Monks of Palestine* preserves even more information about Ephiphanius’ home and family. The author records the name of his hometown as Gagae, one of the towns closest to Olympus in the south-east corner of Lycia, just on the other side of Cape Gelidonya (the two towns are about 12 miles apart overland). Although the Roman era buildings have not been excavated, surface surveys have revealed a bath complex (known from inscriptions to have been built between 145-150 AD), forum, theatre and aqueduct.

There is every reason to believe that Epiphanius knew Methodius, who was an active Christian intellectual in the same small geographical area at exactly the same time. His choice to

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57 The textual tradition of the *History of the Martyrs of Palestine* is very complicated, since there are versions in three languages: Syriac, Greek and Latin. Lawlor and Oulton 1927, provide translations of two traditions: a longer recension which records his name as Epiphanius, and a shorter recension, in which he is called Apphianus. Although in the shorter version Apphianus’ hometown is named as Gagae, the longer version only states that he came from Lycia. For the complicated state of the text see Lawlor and Oulton 1927 vol. II, 46-50.

58 Çevik and Bulut 2008, 11

59 A fifth century basilica is present on the upper acropolis (Çevik and Bulut 2008, 6). But as is typical, there are no earlier Christian remains.
move, penniless, to the Origenist school of Pamphilus in Palestine rather than to stay the son of a wealthy family in Lycia, and his subsequent collegiality and friendship with Eusebius, help explain the ties that bound together the community around Methodius and the community around his more famous contemporary, Eusebius. It was precisely through connections such as Epiphanius that Methodius and Eusebius must have come to establish the more personal connection that led Eusebius to be so upset when Methodius rejected the teachings of Origen later in life.⁶⁰

Not only, then, was Methodius connected to the literary centers of his time, but he is himself one of our best pieces of evidence of rhetorical education between the mid-third and the early fourth centuries. Methodius has written, inset in the fiction of the dialogue, our only surviving epideictic speeches from the roughly one hundred year span between a speech in praise of Philip the Arab (emperor from 244-249),⁶¹ and Eusebius’ *In Praise of Constantine* (335-336). Although Methodius, like many authors of his age, has interests which are more than rhetorical,

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⁶⁰ This connection goes a long way towards answering Patterson: “Speculation as to how Methodius acquired his familiarity with Origen is fruitless. But it is not insignificant that his extensive and specific references to his writings are not so far removed from the Alexandrian in time as they were in space. Did Methodius ever travel very far beyond his Lycian locale? Does the fact that he and at least some of his own writings were known to the authors of the *Apologia* suggest more than a nodding acquaintance with the school of Caesarea? Where in Lycia could Methodius have acquired such a familiarity not only with Origen, but with Irenaeus, Clement, and the many other early Christian writers that he displays? For these questions we have no answers.” (Patterson 1997, 123-124) And also his footnote: “It is perhaps a matter of some interest that we tend to assume the ancient availability of the writings of such a person as Origen in terms of contemporary standards of printing, mailing, libraries, bookstores, and the like. We might ponder, in the case of Methodius in particular, the questions of how and where he had access to the writings of Origen that he obviously did have, or for that matter access to the many writings of other predecessors whom he obviously knew” (Patterson 1997, 20-21, n. 8).

⁶¹ According to most scholars, the work preserved as ΕΙΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΑ in the corpus of Aelius Aristides is really composed by an anonymous third century author and should be put under the reign of Philip the Arab (de Blois 1986). C.P. Jones, on the other hand, argues for re-attributing it to Aristides (Jones 1972).
he uses the training and the imagined (or perhaps remembered) rhetorical performance settings of the previous two centuries for his theological projects.

**Scholarship on Methodius**

Although Methodius has much to add in filling out the picture of highly-educated literary activity in the third century, there has not yet been a thorough literary study of Methodius’ works. His corpus, when it has captured scholars’ attention at all, has been looked at primarily from a theological perspective as an important critique of Origen (Patterson 1997; and more particularly as a critic of Origen’s idea of the resurrection: Rush 1972, Patterson 1989), as a moment in the development of ascetic theology (Brown 1988 and Finn 2009), as a predecessor to the thought of Arius (Williams 2002, 167-174) or as a discussion of the theology of eros (Prinzivalli 1998a, Bracht 1999 and Zorzi 2003a). A particularly strong body of scholarship has grown up about Methodius’ eschatology and specifically his brand of millennialism, inspired by his exegesis of the *Apocalypse* (Buonaiuti 1921, Biamonti 1923, Rush 1972, Simonetti 1975, Mazzucco 1985 and 1986, Daley 1991, Patterson 1993, Prinziavalli 1998b, McGinn 2001, Hill 2001, Uglione 2002, Mejzner 2011). A handful of monographs have attempted to take on Methodius’ corpus as a whole and to outline the key elements of his philosophy (Fritschel 1879, Bonwetsch 1903, Farges 1929, Bracht 1999). Important to mention in this regard is the only monograph on Methodius so far written in English, Lloyd Patterson’s *Methodius of Olympus: Divine Sovereignty, Human Freedom, and Life in Christ* (1997), which deals with the important issue of Methodius’ changing relationship with the legacy of Origen. Patterson, however,
explicitly side-steps a literary analysis of Methodius’ works, and is therefore a particularly strong example of the larger trend of Methodian scholarship.⁶²

Although far from central, literary readings have not been entirely absent, particularly in discussions of the *Symposion*. One of the earliest works of scholarship on Methodius, Jahn’s 1865 edition of the Greek texts, devotes its second volume to noting Platonic parallels and citations in Methodius’ corpus. An interest in Methodius’ stylistic and philosophical relationship with Plato has continued ever since, particularly among Italian scholars (Lazzati 1937, Montserrat 1969, Pepin 1975, Tibiletti 1987, Bril 2006). More broadly, Methodius has found a place in overviews of the history of the dialogue, which have been particularly popular in German scholarship (Hirzel 1895, Hoffmann 1966 and Voss 1970⁶³). In his monograph on Methodius, Farges (1929) includes a chapter “La Forme Litteraire”, and Buchheit’s 1958 *Studien zu Methodios von Olympos* contains a helpful chapter on “Rhetorik und Stilistik”. A short Latin work from 1880 written by an American professor of rhetoric contains a chapter “De Methodii Stylo: Poesis, Novitas et Ubertas” (Carel 1880, 77-88). The concluding poem sung by the women has had a separate history of scholarship, with interest shown in its form and place in the development of Greek lyric, which is looked at most thoroughly in Pellegrino’s *L’inno del simposio di S. Metodio Martire* (Torino 1958), and also in passing by Maas 1962. But apart from what are typically short treatments tucked here and there, there has not been a systematic look at Methodius’ corpus as literature and the role of that literature in cultural history. A notable exception is Jason König, who dedicates a chapter of his 2012 book *Saints and

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⁶² “It should be admitted, however, that our principal consideration here is not literary. We shall only very generally concern ourselves with the literary sources Methodius uses or the stylistic techniques he employs, and then only as they shed light on the presentation of his views.” (Patterson 1997, 12)
⁶³ Voss places Methodius as the first high point of the development of the Christian literary dialogue (Voss 1970, 334-338).
Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture to a study of Methodius’ Symposium in the context of larger Imperial sympotic literary trends.⁶⁴

Now is a particularly fruitful time to turn to a more complete reading of Methodius because of the recent flourishing of scholarship on Greek Imperial literature. While much of the work on Greek Imperial literature has been written by Anglophone scholars, only the work of Jason König has treated Methodius as a literary writer of the same period and movement.⁶⁵ I suggest an alternative track to approaching Methodius, one which will hopefully have repercussions not only for Methodius, but for the wider discussion of the development of Greek literature in the field of Classics. What happens when we look at Methodius not primarily as a Christian writer, but as a late third century pepaideumenos?

Methodius’ Symposium

“‘The Symposium stands, therefore, as one of the most peculiar phenomena in patristic literature...’” (Musurillo 1958, 17)

Before entering into a discussion of the literary tools that Methodius uses in his Symposium, a brief summary of this unfamiliar work is called for. The subtitle of the work is Περὶ Ἁγνείας, “About Purity,” although Methodius frequently speaks more specifically about virginity (παρθενία) rather than purity.⁶⁶ As Gregorion narrates to her eager listener Eubulion, the ten virgins gather to the garden of Arete and, after they have finished their meal, begin to give speeches. The first three speeches form a trilogy, and it is tempting to view them as a thesis, antithesis and synthesis of arguments on virginity and marriage. Marcella begins by

⁶⁴ Chapter 6 “Methodius”, with the preceding Chapter 5 “Early Christian Commensality and the Literary Symposium” as an important backdrop.
⁶⁵ König 2009, his article on Imperial symposia, and König 2012, his book on the same topic, place Methodius next to his literary peers and has proved an inspiration to this dissertation.
⁶⁶ For an investigation into the use of these terms in the Symposium, see Zorzi 2009.
emphasizing the power of purity to lift the soul to contemplation and outlines the inevitable development of God’s law from incest, to polygamy, to monogamous marriage, and finally to virginity. Next, Theophila pointedly counters Marcella’s highly spiritual description and extreme praise of virginity as the new dispensation with praise of the married life and the continued role of procreation in God’s providential plan. The third speaker, Thalia, supports Theophila’s endorsement of marriage, but emphasizes that marriage and the story of Adam and Eve must be seen primarily as a spiritual image of Christ and his Church, rather than a literal encouragement to sexual practice. These first three speeches are clearly related to each other, and the women directly comment on each other’s contributions and intersperse exchanges during each other’s speeches.

The next group of five speeches are less clearly related to each other, but are all linked insofar as they each explicate biblical passages as symbols of virginity. Theopatra uses Psalm 136 to explain how the Hebrews hanging up their harps on the trees of Babylon serves as a sign for hanging up one’s reproductive “instrument” in the willow tree of chastity. Thallusa presents an entire range of Old Testament images of the virgin from an unyoked heifer to the altar of sacrifice. Agathe introduces and explicates Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Next, Procilla gives an allegorical reading of the Song of Songs. Finally, Thecla focuses in on the Apocalypse as a rich site of images important to the Christian life more generally and the life of virginity more specifically. After her speech using the Book of Revelation, Thecla begs Arete to allow her to make a second speech on a more specific topic: the foolishness of astronomy. In this second speech, she refutes predestination due to astral influences and asserts the free power of the human will.
After Thecla’s two speeches, which form the eighth contribution in the series, the recounting of the rhetorical competition becomes more and more punctuated by the external narration. Eubulion and Gregorion make a quick reappearance to comment with appreciation on Thecla’s speech. Then, after Tusiane’s ninth speech explaining the allegorical significance of the Feast of Tabernacles, they reappear and express sympathy for the difficulties of the final speaker, Domnina, to speak after so many other eminent contributors. Domnina’s final speech explains the symbolism of the different trees in the parable of Joatham (Judges 9:8-15). After the last speech has been given, Arete provides her own short encomium to chastity and announces that the award will be given to Thecla. Thecla then stands and leads the women in a twenty-four stanza iambic hymn to Christ the bridegroom.

With the end of the hymn, the dialogue finally completely emerges back into the framing narrative, and Eubulion and Gregorion have a final discussion in a style heavily reminiscent of the banter of Platonic dialogues. They debate whether it is better to have no desire at all, or to have desire and to overcome it. The argument swings in favor of the later, and with a playful promise to continue the conversation in the future, the dialogue comes to a close.

**Summary of Chapters:**

From this summary, it is clear that the *Symposium* is a highly literary work, self-consciously imitating Plato while obviously and polemically “updating” Plato into a new third century, and incontrovertibly Christian, context. Paying attention to this literary styling, my

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67 “Eub: It is clear then, from what has been agreed, that the soul which has concupiscence and yet controls itself is superior to the one that controls itself and has no concupiscence. Greg. Yes, that is true, and I should like to discuss this further with you. So, if you like, I shall come back tomorrow and listen again to these matters. But now, as you see, it is already time to go and to give attention to the outer man.” (Musurillo 1958, 162)
dissertation is organized around four genres that Methodius uses in the *Symposium*: the symposium itself, philosophical dialogue, epideictic oratory and poetry. Once the *Symposium* has been placed in a larger context of the development of Greek Imperial literature, the changing ways that Methodius manipulates literary forms for his theological and cultural projects can become clear. Two collections of themes in particular run throughout these chapters, both of which interact with the contemporary literary concerns of the Second Sophistic. The first is Methodius’ resistance to the literary nostalgia for the past that often typifies the literature of the Second Sophistic. Rather than the past, Methodius chooses to orient himself towards the future. He finds ways of expressing this change in orientation through literary styling, most especially in the change in setting for his dialogue and the emphasis on the role of the imagination not to bring forth ekphrases of past events, but ekphrases of those that are yet to come. Christians are meant to spend their time imagining their future lives, and Methodius’ project is to aid in this imagination by presenting a fetching world that partially participates in the full version yet to come. This first cluster of issues will be dealt with most strongly in the first, second and fourth chapters. In the first chapter, this issue is approached from the angle of the imagination: philosophical dialogues engage the imagination of their readers in order to induce them into a certain type of life, and the *phantasiai* that Methodius is interested in cultivating are those which make vivid the full reality to come. In the second chapter, the theme of futurity is emphasized by taking the Sympotic genre, a genre which typically commemorates past generations, and turning it instead onto a future-focused setting, engaged with stirring up hope of a more real symposium to come. Finally, in the fourth chapter, futurity is clearly seen in contrasting the teleological alphabetism of Thecla’s hymn with other nostalgic poetic creations of the Second Sophistic, such as Philostratus’ “Hymn to Echo” in the *Heroicus*. 
In addition to hope’s overcoming of nostalgia, the second cluster of themes central to this project is the role of variation and harmony within the dialogue. This touches on issues of consensus and closure more broadly, which have been topics of interest for those researching the ancient dialogue. How varied are the voices of those participating in the competition? Does staged difference, with a unified ending, work the same as genuine difference? Is it possible to say that these women really “do” dialogue at all, if they are fundamentally in agreement and are all potentially ventriloquizing the voice of Methodius? If they are in agreement about the fact that chastity is praiseworthy, then why is there so much focus on a variety of voices and means of praising chastity? These themes come out most strongly in the first, third and fourth chapters. In the first chapter, variety is part of the creation of a authentic mimetic world, which is necessary for Methodius’ philosophic project. For the third chapter, variety and harmony take center stage as I investigate how competitive oratory interacts with the moral unity of the speakers. Finally, in the fourth chapter, the theme of harmony becomes less allegorical as I look at how the song sung by the participants at the end of the dialogue combines a variety of voices from the past and the present. Through a sophisticated arrangement of stanzas and themes, Methodius enacts his principles of variety and order within the poem itself, as well as playing with the thematic issues of harmony and variation in the rest of his dialogue.

Chapter 1: The Symposium in the Dialogic Tradition

Methodius was a writer of dialogues in a variety of styles, and dialogues comprise five of the eight surviving works (only one of which is a Symposium). Especially in the Symposium, Methodius is careful to emphasize his Platonic ancestry even though that Platonic predecessor is not incorporated without being changed, being tilted into a new sophistic (and Christian) context.
If Methodius is particularly concerned with Platonic imitation in the *Symposium*, what role does the intervening dialogic tradition play?

In the Imperial Period, some philosophers still cared about dialogue. Our most vivid example is Plutarch. Lucian, too, continued at least the satirical pose of the philosophical dialogue, and Philostratus contributed two dialogue examples of his own (the *Heroicus* and the *Nero*). Most Greek Imperial philosophers, however, chose not to write in the dialogic genre. For instance, the third-century Neo-Platonists almost exclusively wrote in treatises and biography, choosing not to follow their eponymous founder in his generic choice. Christians are the philosophers of the Imperial era who really take up the dialogic genre and make it their own. It might be fairer to turn Simon Goldhill’s provocative question: “Why don’t Christians do dialogue?” to “Why does dialogue lose favor among Imperial philosophers who are not Christians?”

The Christian preference for dialogue starts at the beginning of Christian literature, and the earliest surviving dialogues are of an apologetic nature. The first of these depict conversations with Jews: Justin’s surviving *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (c. 150) and Ariston of Pella’s lost *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus* (pre 170’s).

Characters, while sometimes finely drawn, are clear representatives of divergent views, with one of the characters unfailingly being the orthodox representative and one the heterodox representative. Although apologetic texts, they contain much more than pure apology and are literary dialogues in the true sense.

Manfred Hoffmann, in his 1966 book *Der Dialog bei den Christlichen Schriftstellern der Ersten Vier Jahrhunderte*, delineates three types of early Christian dialogue: 1) the apologetic

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69 This dialogue is mentioned in Celsus’ work against the Christians, and received a damning literary estimation from Origen in his reply (Origen in *Contra Celsum* 4.52, see Hoffmann 1966, 9-10). For a newly-discovered fragment, see Bovon and Duffy 2012.
dialogue, 2) the dogmatic-polemic dialogue and 3) the Christian-philosophical. 70 If the Jewish apologetic dialogues are examples of the first, and Methodius’ Symposium an example of the third, as examples of the second we have texts from two third century debates, one in whole and one in part, which are said to be genuine records from stenographers’ notes, which both fall chronologically between the apologetic dialogues with Jewish interlocutors and Methodius’ dialogues. 71 The first is the debate between Origen and Heraclides, which occurred in Arabia around 245 AD. 72 The other dogmatic debate we have from the mid-third century was that between Malchion and Paul of Samosata during the third council against Paul of Samosata in 268 AD, which Eusebius (and Jerome following him) claim was written down by stenographers who were present at the debate and was widely circulated, but whose written record no longer survives (Halton 103 and Eusebius 7.29). 73 When reading literary dialogues, it should be kept in mind that such live debates are occurring in theological contexts. Dialogue should not be seen only as a freeze-dried literary form.

With so many surviving examples, I turn from the simple fact that Christians were writing dialogues to looking at the ways in which they were writing them. In particular, I challenge the view of Simon Goldhill that Christianity killed genuine philosophical dialogue by shutting down the possibility of difference. His accusation that Christianity substituted a

70 Bernd Voss, in his indispensable book Der Dialog in der Frühchristlichen Literatur, makes a somewhat similar distinction between the art dialogue and the dogmatic disputation (Voss 1970, 338-341).
71 There are, of course, also literary versions of dogmatic dialogues. See, for example, the other dialogues of Methodius and Gregory Thaumaturgus’ dialogue To Theopompus, On the Impassibility of God.
72 The text was discovered in a sixth-century papyrus in 1941. “It is not a literary dialogue but the complete record of an actual discussion, something unique, as A. D. Nock remarks, not only among Origen’s writings but in early Christian literature and in ancient literature as a whole outside of Augustine.” (Quasten 1950, Vol. 2, p. 62)
73 Both Eusebius and Jerome say that they have copies, but we are left with only meager quotations in Leontius of Byzantium and other later writers. See Quasten Vol. 2, p.140-142.
catechism in place of dialogue mistakenly combines two related but distinct genres, both of which were open to Christian and non-Christian practitioners alike in the Imperial period. While the question-and-answer is a textual method of organizing material so that it can be more easily digested and memorized, the philosophical dialogue is a literary method that attempts to represent an enticing way of life to be imitated. I argue that Methodius’ *Symposium* is an excellent example of a philosophical dialogue that is genuinely philosophical, one involved in engaging the imagination to promote imitation. Further, I argue that Methodius has two purposes in utilizing dramatic forms for his philosophy. The first is to invoke a *phantasia* in his readers’ minds in order to stimulate a desire for the imagined pleasures of the Christian philosophical life. The second is to teach his readers how to subsequently become participants in that philosophical life, a movement that he models in the intense interchange between the framing interlocutors at the end of the *Symposium*.

Next, I turn to examine what *was* changing in dialogues written in the Imperial period and how Methodius fits into these changes. Dialogues of this period more often brought to life educational settings, with students questioning a teacher. Likewise common are scenarios approximating the courtroom, where two sides of an issue are argued in the presence of a presiding judge. I argue that these are not changes that come with Christianity, for both are present already in Plutarch (with elements in even earlier dialogues), although they do represent a change from what would be expected from Socratic dialogues.

While many dialogues, Christian and non-Christian alike, express these common Imperial-era changes, Methodius’ engagement with these two strands is not straightforward. There is no teacher, although there is a hierarchicization among the participants. There is a judge, but there are no losers. Arete declares that all of the participants are winners (although
Thecla’s contribution was preeminent). Methodius’ *Symposium* represents a relatively open social environment in the context where closure was on the rise. Difference is not only tolerated but celebrated, albeit with the requirement that it serve the praise of chastity.

**Chapter 2: The Symposium in the Sympotic Tradition**

The second chapter turns to a subtype of the philosophical dialogue that experienced particular popularity in the Imperial period, the Symposium. Lactantius, later famous for his polemical works *The Divine Institutes* and *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, began his writing career in the late third century at the same time as Methodius. Jerome claims to have in his possession three of Lactantius’ early works which no longer survive. The first is a grammatical treatise; the second is a hexameter travel poem which he wrote *en route* to joining the court of Diocletian in Bithynia. The third work, written while he was still in Africa before he made the journey to Bithynia, was a *Symposium*. It has recently been claimed that this work does in fact survive, hidden under the title of the “Symposium of the Twelve Wise Men”, but this attestation is far from certain. Regardless, it is suggestive that an exact contemporary of Methodius in Latin-speaking North Africa should choose to express himself in the same genre as Methodius in Greek-speaking Asia Minor. Methodius is not unique in his generic choice, and this piece of

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74 Section 80, Halton 111
75 He was not alone in this. There survives a 1187 line geographical hexameter poem by Dionysius of Alexandria, *Guide to the Inhabited World*, produced probably in the 130’s AD. See Bowie 1990, 70-80 for a discussion.
76 This is the claim of Friedrich 2002, who bases her case on verbal parallels with the rest of Lactantius’ work. If this text is in fact the one mentioned by Jerome, then Lactantius’ Symposium looks quite different from any other that has survived—it is a polymetric collection of poems by twelve different speakers, without any mimetic scene-setting. Friedrich places it in the grammatical-rhetorical line of Symposia that became popular in the Imperial period, rather than the Methodian-Platonic line (Friedrich 2002, 496 n. 857).
evidence from Jerome suggests a richer context into which Methodius’ endeavor should be placed. How does Methodius fit into other Imperial sympotic literature?

The sympotic genre was popular both before and after Methodius. Often explicitly referencing their Socratic predecessors of Xenophon and Plato, Plutarch (late first/early second century), Lucian (second century) and Athenaeus (late second/early third century) wrote surviving Symposia in Greek before Methodius, and Pseudo-Cyprian and Macrobius (both fourth century) continued the tradition after him in Latin. One of the striking elements of many of these sympotic works under the Empire is their emphasis on compilation and cataloging.\(^{77}\) None of the surviving symposia are organized around a single guiding question that elicits multiple contributions (apart from Julian’s Caesars). Many of them seem far from philosophy at all. Why have pagans moved from philosophy at their banquets to displays of encyclopedic learning?\(^{78}\)

Most scholars assume that the primary model for Imperial Symposia was Plato’s dialogue, which is more widely read and highly regarded by modern scholars. On the contrary, as the tradition of writing Symposia developed throughout the first-fourth centuries AD, writers just as frequently reference Xenophon’s Symposium, which was often more useful for their miscellanistic and ludic projects. I argue that, flowing from the two founders of the Sympotic

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\(^{77}\) See generally König 2008. For Plutarch, see specifically König 2007 and Morgan 2011. For Athenaeus, Braund and Wilkins 2000. The text and a discussion can of the Cena Cypriani can be found in Modesto 1992. Kaster’s 2011 Loeb of Macrobius includes a good introduction to this text (see esp. xxxvi-xlv). For Lucian’s Symposium see Gomez and Jufresa 2010.

\(^{78}\) The first of the Sympotic Questions of Plutarch deals precisely with this question: Is it appropriate to do philosophy at a symposium? He answers in the positive, but only if it is done correctly and with the right people. See König “Fragmentation and coherence in Plutarch’s Sympotic Questions” (2007) for a new look at how compilatory writing can be simultaneously philosophical. For other investigations of this topic see Kechagia 2011 “Philosophy in Plutarch’s Table Talk: In Jest or in Earnest” and Oikonomopoulou 2011 “Peripatetic Knowledge in Plutarch’s Table Talk”.
genre, Xenophon and Plato, there are two fundamental *modes* of Sympotic writing that practitioners can choose to follow. In the Imperial period, it was common for writers of Symposia to explicitly show their reliance upon both models, with a marked tendency towards writing the Xenophontic. In contrast, Methodius pretends ignorance of the Xenophontic mode, while simultaneously incorporating some of the elements of that mode into his work, namely elements of variation and compilation, which he shares in common with the other Imperial Symposia.

I argue that Methodius advertises Plato as his only model and strives to disassociate himself from his near contemporaries in order to set his *Symposium* in such a way that not the past, nor even the present, but rather the future is the temporal space most emphasized. The reason that Methodius chooses to point only to his Platonic predecessor instead of admitting that there exists a whole bevy of intervening and near-contemporary sympotic texts is because he wants a unified ancestor in order to set up his desired progression. Plato’s *Symposium* stands as the Shadow, his own Symposium as the Image, and the Heavenly Banquet with the Divine Bridegroom as the Reality, thus showing that not only the virgin’s banquet, but all of terrestrial life, is waiting to be fulfilled in a reality that will only come at the Second Coming of Christ. Methodius ignores the trend towards compilation and nostalgia found in other late sympotic texts, and instead moves the *Symposium*’s time and place into a Christian-symbolic landscape. His *Symposium* points not to a party shared by philosophers of the previous generation, but to a future banquet yet to come after death.

Although it is the Imperial symposium most faithfully modeled on Plato, Methodius differs from Plato in the time, place, and attendees of the party: precisely the areas where he also
differs from other Imperial literary symposia. The first area that I will investigate is the temporal positioning of the *Symposium*. Like its Platonic model, the readers are distanced from the event by its presentation through an inset narrative. Methodius removes his *Symposium* even further from the present by creating an unreachable time for his virgins to inhabit, a time after death. Some literary symposia are set in the more distant past, such as Plutarch’s *Symposium of the Seven Sages*, while others relate recent parties at which the author was present, such as Plutarch’s *Table Talk*. Often the banquet is set only a generation before the author is composing, which is the case with Macrobius’ *Saturnalia* (as well as Plato and Xenophon’s *Symposia*). Instead of any of these possibilities, Methodius’ *Symposium* has taken on a specifically eschatological tenor, eagerly awaiting the final arrival of Christ the Bridegroom.

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79 Another fundamental difference is the absence of any consumption of alcohol. Thallusa’s speech briefly addresses the issue, spiritually interpreting the Nazaritic vow against alcohol as an injunction not to participate in the intoxicating products of evil. “A man does not become so drunk and insane from wine as he does from grief, as he does from love or from incontinence” (Musurillo 1958, 87). Even calling the dialogue the *Symposium* is an intentional misnomer. Although it occurs after a banquet, it is philosophy without alcohol.

80 Arete calls her garden to which she has called the virgins that “Meadow of Immortality” (Musurillo 1958, 40), and later, Eubulion’s comment after Thecla’s speech confirms that at least Thecla has already passed through the trials of martyrdom: “And so outstanding did she [Thecla] frequently show herself as she engaged in those first great contests of the martyrs, possessing a zeal equal to her generosity, and a physical strength equal to the maturity of her counsels” (Musurillo 1958, 130).

81 In his Introduction, Plutarch tells his dedicatee Sossius Senecio that he is relating a collection of conversations that he himself has heard over the years, in some of which Sossius himself was a participant. For a very helpful recent collection of essays on Plutarch’s *Table Talk* see Klotz and Oikonomopoulou 2011.

82 His eschatological bent (see Mejzner 2011) might be the reason why Methodius’ name was later associated with the mid-seventh century Syriac apocalypse that became the basis of all subsequent Byzantine apocalyptic literature. Pseudo-Methodius’ *Apocalypse* also exerted a strong influence in the West due to a popular early-eighth century Latin translation. For the early Greek and Latin translations, see Aerts and Kortekaas 1998. See also Chapter 1 of Alexander 1985 for an English translation and discussion. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to locate a discussion of the reasons for the attribution of this work to Methodius. The Syriac manuscripts cite the author as Methodius of Olympus while the Greek translation has Methodius of Patara.
The event is related to Methodius, Eubulion and Gregorion soon after it occurred, but from a place outside of time.

While the temporal setting of the Symposium may be disorientating, likewise is the spatial setting, an evocation of which began this Introduction. It takes place on top of a mountain, in the protective garden of Virtue the daughter of Philosophy, the pathways up to which were full of noxious beasts. The symposium has been relocated to a vertically distant place, separated from the normal realm of life. And its situation is not only vertiginous, but also verdant. Plato’s Symposium occurred in the interior space of a home, although that space is broken into first by Alcibiades and then by a drunken crowd. The other important model for Methodius, Plato’s Phaedrus, is the locus classicus for a pastoral setting of philosophy. However, in the Phaedrus, Socrates and Phaedrus are in a dangerous space outside of the civilizing control of the city and culture. Arete’s garden is entirely lacking in wildness; it is the essence of civilization, having only been reached once the wild mountain path had been surmounted. In contrast, the Phaedrus does not take place in a garden, but in the relative wilderness, the non-city. Despite a superficial similarity, the difference in setting between Plato’s Phaedrus and Methodius’ Symposium might have everything to do with the gender of the participants.

Horticulture is a prevailing image in the Symposium, perhaps one of the most important recurrent images. The women who are competing in a garden, imagine the future garden of their ascetic ascent and imagine themselves as gardens flowering with pure foliage of virtue. The physical setting is a metaphor for the larger goal of the female ascetics. The pastoral world that Methodius creates seems to be one that is made particularly for women to inhabit, continuing in

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83 For instance, there is a disquieting possibility of rape. Cf. The story of Boreas and the nymph Orithuia 229b-e.
a long history of the association between women and gardens. There is a relationship between the unexpected spatial setting and the unexpected nature of the participants.

Besides their gender, the other important distinguishing characteristic of the group of women is that one of them, Thecla, is honored as a famous saint, while the other virgins have names that are not associated with historic or hagiographic personages. In this chapter I argue that Thecla’s particularity is used to transform her into a symbol of ideal education rather than to tie the Symposium down to a particular historical setting.

Chapter 3: The Symposium in the Rhetorical Tradition

The third chapter treats Methodius’ relationship with competitive rhetoric. It might come as a surprise that competition plays such a key role in a gathering of Christian virgins who are dedicated to fostering the virtues of humility and selflessness. I argue in this chapter that Methodius maintains competition because he believes in the utility of variety on a number of levels. The image that he uses to explicate each of these levels is the garland, composed of many different flowers woven into one chaplet. Again and again, Methodius makes a plea to continue variety: variety in persona, variety in rhetoric, variety in voices. But rhetorical competition is only allowed to remain if its variation is not antagonistic, but complementary.

This is most clearly seen in the preface to another of his dialogues, On Free Will, which addresses its audience as a “holy symposium” of listeners who are free from the rivalry that is present among the pagans. I make the connection between the language of the preface with the language of the virgins’ descriptions of their ideal life to show that Methodius makes a parallel

84 We have evidence for a flourishing cult around the reputed tomb of St. Thecla in Seleucia in Pamphilia, 50km south-west from Tarsus, not far from Methodius’ reputed bishopric. See Davis 2001, 36-80.
between the rhetorical activities of his virgins and his own rhetorical activity of writing and performing philosophical dialogues. A legitimization of the virgins’ actions simultaneously legitimates his own.

Rather than being concerned with the dangers traditionally associated with it by philosophers, Methodius celebrates the rhetorical variety and entertainment provided by the contest in a way that looks familiar to readers of Philostratus. Methodius has transferred the *Symposium* from a first sophistic to the second sophistic context. As in the sophistic performances common in the proceeding centuries, the women are invited to speak extemporaneously on a topic proposed by the hostess. The language of an athletic contest is used, a prize is promised and a winner declared. But the rhetorical working out of elite status in the Second Sophistic gets a new turn in the Christian literary imagination and occurs among females who are ascetical, not political, elites.

How is the traditional language of competition managed when the participants are all women? Their competition is spoken of in terms of athletic wrestling as they admire the strength of each other’s performance. A parallel to females in competitive environments can be found in martyr narratives such as the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity and Blandina’s role in the Martyrs of Lyon preserved in Irenaeus. Like their overcoming of the wild beasts in the mountain path up the mountain, the rhetorical competition among Methodius’ virgins is another manifestation of their ascetic manliness. If, as Gleason has convincingly shown, the purpose of sophistic display is to perform gender, to prove manhood in a world where manhood is not inherited, but achieved, how does the performative project change with an all-female cast? This

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85 E.g. “Now Theophila, although grasped around the waist by a sturdy opponent in the arena, began to grow dizzy, and recovering herself with great difficulty, she said…” (Musurillo 1958, 52).
question will be illuminated by taking as a comparison another all-female competition related in the *Letters* of Alciphron, where prostitutes at a party have a beauty competition that is also spoken of with athletic metaphors. Methodius’ female competition is radically different than that imagined by Alciphron because of the sexual status of the women who are competing, and the corresponding moral seriousness of their competition.

There are important ways in which the women’s performance does not neatly fit into Second Sophistic expectations, in addition to the surprising gender and sexual status of the participants. Strikingly, in Methodius’ imagined rhetorical competition there are no outside spectators, and it is not meant as public entertainment to the masses. Instead of an internal audience, the news of the event spread through oral reports, leaking out through select observers and participants and making its way both to Gregorion, whose conversation we are allowed to overhear, and to Methodius, who wrote the book that many will read.

**Chapter 4: The Symposium in the Poetic Tradition**

The themes of variation and harmony find a natural conclusion in the hymn which closes the internal narration of the symposium. The competition among the women gives way to a fundamental unity reached by the end of the debate, a unity represented by a final hymn sung by all the participants. My fourth chapter will therefore be an examination of the poem which seals the event. Simon Goldhill characterizes its culminating role in the dialogue polemically:

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86 In this way, it imitates Plato’s *Symposium* and not the expected setting of a formal rhetorical performance of the Imperial period, putting it more in line with philosophical than sophistic literature.

87 The appearance of Methodius occurs in the very last pages of the work. “Eubulion: ‘And tell me, what of our Termessian friend? Was she not listening from outside? I should be surprised if she sat idle when she heard about this banquet and did not immediately run to listen to our discussion like a bird in search of food.’ Gregorion: ‘No; the report is that she was with Methodius when he was questioning Arete about this matter.’” (Musurillo 1958, 158)
…in the piece, each virgin gives a set speech, and they end by singing hymns [sic] together: it is a dialogue without conversation. It inevitably—and proudly—lacks the dangerous thrill of a drunken Alcibiades crashing into the party, flute girl on each arm, to relate his failed attempt to seduce Socrates. (Goldhill 2006, 5)

Is Goldhill right to claim that the narrative synthesis represented in the final dramatic act of the virgins undermines the dialogic aspect of the rest of the work? What is the structural impact of the Thecla’s poem on the dialogue as a whole?

This chapter has two parts. In the first, I summarize the complicated poem and put forward a new argument about its poetic structure. Like the arrangement of the speeches of the virgins, which were carefully ordered to highlight certain intersections, the poem’s stanzas are also hinged along certain edges. The investigation into structure concludes with a discussion of the genre of the poem and suggestions of the possible influences on the innovative elements of its alphabetism and refrain. Once we understand the distinct shape of the poem, we can make better sense out of the variety of voices that speak throughout it. The particular performance requirements of the mimetic world that Methodius has created for his virgins leads to a complicated interaction of voices.

This reading leads into the second part of the chapter, where I return to the fundamental question of shifting time-space settings as theology bumps into aesthetics in the fluid period of Imperial Greek literature. Comparing Methodius’ hymn to Philostratus’ “Hymn to Echo” in the Heroicus and Lucian’s depiction of Homer’s poetic creations in the Island of the Blessed in the True Histories brings into stark relief how Methodius uses the poetic expectations of his time to shift focus from nostalgia about the past to hope in a future to come. Thecla’s poem acts as a closural device, rounding off the internal narrative in a glorious image of unified praise. Yet, the directional aspect of the culmination means that the closure is imagined as continual progress.
In each of these chapters, I look at how Methodius molds genres to emphasize a new goal. His voice, yearning for a future yet to come, is important to hear alongside many of those of the third century that longed for a lost Classical past. Just as there was a growing trend at this time to look to “barbarian wisdom” as an alternative source for much that was “Greek”, Methodius too turns away from a valorization of a static Greek “past” to different sources of value. However, he is able to do so persuasively precisely because he anchors his own innovations in traditional cultural forms, such as Plato’s *Symposium* and hymnic poetic structures, which allow him to showcase his innovation. Methodius shows the exciting possibilities of being “post” a tradition—you can use selected elements of that tradition to vault your way into a future eagerly anticipated.

I began writing this dissertation with an assumption of similarity, believing that Methodius would closely map onto the literary interests of the non-Christians of his time. But in this assumption I was misled by the surface similarities Methodius constructed with his Classical models. As the project progressed, I was surprised to discover a greater amount of difference. When Methodius uses the classical tradition, he does so in order to claim to have overcome it, to have advanced it along the line towards manifest reality. And in so doing, he is very much one of the literati of the Second Sophistic, rewriting and revoicing, ventriloquizing the past for present preoccupations.
Chapter 1

Methodius’ *Symposium* and the Dialogic Tradition

In 362 AD, Julian the Apostate issued his famous School Edict, which effectively forbade Christians from teaching pagan texts.1 Decreed by pagan and Christian alike,2 it also led to a rush of creative writing from a Christian father and son of the same name who were already well known as rhetoricians, the Apollinarii. The church historians Socrates and Sozomen relate that they took to transforming the Christian Scriptures into pagan forms, to provide substitutes for the traditional pagan texts that were now forbidden for Christian teachers to use. The historical books of the Old Testament were translated into a mixture of heroic verse and tragedy, the Psalms into dactylic hexameter. But the Gospels were transformed into Platonic dialogues.3 In many ways, the intuition of the Apollinarii was a natural one: Jesus, like Socrates, was a wise

2 Ammianus Marcellinus *Roman History* 22.10.7: “But this one thing was inhumane, and ought to be buried in eternal silence, namely, that he forbade teachers of rhetoric and literature to practise their profession, if they were followers of the Christian religion.” (trans. Rolf, Loeb Vol. 2, p. 257) Cf. 25.4.20. Gregory Nazianzus *Oration 4* § 5-6 “In the first place, because he wrongfully transferred the appellation to a pretence, as though the Greek speech belonged to religious worship exclusively, and not to the tongue; and for this reason he debarred us from the use of words as though we were stealing other people's goods----just as if he would have excluded us from the practice of the arts that are found in use amongst Greeks, and thought it made any difference to him on account of the identity of name” (King 1888, 3). See Kurmann 1988. For a sympathetic account of the reasons for Julian’s edict based on his conception of *paideia*, see Athanassiadi 1981, Chapter IV “Paideia”, p. 121-160: “…realizing that theirs [i.e. Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus] was an irreverent attitude towards his thought-world, one of exploitation of Hellenism in order to serve Christianity.” (Athanassiadi 1981, 127)
3 Ὅ δὲ νεώτερος Ἀπολλινάριος, εὖ πρὸς τὸ λέγειν παρεσκευασμένος, τὰ εὐαγγέλια καὶ τὰ ἀποστολικὰ δόγματα ἐν τῷ χωρίῳ διαλόγων ἐξέθετο, καθὰ καὶ Πλάτων παρ’ Ἕλληνιν. “The younger Apollinaris, who was well trained in eloquence, expounded the gospels and apostolic doctrines in the way of dialogue, as Plato among the Greeks had done.” (Socrates the Historian III.16, Post-Nicene Fathers translation) Cf. Sozomen V.18.3ff who mentions the translations of the Old Testament, but not that of the Gospels into dialogues. None of these translations have survived, unless an extant hexameter Psalm translation is Apollinarian (for the text and an analysis, see Golega 1960). We do have one fragment preserved in Leontius of Byzantium of a different dialogue that Apollinaris wrote on the nature of Christ: Fr. 157, Lietzmann 1904, 249, as well as a *Dialogue on the Holy Trinity* attributed to him (Dräseke 1892, 252-341).
man who spread his teaching through personal conversation and interaction, sometimes in the context of celebratory meals, until suffering death at the hands of the state for his subversive teaching. However, the choice seems far from natural to other readers and thinkers, especially certain modern scholars. For them, the playful seriousness and genuine openness of the Socratic-inspired dialogues of Plato (and presumably the other Socratics) is antipathetical to the spirit of Christianity.

If a modern Classicist has encountered Methodius of Olympus at all, it is most likely due to the delightfully wide-ranging work of Simon Goldhill. He provides two descriptions of Methodius’ Symposium, the first opening Foucault’s Virginity and the second featuring somewhat prominently in the introduction to his edited volume The End of Dialogue in Antiquity. In the preface to the End of Dialogue, Goldhill uses Methodius’ Symposium as an example of the ways in which dialogue changes under the influence of Christianity, losing its true dialogic nature, domesticated into a dreary line of catechesis that stretches through Byzantium right up to the Baltimore Catechism (and beyond).

5 Justin Martyr early on makes the connection between the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus: “When Socrates attempted with true reason and judicious inquiry to bring these things into the open and to draw people away from the demons, the demons, using people who delight in evil, worked it that he too was killed, on the pretext that he rejected the gods and was irreligious—alleging that he introduced strange new divinities. And likewise they are working to bring about the same things for us. For these things were brought to light not only among the Greeks by reason, through the words of Socrates, but also among the barbarians by the Logos himself, who acquired physical form and became a human being and was called Jesus Christ.” (Justin Martyr’s First Apology 5.3-5.4, Minns and Parvis 2009, p. 91). For an investigation into the enduring importance of Socrates as an exemplum of martyrdom see Emily Wilson The Death of Socrates: hero, villain, chatterbox, saint (Harvard 2007), especially Chapter 5 “Pain and Revelation: The Death of Socrates and the Death of Jesus”, p. 141-169. Wilson goes so far as to claim that Luke explicitly models his account of the death of Jesus to correspond to the death of Socrates (Wilson 2007, 142-143).
The second-century [sic] Syrian [sic] Christian Methodius writes a *Symposium*, where a group of virgins ‘discuss’ the benefits of virginity: it is clearly modeled on Plato as well as the symposiastic tradition and aims to replace the Platonic image of desire with a Christian repression of desire. But in the piece, each virgin gives a set speech, and they end by singing hymns [sic] together: it is a dialogue without conversation. It inevitably—and proudly—lacks the dangerous thrill of a drunken Alcibiades crashing into the party, flute girl on each arm, to relate his failed attempt to seduce Socrates. (Goldhill 2006, 5)

This summary fits with the provocatively polemical position around which Goldhill structures the collection of essays. He argues that the requirements of consensus inherent in Christianity’s worldview destroyed the possibility of genuine dialogue of the type represented in the Socratic dialogues of Plato. Against this characterization, it will be my project in this chapter to argue that Methodius’ *Symposium* uses the form of the philosophical dialogue in a genuinely philosophical and dialogic way. Methodius engages his readers’ imaginations in order to stoke their desire to imitate what they are reading. Through this, he hopes to lure them into a particular method of doing philosophy, not to force them to accept a body of predetermined dogma.

Goldhill outlines three areas of investigation to which he hopes his edited volume will contribute: (1) the fundamental difficulty of reconciling Christianity with dialogue, (2) a more subtle investigation into Bakhtin’s theories of the dialogic in relation to ancient literature, and (3) the relationship of power structures in literature (and religion), especially the mechanisms provided for dissent and consensus (Goldhill 2009, 8-10). This list of desiderata is an excellent example of one track of investigation that has dominated dialogue studies to date: the mapping of dialogues along an axis of power and authoritative discourse. Instead, I would

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7 Goldhill admits to being intentionally polemical in the introduction (Goldhill 2009, 1, 7-8). Of course, the essays in the collection each in their own way push against this strong thesis, even while created within its creative forge. Although some of the contributions agree with the basic premise while differing in details. Lim 2008: “…lack of investment in the dialogue form among Christians” (171). Cf. Lim 2008, 156. Long before Goldhill, R. Hirzel outlined a similar development. See Lim 2008, 151.
like to look more deeply into the internal justifications of various dialogue projects (Part I).
What are dialogue writers attempting to do when they write imitations of oral conversations?
Why is this attractive to them, and why did the dialogue form continue to be popular after the immediate memory of Socrates had faded? What range of uses did the dialogue form serve in its long history? In the second half of this chapter, I will look at three possible locations where Methodius could be suspected of shutting down genuine conversation: in possibly evidencing a stronger educational intent, in providing his sympotic competition with a judge, and in making himself a (sly) part of the symposium he narrates (Part II). I conclude that these are general movements Methodius has in common with other Imperial dialogues, and that his utilization of them often undercuts an easy anti-dialogic reading. Finally, I will turn to the evidence we have from the Neo-Platonists for their ambivalent engagement with the dialogic tradition of their heroes, Socrates and Plato. Although we have evidence that Porphyry wrote dialogues, they seem to be explicitly part of his philological and not his philosophical output. If Christian Platonists continued to write philosophic dialogues while their Neo-Platonic opponents moved into more scholarly modes of doing philosophy, it seems more accurate to say that Christianity was actually more open to dialogue than other Imperial philosophies of the third century.

**Philosophical Dialogue and *Erotapokriseis*: Method verses Content**

If Goldhill wishes to claim that the “dialogic” died with Christianity, he is not able to do so based on an argument that philosophical dialogues ceased to be written by Christians. Early Christians were clearly interested in experimenting with the power of the philosophical-dramatic

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8 The thesis of Long’s contribution to Goldhill’s collection, which looks only to the dialogues of Plato, makes a stronger argument about the variety of “ends” of dialogue even within one author (Long 2008).
form. In fact, from our earliest examples in the mid-second century,\(^9\) at the very dawn of Christian literature, we have examples of literary dialogues written by Christians, who continued to write them in every period of Late Antiquity and well beyond, a fact that is just beginning to draw scholarly attention.\(^10\)

The accusation that Christianity killed dialogue and substituted the catechism mistakenly combines two related but distinct genres, both of which were open to Christian and non-Christian practitioners alike in the Imperial period. The first goes under a variety of names: *erotapokriseis, quaestiones, zetemata, problemata*, and the Question-and-Answer. The second is the philosophical dialogue proper, which is concerned with imitative representation of philosophical conversations and includes a greater amount of mimesis and characterization. The former is a textual method of organizing material so that it can be more easily digested and memorized. The later is a literary method that attempts to represent an enticing way of life to be imitated. Methodius’ *Symposium* is an excellent example of the latter.

After a brief overview of the genre of the *erotapokriseis*, and the ways in which it helps us to define the borders of the genre of philosophical dialogue, I will turn to investigate Methodius’ justification for his own dialogic project. How does he explain the purpose of the imagination? Why does he wish to set his philosophy within a dramatic world? What does he

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\(^9\) As discussed in the Introduction, discounting the dialogic elements in the Gospels and the various Acts, the earliest attested Christian dialogue is Ariston of Pella’s *Dialogue between Jason and Papsicus*, discussed by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 4.52 and dated to c. 140-145AD (Hoffmann 1966, 9-10). Other second century Christian dialogues include Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* and Bardaisan’s *The Book of the Laws of the Countries*.

\(^10\) Contra Lim: “If it means asking whether early Christians composed works that are set in the form of the dialogue, one reasonable answer would be that they did so but rarely.” (Lim 2009, 156) In fact, a project begun by Averil Cameron to collect all of the Late Antique and Byzantine philosophical dialogues has already gathered over 200 specimens. For a first analysis of some of these texts, see Cameron 2014. I would like to heartily thank Averil Cameron for showing me this text prior to publication.
see as the educative powers of mimetic philosophy? Methodius has two purposes in utilizing dramatic forms for his philosophy. The first is to invoke a *phantasia* in his readers’ minds in order to produce a desire for the imagined pleasures of the Christian philosophical life. The second is to teach his readers how to subsequently become participants in that philosophical life, a movement that he models in the intense interchange between the framing interlocutors, Eubulion and Gregorion, at the end of the *Symposium.*

After looking at Methodius’ rationale for using a dramatic form of philosophy, I will broaden my investigation to set the *Symposium* within the wider network of Imperial dialogues, turning to examine what was changing during the Imperial period, and how Methodius fit into these changes. It seems that in this period dialogues more often bring to life educational settings. Likewise common are scenarios approximating the courtroom, where two sides of an issue are argued in the presence of a presiding judge. These are not changes that come with Christianity, for both are present already in Plutarch (with elements in even earlier dialogues), but they do represent a change from what would be expected from Socratic dialogues. The conjunction of these two movements causes many Imperial dialogues to have a greater sense of being predetermined and closed to multiple conclusions, a situation which perhaps fuels Goldhill’s argument that dialogue “ended” in late antiquity. While many dialogues, Christian and non-Christian alike, express these changed settings, Methodius’ engagement with these two strands is not straightforward. The hierarchicization among participants is joined with the emphasis on their united social and moral activity, where they are all valued participants. Arete, while picking out Thecla to be particularly honored, declares that all of the women are winners, and gives them all the victory crown. Difference is not only tolerated, but celebrated, as long as it serves the fundamental project of praising the virtuous life. In addition, Methodius’ positing of
himself as a minor character within his *Symposium* can be read as a way of undercutting his own authority over the content of the text. When these characteristics are taken into account, it comes to seem that Methodius’ *Symposium* represents a relatively open social environment in the context where closure was on the rise.

There has been a small flurry of interest recently in a genre neighboring the philosophical dialogue, the Question and Answer, or, as it is known more commonly by its Greek name in the secondary literature, *erotapokriseis*.  Asking questions and giving answers are part of both *erotapokriseis* and the philosophical dialogue, but the major difference between the two genres is the type of educational intent of the text.  *Erotapokriseis* are above all concerned with teaching *content*, and those written in a catechetical style presumably were *aide-mémoires* to be conned by students. Dialogues, on the other hand, are concerned with *method*. They dramatize the process of coming to know, of learning how to ask helpful questions and how to evaluate one’s own assumed answers. *Erotapokriseis* is a subset of the miscellany, a means of compiling a large body of disparate information in an accessible way. The philosophical dialogue, on the other hand, creates a vivid dramatic world representing characters doing philosophy. Methodius’ *Symposium* runs away from the compilation and the catechism, and aligns itself with the traditional use of philosophical dialogues.

The question-and-answer finds its earliest form in scholarly circles. The first example we have is the *Scientific Problems* of Aristotle, and it subsequently continued to be popular as a way of collecting issues of natural science. Medical literature was another major scholarly area

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12 On the differentiation between Questions as process, form, and content see Volgers and Zamagni 2004, 10. Papadoyannakis 2006, 93ff takes up their distinction. As a process, questions are found within many different genres. *Erotapokriseis* is when the questions constitute the form of the text itself.
where this genre was first popularized, which might be the reason that a fifth-century collection of theological, philosophical and natural questions-and-answers are attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus’ physician brother Caesarios. When it is first used by Christians, Eusebius uses it as a tool for solving biblical cruxes. It was a textual strategy, directly parallel not only with the Homeric Zetemata, but with the commentary tradition that was building up in the Neo-Platonic and other philosophical schools of this time. Plutarch provides us with a few examples of this genre: the Natural Questions, the Greek and Roman Questions and the Questions on Plato. His Table Talk demonstrates how such Questions could be martialed to enrich social interactions and intellectual exchanges, and as a result the Table Talk feels very much in the interstices between Questions and the philosophical dialogue.

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14 Seen for instance in the mostly medical interests of Alexander of Aphrodisias (Blair 2009, 176-177) and especially in the questions-and-answers of Cassius, a fourth-century iatrosophist (Garzya and Masullo, 2004).
15 For Eusebius, see Zamagni 2004. He thinks that Eusebius used the genre to give internally-focused answers to externally-given problems on particularly difficult passages of Scripture that seem to contradict one another, but warns against extrapolating from Eusebius’ goals to the goals of other practitioners of the genre. For the text, English translation, and a discussion, see Pearse 2010.
16 Porphyry’s Homeric Questions is a good example. For text and translation, see MacPhail 2011.
17 Dexippus’ dialogue, for instance, is a commentary on Aristotle’s Categories, written in the form of question and answers in a clearly educational context. See Dillon 1990 for an introduction and English translation. You could see Plutarch’s Reply to Colotes (discussed below) as a (negative) commentary on that text set in dialogue form.
18 In 8.10 a symposiast has been reading Aristotle’s Natural Questions, which sparks a conversation. “Florus, who was engaged in reading a copy of Aristotle’s Scientific Problems that had been brought to Thermopylae, was himself full of questions, as is natural for a philosophic spirit, and shared them with his friends too, proving Aristotle’s own statement that ‘great learning gives many starting-points.’ Most of the questions raised provided us with a pleasant pastime during our daytime walks; but the common saying about dreams—that they are especially likely to be unreliable or false in the fall months—somehow came up after dinner, after Favorinus had finished a discourse on other topics.” (trans. Olson, Loeb Vol. IX, p. 203-205) I discuss the exemplary nature of Plutarch’s Qaestiones-fueled conversations in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
19 Oikonomopoulou 2011.
The accusation raised by some scholars is that the later dialogues are secretly *erotapokriseis* hiding under a veneer of philosophical dialogue:

“In late antiquity, the dialogue form was seen as a suitable vehicle for carrying out the wars of sectarian rivalry among Christians and was put to use in apologetic and polemical efforts as well as in prophylactic and catechetical exercises—sometimes if only to breathe some life into tiresome, pedantic florilegia of proof-texts.” (Lim 1991, 181-182)

Because *erotapokriseis* seems to echo the language of the classroom,\(^\text{20}\) any movement towards classroom settings in philosophical dialogues is seen by some as an approach toward this neighboring genre.

Along the axis from content to method, Methodius’ *Symposium* lies on the side of method. While a certain amount of doctrine is conveyed, on a wide variety of topics in addition to the advertised one of virginity, the impression left after reading it is that Methodius wishes to catch his readers and induce them into joining a particular school of scholarly and religious investigation.\(^\text{21}\) As his virgins playfully and enticingly exercise their mental ingenuity to find

\(^{20}\) Papadoyannakis 2006, 94-98.

\(^{21}\) Musurillo disagrees, and instead claims that Methodius was primarily interested in educating his readers on a broad range of topics. “Interest in the *Symposium* as an imitation of Plato’s dialogue has tended to obscure the fact that it is actually a manual of Christian doctrine, of philosophy and theology, unified under the concept of chastity, and dedicated apparently to Methodius’ patroness Telmeskiake (or, as I should prefer, ‘the Lady from Termessus’). It is clear that in the course of the eleven great discourses with prelude, interludes and epilogue, Methodius is not only discussing the place of celibacy in the Christian scheme of life; he is also giving practical instruction, for example, on the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures (e.g., on the numerological and ‘botanical’ methods of exegesis, on the nature of the Millennium and the hereafter, on the divinity of Christ, on the fallacy of astrology, on the freedom of the will, on the meaning of world history, on prayer, and on the method of combating temptations.” (Musurillo 1958, 10-11).
Scriptural support for the doctrine of chastity, so too are the readers of the text encouraged to learn this method and to try their own hand at similar exegesis.\textsuperscript{22} 

In fact, to emphasize the distance between Methodius and the \textit{erotapokriseis} genre further, there is actually a studied lack of questions in the entire \textit{Symposium}. The reason has more to do with Methodius’ imitation of the arrangement of sequential speeches found in Plato’s \textit{Symposium} than with a discomfort with questioning: the rest of Methodius’ dialogic corpus is quite happy with a greater amount of exchange. But in the \textit{Symposium}, only one important question is asked within the world of the virgins. How can chastity best be praised?\textsuperscript{23} And in the framing narrative, a final important question is raised after the symposium has finished: Eubulion asks whether it is better to experience desire and overcome it, or never to experience desire at all.\textsuperscript{24} The transition to asking this question in response to hearing the sympotic narration will be looked at later on, where I argue that it is a dramatization of whether the lesson of “method” has been correctly learned by the auditors of the story.

Now that the philosophical dialogue has been differentiated from its near neighbor, \textit{erotapokriseis}, the distinct aims of the philosophical dialogue can be fleshed out. There are two characteristics emphasized in the ancient sources that make the philosophical dialogue different from other types of philosophical texts. The first is that it chooses to express itself via mimesis, in a way akin to drama, and the second is that this mimesis takes place among interpersonal

\textsuperscript{22} As will be discussed later, one of the places where this is made explicit is when Theopatra insists that there are as many ways of praising chastity as there are people (93, Musurillo 75). There is always room for one more treatise on virginity, if any reader wishes to set her mind to it.

\textsuperscript{23} Although even this is not expressed as a question, but as Arete’s desire to hear a “\textit{λόγον … ἐγκωμιαστικῶν περὶ παρθενίας}” (Preface).

\textsuperscript{24} ΕΥΒ. Ἀτάρ, ὁ Γρηγόριον, ποτέρους ἁμείνους λέγομεν, τοὺς μὴ ἐπιθυμοῦντας ἢ τοὺς ἐπιθυμοῦντας μὲν, κρατοῦντας δὲ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας καὶ παρθενεύοντας; (Epilogue)
relationships. I have found that the first element stays constant through many dialogic texts: from Plato, to Methodius and beyond. However, as societal situations changed, so too did interpersonal relationships, resulting in new models of the philosophical dialogue. The first part of this chapter will look to the mimetic use of the dialogue, and the ways in which Methodius remains part of a stable tradition, and the second will turn to the interpersonal element, and look to how Methodius is involved in broader changes that were occurring in the Imperial Period.

**Part I: Phantasia, Mimesis and the Delights of Dialogue**

The lion’s share of scholarship on the dialogic method focuses on the dialogues of Plato. His corpus is the largest collection of dialogues to survive from antiquity, and it is also unique in standing at the very beginning of the dialogic tradition. Although we have evidence for about three hundred Socratic dialogues having been composed, only Plato’s and Xenophon’s survive in more than fragments. There is incredible variety even within the Platonic corpus, not all of which can be explained by pointing to a temporal development in Plato’s philosophy (especially since there is no consensus on the order of the Platonic dialogues). Dialogue can do different things depending on who is involved and what purposes are pursued. But our earliest reflections on dialogic theory are reflections on Plato, the first by Aristotle and the second by Diogenes Laertius. It is to these authors, then, that I will turn first.

The earliest mention we have of dialogues in ancient literary theory comes from a brief note in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which has been made to carry much interpretive weight. There, Aristotle places the Socratic dialogues alongside the mimes of Sophron as examples of prose (or

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25 Followed by Plutarch. Plato wrote 36 dialogues. Plutarch wrote 16 extent dialogues, if you count the voluminous collection of dialogues in his Table Talk as only one dialogue.

mixed) styles of mimesis that, unlike music and dance, do not use rhythm and melody to create their imitations.  

For we have no common name to give to the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and to Socratic dialogues; nor even to any mimesis that might be produced in iambic trimesters or elegiac couplets or any other such metres. (Poetics I.1.1447a28-1447b11, trans. Halliwell, Loeb 31)

There is a long tradition of associating the origins of Plato’s style with his imitation of dramatic forms, and in particular, of the mimes of Sophron (f. 440-430 BC).  

By representing philosophy as a drama, imitating methods of speech and characterization, the philosophical dialogue is brought close to other works of mimetic art. Plato’s works themselves have a complicated relationship with the stage arts. Both Nussbaum and Nightingale have investigated his incorporation of, and subsequent agonistic surpassing of, the dramatic elements in his dialogues.  

A fascinating piece of evidence connecting philosophical dialogues beyond those of Plato with the dramatic genre comes from a notice in Diogenes Laertius about the fourth-century BC philosopher Heraclides, a student of Plato’s successor Speusippus. Heraclides wrote a number of “ethical dialogues,” none of which survive. Diogenes has this to say about their style:

“Apart from some of them which are in the style of comedy, for example the works On Pleasure and On Temperance, others in the style of tragedy, as the books entitled Of those in Hades, Of Piety, and Of Authority. Again, he has a sort of intermediate style of conversation which he employs when philosophers, generals

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27 Poetics I.1.1447a28-1447b11. Cf. Rhetoric III.16 1417a19-21. Also, Diogenes Laertius states that Plato was influenced in his style by the mimes of Sophron. (trans. Hicks, Loeb III p. 293) See too Athenaeus’ quote from Aristotle’s fragmentary On Poets: “And Aristotle in his On Poets (fr. 15) writes as follows: Should we, then, deny that the so-called Mimes of Sophron (test. 3), which lack a metrical character, are imitations of actual conversations, or that the same is true of the dialogues of Alexamenus of Teos, which were written before those that feature Socrates?” (Deipnosophists XI.505c, trans. Olson, Loeb Vol. V, p. 471)

28 Charalabopoulos 2012, 5ff.


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and statesmen converse with each other.” (Diogenes Laertius V.88-89, trans. Hicks, Loeb 543)

Plato was not the only one, then, to write philosophical dialogues that had a complicated relationship with drama and that were read against the background of dramatic terminology.

Plato’s Symposium also explicitly thematizes the elements of comedy and tragedy that have been woven into the dialogue. In addition to being set at a celebration of Agathon’s awarding of the prize for tragedy, Aristophanes’ presence at the party allows for Plato to comprehend both the tragic and the comic within his work, and to allude to the presence of both in the parting scene of Socrates trying to convince Aristophanes and Agathon that the same man can be adept at composing both types of drama (Symposium 223d, Cooper 505). Methodius of Olympus clearly shows that he knows about this “dramatic” tradition of dialogues, peppering his text with buzzwords involving the imagination, visualization and the stage, as I will discuss later on.

More specifically, dialogues are a mimesis of people having conversations. Diogenes Laertius offers a definition of dialogue in his biography of Plato that reflects the importance of characterization: “A dialogue is a discourse consisting of question and answer [ἐξ ἐρωτήσεως καὶ ἀποκρίσεως] on some philosophical or political subject, with due regard to the characters [μετὰ τῆς πρεπούσης ἡθοποιίας] of the persons introduced and the choice of diction” (Lives of the Philosophers III.48, trans. Hicks, Loeb Vol. 1, p. 319). Characterization is a vital part of the ekphrastic tool-kit used for philosophical dialogues, and the philosophical dialogue requires the

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30 “This is, arguably, the defining feature of drama: the imaginative presentation of persons...According to both Plato and Aristotle, poetic mimesis represents persons doing things.” (Blondell 2002, 16)
31 ἔστι δὲ διάλογος <λόγος> ἐξ ἐρωτήσεως καὶ ἀποκρίσεως συγκείμενος περί τινος τῶν φιλοσοφουμένων καὶ πολιτικῶν μετὰ τῆς πρεπούσης ἡθοποιίας τῶν παραλαμβανομένων προσώπων καὶ τῆς κατὰ τὴν λέξιν κατασκευής, διαλεκτική δὲ ἐστὶ τέχνη λόγου, δι’ ἧς ἀνασκευάζομεν τι ἢ κατασκευάζομεν ἐξ ἐρωτήσεως καὶ ἀποκρίσεως τῶν προσδιαλεγομένων.
characterization of multiple personalities. Vittorio Hösle, a recent theorist of the dialogic genre, divides all philosophical genres into three sub-genres: those primarily concerned with the content, those concerned with the author, and those concerned with the audience. He then claims that the philosophical dialogue the preeminent member of the third set, which is particularly concerned with intersubjectivity. Readers listen (and watch in their imaginations) a conversation among different speakers. The complications of setting philosophy among characters is offset by the benefits and multitudinous opportunities of subtle education that ensue.

Why would an author go through the considerable difficulty of conducting philosophy in the midst of complicated interpersonal relationships? Why represent philosophy in a dramatic form? The benefits are at least two-fold, and they correspond to the two main characteristics of the philosophical dialogue that distinguish it from other modes of philosophy. The first is the attractiveness that results from creating a fetching mimetic world. A description of setting and event brings about the engagement of the imagination, which is a vital step in creating desire. Secondly, after stoking desire, the dialogue teaches its readers how to become a member of the conversation, how to insert oneself into the relationships that are being depicted so that one can

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32 “These three aspects can easily be interpreted as manifestations of the fundamental philosophical categories of objectivity, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity…The differences between philosophical genres depend on which of these three properties is accented.” (Hösle 2012, 11)
33 “A dialogue involves at least two persons who speak with one another. A form of intersubjectivity is thus present not only in the creation of a literary universe by the writer of the dialogue, who must put himself in the place of another person; intersubjectivity is an essential element in the created literary universe itself.” (Hösle 2012, 18)
34 König 2012 lists the establishment of an imaginary community, both with “present-day intellectuals” as well as voices from the past, as one of the chief attractions of the Sympotic dialogue as a sub-set of the philosophical dialogue (König 2012, 40-52)
enter upon the life of philosophy oneself. The imaginative work involved for readers of a
dialogue trains them to undertake similar processes inside of themselves. 35

**Fantasizing Philosophers, Training the Imagination**

Swirling around Methodius’ main character, Thecla, are words of imagination. Thecla is
a fantasy, a fictional construction, who in turn encourages her listeners to construct phantasies of
their own: she is both a *phantasia*, and also an educator in salutary *phantasia*. One of
Methodius’ major educational purposes is to form in his readers the correct use of their
iminations. The *Symposium* is a plea to its readers to develop their imagination, which will
increase their desire through the enticement of beauty. Immediately after Thecla’s speeches have
been recounted, the external narrators comment upon her contribution, and upon her as a
speaker.

Gregorion: What then would you have said had you listened to her in person as
she spoke so gracefully with fluent tongue, with great charm and acclaim? All of
us who paid attention to her marveled at the way her beauty seemed to flower in
speech, how intelligently and truly vividly she developed her points [ός
ἐνδιαθέτως καὶ τῷ ὄντι φανταζόμενη], her face growing red with modest blush.
She is a woman wholly fair in body as well as in soul. (Musurillo 130) 36

Without its larger context the participle φανταζόμενη might not be a marked word, but it
certainly is one here. Gregorion, who was not even present at the party but needed to learn the
events from Theopatra’s narration, emphasizes the display that Thecla’s bodily performance

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35 Of course, the cynical underbelly of this potential is that it also allows authors to silence their
readers through giving sham questions room to play and thereby shutting down any other
questions (which may be more difficult to respond to).

36 ΓΡΗΓΟΡ. Τί οὖν, εἰ αὐτῆς ἐκείνης ἣμηκόεις ρύθην καὶ εὐτρόχω τῇ γλώσσῃ μετὰ πολλῆς
χάριτος καὶ ἱδρυνός διαλεγομένης; ὡστε ἀγασθήναι τινα προσέχοντα καὶ τῆς μορφῆς ἐπανθούσης
toῖς λόγοις, ὡς ἐνδιαθέτως καὶ τῷ ὄντι φανταζόμενη περὶ ὃν ἄφηγεῖτο διετέλει
ὑπερυθραινομένης αὐτῇ τῆς ὄψεως αἰδοί· ὁλὴ γὰρ εἶναι πέφυκε λευκὴ καὶ σῶμα καὶ ψυχήν.
Theopatra’s tale to Gregorion has caused her mind’s eye to make a vivid representation of the events, even down to the whiteness of Thecla’s body, suffused with a modest blush. Gregorion is a good imaginer, and she hopes to inspire a similar image in the mind of her interlocutor Eubulion through her narration.

Gregorion, Eubulion, and by extension the readers of the dialogue can feel comfortable with actively picturing Thecla because Thecla herself theorizes the endeavor of phantasia-making in her speech. There are two passages in Thecla’s first speech where she specifically encourages active image-making:

“For as soon as their souls have left the world, we are taught that angels meet the virgins and in solemn silence escort them to the meadows we spoke of, which they had longed to enter before, picturing them in their imaginations from afar, while, even though they still dwelt in their bodies, they had images of things divine [εἰς οὐς καὶ πρόσθεν ἐλθεῖν ἐγλίχοντο, μακρόθεν αὐτοῖς φαντασιωθέσαι τότε, ὅπως ἐτί ἐπενθημοῦσαί τοῖς σώμασιν ἱνδάλλοντο τὰ θεία]. (Thecla 8.2, Musurillo 107)

Imagining the life to come is meant both to stoke desire, and also to serve as a protection against temptation.

“But [the devil] misses and loses his prey, for the reborn are snatched up on high to the throne of God: that is, the minds of those who have been renewed are raised up to the divine throne and to the irrefragable foundation of truth, being taught to try to see and to picture to themselves the things of that world [τὰ ἐκεῖ βλέπειν καὶ τὰ ἐκεῖ φαντάζεσθαι παιδαγωγούμενον], and not to be tricked by the Dragon who tries to prevail over them. For he is not permitted to destroy those who look upwards and are turned towards heaven.” (Musurillo 115)

An important content of Christian education, a protection against the scheming wiles of the devil, is instruction in proper imagination, the longing construction of images of the life that is to come. Methodius has given an example to his readers of how this can be done by constructing dramatic dialogues set in an enticing location of virtuous camaraderie. Thecla is part of Methodius’ own
phantasia of the life to come, of the Gardens of Immortality, but only in a preliminary way since
Thecla has not yet entered the ultimate doors of the Bridegroom’s house. Methodius hopes that
his readers will have as actively imaginative a response to the telling of the story as Gregorion
did. But he also hopes that this imagining will become an activity that they do on their own,
apart from reading his books, in their own contemplations of what the beautiful afterlife looks
like.

And Thecla is not the only virgin rhetor to encourage image-making. In the third speech,
Theophila uses similar language.

To some it has never been given to attain virginity, while for others it is His wish
that they no longer defile themselves by lustful provocations, but that henceforth
they strive to preoccupy their minds with that angelic transformation of the body
wherein they neither marry nor are married according to the prophecies of the
Lord which cannot deceive. (Musurillo 57)

Τοίς μὲν γὰρ οὐδέπω συγκεχώρηκε παρθενίας τυχεῖν, τούς δὲ καὶ οὐκέτι βούλεται
χραίνεσθαι φοινισσομένους ἔρεθσομι, ἀλλὰ μελετᾶν ἀπενεθέθεν ἡδή καὶ
phantáζεσθαι τὴν ἰσάγελον μεταστοιχείωσιν τῶν σομάτων, ἐνθα «οὔτε γαμοῦσιν
οὔτε γαμίσκονται» κατὰ τούς ἄγευνεῖς τοῦ κυρίου χρησμοῦ· (Theophila 2.7)

Theophila is arguing for the legitimacy of the married life, even in a schema which privileges the
life of virginity. And she characterizes the virgin life in particular as one that involves the use of
the imagination, as they foster images of their future angelic, post-death lives.

But what role does phantasia have with desire? There has been much work done recently
on this topic among ancient philosophers, an excellent example of which is Jessica Moss’ book
on phantasia in Aristotle,37 where she explains his theory that “…every locomotion-inducing
desire is based, directly or indirectly, on an evaluative phantasia—a quasi-perceptual appearance

37 Moss 2012. See also Johansen 2012, Chapter 10 “Phantasia”. For the most comprehensive
overview of the topic of phantasia, see Watson 1988. For the changing definition of the term in
our time period, see Platt 2009 and Watson 1988, Chapter 4 “Transformation of Phantasia” and
Chapter 5 “The Neoplatonists.” For the ways in which Porphyry interacts with the Neoplatonic
interpreations of phantasia, see Sheppard 2007.
of the desired object as good” (Moss 2012, 49). The psychological purpose of *phantasia*, according to Aristotle, is to inspire movement in animals through the stirring of desire. For instance, a cake is only enticing if we *imagine* that it tastes good, which we do either through the memory of past experiences of eating cake or from what others have told us about cake. Likewise, we can cultivate our imaginations to desire certain things that we consider salutary, such as a life of virtue. Methodius seems to be working with very similar concepts.

In addition to the explicit plea for Christians to promote imaginative involvement in the life to come, Thecla is also the only virgin to use theatrical words in her speech, tapping into the traditional connection between the philosophical dialogue and drama, and emphasizing her own mimetic role.

“Learned men have told us that our life is a festival and that we have come into the theater to put on the drama of truth, that is, of justice, with the devil and his demons plotting and striving against us. Hence we must keep looking upwards, and, soaring on high, fly from the charm of their beautiful voices and from their forms, which are colored over on the outside with an appearance of continence, even more than we would from Homer’s Sirens.” (Musurillo 105-106)

This short passage wonderfully encapsulates the dual nature of Thecla. Using the allegory of the stage, she embraces a role as an object of representation to be gazed upon by others. But that life of the stage is deadly serious for the actors themselves, who must to keep their eyes glued above in order to move from the stage to the next level of reality.

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38 Επειδή γὰρ πανήγυριν τὸν βίον ἡμῶν εἶναι σοφῶν παιδείς εἰρήκασιν, ἡμᾶς δὲ τὸ δρᾶμα τῆς ἁλθείας τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἤκειν ὡς εἰς *θέατρον* ἐπιδειξόμενος—ἀντιτεχνοῦντων ἤκειν ὡς εἰς *θέατρον* ἐπιδειξόμενος—ἀντιτεχνοῦντων ἡμῖν καὶ ἀνταγωνιζοῦντων τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ τῶν δαιμῶνον—ἀνανεύοντας ἄνω δεῖ καὶ ἀνπαμένους μεταστρέφθαι καὶ φεύγειν τὰ θέλητρα τῆς καλλιφωνίας αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ σχήματα ἔχοντος φαντασία σωφροσύνης ἐπικεχροσμένα ἢ τὰς Σειρήνες μᾶλλον τὰς Ὀμηρικὰς

39 Thecla’s willingness to figure herself as an actress is quite surprising considering a typical polemical connection in other early Christian thinkers between the theatre and lewd sensuality, especially when women are on the stage. See Webb 2008, Chapter 8 “Ideas of the Audience: Possession and the Eye”, p.168-196, esp. p.179-187. Also see Leyerle 2001.
Methodius fantasizes an image, and within that *phantasia* his images in turn imagine—
Thecla creates a beautiful word-picture of the Gardens of Immortality that await the faithful virgin; completely unsurprisingly, the description almost perfectly matches the garden where they are holding their symposium.

Methodius can imagine the Gardens of Immortality, and he can imagine well-educated Christians imagining them. Through this doubling, he emphasizes the exemplary purpose of his work. He is trying to teach his readers the habit of anticipatory imagination, of saturating the present world with intimations of the world to come.

Correct understanding of this “fantastic education” makes sense out of the confusing postlude to the dialogue: Eubulion and Gregorion’s debate over whether it is better to be passionless or to feel passions and to overcome them. The arch of the argument is not to deny the sense-fueled imagination, as Gregorion first suggests, but rather to purify it and use it for good. Gregorion’s first position is that it would be better to be sealed shut and preserved entirely from external-induced *phantasia*.

Gregorion: “First of all, because such persons keep the soul itself pure; the Holy Spirit ever dwells within it, and it is never disturbed or dragged down by impure thoughts or imaginings which could sully the soul if it reflected on them [μὴ περιλκομένης αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπιθολουμένης *ϕαντασίαις* καὶ λογισμοίς ἀκρασίας]. Souls that have no concupiscence are inaccessible to lust in every way, in body and in mind, and live in tranquil freedom from passion. Those, however, who are deceived in their faculty of sight by images from without [Ὀἱ δὲ διὰ τῆς ὀψεως ἔξωθεν δελεαζόμενοι ταῖς *ϕαντασίαις*], and receive like a flood the onset of desire in their hearts, are nonetheless often soiled, even though they may think

40 „And when they arrive there, they behold things of marvelously glorious and blessed beauty, and such as are difficult to describe to men. There is Justice itself, and Love itself, and Truth and Prudence and all the other flowers and plants of Wisdom in like splendor, of which we in this world see merely ghost-like shadows as in a dream, when we think we see them come into being from the actions of men; because in this world there is no clear image of them, but only faint copies, and even these copies we often perceive only obscurely as we try to represent them to ourselves…Yes, there is a tree of essential Continence there, one of Love, and one of Understanding, just as truly as there are fruit trees in this world, such as the grape, the pomegranate, and the apple.” (8.3.176, Musurillo 107-108)
they fight and struggle against their lust, since they are conquered in mind.”
(Epilogue, Musurillo 159)

This argument of Gregorion’s is demolished by Eubulion’s spirited response. The chaste virgin should allow input into her senses, which had been called by Agathe “portals of wisdom” and “pathways of virtue” (σοφίας...πύλαις; τῶν πέντε διόδων τῆς ἁρετῆς; Musurillo 92-93). But Eubulion also includes a plea to police phantasia. Eubulion claims that by using the senses correctly, fortitude is increased, which is “the very driving force of virtue” (δύναμις ἁρετῆς ἐστιν ἡ ὑπομονή, Musurillo 162). Virtue is not found in a closing off, but in allowing in and controlling impressions from without.

Simon Goldhill uses this final interchange to make the opposite argument about Methodius’ Symposium. His investigation into narrative constructions of desire in Foucault’s Virginity takes the fact that Methodius returns to a framing narrative, against his Platonic model, to be a sign both of authoritarian shutting down of alternative readings, as well as a shutting down of desire. 41 He fails to notice that desire is fostered in the Symposium precisely through suasive language in a way similar to what Goldhill argues occurs in Daphnis and Chloe, and that the hymn which concludes the dialogue is an intense cry of longing to enter into the Divine Wedding Chamber. 42

41 His argument is crafted on a mistaken reading of the final interchange. He erroneously writes that the conclusion to their debate is that it is better not to have desire at all. “Methodius’ Gregorion and Euboulion end by agreeing (‘Aye, by Sophrosune!’) that it is ‘better to maintain virginity without experiencing desire than to be able to control one’s desire’ (Epilogue 293).” (Goldhill 1995, 4)

42 ‘In Longus’ sweet writing, sensual and narrative pleasure—to terpnon—overlap. The pleasure of this text is a real barrier—or lure—for a regulated reading within the Christian parameters inscribed paradigmatically by Methodius. Where Methodius ends his Symposium with a hymn sung by a choir of virgins, lauding chastity and god, Longus leaves us not merely with a grating wedding song, but with a carefully constructed moment of veiled voyeurism, as he takes us to the bedroom door and invites—but bars—our gaze within. If for Methodius knowledge of nakedness is the result of man’s fall, and flesh is thus ‘rotten meat’ to be ‘purified of its
However, Goldhill is right that there is a certain unease in Methodius’ text on the topic of pleasure. In fact, Gregorion’s view, although overcome by the opinion of Eubulion, has a good pedigree, being similar to the previous statement by no less an authority than the hostess Arete herself.

“It is most imperative then that anyone who intends to avoid sin in the practice of chastity must keep all his members and senses pure and sealed—just as pilots caulk a ship’s timbers—to prevent sin from getting an opening and pouring in.”43 (282.41-283.46, Musurillo 150)

Arete’s concluding statement after the virgins have finished their speeches is a salutary reminder not to become too nonchalant in our belief that Methodius embraced imagination, and the pleasure that it entails. Arete thanks the virgins for providing her with “no mere entertainment (γλυκυµυθίαν πρός τέρψιν τόν ἀκουόντων), but a document for their sobriety and self-improvement (πρός ἐπανόρθωσιν ὑπόμνημα καὶ νήψιν)” (279.1, Musurillo 149). The purpose of the speeches is not delight, terpsis, alone. She even reminds her women that the truly chaste virgin must control her pleasures in all respects, not only in sexual matters.44

In many ways, this simultaneous embracing of (and fear of) the pleasures resulting from the imagination parallels Plotinus’ stance toward the imagination. Plotinus thinks that there are two types of phantasia, that of the upper soul and that of the lower soul. Those in the upper soul putrefaction by the repeated application of the salt of sophrosune’ (I.13), for Longus innocence and knowingness—of fleshly desire, of the naked body, its mechanisms—are playful terms in his manipulative contract with the reader. The narrator’s opening prayer in Daphnis and Chloe for sophrosune, unlike Thecla’s prayers for sophrosune, establishes not so much an ideal as a ludic complicity with the reader. Longus’ erotics disrupt the regulatory force of a Methodius.” (Goldhill 1995, 44)

43 Δεί γάρ πάντως τὸν μέλλοντα μὴ ἀμαρτήσεις οἱ περὶ τὴν ἀσκησιν τῆς ἀγνείας τὰ μέλη πάντα καὶ τὰ αἰσθητήρια τηρεῖν ἑαυτοῦ καθαρὰ καὶ συνεσφιγμένα καθάπερ δὴ καὶ πλοίων ὄν ὁι κυβερνήται τάς ἄρμογάς σφίγγοις, πρὸς τῷ μὴ σχεῖν ἔσω διόδον τὴν ἀμαρτίαν ἐπεσιχεωμένην.
44 “For if a person endeavors to restrain his body from the pleasures of carnal love without controlling himself in other respects, he does not honor chastity; indeed, he rather dishonors it to no small degree by base desires, substituting one pleasure for another (βαναύσοις ἐπιθυμίαις ἡδονάς ἀντικαταλασσόμενος ἡδονάς).” (279.12-13, Musurillo 149)
come from memory of what we have experienced when our souls were with the One. Those in the lower soul come from sense perception and are dangerous and potentially misleading.\(^45\)

*Phantasia* was seen as a two-edged sword by the Neo-Platonists, which is a reflection of *phantasia’s* necessary connection with the body and the senses. As has been explicated by Watson, the Neo-Platonists were suspicious of *phantasia* since it is a primary means through which humans are tied to the body. On the other hand, following Aristotle, they believed that imagination was a necessary cognitive step between perception and cognition. In humans, imagination culminates in thought, unlike animals who remain only on the level of *phantasia*.\(^46\)

Methodius too believes in the motivational power of the imagination, while insisting that it be controlled and guided towards the right uses.

The type of safe pleasure Methodius is trying to encourage his readers to enjoy in their imagination is clearest to see at the beginning and the end, in the delicious description of the garden of Arete, and in the aesthetic explosion of the final poem. “This is a work designed to inspire and even to bring pleasure (some sections more successfully than others, perhaps) as well as to instruct” (König 2012, 155). Those who pick up the book are bewitched by the immediately gripping scene setting, which Eubulion exclaims is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden (Prelude 8, Musurillo 41). The virgins unabashedly enjoy their food (as Eubulion enjoys the description of it),\(^47\) and Arete says she desires nothing more than to hear speeches (ὅ θέλω λοιπὸν ἡδη, Prelude 9). In the middle, too, is the expression of excitement and delight that

\(^{45}\) Watson 1988, 102.


\(^{47}\) “After we had enjoyed a richly laden banquet, with every kind of good cheer added so that no delight was lacking [ὅς μηδενός εἶναι τῶν τερπνῶν ἐπιδεεῖς]’,…” (Prelude 9, Musurillo 41).
Eubulion and Gregorion have to hear Thecla speak in person. If images are supposed to provoke desire, creating the right kind of images provokes desire for the right things. The reader is reminded of the need to desire something further right at the end before they put the book down. Paradise is described in the seventh stanza as ready to receive the coming Bride and bridesmaids:

“O Queen arrayed in beauty, receive us too with open door within the bridal bower, O Bride of unsullied body, gloriously triumphant, breathing loveliness! At Christ’s side we stand in robes like thine, singing, O youthful maiden of thy blessed nuptials.” (stanza Eta, Musurillo 153)

Methodius leaves us with an image of virgins who are filled with eager anticipation in sexually charged allegorical language.

Thematized, too, is the desire for the pleasure of hearing speeches. In language that echoes the erotic longing for speeches expressed by both Socrates and Phaedrus in Phaedrus, 228a-c, Eubulion is imperious because of her desire. Perhaps the strongest statement of the desire to listen to such speeches comes at the end of the dialogue in the brief referral to the “Telmessian friend” who also heard about the events directly from Arete.

Eub. And tell me, what of our Termessian friend? Was she not listening from the outside? I should be surprised if she sat idle when she heard about this banquet and did not immediately run to listen to our discussions, like a bird in search of food. (Musurillo 157-158)

48 Since it appears that Thecla is on the other side of her death (which will be argued more in-depth in the final chapter of this dissertation), their excitement to hear her speak is also reminiscent of the “dialogue with the dead” tradition. See König 2012, 41-52.
49 The issue of pleasure arising from delightful rhetoric will be addressed in greater depth in the third chapter of this dissertation.
50 “So if you had anything else on your mind in coming here, do put it off and hurry and give me a complete and orderly account of everything that has to do with our request.” Εἰ οὖν ἐτέρου τινός ἔνεκα ἥλθες, τοῦτο εἰσαῶθις ἀναβαλομένη μὴ ὀκνήσῃς νῦν περὶ ὧν πυνθανόμεθα σου ἀκολούθως ἣμίν ἀπαντα διελθεῖν.
51 It seems that this is a unique phrase, but the food and animal metaphor calls to mind Socrates’ self-description of himself as a lover of conversation in Phaedrus 230e: “Socrates: ‘But you, I think, have found a potion to charm me into leaving. For just as people lead hungry animals
ΕΥΒ. Τί δαί; ἡ Τελμησσιακή ξένη, εἰπὲ μοι, κἂν ἔξωθεν οὐκ ἐπηκροᾶτο; Θαυμάζω γὰρ ἐν ψυχίᾳ εἶχεν ἐκείνη μαθεῦσα τὸ συσσίτιον τοῦτο καὶ οὐκ ἐνθέως ἀσπερ ὅρνιον ἐπὶ τροφηνέφισσατο τῶν λεγομένων ἄκουσομένη.

Not only is Eubulion speech-crazy, but the other recipient of the text, the Telmessian female guest, is speech-crazy as well, so much so that she is compared to an appetitive animal.

The dialogue has a strong emphasis on desire, but like imagination, that desire needs to be correctly directed. The only place in the *Symposium* where *terpsis* is used positively is in the initial description of the feast (Prelude 9, Musurillo 41). The other places where pleasure is explicitly mentioned, it carries a negative valence (11.279.1, Musurillo 149, quoted above, and twice in the fifth speech at 5.3 and 5.6). Pleasure, *terpsis*, is not a word that Methodius is comfortable with. Yet he is comfortable with the idea of creating rhetorical situations that entice through the encouragement of desire.

**Participatory Insertion**

Writing in such a manner as to vividly put before the eyes of the listeners the vision of what is occurring (ekphrasis) was one of the primary skills taught in an ancient rhetorical education, but the further purpose of this ekphrasis needs to be investigated. As mentioned above, Aristotle believes that the psychological purpose of *phantasia* is to create desire in locomotive animals.\(^{52}\) The role of phantasia in rhetorical usage was also to create desire and forward by shaking branches of fruit before them, you can lead me all over Attica or anywhere else you like simply by waving in front of me the leaves of a book containing a speech.”’ (Cooper 1997, 510)

\(^{52}\) See Johansen 2012, Chapter 10 “Phantasia”, and Moss 2012 “Phantasia and the Apparent Good” p. 48ff. “The appearance of goodness is thus the representation through *phantasia*—the memory, anticipation, imagination, or other quasi-perceptual simulation—of perceptible goodness. We now have an account of the apparent good as it functions in Aristotle’s account of locomotion. An appearance of goodness is a pleasurable, essentially motivating *phantasia* of an
thereby to persuade one’s listeners. But a dialogue is not only about persuading listeners to accept a certain position, it is also about teaching a particular method. Vividly presenting characterized interactions encourages listeners to put themselves into the position of interlocutor. It teaches the listeners to insert themselves into the philosophical endeavor of conversation.

As usual, Plutarch is at the forefront of generic innovation, and his extensive corpus includes a wide variety of dialogic styles. Among his dialogues, he includes some that reflect intensified educational settings in a way closer to the classroom than anything found in Plato. In one pair of dialogues in particular, he features lectures that display the techniques of dismantling the texts of other philosophical schools (here, in particular, the Epicureans): the Reply to Colotes and That Epicurus Actually Makes the Pleasant Life Impossible.54

The first work, the Reply to Colotes, stars Plutarch as teacher. Two of his pupils, Aristodemus and Theon, are trying to come to grips with a book they have recently read which encourages the Epicurean position that the gods have no interest in the world, and that providence is nonexistent. After the book is read out loud in their company, Aristodemus asks Plutarch to offer a counter-speech (1107F). Plutarch responds to their request and gives a point-by-point rebuttal of Colotes’ argument, which comprises the rest of the dialogue. The second

53 Watson 1988 explains that right around the time of Philostratus in the third century, the use of the word phantasia shifted from being primarily cognitive to being a word also used for creative imagination (Chapter 4 “The Transformation of Phantasia, esp. p. 91). As Verity Platt summarizes, “Watson has demonstrated in his study of phantasia that there is a significant shift in the Second Sophistic from the Stoic/middle Platonic use of the term as part of complex theorizing about the relationship between vision and knowledge, to the later, Philostratean appropriation of phantasia as a term for the aesthetic imagination” (Platt 2009, 151). Instead of dividing these two ideas as subsequent uses of the term, it might be more helpful to think of them as both involved in creating desire through making images in one’s mind from sense perceptions.

54 Reply to Colotes 1107D-1127E and That Epicurus Actually Makes the Pleasant Life Impossible 1086C-1107C. Both are found in Vol. 14 of Plutarch’s Moralia Loeb (ed. Einarson and De Lacy).
dialogue, *That Epicurus Actually Makes the Pleasant Life Impossible*, follows in immediate
dramatic sequence. Now that Plutarch has responded to Colotes’ objections, Aristodemus and
Theon desire to make positive arguments against Colotes’ position and not only to defend their
position (1087A). Plutarch claims that he is too tired from his earlier reply to take on this new
task, and leaves the project to Aristodemus and Theon.

> ‘Then why,’ said Theon, ‘if you approve the subject, do you not follow it up
> yourself, now that the opportunity offers?’ ‘I will follow it up,’ I answered, ‘by
> being a listener, and, if you desire it, by answering questions; but I leave the
> conduct of the discussion to you and the rest.’ (1087C, trans. Einarson and De
> Lacy, Loeb XIV.21)

Plutarch removes himself from the fray, positioning himself as an expert teacher who can help
out his students in case they get stuck, but who hopes he will be vindicated as a teacher by the
fact that such help will be unnecessary (which in fact turns out to be the case). There are further
points to be made against Colotes, but Plutarch passes the baton to his two students. Have they
learned enough by his example to continue the process further on their own? Theon begins the
project, and then he, in turn, hands it over to Aristodemus to finish it. Plutarch plays the role of a
(mostly silent) judge.

> ‘Not if you make me the judge,’ I [Plutarch] answered. ‘You are not declared
guilty of any kind of slander; therefore proceed with the rest of the argument
undeterred.’
> ‘How so?’ he said; ‘is not Aristodemus to take up where I leave off, supposing
that you are too spent to go on?’
> ‘That I will do,’ said Aristodemus, ‘when you are quite exhausted like our friend
here. But you are still going strong, bless your heart; exert your powers if you
don’t want to be taken for a quitter.’ (1096F-1097A, trans. Einarson and De Lacy,
Loeb 83-83)

In these two dialogues the “opponent” is not present in person, only mediated through a text. All
of the characters who participate in the dialogue are on the same “side,” and, although the
argument is divided among the three speakers, they present a unified perspective. The point of
the dialogue is to perform the educational process. Readers watch Plutarch’s students learn how to perform philosophical debate on a textual level. Just as all of Methodius’ virgins fundamentally agree that the life of chastity should be pursued and praised, and their varied speeches function as threads woven into one variegated encomium, so too Plutarch, Aristodemus and Theon each contribute to the reply to Epicureanism in a multi-form contribution.

The place where this participatory insertion is most clearly seen in Methodius’ work is in the reaction of the internal listeners in the framing narrative. To begin with, Methodius dramatizes the good virgin’s eagerness to hear instruction in Eubulion’s early eagerness to hear the full account of the symposium from Gregorion. But her suitability as a listener is originally questioned.

Greg. Eubulion, you are always so clever in discussion, and argumentation is your speciality. You simply get the better of everyone!
Eub. Please, Gregorion, do not work yourself into an argument on that subject now. Do fall in with our request and tell us exactly what happened from the beginning.
Greg. I shall try my best. But first of all, let me ask you a question. Of course you know Arete, the daughter of Philosphia? (Musurillo 39)

ΓΡΗΓ. Αἰεὶ δεινὴ ἐν ταῖς ὀμηλίαις καὶ φιλοπευστοῦσα, ὃς Εὐβοῦλιος, σφόδρα τυγχάνεις ἀπαντας ἀτεχνῶς ἐξελέγχουσα.
ΕΥΒ. Ὁὐκ ἄξιον περὶ τούτων, ὃς Γρηγόριον, νῦν σε φιλονεικεῖν· ἀλλ’ ὅπερ ἐδεόμεθά σου, διήγησαι ἡμῖν τὰ γεγονότα ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ μὴ ἄλλως ποίει.
ΓΡΗΓ. Ἐγὼ δὴ πειράσομαι. Πρῶτον δὲ μοι αὐτὴ ἀπόκριναι· γινώσκεις δήπου τὴν θυγατέρα Φιλοσοφίας Ἀρετήν; (PG 31C-32A)

Gregorion wonders whether Eubulion is earnest in her enquiry, or just looking for a good discussion. Even after Eubulion assures her that she knows this is not the time for a verbal wrangle, Gregorion marks her hesitation by asking her an important first question. Does she know virtue? Although we soon realize that this is the proper name of a character, when Gregorion first asks the question, it could just as well mean: “Eubulion, do you understand the
virtue which is born of philosophy? Do you understand that the point of argumentation is not the pleasure of the debate, but a life well lived?”

Gregorion’s hesitation about Eubulion’s motives continues in the concluding interchange between these two characters. The whole dialogue concludes not with Thecla’s poem, but with the lively interchange between Gregorion and Eubulion. It comes as something of a surprise, not only because it is one of the major structural differences from Plato, but because Eubulion and Gregorion do not choose to comment directly upon the foregoing speeches that they have just recounted and heard recounted. Instead, Eubulion immediately begins a discussion with Gregorion on a related but different topic of the presence of concupiscence in the holy human: is it better to be entirely without desire, or to have temptations but constantly struggle against them? From being the recipient of instruction, Eubulion quickly becomes the protagonist in the conversation, egging on and taking control of the interchange. Gregorion begins confident in her opinion. Eubulion starts to tease her with mock praise, and when Gregorion calls her out on this point, Eubulion responds that she is only trying to undercut Gregorion’s too-easy certainty:

EUB. “You must say that, my dear. Really, I have great admiration for your intelligence and your reputation. But I said what I did because you not only claim to understand something which many philosophers frequently dispute among themselves; but you even boast that you can explain it to others.” (Musurillo 158-159)

ΕΥΒ. Εὔφήμησον, ὦ μακαρία· θαυμάζω γὰρ σφόδρα σου τὸ συνεῖτον καὶ μεγαλόδοξον. Ἔγὼ τούτῳ ἔφην ὅτι περὶ ὧν πολλοὶ πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς πολλάκις ἀμφισβητοῦσι σοφοί, ταῦτα οὐ μόνον ἑπίστασθαι σὺ λέγεις ἄλλα καὶ διδάσκειν ἐπέρους σεμινῦνη.

Like other σοφοῖ Eubulius wants to continue this conversation, not allowing it to be cut off prematurely with Gregorion’s claim to certainty.

While Eubulion apparently convinces Gregorion of the correctness of her position that it is better to have desire and struggle to overcome it, Gregorion puts off a final conclusion to the
debate until a further time, and in her manner of doing so, betrays further the complete change in
dynamics between the two women.

Greg. ‘Yes, that is true, and I should like to discuss this further with you. So, if
you like, I shall come back tomorrow and listen again to these matters. But now,
as you see, it is already time to go and to give attention to the outer man.’

ΓΡΗΓ. Ἀληθῆ λέγεις, καὶ ἐπιθυμήσω πληρέστερον ἐτι περὶ τούτων διαλεχθῆναι
σοι. Εἰ οὖν σοι φίλον, αὐριον ἀφίξομαι πάλιν ἀκουσομένη τούτων. Νῦν γὰρ, ὡς
ὅρας. ἀρα λοιπὸν τραπέσθαι καὶ περὶ τὴν τοῦ ἔξωθεν ἀσχολίαν ἡμᾶς ἄνθρώπου.

Gregorion throughout the dialogue has been the speaker, relating the story of the banquet about
which she previously heard. At the end, there was a vital change in the positions between the
two women, Eubulion gaining the upper hand. Gregorion ends the entire work with her stated
desire to return tomorrow and continue listening to Eubulion, whom she has spent the whole day
speaking to.

Eubulion’s patient and dogged listening to the long tale told her by Gregorion ends in her
becoming a speaker herself, ends in her instigating a philosophical debate with her former
teacher. Methodius thereby holds out a promise to his readers: if they first learn how to listen,
then they will also learn how to speak. In the first speech by Marcella, Methodius placed another
hidden plea for the readers of the text to patiently listen until the end.55

‘Thus, as blessed Paul says, the unmarried woman thinketh on the things of the
Lord, how she may please God, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.
But there are many women who consider religious instruction (τὴν ἀκρόασιν) a
waste of time, and think they are doing something wonderful if they listen to it
(παράσχωσι τὰς ἄκοας) even for a short time. These we ought to exclude. For it
is not right to share the divine teachings with a creature that is petty, mean, and
pretends to be wise. For would it not be ridiculous to go on talking to such who
waste all their efforts on insignificant trifles, trying to fulfill their own desires
down to the last detail, without ever a thought for the heroic efforts which are
absolutely essential if the love of continence is to grow in them?’ (Marcella 1.1,
Musurillo 43)56

55 König 2012, 160 also notes the programmatic nature of this passage.
56 «Ἡ γὰρ ἀγαμός μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κυρίου, πώς ἄρέσει τῷ κυρίῳ, ἵνα ἡ ἁγία καὶ σώματι καί
Listening (ἀκρόασις) is not a distraction or a hobby (πάρεργον), but requires enduring great
difficulties (μεγίσται αἱ ἀκριβείαι) in order to feed the love of modesty (αὐτὸς ὁ τῆς σωφροσύνης ἔρως). If the readers persist in listening to the entire content of the Symposium, they will learn
how to correctly combine seriousness of purpose (knowing that the daughter of Philosophy is
Virtue, not pleasure in rhetorical artistry), while simultaneously enjoying themselves immensely,
like Eubulion herself, and like the virgins at the symposium. There are as many ways of
speaking about the truth as there are participants, and the desire for variety will never be satiated.
Methodius wants to take over the traditional educational setting of the Symposium to teach a
new elite a new topic on which to use their mental ingenuity. Methodius wishes to divert the
ingenuity typically used in sympotic occasions unto a new subject: biblical interpretation. The
pleasures of education are not lacking in this new, Christianized setting, but are intensified
because of the freshness of the material and bracing seriousness of purpose. And the project
promises to be insatiable. You can always add one more speech. The conversation can always
be extended to tomorrow.

Methodius writes a dialogue set in a scene that deeply engages the imagination. He
legitimates this move by putting in the mouth of his star character, Thecla, justifications for the
use of the imagination in contemplative ascent. The goal of the Meadows of Immortality should
be imagined vividly in order to increase the desire of the virgins to achieve then. In turn, readers
of the dialogue also experience an increase of desire to enter into the life they are witnessing.
They are shown that this is possible through scripted internal receptions, as Eubulion turns from being only a listener of the account to being an originator of philosophical conversations herself. Methodius embraces the mimetic nature of dialogues and finds a theological justification for its use.

**Part II: Changing Interpersonal Constellations**

If participatory insertion is a vital goal for writers of dialogues, it becomes an important concern into what community of philosophers they wish to induce their readers. Authors of dialogues have the opportunity to depict and promote certain types of relationships into which the reader is meant to enter. The way that the participants relate to each other illuminates the structuring of the social arrangements, and the relative levels of authority among interlocutors. Are the interlocutors fundamentally equals or is there a noticeable power differential among them that is emphasized in the discussion? Who is leading the conversation and how?

When scholars mention an increase in authoritarianism among later dialogues, moving away from what they believe to be truly dialogic and into the monologic, what they are often noticing is a change in the typical relationships depicted in the philosophical dialogues. As antiquity progresses, there *does* seem to be a shift to dramatize teacher-pupil interactions and the more frequent presence of a judge or umpire whose role is to adjudicate between sides in the debate. I will go through some examples of these two changes before turning to examine how Methodius participates in these changes and the repercussions of this for discussions about the open or closed nature of his *Symposium*.

**A. How to Ask a Question: The Classroom**
A frustration many readers experience in reading certain philosophical dialogues is that there can be an extreme power differential among the speakers, one often taking the role of the questioner and one of questioned. Unexpectedly, the power-roles do not uniformly align along the same axis, even when there is a clear hierarchy of roles. Socrates takes the role of questioner, although he guides the conversation. Later in the tradition, it is mainly the student who ask questions of a teacher.

Because dialogue always represents philosophy happening among different people, it would be important to note if there was a change in the characterization of the relationships depicted. Changing social patterns should express themselves in the change in execution of the philosophical dialogue. Into the Imperial period, more and more dialogues are set in the classroom, courtroom, and auditorium rather than the marketplace. My claim is that it is not Christianity that brought about these changes. It is not a need for greater consensus because of an ossification of dogma, but rather a change in the typical setting of philosophy and, along with it, a change in relationship patterns. There was an intensification of interest in the more mundane aspects of paideia-acquisition (i.e. schoolrooms). The change in relationships often goes hand-in-hand with an incorporation of a greater amount of question-and-answer into the dialogue. Richard Lim suggests that this is because of the rise of the concept of the philosopher-sage in the Imperial period, and the concomitant change in the model of education (Lim 2009, 152). While he is right to suggest this thesis for some of our texts (e.g. the intensely erotic

57 “As philosophers increasingly came to be regarded in the popular tradition as sages, their role in dialogues more and more assumed that of a figure of authority that responds to questions posed by disciples. They were also presented as the objects of the readers’ own philosophical pursuit and, indeed, erotic longing. The rise of the philosopher-sage in the postclassical period parallels the use of question-and-answer dialogues in which the master’s teachings are systematically expounded with only lip service paid to the principle of dialectical exchange.” (Lim 2009, 152, emphasis mine)
language Gregory Thaumaturgus bestows on his teacher Origen), often the teachers in these new classroom settings are rather too banal to be considered philosopher-sages. The opening of Dexippus’ fourth century AD Neo-Platonic Dialogue on the Categories of Aristotle is a good example of the pedestrian nature of many of these classroom dialogues. Dexippus replies to his eager student Seleucus by referencing those who have done what he has done before better, and with a plea to limit the questions to the acknowledged cruxes in the text.

“I am glad, then, on the one hand, to accede to your request, but I have resolved to agree from afar, as do cowardly contestants, because it is hard to contradict the Platonic philosopher Plotinus when he has produced such penetrating difficulties. However, for your sake I will not shrink from going forth, like the Homeric hero, ‘even against a divinity’. But do you aid me in the argument by not insisting on detailed exegeses; for many scholars, in particular Porphyry, and then later Iamblichus, have produced a vast number of commentaries on this work, difficult to master because of their bulk. So then, that I may not fall into the same situation as them, please confine your questions to the disputed questions. For it is not my ambition to fill any deficiencies in their treatments (I do not flatter myself so much), but I simply wish to provide solutions which are swift and concise and clear.” (5.1-15, Dillon 1990, 21)

The fact that philosophers were growing in authority is marked in this passage—Dexippus treats his Neo-Platonic predecessors almost like divinities—but he himself stages his teaching in the dialogue as a derivative, everyday affair. That the student now asks the questions instead of the teacher is not necessarily a symptom of the increase in the spiritual authority of the philosophical teacher, but a result of the fact that more authors found it attractive to use the form of the philosophical dialogue to reflect the reality of the classroom. While Richard Lim believes this move to the classroom is due to the fact that the authority of the philosopher as teacher was increasing, I am more taken with Hösle’s suggestion (looking both to Near East antecedents to the Socratic dialogues as well as the continuation of the genre into the Middle Ages) that the
teacher-pupil model is the intuitive one for dialogic texts, from which the Platonic counter-
examples are an aberration.\(^{58}\)

Plutarch has once again provided us with a useful passage to begin thinking about asking
questions of an expert instructor. In *How to Listen to Lectures*, he gives advice about how to
construct a useful and appropriate question following a lecture.

“However, when the speaker requests his hearers to ask questions or to propose
problems, one should always manifestly propose some problem which is useful
and essential...It is quite necessary that in formulating questions the questioner
should accommodate himself to the proficiency or natural capacity of the speaker,
to those matters ‘in which he is at his best’...A man must also guard against
proposing many problems or proposing them often himself. For this is, in a way,
the mark of a man who is taking occasion to show himself off. But to listen good-
naturedly when another advances them, marks the considerate gentleman and the

Plutarch’s advice can be helpfully compared with his Syriac-speaking Christian contemporary’s
advice to students looking for wisdom through conversation. Bardaisan’s *Book of the Laws of
the Countries*, which would be better titled *Dialogue on Fate*, treats this issue in its opening
setting.\(^{59}\) Bardaisan says to the young Awida:

“If you wish to learn, it is better that you should learn from some one who is older
than they. But if you wish to teach, it is not right that you put questions to them,
but you must persuade them to ask you whatever they like. For it is teachers who
are questioned, but they themselves do not put questions. And if they do (it is) to
lead the ideas of the one who is questioned upon the right track, so that he may

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\(^{58}\) “Despite the many dialogues in other cultures we can maintain that the Greeks succeeded in
elevating the genre to a new level, among other reasons because alternatives to the teacher-pupil
dialogue were discovered.” (Hösle 2012, 74) It did this by imbuing it with drama: “Similarly,
from a formal point of view it is clear that dramatic dialogue in general and stichomythia in
particular were the great school of philosophical dialogue.” (Hösle 2012, 75) He believes that
only in periods of cultural transition are there exciting innovations to the teacher-pupil dialogue.
“The least fascinating subgenre, the teacher-pupil dialogue, can be used, and is, during periods
when tradition is transmitted in a normal way, and it was thus favored in the Middle Ages…”
(Hösle 2012, 120-121)

\(^{59}\) For an edition with commentary, see Drijvers 1964. The fundamental work on Bardaisan is
Drijvers 1966, but for a more recent analysis of his writings and legacy, see Ramelli 2009.
put good questions and they may understand his meaning. For it is an excellent thing that a man knows how to formulate questions.” (Drijvers 1964, 5-7)

Such a warning would be completely unexpected coming from the mouth of Socrates, who believes strongly in education via the student being questioned rather than posing questions. To know who is the originator of the question is not sufficient to correctly understand who is in control. Rather, a broader view must be taken of the personal interactions among the interlocutors.

An increase in the occurrence of classroom settings for dialogues does not necessarily mean a move away from Socratic questioning to lectures. A wonderful example of the combination of Socratic questioning with an auditory/classroom setting is preserved in Gregory Thaumaturgus’ Thanksgiving in Praise of Origen. As Gregory recollects, potential students were first captured through listening to Origen’s lectures. After Origen had captured the attention of a new student, he inducted him into a life of Socratic dialogue:

“These are the kind of people he [Origen] takes, and surveying them thoroughly with his farming skill, he understands not only what is visible to all and out in the open to see, but also digs down and tests their innermost parts, questioning and probing and listening to the answers.” (7.95, Slusser 1998, 106)

After this Socratic softening, the next step in their formal training was to learn to listen to the content of the arguments made instead of the rhetoric used in making them. Gregory recounts how Origen explicitly misled them in conversation in order to teach them not to trust in beautiful rhetoric alone.

“On occasion he would trip us up in speech, challenging us in thoroughly Socratic fashion, every time he saw us fighting the reins like unbroken horses, veering off the road and running aimlessly every which way, until by persuasion and coercion, as by the bit which was the word from our own mouth, he made us stand quietly before him. At first it was hard for us and not without grief, as he was introducing us novices, who had never practiced following an argument, to his own reasoning, and purifying us at the same time.” (7.97, Slusser 1998, 107)
The role that Socratic dialectic plays in Origen’s regimen is to prepare the ground for education, but it is not the content of education itself. Origen follows his lesson in the dangers of rhetoric with a rigorous positive education starting with natural philosophy and moving on to ethics and finally to theology. Origen’s education is not just an education in method, but is at the service of a definite content, of which Origen is the eroticized dispenser.

Gregory Thaumaturgus must have taken to heart this Socratic questioning style of Origen, because he chooses to use it himself in *To Theopompus, on the Impassibility and Passibility of God*. There, like in Bardaisan’s dialogue, the setting is similar to a classroom, although in a less formalized way. Gregory is on his way to “where friends used to gather” when someone outside of the circle, a certain Theopompus, runs after him and asks him to take up the question of whether God can suffer. Gregory wishes to avoid the question, but it seems like this is less because the topic does not interest him as it is because Theopompus is not one of his circle. When he arrives at the place where his friends are, he explains, “I was on the point of asking them about what I had said the previous day…” (Slusser 1998, 152). Gregory is ready for a philosophical discussion, but only with those he knows and with whom he has a relationship. The way that Theopompus persuades him to address his query is by placing himself in the position of Gregory’s student.

“…coming right up to me he began to speak thus: ‘The uneducated and those unfamiliar with doctrine, O Gregory, should be eager to learn from teachers and those with wide experience. But because I have decided to occupy myself intensely with this question which lies before us, I beg you to propose a remedy for these conflicting thoughts, which are constantly in my mind and leave me no rest. I beg you to help me by your clear and competent explanations relative to this question which is addressed to us.’” (Slusser 1998, 152)

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60 For an investigation into the social formation of Christian circles and an illuminating comparison with the process of community formation among sophists, see Eshleman 2012.
In this dialogue, Theopompus and Gregory agree that the basis of a philosophical discussion is the proposal of a question. And the hope held out is that the wise teacher will be able to answer a student’s well-put question. Theopompus legitimates his inclusion in the circle by bringing a particularly pressing question for discussion. But Gregory must first accept the question as a fruitful one; he must give up his previous agenda of asking them about his lecture of the previous day. Gregory needs to be convinced that Theopompus is someone who can enter upon an educational track similar to the one he learned from Origen, where he dispenses wisdom to a soul prepared through Socratic questioning.

The fundamental importance of asking questions to form a dialogue is also evidenced in the vestigial dialogue form used in both Imagines of the Philostratii, who were both writing in the second century. The evidence from Philostratus the Elder’s Imagines is particularly interesting in this regard. In his preface, Philostratus explains that he wishes to “praise” the paintings in his host’s villa (ἐγὼ μὲν ἀπ’ ἐμαντοῦ ὃμην δὲ ἐπαινεῖν τὰς γραφὰς). When his host’s son asks him to explain them to him, he obliges. But the conceit is more complicated than that. A group of students have come to hear him lecture on the paintings. He addresses them all implicitly, but only directly addresses the son of the house. He encourages his auditors to interrupt him and ask him questions if he says anything that is unclear.

“I said, ‘Let me put the boy in front and address to him my effort at interpretation; but do you follow, not only listening but also asking questions if anything I say is not clear.’” (1.1.4, 296K, trans. Fairbanks, Loeb 7)

“ὁ μὲν παῖς ἐφην “προβεβλήθω καὶ ἀνακείσθω τοῦτο ἢ σπουδή τοῦ λόγου, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐπέσθε μὴ ἐξυνθιθέμενοι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐρωτώντες, εἰ τι μὴ σαφῶς φράζοιμι.”
For the entire text, though, the students are silent. The few questions that are present could very well be rhetorical rather than actual, revealing how necessary the possibility of asking questions was for the establishment of an educational setting, for the conceit of a dialogue, even when no questions are actually asked. Philostratus taps into the mimetic tradition of philosophical dialogues, even while only producing a truncated version of one that is almost entirely monologic. The Imagines of Philostratus the Younger make even more explicit the fact that the interlocutor’s presence is a fiction only vestigially necessary.

“But in order that our book may not proceed on one foot, let it be assumed that there is a person present to whom the details are to be described, that thus the discussion itself may have its proper form.” (trans. Fairbanks, Loeb 287)

The “harmony” (ἀρμότητον) of the imagined dialogue requires that there be an engaged student who listens and asks questions from the expert teacher.

In a world where it was becoming more comfortable and fashionable to depict settings where students pepper a wise teacher with questions who then solves them, Methodius’ Symposium looks even more Socratic. The hierarchy is mild, even though there are superior participants: Arete, the hostess, Thecla, the winner, and Marcella, the oldest.

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61 Places where there are questions: Perhaps at I.10.3 “What is Amphion saying?” but the text is corrupt. I.13 “Why do you not go on to another painting? This one of the Bosphorus has been studied enough for me.” (trans. Fairbanks, Loeb 55), I.26 “Now what was the theft?” (trans. Fairbanks, Loeb 101) It is hard to know if some of these are rhetorical questions or are supposed to be imagined as coming from the boy (or other students). II.6.3 “And as to the wrestling?” (trans. Fairbanks, Loeb 151) “Why do the Muses come hither? Why are they present at the source of the Meles?” (II.8.6, trans. Fairbanks, Loeb 163). At II.17.1 Philostratus “scripts” the boy’s response, cutting off genuine contribution.

62 Another intense educational setting occurs in the Pinax of Cebes, which was composed at some point in the Imperial period (see Fitzgerald and White 1983).

63 “When Arete welcomes them to the garden, she stresses the homogeneity of the group who will dine together…” (König 2012, 160)
are gathered are not gathered around a teacher, and they do not form a habitual class. There are few questions in the *Symposium*, and each participant is placed on equal participatory footing. Although Marcella is allowed to speak first because she is oldest, no other system is mentioned for the order in which Arete asks the virgins to speak. If dialogues are moving more towards closed methods of the classroom, perhaps Methodius’ competitive setting carves out a space where dialogues can still be open.

The only two “inferior” questioners in the entire *Symposium* are Eubulion and Methodius himself in his cameo appearance, said to have questioned Arete eagerly about the content of the Symposium. Asking to hear about what happened is not the same as asking a teacher for solutions to dilemmas. Those not invited to the symposium, the eager listeners to the conversation, are positioned lower, utterly dependent on their sources to hear the story, which results in highlighting the equality of the participants of the contest to which they are listening. One of the main reasons that there is such a dearth of questions in the *Symposium* is because there is no expert who is answering the questions. Arete, who could be that person, instead elicits responses from the women and remains primarily silent. She is called “teacher and guide” (τοιαύτη διδασκάλῳ…καὶ ὁδηγῷ) in the Epilogue, but her teaching is not that of a wise answerer of questions, which is what the surrounding dialogic literature might lead us to expect.

**B. The Trial of Words: The Courtroom**

In contrast with his Platonic model, one of the surprises of Methodius’ *Symposium* is that the speeches are delivered in the context of a competition, and Arete is judge as well as hostess. After the dinner has been consumed, Arete proposes the subject of competition and promises the prize.

“Now what shall we do next? What do you suppose I wish and look forward to?"
That each of you deliver a panegyric on virginity. Let Marcella begin. She is the eldest and reclines in the place of honor. Now I give you my word: whoever wins the contest, I should be ashamed of myself if I did not make her one to be envied; I shall crown her with an exquisite garland of wisdom (τοῖς ἄμισντοις τῆς σοφίας ἀναδήσασα πετάλοις).” (Musurillo 41)

Since Arete praises one of the speeches above the others, declaring Thecla’s speech to be the best, it is tempting to see a move towards official sanctioning of one position in a dialogue, and a concomitant shutting down of the other voices in the conversation. But this easy assumption of Thecla’s monovocality is complicated by the fact that each of the virgins is awarded a crown; Thecla’s is only the biggest and thickest.

“And now, after hearing you compete so efficiently in this contest of words, I declare and crown all of you as winners; but to Thecla I must give a larger and thicket chaplet, for she has been your leader and has shone more magnificently than the rest.” (Musurillo 151)

The differences among the virgins are allowed to persist and are supported by Arete’s declaration of their combined success. Yet, how restricted were the virgins in what they contributed to the discussion if variation of form is the only thing permitted, not variation of content? Is the presence of a judge a distinct result of Methodius’ Christianity and its need for authoritative discourse?

Within the Platonic corpus, there are a few places where a judge (almost) appears. The most memorable is in the Apology, where the silent presence of the jury is an ever-present reality in the dialogue. These judges are characterized negatively, as biased and incompetent, wishing to hear from Socrates a certain type of law court speech to which they are accustomed. Socrates refuses to pander to them, instead insisting on the philosophic mode that is standard to him (38d-
e, Cooper 34). In two other dialogues, something approaching a courtroom setting is suggested, only to be rejected. In both, Plato posits a fundamental difference between the type of talking done in law courts and those done among philosophers. In the first, at *Laches* 196b4ff, Laches makes the distinction between a courtroom debate and a dialogue fundamental. “Laches: If we were making speeches in a court of law, there might be some point in doing this, but as things are, why should anyone adorn himself senselessly with empty words in a gathering like this?”

In the second, *Protagoras* 338a-e, Hippias suggests that a judge be appointed to moderate the debate between Protagoras and Socrates. Socrates refuses this suggestion, saying that it is impossible to pick a judge, and leaving the judgment to the entire group of bystanders.

In the face of the rejection of adjudication in the Platonic corpus, it is interesting that judges were often present in Imperial dialogues. In fact, during the Imperial period there was an influx of influence from law court practices into the philosophical dialogue. Christian examples are Minucius Felix’s third-century Latin *Octavius* and an early fourth-century (?) descendent of Methodius’ *Symposium*, the *Adamantius*. But having a judge present to adjudicate between sides in a dialogue is not a Christian innovation. Plutarch’s *Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer* (*De sollertia animalium*) is a useful comparandum to Arete’s role of judge in Methodius’ *Symposium*. With the presence of a judge, the focus of education shifts. Instead of being focused on the interlocutors, the focus moves to the listener, the judge, those gathered around who must render a verdict, and by extension, onto the reader as judge (especially where the final verdict is avoided, as in Plutarch).

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64 εἰ μὲν οὖν ἐν δικαστηρίῳ ἦμιν οἱ λόγοι ἦσαν, εἴχεν ἂν τινα λόγον ταῦτα ποιεῖν· νῦν δὲ τί ἂν τις ἐν συνουσίᾳ τοιάδε μάτην κενοῖς λόγοις αὐτός αὐτὸν κοσμεῖ; (p. 681 Cooper ed.)
65 Hösle remarks that this is really a backhanded way of praising Socrates’ unique position (Hösle 2012, 280).
66 In another dialogue of Methodius, the *Aglaophon*, “Eubulus” is chosen as a judge.
Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer is set in the educational community surrounding Plutarch’s father, Autobulus.\textsuperscript{67} The subject under debate arose the night before during a symposium, when a speech in praise of hunting was read aloud, and the young men were exercised enough to ask for a more formalized follow-up conversation on the next day.

“Yesterday, as you know, we proposed the thesis that all animals partake in one way or another of reason and understanding, and thereby offered our young hunters a field of competition not lacking in either instruction or pleasure: the question of whether land or sea animals have superior intelligence. This argument, it seems, we shall to-day adjudicate if Aristotimus and Phaedimus stand by their challenges; for Aristotimus put himself at his comrades’ disposal to advocate the land as producer of animals with superior intelligence, while the other will be pleader for the sea.” (960A, trans. Cherniss and Helmbold, Loeb XII 325)

Two of the best students were chosen to represent the opposing sides of the question. Upon the arrival of the competitors and their supporters, a judge is appointed from among their number and in turn each presents his arguments about the relative superiority of land or sea animals. The educational setting has been formalized away from the more casual sympotic conversation of the night before into a mock trial. The teachers, goaded by the eager students, have set up a formal debate complete with judge. In the first half of the dialogue, the two older men discuss the rationality of animals before the arrival of the young men and the commencement of the debate. And at the end, like so many other dialogues of Plutarch, the dialogue trails off in a surprising way, and no winner is declared.\textsuperscript{68} The trappings of the courtroom are explicit, although frustrated at the end when the judge gives no judgment.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{67} While there is no assurance that this Autobulus is Plutarch’s father, Mossman, at least, believes this to be the case. Mossman 2005,142.

\textsuperscript{68} Mossman believes that the dialogue’s inconclusive ending is a purposeful transition away from the question of the relative superiority of aquatic and terrestrial animals into an anti-Stoic argument about animal rationality. “Finally, it is important that the competition is revealed at the end to be something of a rhetorical device in itself: for all that stress is laid on the competitiveness with which the competitors approach their task, through the legal and athletic..."
Considering Plato’s allergy to the language of the law court in his dialogues, the presence of courtroomesque dialogues complete with judges might lead us to suspect an important shift in generic expectations during the Imperial period. But the question remains: does providing a dialogue with a judge necessarily mean that a dialogue has become closed?

In addition to the courtroom, there is another vital arena of public speaking involving judgment that rose up during this period and most likely influenced Christian dialogues: the public doctrinal dispute common in Christian councils. Although nothing like *Acta* survive from pre-Nicene doctrinal meetings of the Christians, we do have some texts that give insight into this method of dispute. The earliest is the description of what later came to be known anachronistically as the Council of Jerusalem in the *Book of Acts*, Chapter 15, where Paul and Barnabas present speeches on the issues confronting the early church such as Gentile circumcision and the observance of dietary laws. At the end of the debate, a judgment is promulgated. Closer to Methodius’ time is a valuable text precariously preserved and discovered imagery discussed above and in other ways, in the end no real judgment is made, certainly not by Optatus, despite Autolulus’ reference to him as a umpire at 965d; it is in fact Soclarus who collapses the competition into a draw and almost casually twists the whole competition into a rehearsal for combatting the idea that animals do not have reason. This setting up of a competition only to undermine it is a literary device used elsewhere by (for example) Lucian; here it further underlines the weight of evidence against the Stoics by stressing that the similarities between the two sides as presented in the debate are far greater than their differences from the Stoics, who are given no significant voice in the dialogue at all.” (Mossman 2005, 146-147).

69. “The lot…admits into court the case of the land animals before that of creatures from the sea…The court is open for the litigants…” [ὁ…κλῆρος…τὰ χερσαία προεισάγει δίκαια τῶν ἐνάλλων…Ἡ μὲν ἁγορὰ τοῖς δικαζομένοις…] (965D-E, trans. Cherniss and Helmbold, Loeb XII.357-359) Aristotimus commands the jury to vote, but there is no further mention of a specific judge (985C, trans. Cherniss and Helmbold, Loeb XII.477).

70. For a good overview of the recent literature on the early Councils with some suggestions of how they interacted with the dialogic genre, see Cameron 2014, 34. Out of necessity, she deals with material from the later councils, which whose proceedings were better preserved. In fact, *Acta* do not survive from Nicaea, only the resultant canons and creed (Price and Gaddis 2007, 5).
only in 1941, Origen’s *Dialogue with Heraclites*. It seems that this was one of a number of “dialogues” that are mentioned as written by Origen, which were not literary dialogues in the Platonic tradition but rather notes from live debates that occurred at historically specific moments.

The records from these doctrinal debates show a genuine exchange of opinion, but the purpose is to arrive at consensus. It is often a trial of a theologically suspect opinion. A theologian is accused and brought before a jury of bishops. In the case of Bishop Heraclites, Origen is summoned to question him and point out the error of his ways, something like an expert witness. But the dialogue does not end there. After Origen has successfully countered Heraclites, other bishops take the opportunity to raise questions that have been troubling them, specifically in this case, about whether the soul is composed of blood and therefore material. At the very end, before it breaks off, a new bishop arrives. A certain Demetrius explains to him that Origen has been “teaching” them about the immortality of the soul (167, Chadwick 1954, 453).Somewhere during the event Origen’s position moves from being a prosecutor to being a teacher. This, then, is another good example, along with *Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer*, of a

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72 It appears that Pamphilus and Eusebius gathered a collection of these dialogues and published them together: a 215AD debate with governor of Arabia; c. 229AD with the Valentinian Candidus; winter 213-232AD before empress Julia Mamma; c. 238-244AD Synod of Bostra with bishop Beryllus; a synod-like meeting with bishops of Arabia like this one; and apparently some debates with rabbis (Sherer 1960). See Jerome *Contra Rufinus* for mention of two dialogues of Origen, a *Contra Candidus* and another anonymous one.
73 Origen is explicit about the drive towards consensus: “The whole church is present and listening. It is not right that there should be any difference in knowledge between one church and another, for you are not the false church.” (120, Chadwick 1954, 437)
74 Διδάσκει ὁ ἀδελφὸς Ὡριγένης ὅτι ἡ ψυχή ἀθάνατος ἐστιν.” (Scherer 1960, 102)
text that contains both the questions of the schoolroom and the debate of the courtroom.\textsuperscript{75} We see Origen as an interlocutor who on one occasion moves seamlessly between the two roles of prosecutor and teacher. In both roles he is a figure of authority, but he acts out that authority in different ways and for different purposes.

In a courtroom setting, the speakers are opponents, with one determined as the winner and one as the loser. If the judgment is rendered within the literary world, the dialogue appears to be a rather closed one. If the judgment is withheld, it seems that the dialogue is meant to educate the reader into making her own decision about the relative merits of the antagonists (perhaps with an implied correct answer). Is there a way of keeping the competitive nature, but constructing it in such a way that the participants are not antagonists? Were polemical debate and didactic education the only two options for Christian “dialogue” in the third century?

Methodius offers us a third option for setting and social relationship, which shares certain elements in common with the classroom and courtroom—the speech competition. Although there is not strict equality among the women at Arete’s banquet, there is certainly an emphasis on the unity of the group. Arete tells them at the beginning that she has personally made sure they all got there; they are desired participants, hand-chosen. And they end in a similar stance of unity; they are a crown, they are a chorus. The work is a florilegium, with each virgin being a flower. But Methodius’ solution to this problem is not without its own difficulties, as we will see when we look more carefully at the question of rhetorical competition in Chapter 3.

\textbf{C. Authorial Authority:}

\textsuperscript{75} Also Malchion’s response to Paul of Samosata, which was described in the Introduction of this dissertation. Eusebius HE 7.28-30 and Epiphanius’ \textit{Panarion} 65.
Another question that impinges on the nature of Methodius’ dialogue is the involvement of the author himself in the work. If an author writes himself into his dialogue, it would seem that he could even more completely control the event as well as the interpretation of it by his readers. What were the traditions of authorial involvement, how does Methodius manipulate them, and how does that affect the relative amount of openness in the dialogue?

Plato famously distances himself from the actions of his dialogues.\textsuperscript{76} Xenophon’s role in his \textit{Symposium} is less clear. Although in the opening sentence Xenophon seems to claim that he was present at the symposium, calling himself \textit{παραγενόμενος}, he plays no further role in the proceedings. In the \textit{Memorabilia}, he once represents himself in conversation with Socrates, but speaks of himself in the third person.\textsuperscript{77} The earliest dialogue writer who gave himself a role in his dialogues seems to have been Aristotle. Hirzel takes this to mean that his dialogues also brought with them a growth in heavy-handed indoctrination, an accusation with which Hösle agrees.\textsuperscript{78} Plutarch innovates away from the submerged authorial persona tradition in Symposia and plays an active, and often a decisive, role in most of the dialogues related in the \textit{Quaestiones}

\textsuperscript{76} “Nowhere in his writings does Plato mention himself by name, except in the dialogue \textit{On the Soul} [i.e. the \textit{Phaedo}] and the \textit{Apology}.” (Diogenes Laertius II.37, trans. Hicks, Loeb Vol 1, p. 311) “…Plato’s wish to efface himself—even where he is referred to” (Hösle 2012, 80).

“Platonic anonymity” has a long bibliography: e.g. Edelstein 1962, Plass 1964, and especially the collection of essays comprising Press 2000.

\textsuperscript{77} Memorabilia 1.3.9-13

\textsuperscript{78} Hirzel 1895 (vol. 1), 292. “In general, no one who studies the fragments can escape the impression that the crucial tendency of the Aristotelian dialogue was toward the loss of the indirectness of communication…In contrast, a play of masks is hardly possible for an author who appears in his own work…” (Hösle 2012, 84) “The origin of dialogue in living conversation, of which the Socratics were still very aware, was farther away for Aristotle—discussions in school had replaced chats in the gymnasium or the agora. Nor did classical Greek tragedy live on in Aristotle. He sought to archive tragedies, to reflect on them theoretically, but he no longer strove to incorporate them into his philosophy. Only someone who no longer feels tragic emotions puts himself onstage—or has himself appear in dialogue. Only the genre of comedy allows the author to represent himself. Not being able to resist expressing one’s own opinion is ultimately an expression of the decline of aristocratic forms, of which the techniques of distancing are always part.” (Hösle 2012, 85)
Convivales. Following Plutarch’s lead, Athenaeus also emphasizes his role in the dialogue. By the Imperial period, then, it seems that the convention has moved to the author playing an explicit role in his Symposium, following in the dialogic tradition of Aristotle.

The striking element of Methodius’ treatment of the problem is that he does give himself a minor role in the Symposium, but not a direct one. He inserts himself into the dialogue in two ways. The first is the most explicit, and in in a passage that we have already discussed in relation to desire.

Eubulion: “And tell me, what of our Termessian friend? Was she not listening from outside? I should be surprised if she sat idle when she heard about this banquet and did not immediately run to listen to our discussions, like a bird in search of food.

Gregorion: “No; the report is that she was with Methodius when he was questioning Arete about this matter. It is indeed a good and blessed thing to have a guide and teacher like Arete.” (Musurillo 157-158)

ΕΥΒ. Τί δαί; ἡ Τελμησιακὴ ξένη, εἰπέ μοι, κἂν ἔξωθεν οὐκ ἐπηκροάτο; Ὑπαμάξω γὰρ εἰ ἡσυχίαν εἶχεν ἐκεῖνῃ μαθοῦσα τὸ συμπόσιον τοῦτο καὶ οὐκ εὐθέως ὑσπερ ὄρνεον ἐπὶ τροφῆν ἐφίππατο τῶν λεγομένων ἀκουσμένη.

ΓΡΗΓ. Οὔ· λόγος γὰρ αὐτῆν Ἔκδωδο συμπαραγεγονέναι αὐτὰ δὴ ταῦτα τῆν Ἀρετὴν πυθανομένῳ. Ἀλλὰ καλὸν καὶ μακάριον τοιαύτη διαδακάλῳ χρῆσασθαι καὶ ὀδηγῷ τῇ Ἀρετῇ.

We are assured, then, that Methodius has heard the same story directly from the mouth of Virtue. He did not need to wait to be told by Theopatra or Gregorion, but went directly to the hostess.

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79 Trapp comments upon this innovation, suggesting that it is one way in which Athenaeus attempts to trump Plato’s Symposium, first by combining the introductions of the Symposium and the Phaedo, and then by introducing himself as a participant (Trapp 2000).

80 Cicero and Augustine bring into Latin the tradition of representing yourself as a participant in your literary dialogue.

81 Julian’s role in his Symposium provides the closest parallel to Methodius’s role in his Symposium. Julian is able to narrate the other-worldly symposium not because he was there in person, but because a divine figure, in this case Hermes, personally told him about it. Like Methodius, he is a privileged listener to the tale that he relates, and suggests that he has special access to divine favor. Since both of them set their Symposia beyond the realm of normal social reality, they must also provide a mechanism of audition, and the mechanism for both is (semi-
Musurillo suggest that this passage functions as a “seal” on the work, including the author and the dedicatee (whom he suggests is the female “Telmessian Friend”, although we have no other indication of this).\(^{82}\)

The second way that Methodius involves himself in the dialogue is through using the name Eubulion for the main questioner in the dialogue. Eubulion is the feminine form of Eubulius, a name used by Methodius for himself in some of his other dialogues.\(^{83}\) If Eubulion is a female cipher for Methodius, why does he introduce a separate version of himself under his own name later in the dialogue?\(^{84}\)

One of the reasons that Methodius hides his authorial voice must be because of all-female setting he has carefully crafted for his characters. Methodius’ presence on Arete’s mountaintop retreat would be as welcome as Pentheus’ on his mother’s Theban mountainside. Although far from being in danger from the women, he would rather represent a danger to them. More than that, however, he would need a mechanism of ascent from the mundane realm, since the location

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\(^{82}\) “The peculiar nature of the references to the Lady and Methodius suggests that it was intended as a kind of ‘seal’ (σφραγίς) or signature on the work; and the Lady from Termessus, who is pictured as running ‘like a bird in search of food,’ was perhaps a benefactress of Methoidus, and may well have been the moving spirit of a household of women consecrated to chastity, somewhat like Olympias, the friend of Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom.” (Musurillo 1958, 240)

\(^{83}\) One of the speakers in the dialogue *On the Resurrection* is called Methodius, but also at times called Eubulius by his interlocutors, e.g. at I.30.1 (p. 264 Bonwetsch 1917) “ἈΓΛ Ὑρᾶις, ἔφη, ὦ Εὐβούλιε, ὡς ἐγὼ ἔτοιμός ἐμί σε ἐπαινεῖν, ὅπως ὅρθως διασαφῆς τοὺς λόγους.” Also, the main interlocutor of the De Lepra/Sistelius is “Eubulius”, often taken as a Methodian mouthpiece (“e.g. “Methodius unter dem Pseudonym Eubulius” Bracht 1999, 381). Perhaps Eubulius was a second name for Methodius, or perhaps an honorific title as a “giver of good counsel”. For an overview of this issue, see Bracht 1999, 177-178 n. 11, who points us to Pankau 1887, which I have not yet been able to locate.

\(^{84}\) In parallel to this, most scholars interpret the “Adamantius” of the eponymous dialogue as a cipher for Origen, who also went by the name Adamantius (Pretty 1997, 21). The *Adamantius* quotes long passages from Methodius’ *On the Resurrection* and therefore seems to have been composed by the same school.
of the symposium is otherworldly. There were such mechanisms available, as will be discussed in the following chapter, such as the dream and the magical transportation familiar from the Menippean satire tradition, but it is a barrier that Methodius avoids by absenting himself. His other dialogues, which are exclusively male and take place against a normal chronotope, do feature Methodius either by name or by correctly-gendered pseudonym Eubulius.

Does Methodius leave his women free to talk among themselves? Or is his secret ventriloquizing even more disturbing? Goldhill believes that Methodius’ cameo appearance is part of Methodius’ goal of shutting down alternative reading of his dialogue.

“Methodius’ praise of virginity has a didactic import. Indeed, while Methodius’ work replays the form of Plato’s dialogues by having the symposium of women relayed by a certain Gregorion to a certain Euboulion (both female), it also returns at the end of the dialogue to the framing scene (unlike Plato’s work) so that Gregorion and Euboulion can finally discuss and underline the conclusion to be drawn from the speeches (as if trying to avoid the openness so carefully cultivated by Plato). Where Plato famously inscribes himself as absent from the dialogue around Socrates’ death-bed (‘Plato was ill…’), Gregorion in an authorizing gesture tells us in the final pages that Methodius, absent inevitably from the maidens’ symposium, none the less learnt precisely what has just been recounted from the hostess of the symposium herself (293).” (Goldhill 1995, 3)

But this technique is also open to the opposite interpretation to the one given by Goldhill. Rather than being part of an “authorizing gesture,” Methodius might actually be undercutting his authoritative presence by displacing himself outside of the recounting of Gregorion’s story to Eubulion. If Methodius heard the story from Arete at some other time, then what we are reading is not what Methodius heard. There must be multiple versions of the events in circulation, only one of which is the one to which the readers have had the pleasure to listen. In addition, Methodius’ move holds out the possibility to its readers to involve themselves in the events. If Methodius was able to directly question Virtue about the content of the Symposium, perhaps we
too could come to knowledge about why chastity should be praised if we lead a life in contact with Virtue.

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that the elements of Methodius’ work that seem to make it more “closed” are actually part of larger Imperial trends. When put in his proper context, Methodius’ *Symposion* is actually less closed than the direction in which the tradition was moving. There are different ways of staging education. Dialogues were imitating classroom education, and in this way, the ties were being tightened between the two neighboring genres of *erotapokriseis* and the philosophical dialogue. But Methodius’ dialogue was set within a different type of interpersonal constellation, in an epideictic space, among women who are fundamentally equal, with a superior party (Arete) who maintains her silence. And while at first sight his presence as a “seal” at the end of the work might point to his authorial control over the text, it could also be read as authorizing multiple versions of the sympotic account.

**Coda: Philosophy and Dialogue among the Neo-Platonists**

Perhaps the most natural context for the Platonist Methodius to write his work of philosophy would be the writings of the Neo-Platonists. The Neo-Platonic circle of Plotinus and Porphyry was very close to Methodius’ own world, if, as no one doubts, Methodius wrote a reply to Porphyry’s *Against the Christians*. What is surprising about the Neo-Platonists is that they did not choose to follow Plato in his generic choice; they did not write their philosophy in dialogue, pointing out the fact that it might in fact be *Christians* who are the most interested in keeping this genre alive in the later Roman Empire.85

85 The Middle Platonists had continued to write in dialogues, although it was far from being the most popular genre. The “founder” of Middle Platonism, Antiochus of Ascalon, wrote a
That is not to say that philosophical conversations were not vital to their way of life. Porphyry preserves the record of some of these conversations in his *Life of Plotinus*. Plotinus’ commitment to teaching was so deep that he needed to be strong-armed by his pupils to write anything down at all, and then he could not be bothered to edit it, as Porphyry laments once the task passed to him after Plotinus’ death. In his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry records a conversation that makes a connection between Plotinus’ conversations with his students and his composition of treatises. This passage has already been commented upon by Bardy for the purposes of investigating the origins of the Question and Answer genre. But when we look at the passage closer, it becomes clear that it is not about the catechetical genre of literature at all.

“Once I, Porphyry, went on asking him for three days about the soul’s connection with the body, and he kept on explaining to me. A man called Thaumasius came in who was interested in general statements [τοῖς καθόλους λόγοις] and said that he wanted to hear Plotinus speaking in the manner of a set treatise [εἰς βιβλία], but could not stand Porphyry’s questions and answers. Plotinus said, “But if when Porphyry asks questions we do not solve his difficulties we shall not be able to say anything at all to put into the treatise.” (section 13, trans. Armstrong, Loeb 39)

For Plotinus, dissolving the ignorance of questioners finds its fruitful close in writing philosophical treatises. The questions that are posed by Porphyry do not make their way into the style of Plotinus’ written works, but are the fertile background that allows Plotinus to develop his ideas and decide the best way to communicate them. The reason why Plotinus does not choose to imitate in his written work the questioning that was the real context of the development of his ideas may be the highly personal reason that Plotinus admittedly had no literary talent, which even his adoring student Porphyry admits.

dialogue called the *Sosus*, in which he dramatized his break with his former teacher Philo of Larissa. Our only mention of this dialogue is Cicero’s *Lucullus* 12 (Dillon 1977, 54-55 and Barnes 1989, 64ff).

86 Bardy 1932
There is another scene in Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus* that speaks to this issue. Porphyry twice mentions sympotic celebrations of Plato’s and Socrates’ birthdays in the Neo-Platonic school of Plotinus. The first notice is a quick note early on, which occurs when Porphyry is explaining that Plotinus never told any of his friends his birthday so as to avoid being fêted. But this did not stop him from celebrating the birthdays of Socrates and Plato:

But he never told anyone the month in which he was born or the day of his birth, because he did not want any sacrifice or feast on his birthday, though he sacrificed and entertained his friends on the traditional birthdays of Plato and Socrates; on these occasions those of his friends who were capable of it had to read a discourse before the assembled company. (trans. Armstrong, Loeb 7)

Porphyry fleshes out this notice later on when he narrates a literary altercation that occurred during one of these occasions. Porphyry’s contribution to the evening was a public recitation of a poem he had written.

At Plato’s feast I read a poem, “The Sacred Marriage”; and because much in it was expressed in the mysterious and veiled language of inspiration someone said, “Porphyry is mad.” But Plotinus said, so as to be heard by all, “You have shown yourself at once poet, philosopher, and expounder of sacred mysteries.” The rhetorician Diophanes read a defense of Alcibiades in Plato’s “Banquet” in which he asserted that a pupil for the sake of advancing in the study of virtue should submit himself to carnal intercourse with his master if the master desired it. Plotinus repeatedly started up to leave the meeting, but restrained himself, and after the end of the lecture gave me, Porphyry, the task of writing a refutation. Diophanes refused to lend me his manuscript, and I depended in writing my refutation on my memory of his arguments. When I read it before the same assembled hearers I pleased Plotinus so much that he kept on quoting during the meeting, “So strike and be a light to men.” (*Life of Plotinus*, section 15, trans. Armstrong, Loeb 43)
καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον καὶ τὸν ἱεροφάντην.» Ὅτε δὲ ὁ ρήτωρ Διοφάνης ἄνεγγω ὑπὲρ Ἀλκιβίαδου τοῦ ἐν τῷ «Συμποσίῳ» τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἀπολογίαν δογματίζον χρῆναι ἄρετής ἕνεκα μαθήσεως εἰς συνουσίαι αὐτῶν παρέχειν ἐρώττι ἀφροδίσιον μίξεως τῷ καθηγεμόνι, ἦξε μὲν πολλάκις ἀναστάς ἀπαλλαγῆναι τῆς συνόδου, ἐπισχύον δὲ ἑαυτὸν μετὰ τὴν διάλυσιν τοῦ ἀκουστηρίου ἐμοὶ Πορφύρῳ ἀντιγράψας προσέταξε. Μὴ θέλοντος δὲ τοῦ Διοφάνους τὸ βιβλίον δοῦναι διὰ τῆς μνήμης ἀναληφθέντων τῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων ἀντιγράφας ἐγὼ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀκροατῶν συνημμένων ἀναγνώρισι τοῦ Ἀλκιβίαδον ἡφρανα, ὡς κὰ τὰς συνουσίας συνεχῶς ἐπιλέγειν. »<Βάλλ' οὕτως, αἳ κέν τι φόως> ἄνδρεσσι <γένηα.>«

Here we see a festive and competitive environment where members of Plotinus’ circle are called upon to contribute literary works to public entertainment. There was high visibility and a correspondingly high possibility for ridicule or praise. Porphyry’s poetic allegory was not well received by the symposiasts, although praised by the host. Diaphanes “the rhetor’s” contribution of ethopoia, inhabiting the character of Alcibiades as he was portrayed in Plato’s Symposium and extending his argument, is not well received by the host, Plotinus. This is not because of its literary form, but because of its shameful content, even thought it was written to be playful and humorous.

The contributions asked of the sympotic participants are logoi, not dialogoi.87 A dialogic element comes in when Porphyry writes a response to Diophanes’ speech, but this has already moved us into a world of writing instead of speaking. Rather than dialogue, the scene of the birthday party more clearly recalls the sympotic round-robin contributions that we see in Methodius’ Symposium rather than the quick-fire framing narrative between Eubulion and Gregorion, or the other dialogues of Methodius.

Although not central to his corpus, we do have evidence that Porphyry used the dialogue format formally at least twice. The ways that he does so, however, are more of a piece with

87 Hirzel Vol. 2, p. 360 brings up this point as well, mentioning that a sympotic setting that would traditionally be the ideal place for dialogue leads Plotinus to ask for a written response from Porphyry instead.
Imperial scholarship than with Neo-Platonic philosophy, and sound less like Plato (or Plotinus) than like Athenaeus and Macrobius. Both of them feature his friend and former teacher, the philologist Longinus, which leads one to suspect that it that Longinus’ early influence and not Plotinus’ later influence that caused him to experiment with the genre.

The first of Porphyry’s dialogues, preserved in Proclus’ commentary on the *Phaedo*, was a dialogue between Longinus and Medius on the nature of the soul.\(^{88}\) The one extract that still preserves the dialogue form shows the two interlocutors disagreeing about how many parts make up the soul, the Platonic three, or Medius’ suggestion of eight.\(^{89}\) The title was Σύμμικτα ζητήματα, which suggests a miscellany of scholarly questions.\(^{90}\) The difference between ζητήματα and dialogic discussion is far from clear. In Plutarch, the former serve as material for the latter. But in different hands, ζητήματα can be simply answered in a catechetical form. In the slightly later Platonic tradition, Dexippus’ dialogic commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories*, mentioned above, falls into this camp. His student, Seleucus, feeds him (in order) the thorniest issues in the commentary tradition on the *Categories*, which he answers systematically.

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\(^{88}\) If this is the same Medius that Longinus mentions in the preface to his book (quoted by Porphyry *On the End: by Longinus in Answer to Plotinus and Gentilianus Amelius*), then he was a philosopher known to Longinus in his youth who not only taught but also composed texts for distribution (*Life of Plotinus* 20.35). In the same preface, Longinus says that Porphyry decided to follow Plotinus more than Longinus: “…Basilius of Tyre [i.e. Porphyry], who has written a good deal in the manner of Plotinus, whose direction he has preferred to my own…” (trans. Armstrong, Loeb Vol. 1, p. 61)

\(^{89}\) “Ὄδα δὲ ἐγὼ ἡ τῶν Πορφύριον ἐν τοῖς συμμίκτοις ἱστοροῦντα προβλήμασι Μηδίου πρὸς Λογγῖνον συνοικίαν τινὰ περὶ τῶν μορίων τῆς ψυχῆς, ἡν οὐκ ἀξίου παραδραμεῖν. τοῦ γὰρ Μηδίου τῆν ψυχὴν ὀκτάμερη ποιοῦντος…” [Porphyrius Fragmenta Teubner #263, p. 292]

\(^{90}\) Proclus’ commentary on Euclid also cites it, which means there must also have been geometric questions addressed. “We are not unaware of what the philosopher Porphyry in his Miscellaneous Questions (ἐν τοῖς συμμίκτοις) and most of the Platonists have set forth…” (Proclus *Commentary on Euclid* section 56, Morrow 1970, 45-46) Proclus references Porphyry’s mathematical ideas in other places in this commentary, without citing the title of Porphyrian books he is quoting from.
The second dialogue, called Φιλόλογος ἀκρόασις, which will also feature in the following chapter, has a sympotic setting and includes a variety of characters of different types. The scene is a party in celebration of the birthday of Plato held in Athens with Longinus as the host. The issue under discussion in the preserved fragment is a philological one, addressing the question of which authors were plagiarists, and of whom. It cites a long list of previous works on the topic, and acts as a library of sources and information. Since only one quote survives, it is difficult to know whether there were multiple topics discussed in this text, or if it was a shorter work only on plagiarism. But it definitely seems clear that it was a miscellanistic philological symposium, far away from the *Enneads* of Plotinus. It was, at least in part, a work of philology, and Porphyry shows himself willing to write his literary theory in the more playful style of the Symposium, while he leaves his philosophy for non-mimetic genres.

These two examples of Porphyry are notable for their non-Platonic flavor. Porphyry does not seem to use the “founder” of his school as a literary model, but follows in the broader Imperial dialogic tradition, at times writing dialogues that verge on the erotapokriseis genre (the Σύμμικτα ζητήματα), and at other times, using a sympotic style to function as a compilatory device (the Φιλόλογος ἀκρόασις). This does not mean that that the Neo-Platonists were no

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91 “Τὰ Πλατώνεια ἐστιν ήμᾶς Λογγίνος Ἀθήνησι κέκληκεν ἄλλους τε πολλοὺς καὶ Νικαγόραν τὸν σοφιστήν καὶ Μαύρα Απολλώνιον τε τὸν γραμματικόν καὶ Δημήτριον τὸν γεωμέτρην Προσήνην τε τὸν Περιπατητικόν καὶ τὸν Στοικόν Καλλιέτην. μεθ’ ὧν ἔβδομος αὐτὸς κατακλίνεις, τοῦ δείπνου προκόπτοντος καὶ τινὸς ζητήσεως περὶ Ἐφόρου ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις γενομένης…” [Porphyrius Fragmenta Teubner #408F, p. 478-479]

92 Since both of the Porphyrian dialogic text features the character of Longinus, it seems surprising that no dialogues have been attributed to Longinus himself, despite the large number of titles that have come down to us. It seems that he wrote in more typical scholarly genres of *zetemata* and treatise. See the thorough overviews by L. Brisson and M. Patillon (1994 and 1997).

93 Dörrie 1959

94 Much more will be said about the growth of compilatory sympotic tradition in the Imperial period in the following chapter.
longer having philosophical debates among themselves, which they clearly were, as Porphyry himself relates in the *Life of Plotinus*. The Neo-Platonists still had the social forms of the symposium and dialogue, but as their intellectual exchanges became more and more textual, they almost entirely ceased using the dialogue as a literary form in which to do written philosophy.  

Once it is clear that dialogues were becoming less popular as philosophic modes of discourse during the later Imperial period, the amount of Christian dialogues attested starts to look rather normal, if not greater in percentage relative to the amount of Christian literature at the time. When we turn to the rich tradition of second and third century Christian dialogues, we realize that these are not only polemical or catechetical. They staged debates, certainly, and many of them seem influenced by courtroom and schoolroom contexts. But Methodius’ *Symposium* reminds us that there were other options open to writers in the Imperial period, both pagan and Christian, models that more closely interacted with the Socratic models they were emulating.

**Conclusion:**

Many of the issues raised in this chapter share a common concern with closure, a topic that will recur throughout this dissertation. How open is the dialogue in the *Symposium*? Is there a necessary link between the drive towards Orthodoxy in Christianity and a certain level of literary closedness? Is there a straightforward link between literary closure and philosophic

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95 Hirzel claims it has to do with the increased religiosity of the movement as well as their veneration for Plato (Vol. II, p. 360ff). This echoes Christian Wildberg’s suggestion that the Neo-Platonists moved from dialogues to commentaries as the status of the Platonic texts changed to become more sacred (personal communication).

96 “Christian dialogues embrace an enormously wide range of types, from the literary and philosophical to the technical, and their purposes and immediate aims, like the reasons for their composition, are equally wide-ranging.” (Cameron 2014, 35)
closure? König 2008 frames his discussion of Methodius’ *Symposium* using precisely the terms of openness and closure, and he comes to a precarious solution that Methodius’ text is *self-consciously* closed, or at least playing with a tradition that he obviously knows well and some aspects of which he feels discomfort. Averil Cameron believes that, despite König’s best attempt to contribute a more subtle appreciation of Methodius’ dialogic methods, in the end Methodius shares little in common with his other Imperial Sympotic writers. I believe that by placing Methodius more firmly in the context of the dialogues of Plutarch, the Neo-Platonists and the other Christian dialogue writers of the second and third centuries AD, a genuine case can be made for his open use of the dialogue form. The characteristics that may seem to indicate an increase in closure (a certain pedagogical content, the presence of a judge, and authorial involvement) are part of the air that Methodius breathed, a change in dialogic expectations, a difference in method that did not necessarily bring with it a concurrent increase in Christian authoritarian efforts to silence opposition. If a spirited argument has been raised against Methodius (along with all other Christian dialogues) that they are authoritative and silencing, then a careful rereading of Methodius’ literary methods also challenges a general view about the nature of early Christianity. “Why don’t Christians do dialogue?” Goldhill provocatively asks in

97 “In that sense Methodius, I suggest, may be consciously crafting his reaction to the agonistic, ambiguous potential of the dialogue form, reshaping it self-consciously, rather than simply passively falling short of it. What matters here, in other words, is not simply the fact that this particular Christian writer may be wary of sympotic dialogue, but also that he explores and signals to us with a great deal of intricacy and ingenuity where the differences of his own approach lie.” (König 2008, 106)

98 “On the other hand, despite König’s comparison of Methodius with Athenaeus and Macrobius, I would argue that the *Symposium* has little in common with the world of high-level literary conversation that we find for example in Athenæus’s *Deipnosophists*, expounded so elegantly in this series for both Athenæus and Plutarch by Christian Jacob.” (Cameron 2014, 42)

99 As Don Fowler perceptively pointed out in his article “Second Thoughts on Closure,” “given a simple choice of being open or closed, it is difficult for a twentieth-century person to choose to be closed” (Fowler 1997, 5). The plea in this chapter to read Methodius’ *Symposium* as relatively open smells suspiciously of just such a modern rehabilitation.
the introduction to the *End of Dialogue* (Goldhill 2008, 1). Hopefully this chapter has shown that they, in fact, do. We may ask in turn, “Why does it seem that Christian philosophers are using this form longer and more frequently than non-Christian philosophers?”

Methodius also gives us a means forward through his legitimization of the Christian use of the dialogue form for neither a polemical, nor a purely didactic, purpose. Rather, the purpose of the *Symposium* is truly a philosophic one; it is meant to encourage its readers to embark on a certain way of life, to provide an attractive image of what they can join and even contribute to themselves.¹⁰⁰ It is a plea to all of its readers to become philosophers, a role which has been surprisingly reimagined as becoming bridesmaids eagerly awaiting the coming Divine Bridegroom.

¹⁰⁰ I think that, at points, Cameron seems to go too far in her characterization of Methodius as absolutely unique. While I agree with her that “the *Symposium* is a strange text.” (Cameron 2014, 42), I am not so comfortable with saying: “It is not surprising, then, that there is nothing else quite like it; on this basis, Methodius’s experiment was a failure” (Cameron 2014, 42). Julian’s *Caesars*, at least, points to one possible reuse, which I will discuss in the next chapter.
Chapter 2

Methodius’ Symposium and the Sympotic Tradition

Introduction:

Eubulion: I am greatly moved, Gregorion, to think of the embarrassment that Domnina must now have felt; her heart must have been in a state of trepidation and fear lest she be at a loss for words and not measure up to the discourses of the other virgins, for so much had already been said on the topic with the approach to it always different. Come, complete your story and tell me whether she showed that she was troubled. I am surprised that she found anything to say at all, being the last in turn to speak.

Gregorion: Indeed, Theopatra told me that she was disturbed and very much so, but she was not at a loss for words…(Musurillo 140)

Domnina has pulled a difficult draw time, coming to speak last after nine other extended forays on the topic of chastity, including the stunning contribution of Thecla, who was so confident in her abilities that she begged leave to add a second discourse to her first, this time on the subject of free will, and was granted her request by an admiring hostess. The terms that Eubulion uses are telling for Domnina’s predicament: the foregoing speeches were of such a kind and so various (τοσούτων ἢ ῥηθέντων…καὶ ποικίλων) that there simply seems to be nothing left to say. But Domnina is up to the challenge, living up to her lordly name, and contributes a competent and vigorous speech.¹ Domnina’s fear, like that of the other virgins, is staged so that her triumph can be all the more emphasized. Greogorion, hearing of her plight, may express fear

¹ Her speech also clearly references her name in its emphasis on the Lordship of Christ triumphing over Satan. Lord and military terms are strikingly present throughout. E.g. “But from the moment when Christ became man and armed the flesh with the ornament of virginity, the cruel despot that rules incontinence was overpowered; and peace and faith reign, and men are not so much given to idol worship as they were of old.” (Musurillo 141)
on her behalf, but she need not. As the virgins elsewhere claim, rhetoric is inexhaustible (Theopatra 4.1).

In her staged fear and conquest over it, Domnina nicely ventriloquizes Methodius’ own concern with placing himself in the long tradition of Sympotic writing with such illustrious predecessors as Plato, Xenophon and Plutarch. One may well wonder what more can be said; why write yet another Symposium? Like many writers of the Imperial period, Methodius emphasizes the anxiety of belatedness and proclaims his own sense of coming late into the picture.

Not only was the Sympotic genre one that was started seven hundred years earlier by literary and philosophic heavyweights, but it continued to thrive in Methodius’ own time. His Christian contemporary, Lactantius, wrote a Latin Symposium while still living in North Africa, according to Jerome.² Athenaeus composed his Deipnosophists probably within a hundred years before Methodius, and the century following him would find at least three more practitioners of the genre: Julian the Apostate, Macrobius and Pseudo-Cyprian.³ Methodius’ self-conception as coming late to the genre does not dissuade subsequent writers from productively turning the Symposium to their own particular uses, and also advertising their own belatedness and newness, in different ways and for different ends. The stage is rather thickly populated, just as Methodius’ ten sympotic guests outnumbers Plato’s seven. But Methodius’ emphasis on this fact is a literary choice, for nothing has substantially changed since the beginning, when it seems that Xenophon

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² That Symposium may have survived under the name of the Symposium of the Twelve Wise Men, if Freidrich 2002 is correct in her attestation, which she appears to be.
³ These are only the ones that survive. For a good overview of what we know of the intervening Sympotic tradition between Xenophon and Plutarch and the possible uses Plutarch makes of it, see Oikonomopouloou 2007, p. 33ff and Tecusan’s 1993 Oxford thesis ‘Symposion and Philosophy’, who gathers all the fragments of these works.
was already responding to Plato’s earlier sympotic attempt.\(^4\) The Symposium is a genre, like pastoral, which is vividly aware of being part of a well-defined tradition—not avoiding, but self-consciously confronting, the challenge of earlier works.

Far from letting the weight of tradition stop him, Methodius uses the trope of belatedness to point to the fact that he believes he is doing something strikingly different, something that none of the foregoing writers have dreamed about: he has written a Symposium about *chastity*, which he staunchly believes could not have been written until Jesus introduced this particular virtue to humanity two hundred and fifty years previously. Domnina’s final speech takes up the particular tack of emphasizing the newness of the message of chastity,\(^5\) and in doing so, she circles back to the first speech in the collection, that of Marcella, which contained the same emphasis on God’s progressive revelation through stages, culminating in Christ’s recent, and final, revelation of chastity.\(^6\) Linking the first speech and the last speech, Methodius heightens his reader’s awareness that he thinks he is doing something radically new.\(^7\) Just as Domnina blushes to follow so many past speeches, yet adds her contribution confidently and innovatively, pointing out that chastity is a new power in the world, so too does Methodius use the trope of following in a well-worn tradition to point to his radical break with that tradition, striking out

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\(^4\) Thesleff 1978 and Danzig 2005. See also Bowie 1993 for the pre-history of the Symposium as a literary genre.

\(^5\) She does so by presenting an exegesis of Jotham’s Parable of the Trees in Judges 9:8-15. Different types of trees subsequently rule the people until the bramble (which stands for chastity) is ultimately given authority. “Lastly, the bramble refers to the commandment given to the Apostles for the salvation of the world; for it was through them that we were instructed in chastity, and of this alone the devil has not been able to make a deceptive image.” (Musurillo 143)

\(^6\) Also, Marcella and Domnina are also the only two speakers to use the title “Archvirgin” for Jesus.

\(^7\) A deeper analysis of the arrangement of the speeches in a chiastic order will be provided in Chapter 4.
into previously unexplored territory.\textsuperscript{8}

Another virgin, Agathe, prefaces her speech in words that could also be echoes of Methodius: “If you will accompany me, Arete, with great confidence in my ability to persuade and to continue this excellent discussion, I shall try to make my own contribution to the subject; but this will be in accordance with my own talents, not to be compared with what has already been said” (6.1, Musurillo 90).\textsuperscript{9} Feigned fear coupled with extreme literary boldness (Μετὰ πολλῆς εὐτολμίας καὶ πειθοῦς) typifies both Methodius’ virgins and Methodius himself.

The technique that Methodius chooses to emphasize his newness is placing his startling message against a primitivist backdrop. He advertises Plato as his only model, pretending ignorance of subsequent literary developments. He strives to disassociate himself from his near contemporaries and to set his Symposium in such a way that not the past, nor even the present, but rather the future is the temporal space most emphasized. The reason that Methodius chooses to point only to his Platonic predecessor instead of admitting that there exists a whole bevy of intervening and near-contemporary sympotic texts is because he needs a unified ancestor in order to set up his desired progression. Plato’s Symposium stands as the Shadow, his own as the Image, and the Heavenly Banquet with the Divine Bridegroom as the Reality.\textsuperscript{10} It would only confuse the picture to populate the stage with the thicker network of influences. But he is unable, and perhaps also unwilling, to hide certain modernist aesthetics that he shares with the other Imperial Symposia of Plutarch, Athenaeus and Macrobius. The play between these two tensions will be the subject of the first part of this chapter. How does Methodius manipulate his

\textsuperscript{8} Hinds 1998.
\textsuperscript{9} Μετὰ πολλῆς εὐτολμίας καὶ πειθοῦς καὶ τῆς τοῦ καλῶς εἰσεῖν ὑπολήψεως, ὦ Ἀρετή, σοὶ παροματούσης πειράσομαι δὴ κατὰ δύναμιν κἀγὼ εἰς τὸ προκείμενον εἰσενέγκασθαί τι, κατ’ ἐμαυτὴν μέντοι καὶ οὐ πρός τὰ εἰρήμενα.
\textsuperscript{10} This important tri-fold biblical hermeneutic of Shadow-Image-Reality, will be explained in greater detail later in the chapter.
temporal setting and his relationship with the sympotic tradition to make his arguments about the superiority of Christianity’s innovation?

In order to understand what these two tendencies are, the banal contemporary and the exciting ancient/future as Methodius wishes us to believe, an overview of the other surviving Symptotic works will be undertaken. Methodius’ vociferous alignment with Plato is a conscious choice that moves him away from his contemporaries into a separate genealogy. The following chart represents a schematization of the relationships between the texts as emphasized by their authors.

I argue that there are two fundamental modes of Symptotic writing that its practitioners choose to follow. Methodius pretends ignorance of an entire mode, namely the Xenophontic, while simultaneously incorporating some of the elements of that mode into his work, namely elements of variation and compilation, together with an increased emphasis on education, common with the other Imperial Symposia. His is a modern work, no matter how much he wants to emphasize only one aspect of its modernity, namely its Christianity. On the contrary, the other Imperial practitioners of the genre, especially Plutarch and Athenaeaus, are happy to make their reliance on the Xenophontic mode evident, and, in Plutarch’s case, cite Xenophon’s Symposium by name.
with approbation.

The question that guides this chapter is how authors of sympotic dialogues positioned themselves in relationship with their predecessors into a genealogy of influence and response. Rather than simply sharing a certain number of requisite characteristics, each author emphasizes some characteristics, suppresses others, and innovates on still others. In the first section, I look at possible means of making generic alignment in the Sympotic genre, such as sharing titles, topoi and topics of conversation. I will move onto what I find as the more fruitful way of thinking about this collection of texts: as fundamentally “Xenophontean” or “Platonic.”

I then turn to focus on what I call the “Xenophontean mode.” What characterizes it, and how did it become the primary Imperial mode? This investigation will culminate in showing the ways in which Methodius’ *Symposium* participates in this mode even while suppressing the generic markers that would signal the allegiance. Finally, I end with an investigation of Methodius’ manipulation of the “Platonic mode.” While first showing how Methodius makes his allegiance to this mode palpable, I move on to investigate why Methodius finds this allegiance useful and in what ways he changes this model in order to make his new, unique claims. To help to understand better what this mode entails, I will bring in the evidence provided by Julian the Apostate’s *Symposium: or Caesars*, which follows in the Platonic-Methodian track seventy-five years after Methodius.

In addition to the “founding” Symposia of Plato and Xenophon, the other texts this chapter will consider to belong to the genre of Symposium are, in chronological order: Plutarch’s two sympotic works, *Symposiakōn*, or *Quaestiones Convivales* as they are better known (henceforth *QC*) and the *Symposium of the Seven Sages*, or *Septem Sapientium Convivium* (henceforth *SS*), Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists*, Lucian’s satiric *Symposium: or the Lapiths*,
Methodius’ *Symposium, or On Chastity*, and Julian’s *Symposium, or Kronia* (also known as the *Caesars*).\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{11}\) Other texts that are part of this tradition but which I do not investigate are Epicurus’ fragmentary *Symposium* (quoted and cited in Athenaeus), Macrobius’ *Saturnalia* and the *Cena Cypriani*. In addition, there are many symptic scenes in works that are not strictly speaking literary Symposia, such as parts of Aulus Gellius’ *Attic Nights*, the “Cena Tramalchionis” from Petronius’ *Satyricon*, scenes in the *Letters* of Alciphron and a plethora of eating and drinking scenes in all types of narrative literature. For an investigation into Symptic motifs in the novels, apochryphal acts and hagiographies, see König 2012 Chapters 10-12. Although not examined directly, at times examples such as these will be adduced to enrich the conversation.
Part I: Defining the Symposium

Katerina Oikonomopoulou, in her 2007 Oxford dissertation on Imperial Symposia, makes a bold entreaty to abandon the term “Sympotic genre” entirely. Considering the wide variety in the sympotic works that survive and our partial knowledge of those that only survive in fragments and ancient references, she believes it hasty and misguided to attempt to link them into a continuously developing genre. Instead, she suggests that they are each responding to the social practice of the symposium, and doing so in different ways for different purposes.

Although she says that she wishes to “dismiss the notion of genre completely”, she is forced to admit in the next paragraph that the ancient authors seemed to consider themselves part of a tradition “which indicates a perception of some form of continuity founded on Plato’s literary parentage” (23). While I strongly disagree with her emphasis on the role of Plato as the model (to the exclusion of Xenophon), the back-tracking after her strong anti-genre statement does point to a vital fact of our evidence: the ancient authors frequently quote from and reference previous Sympotic texts. Plutarch, for example, explicitly states that he has read other Symposia and been affected by them, and places this declaration at the opening of his work Quaestiones Convivales, which in turn inspired other Imperial Symposia. Athenaeanus is likewise explicit

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12 Oikonomopoulou is not alone in her hesitation to unify these works into a genre. See Jeanneret 1991, 140: “what makes [banquets of classical literature] distinctive is their variety and polyphony. They are too heterogeneous to adhere to an unique model, and also do not have a clear evolution, their genealogy remaining uncertain.”

13 “What are we left with, then, once we dismiss the notion of genre completely? It seems sounder to ground ourselves in the historical practice of conviviality, which can illuminate all literary Symposia as important cultural artifacts, rather than as elusive and self-contained literary creations.” (22)

14 This prologue will be quoted fully below. “…the Table Talk enjoyed such a rich afterlife. It is in fact one of the few imperial Graeco-Roman texts of which we have such a detailed record of the early reception, and this without doubt comes down to the fact that its formal intricacy became a source of creative inspiration for subsequent imperial authors.” (Klotz and Oikonomopoulou 2011, 13)
about his predecessors, although in a more undercutting way, filling the fifth book of the
*Deipnosophists* with criticism of all previous Symposia, except those banquets found in Homer.

What are the mechanisms these authors use to claim relationship with other texts?

**Signs of Generic Alignment**

A relatively straightforward way that authors made claims to membership in the tradition
(and one that was most immediately recognizable for readers) was in choosing a title for their
work. Plato, Xenophon, Epicurus, Plutarch, Methodius and Julian all call their work a
*Symposium*, sometimes with the addition of a differentiating sub-title, and therefore seem
comfortable with placing themselves in an acknowledged literary tradition.\(^{15}\) However, not all
of the texts choose to follow Plato and Xenophon in their titular modeling. Athenaeus pointedly
calls his work the *Deipnosophists*, and Plutarch’s *Symposiakon Biblia* (*Συμποσιακὸν Βιβλία Θ:*
*Quaestiones Convivales*) makes an important shift in direction by substituting the adjective
*symposiakon* for the noun *symposium*.\(^{16}\)

They also reference a literary sympotic tradition through setting their dialogues at the
cultural institution of the symposium.\(^{17}\) Oikonomopoulou’s suggestion that each of the authors
who wrote a Symposium should be seen to be responding individually to the social reality of the
symposium more than the artistic tradition of Symposia cannot be true for all of the Greek

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\(^{15}\) See König 2008 note 4. Titles are important to how we view these texts, but may have more to
do with “the orderliness of Hellenistic pedantries or the simplicities of Roman common sense”
(McKeon 1952, 22) than with the original author’s conception. We should remember that
Plato’s *Symposium* never uses the word “symposium” in the body of the text.

\(^{16}\) Oikonomopoulou says that the *QC* is called *συμποσιακά προβλήματα*. Regardless, this title
bears witness to Plutarch’s blending of the sympotic genre with the genre of “questions”, a genre
which was investigated in the first chapter.

\(^{17}\) Of course, this would assume continuity of the traditions of the symposium over an
exceptionally long period of time. While it does seem that there was surprising continuity, in the
Late Antique period this tradition must have been wearing thin, if not completely overcome by
other traditions of commensality and feasting. König 2012 talks about this for Libanius, etc.,
how even among pagans references to the institution of the symposium disappear.
Symposia. Her suggestion may be plausible when applied to the Imperial Symposia that she is concerned with, but it becomes clearly tenuous when we come to the later literary Symposia of Methodius, Julian and Pseudo-Cyprian, which are, in fact, explicitly and purposefully distanced from real life. For these authors, a sympotic setting clearly references a literary convention and not current convivial custom.\footnote{The problem of setting, both temporal and spatial, will be looked at in depth later in the chapter, but let it suffice at this point to note that not all our literary Symposia depict a realistic setting that would be immediately identifiable by readers as an event that they have often themselves participated in before. It is precisely Methodius’ distance from personal knowledge of the symposium as a social institution that so gained the scorn of Bril: “…not only is Methodius’ sympotic genre dead, but, because of his imperfect understanding of the symposion, the exhumed cadaver has missing bits, hence the resulting monstrosity” (Bril 2006, 301).}

If the sympotic setting of literary Symposia does not necessarily reflect the contemporary sympotic realities of their authors, what are the sympotic characteristics that these authors deem necessary and sufficient to construct a literary Symposium? In the preface to his QC, during his address to the dedicatee Sossius Senecio, Plutarch encourages our reasonable hope that they share the “drinking together” that the term “sym-posium” implies. He legitimates his current project by laying down a list of previous Symposia, and follows it up with an explanation of how his literary activity relates to what other authors have done before him.

…τὸ δ’ ὅλως ἀμηνημονεύν τὸν ἐν οίνῳ μὴ μόνον τὸ φιλοποιῷ λεγομένῳ μάχεσθαι τῆς τραπέζης, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν φιλοσόφων τοὺς ἐλλογιμοτάτους ἀντιμαρτυροῦντας ἔχειν, Πλάτωνα καὶ Ξενοφόντα καὶ Αριστοτέλην καὶ Σπεῦσππον Ἐπίκουρον τε καὶ Πρύτανιν καὶ Ἱερόνυμον καὶ Δίωνα τὸν ἐξ Ἀκαδημίας, ὡς ἄξιόν τινος σπουδῆς πεποιημένους ἔργον ἀναγράφασθαι λόγους παρὰ πότον γενομένους…

…yet to consign to utter oblivion all that occurs at a drinking-party is not only opposed to what we call the friend-making character of the dining-table, but also has the most famous of the philosophers bear witness against it—Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Speusippus, Epicurus, Prytanis, Hieronymus, and Dio of the Academy, who all considered the recording of conversations held at table a task worth some effort…” (612D-612E, trans. Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb Vol. 1, 7)
A literary Symposium “records conversations held at table” or rather, παρὰ πότον, while
drinking, and by including them on this list, Plutarch implies that all of his sources share this
setting.¹⁹ He reiterates the role of communal wine imbibing in Question 1.4 where he defines the
symposium as: “a passing of time over wine which, guided by gracious behavior, ends in
friendship” (διαγωγὴ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐν οἴνῳ τὸ συμπόσιον εἰς φιλίαν ὑπὸ χάριτος τελεύτασα.).²⁰ If
Plutarch is right, it would seem that the generic boundary might be a highly objective one: a
Symposium is a literary dialogue recording the conversations held during the after-dinner
drinking party called the symposium. But even such a narrow and apparently objective criterion
is not fulfilled by all of the texts that place themselves in this tradition. For instance, Athenaeus’
*Deipnosophists*, as its title reveals, focuses more (or equally) on the eating than on the drinking
period of the party.²¹ Similarly problematically, Methodius’ *Symposium* may take place after
dinner, but there is no alcohol consumed, beyond the barest suggestion that is probably only a
literary allusion to Homer.²² (The virgins are still having conversation παρὰ πότον, but the πότος
is a fountain with “water bubbling up like oil”, which is never said to touch their lips.) These

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¹⁹ Apart from Plutarch’s citations, we know nothing of the Symposia of the final three authors,
Prytanis, Hieronymus, and Dio of the Academy.
²⁰ Although here he is defining here the social custom of the symposium and not a literary
Symposium.
²¹ Lukinovich 1990 adduces this characteristic as the main innovation Athenaeus brings to the
Symptotic genre. Athenaeus’ title also makes explicit its greater interest in the people involved,
and the specific type of education being cultivated by them, than on the event: it is called the
*Deipnosophists* and not the *Deipnon*.
²² Prelude 4. Eubulion says to her informant Gregorion that she was the wine pourer
(ὠινοχόησας), but this is followed immediately by a quotation from *Iliad* 4.3 where Hebe is the
wine-pourer of the gods. Wine is not mentioned in Gregorion’s narration, and the injunction
against virgins drinking hard alcohol (although the issue of wine is not addressed) in the 6th
section of Thallusa’s speech: “Further, the virgin is forbidden to touch in any way whatsoever
not only the things that are made from this vine, but also whatever resembles or is similar to
them. Now there is that artificial and spurious wine called *sekar*, sometimes prepared from the
fruit of the date palm or from other trees. This drink upsets a man’s reason in the same way wine
does, only much more so.” (Musurillo 87)
exceptions show that the sympotic setting is both too much and too little to define the Symptic genre.

Perhaps more important is the method or content of the conversation shared, a conversation that certainly gets its specific tinge from the sympotic setting. After all, Plutarch claimed that the Symposium was primarily a recording of *conversations* (ἀναγράψασθαι λόγους) at drinking-parties. And, in fact, two popular topics recur in the collection of sympotic literature: talk about the institution of the symposium itself and talk about love. The first seems the result of a natural impulse to converse about the activity at hand, although the foundational texts of Plato and Xenophon do not focus overmuch on sympotic topics. Rather, a different body of literature flourished that confined itself to sympotic themes, to which the lost treatise of Aristotle *On Drunkenness* most likely belongs. Through an innovation visible to us first in Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Convivales*, with preceding hints from Xenophon, the two traditions of symposium and talk about the symposium, “sympotika”, were merged into one; a combination

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23 Xenophon does include some sympotic-themed discussion, e.g. a brief discussion about perfumes at 2.3-4, the discussion about dancing at 2.15-23, drinking proportions at 2.24-27, and the question about unsympotic silence addressed to Hermogenes (6.1).

24 Oikonomopoulou 2007 in her Introduction includes the treatises on sympotic themes within the sympotic genre in order to implode the generic boundaries attempted by scholars.

25 If indeed *On Drunkenness* is a separate work from his lost Symposium. Brill’s New Pauly believes that they are distinct. Ross’ edition of the fragments puts them all under the “Symposium”, and therefore presumably in a dialogic context, although there is no definitive evidence that Aristotle’s *Symposium* was in fact a dialogue (our only evidence is the quote from Plutarch’s introduction to Book 1 of the *QC*, discussed above). The title *On Drunkenness* does not occur in any of the early lists of Aristotle’s works, but I am not sure that should bother us too much, since each one shows its own lacunae. There are also examples of writing about symposia in moralizing texts, such as Clement of Alexandria’s *Paedagogue* (see König 2008).

26 Plutarch, fittingly, is the one to make the distinction between these two types of writing which concern symposia. “The first group indeed I also call specifically drinking-party topics, but both together generally suitable table-talk.” (trans. Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb Vol. VIII, 109) καλὸ δήτα καὶ ...τὰ συμποτικά· τὰ δ’ ...περὶ κοινῶς συμποσικά. (629D). Unfortunately, this part of the text is somewhat corrupt, but it is clear what Plutarch is getting at in making a distinction between συμποτικά, which are self-referential sympotic conversations (e.g. the arrangement of
that flourished most spectacularly in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists* and will be discussed at length further on. But the treatment of sympotic themes is neither necessary nor sufficient for a dialogue to be a Symposium.

The second topic of conversation that recurs continually in the pages of these dialogues is love. Book 13 of Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists* takes this point precisely in order to mock it, in Athenaeus’ typical anti-philosophical way. When the topic of Eros is mentioned, “…the philosophers present decided that they too should offer some comments about love and beauty. A large number of philosophical speeches were made…” (561a, trans. Olson, Loeb VI, 253). When love is mentioned at a party, philosophers are conditioned to rise up and start speechifying. (They have surely read their Plato, the most famous discussion of love at a Symposium, and are suitably prepared to perform what is expected of them.). Love affairs among the symposiasts are certainly not unimportant to the other Symposia: Xenophon’s *Symposium* includes a discourse on the difference between Heavenly and Vulgar Aphrodite, and the “erudite collections of table talk” such as Plutarch, Athenaeus and Macrobius show “love of information, of the records of the past, and of odd facts observed or alleged” (McKeon 1951, 25). When looking at the genre through this lens, the main turning point occurs with Methodius of Olympus’ celebration of chastity, signaling the introduction of the new paradigm of love that comes along with Christianity (McKeon 1951, 26). But it surely seems something of a stretch to

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27 Speeches that of course Athenaeus chooses not to record because he is setting up his body of knowledge in contradistinction to philosophy.  
28 Richard McKeon’s chronologically ambitious investigation into the sympotic genre from the ancient to the modern world sees the divisions in Symposia literature along precisely this theme of love, dividing Symposia by the object of the love that they celebrate (McKeon 1951-52).
say that love is the theme of all of these Symposia, especially perhaps the satiric ones of Lucian, Julian and Pseudo-Cyprian, which only mention love in passing.

**The Handbook Definition**

With all of these hopeful leads, or perhaps more precisely false starts, in defining the Symposium, it comes as a shock to read our only ancient source to describe the genre of “Socratic Symposia”. Hermogenes of Tarsus, a second century AD rhetorical theorist, decided not to focus on any of the characteristics already explored, failing to even mention the institution of the symposium in his definition. Instead he focused on the *composite* nature of the Symposium, specifically its combination of serious and comic elements. In addition to stylistic variety, he also mentions that Symposia contain a variety of character types and events. Here is the passage in full:

Συμποσίου Σωκρατικοῦ πλοκῆς σπουδαία καὶ γελοία καὶ πρόσωπα καὶ πράγματα, ὡσπερ καὶ ἐν τῷ Ἑξαυθόντος καὶ ἐν τῷ Πλάτωνος Συμποσίῳ. ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῇ Κύρου παιδείᾳ φησὶ Ἑξαυθόν «ἀεὶ μὲν οὖν ἐπεμελέθη ὁ Κύρος, ὅπως συνεκηνοῦν, ὅπως εὐχαριτωτεροί τε λόγοι ῥηθήσονται καὶ παρορμόντες εἰς ἄρετήν».

In Socratic symposia there is a combination of the serious and humorous in regard both to persons and actions, as in the *Symposium of Xenophon* and that of Plato. But in the *Cyropedia* also Xenophon says (2.2.1), ‘Cyrus always took care, when associating with officers on campaign, that the words he was going to say were genial and promoted virtue.”

Hermogenes places the genre of “Socratic symposia” under the wider umbrella of literature constructed “διά τινος διπλῆς μεθόδου”. The symposium is fundamentally diploid in character, distinguished for its nature as a weaving (πλοκῆ). Hermogenes, in fact, lists two diploid

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29 What follows after this in Hermogenes is a brief paragraph about what constitutes the genre of dialogue in general (455, p. 265). This passage will be turned to again in the next chapter of this dissertation.

30 Along with public speaking, dialogue, comedy, and tragedy: Δημηγορία, διάλογος, κωμωδία, τραγωδία, συμπόσια Σωκρατικά διά τινος διπλῆς μεθόδου πάντα πλέκεται. (Kennedy and Rabe 2005, 262)
possibilities. He mentions that Socratic Symposia contain an entwining of the earnest and humorous (σπουδαῖα καὶ γέλοια) in relation to both “people” and “events” (καὶ πρόσωπα καὶ πράγματα), as threads in the pleasantly variegated tapestry. It should also be pointed out that Hermogenes calls these “Socratic Symposia”, and mentions by name the two famous works of Plato and Xenophon, a point which will be taken up later.  

A hybrid tone which alternates between serious and comic finds one ancestral source in the final snap-shot of Plato’s Symposium, where we glimpse Socrates still awake into the early morning, debating with Agathon and Aristophanes whether the same man can write both comedy and tragedy. But the clearer source of the emphasis on the serious and comic is the Symposium of Xenophon. In the first sentence of his work Xenophon claims his purpose will be to show not only the serious deeds of good men, but also those done in jest (Ἀλλ’ ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ τῶν καλῶν κάγαθὸν ἄνδρὸν ἔργα οὐ μόνον τὰ μετὰ σπουδῆς πραττόμενα ἄξιομνημόνευτα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς). He follows up this promise by repeatedly pointing out when the symposiasts in his text are jesting, and when they turn serious.  

Hermogenes’ definition came to be standard in Byzantine rhetorical handbooks, and a later commentary illuminates how Xenophontic later readers found his definition. Gregorios Pardus, the twelfth Byzantine commentator on Hermogenes, when dealing with this passage,

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31 But Hermogenes must not be thinking of the presence of Socrates as being a generically necessary element, since he quotes from the Education of Cyrus, in which Socrates plays no part. Plato and Xenophon are also the only two Socratic symposia that we know of. There is no evidence that Aristotle’s Symposium, or any of his dialogues, featured a character Socrates, or that any of the other Socratic dialogues were Symposia.

32 See, for instance, after some banter about Critobulus’ beauty, Xenophon inserts: Καὶ οὗτοι μὲν δὴ οὕτως ἀναμίξει ἔσκωψάν τε καὶ ἐσπούδασαν (4.29.1); or when the work has turned serious with the contribution of...on friendship with the gods: οὗτος μὲν δὴ ο λόγος οὗτος ἐσπούδαιολογήθη. (4.49), to be immediately followed by Philip the Buffoon’s comic contributions to the debate. Finally, after Socrates gives his long speech about the Heavenly Aphrodite and the Vulgar Aphrodite, he apologizes for speaking too seriously for a symposium: εἰ δ’ ὑμῖν δοκῦ σπουδαιολογῆσαι μᾶλλον ἢ παρὰ πότον πρέπει, μηδὲ τούτῳ θαυμάζετε. (8.40).
brings forward Xenophon’s *Symposium* as his only illustration and divides up all of the
characters to put them either on the “serious” side or the “comic” side of the equation.

μβ’. Συμποσίου σωκρατικού πλοκή· ὁ Ξενοφῶν εἰσάγει συμπόσιον, ἐν ὧν Καλλίας ὁ Ἰππονίκου ἐρῶν Ἀυτολύκου, μετὰ τὸ νικῆσαι παγκράτιον τὸν Ἀυτολύκου, εἰστὶ τὰ τοῦτον ἀμα τὸ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ σωκράτην σὺν Ἑρμογένει τε καὶ Χαρμίδη, Αντισθένει τε καὶ Κριτοβουλω· οὗτοι οὖν σπουδαί ἐν τῷ συμποσίῳ περφύκασι πρόσωπα· γελοία δὲ, αἱ τα ἀυλητρίδες καὶ αἱ ὀρχηστρίδες· ἀλλὰ καὶ Φίλιππος, ὁ γελωτοποιός, ἠσαύτως· καὶ σπουδαί μὲν πράγματα, ἅ τα σωκράτης προβάλλεται, γελοία δὲ τὰ παρὰ τῶν ἀυλητρίδων καὶ ὀρχηστρίδων γενόμενα· ἐτι δὲ καὶ ἃ ὁ Φίλιππος ὀρχηστρίδων γενόμενα· ἐτι δὲ καὶ ἃ ὁ Φίλιππος ἔλεγε. (Rh. Gr. VII 1346-7, 24ff Walz)

About the weaving of the Socratic Symposium: Xenophon introduces a Symposium in which Kallias, the lover of Autolykos son of Hipponikos, after his win at the pankration, feasts both this boy together with his father, and also Socrates with Hermogenes and Charmides, Antisthenes and Critoboulos. These men are the serious characters in the Symposium, and the comic characters are the flute-players and the dancers, and also Philip, the buffoon. The serious activities are those that Socrates introduces, and the comic ones are those of the flute-players and dancers, and also those things that Philip said.

Gregorios’ explication is illuminating in two respects. First of all, he takes Xenophon as his only model, without even mentioning Plato. Secondly, Gregorios believes that the serious and comic characters and events can be neatly divided: serious people do serious things, and comic people do comic things (as difficult as it is to square this idea with the image of the “serious character” Socrates solo-dancing in his room in the mornings). 33

**Modern Sympotic Theories**

33 Hermogenes’ divisional scheme finds a modern champion in Josef Martin’s fundamental monograph *Symposion: Die Geschichte einer Literarischen Form* (1931). Martin believes that the similarities between all of the Sympotic texts can be seen in the presence of certain topoi that consistently recur: for instance, the familiar characters of the buffoon, the doctor, the symposiarch. The fissures of difference begin to show themselves when the relative importance of the meal to the drinking is examined (and therefore Athenaeus’ work is a vital branching for him). But what he finds as a more important distinction between sympotic texts is their relative amounts of the serious and comic.
Hermogenes’ ancient description of the Symposium as a composite of humorous and serious brings us to a modern dilemma. The serio-comic definition of Hermogenes leads naturally to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of the serio-comic genres, into which he places the Symposium. Although I have already discussed the impact of Bakhtin’s theories of the dialogic in my proceeding chapter, the interaction with Bakhtin is intensified when we turn from dialogue generally to the Symposium more specifically. Bakhtin explicitly lists the Symposium among the genres that are intensely dialogic, along with the Socratic dialogue, Menippean satire, and others (Bakhtin 1984, 106-107). Bakhtin believes that Symposia, both those of Plato and Xenophon as well as those of the later Imperial texts, are carnivalesque by nature: “Dialogic banquet discourse possessed special privileges (originally of a cultic sort): the right to a certain license, ease and familiarity, to a certain frankness, to eccentricity, ambivalence; that is, the combination in one discourse of praise and abuse, of the serious and the comic. The symposium is by nature a purely carnivalistic genre” (Bakhtin 1984, 120). Such a definition is in danger of underemphasizing the serious side of the genre. As Plutarch says in his own persona in QC 1.1:

“…but also the height of sagacity is to talk philosophy without seeming to do so, and in jesting to accomplish all that those in earnest could. Just as the Maenads in Euripides, without shield and without sword, strike their attackers and wound them with their little thyrsoi, so true philosophers with their jokes and laughter somehow arouse men who are not altogether invulnerable and make them attentive.” (614A, trans. Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb VIII p. 15)

άλλα καὶ συνέσεως ἄκρας φιλοσοφοῦντα μὴ δοκεῖν φιλοσοφεῖν καὶ παίζοντα διαπράττεσθαι τὰ τῶν σπουδαζόντων. ὡς γὰρ ἄι παρ’ Εὐριπίδη (Bacch. 736) μαίναδες ἄνοπλοι καὶ ἁσίδηροι τοῖς ἵθελοις παιδεύει τοὺς ἐπιτιθεμένους τραυματίζοντιν, οὕτω τῶν ἄληθινῶν φιλοσόφων καὶ τὰ σκώμματα καὶ οἱ γέλωτες τούς μὴ παντελῶς ἀτρότους κινοῦσιν ἀμωσγέπτως καὶ συνεπιστρέφουσιν.

Thyrsoi are equipped with sharp points, and, as much as we moderns might enjoy the comely sight of the frolic of seemingly benign Maenads, we would do well to heed Plutarch’s claim to
the Symposium’s fundamentally serious purpose. The Symposium is a dissimulating genre that is quite comfortable hiding its true purpose, comfortable with Bacchic masks.

Two modern scholars have brought Bakhtinian theories further to bear upon literary Symposia. Michel Jeanneret, in his book about Renaissance table-talk, stresses the multi-vocality that is possible to a heightened degree in a sympotic dialogue, and Jason König extends the idea of “dialogic” to emphasize the importance of entering into dialogue with the dead, sometimes through the ventriloquism of historical fiction, sometimes through quotation of past authors from the archive.

Jeanneret’s scholarship claims that the fundamental movement of the Symposium is toward dissolution and the break-down of order, that it is a “fundamentally pluralistic” form which authors such as Plato work hard to keep in check (Jeanneret 1991, 172). He sees any control of the Symposium as unsympotic, as introducing what is foreign to the genre. He believes we can recognize a grouping around two poles of banquet literature: “Plato’s Symposium and encyclopedic banquets, quality and quantity, thought and information, concentration and dissemination” (Jeanneret 1991, 172), with the natural trend in the genre towards the later pole of diversity and dispersion. Plato, trying to harness the genre more firmly to philosophy against its natural bent, holds back a “fundamentally pluralistic” form, which breaks out as time moves on and the Symposium genre develops. The Imperial Symposia are “mausoleums, all that remains are quotations, information, and archives, a collective memory in

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35 Although König talks about Bakhtin’s theory of carnival (König 2012, 57-58), he is more interested in “double-voicing” and how that might help us to understand the presence of quotation in the Imperial Symposia (König 2012, 52-57).
36 He does not deny that rules are important in Sympotic literature, and devotes a chapter to this topic (Chapter 3: Rules for the Appetite, p. 62-88). But these are external bounds set on the true nature of the genre: “Symposiastic discourse acknowledges the power of the norm, but flourishes when it breaks away from it.” (Jeanneret 1991, 88)
written form”, and “instead of philosophical entertainment, they invite their reader to an orgy of erudition…décor and dialogue are blurred behind the mass of documentation” (Jeanneret 1991, 161). The point of this type of sympotic form has nothing to do with philosophy. For the late antique “compilers and grammarians” (Jeanneret 1991, 161), the sympotic narrative exists chiefly to hold together disparate pieces of encyclopedic information. It is an ordering device instead of a plot device or a thematic necessity, a way to bring together in a slightly naturalized manner as much information as possible.

However, just as Jeanneret can see playful Bakhtinian literary delight as the natural mode of Symposia, it is also possible to turn this setting on its head and focus instead on the author’s task of constructing behavioral guidelines to display to readers how to correctly participate, through good and bad examples. The educational use of Symposia is the other way to look at

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37 “The meal is a topos which justifies the disparity of the texts, as if table talk, which is improvised and resists systematization, can give a decidedly artificial compilation a sense of authenticity and humanity and the appearance of a society game.” (Jeanneret 1991, 164) “The more bricolage and the more visible and composite its texture seems, the more material is needed to bind it together so that it does not descend to the level of a compilation or an academic exercise. The tricks of mimesis—plot, setting, dialogue, etc.—make all the difference. They bring life and motivation to material which would otherwise just be repetition. This is the sole function of the symposiac setting for philosophical debates or encyclopaedic collections” (Jeanneret 1991, 274).

38 Although Jeanneret points to the encyclopedic and parodic as the important styles in the Imperial Era, he is simultaneously wary of claims to a schematic development of the genre, and critiques Martin on this point. He does not go so far as to reject the “genre” of Symposium, as Oikonomopoulou 2007 attempts, but he refuses to make arguments about direct influence. “J. Martin’s developmental study, Symposion. Die Geschichte einer literarischen Form, is useful, but the continuity it seeks to establish is not convincing.” (Jeanneret 1991, 140, note 1) “They are too heterogeneous to adhere to a unique model, and also do not have a clear evolution, their genealogy remaining uncertain” (Jeanneret 1991, 140).

39 “Symposia were implicitly educational, whether it was philosophical precepts being passed around with the wine or lessons on how to behave like a gentleman, a καλοκάγαθος. In either case, the symposium taught through mimesis: younger members watched the older and learned from the actions and talk of good men how to be good men themselves. At the same time, symposia were also erotic, and that eros was part of the curriculum, as the impressionable ἔρωμενος learned to imitate the good example of his older ἔραστής.” (Wohl 2004, 337)
the function of the multivocality present in symposia and Symposia, and one that proves more satisfying because it answers the further question of to what end multiple voices are introduced.\textsuperscript{40} The educational purpose of the dialogue form was looked at in more detail in the preceding chapter.

Another scholar, Jason König, chooses to delimit the literary Symposia as a genre particularly interested in creating “imagined communities”:

“I argue that the appeal of sympotic literature in the Roman imperial period lay partly in its capacity to conjure up fantasy images of community: community between individuals in the present, united by their commitment to shared models of argumentation, and also community with the texts and authors of the past, who are brought into dialogue with the present within the imaginary space of the symposium” (König 2012, viii).

The dialogue is not only among the sympotic participants, but more importantly, with the past.\textsuperscript{41} Sometimes this conversation with the past happens through quotation of earlier authors, sometimes with setting the Symposium in a distant (or not quite so distant) past, creatively imagining the banter between people long gone. Such a perspective fits in very well with much recent scholarship’s typification of the Second Sophistic’s concern to reactivate the past into useful form in the present.

König’s focus on the type of community formed points us in a helpful direction by making explicit the fact that the Symposium is an ideal location to present an imaginary, intellectual community. The Symposium has specific qualities that are not found in other genres of literature, even other dialogues. First of all, there is of necessity a larger number and variety of participants, and secondly, those participants are often required to participate through the

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\textsuperscript{40} The Athenian in Plato’s \textit{Laws} claims that license and drunkenness are allowed at symposia in order to teach one how to speak correctly and to behave with moderation (\textit{Laws} 641a-644b). Symposia could equally be seen as establishing laws that allow sufficient wildness to come in so that one can learn how to control and master that wildness.

\textsuperscript{41} See particularly his section on “Voices of the Dead” (König 2012, 41-52).
tradition of soliciting round-robin responses to a proposed question. A Symposium cannot be a
discussion between two people alone, as other dialogues may. It is wider in its scope and
necessarily creates a sense of a larger community. In addition, not only is a community
represented, or imagined, but the reader is invited to participate in it. The participatory intent of
Symposia is often signaled by the use of inset narratives: eager listeners petition the retelling of
the story from someone who heard about it from someone else or was there themselves.
Symposia often script their own reception, and in so doing attempt to elicit some kind of
reactivation in the present. The form and habits of the community depicted in the Symposium
demonstrate to the reader how to act in a similar way. Within Symposia’s imagined
communities, there are often narratives of education, where younger members watch and learn
from those around them. Also important in this regard in Book 9 where Plutarch scripts himself as a younger man,
learning from older symposiasts (Klotz 2011, 171-178 and König 2012, 70).
Looking at the development of literary Symposia allows the modern
reader to see the shift in what kind of intellectual community was considered ideal, as well as the
more subtle shifts in how one correctly participates in those communities. The educational
aspect can be more or less emphasized, and one of the characteristics of Imperial Symposia is an
increased focus on the educative aspects, and indeed a battle over what the correct content of
education should be.43

Another theorist of the genre has tried to comprehend the genre by mapping out its
development over time. Joel Relihan in his 1992 article “Rethinking the History of the Literary
Symposium” subdivides the surviving literary Symposia into three phases, following the
schematization of genre development found in Alastair Fowler’s Kinds of Literature: An
Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes (Harvard 1982). First comes the “primitive

42 Also important in this regard in Book 9 where Plutarch scripts himself as a younger man,
learning from older symposiasts (Klotz 2011, 171-178 and König 2012, 70).
43 Seen especially vibrantly in Athenaeus’ strenuous attempt to overturn the tyranny of
philosophy and bring back general philological/literary education.
stage”, followed by the “artificial/sophisticated/sentimental”, before the final devolution into the third and final stage of “literary nostalgia” which has ossified certain aspects of the genre beyond manipulation. Following this scheme, he places Xenophon’s *Symposium* and Plutarch’s *SS* in the first, original phase, Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists* and Plutarch’s *QC* in the second, and Methodius and Macrobius in the third. He then sections off Julian and the *Cena Cypriani* in a “Menippean Satire” genealogy, Julian as a version of the second phase, and the *Cena* as a version of the third phase. His division seems overly schematic, and he insufficiently explains why he makes the divisions that he does, too often leaving his readers to guess for themselves, but his attempt at a systematic organization is refreshing and suggestive.45

**The Two Modes**

I would like to propose another method of division to account for the variety among the different works also along developmental lines. Hermogenes remarks that diploidarity is an integral part of the genre of Socratic Symposium, but he fails to make explicit the fact that there is another inherent dualism in the genre, even as he ends his sentence with a perfect statement of

44 Relihan places one of the developmental divisions down the middle of one of the authors, putting Plutarch’s *SS* in the first phase, and his *QC* in the second. This picks up on the importance of Plutarch as a pivotal figure in the development of the genre, an insight which will also be key in my schematization.

45 A final suggestion for divisions in the Symptotic genre is found in Gorgemanns’ article in *Brill’s New Pauly*. He uses a division that resists making Plato and Xenophon determinative of genre, although admitting their importance as founders. He divides the surviving literary texts into five groups. The first contains those Symposia that have explicit sympotic themes for their content (1). Second come those who expand beyond sympotic themes to include other topics of learned inquiry (2). Next, he moves away from making divisions based on topic of conversation and instead makes divisions based on setting and participants, singling out “symposia with important guests” (3) and Symposia that occur at funerary banquets (4). Finally, he concludes with those Symposia that seem explicitly satiric/parodic (5). The final three divisions do not seem to be of the same type as the first two, no longer concerned with the topic of discussion, but with the participants and setting. It is questionable whether the fourth category even exists. Gorgemanns’ scheme seems rather haphazard, choosing unconnected characteristics to define sub-genres within the field.
it: “as in the Symposium of Xenophon and that of Plato” (ὁσπερ καὶ ἐν τῷ Ἑνοφόντος καὶ ἐν τῷ Πλάτωνος Συμποσίῳ). The genre of Socratic Symposia seems to be founded upon the writing of two men: Plato and Xenophon.46 I see the most fundamental division as between the tracks of the tradition founded by Plato and Xenophon respectively, which, in agreement with Jeanneret, I think can broadly be divided into philosophic and compulsory Symposia, although I disagree with his belief that the philosophic branch is not inherently sympotic. Plato’s Symposium is the primary example of a philosophic symposium with one unified topic of conversation; Xenophon’s Symposium begins the tradition of philosophic sympoisa that have multiple topics and a more episodic framework. The latter clearly led the way to the compulsory type especially popular during the Imperial period. Corresponding with the difference in structure is also a difference in the role played by the creation of the company of sympoisaists. In Xenophon and his followers, the horizontal creation of a certain type of community is the primary focus, while for Plato and his followers the emphasis turns to the orientation of that community to its own transcendence. Generic alignment takes place in a historical process of response and development.

From the bi-fold source of Plato and Xenophon, Plutarch’s two Symposia, the QC and the SS, provide the next important branching in the sympotic tree, both stemming primarily from the Xenophontic limb. Plutarch’s SS follows in the tradition of Xenophon as a multi-topic philosophic Symposium, but Plutarch begins a new family of Symposia with his second sympotic work, the Quaestiones Convivales. For the first time the symposium itself and sympotic traditions become the main topic of conversation, an interest that becomes more

46 See Bowie 1993 for a more nuanced modern view. For the sake of this argument, it does not matter whether Plato and Xenophon truly invented the philosophical Symposium, but whether later authors in the tradition thought it to be true.
pronounced in the Imperial Symposia than in either of their Socratic predecessors. Not only is
there an increased focus on what type of community is established and how best to go about
establishing it, but there is also an inward turning to the sympotic institution itself.

My schematization, then, follows up the lead from Jeanneret and discovers that there is a
closer relationship between some of these texts than he realized, and it also gives to Methodius,
who only gets a footnote in Jeanneret, a more mainstream placement within the scheme.
Jeanneret too found in Xenophon’s *Symposium* the first example of truly “dialogic” Symposium
in the Bakhtinian sense:

> Voices and ideas mingle; they are not ranked or integrated. Contradictions remain unresolved, loose ends are left. Philosophical, narrative, dramatic, serious and comic elements exist side by side for better or worse in a text which is fundamentally pluralistic in nature, and where generic rigour is non-existent; it could be described as a foretaste of the Menippean satire. Dialogism and heterogenerity enter the history of the literary banquet with Xenophon and remain part of it from then on. (Jeanneret 1991, 143-144)

Because Plutarch and those who followed after him are explicit about their reuse of Xenophon’s
model, and because Methodius is adamant about ignoring Xenophon and his successors, I
believe it is legitimate to make the genealogical argument that Jeanneret desires to avoid.
Simultaneously, I see the Xenophontean branch as more explicit in its educational intent along
with its increasing miscellanism, the two tendencies supporting one another rather than
conflicting with one another.

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47 “I shall not deal with the Greek *Banquet* by Bishop Methodius of Olympia (third century AD), which is also heterogeneous and full of literary material. It is a *summula theologiae* which discusses various points of doctrine and is an apologia for chastity. The convivial device, which is outlined at the beginning, is merely an allegory of the feast at the wedding between God and the Church” (Jeanneret 1991, 161 n. 25).
Part II: The Xenophontic Mode

Xenophon and the Origins of the Episodic Symposium

In most discussions about the development of the sympotic genre, there seems to be a conspiracy of silence over the role of Xenophon, which is part of a larger trend to denigrate his Symposium in comparison with Plato’s much more famous (and sophisticated, it is claimed) work. König 2012 goes so far as to substitute “sympotic genre” with “Platonic symposium tradition,” with only a short nod in the direction of Xenophon. Oikonomopoulou’s 2007

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48 Although this is certainly the tendency, it is not the only voice and should not be overstated. There have been some scholars who acknowledged the importance of Xenophon. See especially Teodorsson’s recognition that it formed the main model for the development of the Sympotic genre: “The ethos of friendliness, good temper and sense of humour which characterizes Xenophon’s Symposium was to determine the nature of the Socratic kind of symposium for the future, as we can observe in Plutarch’s convivial works. With his Symposium Xenophon broadened the scope of the newly founded genre. With the good spirits and the easy-going conversation Xenophon added substantially to the foundation of the genre laid by Plato. The greater comprehensibility of the content and the less sophisticated linguistic form may have been what inspired the numerous writers at the time who followed his lead and composed sympotic works. We may suppose that these differed considerably among themselves according to the author’s different interests and preferences. But unfortunately, all of these writings are lost.” (Teodorsson 2009, 9) While I agree with him that Xenophon is the more important model, as I shall argue below, I do not quite agree with the characteristics that he lists as attractions “the ethos of friendliness, good temper and sense of humour”, finding the episodic character more important (although humor is certainly important as well).

49 He also shies away from the term “sympotic genre” because he wishes to investigate other genres that include sympotic scenes and themes which may not be defined as “sympotic” proper. For some examples of his privileging Plato: “The sympotic tradition is an important reference-point not just in those works which offer extended imitations of Plato’s Symposium, or in the large number of surviving epigrams probably performed (or written as if to be performed) in a sympotic context, but also as a recurring motif in texts which are not so straightforwardly ‘sympotic’.” (König 2012, 15) “I prefer in what follows to talk about the Platonic symposium tradition, rather than the symposium ‘genre’.” (König 2012, 15 n. 60) “…and most importantly for chapters 1-4 of this book, imagined scholarly and philosophical miscellanies which followed in the wake of Plato’s Symposium.” (König 2012, 29)

50 “Xenophon’s Symposium, probably written in reaction to Plato’s, similarly shows Socrates enjoying playful intellectual discussion in a sympotic setting. Between them these two works indelibly mark the literary symposium tradition.” (König 2012, 11) This is almost all he has to say about Xenophon.
dissertation makes a similar move,\textsuperscript{51} with a similar uncomfortable inclusion of Xenophon as an embarrassing uncle.\textsuperscript{52} But as we have seen in the citations of both Hermogenes and Plutarch, Xenophon was seen by many ancient authors as the co-founder of a genre that we would be better to call, along with Hermogenes, the “Socratic Sympotic tradition” rather than the “Platonic Sympotic tradition”. It should be recalled that there is no consensus over which \textit{Symposium} is chronologically primary. Although the majority scholarly opinion is that Xenophon’s work is responding as a corrective to Plato’s,\textsuperscript{53} there have been two recent arguments strenuously made for the primacy of at least an earlier version of Xenophon’s \textit{Symposium}.\textsuperscript{54}

Four vital characteristics of Xenophon’s \textit{Symposium}, which distinguish it from Plato’s more famous text, had long-lasting influence on the sympotic genre. The first is its pointedly episodic nature. The second, related to the first, is the involvement of the conversations in the text with the actions and development of the sympotic event (most noticeably, the entertainment, as well as a greater interest in sympotic questions, e.g. perfume and convivial unpleasantness). Third is the emphasis that Xenophon places on humor, positioning it as part of the programmatic

\textsuperscript{51} “The tradition has a number of Classical forefathers, such as Ion of Chios or Xenophon, but its principal model text, to the format and content of which all the later works appear to allude, is Plato’s \textit{Symposium}.” (Oikonomopoulou 2007, 15, cf. 23)
\textsuperscript{52} See also Goldhill 2009, “…the importance of Plato’s \textit{Symposium} creates a philosophical and intellectual genealogy to complement the social role of sympotic performance” (4). And Charalabopoulos 2012, “Both the \textit{Sympotic Questions} and the \textit{Deipnosophists} belong to the genre of prose sympotic literature. It is well known that Plato’s \textit{Symposium} was the founding text and a standard work of reference for all writers of the genre afterwards” (223-224).
\textsuperscript{53} There is universal agreement that they are in some kind of close relationship, regardless of direction of influence. The clearest moment of contact is in Xenophon’s work when Socrates quotes an idea of “Pausanius” on the benefits of lover-warrior bands, which summarizes the view of Phaedrus in Plato’s Symposium. There are also broader similarities that may point to polemical response. Diogenes Laertius believed that the two \textit{Symposia} were written in competition with each other. “And it seems that Xenophon was not on good terms with him [Plato]. At any rate, they have written similar narratives as if out of rivalry with each other, a \textit{Symposium}, a \textit{Defense of Socrates}, and their moral reaises or Memorabilia.” (Diogenes Laertius III.34, trans. Hicks, Loeb 307-309)
\textsuperscript{54} Thesleff 1978 and Danzig 2005.
introduction to his work, and then repeating the terms throughout the text at key moments.\textsuperscript{55}

And fourth is a more explicit didactic intent that was to flower more fully in Xenophon’s later imitators.

Xenophon’s use of the episode becomes almost a caricature of itself in the very end of Book 4. To mark the transition from the \textit{agon} where each symposiast made a speech about the thing for which they had the greatest pride, to the beauty contest between Critobulus and Socrates, Xenophon banally remarks, “And so this round of discourse was brought to a close” (καὶ αὕτη μὲν δὴ ἢ περίοδος τῶν λόγων ἀπετελέσθη 4.64). Although the most marked, this is not the only place where Xenophon emphasizes the multi-episode nature of his \textit{Symposium}. For example, Socrates proposes that they turn from watching the entertainment to entertaining themselves through conversation (3.2), and the long speech on love found in Book 8 is introduced with the comment, “Socrates now opened up another new topic for discussion”: ὁ δὲ Σωκράτης πάλιν ἀυτὸν καινὸν λόγον κατήρχεν (8.1).\textsuperscript{56}

The episodic character of his Symposium permeates the level of tone as well. Although the dialogue begins in holy silence caused by the beauty of the young man Autolycus (1.11), Xenophon brings in swift contrast with the entrance of the buffoon, Philip (1.11-16). The first topic of conversation is whether and what kind of perfume is appropriate (2.3): a comfortably sympotic topic that would not have found a place in Plato’s \textit{Symposium}. Socrates uses this conversation to begin a discussion on whether or not virtue can be taught (2.4-7), a conversation

\textsuperscript{55} It important to mention that Plato as well has elements of this important combination of serious and comic, which is reflected in Plato’s closing the Symposium with a parting look at Aristophanes, Agathon and Socrates arguing about whether the same man can write both comedy and tragedy (223C-D). But it is much more central of a motif in Xenophon.

\textsuperscript{56} Danzig 2005 argues that all of Book 8 is a later addition by Xenophon as a response to Plato’s Symposium, which would explains the strong transition made here. But even if this is the case, it only shows how easy Xenophon finds it to insert an additional episode into his loose episodic framework.
which is cut off by Socrates himself in favor of watching the dance routine that has just begun (2.7).

The opening sequence stands in synecdoche for the rest of the dialogue. Xenophon’s Symposium is composed on epicycles that rotate from banal to serious, with new loops initiated by activities surrounding the symposium. Perfumes lead to a discussion of how to learn goodness; observing dancers leads to a discussion about the virtue of women and how to teach bravery. The conversations are intimately connected with the development of the symposium itself. As Socrates comments to his host at the very beginning:

‘On my word, Callias, you are giving us a perfect dinner; for not only have you set before us a feast that is above criticism, but you are also offering us very delightful sights and sounds.’ (2.3, trans. Todd, Loeb 543)

The sights and sounds of the symposium are central to Xenophon as they were not central to Plato. While Plato ends his Symposium with an observed conversation among Socrates, Aristophanes and Agathon, Xenophon ends his with an observed dance by the entertainment troupe. The movements of the sympotic event shape the movements of the sympotic conversation, and as a result there is a greater permeation of sympotic themes and philosophic ones.

It is impossible to miss Xenophon’s emphasis on humor in his Symposium. 57 He makes it a programmatic element, claiming in his first sentence that he is interested not just in the serious deeds of good men (ἔργα), but also in their games (παιδιά, 1.1). The images of Socrates

vigorously solo-dancing in his room for early-morning exercise (2.19), the mock-sycophantic refrain of the banqueters of “yes” (πάνυ μὲν οὖν) that is thrown into confusion when Socrates asks a question that demands a different answer (4.56-60), the “beauty contest” between the ugly Socrates and the acknowledged good-looker Cristobulus (5), are all designed to produce a laugh. After his great speech contrasting heavenly and vulgar Aphrodite, Socrates excuses himself for talking more seriously than is appropriate at a symposium.⁵⁸ The comic elements in Xenophon are only emphasized by his reception. The passage quoted above of Gregorios’ schematization of the “serious and comic” blend proposed by Hermogenes chose to analyze Xenophon’s humorous characters and events, not even mentioning Plato.

Xenophon’s Symposium is also explicitly interested in education, although not in the same way or to the same extent as the later Imperial tradition that was to follow him. Like the Socrates of Plato’s dialogues, Xenophon’s Socrates tries to lead his interlocutors to more cogent thinking and a more thoughtful moral life. The main narrative of education in Xenophon’s Symposium is Socrates’ discourse on Eros in Book 8 directed to his host Callias. In the middle of his speech differentiating the Vulgar from the Heavenly Aphrodite, the fellow symposiast Hermogenes interjects:

‘Marry,’ quoth Hermogenes, ‘you arouse my admiration in numerous ways, Socrates, but now more than ever, because in the very act of flattering Callias you are in fact educating him to conform to the ideal.’ (8.12, trans. Todd, Loeb 617)

Ἡραν, ἐφὶ, ὁ Σώκρατες, ἄλλα τε σου πολλὰ ἀγαμαι καὶ ὅτι νῦν ἀμα χαριζόμενος Καλλία καὶ παιδεύεις αὐτὸν οἴόνπερ χρῆ εἶναι.

The culminating speech of Xenophon’s Socrates is flagged as educational. In a combination that should now sound familiar, Hermogenes asserts that Socrates’ perfect sympotic banter managed to educate at the same time as it gave pleasure. Combining the serious and humorous, this

⁵⁸ εἰ δ’ ύμῖν δοκῶ σπουδαίολογήσαι μᾶλλον ἢ παρὰ πότον πρέπει, μηδὲ τούτο θαυμάζετε. (8.40)
passage also finds a direct descendent in Plutarch’s *QC* 1.1, where Plutarch encourages philosophers to use jokes at parties to make un-philosophic men thoughtful (614A).

**From Xenophon to Plutarch and the Birth of the Compilatory Symposium**\(^{59}\)

One of the most creative inheritors of the Xenophontic Symptotic tradition was Plutarch of Chaeronea in the first and second centuries of our era. Plutarch’s reliance upon and development of the Xenophontic tradition may come as a surprise considering his clear identification as a Platonist.\(^{60}\) Despite his allegiance to Plato’s philosophical world, Plutarch followed in the footsteps of Xenophon’s playfulness and creativity with literary genre.\(^{61}\) In the three passages of the *Quaestiones Convivales* where Plutarch lists previous Symptotic writers, he happily puts the two Socratic Symposia of Plato and Xenophon side-by-side as models, and does not consider the fact that he takes Xenophon to be a stronger literary model to require an abandonment of Plato as another important literary model.

Proof that Plutarch relies on Xenophon is found not only in the passage in his preface to Book 1 quoted above, where he explicitly lists Xenophon among his sympotic precedents, but also in two other important points where Plutarch singles out Plato and Xenophon’s Symposia

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\(^{59}\) For a good overview of what we know of the intervening Symptotic tradition between Xenophon and Plutarch and the possible uses Plutarch makes of it, see Oikonomopoulou 2007, p. 33ff and Tecusan’s 1993 Oxford thesis ‘Symposion and Philosophy’, who gathers all the fragments of these works.

\(^{60}\) An easily accessible overview of Plutarch’s Platonism is Dillon 1977 Chapter 4 “Plutarch of Chaeroneia and the Origins of Second-Century Platonism” p. 184-230. “Plutarch was a Platonist, according to the understanding he had of that term, which grew out of the development in Platonism in the century before his birth…he was, of course, indebted (indirectly) for many formulations to both Peripateticism and Stoicism…” (Dillon 1977, 186).

\(^{61}\) For example, Momigliano, among others, believes that Xenophon’s biographical sketches in the *Anabasis* and especially in the *Cyropaedia* formed the inspiration for Plutarch’s *Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans*. Momigliano 1993, discussed by Gray 1992, 58 in the context of Xenophon’s literary innovations in his *Symposium*.  

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alone of sympotic precedents. The first is in Question 1.1, during the discussion of when philosophical discussions are appropriate at drinking parties:

‘For if the majority of the guests at the party are learned men, like Socrates, Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus at the dinner of Agathon, and Charmides, Antisthenes, Hermogenes, and others like them at the dinner of Callias, we shall let them talk philosophy, blending Dionysus not less with the Muses than with the Nymphs.’ (1.1 613D, trans. Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb Vol. VIII, 13)

Here the two examples of philosophic Symposia for Plutarch have been reduced down from the more expansive list in his preface to Xenophon and Plato alone. The same thing happens in the preface to Book 6, where Plato and Xenophon are the only two Symposia mentioned, and they are given equal weight. Plutarch begins with an anecdote about how when Timotheus was invited to a dinner at the Academy, he approved of the moderation of the celebration because it allowed one afterwards to remember what happened. Remembering the talk of wise men is a beneficial thing.

On the other hand, the topics of philosophical inquiry and discussion not only give pleasure by remaining ever present and fresh to those who actually recall them, but they also provide just as good a feast on the same food to those who, having been left out, partake of them through oral report. In this way, it is even today open to men of literary taste (τοῖς φιλολόγοις) to enjoy and share in the Socratic banquets as much as did the original diners. Yet if pleasure were purely physical, the proper thing would have been for both Xenophon and Plato to leave us a record, not of conversation, but of the relishes, cakes, and sweets served at Callias’s house and Agathon’s. As it is, they never deign to mention such matters, for all the expense and effort these presumably involved; but they preserve in writing only the philosophical discussions, combining fun with serious effort. Thus they have left precedents to be followed not only in meeting together for good conversation over wine, but in recording the conversation afterwards.” (686c, trans. Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb VIII, 455)

…προβλημάτων δὲ καὶ λόγων φιλοσόφων ύποθέσεις αὐτούς ἄπειρανος, ἀκόε πρόσφατος παροῦσαι, καὶ τοὺς ἀπολειψάντας
Not only does Plutarch take the trouble to make multiple explicit references to his two primary sympotic models of Plato and Xenophon, but he also flags the importance of Xenophon by making his own definition of the literary symposium a reference to the opening line of Xenophon’s Symposium: “To my mind it is worthwhile to relate not only the serious acts of gentlemen but also what they do in their lighter moments” (I.1, trans. Todd, Loeb 564, Ἀλλ’ ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ τῶν καλῶν κάγαθόν ἄνδρόν ἔργα οὐ μόνον τὰ μετὰ σπουδῆς πραττόμενα 
ἀξιομημόνευτα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς).

Plutarch wrote more than one sympotic work, and the Quaestiones Convivales is strikingly different from the Symposium of the Seven Sages. By contrasting the two we can see how innovative Plutarch is in reframing his Xenophontic model. Plutarch takes the Xenophontic Symposium and innovates by combining it with two different genres: Peripatetic problemata for the QC and the gnomic literature of the Seven Sages for the SS.62 By combining a dialogue that already featured a variety of characters and events, as his [probable] contemporary Hermogenes

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62 “The Peripatetic tradition was extremely fecund: it bequeathed to posterity an immensely rich and highly variegated field of inquiry which could be readily mined, but also flexibly re-adapted to new ends. It was the tradition that manifestly played the most instrumental role in the development of the imperial Graeco-Roan tradition of miscellanistic and encyclopedic writing: Plutarch’s collections of Quaestiones, and texts like Pliny’s Natural History, Athenaeus’ Deipnosophistae, and Aelian’s On the Nature of Animals, all draw on Peripatetic sources for their contents, but they also adopt from it a certain intellectual paradigm, that of polymathy (meaning ‘the learning of many things’), which encourages their spirit of knowledge-collecting.” Oikonomopoulou 2011,108-109.
reminds us, with the scholarly tradition of collecting and treating *Problems* or the wide-ranging collection of the sayings of the Wise Men, what emerged was an increased emphasis on the principle of variety and a growth in didacticism. It seems that Xenophon’s legacy was particularly open to being fruitfully combined with other genres. In the section that follows, I will look at the various lines of tradition that flow from Xenophon, paying special attention to how the two Symposia of Plutarch develop the Xenophontic tradition in different directions.

**Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Convivales* to Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists***

From the two-fold root of Plato and Xenophon’s Socratic Symposia, the miscellanist Symposium of the Imperial period grows into something quite unlike its predecessors. The growth into miscellany appears to have gotten its strongest propulsion from Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Convivales*, and we are fortunate that in that text Plutarch provides a series of explanations of his rationale for writing a sympotic work that emphasizes assortment and variety.

Plutarch is explicit about what he is attempting to do in the *QC*. He is using the principles of miscellany in order to promote the kind of philosophical practice necessary for fostering friendship. Variety and pleasure are legitimate elements in his larger project. In a few places, he provides his readers with justifications and allegories for the use of variety, and for his emphasis on pleasure along with utility. The first occurs in question 1.2, a placement particularly suited for a programmatic statement of aesthetics. Each of his nine books of questions begins with a short introduction where he gives a reflection upon his undertaking. The first book opens with the listing of sympotic predecessors that motivate his work, as quoted above. He follows this with the first question on whether and how it is appropriate to converse philosophically at a symposium, thereby providing the rationale for the rest of the work. In a
similar manner, the next question, 1.2, also reflects and comments upon the QC as a whole, although not as explicitly. The impetus for the question comes when Plutarch’s brother hosts a dinner party and chooses not to give assigned places to his guests, much to the disapproval of his father. Plutarch is called upon to arbitrate whether it is better to assign seats to your guests or let them seat themselves at random. If it is indeed best to place them in a certain arrangement, what principle of arrangement should be used? At first, Plutarch supports the argument that arrangement according to status is vital in order to sustain correct prestige-relationships. But the guest Lamprias objects to Plutarch’s embrace of prestige as the correct ordering principle. Rather, he argues that it is the host’s responsibility to place his guests in arrangements where they will be able to enjoy themselves the most. This kind of arrangement involves planned variety. Instead of putting like next to like, the host should put complimentary together.

Lamprias explicitly broadens this principle beyond sympotic seating arrangements:

οὔτε γάρ πρὸς τὸ ἐνδοξόν ἄλλα πρὸς τὸ ἅδη δεῖ ποιεῖσθαι τὰς κατακλίσεις, οὔτε τὴν ἐνὸς ἐκάστου σκοπεῖν ἄξιαν ἄλλα τὴν ἑτέρον πρὸς ἑτέρον σχέσιν καὶ ἀρμονίαν, ὅσπερ ἄλλων τινῶν εἰς μίαν κοινωνίαν παράλαμβανομένων. (618A)

For it is not prestige, but pleasure which must determine the placing of guests; it is not the rank of each which must be considered, but the affinity and suitability of each to each, as is done when other things are associated for a common purpose. (trans. Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb VIII, 39)

Plutarch agrees with Lamprias’ suggestion, and then proceeds in the rest of the QC to live up to the variety-pleasure principle, often purposefully placing a contrasting question after a series of interrelated ones, as one would place differing guests next to each other at table. For instance, he surprises his reader with the last question in Book 3. The other eight questions have been about drunkenness, leading the reader to assume that he will end with more of the same. Instead, he closes the book with a question of whether the sun or the moon causes meat to rot more quickly. The reader’s expectations are delighted by the unforeseen change in topics. A second clear
example of his commitment to variety comes in the final book. While all of the other books contain ten questions each, the 9th book contains fifteen questions, purportedly in order to honor the Muses all the more, whose number gives Plutarch the inspiration for limiting the QC to nine books in the first place (see the introduction to Book 9, 736C). Plutarch helpfully provides us with apologia for variety in arrangement: his compilation is not randomized without art. Pleasure is a fundamental organizing principle and also a reason for having a miscellanistic structure in the first place.

Miscellanism can be used for different ends. The miscellaneous element in Plutarch’s QC is at the service of philosophic conversation, while the miscellaneous element in his successor Athenaeus is at the service of paideia, as we will investigate further on. Plutarch’s ultimate goal is friend-making in a pleasurable context, and philosophic conversation is the means to achieve that end. When the works of earlier authors are brought forth into the conversation, they serve the purpose of instigating conversation. For example, in discussing the nature and causes of the disease of bulimy, Plutarch and his fellow diners are temporarily stuck.

Гενομένης δὲ σιωπῆς, <ἐγώ> συννοῶν ὅτι τὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἐπιχειρήματα τοὺς μὲν ἄργους καὶ ἀφυείς οὖν ἀναπαύει καὶ ἀναπίπλησι, τοῖς δὲ φιλοτίμοις καὶ φιλολόγοις ἄρχειν ἐνδίδοσιν οἰκείαν καὶ τόλμαν ἐπὶ τὸ ἦτεν καὶ ἀνιχνεύειν τὴν ἀλήθειαν… (6.8, 694D)

There was a silence during which I reflected that to the idle and dull the solutions of their predecessors to such questions provide only a chance to imbibe and be content; to an eager scholar, however, they present an opening and incentive for boldly seeking and tracking down the truth, on his own. (694D, trans. Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb VIII, 499-501).

There are other places in the QC where Plutarch champions the importance of pleasure in arrangement and use. QC 3.1 speaks of the use of sympotic garlands question, which is especially apropos since one of the chief images of miscellanies becomes the meadow dotted with every kind of flower. QC 4.1, which treats the benefit of variety in food, also contributes to this theme. Interestingly, Oikonomopoulou 2007, 228-232 discusses these sections that focus on mixture and variety, but she looks at them as symbols of political theory instead of aesthetic theory.
He follows up this thought with sharing with his fellow symposiasts a quotation from (Pseudo-) Aristotle’s *Problems*, and with the conversational knot loosed, conversation continues. Plutarch thereby demonstrates that the reason one brings forward the written insights of generations past is not just to admire their authority, but to use them as starting points for independent philosophizing.

Plutarch’s purpose is not the collection of information. Rather, he provides paradigms so that the reader can imitate his method at the next banquet to which he is invited, at the service of fostering friendships over eating and drinking. It is the “education of the gentleman,” showing his readers how to make friends through philosophical conversation. Plutarch’s increased didacticism, although building off of elements found in Xenophon, begins a new trend in the Sympotic genre, and after his *QC*, many of the Symposia are explicit about their educational function.

Plutarch’s *QC* also shows the greater interest in sympotic questions which started with Xenophon and which culminates in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists*. As mentioned above, he admits this interest in sympotic themes, although not to the exclusion of themes that were not explicitly linked to the symposium as an institution. Both were acceptable conversation to accompany drinking.

So it is with the conversation; some topics are accepted by the average run of men as the proper business of drinking-parties, while other topics are entertained because they possess an attractive theme more suitable to the moment than pipe and lyre. Examples of these were mixed together in my first book. … The first
group indeed I also call specifically drinking-party topics, but both together generally suitable table-talk. (trans. Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb VIII, 107-109)

His debt to Xenophon in this regard was recognized by Hobden: “In each letter Plutarch relates a series of short conversations between diners covering a diverse range of subjects, a good proportion of which concern sympotic paraphernalia and protocol. By making his guests discuss such affairs, Plutarch surely draw [sic] his influence from Xenophon’s Symposium, rather than its Platonic counterpart, whose concern with such matters is limited” (Hobden 2004, 136). Plutarch’s personal involvement in the symposia that he relates, and the corresponding increase in the realism of the setting, makes the turn towards sympotika natural.

The move inaugurated by the Questiones Convivales from episodic to miscellanistic arrangement proved to be a most attractive innovation, allowing increased flexibility while still maintaining a recognizable genre with fairly clear formal requirements. Athenaeus’ exceptionally long work follows the trail Plutarch blazed. But despite the surface similarities between Athenaeus and Plutarch’s QC (symptic themes, compilation of a variety of conversations, etc.), Athenaeus puts the compilation to a radically different use. Plutarch compiles in order to provide jumping-off points for fresh conversation and interpretation. Athenaeus compiles in order to preserve/archive. Athenaeus is also trying to teach, but as Paulas has pointed out in his 2008 dissertation, “Athenaeus and the Advantages of Philology”, what he wishes to teach is not philosophy, but “deipnosophistry,” and deipnosophistry is tolerant of quotations remaining without interpretation.

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64 We have certain evidence that Athenaeus knew Plutarch’s QC because he quotes QC 1.6, 624C at 52d.
65 The fact that the Symposium genre could accommodate both only serves to emphasize its flexibility.
66 Also antipathetic to Plutarch, it is tolerant of making enemies in the process.
The compilation of Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists* is of an entirely different order from Plutarch’s. Rather than collating a variety of small philosophical and linguistic conversations, the Symposium under Athenaeus’ hand has become a collation of citations. Athenaeus’ method of compiling fragmentary quote upon fragmentary quote is (Paulas claims purposefully) disorienting. Readers are at a loss to know what to do with all of them, since at times they even seem to war against their speaker’s intention. The fundamental question that the symposiarch Ulpian wishes to ask his fellow symposiasts is, “Is it attested or not?” It is a philological, not a philosophical, Symposium, and Athenaeus is quite comfortable in making the relationship between the two antagonistic. Book 5 is an extended harangue against Plato and the “lies of the philosophers”. Paulas decides that the reason for his animus is that philosophy claims to be totalizing, and pushes against the *paideia* of literary education that Deipnosophistry hopes to cultivate.

Athenaeus is also concerned with displaying a method of conversation and scholarly practice, connected tightly with quotation of grammatical attestation. But he seems less interested in showing his reader how to become a researcher of obtuse citations than with actually preserving the attestations that he himself has discovered. The length of the quotations alone point to the importance he places on the content of the speeches and not only the method. An epitome survives of the whole work (and in fact provides our only evidence for the missing section up to 3.74a), and it is illuminating that the epitomizer chose to preserve the quotations alone and not the interstitial dialogue. In so doing, he only completes what Athenaeus has

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67 “Its dreamlike quality has something to do with its frequent lack of clarity about where we are in the conversation; everyone chips in and the debate rambles, punctuated by misogynist rants and complaints of indigestion, so that the reader often loses track of who is speaking or what the original question was.” (Morales “High-Table Miscellanies”, TLS Aug. 3, 2012, p. 8)

68 For an edition of the epitome, see Peppinki 1937-39.
already well begun. The most important part of the dialogue is the material and not the method: 
the heaped up and thickly packed quotations coming one after another. Athenaeus himself might 
already seem a parody of the miscellanistic sympotic form, and there is a strand of interpretation 
that sees his genius precisely in moving along the razor’s edge between Symposium and anti-
Symposium.69

**Plutarch’s Symposium of the Seven Sages to Lucian’s Lapiths**

While Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Convivales* have recently received the scholarly attention 
they deserve with the collection of essays in Klotz and Oikonomopoulou 2011, Plutarch’s other 
sympotic work, the *Symposium of the Seven Sages* (*SS*), has not yet received similar attention. 
When it has, however, some scholars sometimes admit in a surprised tone that it does not look 
much like Plato’s *Symposium*,70 which only emphasizes how much some have come to see 
Plato’s *Symposium* as the originator of the genre of the literary Symposium to the exclusion of 
Xenophon.71 If Plutarch’s explicit statements in the *QC* were not sufficient to convince us that 
he used Xenophon as an important literary model, then reading the *Symposium of the Seven

69 Romeri 2000 in Braund and Wilkins, 256-271, 2002, 308-316 and Trapp (2000 in Braund and 
Wilkins), 353-363, esp. 361 and Oikonomopoulou 2007, 320.
70 Vela Tejada’s article is mainly concerned with why Plutarch’s *SS* is not as Platonic as we 
might expect. “En efecto, aunque se enmarca dentro del género literario del symposion, el 
contenido de la obra parece acercarse más a la colección de saberes y conocimientos de la 
versión de Jenofonte o de los Deipnosofistas de Ateneo, que a la discusión filosófica de Platón.” 
(Vela Tejada 2009, 259) He sees the most important factor in this decision not a literary 
imitation of Xenophon, but the choice of incorporating the Seven Wise Men and their 
characteristic aphoristic sayings.
71 Some scholars continue to resist this and emphasize Plato alone as the generic model: “By the 
time of Plutarch it is clearly a very well-established genre, dominated by Plato’s *Symposium* (this 
must be the case, whatever else has been lost). Given such Platonic authority, it is hardly 
surprising that Plutarch decided to attempt a variation on the theme, and the result is the *Dinner 
of the Seven Wise Men*” (Mossman 1997, 121).
Sages should. Plutarch’s SS seems far away from Plato’s Symposium, incorporating as it does bizarre dolphin tales, lengthy exchanges of one-line maxims, many riddles and a clear bi-part structure. Yet, when placed next to Xenophon’s Symposium, it looks slightly less strange. After an opening that recalls Plato’s Symposium in being an inset narrative, the SS quickly reveals itself as Xenophontic primarily in its pointedly episodic narrative. In addition, there are two examples of moments when everyone present is asked to contribute a quick answer to a generally proposed topic, as when Socrates begs those present at Xenophon’s Symposium to state what they were most proud of. Because those speaking are famous for their short aphorisms, the contributions are even shorter in SS than in Xenophon’s Symposium. Other similarities with Xenophon’s Symposium are a concern with practical wisdom and an emphasis on heterosexual love (Vela Tejada 2009).

Plutarch’s innovations in the sympotic genre provided later practitioners with new models to use and revise. Lucian, among his wide-ranging satires, created a satiric Symposium titled The Symposium, or the Lapiths. As with Plutarch’s SS, the work opens with the inset narrative form found in Plato’s Symposium. Philo wishes to hear from Lykinos about a banquet that occurred the day before. Neither of them were there, but Lykinos has heard the story from a certain Charinos, who was present for half of the event and heard about the other half from the doctor Dionikos who had been present. Philo opens the dialogue with the telling line:

Ποικίλην, ὦ Λυκίνε, διατηρήσοι φασὶ γεγενήθαι ύμιν χθὲς ἐν Ἀρισταινέτοι παρὰ τὸ δεῖπνον καὶ τινὰς λόγους φιλοσόφους εἰρήσθαι καὶ ἔριν οὐ σμικρὰν συστῆναι ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς… (Lucian Symposium §1)

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72 At least one scholar has recognized this. “In short, Plutarch wanted to write a Socratic symposium. For his Symposium of the Seven Wise Men he no doubt used Xenophon’s Symposium as a model. Plato’s extraordinary work did not match his purpose. His choice of the Seven Wise Men as participants at the banquet shows his intention, to compose a symposium that would contain a large range of topics and variegated discussions. The result was a work of very mixed content, and with a distinct aim and direction.” (Teodorsson 2009, 11)
They say you had all kinds of sport yesterday, Lycinus, at the house of Aristaenetus, at dinner, and that several speeches on philosophy were made, out of which quite a quarrel arose. (trans. Harmon Loeb Vol I, 413)

In one sentence, Lucian manages to reference two major tropes of the literary Symposium. His first word is poikilia, the buzz-word of Imperial miscellanies. His tale is going to be a varied type of narration, and one that he calls a διατριβή, a ditty, a passing of the time. Secondly, he mentions that those who were present made philosophical speeches, but their contest did not remain verbal. Instead, it devolved into a physical fight that left the participants bloody and wounded. Part of the humor, then, will be the externalization of the verbal competition at a symposium that is supposed to sublimate physical violence under the habits of social custom.

Lykinos hesitates to tell the story, which he calls a rather immature event (νεανικότερα), and then quotes the proverb with which Plutarch begins his QC: “μισῶ μνάμωνα συμπόταν”, “I hate a fellow-drinker with a memory”, attributing it to the suitably vague “ὁ ποιητικὸς λόγος”. Since Plutarch is our only other source for this quotation, and since they both play such prominent rolls at the beginning of sympotic works, it seems clear that Lucian is referencing Plutarch on purpose. But unlike Plutarch, Lucian is going to tell the story of philosophers drinking which would have been better left unremembered.

When the narration is undertaken by the pseudo-reluctant Lykinos at last, he first establishes a setting much like Plutarch’s SS. Aristaenetus is celebrating the wedding of his daughter to a philosopher named Cleanthis. As in the SS, and as is appropriate to a wedding feast, there are respectable women present, including the bride herself, but also like the SS, the women never speak during the symposium. The other (male) guests were chosen to represent the

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73 In Chapter 3, I will look more closely at the valences of the word poikilia.
74 After an exchange which closely tracks the opening of the Phaedrus and Phaedrus’ coy denial of his desire to recite the speech, and Socrates’ calling him out on it.
entire range of learning, both philosophical and grammatical: a Stoic, an Epicurean, a Platonist, a rhetor and a grammarian are the primary guests in attendance (section 9, trans. Harmon Loeb Vol 1, 420-421). Philo expresses his appreciation of the variety of the dining party also using terms that could be taken as references to the miscellanistic genre. He says that the gathering of men was like a museum of wise men (μουσεῖον…σοφῶν ἄνδρῶν), plucking the chief representative of each philosophic sect like a bouquet of flowers (τὸ κεφάλαιον ἐξ ἐκάστης αἱρέσεως ἀπανθισάμενος, with perhaps a hint of the violence to come), and marvels that they are all mixed together indiscriminately (ἀναμίξ ἀπαντας). More than a dinner party, Lucian’s description sounds like a florilegium of wisdom, arranged using the typical image of the multiplicity and randomization of flowers. Just like the guests, the food is also described as pleasantly variegated (ποικίλα, section 11).

Lucian takes the traditions of the philosophical Symposium and exaggerates them to such a degree that the characters become stereotyped: he makes sure to have exactly one of each sect of philosopher, the belligerent and gluttonous Cynic comes late, the Stoic and the Epicurean hate each other, and all the other lower educators behave in their most typical fashion:

“Dionysodorus the rhetorician was making speeches, pleading first on one side and then on the other, and was getting applauded by the servants who stood behind him. Histiaeus the grammarian, who had the place next him, was reciting verse, combining the lines of Pindar and Hesiod and Anacreon in such a way as to make out of them a single poem and a very funny one…but Zenothenemis was reading aloud from a closely written book that he had taken from his attendant.” (Section 17, trans. Harmon, Loeb Vol 1, 431)

The variety of the gathering is emphasized, but instead of a harmonious arrangement, the various elements clash, and violently so. Philosophers have been gathered not to discourse intelligently about matters of political and moral importance, as in the SS, but in order to make fun of the pretensions of philosophers. While making sweeping references to Plato’s Symposium in the
opening exchange, and to Plutarch’s QC in the quotation about hating the mindful symposiast, the handiest model for Lucian’s lambast of philosophical pretention is Plutarch’s SS, which makes a point of gathering the wisest men of the time in order to have a wide-ranging philosophical discussion on multiple topics.

With the creative pen of Plutarch, the Xenophontic tradition of writing Symposia continued to develop in the Imperial period. While Xenophon’s text had been episodic, under the influence of Plutarch the episodic moves towards the miscellanistic, as the expansive nature of the sympotic genre begins to be taken advantage of. Along with the growth towards miscellany also came a growing concern for specifically sympotic topics of conversations and an increase in emphasis of the theme of humor. In some of the texts, there seems to be a growth in didacticism, although each author had different priorities in what they wanted to teach.

Methodius the Crypto-Xenophontic Stylist

Giving this rich background in the Xenophontic line of Sympotic writing opens up new observations on Methodius’ text. Despite his explicit Platonic traditionalism, there are many ways in which he incorporates the trends of the intervening tradition, and displays his contemporary aesthetics. He does not inhabit his time unscathed by its literary developments. Despite being underemphasized, and probably purposefully suppressed, Methodius’ Symposium

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In addition, the Platonist at the banquet, Ion, explicitly mentions Plato’s Symposium: “This went on for a long while, until Ion, bending forward to make himself more conspicuous, said, “Stop, and if you wish I will put before you a topic for a discussion worthy of the present festal day, and you shall talk and listen without quarreling, exactly as in our Plato’s circle, where most of the time was passed in discussion” (Section 31, trans. Harmon, Loeb Vol. 1, 451) The topic he introduces is that it is better not to marry, but if we must, we should have our wives in common, which seems a singularly inappropriate topic for a wedding celebration.
engages in certain aspects of compilation and of the intensification of the pedagogical intent that we find in the other Imperial Symposia. While he tips his hat at the importance of humor in the Symposium, he does not greatly emphasize it. And he completely avoids other developments, such as the increase in the focus on sympotic topics of conversation.

In his opening setting, he sprinkles his description with the miscellany buzz-word: *poikilia*. But its first appearance in the text might be meant to put us off our guard. Arete commiserates with the virgins that they have made it up their steep mountain that was beset by all kinds of serpents: “ποικιλων…ἐρπετῶν”. Variety itself is neither salutary nor beautiful, and can be coupled with evil. However, within the following ekphrasis of the beautiful garden of Arete, *poikilia* words are used twice positively in ways that we would expect at the outset of a miscellanistic text. First, there is a meadow full of all kinds of nice smelling flowers: λειμῶνες ἀειθαλεῖς ἔμπνοις ἄνθεσι καὶ ποικύλοις κατεστεμένοι (8.75-76), and second, the virgins consume a wide variety of delicious foods: ὡς οὖν δαιτός τε παντοδαπής ἥδη καὶ εἴφροσύνη ποικύλης ἐτυγχάνομεν· (8.82-83). Much more importantly, later in the symposium, three different virgins use ποικιλ- words to speak approvingly about the speeches that have been made. It is a praiseworthy adjective describing praiseworthy contributions, but only when

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76 There is not yet a comprehensive study on the importance of the word *poikilia* for the miscellanistic tradition, but some mention has been made in studies on Athenaeus’s *Deipnosophists*: Lukinovich 1990, Wilkins 2000, 31, Whitmarsh 2007, 47 and König 2012, 34.

77 The pernicious connotation of ποικιλία are brought up again in the third to the last stanza of Thecla’s hymn. There, the devil is spoken of has having τέχνας…ποικιλιὰς. (chi 3). The other main concentration of ποικιλ- words are in Procilla’s 7th speech, section 2, as she is interpreting a passage in the *Song of Songs* about an alluring necklace (4:9-11), which is interpreted allegorically (7.2, Musurillo 98).

78 But importantly, Eubulion, after Tusiane’s 9th speech, calls the speeches themselves (approvingly) *poikilia*, hypothesizing that the last speaker, Domnina, must be frightened to follow after so many and so various speeches. And again at the beginning of the 6th oration, the speaker refers to their verbal contributions as poilios (she uses the adverb form). The passages that connect *poikilia* to rhetoric will be looked at more closely in the following chapter.
applied correctly to the correct end. Variety and collection are not salutary in themselves; on the contrary, they can even be dangerous.

The modern editor of Methodius, Herbert Musurillo, suggests that Methodius might very well have totalizing miscellanistic intent in his Symposium, not only writing about the purported topic, chastity, but including such a rich array of other topics that the Symposium could be used as a “manual of Christian doctrine, of philosophy and theology, unified under the concept of chastity” (Musurillo 1958, 11). This seems to overstate the sufficiency in the virgins’ speeches and to posit a totalizing intent that I do not find in the work. Far from being a summula theologiae, the virgins’ speeches seem noteworthy in their partiality: extremely minor passages in the Old Testament are chosen upon which to comment, thereby pointing up the fact that any bit of Scripture could be used for this purpose, if read with enough ingenuity. The type and purpose of the miscellanism in Methodius differs as much from Plutarch’s QC and Athenaeus’ Deipnosophists as these two works did from each other. Plutarch’s fragments of various conversations has the purpose of stirring up philosophy in his readers; Athenaeus’ fragments of archived texts has an end of inducting his readers into the world of paideia; Methodius’ fragments of allegorical Scriptural interpretation has the intent of showing his Christian readers

79 He reiterates this point a bit further on in his introduction: “It is difficult to give any unified impression of the various doctrines of the Symposium; for, as we have said, it seems to have been intended not only as a protreptic, an exhortation to the practice of chastity, but also as a handbook against Encratism and Gnosticism, and, further, as a manual of Christian doctrine which would serve as a guide in Trinitarian and Christological dogma, in the technique of allegorical exegesis, in what Methodius regarded as necessary information in psychology and even physiology, and finally, in asceticism and the manner of prayer” (16-17). Musurillo is right to point out the variegated nature of all that the virgins discuss in the Symposium, but I think he is wrong to focus on Methodius’ desire to impart information. Instead, Methodius is primarily interested in imparting method.

80 See note 42 on p. 163 in König 2012. However, Eubulion does petition Gregorion more than once to be sure to include everything that was said from the beginning.

81 Jeanneret 1991, 161 n. 25
the attractions of applying their ingenuity to correctly understanding the world of symbols with
which they are surrounded. Like Plutarch and Athenaeus it is also “miscellanism for education”,
but as Methodius’ educational plans fundamentally differ from his predecessors, so too does the
content of his compilation.

Athenaeus’ Deipnosophists brought the cataloging impulse of the Symposium so far as to
write up part of Book VII, on fish, in alphabetical order, claiming to thereby give his readers
easier access to the material. Methodius also includes one catalog in his work—Thecla’s final
poem, which lists Old and New Testament examples of virginity in an alphabetic framework.
Poetic alphabetism was not at all popular at the time, although we do have a few examples.\(^\text{82}\) In
putting his catalog into an alphabetic context, Methodius seems to be influenced by similar
influences to Athenaeus’ alphabetic fish catalog, and is trying his own hand at exhaustive
collection, Scriptural rather than piscatory.

Also like the other Imperial Symposia, Methodius follows the tradition of giving a certain
role to playfulness in his Symposium. The virgin Theopatra, who not only starts off the second
set of speeches but was also Gregorion’s guide up the mountain, ends her speech with the
sympotic tag-line: “tà μὲν παιδᾶς, tà δέ καὶ σπουδῆς χάριν”, despite the fact that nothing in her
speech is explicitly funny.\(^\text{83}\) Apart from Theopatra’s comment, the central locus of humor-
language is the final interchange between Eubulion and Gregorion. Gregorion accuses Eubulion

\(^{82}\) Our examples are two undated hymns in the Greek Anthology (to Apollo and to Dionysus),
two papyri poems (Amherst Papyri II and Oxy. 15 + 1795.) and an epitome of the Iliad attributed
to Stephanus Grammatikos. P. Oxy. 1756 + 15 provides a particularly interesting parallel to
Methodius’ hymn, combining three infrequent elements: a sympotic song that is both
abecedarian and has a refrain. Alphabeticism was a popular poetic motif in Semitic literature,
et.g. the beginning of the Book of Lamentations, Proverbs 31, Ecclesiastes 51:13-29, and Psalms
25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 145, and most strikingly 119. Of course, the hymn will be treated
thoroughly in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

\(^{83}\) “Let these first fruits of my discourse, too, Arete, be an offering to you, partly for our
entertainment, but also to serve a serious purpose.” (Musurillo 80)
of teasing her in her questioning: “You talk this way just to tease me rather than to tell me the truth” (Musurillo 158, Ὅτι τωθαζομένη με ταῦτα λέγεις μᾶλλον ἢ ἀληθεύουσα). Over the interchange, there is a steady rebalancing of authority from Gregorion, who has been relating the entire content of the dialogue up to this point, and Eubulion, who turns the conversation around to a new topic, a new question, and her terms. Gregorion is reduced to a position similar to one of the toadying of Socratic interlocutors, exploring all the ways that Greek provides for saying “yes”. From the beginning, Eubulion is a goading figure, and Gregorion seems not to trust that she has the purest motives for asking about the banquet. Gregorion suspects that she loves argumentation more than truth, and tests her in the beginning by asking her whether she’s acquainted with Virtue, the daughter of Philosophy. But even the slightly impish character of Eubulion does not match the pugilistic Cynic nor the professional clown found in Xenophon and Athenaeus. While light in places, one is hard pressed to find genuine comedy in Methodius’ dialogue.

The fourth “Xenophontic” sympotic element, increased educational intent, also plays a role in Methodius’ Symposium. Methodius certainly participates in the educational game as much as any of the other sympotic writers. However, as we investigated in the previous chapter, Methodius’ educational intent, although thorough-going, is held in common and in some ways more subtly expressed than his Imperial confrères.

The element that is missing entirely is any interest in sympotika. Methodius does not care about the actual accoutrements of the symposium, and gets through the practicalities of feasting as quickly as possible. It is not even clear what precisely the women are drinking at their party—water or wine. I will argue in the next section that Methodius has moved his symposium into a symbolic realm, which explains the turn away from “realistic” representations of the
Methodius is concerned to utilize other elements of the sympotic tradition, but not this aspect of the tradition that stems from Xenophon.

**Conclusion of Part I**

Methodius is the most Platonic and the least Xenophontic of the later writers of Symposia. Into the Imperial period, the Symposium has been moving in a more compilatory/philological direction at the expense of Platonizing philosophy (and in the case of Athenaeus explicitly in competition with philosophy). At first glance, Methodius seems simply unaware of the developments of Plutarch and Athenaeus. Upon closer inspection, however, it seems to be an intentional blindness towards certain developments in the tradition. Elements of the later tradition cannot help but make their way into his work, even as he tries to suppress them.

Methodius chooses to align himself with the Platonic mode not only because he found the Platonic model more helpful. He was also making a prestige argument in going back to the “primary” Symposium. This should be paralleled with Athenaeus’ attempt to get behind even Plato and Xenophon by making the argument that Homer not only precedes them chronologically, but is also superior to them (Book V). Methodius is participating in the same game with Gregorion’s early reference to the goddess Hebe pouring the wine for the gods in the *Iliad*, but he does not choose to focus over-much on Homeric precedents. Methodius makes an argument for the newness of his work by bypassing the current tired trends in Sympotic literature and returning to the ur-Symposium of Plato, although in doing so he misconstrues the singularity of the original, and makes slight use of the opportunity taken by Athenaeus to show that even the Socratic Symposia are secondary (and inferior to) Homer. By using traditional forms,

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84 A response to Bril 2006’s objections to Methodius’ ignorance of actual sympotic customs will be taken up in Chaper 3.
Methodius’ newness can stand out to best advantage. He purposefully obscures any contemporary aesthetics so that he can emphasize a different type of modernity. He stretches farthest back in order to claim the ingenuity and superiority of his most recent creation—a creation which persists in emphasizing the future. The ways in which he shockingly changes his Platonic model to make this newness felt will be the topic of the second part of this chapter.
Part III: The Platonic Sympotic Mode

Methodius marks his allegiance to Plato from the very start. Lazzati illustrates the close connection between Methodius and Plato’s frames with an architectural analogy: Methodius has spoliated the pillars of Plato’s house to put up in front of his own, but the interiors of the structures are strikingly different. Methodius is especially keen to display his Platonic ancestry at the very beginning of the dialogue, and the opening scene between Eubulion and Gregorion is linguistically the closest section of Methodius’s Symposium to Plato’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodius’ Symposium:</th>
<th>Plato’s Symposium:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Εὐκαιρότατα ἐπέστησ, ὦ Γρηγόριοιν· καὶ γάρ ἐναγχός σε ἐξήτουν, βουλομένη μαθεῖν τὴν Μαρκέλλης συνουσίαν καὶ Θεοπάτρας καὶ τῶν λυπῶν παρθένων τὸν τότε ἐν τῷ συνδείπνῳ παραγενομένων περὶ τῶν τῆς ἀγνείας λόγων, τίνες ἦσαν.</td>
<td>“Ἀπολλόδωρε,” ἔφη, “καὶ μὴν καὶ ἐναγχός σε ἐξήτουν βουλόμενος διαπυθέσθαι τὴν Ἀγάθωνος συνουσίαν καὶ Σωκράτους καὶ Ἀλκibiάδου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τότε ἐν τῷ συνδείπνῳ παραγενομένων, περὶ τῶν ἐρωτικῶν λόγων τίνες ἦσαν. (172a-b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are just in time, Gregorion. I had just been looking for you! I wanted to find out about this meeting Marcella and Thoopatra had with the other girls who attended the dinner party, and what they had to say on the subject of chastity. (Musurillo 38)</td>
<td>“Apolloadorus, I’ve been looking for you!” he said. “You know there once was a gathering at Agathon’s when Socrates, Alcibiades, and their friends had dinner together; I wanted to ask you about the speeches they made on Love.” (Cooper 1997, 458)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Although Methodius’ first sentence directly echoes the vocabulary of Plato’s text, there are also interesting differences that Methodius makes. He must accommodate the difference in gender among his speakers and the narrator (βουλομένη for βουλόμενος, the more specific τῶν λυπῶν παρθένων for the more generic τῶν ἄλλων), as well as the change in topic from eros to chastity.

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85 Lazzati 1937, 119. He goes on to say that the similarities with Plato are merely decorative (“elemento decorativo” 120), while the center of the text has become a treatise, influenced by the later philosophical tradition.
86 For this table, see Farges 1929, 47-51 and Bracht 1999, 178 n. 12.
(περὶ τῶν ἔρωτικῶν λόγων ὀπίσθεν ἐρωτικῶν λόγων). The relationship between Methodius and Plato will form the substance of the rest of this chapter, where I will diverge from Lazzati, pointing out how Methodius shares more with Plato than simply decorative verbal echoes at the opening.

If the Xenophontic mode frequently narrates the involvement of the symposiasts in the entertainment and the eating, both Plato and Methodius transcend any interest in the sympotic realities of their settings. By the time Methodius came to write his Symposium in the third century, it is a marked decision to exclude sympotika from a Symposium. To do so makes the allegiance with Plato felt very strongly, who had the symposiasts at the urging of Socrates send away the flute girl so that she would afford no distraction to their conversation. Xenophon’s Socrates also encourages philosophical conversation (especially in the third book), but he is happy to alternate such conversation with observing and commenting on professional entertainment. Plato’s asceticism is broken into at the end with the disruption of Alcibiades and a devolution into speechless drinking, but Socrates persists in philosophizing all through the night, and when last we see him, he is still talking as the others drop off into drunken sleep.

In addition to the turning away from involvement in the details of the sympotic occasion, and in contrast to all of the other Imperial Symposia besides Julian’s Caesars, Methodius doggedly sticks to one question around which he structures his dialogue. He eschews the pointedly episodic trend popularized by Xenophon. There is a simple and clear substitution of Plato’s encomia to Eros and Methodius’ encomia to Purity/Hagneia. In the process of praising purity/chastity, the virgins use many different types of argument and in passing make a variety of ethical exhortations, but each tells her encomium in turn, contributing to the development of the

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87 See Bracht 1999, 174-190, which covers sections 5.1 and 5.2 (“Parthenia versus Eros. Ein Vergleich der Reden von Sokrates und Thekla”).
conversation. Methodius’ interest in *poikilia* does not infiltrate to the level of the episode, but rather permeates different levels, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. His *Symposium* is far from any of the Symposia that stem from the model of Xenophon, either in the fracturing of event into multiple occasions, as in Plutarch’s *QC*, or in the fracturing of topics, as in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists*.

Beyond the commitment to a unified topic of conversation and the avoidance of specifically sympotic topics, Methodius also has a focus on the vertical, shared with Plato. Socrates in his culminating speech relates the famous ladder of love, speaking about how the love of individual bodies gradually becomes rarified into the love of wisdom. Physical relationships are pointers to a love that is beyond the physical, and even beyond the particular. His ascent narrative partially explains his sending away of the entertainment at the beginning of the Symposium. Plato constructs a dialogue that continually pushes beyond the physical. Although Plato is concerned with how to relate to your fellow-symposiasts, he is more centrally interested in teaching how to transcend the drinking circle to join the circle that surrounds the Forms in contemplation. Human loves are but a shadow of the real love to which they point.

Methodius takes this narrative of ascent one step further and externalizes it in setting making his symposiasts literally ascend a steep mountain to arrive at the party, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter. Moreover, Methodius is committed to vaulting his readers beyond the physical world, which is a world of shadows and images, in order to transport them further upwards to the world of reality. Methodius increases the emphasis on the ascent narrative that he found in Plato’s *Symposium* by combining it with the ascent narrative from the *Phaedrus*, especially in Thecla’s speech where she links together the Platonic and Scriptural
systems through the narration of the soul’s ascent to the Gardens of Immortality, which will also be spoken of at greater length later in this chapter.

**Julian’s Symposium, or the Caesars**

When one more text is brought forth into investigation, the characteristics of the Platonic mode of sympotic writing become more distinct. Julian the Apostate’s *Symposium*, or the *Caesars* as it is commonly referred to, was written about seventy years after Methodius. Despite the fact that the two authors exist on opposite sides of the religious questions of the fourth century, and on different sides of the reign of Constantine, their works contain many striking similarities, and Julian’s *Caesars* thereby provides a surprising coda to the history of the Platonic symposium.

Julian seems to be self-consciously following in the footsteps of Lucian, but he uses the satiric possibilities of the Symposium to make the point exactly opposite to Lucian’s. His is not an anti-philosophical work, but a pro-philosophical work, one of whose main purposes is to lambast the pursuit of pleasure while using literary means that are themselves pleasurable. At the heart of the work is the serious business of political commentary, as Julian picks out the characteristics that make the best ruler.

Partially funny, especially in the character of Silenus, who constantly makes belabored sexual innuendos, the tone on the whole is rather serious. Perhaps attempting to stave off any

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88 “ΣΥΜΠΟΣΙΟΝ Η ΚΡΟΝΙΑ” is the title given to it in the manuscripts. The Kronia was the Greek appellation of the Saturnalia, the festival when Julian’s journey to the upper world was imagined to take place.
89 The short introduction by Wright to his version in the Loeb series says, “The idea and the working out of the satire is Lucianic and there are echoes here and there of Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Dead*, but Julian is neither so witty nor so frivolous as Lucian” (Wright 1949, Vol. II, 343).
criticism on this point (or rather to warn the readers of what they are about to undergo), Julian claims for himself no talent for comedy at the outset. However, the light character of the festival requires of him a corresponding literary endeavor.\(^\text{90}\) He titles his story a “myth” (306B) and a creation of Hermes (πλάσμα λέγος Ἐρμοῦ 307A). During the Kronia festival, as Hermes tells Julian, Romulus holds two banquets: one for the gods at the peak of Olympus and one for the Emperors at the highest sub-lunar point. During the symposium the gods stage a debate between the Emperors to decide which of them deserves to be admitted into the company of the gods. Unsurprisingly, Julian narrates that the winner of the debate was the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius, a model for his own philosophical guidance of the empire. The emperor Constantine, on the other hand, is subjected to scorn as a pleasure-loving boaster, who, easily defeated in the contest, files off to disport with the goddess Pleasure, where Jesus is hanging out as well, encouraging all those who live dissolute lives to be of good cheer since baptism and repentance wash away all guilt (336A-B).

Julian’s Caesars has recently been comfortably moved out of the Symposium genealogy into the “Menippean Satire” genealogy by his most insightful critic, Relihan.\(^\text{91}\) While I do not deny that there are elements that the Caesars share with others texts that Relihan includes under the title of “Menippean Satire”, I believe that the “Menippean Satire” is too shaky of a genre to pin the Caesars on.\(^\text{92}\) If “Menippean Satire” was the main influence on Julian, why does he

\(^{90}\) For a parallel situation, see M. Gleason’s work on the *Misopogon* (Gleason 1986).
\(^{91}\) “What we have is not a symposium, but a comic contest for deification, whose roots are Hellenistic but which exists for Julian in the form of some of Lucian’s dialogues and Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* as well” (Relihan 1993, 120). All of Chapter 8 of Relihan 1993 is devoted to discussing Julian’s Caesars.
\(^{92}\) “Menippean satire is a useful name for the epicenter of a range of phenomena, both stylistic and thematic, that in fact evolve over time. The essence of Menippean satire is an otherworldly fantasy in which a naïve experimenter travels to an impossible realm in order to learn that the
choose to title his work a *Symposium*? As we have seen many times before, the Symposium is a good host genre in which other parasitic or symbiotic genres happily dwell (e.g. Aristotelian problems, sayings of wise men), and it may well be that Julian incorporates elements from the Menippean tradition into his Symposium. Yet, it is still a Symposium, and, in fact, our closest parallel to Methodius.

The one debate occurring in the Caesars is a dreadfully serious fight over which Emperor will be allowed to live among the gods. The gods elicit contributions from the Emperors who speak for their cause in two different rounds of speeches. Like Plato and Methodius, one topic is proposed in a hierarchical communal setting, and there is no interest in talking about types of drinking vessels or the benefits of sympotic garlands. The similarities between Julian and Methodius continue with their choice in chronotope. Both set their symposia among the dead in a vertically distant realm that itself looks up to seek entrance into the Divine Banquet. Julian’s relationship to the scene is likewise similar to Methodius’. For both of them, although at a slight remove, access is gained to this supra-mundane symposium through the aid of a supra-human character, Hermes for Julian and Arete for Methodius.

truth is not to be found at the edges of the world but at home and under one’s own feet.” (Relihan 2005,109-110)

93 In attempting to reconstruct a genre which had no ancient theorists, Relihan is left the difficult task of deciding who is in and who is out, especially in the Sympotic tradition which lies at the edges of his definition. “Further, while some symposia are, or are contained in, Menippean satires (the *Cena Trimalchionis*, Julina’s *Caesars*), others are not (the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius and the *Deipnosophists* of Athenaeus, or Methodius’s *Symposium of the Ten Virgins*). Lucian’s *Symposium, or The Lapiths* is a parody of Plato’s Symposium without actually being a Menippean satire. Frye is right that Macrobius and Athenaeus embody the same principle of anatomy that Menippean satire feeds on, and Athenaeus even has some of the academic humor that we required; but I think that Macrobius and Petronius are best relegated to different genres. The various elements of anatomy that Frye catalogs—dialogue, stylization of character, fantasy, intellectual satire, and so on—are separable, and I would allow that only particular combinations of them denominate essential Menippean satire, while other combinations result in other related comic, or noncomic, genres.” (Relihan 1993, 5)
Like Methodius, Julian wishes to draw the Symposium away from the miscellany that it had become in the hands of writers like Athenaeus. Julian not only shares some of the similarities that Methodius has with Plato, but additional similarities that Methodius had introduced into the Platonic tradition such as the supra-mundane setting accessed through special permission. This is illuminating because it shows that the tradition stemming from Platonic mode could be followed for very different purposes. It is not only attractive to Christians. Either mode (the Platonic or Xenophontic) could be accessed by writers as they saw fit for their own purposes, and changed at the hand of creative practitioners.

**Methodius’ Bracing Play with the “Platonic Mode”**

Methodius tries hard to make it clear to his readers that Plato is the most important model for his work of literature. He does not use Platonic trappings to mislead his readers and to provide a veneer of Classical respectability for his radically different substance, as Lazzati suggests. It is not just a presentation of credentials. Instead, he finds Plato congenial, as so many other Christians had and would continue to do, and as non-Christians like Julian would also find.\(^94\) However, Lazzati is right that Plato’s modeling only goes so far, and is used by Methodius to state his own differences as well as his similarities to his model.

Once Methodius has aligned himself with Plato, what does he do with the legacy? I argue that Methodius transmutes the sympotic setting to a symbolic world in order to create a reflection of the situation he believes his readers are living in. The Symposium is poised on the

\(^{94}\) For a recent collection of essays about the influence of Plato in the late second through fourth centuries, see Fowler 2014. Fowler reminds us that Plato’s legacy in Christianity was a complicated one in this period “…it is now nearly impossible to imagine late antique Christianity or rhetoric without Plato: as an enemy, a source, an inspiration, or an accomplice—at times, it seems that Plato can be all of these things simultaneously.” (Fowler 2014, 36)
edge of a further ascent into the *real* world that will be inaugurated when Christ comes again, when the Bridegroom arrives at the door and opens it for the expectant virgins. Using a tri-fold interpretation scheme of shadow-image-reality familiar from the biblical hermeneutical work of Origen of Alexandria, Methodius takes Plato’s Symposium as parallel to the world of shadows of the Old Testament, his own Symposium as the world of images in the new dispensation, and the hoped for Symposium of the final Wedding Banquet as the real symposium to which the other two point. A richer explanation of the symbolic nature of the Symposium will make sense out of the confusing temporal and spatial setting of Methodius’ Symposium that has troubled so many readers. After looking at the symbolic valence of the time and space settings of the Symposium, the role of the symposiasts is further illuminated as well. If the sympotic genre is particularly adept at ficting an imagined community, then what type of community is represented for imitation by the readers, and how are readers invited to take part? In addition, against her symbolic backdrop, the role of Thecla as an ideally educated woman, a symbol of the perfect virgin, is enhanced. The elements of time, place and participants are all shifted into a symbolic sphere, and the changes are interwoven with each other to serve Methodius’ new overarching purpose of educating his reader to keep their imagination focused on the Divine Symposium that was yet to come.

**Time**

The first Socratic Symposia, as part of the wider genre of Sokratikoi Logoi, memorialized the period of a generation earlier, especially the person of Socrates and his circle. Plutarch, with his typical generic playfulness, sets his two Symposia on either side of his predecessors’

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95 Henri Crouzel *Origene et la Connaissance Mystique*, 217-220. The key text is Origen’s commentary on Psalm 38 PG 12.1401-1404. See also Patterson’s explication of Methodius’ use of Origen’s tri-fold interpretational scheme, Patterson 1997, 127-130.

temporal choice. The SS is set far back in the legendary past, and the QC is set in Plutarch’s own lifetime, with himself as a participant. Although Methodius slyly makes himself a minor character in his dialogue, Thecla is supposed to have been a contemporary of Paul, putting her 200 years before Methodius lived, leading some readers to put the “dramatic date” in “the days of Thecla, companion of St. Paul” (Musurillo 12). Therefore, at first glance, Methodius could be doing something similar to Plutarch’s SS but substituting heroic female martyrs of the early Church for the Wise Men of ancient Greece. Upon closer investigation, however, the idea that this debate is set in the past as “historical fiction” breaks down. Rather, it takes place in a symbolic temporal setting focused on a time yet to come. Whereas Plutarch’s QC moved the sympotic setting from the past to the present, Methodius plays with the possibility of putting his Symposium in the future, or at least concurrent with the present in a different realm that relentlessly points to the future symposium to come.

There is one speech in particular that teaches its readers where they are in time: the ninth speech, delivered by Tusiane. Her speech occurs after a short dialogue between the external narrators broke into the relaying of the Symposium, and Methodius uses the break in order to emphasize Tusiane’s speech as a programmatic one. He tends to utilize these sutures of his text to emphasize key passages that follow, and had done so earlier in a programmatic passage that occurs in the fourth speech, when Theopatra inaugurates the next section of speeches after the obviously linked triad of the speeches of Marcella, Theophila and Thalia:

‘My dear virgins, if the art of eloquence ever followed on the same road and always trod on the same path, I could not avoid boring you with arguments which have already been brought forward. But if there exist innumerable verbal tactics and thrusts—for God inspires us at sundry times and in divers manners—does one have the choice of hiding one’s face and being afraid? No, anyone who has the gift of expression, would surely be blameworthy if he did not use it to enhance what is beautiful with grateful speech. Wherefore let us too sing the praises of the most brilliant and glorious star of all Christ’s charisms, virginity. For this path of
the Spirit is a most broad and generous one. I must consider therefore how I should begin to present a discourse which may be suitable and a fitting contribution to the subject we are discussing.’ (Musurillo 75)

Although there appears to be a resolution after the first three speeches, Theopatra makes an apology that allows for an endless production of new speeches. The virgins yet to come should have no fear of the topic being exhausted before their turn comes around. Rhetoric is a God-given gift that should be used in praise of what is good.

The second suture is immediately after Thecla’s eighth speech. It is not at first apparent how Tusiane’s ninth speech could also be seen as programmatic (just as it is not at first clear why Methodius chooses to add two more speeches after Thecla’s winning and longest eighth speech). However, Tusiane turns out to present the key to reading the entire dialogue and the key for readers to use to understand their own place in cosmic time.

Tusiane’s contribution is about how to read correctly. She outlines the three-fold interpretive method familiar from Origen of shadow-image-reality. The example she uses is the Old Testament Feast of the Tabernacles. She warns against the “literal” interpretation of the Jews, who believe that the feast is meant to point backwards as a memorial of events that have already occurred. Rather, she argues, the Feast stands as an image of the current bodies of the virgins that must be adorned with the foliage of virtue. This period of images, however, will itself pass away at the Second Coming of Christ.

‘Let this then stand as an instance to prove that the Jews, by misinterpreting things present as types of things that are already past, have foudered their hopes of the good things to come, unwilling as they are that their types should foreshadow images, and that these images should represent the truth. For the Law is the shadow and type of the image, that is to say the Gospel; and the image, the

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97 See above footnote. Musurillo disagrees: “Methodius’ Origenism, again, is rather an Asiatic form of Alexandrianism: by temperament, perhaps, and education, Methodius inclined towards the more moderate school of allegorizers; and even his adaptation of the shadow-image allegorism should not be made to derive directly from Origen.” (Musurillo 1958, 22)
Gospel, represents the truth which will be fulfilled at the Second Coming of Christ. Thus the ancients and the Law foretold and prophesied to us the features of the Church, and the Church foretells those of the new order. And we, who have accepted the Christ who said *I am the Truth*, are aware that the shadows and types have come to an end, and we press on towards the truth, proclaiming it in vivid images. For as yet we know in part, and, as it were, through a glass, for that which is perfect is not yet come to us, the kingdom of heaven and the resurrection, when that which is in part shall be done away.’ (134 Musurillo)

Both the real world inhabited by Methodius’ characters and the world inhabited by Methodius’ readers is a world of images, poised between Christ’s first coming as a man and his Second Coming in glory. Methodius trains the eyes of the readers to join those of the virgins in looking into the future, standing ready to enter the wedding chamber as soon as the Bridegroom comes. Methodius creates a Symposium that emphasizes its temporary nature as a symbol, as an image, and which serves to point to its own obsolescence in the future. It is partly for this reason that Methodius’ project to foster the imagination (as discussed in Chapter 1) is so important. The correct understanding of the image-rich nature of both his literary mimesis as well as what he believes to be his historical reality is one of the primary projects of Methodius’ literary-theological task.

**Space**

In correspondence with this project, which is predominantly about time, Methodius creates a symbolic landscape for his virgins in order to intensify the connection between their world and the world of his readers, so as to teach his readers to correctly understand that they too live in a world of images that will be fulfilled when the final age of reality arrives. The two main elements of the setting that are completely foreign to Plato’s Symposium, the mountaintop and the garden, are laden with meaning and provide insight into the position Methodius chooses to take in the history of symptotic literature. He reaches back into the past for models against which he could contrast the newness of what has come and what he believed was still to come.
Mountaintop

The steep mountain path receives one of the first ekphrases in the dialogue. Arete describes the climb that the virgins made to come to her garden: “Now you have come to me with great difficulty along a path beset with all kinds of terrifying monsters. I watched you as you turned aside again and again, and I was frightened lest you would turn back and slip over the cliffs” (Prologue, Musurillo 40). By placing the Symposium on the mountaintop, Methodius increases our awareness of the strange nature of this symposium. While it was common to record how the guests traveled to the symposium (Plato, Xenophon, Plutarch’s SS all record this), the danger inherent in this journey is unique. The setting most closely parallels Julian’s Symposium among the gods and dead emperors on Mt. Olympus (although the journey of the emperors thither is not recorded). Julian’s emperors are also clearly already dead, while we may be uncertain about the status of our virgins. What may seem at first like a peculiar coincidence, that the two Symposia of Methodius and Julian take place in vertically lofty spaces, comes to look like more than a coincidence when we take into account their temporal and cultural closeness. Chris Fitter in his book Poetry, Space, Landscape (Cambridge 1995) notes that there is a marked increase in vertical spaces in the Late Antique imagination:

“The early Christian centuries, with their sense of the progressive withdrawal of divinity from the world, will flee the wide-open Hellenistic and Campanian landskips, the ‘open pleasance’, for landscapes of retreat: for an anchoritic aesthetics of mountain bastions, unclimbed peaks, foreshadowing the beauty of immunity and enclosure of the medieval hortus conclusus. Furthermore, earthy landscapes will become transcended by the brooding terrestrial pessimism of the

98 μόλις ἐληλύθατε κατὰ τὴν ὅδὸν ἰσως ποικίλων ύμᾶς ἐκφοβησάντων ἐρπετῶν. Ἐώρων γὰρ ἄποσκοπέουσα πόλλαις ἐκτεταμένας καὶ ἐδείξας με πῶς ἀναποδίσασαι κατοικίσθηση ταδί κρημνῶν. The only other description comes immediately before: “What a rough and difficult path it was, Eubulion, and uphill too!” (Ὡς τραχεῖαν καὶ δύσβατον ὥδεύσαμεν, ὦ Γρηγόριον, καὶ ἄναντι τριβὸν.) (Prologue, Musurillo 39)
99 A more thorough argument for the symposiasts’ status as dead heroes will be made in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.
late antique ‘vertical imagination’, in which the earth shrinks to a trivial pinpoint, the Isles of the Blessed are located on the moon [see Cumont The Afterlife in Roman Paganism]…The goatherd piping under the trees by the waterfall, the quiet labours of the *vetus colonus* among ancestral meadows, are displaced by the topos of the soul’s flight through the universe, of the penetrating mind piercing the celestial spheres.” (45-46)

Athenaeus and Macrobius insist on keeping their Symposia regularly placed in the dining rooms of wealthy men and, in so doing perhaps, clasp onto a fading world. Methodius and Julian are part of the new world, both enmeshed in Christianity. Perhaps this involvement is mirrored in their placing their symposia in vertically distant locations.

The importance of the vertical appears in the opening dialogue between Eubulion and Gregorion. Eubulion, teasing Gregorion into telling her the whole story that she heard from Theophila, playfully quotes Homer, making an important accommodation to fit her purpose.

Gregorion, the narrator of the contents of the *Symposium* to Eubulion, is the wine server of the feast. Once before in Greek literature was the position of wine pourer filled by a woman. In *Iliad* 4.3, Hebe pours the wine for the reclining Olympians overlooking the battle of Troy.

> Οἰ δὲ θεοὶ πάρ Ζηνὶ καθῆμενοι ἵγορῳ ὄντος χρυσέῳ ἐν δαπέδῳ, μετὰ δὲ σφισὶ πότνια Ἡβη
> νέκταρ ἐσονοχός· τοι δὲ χρυσέως δεπάσσει δειδέχατ' ἀλλήλους, Τρώων πόλιν εἰσορώντες· (4.1-4)

Now the gods at the side of Zeus we were sitting in council over the golden floor, and among them the goddess Hebe poured them nectar as wine, while they in the golden drinking-cups drank to each other, gazing down on the city of the Trojans. (trans. Lattimore)

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100 Whether or not Gregorion is supposed to have been in attendance at the symposium is unclear. Here she is described as functioning as the “cup-bearer” for the banquet (Prelude, Musurillo 39), but she professes a little further on that she has heard the story from Theopatra (also Prelude, Musurillo 39), implying that she was not in attendance. See the discussion in Murusillo’s note, p. 184, n. 1. This is also the only place in the text where it is suggested that the virgins drink alcohol at their symposium.

101 Bremmer believes that an Archaic tradition of using female wine pourers was superceded by the use of adolescent boys as the “passion for boys” grew (Bremmer 1990, 140).
Methodius has his character quote this sole Homeric precedent for her unexpected position, but not without slight revision. Eubulion beseeches Gregorion to tell her everything about the symposium that occurred in her absence, complete with imagined Homeric detail:

\[\ldots\alpha \delta \chi ρυξέως δεπάσσειν\]
\[\deltaειδέχατε \'\alphaλλήλας \muέγαν \ούρανον \εἰσορώσαι.\]

\ldots They in golden goblets
Each other pledged, gazing upon the broad heavens. (Prelude, Musurillo 39)

In addition to the necessary change in gender of τοι, ἀλλήλους and εἰσορῶντες to αἱ, ἀλλήλας and εἰσορῶσαι to fit the new all-female cast, Methodius makes one more important accommodation: he changes the direction of the gaze of the symposiasts. In Homer, the gods were looking down upon the sufferings of the city of Troy from the comfort of their immortality. In Methodius, mortals are the ones feasting, and instead of looking down from their pleasant feasting into “the city of the Trojans”, they look upwards “upon the broad heavens.”

This small accommodation of the Homeric line is a symptom of a wide-spreading theme in Methodius’ Symposium. The women’s upward gaze is not an unimportant detail in his work but, rather, represents their expectant longing to move upwards, one of the essential elements of the work. Not only are the virgins on top of a mountain that they have already committed great effort to ascend, but they are also focused upon the possibility of further ascent.

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102 For an overview of this technique in Homeric reuse (looking particularly at the Homeric centoist Eudocia), see Usher 1998, Chapter Four “Accommodations” (35-57). Usher briefly speaks of Homeric accommodation by Plato as well (Usher 1998, 40-41).
103 The verb does not need to change, for the directionality is implied by the content, not the syntax.
104 The parable that guides the whole hymn is that of the wise and foolish virgins waiting at the door for the bridegroom’s arrival. The question around which the parable is structured is the possibility of movement: will they be able to enter the door with the bridegroom or will they be left outside? The parable has no ascent narrative, but Methodius adds this by emphasizing the celestial nature of the heavenly wedding chamber (ουρανός in each of the concluding two stanzas).
In this way, Methodius directly inverts the tradition of “Menippean Satire”, where a narrator is often brought to a distant position of great height to look down upon the world, a position of superior sight and analysis which is typically turned against the seer who consistently misunderstands what he views. Relihan sees a variant of this tradition in Julian’s *Caesars*, where the gods look down upon the dead emperors gathered in the sub-lunar sphere in order to judge them (Relihan 1993, 131). But both Julian and Methodius are more concerned with the ascent upwards rather than the view downwards. They are both observers of events that occur above them.

Verticality is emphasized not only in the setting, but in the speeches of the virgins. The clearest reference to any passage of Plato’s dialogues (apart from the atmospheric opening allusions to the *Symposium*) is found in Thecla’s winning eighth speech. She begins her speech with a narrative of ascent of the soul through virginity to the “Gardens of Immortality” that closely resembles the *Phaedrus*.

Thecla divides her speech into three sections. The first is heavily Platonic, describing the ascent of the soul relying on the language of the *Phaedrus*, and echoing Marcella’s use of the same set of images of ascent. The second part is a detailed exegesis of Revelation 12, the story of the Woman who gives birth to the male child as a dragon waits nearby to devour him, before they are both snatched away to the safety of the wilderness at the final moment. The wilderness is described, paradoxically, as a garden, using much the same language as that used

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105 “The *catascopus*, who like Plato’s Er, views human folly from some great height, is one of the genre’s most important comic conventions” (Relihan 1993, 30).
106 He further comments that this imputes fallibility to the gods’ decisions. (Relihan 1993, 131)
107 “Hence it demands strong and generous natures, that can completely divert the stream of sensuality and guide aloft the chariot of their soul, straight up and up, never losing sight of their goal—until, leaping easily over the world with the lightning speech of thought, they stand upon the very vault of heaven and gaze directly upon Immortality itself as it wells up from the pure bosom of the Almighty.” (1.1, Musurillo 42)
by Procilla in the speech before Thecla’s to describe the faithful virgin as a “sealed garden.”

In Thecla’s first, Platonic, section, she adds a garden to Marcella’s mental ascent to contemplation of the beautiful and in her second, Scriptural, section she adds ascent to the garden in Procilla’s exegesis of the Song of Songs. In so doing, she also perfectly consolidates the two texts that Methodius’ Symposium is concerned with—Plato’s Symposium and the Scriptures. She combines the Platonic and the Scriptural, aligning the two into a seamless process of ascent to the divine Garden of Immortality. To emphasize the unity of both ascents, she presents the process and the verdant goal twice.

At the end of her first section, the garden is described as the home of the Forms: “Justice itself, and Love itself, and Truth and Prudence and all the other flowers and plants of Wisdom in like splendor,” only the shadow of which we are able to see in this life (8.3, Musurillo 107). In the second section of Thecla’s speech, the mode is Scriptural exegesis and no longer philosophical allegory. Thecla interprets the Woman giving birth to the child in Revelations 12 as the Church, and the male child she gives birth to as the Christian soul into which Christ has been born. When the woman is removed to the wilderness, Thecla emphasizes that it is not a wilderness as we would normally conceive of it. This wilderness consists of being “truly bare of evil, unfruitful and sterile in what is corruptible” (8.11, Musurillo 116). The wilderness is not a wilderness at all, but a beautiful garden. The cultivated garden at the end of the Scriptural section is even more striking than that at the end of the Platonic section in its direct

108 “For the spouse must be betrothed to the bridegroom and call herself by his name, and till then she must remain pure and undefiled, like a sealed garden in which all the spices of heaven’s fragrance grow, that Christ alone may come and pluck them as they blossom and grow with incorporeal seed.” (7.1, Musurillo 98)

109 “This wilderness [of Rev. 12], described as a fruitful place in language not unreminiscent of Methodius’ descriptions of Paradise, is a wilderness only in the sense of being barren of corruption” (Patterson 1997, 98-99).
correspondence to the dramatic garden setting of the dialogue. In fact, it is even named as the
garden of Virtue, i.e. the garden of Arete.

But it is fruitful and abounding in pasture, blossoming and easy of approach to the
holy, full of wisdom and flowering with life. And this is none other than the
lovely place of Virtue, full of fair trees and gentle zephyrs, where the south wind
rises and the north wind blows and the *aromatical spices flow.* (Symposium 116,
italics in original to show the Scriptural citation)

In the second section, then, instead of making the garden the goal of Platonic ascent, the home of
the Forms, Thecla transforms it into the setting of the *Song of Songs*, referring to the same
“aromatical spices” as Procilla (7.1, Musurillo 97). In so doing, she has stabilized and made
linear the ascent in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Plato’s contemplating souls circle around the Beautiful,
only to fall back down to earth in order to attempt the process once again. Thecla’s
contemplating souls reach the garden and are welcomed by the Bridegroom into a stable,
permanent marriage.

**Gardens**

Thecla’s speech links ascent with a garden goal, and the garden setting of Methodius’
Symposium must be turned to next. Plato’s *Symposium* occurred in the interior space of a home,
although that space is broken into first by Alcibiades and then by a drunken crowd. The other
important model for Methodius, Plato’s *Phaedrus*, is the *locus classicus* for a pastoral setting of
philosophy. However, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates and Phaedrus are in a dangerous space outside
of the civilizing control of the city and culture. Arete’s garden is entirely lacking in wildness;
it is the essence of civilization, having only been reached once the wild mountain path is
surmounted. In contrast, the *Phaedrus* does not take place in a garden, but in the relative
wilderness, the non-city.

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110 For instance, there is a disquieting possibility of rape. Cf. The story of Boreas and the nymph
Orithuia 229b-e (Cooper (ed.), 509).
Although a symposium by its nature delimits an activity and not a location, there were
typical spaces where this activity would take place. Most traditionally, they occurred in the
andron of an elite Greek home.\footnote{This is at least true in the Classical period. By the Hellenistic period, a separate square dining
room was substituted with an oblong room more closely associated with the rest of the house.
Dunbabin believes that “the change reflects a decline in the notion of the symposium as an
activity requirely its own special setting, separate from the main living quarters of the house”
Dunbabin 1991, 122).} As a means of social differentiation and friend-making, the
symposium occurred in the civilized, internal spaces of the home. Kristen Ehrhardt, in her 2011
dissertation on the evidence for outdoor symposia in pottery and poetry, has pointed out the
expectation of this norm in their breach by collecting evidence for symposia that did not occur in
the expected interior, but rather outside:

“It is precisely because the two places seem to stand in such stark opposition to
one another that the conjunction of the two, the “alfresco symposium”—the safe-
unsafe, inside-outside place, seems as if it ought to be a logical impossibility. In
the end, the collision of the two tropes destabilizes the usual values of each
location, entangling the safety of the symposium with the wilds of nature.”

(Ehrhardt 2011, 4)

Since Ehrhardt restricts herself to evidence from pottery and poetry, she unfortunately neglects
Methodius as a representative of the small number of “alfresco” symposia. She looks at how a
small part of the sympotic tradition combines the symposium, which should take place inside,
with the theme of the locus amoenus, sometimes with its dangerous erotic connotations and
sometimes lacking them.

An interesting piece of evidence she discusses is a letter from the Greek writer Alciphron,
who was active in Rome presumably in or near the time of Methodius.\footnote{Although almost all of Alciphron’s biography is contested. See Granholm 2012, 13-15.} In a fictive letter from
one prostitute to another, a sympotic orgy is described which occurs, surprisingly, outside. The
prostitute-correspondent points out the oddity of the setting: “I would like to recline on this grass
rather than on those rugs and softs sheets in private. Let drinking parties (συμπόσια) here amid
the beauty of the countryside and open air surpass those in town!” (4.13.7, Granholm 2012, 97).
The typical symposium was supposed to take place inside and in the city, and Alciphron’s
courtesan emphasizes the oddity of their locale choice.

This letter is illuminating in other respects as well. First of all, it is unique in being
related by a woman and being filled with female participants. This is normalized by the fact that
the participants are prostitutes, the only women typically present at a symposium. Yet it is
rare to hear a narration of a symposium from their perspective. There are men present, and
pointedly so. The symposium quickly turns into an orgy as each pair moves off into the hedge,
which is euphemistically called “a bridal chamber,” (θάλαμον 4.13.14), before returning for a
second round of drinking and eating. There is no philosophical conversation at this party, only
eating, drinking and sex. This is the kind of symposium to expect when women are present,
when the flute-girls are not sent away by a sophistic Socrates. Alciphron plays with the idea of
the locus amoenus as sexually dangerous by filling it not with innocent virgins in danger of being
raped, but sex-hungry courtesans who know exactly what they are getting into and relish it.
Alciphron’s “bridal chamber” is slightly different from that spoken of with anticipation by
Methodius’ virgins: “So too in this case He reveals that the order and holy choir of virgins will
be the first to follow in His train as it were into a bridal chamber, into the repose of the new
ages” (7.3, Musurillo 99).

Alciphron’s letter provides such a welcome comparison to Methodius’ dialogue because
it offers what we might expect to see when we hear about a symposium peopled by women,
taking place in a pleasant garden: a male fantasy of sex in the bushes. Methodius is not just

113 For a discussion about the variety of types of prostitutes associated with the symposium, see
defying Platonic expectations of erotic conversation at symposia, but defying the erotic
expectations of depicting a garden full of female symposiasts. He vehemently resists the
assumption of sexual violation or adventure in his garden by removing alcohol and removing the
presence of any male participant. Yet, he maintains the garden. The garden provides a canon of
similarity between Alciphron and Methodius’s women-filled symposia.

Perhaps there is a deeper connection between the garden setting and the female
participants. Gisela Ecker has studied the different perspectives on the garden in early twentieth-
century novels caused by the difference in the gender of the authors (Ecker 1995). She posits a
genealogy of the persistent image of the garden that would put these novels in line with our own
text. Both get their origin from the enclosed garden, the *hortus conclusus*, of the *Song of Songs.*
The image became popularly associated with Mary throughout the Middle Ages, in literature and
art, making its way into widespread popular culture.\(^{114}\) The passage was used early on by Origen
and Hippolytus in reference to the soul of the Christian as the Bride of Christ, but Methodius is
the first to make use of it in specific reference to the virgin and her relationship with Christ.\(^{115}\)
Procilla’s seventh speech is a long exegesis on the imagery in the *Song of Songs* as symbols of
the virginal life.

Such are the praises that Christ sings of those who have achieved the perfection of
virginity, comprising them all under the title of His spouse. For the spouse must
be betrothed to the bridegroom and call herself by his name, and till then she must
remain pure and undefiled, like a *sealed garden* in which all the spices of
heaven’s fragrance grow, that Christ alone may come and pluck them as they
blossom and grow with incorporeal seed. (Musurillo 97-98)

\(^{114}\) For the history of the exegesis of this passage see Daley 1986, esp. 259-267.
\(^{115}\) “It is this application of the Canticle (and related texts) to virginity that marks Methodius
advance on Origen” (Musurillo 169). After Methodius, Ambrose and Jerome will link the
passage to Mary as the virginal archetype (Musurillo posits that Ambrose is influenced by
Methodius in this regard, 169). The link with Mary is picked up in the later Medieval tradition
and becomes the typical exegesis of the “garden enclosed.”
The “garden enclosed” has become the pure body of the virgin who is espoused to Christ.

If the garden is almost universally associated with the feminine, it is to be expected that male and female writers would view the garden from different locations. Ecker found the expected dichotomy borne out in early twentieth century fiction: male writers tend to see the garden from the outside as a place to enter, as the other; female writers associated the garden with introspection and self-unification, as the self. Looking specifically at the short stories of H.G. Wells and Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ecker breaks the male approach to gardens into two psychological types:

In regard to closed gardens ‘male’ desire aims in two different directions, if I may be allowed to simplify. One is a desire for the lost space of childhood, the space of happiness before the Fall, before the eviction from the maternal realm; in the other case woman sits in a sexually conceived space of desire or represents it. In the first case we find many similarities between the garden images of both sexes, but in the second they follow different paths. (Ecker 1995, 264)

In contrast with the male author’s use of gardens, Ecker develops a theory of the female author’s view of gardens as primarily an extension of the self (in writers such as Virginia Woolf and Frances Burnett) (Ecker 1995, 266). The male relationship to gardens is characterized by “quest” but the female by “extension” (with the garden, of herself). In the female perspective the sexual element of gardens is missing, and there is “no hero to be languished after” (Ecker 1995, 263).

If we can extend Ecker’s analysis of the early twentieth-century, English speaking novelists to the third century Mediterranean (and the continuity of literary garden imagery just might legitimate such a move), Methodius perfectly exemplifies the male view of women and gardens as outlined by Ecker. Arete, the mistress of the garden, receives the virgins as if she were their mother (Prologue, Musurillo 40). At the same time, both she and the other virgins are constantly praised for their beauty and are explicitly eroticized as awaiting the coming of the
Bridegroom. The garden both hearkens back to the Garden of Eden, the place of original innocence, and is the exciting place of waiting for the next movement beyond the garden. According to Ecker’s divisions, the clearest sign of the maleness of the garden metaphors is the all-pervasive absent presence of the Bridegroom, for whom the inhabitants of the garden wait in eager expectation. This garden does have a “hero” who is “languished after”—Christ. In addition, the indirection of the narration places Methodius and also, implicitly, his readers, into the male space outside the garden, curious for knowledge of the internal events. Despite the fact that the narrator is purported to be a woman, Gregorion, and ultimately Theopatra, the maleness of the author Methodius nevertheless reveals itself in the method of depiction.

But Methodius’ particular literary spying into the inside of the female garden exposes the virgins to our gaze without presenting the virgins with the threat of corruption. There is not a hint of violation. Instead, these women are held up as models presenting a persuasive way of life for Methodius’ readers. Both of these factors cause us to take a second look at the positioning of gender in the Symposium.\textsuperscript{116} The cameo appearance that Methodius makes in his dialogue occurs at the very end, in the final exchange between Gregorion and Eubolion. We have already looked at the passage in detail when examining Methodius’ authorial role in his dialogue. But his authorial role also is impacted by his gender. Methodius, as one of the few men in the story, is placed alongside the “Lady of Termessus” as an equally eager inquirer into the contents of the garden party.\textsuperscript{117} Methodius longs to learn about the ascetical life from these women. And so

\textsuperscript{116} The issue of gender reappears throughout this dissertation, but will be looked at particularly in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{117} Both Musurillo and Patterson suggest that this Termessian woman is the sponsor of the work, perhaps the head of a community of female ascetics. See Musurillo 240, n. 1 and Patterson 1997, 68.
does the Termessan lady. He does not present himself as a controlling observer, nor a
threatening one. Methodius includes himself as an eager learner from those who dwell in this
feminine-gendered space. This seems to be more than a voyeuristic desire of a permanent
outsider to peep at female spirituality. Methodius betrays no desire to transgress illicitly and
destroy the wall surrounding the garden; rather, he presents himself as one who wishes to enter
the garden in order to join the virgins. If the female ascetics who entered the desert “became
male,” perhaps it is not illegitimate to say that Methodius’ presentation of the life of virginity as
feminine welcomes males to metaphorically “become female,” to order and cultivate the natural,
wild tendencies in their souls, to adorn their tabernacles with the fruits of virtue.¹¹²

Not only is the garden clearly feminized by being filled with women, but the garden is
consistently and explicitly identified with the intact virgin female body. The word for garden,
κῆπος, is only used in three places in the Symposium. The first one we have seen already.
Gregorion’s description of the setting of the banquet begins, “It was to her garden (εἰς τὸν
κῆπον), with its view to the east, that we were invited” (Prologue, Musurillo 39). The other two
times it is used, there is an explicit link between the garden and the female body: a reference to
adultery as “stealing from others’ gardens” (2.5, Musurillo 55) and Procilla’s quotation of the
famous passage from the Song of Songs, where the Bridegroom says to his Bride: “A garden

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¹¹² In this regard, it seems germane to mention one of the most famous gardens in Late Antique
literature—the location of Augustine’s conversion in Confessions X.viii.19-X.xii.30 (Oxford:
would seem to follow the “feminine” use of a garden as outlined by Ecker, a place of integration
and self-knowledge. Perhaps this is an example of the use of feminine imagery for the male
Christian soul.
enclosed art thou, my sister, my spouse, a fountain sealed up” (7.1, Musurillo 97). Procilla has this to say about the passage:

For the spouse must be betrothed to the bridegroom and call herself by his name, and till then she must remain pure and undefiled, like a sealed garden in which all the spices of heaven’s fragrance grow, that Christ alone may come and pluck them as they blossom and grow with incorporeal seed. (7.2, Musurillo 98)

The enclosed garden is the body of the virgin, longed for by the Bridegroom.

The final two speeches of the contest, given by Tusiane and Domnina, deal with “Botanical Exegesis.” In so doing, they too link horticulture with the virgin herself. First, in the most important passage for understanding Methodius’ eschatology, Tusiane interprets the Leviticus injunctions concerning the Feast of Tabernacles. Each of the tree boughs that Scripture command to be used to decorate the tabernacles represent a virtue to be used to decorate the virgin’s soul: the palm branches of care for the Scriptures, the thick bows of charity, the weeping willow sprigs of justice, and finally the branches of the chaste-tree, the life of virginity (9.4, Musurillo 137). Tusiane’s speech identifies the tabernacles with the virgins’ bodies, which must be adorned with the foliage of virtue. Next, Domnina’s speech provides an interpretation of the tale of Joatham (Judges 9:8-15). Four trees (olive, fig, vine and bramble) are asked to become king. The first three refuse, while the bramble, here the symbol of chastity, accepts. The fable is interpreted to represent the succession of God’s dispensations to humanity. The bramble comes last, as the final dispensation, the life of chastity finally revealed in Christ. The culmination of each of the botanical exegeses is the plant representing chastity—the bramble or the chaste-tree

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119 Musurillo uses this phrase in his introduction to describe Domnina’s speech (Musurillo 1958, 16).
120 Methodius thus brings the last speech in line with the first speech by Marcella, who argued a very similar dispensational development through history, culminating in Christ the Arch-Virgin (Symposium 41-48).
branch. In the virgin’s body is combined the lush and productive (“compact and completely full of thick fruit” of charity; 9.4, Musurillo 137) with the sparse bramble.\textsuperscript{121}

One further collection of images closely ties the virgin with the garden. Thecla describes the activity of those virgins who are living in the Garden of Immortality.

Here all is drenched with ambrosial dew and garlanded with the unfading blossoms of eternal life, and it is for this that we are now gathering flowers and weaving a brilliant chaplet of sea-purple for our Queen with chaste fingers: for the bride of the Word is being adorned with the fruits of Virtue. (8.11, Musurillo 116)

The virgins are busy weaving garlands of flowers in order to crown the Church, their Queen. They pick the virtues that bespeckle the garden like flowers in order to create a beautiful chaplet. And, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, they not only weave garlands to give to the Church; they themselves become a garland offered to the Lord.

Methodius’ innovation of blending the Sympotic literary tradition with the Pastoral literary tradition, and its focus on ideal natural landscapes, ingeniously brings out the complementary nature of the two genres. They both seem to burst onto the scene at a distinct historical moment with known founders (although with precedents in the Homeric writings, among others); both experience a long after-life; and most importantly, perhaps, both are concerned with the creation of a certain idealized, artificial landscape and community. Their generic bounds are tied up with specific imagined spaces and events. However, one focuses on indoor spaces and one on outdoor spaces.

Participants:

Women

\textsuperscript{121} This is a strange type of garden, and recalls Thecla’s interpretation that the desert in Revelation 12 is in fact a garden (“…a wilderness truly bare of evil, unfruitful and sterile in what is corruptible, difficult of access and hard for the majority to pass through” 8.11, Musurillo 116).
Methodius’ choice to set his symposium in the garden of Virtue instead of in her dining room not only plays with the fundamental garden theme in the rest of the Symposium, but, as we have argued, also corresponds to the long-term connection between women and gardens. Methodius’ odd setting has everything to do with his odd participants. But why does Methodius have such odd participants? Why does Methodius choose to make all of his symposiasts women?\(^{122}\)

The first suggestion, made by Musurillo and others, is that Methodius is writing for a primarily female audience and, therefore, makes the entire internal audience also female. He sees the veiled allusion to the “Lady from Termessus” at the end of the dialogue as a seal of the commissioner of this work. We know from Methodius’ other surviving texts that he addressed at least one of his theological investigations to women. One of his letter-treatises, the De Cibis, is addressed to a woman (or women) who had inquired about certain biblical passages.\(^ {123}\)

There is internal evidence in the Symposium of a female audience as well. Marcella’s first speech contains a long section that does not fit quite snugly into the rest of her argument. She insists that for a true virginal life, sexual continence is not enough, but must be combined with a dedication to instruction—especially in Scriptural explication. She rails against the “many women (πολλαί) who consider religious instruction a waste of time (πάρεργον), and think they are doing something wonderful if they listen to it even or a short time” (1.1, Musurillo 43).\(^ {124}\) The fact that Methodius writes this exhortation in the first speech seems a clear

\(^ {122}\) I will turn again to this question in the third chapter, when I look specifically to how the gender of the symposiasts interacts with the theme of competition.

\(^ {123}\) The De Cibis et de Vacca Rufa. This work survives only in Slavonic, for which Bonwetsch provides a German translation p. 427-447 (Bonwetsch 1917 edition). The addressee either has two names (Musurillo’s suggestion p. 8), or are two women, Phrenope (1.1 p. 427) and Chilonia (4.2, p. 430, 5.3 p. 432, 5.6 p. 432).

\(^ {124}\) This passage will be treated at greater length in other chapters.
indication that it should be read as an exhortation to his readers not to grow tired of reading his 
book. His imagined readers, then, appear to be women, at least in Marcella’s characterization. 

This is not to say that Methodius restricts his readership to women. By incorporating 
himself as a male who also heard tell of this symposium from Virtue herself, he shows that men 
can equally profit from what is being said, even if the primary audience is imagined as female. 
Just as Methodius presents a male vision of female spirituality, so too he allows male 
participation in female lessons.

The second reason that has been suggested for the polemic switching of cast to all-female 
is that Methodius wishes to pay homage to Plato’s Diotima. Just as Plato designed to have 
Socrates learn erotics from a woman, so too does Methodius mark his chaste eroticism as 
feminine teaching. Intriguingly, in a different dialogue of Methodius, the De Lepra, there is a 
much closer parallel to Diotima. The participants of that dialogue are all men, but the witness of 
a female educator is brought into the discussion at the end much like Diotima’s erotic speech is 
brought in by Plato’s Socrates.

Of course, this only displaces the question from Methodius onto Plato’s text. Why did 
Plato choose to make a prophetess so fundamental to Socrates’ account of the nature of love? 
David Halperin argues that one of the main reasons Plato makes Diotima a woman is that her 
femininity allows Socrates a focus on fertility rather than appetitive desire alone in the 
construction of the erotic (Halperin 1990, 262ff). Just as Socrates’ account of love in the 
Symposium insists upon fecundity, so too does Methodius’ erotics. Not only do his virgins 
discuss natural fertility at length (see especially the analogy constructed by Theophila for the 
method of procreation 2.2, Musurillo 49-50), but virginal fertility is spiritualized to become the 
procreation of new men through the conversion wrought by preaching the Word.
“Thus the Church stands upon our faith and our adoption—signified here by the moon—until the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, laboring and bringing forth natural men as spiritual men, and under this aspect is she indeed their mother. For just as a woman receives the unformed seed of her husband and after a period of time brings forth a perfect human being, so too the Church, one might say, constantly conceiving those who take refuge in the Word, and shaping them according to the likeness of Christ, after a certain time makes them citizens of that blessed age” (8.6, Musurillo 111).

As in the final hymn, there is an elision in this section of Thecla’s account between the feminine Church and the female virgins who model it. While Thecla first explicates the Woman Clothed with the Sun from Revelation 12 as “our Mother…sometimes called Jerusalem, sometimes the Bride, sometimes Mount Sion, and sometimes the Temple and God’s Tabernacle…it is the Church...” (8.5, Musurillo 110), the referent is quickly moved to the virgins themselves. “I beg you to consider this great Woman as representing virgins prepared for marriage” (8.5, Musurillo 111). Through their marriage to the Bridegroom the virgins (because they stand in for the Church as a whole) become mothers of the baptized.126

Related to the fecundity of his erotics, Methodius’ erotics must be gendered female because of the marriage imagery that permeates his descriptions of virginity. The Bridegroom, Christ, is male, and therefore, the most logical spouse is female. Methodius follows in a well-established tradition by setting his Symposium at a wedding. Plutarch’s Symposium of the Seven Sages, as well as sections of his QC, and Lucian’s Lapiths take place during the celebration of weddings. Intriguingly, these Symposia are the only ones where women are present, although

125 In the final hymn, although the singers are at first identified with the brides anticipating the arrival of their bridegroom, in the upsilon stanza, the refer to themselves as θαλαμηπόλοι waiting on the virgin Church (παρθένοι). έκκλησία).  
126 For an analysis of this passage in the light of the image of Church as Mother, see Plumpe 1943, 118-122.
they are almost never given speaking roles apart from Methodius. The marriage imagery is most strongly felt in Thecla’s final hymn, which is nothing other than an epithalamium, in the strange situation where the bridesmaids who wait at the door are also all future brides of the Bridegroom himself. The first stanza makes it explicit.

**Alpha**
Arousing us from death, o virgins, came the sound of a cry from above, telling us to meet the bridegroom with all our force, wearing white robes and with our lamps to the east. Awaken before the lord arrives and enters the gates before you!

**Refrain:**
I am pure for you, and holding in hand the light-bearing lamps, o bridegroom, I go to meet you.

The bridal imagery permeates the poem, as Thecla closely tracks the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins from Matthew 25. What makes this symptic wedding celebration so strange is that it occurs before the wedding, before the arrival of the bridegroom rather than after, in order to increase the expectancy of the final entrance into the doors of the wedding chamber.

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127 See Burton 1998, 158-159, for an examination of respectable women being present at marriage symposia. Cf. Corner 2012 for a tempering of some of her conclusions.
128 “In form, Thecla’s Hymn is a symbolic marriage hymn to Christ, in which Thecla speaks on behalf of all the virgins.” (Musurillo 1958, 237) Chapter 4, on the poem, will deal explicitly with this issue.
129 A full translation of the poem can be found in Appendix A.
130 One of the reasons why Methodius keeps his women at the door is so as to avoid bringing a man into the Symposium. Surely the more important reason, however, is to model the expectancy of Christ’s Second Coming that all Christians should experience.
These suggestions fall on the same criticisms Halperin rallied in “Why is Diotima a Woman?” The dialogue may be written for women and may have female stars, but it is still clearly written by a man. Like his modern aesthetics, Methodius’ role as the ultimate narrator of the dialogue is obscured, but not completely submerged in the Symposium.

**Thecla**

Of all the women invited to the party at Arete’s garden, only one is a known personage. Not only is she a known personage to literary history, but her fame is flagged in the text by the virgins. Eubulion and Gregorion have heard much about her and are excited to hear her speak. Thecla’s uniqueness cannot be missed: she has the longest speech (actually giving two speeches) and wins the contest. Her recognizability is also unique. Arete introduces Thecla’s speech with a bit of praise:

“We know that you are second to none in your grasp of philosophy and universal culture [liberal arts], and I need hardly mention that you were instructed in divine and evangelical doctrine by Paul himself.” (Musurillo 105)

The structure of this sentence is careful and revealing. It falls into two halves, the secular and the sacred. Each half has its own two parts combined with a τε…καὶ construction. The first τε…καὶ connects “philosophy” with “liberal arts education”, and the second adds the connected adjectives “evangelical and divine”, which, since they are feminine adjectives, seem to go with “paideia”, although they could just as well go with philosophia. Finally, the sentence ends with a substantive participle describing Thecla as “the one who has been made wise” alongside Paul, which wonderfully rings back to the first word of the sentence through the echoed “soph” root. Virtue’s parallelism between secular and sacred learning encapsulates the perfection of Thecla as a symbol, just as Virtue is a symbol. Her historical context is marked by the mention of Paul, but
her description as the woman who combines both secular and sacred education within her person overwhelms her historical persona.

There are, of course, other reasons why Methodius might choose Thecla as his example of the perfectly educated female Christian. Most strikingly, he was living in an area very close to her bustling shrine at Iconium less than 500km on the same rugged coast of southern Asia Minor. Asia Minor apparently boasted a vibrant Thecla cult in the third and fourth century, and it is reasonable to suggest that the (probably female) community to which the work was addressed had a particular devotion to Thecla. In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, the city where Thecla receives the mandate from Paul to preach is Myra, a town very close to Olympus in Lycia (AP 4.15-16, Barrier 2009, 178-183). Such a devotion might have made reading this work gratifying to its recipients, but Methodius must have intended circulation to a wider intended audience than one community, and it seems that he took the opportunity to transform the popular saint into the ideal type of educated woman. Methodius cashes in on the popularity of the cult of Thecla in order to make her into a richer image for his readers. By having Thecla be the model of ideal feminine education, Methodius is also able to more deeply emphasize her role as an educator in the correct methods of imagination described in the preceding chapter.

131 Musurillo actually does not suggest this, although he does suggest that the otherwise unknown characters in the dialogue might be members of a pre-monastic household under the “Lady from Telmessus”. “Methodius’ patroness was perhaps herself unmarried or a widow; further, she may have encouraged a number of young ladies to embrace a life of virginity and live within her household; and it is for these women, perhaps, that the work was primarily written. If so, it is not unlikely that Methodius would have used the actual names of some of these women for his characters: they are certainly of the kind that turn up not infrequently among the Greek inscriptions of imperial Asia Minor.” (Musurillo 11) If it were the case that the “unidentified” interlocutors were current people (or I would more readily imagine, recently deceased women from their community), then one could imagine the excitement that would be caused in imagining them conversing with such a famous figure as Thecla.
Using a historical personage in a work of Sympotic literature has a long pedigree. Plato, Xenophon and Plutarch all play with writing Symposia that take place among famous people of the past. Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Convivales*, on the other hand, brought the sympotic genre up into the present day and shifted the focus from solely famous people to people of Plutarch’s acquaintance. The special trick of Methodius’ temporal displacement allows him to use this custom of bringing famous historical personages around a table for an imaginary conversation, but also displaces them away from the past into the present timelessness of otherworldliness.\(^{132}\)

Thecla’s symbolic role as an ideally educated virgin corresponds well with the setting of the Symposium more generally. The imagistic nature of the text reminds the readers that they too are living in a world of images, like the virgins they are eagerly reading about, awaiting the fulfillment of their lives which would occur at the second coming of Christ.

**Conclusion:**

Plato proves a useful predecessor to Methodius’ innovations. The changes in location and participants that strike even the most casual reader correspond with a more subtle change in the Symposium’s orientation to time. Methodius can incorporate the cultural cachet of Plato’s literary Symposium while also making an argument that the Christian Symposium is superior to the Platonic one, precisely because it shows that it itself needs to be superseded. The female participants, holding their Symposium on a mountaintop and in a garden, are awaiting entry into a more real symposium upon which they are training their imaginations.\(^{132}\) Julian does something much the same when he imagines the judgment of the past Roman Emperors happening simultaneously to his celebration of the Kronia in another realm.
There is no nostalgia at this symposium: the virgins know that they are not the best, but they also refuse to believe that the past was best. If Plato’s Symposium can be paralleled to the Jewish period of shadows, then Methodius’ Symposium is the image, the stage that corresponds to the Gospel. Both of these are preliminary and are meant to point to the final fulfillment of the Symposium in the divine Wedding Banquet of the Divine Bridegroom. What Methodius is trying to teach his readers is how to read different levels correctly, to correctly read where they are, to see that everything points to a reality that still lies distant. His virgin symposiasts spend their time reading Old Testament stories as allegories of what is present. But the readers of the Symposium are called upon to learn how to read the Symposium itself as finding its final referent in the long-expected Divine Wedding Banquet to come.

The Symposium is a space constructed to display intellectual elites in a setting that combines the serious and playful. Methodius seizes the opportunity to present a re-imagining of what intellectual elite means for Christians. Martyrs and ascetics have a pride of place, and women can be just as honored as men. But importantly, the substance of their conversation has radically changed from any of Methodius’ predecessors. Scriptural interpretation provides many of the same pleasures and opportunities for clever innovation as did the more traditional sophistic playfulness with classical texts such as Homer. Methodius makes a convincing argument that Christianity is an attractive alternative, incorporating the best in the old tradition, while providing a foundation that is excitingly new. There are so many Old Testament passages that stand waiting for commentary, waiting for ingenious and playful readers. Yet, Christianity also provides a deep sense of seriousness, a new goal of all of this conversation and conviviality—the expectant arrival of the Bridegroom and the ushering into the divine wedding chamber. It is the
combination of the seriousness of purpose and the insense focus of the conversation that makes Plato such an attractive model to Methodius to follow and radically redirect.
Chapter 3  
Methodius’ Symposium and the Rhetorical Tradition

After the virgins have gathered under their plane tree and had their fill of eating and drinking, Arete proposes the after-feast entertainment. Each symposiast is to deliver an encomium on the topic of virginity, starting with Marcella. This set-up at first sounds simply like a marker of literary genealogy, a purposeful echo of the opening of Plato’s Symposium. But attention to the slight changes in details reveals that with Methodius we have entered a different world, and that the sympotic activity of the virgins has been radically reimagined as a more formalized competition, one which had become more common in the generations leading up to Methodius.

Therefore, there is something else that I want, and why do I hesitate? That each of you speak an encomiastic speech about virginity. And let Marcella begin, since she is reclining in the first place and is also the elder. I would be ashamed of myself if I did not make the one who has competed well-envied, having crowned her with the unblemished garlands of wisdom.¹

οὖν ἔστιν δ’ θέλω λοιπὸν ἡδῆ, καὶ τί προσδοκῶ; λόγον ἐκάστην ύμῶν ἐγκομιαστικὸν περὶ παρθενίας εἰπεῖν. Καταρχέτω δὲ Μάρκελλα, ἐπειδὴ καὶ πρώτη ἀνάκειται καὶ ἔστιν ἁμα πρεσβυτέρα. Τὴν μέντοι καλὸς ἀγανισαμένην, αἰσχυνοίμην ἂν ἐμαυτήν, ἐὰν μὴ ποίησαμι ἥλιοτήν, τοὺς ἁμιάντοις τῆς σοφίας ἀναδήσασα πετάλοις.

In Plato’s Symposium, the topic of conversation was proposed not by the host of the party, Agathon, but by a guest, Eryximachus. He had been speaking with another party-goer, Phaedrus, about the lamentable lack of proper encomia to Eros and as a solution proposes to fill the gap by eliciting contributions from each of the symposiasts.² There is no suggestion that their entertainment will be a strict competition, although, of course, sympotic games always have their

¹ Unless marked, translations are my own.
² εἰ οὖν συνδοκεῖ καὶ ύμῖν, γένοιτ’ ἂν ἡμῖν ἐν λόγοις ἰκανή διατριβή· δοκεῖ γάρ μοι χρήναι ἐκαστὸν ἡμῶν λόγον εἰπεῖν ἐπαινοῦν ἔρωτος ἐπὶ δεξιὰς ὡς ἂν δύνηται κάλλιστον, ἁρχεῖν δὲ Φαϊδρον πρῶτον, ἐπειδὴ καὶ πρῶτος κατάκειται καὶ ἔστιν ἁμα πατήρ τοῦ λόγου. (177d)
competitive side.\textsuperscript{3} Rather, out of piety, each will attempt to contribute as best as he can to the project (ὡς ἂν δόνηται κάλλιστον 177d). In Arete’s opening, on the other hand, not only does she directly call the speakers competitors (τὴν ἀγωνισμένην), but she also says that there will be a winner chosen from among them: the winner will then be one to be envied (ζηλωτήν), wearing a crown given by Arete.

The increase in competitiveness in Methodius’ \textit{Symposium} goes hand-in-hand with an emphasis on an understanding of Christian virtue which explicitly eschews rivalry.

“For actually it is not so much the wine that arouses a man or makes him lose control of himself as it is anger stemming from rivalry.” (Thallusa 5.5, Musurillo 86-87)

Οὕτως γὰρ οὐκ ἔξισται ἄνθρωπος ἀπὸ οἴνου καὶ παραπαίει, ὡσπερ ὑπὸ ζῆλου\textsuperscript{4} καὶ ὀργῆς.

Rivalry and anger, Thallusa argues, are more dangerous than drunkenness, both of which are problems often encountered at a symposium,\textsuperscript{5} but neither of which should be problems in the moderate and restrained symposium such as the one being related by Gregorion.

The language of competition resurfaces strongly at the end of the work, when Arete fulfills her promise to grant an award to the best speaker.\textsuperscript{6} While they are waiting for the declaration of the winner of their contest, Arete increases their anticipation by delaying the announcement while she provides her own short commentary on the proceedings. She complements and thanks each of the virgins for their contribution, but she also takes the

\textsuperscript{3} “Sympotic play is ultimately competitive in nature, insofar as symposia are venues for the agonistic display of learning and non-professional poetical talent” (Collins 2004, 63). Cf. Collins 2004, 63-166 for an investigation into poetic sympotic games.

\textsuperscript{4} This is the only use of the word ζῆλος in Methodius.

\textsuperscript{5} “…the competitive sympotic performance also lent itself to the expression of personal ambition and private gain, at times with ruthless consequences” (Collins 2004, 63). We see such animosities come out in Athenaeus’ \textit{Deipnosophists}, and increased to a satiric degree in Lucian’s \textit{Symposium}, which ends in violence.

\textsuperscript{6} As also mentioned by König 2008, 105.
opportunity to expand on her own view of virginity. Echoing the other contributions, she states that the life of virginity is not only about preserving sexual integrity. All of the virtues are connected, and the ones who are truly pure will also be humble, unattached to wealth, selfless, and pure in all of their senses (Arete 11.1, Musurillo 149-151). Among the list of all the ways in which one might dishonor purity, she prominently includes pride.

Rather do they dishonor purity by being hubristic in pride, “purifying the outside of the dish and the platter”, that is, the flesh, the body, but doing harm to their heart in their puffed up pride and love of strength.

Even the most chaste of virgins fails in her endeavor for holiness if she permits pride to percolate through her actions. Yet the same Arete ends with congratulating them on how well they have competed against each other, and gives the best award to the one who performed best, just as she promised at the beginning. She encourages rivalry and pride in a good performance.

How can the requirement of humility and self-effacement propounded by Arete be reconciled with the requirements of her competition? How is one to strive to be the best, the one who shines most brilliantly, without falling prey to pride?

This question is especially pointed since the Symposium represents a conversation among Christians, not between representatives of varying philosophies, like Methodius’ other dialogues and dialogues such as Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho. In another type of setting, where a
speaker is arguing against non- or heterodox Christians, winning the argument could be a win for orthodoxy, but here, the only competitors are fellow insiders, members of the same team. What point is there in winning?

I first argue in this chapter that the competition among the virgins sounds much like the competitive activity of other professional rhetoricians of this time, and for this I look especially at the evidence in Philostratus’ Lives of the Sophists. Methodius is living in a particular time and place, Asia Minor the late third century, immediately following the period of great rhetorical practice enshrined by Philostratus, and the rhetoricalization of his Symposium is a reflection of that change in time and place. The sense of the sophistic context is increased when we look at how Methodius constructs his own rhetorical persona as a reciter of his dialogues in the preface to another one of his dialogues, On Free Will. I show that Methodius makes a parallel between the rhetorical activities of his virgins and his own rhetorical activity of writing and performing philosophical dialogues. He legitimizes his own endeavor as he legitimates that of the virgins. The “real-time” intellectual community that Methodius asserts and simultaneously constructs as the auditors of his dialogues explicitly parallels the intellectual community formed (and encouraged) by the virgins in his Symposium.

What these intellectuals do is speak and listen in harmony to variation, which maintains the theme of rhetorical competition while smoothing over the danger of antagonism. How is this variety-loving competition compatible with Methodius’ Christianity? Methodius responds to this question with one of his favorite images—the garland, one object that is composed of many plants. The garland is a symbol of his pro-harmony and variation argument on a number of levels: the level of pleasing variation of rhetoric in a speech, pleasing variation among the

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Outside of the dialogic tradition, see the recent collection of essays by Rosenblum, Vuong and DesRosiers 2014.
collection of speeches in a work of literature, and the pleasing variation among the ways of life that comprise the Church. In reflecting his landscape, Methodius privileges competition, despite its dangers, because he wants to maintain variety on a number of levels. He believes in the utility of competition-induced variety, which not only pleases, but is also part of God’s creative method. In order to maintain the legitimacy of variety within Christianity, however, Methodius subordinates variety to another over-arching concept—harmony. The expected competitive dynamics of intellectual conversation are not destroyed, but changed. The harmonization of the *poikilia* of rhetoric requires a hierarchy, an ordering of voices into their correct places. In the Symposium, there are better and worse participants, just as there are more and less perfect ways of life. Competition helps create the correct ordering of parts, as well as provides in high relief the variety which contributes to the pleasure and edification of the listeners.

In the final section of this chapter, I look at how the gender of the virgins fits into this competitive narrative. Methodius does not feminize his female rhetorical competition. Instead, he chooses to make his women compete using much the same vocabulary as male competitors, which serves to connect Methodius’ activity and that of the virgins more easily. Through masculine images of the athlete and the warrior-hero, they counteract the dangerous femininity their embrace of rhetoric might otherwise convey.

In this chapter, I build from an argument made by Jason König, who has also spoken about the problem of competition in Methodius’ dialogue.² He believes that Methodius self-consciously plays with the tradition of sympotic competition, and that one of the main moves that Methodius makes is to redirect the competitive aspect away from a competition between

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² König 2008.
Symposiasts onto the individual’s battle against sin and the devil. While König is right that there is a new focus on competing against evil in this dialogue, especially in Thecla’s speech, and much of the competitive language has been moved into that arena, I believe that it is important not only to emphasize the fact that competition has been redirected and internalized. Sympotic and rhetorical competition also are allowed to remain in Methodius’ world, as long as they comprise a variation that is non-antagonistic. Again and again, Methodius makes a plea to continue difference: difference in persona, difference in rhetoric, difference in voices. But all these different voices must sing a harmonious song, which Methodius believes is possible.

Part I: Audience, the Problem of Rivalry and the Second Sophistic Context of Methodius

A recent commentator on Methodius’ Symposium has taken issue with Methodius’ changes to sympotic expectations, seeing them not as purposeful reflections of changing social circumstances, but as the repercussions of ignorance combined with bad writing.

When we turn from a consideration of the Platonic handling of the sympotic genre to Methodius’, the absolute failure of the later author in artistic and literary terms is painfully obvious. The reasons for this failure are to be sought both in the author’s meager literary talents and in his ignorance of genuine sympotic custom…not only is Methodius’ sympotic genre dead, but, because of his imperfect understanding of the symposion, the exhumed cadaver has missing bits, hence the resulting monstrosity.” (Bril 2006, 299, 301)

Bril is right to point out that Methodius’ literary symposium contains surprises, elements that no longer look like the symposia we are used to hearing about from Oswyn Murray and others who

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9 “One of the striking developments, for example, is the way in which the language of agonism tends to be redirected, rather than dropping away entirely. There is an increasing sense that the true struggle is against oneself, rather than against rivals in conversation, with virginity, and the nearness to God it provides, as the prize. That assumption is prominent especially in the speech of Thekla (8) which is saturated with agonistic language; and it culminates in another wrestling image in the work’s final lines, where Euboulion suggests that the best wrestler is the one who is being constantly tested against difficult opponents in competition, just as the most valuable type of virginity is one which is constantly being tested against temptation.” (König 2008, 106)
have explicated the importance of ancient sympotic culture. But I cannot agree with Bril that these differences are due to blind ignorance. Although Methodius may have been living in a time when the symposium was no longer practiced with Archaic or Classical frequency, he still is well aware of the generic conventions of sympotic literature, and the changes that he makes to our expectations are purposeful.  

Rather than seeing these differences as due to ignorance, then, it is more fruitful to assume that they communicate something important to the reader. I argue that by looking at precisely where the differences between Methodius’ symposium and traditional sympotic custom lie, we can gain insight into the social forms with which Methodius was familiar. Many of the changes that Methodius makes are due to the change in social setting for epideictic speech-making. He has reset the symposium in a sophistic display context, and this cultural interference causes some of the unexpected elements that so bothered Bril. Between Plato and Methodius, a great revolution occurred, the move from the First Sophistic to the Second Sophistic, and with it an intensification of the performative and agonistic elements of epideictic oratory. The changes that Bril attributes to unintentional ignorance, I see instead as a reflection of changing social settings, along with a deeper allegoricization common in later literary Symposia, as argued in the second chapter.

Bril mentions a handful of characteristics of Methodius’ Symposium that would not have been part of a Classical symposium: the symposiasts are women, the event happens in the daytime and in a garden, some of the women stand to deliver their speeches (not reclining on klinai), they speak in order of age rather than seating arrangement, there is no separation between the eating and drinking periods of the party, they sing at the end and not the beginning of the

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10 For a discussion of these sympotic expectations and Methodius’ manipulation of them, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
event, and the women are crowned with victory crowns instead of sympotic garlands (Bril 2006, 291-293). The purposeful change in setting and participants have already been considered in the previous chapter, where I argued that the two innovations of women and gardens go hand in hand, and are in aid of a new role made available to women with the coming of Christianity. I will treat the innovation of the hymn in the final chapter. In this chapter, I look more closely at one of the other changes noted by Bril, the awarding of the winning competitors with garlands. I argue that this detail gives us a glimpse into a broader change in Methodius’ *Symposium*, namely his superimposition of an increased rhetorical atmosphere upon the cultural event of the symposium.

A. The Sophistic Rivalry among the Virgins

Athletic rivalry is not an unfamiliar metaphor for rhetorical competition. In the middle of the biography of the sophist Dionysius of Miletus, Philostratus introduces another famous rhetorician, Polemo, who will get his own full-length biography later on in the work. Polemo has come to Sardis to argue a court case for a rich client, and the local established professional sophist, Dionysius, is a bit concerned that his turf is being grabbed and that he will be surpassed in rhetorical skill. As Polemo leaves the courtroom, Dionysius quips at him, “This athlete possesses strength, but it does not come from the wrestling-ground.”¹¹ Polemo’s response was to come to Dionysius’ house soon afterwards and make a public performance of his rhetorical ability. After he had competed well at his house (διαπρεπῶς ἀγωνιζόμενος), “he went up to Dionysius, and leaning shoulder to shoulder with him, like those who begin a wrestling match standing, he wittily turned the laugh against him by quoting, ‘Once O once they were strong, the

¹¹ “ἰσχὺν” ἔφη “ὁ ἀθλητὴς ἔχει, ἀλλ᾿ οὐκ ἐκ παλαιστρας.” 525 Philostratus Loeb 97
men of Miletus.”\footnote{12} Polemo and Dionysius stage their relationship as one which is as strenuous and takes as much skill as the competition between wrestlers.

In the biography of Polemo himself, the athletic, wrestling language is continued and developed. Philostratus summarizes Polemo’s style thus:

\[ \text{Ἡ δὲ ἴδεα τῶν Πολέμωνος λόγων θερμὴ καὶ ἐναγώνιος καὶ τορὸν ἥχουσα, ὡσπερ ἢ Ολυμπιακὴ σάλπιγξ.} \] (542)

Polemo’s style of eloquence is passionate, combative, and ringing to the echo, like the trumpet at the Olympic games. (trans. Wright, Loeb 131)

A combative style was not the only one possible, but it particularly suited Polemo, who developed a particularly masculine persona, as opposed to other famous rhetoricians such as Scopelian and Favorinus (one the ally and one the enemy of Polemo), both of whom developed more effeminate personas.\footnote{13}

Polemo’s pugilistic rhetoric is an important comparandum to the rhetoric of the virgins at Methodius’ symposium, where the language of athletic competition is especially strong in the interchange between the first and second speakers. When Theophila makes an argument which directly conflicts with Marcella’s opening speech, Marcella interrupts her with a challenge. She claims that Theophila has made a misstep (σφάλμα) and contradicted herself, tauntingly calling her “oh most wise one” (ὦ σοφωτάτη) (2.3). She tells Theophila that she cannot flee behind the wall of a text (ἳνα μὴ καταφύγῃς ὡσπερ εἰς τειχίον), and warns her not to play the wise woman (αὐτὰ πάλιν σοφιζομένη) by making another specious argument (2.3). This is the only place in the Symposium where a speech is interrupted by another participant, and Theophila is suitably shocked.

\footnote{12} Προσήλθε τῷ Διονυσίῳ καὶ ἀντερείσας τὸν ὄμον, ὡσπερ οἱ τῆς σταδιαίας πάλης ἐμβιβάζοντες, μάλα ἀστείως ἐπετῶθασεν εἰπών ἥσαν ποτε, ἥσαν ἔλκυμοι Μιλήσιοι. 526 Philostratus Loeb 97

\footnote{13} See Gleason 1995, 26-27 for the gendered rivalry between Favorinus and Polemo.
Now Theophila, although grasped around the waist by a sturdy opponent in the arena, began to grow dizzy, and recovering herself with great difficulty, she said… (Musurillo 52)

Although she gasps like a wrestler taken around the waist, she quickly gathers herself and is able to make a suitable response to her challenger. After she has done so and successfully concluded her speech, she is greeted with a resounding round of applause from the rest of the virgins.14 Methodius chooses to highlight this tense moment with the familiar allegory between rhetorical performance and wrestling that we saw in the interchange between Dionysius and Polemo. In so doing, he comfortably inserts his female rhetoricians into the traditional male role of competitive rhetorician.

The virgins in his symposium behave as we would expect rhetoricians in the Second Sophistic, beyond being scripted into athletic metaphors of competition. Sometimes the extemporaneous nature of their contributions is mentioned (Thallusa 5.8), a particular skill that certain sophistic performers were eager to show off.15 They enjoy giving speeches in front of audiences, and enjoy listening to quality speeches being performed. The performances are not

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14 None of the other virgins are honored with clapping at the end. Perhaps this is because of the increase on sophistic references in Theophila’s speech.
15 At the end of Thallusa’s 5th speech, she references its extemporaneous nature: “Ταῦτά σοι ὡς ἐκ τοῦ παραχρήμα κάγω κατὰ δύναμιν ὑπὲρ ἀγνείας, ὦ Ἀρετή, συμβάλλωμαι.” (Thallusa 5.8) παραχρήμα is a word that Philostratus uses twice, once in the Heroicus 51.13 and once in the Life of Apollonius of Tyana 6.4. In the Lives of the Sophists, advanced rhetors would ask their audience to choose a theme for their declamation, thereby showing their competence over a large range of topics, e.g. 529, 575, 527. Aelius Aristides was remarkable for not being willing to perform extemporaneously: “'Propose the theme to-day,' [Aelius Aristides] replied, ‘and tomorrow come and hear me, for I am one of those who do not vomit their speeches but try to make them perfect.’” (Lives of Sophists 583, trans. Wright, Loeb 217).
only for pleasure, but are competitions that establish social hierarchies.\(^{16}\) In Philostratus’ world, men jockey for status through rhetoric. In Methodius’ world, through the extemporaneous competition of the speeches, Methodius’ virgins are competing over who is the best, who is the one that Arete will make “envied.”

**B. Methodius’ Sophistic Stance Towards his Audience**

It would be enough to see a reflection of a new, sophistic-influenced setting in the imagined world of the virgins themselves, but the belief that Methodius is involved in and alluding to such a sophistic setting is strengthened when we add the evidence of the activity Methodius writes for *himself* in his other dialogues. This, in turn, has interesting repercussions for Methodius’ treatment of gender. He makes a parity between himself as a male rhetorician in front of a male audience, and his virgins as female rhetoricians in front of a female audience.\(^{17}\) Although the separation of the genders is complete in the dialogues that we have preserved, the separation is complicated by the fact that Methodius makes himself a sort of auditor for the virgins’ speeches, and the fact that male readers are presumably encouraged to listen in as well. Female rhetoric can and should be listened to by males, even though they are not allowed to do so directly.\(^{18}\)

In the preface to another of his dialogues, *On Free Will*, Methodius lets us catch a glimpse of his own audience and how he understands his role within his intellectual community, whom he addresses here directly in the second person. He positions himself as a performer in

\(^{16}\) For an excellent recent book on the similarity of social construction in circles of sophists and circles of Christians, see Eshleman 2012.

\(^{17}\) “The ancient Greek literary tradition similarly portrays women’s speech communities as separate from those of men and represents women as speaking differently among themselves than they do before men.” (McClure 1999, 36)

\(^{18}\) See the discussion of the dangers of males in the garden-space of the virgins discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.
front of an audience of eager and expert listeners, a similar activity to the one we see so often from sophists of the second and third centuries. In his attempt to include Lycia in the literary networks of his time, he advertises the high-quality intellectual community that it has to offer, and provides us with rare evidence for this period. The terminology that he uses for his performance in front of his audience mirrors that of the virgins, and the combined force of the two puts Methodius squarely in the milieu of sophistic rhetorical performances.

**On Free Will and On the Resurrection:**

Unlike the Symposium, Methodius fronts On Free Will with a preface in the form of a lengthy address to his listeners. The preface begins with an allegorical reading of the Sirens from Book 12 of the Odyssey, through which Methodius contrasts two types of listening. The first type is the dangerous listening, a listening which Methodius elides with the Greeks, and therefore pagan secular learning. The seductive singing of such Sirens brings death to those who listen. On the contrary, Methodius says that he desires only to hear the song from the

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1 For example, see the anecdote in Philostratus’ Lives of the Sophists about Alexander the Clay-Plato’s visit to Athens and his encounter with Herodes. When he arrives, he is worried that the best audience is out of town with Herodes, so he delays while waiting for Herodes to return. While he’s delaying, he pleases his audience with a warm-up speech in praise of Athens and “a low buzz of approval went around as a tribute to his perfect elegance”. He takes up the theme they propose, and when Herodes arrives midway through, he is willing to change topics if Herodes chooses. Herodes hands the choice back to the audience, who stick to their original topic, “for indeed Alexander was making out his case with brilliant success” (572, trans. Wright, Loeb 195). Herodes obliges Alexander by also giving a speech after him, and they are mutually delighted in each other’s ability (573-574).

20 “…frequently dismissed as a mere rhetorical exercise…” (Patterson 1997, 40)

21 The contrast between Sirens’ song and true rhetoric is also found in Clement Protrepticus IX.12, and elsewhere in Methodius (Symposium 8.1 and On the Resurrection 1.28).

22 αἱ θανατηφόροι Σειρῆνες Ἑλλήνων, Vaillant 1930, 5 ln. 2
biblical chorus of the prophets (ةبيؤς تي χορός προφητῶν, Vaillant p. 5, ln. 3). Rather than luring listeners to death, hearing this group of singers transfers listeners to a better life.23

After setting up this allegory, Methodius turns from third person to direct second person address. He tells his audience to come and hear, unafraid, the divine song that he will be singing along with the prophets and apostles (Vaillant 1930, 5 ln. 7). Together they form a beautiful chorus, and he hopes to be able to join his voice to theirs (Vaillant 1930, 5 ln. 13-15). The image that he uses for his dialogue is a musical one. His dialogue is part of a larger chorus singing in harmony, composed of prophets, apostles and himself.

I too beg to sing along with them. Let us sing, then, even us, the same song, and let us send up the hymn to the holy Father, glorifying by the Spirit Jesus who is “in his bosom” (John 1:18). Let us not flee, man, the pneumatic hymn, nor place yourself at enmity with the listening. It does not hold death. Our song is the narration of salvation. But I already seem to enjoy the better things, having dialogued about these things, and most of all when there was present to me such a meadow of flowers (ἄνθεων λειμών), i.e. your gathering (σύνοδος) of the listeners and the fellow-singers of the divine mysteries.24

There are two important groups, those who sing the spiritual hymn, and those who listen to the song. The hearers and singers are united by loving the correct type of music, and by avoiding the deadly singing of the Sirens of pagan learning.

23 τῶν μὲν γὰρ μετὰ τῆς φωνῆς ο ἀκροατῆς τοῦ ζῆν παύεται, τῶν δὲ ἐπὶ πλείον ἀκούουν τοῦ κρείττονος ἀπολαύσει βίου, ὑπὸ θείου πνεύματος χειραγωγούμενος Vaillant 1930, 5 ln. 4-6).
24 There has not yet been an English translation of this work.
He then praises his listening community for not being competitive and jealous as was the problem with Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, or the brothers of Joseph. \(^{25}\) Instead, his auditors not only listen to a harmonious song but also have a great harmony among themselves. He concludes by addressing his audience with a string of interesting vocatives.

Oh beautiful audience hall and holy symposium and pneumatic dishes of food! I beg that I might always be worthy to be with such men.

Ω ἀκροατηρίου\(^{26}\) καλοὶ καὶ συμποσίου σεμνοὶ καὶ πνευματικῶν ἐδεσμάτων· τοιοῦτος ἀκεῖ συνεῖναι δικαίως εὐξάμην. (Vaillant 1930, 7 ln. 12-13)

By terming the gathering a “symposium,” he connects his actual academic setting and the imagined setting of the virgins. He will recite his dialogue\(^{27}\) to a group of colleagues who are fellow-believers and who also enjoy feasting upon words.\(^{28}\) Through using the word “symposium,” the mental link between his own activity and that of his virgins is inescapable.\(^{29}\) He begs to always be worthy of such a group, suggesting that he could imagine a time when all was not unified and smooth. The argument against their rivalry implies that academic

\(^{25}\) “ὅτι μοι παντὸς φθόνου καθαρὰς παρέχετε τὰς ἀκοὰς, οὐ τὸν ζῆλον τὸν τοῦ Κάϊν μιμούμενοι, οὐχ ὁμοίως τῷ Ἡσαῦ διώκοντες τὸν ἀδελφόν, οὐ <τοὺς> τοῦ Ἰωσήφ ἐπαινοῦντες ἀδελφοὺς” (Vaillant 1930, 731) For a study on the image of Cain and Abel in early Christian literature, see Byron 2011.

\(^{26}\) The only biblical use of this word is at Acts 25:23, which, oddly, is when St. Paul is brought to trial in Caesarea Maritima, the city to which Origen would move and in which Pamphilus and his student Eusebius would establish a famous Christian intellectual center.

\(^{27}\) We have literary evidence for the performance of Platonic dialogues in Athenaeus and Plutarch, which may have been a short-lived fad in the second century AD, but which Charalabopoulos believes probably found their roots in dramatizations of the dialogues over dinner at the Academy during Plato’s lifetime (Charalabopoulos 2012, 197-226).

\(^{28}\) Of course, the idea of “feasting on words” has a long pedigree, and as such is the metaphor used as the title of the 1991 translation of Jeanneret work on the sympotic tradition, “A Feast of Words.” Patterson comments about his preface: “He assumes an intellectual audience…” (Patterson 1997, 41)

\(^{29}\) Although Patterson believes that On Free Will was written before the Symposium (Patterson 1997, 31), and in this he is followed by the most recent editor of On Free Will (Franchi, forthcoming). The two texts most definitely interact, even if it is difficult to determine the direction of influence.
competition could at times get out of hand and become fratricidal. He wishes to slate his listeners as those who are not tempted along such lines, but the very comment points to the danger that rivalry always plays in competitive academic contexts.

In this preface, Methodius makes a case for his own project, arguing that what he is doing is not dangerous but life-giving. His argument implies that there may have been other voices in his community that questioned the particular fascination that Methodius had with beautiful rhetorical style, perhaps accusing him of seductive and deathly singing like the Sirens. The danger that Methodius might be too concerned with rhetoric is also shadowed in the Symposium. Eubulion, the female cypher for Methodius-Eubulius, is accused by Gregorion at the very beginning of the work of being too fond of intellectual banter, and not sufficiently devoted to the truth. Eubulion denies this charge, and shows through her taking control of the conversation at the end that she is genuinely able to carry on persuasive and helpful philosophical dialectic. But the danger of content being overrun by style is present and marked in Methodius’ works.

C. The Parallel in Intellectual Activity between Methodius and his Virgins

The link between the preface to On Free Will and the Symposium continues in furthered echoed language concerning the content of their way of life. While the virgins inhabit an unusual locale, their activity is not unusual. The key term that that carries across the two is the focus on listening. The clearest echo occurs in Marcella’s opening speech, where she outlines who the ideal virgin will be, and how much work is required to reach the ideal state of virginity. Virginity is not just a goal of bodily intactness to be attained, but is a much broader way of life that requires diligence and application. In particular, it requires persistent listening. And this

30 Αἴει δεινὴ ἐν ταῖς ὁμολίαις καὶ φιλοπευστοῦσα, ὃς Εὐβούλιον, σφόδρα τυχανέις ἄπαντας ὑπερτήνοις ἐξελέγχουσα. (Prologue)
But there are many women who consider religious instruction a waste of time, and think they are doing something wonderful if they listen to it even for a short time. These we ought to exclude. For it is not right to share the divine teachings with a creature what is petty, mean, and pretends to be wise. For would it not be ridiculous to go on talking to such who waste all their efforts on insignificant trifles, trying to fulfill their own desires down to the last detail, without ever a thought for the heroic efforts which are absolutely essential if the love of continence is to grow in them? (Musurillo 43)

Methodius calls the activity of the virgins a “listening” (τὴν ἀκρόασιν, a term which Musurillo overtranslates as “religious instruction”), the concept that was so central to the preface to On Free Will, and to the intellectual life of the Imperial period more broadly. The terminology of listening was embedded in the sophistic context of sophist and student. An ἀκριβείας was the normal term for the students of a sophist,31 who would attend and listen to his lectures, which were called an ἀκροάσις.32 Sometimes sophists would admit students at different levels of access, but all of them were styled as “hearers.”

Not only is listening important, but even more so is the content of what is being listened to. The virgin is enjoined not to listen to “insignificant trifles” (ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς μικροὶς ἄξιοις) but
rather to the divine lessons (μαθημάτων θείων). In addition, it is a type of learning that happens communally, not in isolation, and the people with whom you associate matter in how well you are educated. Marcella warns against admitting a certain type of silly woman into their company. The integrity of the community must be maintained in order to ensure productive education. Marcella’s statement supports the argument made by Kendra Eshleman that sophistic circles policed their boarders in much the same way as Christian Eucharistic communities. The quality of those who listened to you was one of the most important markers in your own quality as a professional sophist with fee-paying students (Eshleman 2012, 38-49),

Earlier in the same passage, Marcella had explained more about the content of this “listening”. It is a “spiritual melete” of the Scriptures that train and purify the soul in its ascent towards God. Melete could simply be a generic term for practice, but here I believe it has strong rhetorical coloring. The virgins’ lives are taken up with rhetorical exercises of a different kind than in the typical schoolroom—biblical interpretation. Nevertheless, the same vocabulary is used in this transposed reality. The fundamental activity is a certain type of listening, but that listening should in turn be practiced in just the type of creative biblical interpretations that are so much in evidence among the speeches of the virgins.

Herodes Atticus, in addition to his normal group of students, had a smaller, select group of ten of his best students who would gather for special classes. He called this group the “water-clock”, the Clyspedrion, because the special classes would happen for a set length of time, during which Herodes would exegete sections of verse over dinner. The group also became known as the “thirsty-ones,” perhaps as a joke in connection with their watery name, or perhaps a

33 ἡ πνευματικὴ πᾶσα τῶν γραφῶν ἔδόθη μελέτη, ἣς δὴ χωρίς ἀδύνατον τῷ παντοκράτορι διὰ τοῦ λόγου προσενεχθῆναι ψυχήν· (Marcella 1.1, Musurillo 43).
connection with the fact that they were also known to have private drinking parties. The group of ten became a social group of its own, having special intellectual symposia which were spoken of as similar to initiation into mystery cults.

And since [Herodes] had enjoined his pupils not to be idle even when it was the hour for drinking, but at that time also to pursue some sort of study over their wine, Hadrian used to drink with the pupils of the clepsydra as their partner in a great and mysterious rite. (Philostratus Lives of the Sophists 585-586, trans. Wright, Loeb 224-225)

The anecdote ends with Hadrian, a consummate caricaturist, imitating the performance styles of various sophists. He refuses to imitate the style of their teacher Herodes, however, since he says that he would be lucky to imitate him even when he was sober (Lives of the Sophists 586).

Herodes’ Clepsydrion is a useful comparison to Arete’s collection of ten star pupils of her own, who have been chosen from among the greater mass of her followers because of their excellence. They are listeners at her feet, but also perform in their own sympotic displays of oratorical ability.

Such a classroom atmosphere was argued by the only commentator on the preface to On Free Will, Andre Vaillant. He believes that Methodius addresses a community, this ἀκροατηρίον which functions similarly to a school, practising specifically Christian exercises (meletai). He goes on to argue that the issues under discussion in the body of On Free Will are those of interest to a generation before, not to Methodius’ own time, and suggests that this is an example of creating a Christianized “topic” around which to create a literary work (Vaillant 1930, 648).

34 “Pausanius was educated by Herodes, and was one of the members of the Clepsydrion, who were vulgarly called ‘the thirsty ones.’” ὁ δὲ Παυσανίας ἐπαιδεύθη μὲν ὑπὸ Ἡρώδου καὶ τὸν τοῦ Κλεψυδρίου μετεχόντων εἰς ἐγένετο, οὗς ἐκάλουν οἱ πολλοὶ διψώντας (594, trans. Wright, Loeb 241).
Because of the similarity between the language of the preface to the dialogue *On Free Will* with the imagined “model student” in Marcella’s speech, I believe that we are authorized to combine the two into a certain intellectual environment in Methodius’ circles. There is an analogy between Methodius’ constructed audience for his dialogues and what we see in the virgins who participate in the *Symposium*. The *Symposium*, while fictitious, echoes Methodius’ own culture moved into the allegorical key. Methodius creates for himself an audience much like that of the sophists in the Second Sophistic, where there are “listeners” (ἀκροατής) to “lectures” (ἀκρόασις). Arete’s circle of female sophists reflects the sophistic forming of smaller, select groups that have particular access to their teacher, and who engage in intimate, sympotic literary events, like the Clypsedrion we see in Philostratus’ biography of Hadrian of Tyre.

**Part II: How to Read and How to Speak: Harmony and Variation**

“My tongue is his pen; for like a lovely pen is it consecrated and offered to Him, to write things more beautiful than the compositions of poets and rhetoricians who support merely mortal doctrines.”

(Musurillo 84-85)

As we saw in the preface to *On Free Will*, Methodius made an important replacement: while he maintains the agonistic aspect of intellectual activity, he substitutes choral harmony for rivalry. Difference has been reevaluated and put to another purpose. The same theme of harmony permeates a range of levels of the *Symposium*, where it serves not only as an important concept for the relationship among the competing virgins, but, on a finer level, as the key to

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35 Τούτου «κάλαµός» ἐστιν «ἡ γλῶσσά μου» τοῦ «γραµµατέως» ἤγνισθη γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ ἀνάκειται κάλαµος ὁσπερ ὀραιότερα γράφων τὸν τὰ ἀνθρώπινα δόγµατα κρατοῦντων ποιητῶν καὶ λογογράφων. (5.4)
understanding how words are ordered in good rhetoric, and on a broader level, as the key to understanding the legitimate difference among vocations in the Christian church. All three, way of life, community dynamics and rhetorical arrangement, depend upon variety, but a variety that is placed under a unifying goal, transformed from rivalry to peaceful difference.  

To track this important theme of variation, I will follow one metaphor that Methodius uses throughout his Symposium in contexts where he supports variety—the garland. A closer investigation of Methodius’ use of this metaphor shows that he has carefully taken the idea of garlands from the sympotic tradition, added the aspect of competitive garlands awarded to winners of contests, before finally bringing in the miscellanistic usage that accrued to it during the Imperial period. The garland is a guiding image of his entire moral and artistic aesthetic of variation within harmony. Alexander Bril took Methodius’ replacement of sympotic garlands with competitive garlands as one of the examples of Methodius’ ignorance of sympotic customs, and he was right to notice that Methodius has made this replacement. But what Bril attributes to “sympotic ignorance” (Brill 2006, 293), can be more helpfully read alongside Methodius’ other intentional changes in setting, as a continuation of the greater sophistic context which we looked at in the preceding section.

A. Harmony and Variation in Rhetoric:

Agathe, speaking in the sixth position, ends her contribution by calling her own speech a

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36 König also notes this emphasis on unity within the diversity: “There are repeated references to the fact that we are hearing a variety of voices, and to the idea that there are countless numbers of different ways of saying the same thing, although the stress is always on the way in which different contributions work by reinforcing rather than undermining each other.” (König 2008, 103-104).

37 “Hence, Methodius appears to have confused the victory ταινίαι with the ordinary sympotic garland and to have been unaware that the sympotic garland was not given as a prize at the end of the symposion, but was worn for the duration of the party” (Bril 2006, 292).
garland:

“I offer you, Arete, this garland which I have adorned and plaited from the meadows of the Prophets.” (Agathe 6.5, Musurillo 96)

Σοὶ τόνδε πλεκτὸν στέφανον ἐκ τῶν προφητικῶν λειμώνων, ὦ Ἀρετή, κἀγὼ κοσμήσασα προσφέρω.

The meadow of the prophets is a favorite image of Methodius, which he also uses at the beginning of his treatise On the Leech (1.1). Similarly, the preface to On Free Will spoke of the audience of the dialogue as a “flowering meadow.” Garlands and meadows were a common image used to describe miscellanistic texts from the Imperial period. For instance, the early third-century writer, Aelian, concludes his History of Animals with a justification of its miscellanistic style using the image of the garland and meadow:

And in the second place, since I was aiming to attract through the variety of my reading matter, and since I flee from the tedium arising from monotony, I felt that I ought to weave the tissue of this narrative of mine so as to resemble a meadow or a chaplet beautiful with its many colours, the many creatures, as it were, contributing their flowers. (trans. Scholfield, Loeb Vol. 3, 386-387)

δεύτερον δὲ τῷ ποικίλῳ τῆς ἀναγνώσεως τὸ ἐφολκὸν θηρῶν καὶ τὴν ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων βδελυγμίαν ἀποδιδόμας, οἷον ἡ λειμῶνα τίνα ἡ στέφανον ὑραῖον ἐκ τῆς πολυχρώματος, ὡς ἀνθεσφόρων τῶν ζῴων τῶν πολλῶν, ὡς ὁ ὁποῖον δεῖν τήν ὑπάρχαι τε καὶ διαπλέξαι τὴν συγγραφήν.

38 “Sondern wie eine Biene, welche Honigquellen findet, fliegend zu den betauten Blumen, den Duft der Zeitlichen Blüten nimmt, uns der Wiese entsprechende Frucht bringend,--so auch wir, mit dem leichten Flügel der Weisheit fliegend und gemäss den Worten der Evangelien und Propheten aus vielfachen Gesängen Masse (Muster) der Worte webend, machen mit dieser geistigen Ehrerweisung Gott barmherzig.” (Bonwetsch 478, translation of the Slavonic text)

Here Methodius also uses the familiar metaphor of a bee gathering nectar from various flowers. For other uses of the bee metaphor, see Seneca Moral Letters 84, Clement of Alexandria Stromateis 1.33.6 and later Basil of Caesarea On the Value of Greek Literature 4.

39 Ἔγὼ μὲν οὖν ἧδη καὶ τῶν κρειττόνων ἀπολαύειν δοκῶ περὶ τοιοῦτον διαλεγόμενον, καὶ μάλιστα ὅτε ὁ τοιοῦτος μοι πάρεστιν ἀνθέων λειμῶν, τουτέστιν ἡ ὑμετέρα σύνοδος τῶν ἁμα τε καὶ ἀκουόντων καὶ συναθόντων τὰ θεία μυστήρια· (Vaillant 1930, 731). “But I already seem to enjoy the better things, having dialogued about these things, and most of all when there is present to me such a meadow of flowers, i.e. your gathering together (synodos) of those who are at once listeners and fellow-singers of the divine mysteries.”
Like Agathe, Aelian describes his work as a literary composer as that of a garland-weaver, choosing the appropriate flowers and plants to weave into a beautiful and varied (τῷ ποικίλῳ) crown.

Another virgin, Thalia, picks up on the description of a rhetorical work as one intimately involved with ordering variety (poilikia) when she explains more explicitly how variation is part of the good rhetoric in the letters of Paul. Thalia’s third speech is the most illuminating part of the Symposium for the purposes of rhetorical method. It is a speech that is thematically concerned with harmony on multiple levels: restoring the harmony between the first and second speakers after they have quarreled, arguing for the harmony of the rhetoric in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, and encouraging harmony within the soul of humans who are “not disharmony and unevenness, nor yet harmony and evenness.”

Each harmony requires a certain amount of variation, of poikilia. In fact, Thalia explains that Paul’s rhetoric is the most varied in its style (ποικιλώτατος). It moves from the more simple expression to the more complex in a scheme of amplification (παραύξησιν).

You see, the style of his discourse is most varied and follows a climactic method of development: he begins with the more commonplace and advances to the more lofty and sublime. Then again, shifting to a profound level, he sometimes arrives at what is easier and simpler to grasp and sometimes at a point that is rather difficult and subtle. And yet in all these transition he introduces nothing irrelevant to his subject; but encompassing all his ideas in a wonderful harmony (κατὰ τινα θαυμαστὴν οἰκειότητα), he makes them all tell on the single point at issue before him. (Musurillo 59)

Ὁ γάρ τοι χαρακτήρ αὐτῷ τῶν λόγων, ποικιλώτατος ὃν καὶ κατὰ παραύξησιν ἐξειργασμένος, ἀρχεῖ αὐτὸν ἐπιπολαιότερον, προχεῖται δὲ εἰς τὸ ύψηλότερον καὶ

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40 “But when he took on disharmony, that is, transgression and sin, he became disharmonious and inacceptable; and when he took on harmony, that is, justice, he became an harmonious and acceptable instrument, so that the Lord, Incorruptibility itself and the Conqueror of death, might mix in harmony the resurrection with the flesh, and never again suffer it to be claimed by incorruption.” (Musurillo 65)

41 Ὁ γάρ τοι χαρακτήρ αὐτῷ τῶν λόγων, ποικιλώτατος ὃν καὶ κατὰ παραύξησιν ἐξειργασμένος,
Paul is the ultimate rhetorician, who is able to construct a balanced piece of writing that combines extreme variation with innate appropriateness and harmony amongst the parts. Likewise too, the rhetoric of the virgins who imitate Paul presents a varied offering at the service of unified praise.

Thalia’s speech was concerned with emphasizing the necessity of harmony not only in the rhetoric of Paul, but in various other levels as well. Her speech follows the harshest conflict in the work, that between the first two speakers, Marcella and Theopatra, which was described in the wrestling image analyzed above. One of the functions of Thalia’s speech is to harmonize their division through presenting a reading of Genesis and Paul that incorporates elements from both of the preceding speakers. The culminating role of her speech is emphasized by its placement, immediately before the “external” narrators briefly comment on the proceedings. But the theme of harmony goes even deeper in Thalia’s speech. Harmony is also the key to understanding the moral life.

It follows, then, that man is not disharmony and unevenness, nor yet harmony and evenness. But when he took on disharmony, that is, transgression and sin, he became disharmonious and unacceptable; and when he took on harmony, that is, justice, he became an harmonious and acceptable instrument, so that the Lord, Incorruptibility itself and the Conqueror of death, might mix in harmony the resurrection with the flesh, and never again suffer it to be claimed by incorruption. (Musurillo 65)

An analysis of the placement of this speech will be covered further on.
She advertises her role as the harmonizer of the preceding speeches by making harmony the central theme of her speech—both rhetorical harmony as well as the harmony of virtue. To emphasize the theme still further, she concludes her entire contribution by asserting boldly, “Let anyone who will pick up the Epistle to the Corinthians and examine all the texts in detail and then compare them with what I have said, and see if there is not a perfect harmony and correspondence (συμφωνίας πάσης ἔχοντα καὶ ὀμοφροσύνης)” (Musurillo 74, Thalia 3.14). Her words are in accord with the harmonious words of Paul; she can claim, like Methodius in the preface to On Free Will, that she is joining in with the song sung by the apostles and prophets.

B: Harmony and Variation among the Speeches of the Virgins:

The twin rhetorical themes of harmony and variation are not only present on the micro-level within the women’s speeches, but also on the macro-level among the women. The women are inspired at different times to make different types of arguments, but the arrangement of these arguments by Methodius into a unified whole also expresses his embrace of variety that has been subordinated to a unified harmony. The ten speeches include a great level of variation that are all harmoniously reconciled in the final hymn of the dialogue as the rivalry among the women gets smoothed into a unified work of praise of the topic of virginity. But it is not only the hymn, but the structure of the speeches in the Symposium as a whole that expresses harmony.

As should come as no surprise from an author who is deeply involved in numerology, the ten speeches of the virgins have been carefully arranged by Methodius into a pattern. The

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43 For instance, Thecla 8.11 where she gives a numerological explication of the 2,260 days that the Woman in Revelation is said to journey and Procilla 7.5, who discusses the meaning of the 60 queens, 80 concubines and numberless virgins mentioned in the Song of Songs.
pattern only becomes clear at the very end, when the final speech closely echoes the first. The delightful activity in the clever reader is to retrace her experience of the symposium to see if the chiastic patterns holds for the rest of the speeches. Thoughtful retraction is rewarded, and she can feel some of the delight that Marcella had claimed was the result of close reading and astute attention.

The echoing is strongest between the first and the tenth speech. Marcella’s opening contribution was a sweeping interpretation of the development of humanity from brother-sister marriages, through polygamy, to monogamy and finally arriving at the virginity proclaimed by the Divine Bridegroom. Domnina’s final speech contains this same “stages of humanity” argument which Marcella had used in the first speech, only this time moved onto the allegorical space of trees.

Consider too how all the commandments that were given from the time of the first man in succession until Christ set forth in the Scriptural text…God has four times evangelized and instructed mankind with four laws, and the occasions of these are clearly suggested by the different types of fruit… (Musurillo 142-143)

Καὶ ἐπισκέψασθε μήποτε τὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ πρωτοπλάστου μέχρι τοῦ Χριστοῦ καθεξῆς ἡ γραφή νομοθεσίας δηλοὶ…τετράκις εὐαγγελισαμένοι τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα καὶ πανδαγωγήσαντος τέσσαρι τόνοις, ὥστε οἱ καιροὶ σαφῶς ἀπὸ τῆς διαφορότητος δηλούνται τῶν καρπῶν. (Domnina 10.2)

Both claim that there are four sets of laws that bring humanity from natural childhood to grown-up virginity.

Looking back, the pattern becomes unmistakable. The second and the ninth speeches are the only two to insist on the continued necessity of bringing physical children into the world until the time when God ordains the world to end. The third and eighth speech are structurally more

44 We will see him utilize a similar playfulness in the arrangement of the stanzas in his final poem, confirming our suspicions that Methodius is careful with his literary architecture.
45 Περὶ μὲν οὖν τῶν καιρῶν τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος, “the ages of the human race” (Musurillo 46).
than thematically linked. One of the pay-outs of the awareness of the chiastic structure is that it explains the placement of Thecla’s winning speech in the eighth position. It is put in a parallel place with the second-longest third speech, which is also the synthesis of the first two speeches. They also both have breaks after them. And they are both the center of their respective halves. Methodius likes syncopation and playing with multiple numbering systems.

The pattern is less strong for the next two pairs. The fourth and seventh seem to have the weakest connection, but both explicate Psalms, in both of them Christ is called a farmer, and sailing and water imagery is important to both. Finally, the center of the sandwich, the fifth and sixth speeches, while minor in themselves, are the only two to give explicit interpretations of the Parable of the Ten Wise and Foolish Virgins, the most important biblical paradigm for the Symposium, and the reason for the ten participants in the first place.\(^{46}\)

Methodius is capable of making his own artistic creation manifest the themes of harmony within variation through a careful structuring of the speeches in the dialogue. The pleasing syncopation would have been impossible without each virgin contributing a unique speech. Methodius shows in his own careful arrangement that the themes of harmony and variation are present in all well-

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\(^{46}\) Although this does leave one with lingering questions about the appropriateness of having ten participants. After all, in the parable, five of the virgins were not welcomed into the wedding feast because they had not furnished their lamps with sufficient oil, yet all of the virgins in Methodius’ dialogue are approved by Arete.
written texts, whether these are a letter of Paul, the hymn sung by ascetical women to end their party, or an entire literary dialogue.

The women at the end of their speeches circle around Thecla and Arete, who stand as two nodes in the center. They have each been crowned with a garland, but as they ring Thecla, they form a new crown of variation with their bodies, entwining into a final song to Christ the Bridegroom. The band of virgins, the chorus of young maidens, themselves are spoken of as a garland that has been woven together, which is a traditional image for female lyric choruses.47

The virgins wear crowns in their chorus procession, as Agathe combines images from Wisdom 4:2 and Revelation 14, but they too become a crown.

“These, my fair maidens, are the secret rites of our mysteries, the mystical rites of initiation into virginity; these are the rewards of undefiled conflicts of chastity. I am espoused to the Word, and as my dowry I receive the eternal wealth and crown of incorruptibility from my Father, and I walk in triumph crowned forever with the bright unfading flowers of wisdom. I am in the choral band in heaven with Christ my Rewarder, around the King who always was and ever shall be. I am the lamp-bearer of unapproachable lights, and I sing the new song in the company of the archangels, announcing the Church’s new grace. For the Scriptures proclaim that the band of virgins ever follows the Lord and forms His train wherever He may be. This too is the meaning of John’s symbolism when he speaks of the hundred forty-four thousand.” (Agathe 6.5, Musurillo 95)

47 Calame 1977, 77-78 n. 63
To the symptotic crown and the crown of competition has been added another intertextual layer—the crowns awarded the triumphant elders in the *Book of Revelation*, chapter 4. Just as many plants go into constructing one wreath, so too the virgins stand in a circle and in the refrain together once they have finished their individual contributions, themselves forming a wreath made up of a variety of plants.

Another virgin uses the variation of divine favor to justify her concern with rhetoric. At the beginning of the fourth speech, which immediately follows Thalia, Theopatra responds to Arete’s invitation with a plea for rhetoric based on the natural differences among the virgins. She argues that “there exist innumerable verbal tactics and thrusts—for God inspires us ‘at sundry times and in divers manners’” (Εἰ δὲ μορίαι μὲν λόγων ὄρμαι καὶ διέξοδοι «πολυμερὸς καὶ πολυτρόπως» ἐπεισπνέοντος ἡμᾶς τοῦ θεοῦ, Theopatra 4.1, Musurillo 75). As a result, each of the virgins are morally required to give their speeches to honor the variation of divine inspiration. Rhetorical ornamentation is not only legitimate, but required in order to live according to the providential difference among speakers. God inspires speakers differently at different times, and they should use these skills to praise the topic in their own way. The possibilities of rhetoric get a divine imprimatur because of the natural variation among the women.⁴⁸

**C. Harmony and Variation among Ways of Life**

The third collection of various types of flowers, after the garland of rhetoric and the garland of the virgins, is the garland of vocations among Christians.

For certainly the immaculate state of being a *eunuch for the kingdom of heaven* is not entrusted to all, but obviously only to those who are able to preserve the

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⁴⁸ Zorzi 2003b takes up the evidence for the individualization of the virgins characters, and argues that this differentiation is part of Methodius’ anti-encratic doctrine.
undefiled and ever-blooming flower of virginity. Thus the prophetic Word can compare the Church with a meadow full of gay-colored flowers, adorned and garlanded not only with the blossoms of chastity, but also with those of continence and motherhood: for on the right hand of the Bridegroom stands the queen ornate in a gold-embroidered gown. (Musurillo 57)

Theophila makes the leap from variation within the speeches and variation among the rhetorical contributions of the virgins to variation within the moral lives of the members of the church, using precisely the same language of the miscellany (poikilia, leimon, anthai) that we have seen the virgins use in the other passages about garlands. The virgins pluck flowers from the various-blooming meadow to offer garlands to Arete, but they also are flowers themselves, only one of a variety of possible ways of life.

Within the context of the entire work, however, one has to wonder if this is the final word on the subject. After all, Theophila’s speech is in the most agonistic place of the competition—she is directly contradicted by Marcella who interrupts her in challenge, and she is succeeded by Thalia’s culminating 3rd speech. Thalia also uses the term poikilia, but she turns them from Theopatra’s focus on variation in ways of life, onto a focus on the rhetoric of Paul and the harmony in an individual moral person. Perhaps the dialogue as a whole implies that Theophila has once again made arguments that are too physical, and that ignore the more important allegorical reading of the Scriptures.

Such an interpretation could be possible, were it not for the fact that a much later speech echoes Theophila’s endorsement of various ways of life within Christianity. The speech that
This chastity we, who are devoted to virginity, cultivate to a special degree and offer it to the Lord. They also practice it who live chastely with their wives: they bring forth as it were little shoots around the trunk of the tree of chastity, blossoming with self-control, not coming high enough, as we do to touch its mighty branches, but they too, nonetheless, produce shoots of chastity however small. (Tusiane 9.4, Musurillo 138)

And although some of the virgins wish to claim that the married life can also be a flower or shoot in the garden of virtue, none of the speakers deny that the virgin followers of Christ remain preeminent in the meadow. Virgins are the ones who are crowned in a specific way, and form the choral band of Christ led by Christ the choragus and Archvirgin. Theophila herself reminds us that the endorsement of diversity in ways of life does not mean that all paths are equal. Rather, there is a hierarchy among the vocations.

The woven garland, then, is used for three different levels: as marking the harmony and diversity of rhetoric, of the variety between the virgins and their speeches, and of the diversity among legitimate ways of the Christian life. The garland that Bril asserted was thoughtlessly misplaced from the sympotic to the competitive realm turns out to be an image that is intentionally wielded throughout the text and that serves as a symbol of a deep commitment to the miscellanistic tradition, symbolizing variety put at the service of harmony.

The crowns that Arete grants to the virgins are the reward for manfully competing in the rhetorical competition, but also stand as crowns that are given as a reward for those who fight manfully in life and are counted among the 144,000 virgins in the Book of Revelation, the
martyrs of the Church. How does the fact that they are women influence all of this intense competitive vocabulary? How do women compete? How do you fight like a girl?

**Part III: Gender and Competition**

Methodius addressed a letter-treatise to a woman who asked him about the correct interpretation of tricky biblical passages,49 which shows that he was in correspondence with educated women who were involved in the type of intellectual activity in which the virgins in the *Symposium* also take part. Just as strikingly, in *De Lepra* (a dialogue that treats prescriptions about leprosy in Leviticus as symbols of sin), a woman’s speech (a virgin from Lycia, in fact) is reported and taken as authoritative in the final part of the dialogue.50 But neither in Methodius’ other dialogues nor when he directly addresses his audience in the preface to *On Free Will* are there any primary level female speakers or listeners. How did Methodius incorporate women into his intellectual world?

We will set up this question by briefly outlining the concerns surrounding gender and rhetoric during the Imperial period. From this discussion, it becomes clear that the real danger is not simply feminized rhetoric, but a more extreme “prostitutional” rhetoric. Methodius’ virgins are able to avoid the dangerous associations of “feminine rhetoric” through their emphatic virginity, which not only lends them an assumption of honesty, but also brings them closer to the masculine realm. Then, we will turn to the ways in which the virgins’ rhetorical competition is

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49 This treatise is known as the *De Cibis*, see Patterson 1997, 27-31 for a brief discussion of this text. It is addressed either to two women or to one woman who has two names (like Methodius-Eubulius), Phrenope-Kilonia. *The De Cibis* mentions the *Symposium* explicitly, so must have been written after our text.

50 Patterson 1997, 235-239 gives a helpful summary and beginning analysis of this work. *The De Lepra* seems to be directly interested in many of the same issues as the Symposium. We eagerly await Anna Jouravel’s forthcoming edition and commentary on the Slavonic and Greek fragments of the *De Lepra*. 

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masculinized, especially through the allegory of athleticism. Their competition is further illuminated through comparison with other possibilities of female competition available to the Classical imagination as well as the new allegorical arenas opened through the descriptions of heroic female martyrs of the early church, in particular of Thecla herself.

The increase in the status value of rhetoric in the Imperial period brought with it a discomfort that rhetoricians would go too far in their efforts to persuade and end up losing the manly power of speech for which Classical Athens was famous.\footnote{See Connolly 2001 for a description of the fine line drawn between appropriate theatricality in rhetorical performances of the Second Sophistic and theatricality that has gone beyond propriety. Her answer to the question “why did some men adopt mannerisms of self-presentation that served as stylized signifiers of the feminine and the non-elite in both their performances and their daily lives?” is that they did so in order to resist a specifically Roman idea of oratorical manliness. “It seems, then, that these Greeks play up Roman vices: they imitate, pose, wear perfume, play the woman. Above all, they do not conceal the mimetic habits that Roman orators treat with fear and disgust. We might say, then, that the Greek sophists reclaim the theatrical aspects of rhetoric which Roman rhetoricians are so eager to disavow and demonize.” (Connolly 2001, 92).} We see this fear in the self-presentations of various rhetors and, in a spectacular way, in Lucian’s satiric Professor of Public Speaking. Lucian claims that the “new style” requires emasculation, and moreover, a prostitute-like concern with appearance and scintillation.\footnote{See the description of the guide along the easy way up the mountain at section 11ff. See also section 24, when the guide recommends effeminate private sexuality to the potential rhetorician in order to gain a wide reputation.}

“He would address you, then, somewhat in this fashion, tossing back what hair is still left him, faintly smiling in that sweet and tender way which is his wont, and rivaling Thais herself of comic fame, or Malthace, or Glycero, in the seductiveness of his tone, since masculinity is boorish and not in keeping with a delicate and charming platform-hero…” (Professor of Public Speaking, section 12, trans. Harmon, Loeb IV, 151)
The effeminate teacher of this new style is not only womanized, but also turned into a prostitute.53

*On Those Who Burlesque the Mysteries*, Aelius Aristides continues the metaphor of the new-fangled orator as a prostitute.

The orator, the philosopher, and all those involved in liberal education should not, I think, please the masses in the same fashion as these servile fellows, dancers, pantomimes, and tricksters…For when the same conduct does not seem proper to a free woman and to a whore, and still less does the same conduct seem proper to men and to women, we certainly shall not say that the same conduct is proper to men and to whores. (*Those Who Burlesque the Mysteries* 33.55-56, trans. Behr 138)

Aelius Aristides helps us out of a binary between male and female rhetoric alone. As man is to women, so is chaste woman to wanton woman. While the best orator is masculine, here Aristides seems to imply that a chaste female is on the masculine side of feminine. Gleason goes on to argue from this speech that instead of mapping the difference between good and bad rhetoric as simply that between masculine and feminine, Aristides plays with mapping the difference between good and bad orators as that between the chaste virginal woman versus the prostitute. The correct way to do oratory is to make the audience desire and court you, not the other way around. A good orator pursues Rhetoric, but in relation to the audience he is as retiring as a virginal girl at home, demurely receiving the advances of an amorous crowd.54

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53 “Both the sophist and the hetaera are represented as actors in a public space, both construct a false exterior intended to seduce their interlocutors, both exemplify a decadent aesthetic that privileges artifice and ornament over a natural, unadorned style. And yet the hetaera in this passage is marshaled in critique of the corrupting power of rhetoric and as a parody of the affected manner and vain pretentions of the sophist.” (McClure 2003, 168)

54 “Thus, according to Aristides, the correct relationship that should obtain between an orator and his audience is like the relationship between a sequestered virgin or chaste boy and their admirers. These secluded objects of desire do nothing consciously to enhance the force of the attraction they emit. In just such a way, the orators’ words, unadorned by ingratiating gestures, ought to have the power to enforce desire.” (Gleason 1995, 126)
Methodius’ virgins, in their chastity, do not court the attention of a large audience. Their performativity is not accompanied by elaborate gestures, besides Thalia rising to speak, or marked changes in speaking tone. They perform moderately while firmly sequestered behind the garden walls of Arete.

The evidence from Aelius Aristides is supported by a much longer history of the moral value of women’s speech, which has been investigated by Laura McClure. She illustrates that there was a widespread belief in the ancient Greek world that women’s ways of speaking were distinct from males’ ways of speaking. Women’s speech was dangerous, except when it was involved in certain controlled ritual settings. McClure picks out four types of women’s speech in Archaic and Classical Greece: ritual lamentation, ritual obscenity, ritual cries, female choruses, gossip and seductive persuasion, and notes that specifically the latter two types are seen as subversive to male authority and thereby bad (McClure 1999, 38). But virgins seemed to avoid the problems associated with the dangers of seductive persuasion: “because sexually inexperienced, virgins are represented as lacking the verbal guile of their married counterparts” (McClure 1999, 261). Virgins are also more likely to be part of socially-sanctioned ritual activities, where their speech was seen as propitious. By emphasizing their chaste, virginal status, Methodius directs the possible dangerous associations with women’s rhetoric away from his female rhetors.

With this in the background, it is perhaps less surprising how little anxiety there is over the gender of the rhetors in Methodius’ Symposium. Their rhetoric avoids the dangerous type of femininity (seductive pursuit of erotic attention), and instead embraces only the virtuous (and

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55 Although they are by necessity on the stage of life, viewed by lascivious demons. Thecla 8.1.  
56 “The fact that Attic drama could deploy virgins in service of a political or religious ideal points also to the pervasive association of virgins with truthful discourse” (McClure 1999, 262).
partially masculinized) remainder. And this remainder involves a type of competition that is regularly reserved for men.

As we addressed earlier in this chapter, the disagreement among the first and second speakers of the dialogue is described as an intense wrestling match between two athletes. Jason König focuses on this agonistic language and argues that in the *Symposium* sympotic social struggle has been reoriented away from competition with each other and onto the struggle against the devil and sin (König 2008, 106). You can see this played out in Thecla’s speech which typifies the women as both heroes and as athletes, fighting against sin.

First, Thecla describes virgins as heroes. Thecla encourages her fellow-virgins to fight manfully, first using the battle imagery of Ephesians 6 about the armor of Christ and then melding it onto the description of the heroic feats of the Lycian hero Bellerophon as narrated in *Iliad* 6. In the middle of her speech, Thecla recites a short poem, a cento that begins with three lines from the Iliad (6:181-183) and ending with one line of hexameter and one of pentameter of her own composition.

Lion in front, serpent behind, in the midst chimaera.  
Belching forth dread might of flaming fire.  
And He slew it, relying on His Father’s omens,  
Christ the King. Many indeed had it destroyed, nor could any endure  
The deadly foam that spilled from its jaws… (Musurillo 119)

If the virgins withstand the Devil, they are promised that they will be able to “carry off the prize…” (Musurillo 119). The Beast the Devil is like the Chimera, a monster that the heroic virgins must fight on the edges of civilization to win and prove their heroic status. He is
associated with the desert, an appropriately marginal place for a hero to fight a beast, but which
Thecla goes on to rename a garden, the place of ascetic contest where the virgins are themselves
currently residing, the garden of Virtue (8.11, Musurillo 116). It is especially Thecla who
compares the life of virginity to a heroic life, as fits her status as the most famous participant of
the party. She encourages her fellow virgins with an appeal to glory: “Entertain generously the
same desire for the glory of chastity as those before you, despising this life” (Musurillo 108).

Thecla’s speech, which is so full of hero language, also participates in athletic language.
Right after she uses heroic language to encourage her fellow-virgins, Thecla further exhorts them
with agonistic terminology:

With sober and virile heart, then, take up your arms against the swollen Beast; do
not on any account yield your ground, and do not be terrified by his fury. Endless
glory will be yours if you defeat him and carry off his ‘seven diadems’, for this is
the prize of our contest as our teacher Paul tells us. (Musurillo 119)

Διὸ θυμὸν ἄρσενα λαβοῦσαι καὶ νήφοντα ἑναντία θέσθε τῷ θηρὶ σφριγῶντι τὰ ὀψα, μηδὲ ὑπαναχωρήσετε τὸ σύνολον, ἐφ’ οἷς θρασύνης ταραχθεῖσαι: μυρίων γὰρ ἐξετε κλέος, ἐὰν ἀφέλησθε νικήσαι τους ἐπ’ αὐτῷ στεφάνους ἐπτά, δι’ οὐς ὁ ἄγων ἡμῖν πρόκειται καὶ ἡ πάλη κατὰ τὸν διδάσκαλον Παῦλον. (8.13)

The manliness of the metaphors have become explicit at this point, as Thecla tells her fellow
virgins to have a manly heart (θυμὸν ἄρσενα).

While König believed that the agonistic language has entirely moved away from
competition among the virgins and onto the competition of the virgins against sin and the devil,
perhaps he too far underplays the fact that rhetorical competition is still allowed to remain
among the virgins. After all, Thecla’s speech is called “very competitive” by Eubulion (λίαν
ἀγωνιστικῶς 8.17). As we argued earlier, rhetorical competition and variation are allowed (and
even encouraged) to remain as long as they are at the service of creating a harmonious hierarchy.
If Methodius uses traditional male competitive terminology of fighting heroes and athletic competitors, perhaps that is because there were so few well-known female competitions available to the ancient woman and to writers who wished to reference them. We have some evidence for a female shadow Olympics, which involved a foot-race in honor of Hera in the days leading up to the Olympics. But the better-known female competition, however, is the beauty contest, which finds its origin in the Judgment of Paris. To show more clearly the unsuitability of the sparse female models for Methodius’ project, let me turn once again to Alciphron’s *Letters of Courtesans* for a situation that combines the athletic metaphor with a heavily-feminized beauty-contest scenario.

The fourteenth letter of Alciphron’s *Letters of Courtesans* provides an interesting comparison to Methodius’ all-female competition, which blends the highly-feminized beauty contest with the manly athletic competition. In this letter, a certain prostitute named Megara is writing to chide a fellow hetaera Bacchis for missing a party without good reason. The party was something of a girls’ night out, and even the one hetaera who had recently married snuck out after her husband had fallen asleep to spend time with her old friends. By all accounts, it was an excellent party, full of drinking, singing and joking until dawn (14.3). But what Megara remembers with greatest fondness was the beauty contest that arose among the women. They

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57 Scanlon 2002  
58 Beauty contests do not only take place among women, especially not in the sympotic context. For instance, in Xenophon’s *Symposium*, there is the comic beauty contest between Autobulus and Socrates (section 5). The earliest attestation of the Judgement of Paris happens in the *Iliad* 24.25-30. See Mackie 2013 for an analysis of this passage, and Stinton 1965 for the afterlife of the Judgement of Paris story. STinton 1965 believes that “beauty contests/καλλιστεῖον” were an archaic feature of Greek society: “Such contests seem to have originated in the cult of Hera and Demeter; there is no evidence for them before he mid-seventh century” (Stinton 1965, 10). One of the most important after-traditions of this contest is the Judgment of Heracles, where Heralces chooses between two women who are competing along very different lines (Xenophon *Memorabilia* 2.1.21). The description of Arete at the beginning of the Symposium has strong echoes with the Judgement of Heracles (see Musurillo 1958, 185).
eagerly began competing among themselves about who had the best body parts, beginning with a spirited discussion of who had the most beautiful buttocks. Thryallis and Myrrhina were the contenders, and their competition is described as a “serious rivalry” (δεινή τις φιλονεικία). After Myrrhina shows off the suppleness of her behind by jiggling it swiftly and amorously, Thryallis one-ups her by insisting on removing her garment so that there could be no masking of the quality of her performance. The sight of her shapely bottom, but even more so, her skill in wiggling it, makes all the other hetaerae universally declare her the winner of the contest. The language that Thryallis uses when she removes her garment is specifically athletic. She says that she must strip as in a gymnastic exercise so that the contest might be won without deception.

The prurient imagination of what hetaerae do when alone is a good example of a possible male imagination of female competition. The fiction of privacy within an all-female party actually serves a pornographic purpose (Konstan 2011). As in another letter, when the hetaera Phryne was praised for her well-timed display of breasts in the courtroom that won for her the case for her life, so too here the body of the hetaera is on display. Although the display is embedded in a letter that is supposedly private, the “interception” of this letter by us readers allows us to peep for ourselves. The publicity of the hetaera’s body is in direct contrast to Methodius’ virgins. They are kept away from the gaze of male viewers, in their (genuinely) all-female setting, where even those who hear about the competition from within the story are

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59 δεινή τις φιλονεικία κατέσχε Θρυαλλίδα καὶ Μυρρίνην ύπὲρ τῆς πυγῆς ποτέρα κρείττω καὶ ἀπαλωτέραν ἐπιδείξει. This type of competition (φιλονεικία) should be avoided at symposia according to Platach QC 736e.

60 ὃς γὰρ διὰ παραπετασμάτων ἐγὼ θείσα ‘ἀγονιοῦμαι, οὔδὲ ἀκκιζομένη, ἄλλ’ οἶν ἐν γυμνικῷ καὶ γὰρ οὐ φυλεῖ προφάσεις ἀγών’. (IV.14.5)

61 For a discussion of this story, see McClure 2003, 132-136.
female (and all clothes remain firmly on). The danger of being watched by demons as if on a stage is the only suggestion of a wider, and dangerously erotic, audience.\footnote{Thecla 8.1, Musurillo 105-106. The quick cameo of Methodius was already treated in an earlier chapter.}

If this is what can be coyly imagined as a contest among women in an all-female party, how much more subversive is Methodius’ competition between the chaste women of his imagination. They do not compete in an element that is distinctly feminine, but rather in a surprisingly non-feminized space of rhetorical suasion (a space which was often negatively gendered feminine). The athletic metaphor is still being used, as in the Letter of Alciphron, but for an entirely different erotic valence. His virgins have been safely removed far from the negative dangers of the prostitute’s concern with deceptive, erotic persuasion and moved closer, in their virginity, to the manly rhetoric which matches their athletic and heroic metaphors.

In contrast with the paucity of traditional models of female competition in the ancient world beyond the beauty contest, Christianity was very comfortable with the idea of women competing like athletic men. The connection between the Christian life and the life of an athlete is as old as Paul.\footnote{Hebrews 12:1 is the most extensive, but see also Philippians 2:16, Galatians 2:2 and 5:7, 2 Timothy 2.5 and 4:7, 1 Corinthians 9:24-26.} This imagery was strengthened through the growing tradition of representing female martyrs in the amphitheater. The depiction that stands out most sharply, and which has received great scholarly attention, is the representation of Perpetua both in her own description of herself in her dreams (where she becomes a man in an arena in order to fight against a giant Egyptian), and in the narrator’s account of her martyrdom.

In both these moments of Perpetua’s narrative, the masculinity of her actions is explicitly referenced. In the fourth dream that she relates, Perpetua is led into the arena, in which she becomes a male gladiator in order to fight against her Egyptian opponent. This is the context of
her most famous statement in the Passio, “facta sum masculus”—“I became masculine.” There
has been much ink spilt on the question of Perpetua’s gender-switching here, but what remains
unquestionable is her transformation into an athlete: she is stripped and rubbed down with oil
“quomodo solent in agonem” (10.6-7). Similarly, in the depiction of her martyrdom, she takes
on male athletic terminology. After her own first-hand account ends, the narrator takes over and
describes how she enters the arena with the bold gaze of a penetrator, not a penetrated. Her gaze
and gait as she enters, and perhaps especially her bold assistance to the inept executioner as he
makes his final swing of the sword, all add to the link between Pepetua’s martyrdom and a
masculine contest, where she does indeed defeat the devil (Williams 2012, 73).

Closer to our story is the Acts of Paul and Thecla, a Greek hagiographic novel from the
second century that is one of the best pieces of evidence for the prominence of the Thecla cult in
the early church.64 There are multiple moments in the Acts when Thecla is described as a “beast-
fighter” (τὴν θηριομάχον).65 In one place in her Acts, when she is put into the arena for the first
time and catches sight of her teacher Paul in the crowd, she exclaims, “As if I am not enduring,
Paul gazes upon me” (3.21, Barrier 2009, 121-122). Inspired by the possibility of humiliated
failure in front of such an important witness (who actually turns out to be Jesus disguised as
Paul), she does indeed endure, like the good athlete she is, and lives to endure further attempts at
martyrdom in her Acts.

Not only is Thecla a fighter in the Acts of Paul and Thecla, but she is also famously (and
controversially) a rhetorician.66 After her trials, when she has found Paul once again in Myra, he

65 4.5 (Barrier 2009, 152); 4.11 (Barrier 2009, 168); 4.4 (Barrier 2009, 149); 4.6 (Barrier 2009,
66 Tertullian finds fault with the Acts of Paul and Thecla for two primary reasons: Thecla
baptizes herself and her example encourages women preaching (On Baptism 17.5).
gives her a commission to go forth and preach, “ὑπαγε καὶ δίδασκε τόν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ” (4.16). The site of this meeting seems significant for Methodius—Myra is an important coastal town of Lycia, between Olympus and Patara. Thecla, then, first preached officially at Myra, before returning to her hometown of Iconium. It is therefore singularly appropriate that the Lycian writer Methodius chose Thecla to be his model rhetorician. Methodius reflects both the tradition of her manly boldness of speech and her athletic boldness in fighting real beasts found in the Acts. However, in his Symposium she is no longer alone, but rather is accompanied by a circle of other athletic, persuasive women.

**Conclusion:**

The theme of harmony and variation is not only discussed by the virgins, but is also a part of Methodius’ broader structural organization. It is a deep image that permeates many layers of the text and that can be tracked by following the metaphor of the garland. The twin, shadow theme paired with the theme of harmony is competition. We saw in this chapter that the staged competition among the virgins is carefully contained in order to avoid a certain type of rivalry which Methodius identifies with “Greek” (i.e. non-Christian) scholarship, an alternative to which he is explicitly trying to create with a new type of “listening”. Methodius works hard to show how differences can have a divine origin and, thereby, be non-aggressive.

The Symposium is a competition among women which is nearly devoid of feminized language about their rhetoric, which does not make a fuss over the fact that it is women, with their long association with deception, who are the rhetorical practitioners. Instead, Methodius’ virgins compete in arenas traditionally reserved for men. Rather than beauty contests that are humorously spoken of as athletic, they have rhetorical contexts that are seriously spoken of as athletic. It is not a distinctly feminine type of competition, but rather seems to be one that is
participated in equally by men and women.

Having seen how harmony coordinates variety in the speeches of the virgins, we are primed to turn next to the most natural place to discuss harmony—the song which the virgins sing together at the end of their competition. While not sung in melodic harmony, there is a combination of voices from the past and present which blend together to form one diachronic chorus, just as the voices of the various virgins combine into one standing chorus, and just as Methodius insisted in the Preface to *On Free Will* that he is singing together with the prophets and apostles. In the hymnic context the problem of silencing difference, implied by unison, will be addressed head-on, enriched by the observations of the importance of this theme for the rest of the dialogue.

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67 Rather, it is sung antiphonally, with Thecla singing the verses and the other nine virgins singing the refrain. “τὰς δὲ λοιπὰς ἐν κύκλῳ καθάπερ ἐν χορῷ σχήματι συστάσας ύπακούειν αὐτῇ” (Epilogue).
Chapter 4
Methodius’ Symposium in the Poetic Tradition: Poetic Closure and Narrative Drive

In the first chapter, I discussed the return to the framing narrative and the opening up to a new dialogue between Eubulion and Gregorion, which is a true re-opening at the very end of the work and is one of the most important signs of the dialogue’s insistence that it is not itself complete or final. But immediately before this concluding dialogic coda Methodius places another surprise: a lengthy hymn sung by Thecla and the other virgins at the close of their verbal competition. Although Methodius usually makes his Platonic model clearly felt, in closing the internal scene with a performance he instead more closely follows the Xenophontic tradition. As an erotic pantomime led Xenophon’s symposiasts to leave the celebration as quickly as possible to get home to make love to their wives (section 9), Methodius’ song about the coming of the Divine Bridegroom is also meant to cause an erotic longing in its listeners, both those internal and external to the dialogue. But the erotic longing, as always in Methodius’ Symposium, has been shifted onto chaste desire for a divine spouse rather than Xenophon’s focus on contented married love. Methodius attempts to cultivate a desire to rush to the doors not in order to go home, but in order to enter a divine bridal chamber only hitherto imagined.

Methodius includes a musical performance in his Symposium in a way similar to Xenophon, but upsets a comfortable similarity by moving the performance it into a semi-liturgical, future-focused setting. Xenophon’s pantomime inspires a backwards return to where the symposiasts were before the symposium—they return to their homes, reintegrate into the lives from which they came. It is a literary mechanism of closure through chiasm. For Methodius’ virgins, the movement that closes the scene is not a return from whence they came,
for such movement has been emphatically shut off to them,\(^1\) but upwards to where they have not yet gone (stanzas A-E). My argument in this chapter is that the shift onto the future, leaving behind the past, a denial of temporal looping, is the fundamental point Methodius images in the poem sung by Thecla and the virgins.

This chapter has two parts. In the first, I will summarize the complicated (and lengthy) poem and put forward a new argument about its poetic structure. The investigation into structure will conclude with a discussion of the genre of the poem and suggestions of the possible influences on the innovative elements of its alphabetism and refrain. Once we understand the distinct shape of the poem, we can make better sense out of the variety of voices that speak throughout it. The particular performance requirements of the mimetic world that Methodius has created for his virgins leads to a complicated interaction of voices, and contributes to the considerations of monovocality and polyvocality in the work as a whole. Methodius deals with the paradoxes of his eschatological chronotope in ways that make generic qualification of his work complex and intriguing.

This reading will prepare me to enter into the second part of the chapter, where I return to the fundamental question of shifting chronotopes as theology bumps into aesthetics in the fluid period of Imperial Greek literature. Comparing Methodius’ hymn to Philostratus’ “Hymn to Echo” in the *Heroicus* and Lucian’s depiction of Homer’s poetic creations in the Island of the Blessed in the *True Histories* will bring into stark relief how Methodius uses the poetic expectations of his time to shift focus from nostalgia about the past to hope in a future to come.

\(^1\) “For Thee, my King, have I refused a mortal marriage and a home rich in gold, and I have come to Thee in my immaculate robes that I may enter with Thee Thy blessed bridal chamber.” (stanza Γ).
Thecla’s poem acts as a closural device, rounding off the internal narrative in a glorious image of unified praise. Yet, it is a closure that is figured as continual progress.

**Poetry in Prose Genres of the Imperial Period:**

Writers of the Greek Imperial period believed that they were living in a great period of prose; it was an element of their self-conscious periodization. When a visitor to Delphi asks in Plutarch’s *The Oracles at Delphi are No Longer Given in Verse* why the Pythia no longer gives poetic prophesies, the interlocutor Theon explains that it is not only the Pythia that has moved from verse to prose, but a large number of other genres of literature have made the change as well, such as history and philosophy. Modern scholars tend to agree with this ancient assessment. The rise of the novel, the gospels, the cultural capital of display oratory, even the emphasized innovation of Aelius Aristides’ composition of prose hymns is adduced by modern scholars as evidence of this change that was noticed by authors of the time. But, of course, poetry was still being written in this period, even if it had lost some of the prestige of earlier centuries. Ewen Bowie has helpfully consolidated our evidence for sophists writing poems in the Imperial period, and it forms a surprisingly rich body of material.

Bowie’s research uncovers that often the same people who were prominent in the new prose genres also periodically turned their hand to poetry. Three of the novelists, Xenophon of

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2 See Whitmarsh 2013, 200.

3 “So, as language also underwent a change and put off its finery, history descended from its vehicle of versification, and went on foot in prose, whereby the truth was mostly sifted from the fabulous. Philosophy welcomed clearness and teachability in preference to creating amazement, and pursued its investigations through the medium of everyday language...When he had taken away from the oracles epic versification, strange words, circumlocutions, and vagueness, he had thus made them ready to talk to his consultants as the laws talk to States, or as kings meet with common people, or as pupils listen to teachers, since he adapted the language to what was intelligible and convincing.” (Plutarch 406E, trans. Babbitt, Loeb Vol. V, 329)

4 Although he also wrote verse hymns to be performed in cultic settings. Bowie 1989, 221. See also Russell 1990.

5 Heitsch 1961 has collected another set of poems, many culled from papyri discoveries.
Ephesus, Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus, embed poetry in their narratives. All three include verse prophecies, showing that despite Plutarch’s evidence that the oracle at Delphi was no longer delivering verse prophecies, it remained fashionable for prophecies that appeared in Imperial prose works to be in hexameter form. The oracles in Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus “add realism to the religious texture of the novels, while linking them with classical historiography, their most obvious godparent, where oracles are often quoted (above all by Herodotus)” (Bowie 1989, 225). The novels were not the only prose genres to include verse prophecies. Porphyry includes a sixty-three line hexameter prophecy about the divinity of Plotinus at the end of his biography of his teacher. Hymns are the second type of poem included in the novels. Heliodorus records a hymn to Thetis sung by two choruses of young Thessalian girls in a rare pentameter verse. Philostratus’ Heroicus includes two hymns, one also to Thetis and one to Echo, which will discussed at length below. These examples remind us that in the Second Sophistic “poetry was not simply regarded as a dead form from the past whose corpse could provide spoils, but a living medium of literary expression where traditional themes and language could be reworked as they were in prose” (Bowie 1989, 255).

In parallel, in the collection of texts that comprise the New Testament, there are quite a few examples of poetic sections embedded in prose. Two of the letters of Paul incorporate cult hymns to Christ (Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20). Luke crowds four hymns into the beginning of his Gospel (the Mary’s Magnificat, Zechariah’s Benedictus, the song sung by the angels to the shepherds and Simeon’s song, see Gordley 2011, 305). However, the New Testament

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6 Xenophon of Ephesus 1.6.2, Heliodorus II.26, II.35.
7 Life of Plotinus 22, trans. Armstrong, Loeb 64-68.
8 All extracted and put into the Greek Anthology (numbers 485 and 490, trans. Paton, Loeb Vol. III, 270-273, see Bowie 1989, 225-229 for a discussion). Since this hymn begins and ends with the same line, it was probably meant to be repeated (Furley and Bremer Volume 1, 31).
9 For these, see Gordley 2011.
Testament poems do not follow classical meter and seem closer to Semitic forms of poetry than Greek, although they were presumably composed in Greek.

This period also marks the beginning of poetry in Syriac. Sozomen states that Bardaisan (whom we met as a Syriac Christian writer of dialogues in Chapter 1) was also instrumental in writing the first Syriac hymns. Sozomen claims that Bardaisan’s son, Harmonios, was responsible for converting Greek classical meters into Syriac. However, most scholars think that Sozomen invented Hermonios in order to prove that Syriac poetry’s early efflorescence was based fundamentally upon Greek expertise in what Brock calls “a case of Greek chauvinism” (Brock 1985, 79). Despite the debate over Hermonios’ existence and role in national poetic developments, we have separate, earlier attestation that Bardaisan did indeed write hymns from the writings of Ephrem the Syrian.

Like the hymns to Thetis found in Heliodorus and Philostratus, two Syriac hymns, including the famous “Hymn of the Pearl,” are found in the larger prose work, the Acts of Thomas, written in the early third century.

Across the differences, Greek, Syriac, pagan and Christian, hymns and prophecies were the types of poetry most likely to find their way into prose genres. Perhaps hymns and prophecies were more closely tied to metrical expression than other forms, and therefore were

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10 Sozomen Hist, Eccl. III.16 “It is related that Bardaisan’s son Hermonios was deeply versed in Greek learning, and was the first to subdue his native tongue to metres and musical laws. These verses he had sung by choirs, and even now the Syrians frequently sing, not the precise poems of Harmonius, but the same melodies.” (Brock 1985, 77ff)

11 These hymns do not survive but are referenced by Ephrem’s Hymns against Heresies 53.5: “He (Bardaisan) wrote madrashe and provided them with tunes; he composed psalms and put them into metrical form; by means of measures and balances he distributed the words. He offered to the guileless bitter things in sweet guise, in order that, though feeble, they might not choose wholesome food.” Cited in Brock 1985, 80.

12 Some scholars believe that the Hymn of the Pearl was earlier written by Bardaisan and incorporated into the early third century Acts of Thomas at a later date. Only some of the manuscripts of the Acts of Thomas include the hymn (Klijn 2003, 187-188, and 195-198 for an addition to the poem that is believed by Klijn to be a later addition). See McVey 1999, 196-198.
able to persist in a period of prose. Alternatively, it may be that the mimetic world created by these works could easily include these poetic genres,\textsuperscript{13} while it might be more difficult to imagine how epic, for instance, might be embedded.\textsuperscript{14} Considering these trends, Methodius’ hymn at the end of the \textit{Symposium} is less surprising, falling as it does into one of the two categories of poems common to incorporate into prose genres in the Imperial period.

Both of these types of poems, prophesies and hymns, share a mimetic, performative quality. Poetic quotation are common throughout all times and genres, but here we encounter poetry not as quotation but as performance, as an integral part of the mimetic world of fictional works. To bring this into higher relief, at two points in Methodius’ corpus he includes new poems that are not performative but rather citational. The first is also from the \textit{Symposium}, quoted by Thecla in the context of a rousing speech of encouragement for her fellow virgins to take up arms against the temptations of the devil (8.12, Musurillo 119). This is the hexameter cento which we have treated at greater length in our investigation into competition and rhetoric in Chapter 3. The second, comprising nine and a half iambic trimeters, is brought into the discussion by one of the interlocutors, again as a commentary on the role of the devil (\textit{De Resurrectione} I.37.6-16). Neither of these examples have the performative, liturgical overtones of the Hymn at the end of the \textit{Symposium}. Thecla’s hymn is unique also for its extensive length and its elaborate form, complete with refrain and alphabetic stanza structure. Because it is such a substantive part of the work as a whole, and not just a learned quotation used to enliven the

\textsuperscript{13} The hymn in Heliodorus was “asked for” by the internal listener so that the scene could be heard and not only seen (III.2.3). When it was excerpted into the \textit{Greek Anthology}, it was placed in the category of epideictic poems (A.P. 9.485).

\textsuperscript{14} Although the example of Demodicus’ story in Book 8 of the \textit{Odyssey} is a perfect example of how an epic (or epyllion) could be included within a larger work. Another example is the inclusion of the opening line of the imagined new epic that Homer composed in the underworld about the battle between the dead heroes and the dead villains, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.
conversation, it deserves particular attention. And because it clearly plays with stanzaic form and arrangement, it also calls for a careful reading of its structure as a whole, as well as how is it relating to the rest of the dialogue. How does the particular imaginative setting and the theological commitments of Methodius impinge on the generic allegiances the poem tries to make for itself?

The emphasis on the performative nature of Thecla’s poem guides the concerns of this chapter. It is because of the particular mimetic setting in which the virgins find themselves, the mimetic setting that is based upon a particular theological world-view, that the poem has the shape and characteristics that it does. The voices in the dialogue, both those of the singer and of the addressee, are vital arenas for playing out the shifts between the monovocal and polyvocal aspects of the dialogue.

**Part I. The Shape of Thecla’s Hymn to Christ the Bridegroom:**

Although the hymn was never excerpted in antiquity, in modern times it has frequently made its way into collections of early Christian hymns.\(^{15}\) Despite multiple editions over the last century, there is no completely satisfactory edition of the hymn, which also has the result that there is no agreed-upon lineation.\(^{16}\) The standard text for the entire *Symposium* (Musurillo 1963) would be a logical numbering system, but I prefer the more intuitive numbering of the poem’s

\(^{15}\) Two editions, both based fundamentally on the Migne text with some emendations, are found in Christ and Paranikas 1871. Another Greek edition of the excerpted hymn appeared in Thierry 1972.

\(^{16}\) Unfortunately, Musurillo failed to incorporate Pellegrino’s numerous conjectures into his edition (an odd situation, since Murusillo clearly knows and cites Pellegrino’s work), and clearly Pellegrino had no way yet of incorporating Musurillo’s emendations into his own preceding edition.
The greatest commentator, M. Pellegrino: the stanza name (by letter), followed by the line number within the stanza (Pellegrino 1958). I will be following this system in my paper.17

The poem begins with a short refrain and then proceeds into a complicated collection of twenty-four stanzas. The refrain is a beautifully programmatic passage for the entire poem.

Ἁγνεύω σοι καὶ λαμπάδας φαεσφόρους, κρατοῦσα, νυμφίε, ὑπαντάνω σοι.

I am pure for you, and holding in hand the light-bearing lamps, o Bridegroom, I go to meet you.

It begins with the word, Ἁγνεύω, that echoes the subtitle of the entire work, Συμψόσιον, ἡ Πέρι Ἁγνείας. The second line points to the main Scriptural referent of the dialogue, the parable of the ten virgins from Mathew 25:1-13.18 From an earlier exegesis of this parable in the Symposium, we know that the “lamps” carried by the five wise virgins symbolize the five senses, purified and thereby chaste (Agathe 6.3, Musurillo 1958, 93). “Holding in hand the light-bearing lamps, o Bridegroom, I go to meet you” can be seen as a summary of the life of chastity that forms the subject of the entire work.

**The Thematic Shape of the Poem**19

Thematically, the poem divides into three major sections, each of which contributes to the ideas of progression and movement, moving towards a goal which is itself non-static.

Stanzas 1-10 (alpha-kappa) are largely epithalamic, setting up the topic of desire that is inherent

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17 Appendix A includes a new alphabetic translation of the poem, which I will be using throughout this chapter.
18 To summarize the parable: ten virgins are waiting outside the doors of the festival chamber for the bridegroom to come. When he arrives, they are to greet him and enter into the celebration along with him. When he delays, they all fall asleep. The bridegroom comes late at night, and five of the virgins, not having bought sufficient oil for the entire night, are reduced to waking up merchants to buy more. While they are gone, the bridegroom comes, and enters with those virgins who are prepared, leaving the others outsides of the wedding feast.
19 For the text and translation of the poem, as well as more detailed metrical analysis, see Appendix A.
in the marriage theme. This first section begins with a summoning of the singers (alpha), proceeds to the arrival of the Bride the Church (eta), and ends with a summons to drink at the wedding feast (kappa). The next thematic unit comprises seven examples from the Old and New Testaments of those who have foreshadowed the value of virginity (lambda-sigma). Thecla’s temporal progression from Abel to Mary the mother of Jesus contributes to the sense of forward movement, already build into the alphabetic structure. The final six stanzas (tau-omega) brings the hymn back to the wedding context, with stanzas addressed to the bride and groom (tau and upsilon), before broadening out into a celebration of the cosmological rejuvenation that has occurred as a result of this wedding (phi and chi), and the anticipation the virgins have of a final entrance into the Divine Wedding Banquet (psi and omega). The final cry in the song is for the doors of heaven to be opened, to allow entry into paradise, which is no longer empty, but has been revivified.

**Stanzas 1-10 (alpha-kappa):**

The first ten stanzas create the setting of the poem, which proves to be a rather complicated matter. The first eight stanzas form a cohesive unit beginning with the calling of the virgins from above and ending with the advent of Christ the bridegroom. The first five of these stanzas narrate the journey of the virgins to the door of the bridal chamber. Immediately, the idea of journeying towards a goal is emphasized: the virgins have left their own homes and are going together towards the wedding chamber. Each of these stanzas is spoken by a singular narrator, Thecla, but it seems that we are not to understand them as applying to Thecla alone, but

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20 The hymn’s double structural organization of the poem is explained below. Using the 10 + 8 + 6 thematic division here is not meant to obscure the equally strong 6 + 6 + 6 + 6 metrical division emphasized later on.
to all of the virgins who add their agreement with the refrain.\footnote{Delta is the only stanza that seems to be particularly referencing the narrative of Thecla, with reference to the wild beasts. Although she was not martyred by wild beasts, her trial in the arena was famous and often depicted in her iconography (see especially the artistic depictions reproduced in Davis).} She is first roused by a sound from above,\footnote{The cry from above will only be identified as originating in the ἄναξ in tau 2-3.} then rushing to the doors, she relates all of the difficulties of her journey, leaving her own home and braving the tricks of the snake and the wild beasts. Thecla speaks in bridal terms: leaving her father’s house (gamma 1) and longing for the bridegroom’s charis (ποθοῦσα σῆν χάριν, epsilon 1). At first inspection, then, the poem seems to be a self-addressed epithalamium, sung by the bride as she journeys towards the groom.

It comes as a surprise when a new character enters in Eta, the Church. Thecla and her fellow-virgins turn out not to be the bride themselves, but companions to the bride who is the Church. The change is hinted in stanza Zeta. When Christ first appears to them he is describes not as a bridegroom, but as a chorus-leader (Ζωῆς χοραγός, Χριστέ, zeta 1), and the virgins who follow him are explicitly called his chorus (χορός…παρθένων, zeta 2).

Stanza six (zeta) and stanza seven (eta) present a pair. In the first, the group welcomes Christ as their chorus leader, ask him to receive their own cry (as they had received and responded to his), and then praise him with a string of epithets, some of which seem surprisingly feminine (especially τέλειον ἄνθος, zeta 3).\footnote{Although Mendander Rhetor recommends that the bridegroom be compared with a rose and the bride with an apple (404.8), a recommendation which Russell finds “puzzling” (Russell 1979, 115).} The epithets in the fourth line are concerned with beauty and pleasure, while the three epithets in the last line are synonyms for wisdom/thought.

Stanza seven (eta) is in almost direct parallel as the chorus turns its attention to praise the queen,
the bride. Instead of receiving the cry of the chorus as Christ is, she is asked to receive the virgins themselves into the wedding chamber. She has four epithets, and in contrast to those given to Christ, they are all compounds.

Three more stanzas follow before the section of biblical exempla begins. The next two form a pair (theta and iota), introducing more clearly the important biblical referent of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins that had been alluded to in the refrain (Matthew 25:1-13). Because of the importance of this parable for the entire Symposium, and for the hymn in particular, it becomes the locus where the Greek epithalamion tradition meets with the biblical Jewish marriage traditions in an interesting blend.

The tenth stanza (kappa) is the most clearly sympotic of the entire poem. The exhortation is given to drink, although the kraters are filled not with wine, but with nectar. The call to drink fits in well immediately after the reference to the parable. Those who are welcomed in with the groom for the feast would rightly begin the festivities. The drink is called a heavenly one (οὐράνιον ἔστι πόμα, kappa 2), and we are once again led to question to what kind of wedding the virgins have been summoned.

The most confusing aspect of this stanza is that it moves from the intramural wedding banquet in stanza kappa back to waiting outside of the doors in stanza tau. Is the wedding already over, that the virgins are being invited to drink, or is it yet to come? In the imagined landscape of the Symposium, these women have arrived at one garden, have passed through their sufferings, led by the voice of their bridegroom, but they are also awaiting a future, more perfect Garden of Immortality, awaiting their bridegroom who has not arrived yet. As a result, they are

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24 There seems to be a strong precedent here in the biblical epithalamium of Psalm 44, where the bride is also a queen.
25 Recalling Sappho frag. 2.13-16, another sympotic epiphany.
in the middle of a *Symposium* that is both a celebratory wedding banquet and an anticipatory philosophical gathering. They are enjoined to drink at their wedding banquet, and also to beg to be let into the wedding banquet that has not yet occurred. Once again, Methodius brings forth his refocusing of the imagination of the readers onto expectant longing for the future, forgetting what is behind.

**Stanzas 11-18 (lambda-sigma):**

The seven exempla whose stories are told over eight stanzas are related in their chronological order: Abel, Joseph, Jephte’s daughter, Judith and Susanna from the Old Testament and John the Baptist and Mary from the New. The emphasis on progression finds its parallel in the first speech of the *Symposium*, where Marcella goes through the different stages of biblical dispensation to show how chastity is the culmination of a long series of God’s revelation to his people. There, Marcella explains the slow advancement from incest, to polygamy, to monogamy, and finally, with the coming of Christ, to the arrival at chastity (1.2, Musurillo 1958, 43-45). Here, Methodius presents a different narrative, one that is, in one sense, in conflict with Marcella’s speech, eager to show that there are examples of chastity even in pre-Christ biblical stories.

The first exemplum, Abel, is introduced with the word Λαμπρός, making a clear link with the refrain’s λαμπάδας φαεσφόρους. The exempla are to shine out just as clearly as the lamps in the hands of the virgins. Abel is a type of Christ, slaughtered unjustly at the hands of his brother, but he is also a type of the virgins, begging to be received by the Word.\(^\text{26}\) Jeptha too seems to be primarily presented as a type of Christ: although she died a virgin, she did not die

\(^{26}\) Although this also recalls Christ’s death cry of, “Into your hands, oh Lord, I commend my spirit” (Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθημι τὸ πνεῦμά μου·, Luke 23:46).
because she was a virgin. The combining of “type of Christ” imagery with an emphasis on virginity can be reconciled by Christ being named the “Archvirgin” in the first speech of the dialogue.

While all of the Old Testament characters are directly named in an early part of their stanza, the two New Testament examples, John the Baptist and Mary, are named only by their epithets, the standard πρόδρομος for John the Baptist, and the nonstandard ζωητόκος for Mary. Although all of these exempla are offered for the imitation of the virgins, the last stanza about Mary has the strongest verbal connection to the following stanza describing the choir of virgins themselves. Mary carried the unstained seeds of Christ in her womb (τὰς σὰς γονὰς ἐν ἄσπόρῳ φέρουσα νηδώ, sigma 2); the virgins carry great gifts (φέροντες, tau 4), wearing unstained robes (ἀσπίλοις στολαῖς, tau 4). Mary is also the only exemplum who receives the direct descriptive of παρθένος (sigma 3).

Perhaps the most intriguing element of the exempla section is that the models of chastity

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27 Both explicitly use the language of “type” so fundamental in Patristic exegesis of the Old Testament. Abel: σου θάνατον Ἄβελ προεκτυπῶν (lambda 1); Jeptha: σου τὸν τύπον τῆς σαρκός (nu 4). Both Abel and Jeptha’s daughter seem to be less associated with virginity itself than with the slaughter of the young. These two stanzas are almost the only part in the entire Symposium. One of the few other passages (and one that is a clear echo of the language of the hymn) is in Thecla’s speech: “It was for this that all of our discourses up till now have been held, in order to teach you, my fair virgins, to imitate your Mother as best you can, and not to be disturbed by the pains, afflictions, and reverse of life, that thus you may enter joyously with her into the bridal chamber, holding your lamps lighted” (8.12, Musurillo 1958, 118-119).

28 “He who was Archpriest, Archprophet, and Archangel, should also be called Archvirgin (ἄρχιπαρθένῳ).” (Symposium 1.4; Musurillo 1958, 46)

29 Mary’s title as theotokos would be declared by the Council of Ephesus, but the term zoetokos was never again used as an epithet for Mary. It is attested only once again after this hymn, now referring to the Church, in Anastasius of Sinai’s Hexameron (post 700 AD) (Lampe 596).

30 Mary does not play a roll in the rest of the work—it is the Church and not Mary who get Rev. 12 imagery, etc. There is no explicit connection with the virgins and Mary in the rest of the dialogue, although she would come to claim such an important role in ascetical works in the later tradition. To take one particular example, throughout the Symposium the image of the “garden enclosed” from the Song of Songs 4:12 refers to all intact virginal bodies (for the first time in the literature). Later, this image was to be used almost solely for Mary (Daley 1986, 260).
are allowed to speak the refrain themselves. The virgin choristers ventriloquize the earlier characters. At the end of each stanza, it is said that the biblical type “cries aloud” the refrain (e.g. Mu 5: ἐκβοῶν, Nu 5: ἐκραζε, Xi 4: νικαφόροις δ´ ἔφη βοαῖς, Omicron 4: ἐντρόµους ἔφη βοαῖς, Rho 4: ἐκραζέ). While the speaker of first six stanzas flicked between the singular Thecla and the multitude of the chorus, the confusion over the speakers here in the exemplum section is temporal. When is this song being sung? And by whom, precisely? Why can they all cry out the same thing, despite the radical difference in time?

**Stanzas 19-24 (tau-omega):**

Tau provides the clearest verbal connection of the virgins to Mary, thereby both connecting itself to the exempla section and leading the hymn out of it. Tau also repeats the address to the anax, while upsilon switches addressee to the bride (with yet another string of epithets), with the result that stanzas tau-upsilon are set up as a parallel to stanzas zeta-eta.

In upsilon, the queen is titled νεόνυµφε, which implies that her marriage has already happened, and that the virgins are only awaiting the feast and the consummation of the marriage within the wedding chamber. Upsilon also explicitly connects the queen with the church for the first time, and gives the ἐκκλεσία its own string of epithets, calling her too an untouched virgin (upsilon 2, cf. sigma 1). The two epithets in the third line are quite interesting, both are hapax legomena, and both are compounds that emphasize contrasting colors--white body and dark braids (χιονόσωµε, κυανοβόµτρυξε).

The next three stanzas widen the picture to include the entire world’s joyous healing. Dripping, oozing sickness has been cleansed, death has died, and the healing light God’s grace shines upon mortals. The lamps that the virgins had carried (their cleansed senses) now shine
forth the light of χαρὰ (which had earlier been used as an epithet for Christ). The change is sudden and gloriously complete.

The ecstasy continues in the next stanza when the view is turned towards paradise.\(^\text{31}\) There has been a great restoration to the way things were previously (ὁσπέρ τὸ πρὶν), but this restoration of the former state is also emphasized as new. The old and the new are combined as the chorus of virgins “sing a new song to the Lord”, a phrase from the Psalms.\(^\text{32}\) The queen is the light\(^\text{33}\) and the chorus are wreathed with flowers, carrying flames in their hands.

This cosmic joy and great procession of light and flowers which is journeying back to triumphantly repopulate paradise is capped by the final stanza, the first to address the Father, and the one which also uses the most traditional hymnic language of the entire poem. Once again the petition is repeated, as the virgins beg to be received into the gates along with his Son.

**The Metrical Shape of the Poem**\(^\text{34}\)

While the content of the poem focuses on progression, in the progression of the wedding party forward to the doors of the bridal chamber, the chronological progression through the exempla of chastity, and the alphabetic arrangement of stanzas, there is another organizational devise that emphasizes not to much progression but variety. In particular, Methodius overlays two different stanzaic organizations, one which divides the poem in clusters of six stanzas each (based on the metrical variation) and the other which which divides the poem into a pattern of 10 + 8 + 6 (based on theme). Having these two overlaying structures increased the variation in the hymn, which we already saw in the multiplication of voices that “call out” the refrain.

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\(^{31}\) It seems that this is what lies beyond the gates, a re-imagined *thalamos*.  
\(^{32}\) Psalm 96:1, 98:1 and 144:9. Cf. also Isaiah 42:10 and Rev. 5:9.  
\(^{33}\) Just as earlier Christ was the light without setting (zeta 1)—there seems to be greater conflating of epithets as the hymn goes on.  
\(^{34}\) Here I will only be treating the problem of extra metra in the poem. For a more extensive examination of the meter of the hymn, see Appendix A.
The hymn is composed in iambic verse, beginning with four lines of three and a half metra, concluding with one line of two metra. The strophic form was not popular at this time, and almost all other contemporary verse is stichic (Pellegrino 1958, 32). Four of the stanzas have preceding lines of various lengths (alpha, eta, mu and nu), and, among the scholars who have worked on the hymn, only Christ and Paranikas have attempted to emend all of them away.35 While I believe that these metrical variations are intentional, and work to create meaningful divisions in the poem, most commentators are troubled by them. These out-jutting partial lines are troubling because they raise difficult questions about how standardized poetic form needs to be, and the corollary question of how far emendation should go. Musurillo suggests that the variation is due to some requirement of the music, but this is to beg the question of whether the poem was originally composed with music and meant to be re-performed, or was simply an imaginative literary event.36 But his insight carries weight, and whether the poem was sung or simply read, the stanzas extended by the extra line are necessarily highlighted. I think that the marking, whether simply metrical or also musical, is intentional and corresponds to important breaks within the hymn that are fundamental to giving the entire hymn a pleasingly variegated structure, subsumed under a broader unity, much like the arrangement of the speeches of the

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35 Christ and Paranikas 1871, 33-37 (text), xvii-xviii (explanation). Wilamowitz was not concerned with the extra metra, but he did emend stanza eta, the only one with an uneven metra. He suggested transposing the end of the second line to the first, making the out-jutting line a dimeter, like the beginnings of alpha and mu. Not only does this emendation make the first line come out in even metra, matching it to the openings of both alpha and mu (not nu), it also brings the second line into correct rhythm, making the emendation quite attractive (Wilamowitz 1922, 133).

36 Musurillo is one of the interpreters who thinks it might be possible to gain insight into liturgical forms of the time through the poem. “It is not unlikely that Methodius also composed music for the hymn, for the use of his benefactress, the Lady of Termessus, and perhaps a community of consecrated women. In this case, the style of the music might explain the numerous departures from regular metrical structure.” (Musurillo 1958, 237).
virgins in the early part of the dialogue. In what follows, I will argue for why the four stanzas with this extra-metrical addition might be suitable for highlighting.

The first stanza is an intuitive place for metrical variation, since it strongly marks the beginning of the poem.\textsuperscript{37} From alpha to zeta there is tight thematic unity, beginning with the chorus of virgins jumping up to the sound of the bridegroom calling out, and ending with the epiphany of Christ the bridegroom arriving at the doors (heralded by the traditional χαῖρε, zeta 1). At the seventh stanza, a new character is introduced, the queen (ἀνασσα), who will later be identified with the Church (upsilon 3). The new beginning is marked by Eta being the second stanza to gain an extra fifth line. A pattern begins to emerge in the expectations of the listener. Twenty-four letters can be evenly divided into four groups of six. With variations occurring at the first and seventh stanzas, the listener is led to expect something at the thirteenth to head off the third cluster of six stanzas, and they are not disappointed. The Nu stanza is the fourth and last with variation in line number.

Two anomalies remain in this conjecture that the extra lines occur every six stanzas: Mu also has the variation, and no variation is placed at the final expected spot, Tau’s nineteenth stanza. Reasons can be brought forward for both of these variants. Mu and Nu, as the twelfth and thirteenth letters of the alphabet, flank the exact center of the poem. Therefore, Mu’s unexpected expansion could be a sign of the ending of the first half and the beginning of the second. A change between the first and second halves is also witnessed by the odd form the

\textsuperscript{37} Pellegrino agrees that the dimeter at the beginning of the first stanza poses no problem if it were the only place of variation. But since there are three other occurrences, he admits that finding a reason for them is not at all clear. (“La presenza d’un dimetro giambico all’inizio della prima strofa si spiegherebbe facilmente come un’introduzione a tutto il carme; ma poiche, come s’è osservato (p. 30), anche alter strofe incominciano con un verso breve, non c’è che da riconoscere la liberta del poeta.” Pellegrino 1958, 63)
variation of Nu takes. The first three variations added an iambic dimeter to the stanza, but in Nu, a single metron comprises the extra line. Furthermore, the first three extra lines are composed of three words each, while Nu’s single metron has only one word. Νεοσφαγῆ at the beginning of the thirteenth stanza is not only a startling word, but is starkly placed, alone in its line. The “newness” of the slaughter is given a particular frisson because it is a quotation from an old source: Sophocles’ play the Ajax. There are, then, no dimeter lines in the entire second half, only the one extra metron to start it off. Methodius has created a poem with a strong metrical difference between the first and second halves. Yet, oddly, there is no corresponding sense break at the same point. Over the center of the poem, the hymn continues with Old Testament examples of threatened youth, although the gender of the examples does switch from male to female at that point.

The absence of a final marking off of the last group of six requires a longer explanation. An intriguing aspect of the 6 + 6 + 6 + 6 organization is that it conflicts with the other basic organizational structure in the poem outlined above in the summary—the presence of an almost excerptable exempla section over eight stanzas in the middle. If the 6 + 6 + 6 + 6 organization marks the metrical divisions, the 10 + 8 + 6 organization more clearly marks the thematic

38 This is only true if Wilamowitz’s emendation of stanza eta is accepted. See n. 20 above.
39 It is in exactly the same form and also at the beginning of a line in Sophocles’ Ajax, which I believe is being referenced here (546).
Αι. ἀφ’ αὐτόν, αἵρε δεῦρο· ταρβήσει γὰρ οὖν, Νεοσφαγῆ τούτον γε προσελέσσον φόνον, εἴπερ δικαίως έστ’ ἐμὸς τὰ πατρόθεν. (545-547)
The compound shows up again in Ajax 899, at the end of the line, spoken by Tecmessa, and in a different form. Also in the Trachiniae of Sophocles 1130, Euripides Hecuba 894, and a fragment of Aeschylus.
40 Although there is one more male exemplum—John the Baptist is the first New Testament example (rho). Thereby the genders of the Old and New exempla are paralleled, first male, then female, but it is hard to know whether this is intentional, or whether it is simply a result of the chronology of the biblical models.
divisions. By overlaying these two divisional structures, a synchronization appears at one point—between the eighteenth and nineteenth stanzas, just the spot of our missing metrical highlighting. The first divides the first eighteen stanzas into $6 + 6 + 6$, while the second divides it into $10 + 8$, both leading naturally in their sequence to one more group of six. Because of this synchronization at the nineteenth stanza, there is no need to highlight the last division of six with an extra line of poetry. The divisional gap at the end of the exempla section is naturally strong enough to continue the pattern for both structures.

How does this syncopation of stanzaic arrangement influence our questions of monovocality, voice, and performance? Having two concurrent divisions in a twenty-four stanza poem produces a certain amount of pleasing variation. The variety in the metrical form of the stanzas is an intentional organizational tactic for the poem. The reader’s expectations are developed and teased to feel the combination of the two divisions right before the final set of six stanzas.

The Alphabetism and Refrain

In addition to the shape of the poem and the clustering of stanzas, there are other interesting generic influences impinging on Thecla’s hymn. As we pointed out while outlining its thematic shape, the poem has strong epithalamic themes. Although Methodius calls Thecla’s poem a “hymn” immediately before she gives it ($ἐφη κελεύσαι…@Inject{μνον ἀναπέμψαι τῷ κυρίῳ}$), Thecla’s poem is often referred to as an epithalemion in the literature. Some of the epithalamic features have already been laid out in the above analysis of the first third of the poem, as the

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41 It is along these seams that Pellegrino chooses to make his divisions (Pellegrino 1958, 40).
42 Pellegrino 1958, 42; Musurillo 1958, 236; Christ and Paranikas xvii.
attendants of the bride are awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom.\textsuperscript{43} There is praise of the bride and groom in the form of epithet strings, many following traditional lines. They are carrying torches; it is nighttime; they are waiting at the doors.\textsuperscript{44}

All of these characteristics are familiar from pre-Christian epithalamion, but there are other aspects that do not fit so easily into the generic expectations.\textsuperscript{45} The drama around the door is different from what one would expect from a traditional epithalamic setting. The attendants are not escorting the bride through the doors, but waiting at the doors to be brought into the bridal chamber by the bridegroom as attendants to the bride (\textit{θαλαμηπόλοι}), and also as fellow brides, as is so clearly seen from Thecla’s opening stanzas. The confusion in the poem between the bride and the attendants carries important theological weight. Although the bride is the Church (finally named \textit{ἐκκλησία} in upsilon 3) and metaphorically a single entity, nevertheless the Church is made up of many members. Earlier, Thalia had addressed the issue of one and many in her description of the Church (Thalia 3.8). In once sense, she explains, it is correct to call all Christians the Church, regardless of their level of perfection; in another sense, it is correct to call the Church proper only those who have embraced a life of perfection, that is, the life of

\textsuperscript{43} Two terms are used for the virgins in this role, \textit{ὁμόστολοι} eta 4 and \textit{θαλαμηπόλοι}, upsilon 1.

\textsuperscript{44} Being “at the gates” is an interesting imagistic detail, since all the participants in the hymn have already entered gates and been received inside a garden, namely Arete’s garden (\textit{Καὶ ἀμία ταῦτα λεγούσις εἰς τὸν περίβολον, ἔφη, φθάνομεν ἀνεφομένοιν ἐπὶ τῶν θυρῶν, εἰσελθοῦσαι τε καταλαμβάνομεν ἥδη τὴν Θέκλαν καὶ τὴν Αγάθην καὶ τὴν Μάρκελλαν μελλούσας δείπνειν. Musurillo 1963, Prologue 61-62). They have entered into one closed off area, but their current achievement appears to simply have been an analogy for the greater chamber they have yet to enter.

\textsuperscript{45} For a discussion of Classical epithalamic expectations, see Mendander Rhetor’s instructions on giving epithalamia (\textit{Treatise} II.vi, 399.11-405.13).
The epithalamic elements are used by Methodius in a particular theological setting that requires certain accommodations to be made.

In addition to the expectations of an epithalamic song, there is also an important biblical background text to Thecla’s hymn which impinges on the poem. The *Book of Revelation* likewise tells of a chorus of singing virgins.

Then I looked and there was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. I heard a sound from heaven (φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) like the sound of rushing water or a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. They were singing (what seemed to be) a new hymn before the throne (καὶ ἁδοὺς ὡς φῶναν καινὴν ἐνόπτον τοῦ θρόνου), before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn this hymn except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been ransomed from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women; they are virgins (οὗτοί εἰσίν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, παρθένοι γὰρ εἰσίν) and these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been ransomed as the firstfruits of the human race for God and the Lamb. On their lips no deceit has been found; they are unblemished. (*Revelation* 14.1-5 New American Translation)

A collection of details from this passage, and others around it, have been transferred into the *Symposium*: the sound from above, the chorus of virgins singing a “new hymn”, and earlier in *Revelation*, the wearing of white robes, whose whiteness is connected with the suffering of the virgins.47

This combination of epithalamic motifs with biblical allusions from the Book of

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46 “Those who are more perfect and have embraced the truth with more perception, and thus, by their perfect faith and purification, have detached themselves from the absurdities of the flesh— these become the Church and the helpmate of Christ; they are the virgins, as the Apostle tells us, espoused and wedded to Him that by receiving from him the pure and fertile seed of doctrine they might collaborate with him in the preaching of the Gospel for the salvation of all the rest.” (Thalia 3.8, Musurillo 1958, 66-67) For a discussion of this passage and further analysis of the ecclesiology of Methodius, see Plumpe 1943, 109-122.

47 “He said to me ‘These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’” (*Rev. 7: 14*, New American translation)
Revelation points to an important factor that must be taken into account while interpreting Thecla’s poem. The poem is a hybrid, which combines two separate traditions: Greek poetic customs (witness the meter itself, among other things) with important biblical influences. Beyond the images taken from the Book of Revelation, there are other characteristics that make more sense when placed against a biblical background than against a Classical background, namely the poem’s alphabetism and its refrain.

Being an heir to two poetic traditions gives Methodius a wonderful richness from which to choose his poetic forms. Among his various options, he chooses to take on the alphabetism and the refrain more popular in the Semitic tradition presented to him in the Old Testament because they usefully reflect two of his ongoing preoccupations. The alphabetism aids in his creation of a poem with a strong narrative drive, which moves unfailing towards an omega, echoing the traveling that is done by the virgin brides/bridesmaids to the door of the wedding chamber. His refrain allows Methodius to play with issues of voice, as he scripts different members of the past “crying out” to God with the same words, claiming to embrace chastity like the virgins symposiasts themselves.

**Alphabetic Poems**

The rise of abecedarian poems in the Greek tradition happened rather late, perhaps coming into prominence only around the time of Methodius. There are some papyri finds that display abecedarian poems, as well as two undated hymns in the *Greek Anthology* (one to Apollo and one to Dionysus), and an epitome of the *Iliad* attributed to Stephanus Grammatikos.

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48 For a review of literature on Christian abecedarian poems see Kalish 2009, 77-81.
49 Amherst Papyri II and Oxy. 15 + 1795.
50 *Greek Anthology* Book IX Epigrams 524, 525 and 385.
Perhaps the most suggestive parallel is the hexameter sympotic poem preserved as P. Oxy. 15 + 1756, which parallels three infrequent elements of Methodius’ work: a sympotic song that is both abecedarian and has a refrain. The papyri is dated to the first century AD.\(^{51}\) The poem is clustered into four line stanzas (although the meter is stichic), each stanza beginning with a subsequent letter of the alphabet. Each group of four lines is arranged around a theme, but there is no attempt to link the different four-line groups together into a larger narrative. There is no narrative drive in its alphabetism, but rather the alphabet is used as a collating device.

A further type of abecedary, with more local resonances, remains as yet unnoted. There is another set of alphabetic “poems” with which Methodius would most likely have been familiar on the Imperial-era tombs clustered in the city of Olympus in Lycia. Olympus is a town full of tombs of all styles and periods, some of the most spectacular of which are contemporary with Methodius. In a rocky outcropping above the city in the necropolis were found two alphabetic inscriptions that are part of a rare type of fortunetelling.\(^{52}\) One seeking advice would journey to the tomb, ask his or her question, and randomly select a letter. They would then read the inscribed line associated with their letter to receive the divine message. One imagines that Methodius traveled along these necropolis roads frequently (they are the only way to go inland from the city), and that he knew people who consulted this type of oracle.\(^{53}\) Although far from

\(^{51}\) The poem is preserved in two fragments, published in different volumes of the Oxyrhynchus papyri (Vol. 1 (15) and Vo. 15 (1795). The meter is basically hexameter, except that all of the hexameter lines end with an iamb. Thet refrain “\(\omega \lambda \mu \omega i\),” “pipe me a tune,” is inserted between stanzas (Grenfell and Hunt 1922, Vol. 15 p. 113-116). See also the two alphabetic Christian poems in the Bodmer Papyri “Codex of Visions” dated to the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century (Hurst and Rudhardt 1999, “Adresse a Abraham”, 37-56 and “La Seigneur a Ceux Qui Souffrent”, 127-149, for a study of the Bodmer Papyri, see Kalish 2009). In addition, Pellegrino gathers some Christian Latin examples (Pellegrino 1958, 33).

\(^{52}\) Bean 1968, 140-141. Despite extensive autopsy, I was unable to locate these inscriptions myself. If perhaps they have been moved to a museum, I have found no record of this.

\(^{53}\) Heinevetter 1912, 35 reproduces an iambic version of this type of oracle from nearby Limyra.
Methodius’ project, and closer perhaps to the magical alphabetic hymns to Apollo and Dionysus, this type of evidence shows that abecedarity was not unknown in Methodius’ cultural milieu.

While abecedarian poetry is not unknown to the pagan tradition, the stronger and much more ancient precedent lies in the Jewish tradition, where it is found in a number of books—the beginning of the Book of Lamentations, Proverbs 31, Ecclesiastes 51:13-29, and Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 145, and most strikingly 119.\(^{54}\) A difficulty in looking to the Hebrew for possible influences on Methodius is that the Septuagint fails to reproduce the acrostics in Greek or even to mark their original presence in the Hebrew. However, Origen notes that Psalms 118/119 is alphabetic in his fragmentary commentary,\(^{55}\) and since Methodius was famous for his literary involvement with Origen, first as a supporter, and later as a critic,\(^{56}\) it seems most reasonable to believe that Methodius would have known at least about this abecedarian Psalm, if not the others acrostics in the Hebrew Scriptures.\(^{57}\)

In our scant collection of contemporary and preceding abecedarian poems, the variety is noteworthy. The summary of the Iliad uses the form to promote mnemonic techniques, the hymns to Apollo and Dionysus, along with the inscribed Lycian tombs, apparently have magical functions, while the papyri collection of sympotic stanzas seems to be most of all a collating device. None of these seem quite right in categorizing the use of the form in Methodius’ hymn,

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\(^{54}\) See Freedman and Miano 2005, 88 for a taxonomy of the different Psalmic alphabetic forms.  
\(^{55}\) Sections of this commentary survive only in a Palestinian florilegium, but there are enough clues to be able to securely say that Origen commented on the alphabetic form of the Psalm (Rondeau 1982, 51 n. 81). In addition, Ambrose mentions his debt to Origen in his commentary on the Psalms, and especially his spiritual interpretation of the use of the alphabet (Maur 1977, 271-273). Origen does not remark on the alphabeticism of Psalm 36 in his Commentary preserved in a translation by Rufinus (Prinzivali, Crouzel and Bresard 1995).  
\(^{56}\) An in-depth investigation of Methodius’ problematic relationship with the legacy of Origen is the main concern of Patterson 1997.  
\(^{57}\) If Origen’s Hexapla was still preserved, we would know this in much greater detail. From the fragments on Psalm 25, there does not appear to be any mention of the acrostic (Schenker 1982).
which, as we discussed a length in the second chapter, is far from the compilatory aesthetic of his fellow Imperial sympotic writers who follow the tradition of Xenophon. For example, the alphabetic fish list in Athenaeus Book Seven (from Αφύαι to Ψήτται 284f-339f) has no similar sense of progression and development, but rather the fish names lie side by side as if on fishmonger’s ice.\(^{58}\) While the center of Methodius’ hymn is a list of exempla of chastity from the Old and New Testaments, the sense of narrative drive is stronger than that of compilation. Each exemplum is tightly woven into the plot of the hymn in their speaking the chorus in their own voice. This is not a list, but an expansion of the chorus into wider diachronic participation.

Because of its biblical use, I suggest that Methodius would have seen abecedarity as primarily a sacred style, especially because of its use in the Psalms, that most basic source of Christian poetry. It has further been suggested that Christian alphabetic acrostics were influenced by Revelation 21:6, which ends with Christ proclaiming, “I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.”\(^{59}\) What better way to end a Symposium devoted to watchfulness for the coming of Christ the bridegroom, and so frequently employing Revelation as a source text, than with an omega, which marks the universality of Christ, claiming the entire alphabet for his own.\(^{60}\)

**Refrain (Ὑπακοή):**

Methodius’ song is the first to call a refrain a ὑπακοή, the word that was to become the basic term for “refrain” in the later Byzantine tradition (Lampe 1961, 1433).\(^{61}\) Refrains in ancient

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\(^{58}\) This list is incredibly long: a full 246 pages in the Olson’s Loeb edition (314-560).

\(^{59}\) Hurst and Rudhardt 1999, 38.

\(^{60}\) The Omega stanza is the last word we hear from the virgins. After the hymn, there is only the “outer dialogue” between Eubulion and Gregorion left.

\(^{61}\) It is unattested in this usage in the LSJ. Of course, it is possible that the heading was inserted into the manuscript tradition later, but it would have to have been added rather early, since it
poetry were often part of epithalamic hymns, an example of which is Catullus 61.62 But too few epithalmia survive in Greek to make a certain statement about whether a refrain was a requirement of the genre. In addition, the first century sympotic poem mentioned above, Oxy. 15 + 1795, may also be cited as a parallel, since it too has a refrain between each stanza (αυλι μοι). Otherwise, refrains were not common in Classical Greek literature, and it would be helpful to look elsewhere for further influences on Methodius’ choice.

We find just such an influence in some of the poems of the Old Testament. Two psalms carry the refrain: “God’s love endures forever” (Psalm 118 and 136). Another outstanding Old Testament precedent is the song of the three young men in the fiery furnace found in Daniel 3:52-90, which includes the refrain, “Praise and exalt him above all forever” (ὑμνεῖτε καὶ ὑπερψοῦτε αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας).63 As with the abecedarian form, Methodius could have been drawing on either biblical or Classical precedents for his use of the refrain in the hymn, and most likely both. In many of its different stylistic aspects, Methodius’ hymn represents a dialogue of influences, combined for his new purpose.

Perhaps the most interesting question surrounding the refrain is one of voice. Although the refrain by its nature never changes, the speaker of the refrain, and thereby its imaginative setting, changes throughout and, most spectacularly, in the exempla section, as each predecessor to chastity “cries out” the refrain in turn. The repetition, which could seem static, in fact

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62 Cf. Theocritus XVIII, the Epithalamion of Helen, which also contains the refrain “Hymen o Hymenaiē”, although only once. One wonders what would be revealed if Sappho’s book of epithalamia had survived. Christ and Paranikas have no doubt that the epithalamic refrains of Catullus and Theocritus are the background of Methodius’ refrain (Christ and Paranikas 1871, xvii).

63 The song of the three children is only present in the Septuagint and not the Hebrew version of the Book of Daniel.
represents constant variation that only becomes clear when the surroundings are taken into account. I will speak of this aspect in greater length below.

There are at least three distinct avenues of influence on Thecla’s poem, then: Classical precedent, Biblical precedent, and the particular demands of Methodius’ literary creation. Most succinctly, the genre of the concluding hybrid hymn is a sympotic epithalamium sung by virgins, inspired by the poetry of the Hebrew Scriptures. Because of its creative use of a variety of poetic structures to fit into a particularly innovative imaginative setting, and because of its attempt to echo the poetry found in the Septuagint, the poem stands alone in its period and unique in its type. It was also destined to be one of the last Christian hymns made along Classical metrical models before the transition into isosyllabic forms that came about over the next two centuries. Thecla’s hymn was a radical experiment that proved inimitable. Yes, at the same time, it included certain elements, such as the refrain and the alphabetic structure, which were to become even more popular in the succeeding centuries, albeit with different metrical structures.

Thecla’s hymn should be seen as an early attempt to make a new Greek hymn on the model of the Psalms, which Methodius references when he portrays the virgins “psalming a new song” (Ψάλλων τὸ καινὸν ἀσμα psi 1). But this psalm is to be written in Classical meter, a beautiful hymn twining together the Classical and biblical poetic pasts. It can serve as a model of the Symposium as a whole, combining a collection of voices and influences that create a vertiginous blend of the familiar and the strange.

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64 Greek Christian poems in Classical meter continued to be written, most spectacularly in the output of Gregory Nazianzus, but also in the works of Synesius of Cyrene. However, it seems that these poems (explicitly those of Gregory) were meant primarily for private reading and not for public cult.

65 For some thoughts on the poem’s role in this later tradition, see Appendix A.
While the first part of this chapter was interested in the shape of the poem, the embrace of variety and syncopation through its double structure, and the generic precedents found in both Methodius’ Classical and Semitic influences, the second part turns to questions about the narrative situating of the poem. Why are these women singing a song, and what sort of resonances might this have had for their readers? More specifically, where are the singers along the spectrum of time?

**Part II. Death and Song: Chronotope in Philostratus, Lucian and Methodius**

While I investigated the imaginative location of the Symposium extensively in the second chapter, seeing how it presented some surprising and interlocking changes from typical sympotic settings, in the second half of this chapter I would like to look at a different aspect of the location--its role as an after-death waiting place for heroes. I will compare the Symposium’s allegorical space with Second Sophistic descriptions of the Island of the Blessed, a place which the pagan literary imagination also often sees as a site of musical composition. When Methodius imagines his dead virgins singing to fill their time, he is working within an established tradition. I will discuss two heroic after-death locations that contextualize Arete’s garden in Methodius’ Symposium: the Isle of the Blessed that Lucian visits in his True Histories and the island of Leuke in the Black Sea where the ghosts of Helen and Achilles live in Philostratus’ Heroicus. Focusing on these settings will give an added impetus to my investigation of what types of songs the groups of heroes sing in the afterlife. While a certain important parallel becomes evident between these locales of after-death singing, the types of poems that are sung are radically different. Those in Lucian, and especially in Philostratus, emphasize a longing for a lost past, while Methodius’ song expresses a desire for a future which is more real than the present.
The Isle of the Blessed in Lucian’s *True Histories* sounds strikingly similar to Arete’s garden. Lucian’s first description is made while the travelers are still on the boat.

A rare, pure atmosphere enfolded the place, and sweet breezes with their blowing stirred the woods gently, so that from the moving branches came a whisper of delightful, unbroken music, like the fluting of Pandean pipes in desert places. Moreover, a confused sound could be heard incessantly, which was not noisy but resembled that made at a drinking-party (*ἐν συμποσίῳ*), when some are playing, others singing and others beating time to the flute or the lyre. (II.5, trans. Harmon, Loeb Vol. 1, 311)

The sympotic noise turns out to be evidence of a sympotic scene, which unfolds as the awe-struck visitors approach. They progress through a field of flowers (*διὰ λειμόνος ἐυανθοῦς*, II.6) to discover a delightful scene of dead heroes feasting, outside of the city in a garden, just like in Methodius’ Symposium (Τὸ δὲ συμπόσιον ἔξω τῆς πόλεως, II.14). In this garden there are no seasons, and no change in the time of day: it is always at the point when the sun is rising (II.12).

While on the island, the heroes occupy themselves with feasting and love intrigues. They listen to and perform songs too, preferring above all the songs of Homer (who is present himself on the island), especially those heroes who play a role in his stories.

Like Lucian, Philostratus in the *Heroicus* also imagines his dead heroes on an island, this time specifically located in the Black Sea. His description of the lives of dead heroes is embedded in a dialogue between the Phoenician sailor and a vine-dresser which occurs across the Hellespont from the Troad. The vine-dresser speaks at length to his interested listener about his relationships with the ghosts of the dead Trojan war heroes, especially Protesilaus. Protesilaus relates stories of how Achilles is getting along after death: he lives with Helen on Leuке as their private island, although sometimes other heroes are allowed to visit.66 There he

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66 The Island of the Blessed is a tradition first cited in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* 167ff, and it marks a change from Homer’s citation of the Elysian Fields as a place where special heroes are allowed to reside after death (*Odyssey* 4.563ff). Olshausen 2006. By the Imperial Periods,
occupies himself with singing the songs of Homer, as well as new poems of his own creation. Unlike Lucian and Philostratus, Methodius’ dead heroes do not wait on an island. Rather, they wait somewhere else, which reflects that they are waiting for something in particular, unlike the heroes in Lucian and Philostratus. Methodius’ heroes have also been moved to the top of a mountain rather than the middle of the ocean, hearkening back to the emphasis on vertical space that was discussed more generally in the second chapter (cf. Fitter 1995). In this part of the chapter, I will first of all establish that there were certain expectations of how one interacted with dead heroes during the second and third centuries AD, and second, I will show that Methodius’ relocation makes a distinct theological point about an ideal Christian’s relationship with time. This point will be further explicated as I analyze the types of song that the heroes sing and the interaction of those songs with both the past and the present.

Methodius’ virgins, although less unambiguous dead than the heroes in both Philostratus and Lucian, nevertheless seem to occupy a post-mortem state. In the second line of the first stanza of the poem, Methodius provides an interesting twist to the normal sympotic temporal setting, which is always the past, whether immediate or remote. The noise that the virgins hear calling them to prepare for the bridegroom is “dead-rousing” (ἐγερσίνεκρος, one of the nine hapax legomena in the poem). In the story of the wise and foolish virgins to which this passage alludes (Matthew 25), the cry announcing the bridegroom’s coming rouses the virgins from Elysium had become a part of the Islands of the Blessed (at least in Lucian, for whom the concept seems to have been particularly important). See Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, who argues that Elysium was an Archaic invention from around the time of Homer (Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, 55).  

67 “For it is then that Achilles and Helen drink together, engage in song, and sing their love for each other, Homer’s verses about Troy, and Homer himself.” (Heroicus 54, trans. Rusten, Loeb 311)
sleep, not death. Either this is a vivid intensification, or the temporal setting is meant to be after the death of the symposiasts. While still awaiting the final coming of the bridegroom, they have already safely ascended the mountain and avoided all the concomitant dangers. This would seem to place them after their deaths but before the Second Coming of Christ. Likewise, Gregorion and Eubulion reference Thecla as one who famous engaged in “the first great contests of the martyrs” (Καὶ ὡς διαπρεπής πολλάκις ἑφάνη τοῖς μεγάλοις καὶ πρώτοις ἁθλοῖς ὑπαντῶσα τῶν μαρτύρων, Musurillo 130), implying that these have passed, and that Eubulion and Gregorion are now living in a later time. And not only are they dead, but these women are also heroes, as was argued in the third chapter.

So, Methodius’ virgins are all heroes who have undergone death and are now in a time and place that is difficult to access, but is of tremendous interest to those who are still alive. In all three texts, there is still an active connection between the living and the dead, and each has its own method of somehow witnessing the lives of those who have died. The three author also relate their dead heroes engaged in similar activities: they spend their time feasting, conversing and singing. But the types of song that they sing and the theological implications of that difference express a radical disjunction.

While feasting, the heroes on the Lucian’s island like to sing the epics of Homer, in which many of them play a prominent role (II.15). But Homer keeps composing new songs as well. While Lucian is there, a battle breaks out between some escaped inmates of Tartarus and the heroes. Homer composes an entirely new epic around this event, gives a copy to Lucian,

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68 μέσης δὲ νυκτὸς κραυγὴ γέγονεν· Matthew 25:6
69 “Metodio intende la parabola in senso escatologico” (Pellegrino 1958, 63 on ἐγερσίνεκρος). See also Patterson: “Perhaps the best that can be said, then, is that the contest is set at some mysterious point in the future, beyond the present cycle of living and dying” (Patterson 1997, 71).
who subsequently loses it, but recalls the first line: “This time sing me, O Muse, of the shades of the heroes in battle!” (Νῦν δὲ μοι ἐννεπε, Μοῦσα, μάχην νεκών ἥρωων II.24, trans. Harmon, Loeb Vol. I, 327). Homer composes one more (very short) poem at the end of Lucian’s visit to the Isle of the Blessed. This time not a lengthy epic, but a two-line couplet commissioned by Lucian to put on his memorial stone placed in the harbor to mark his visit (II.28).\(^{70}\) Lucian toys with the possibilities of new compositions by the world’s most famous poet, but in his coy aversion of his readers’ eyes from anything more than two lines of this new poetry, we are left as we sail away with him from the Island with exactly what we had in the beginning—the epics of Homer.

The scene that Philostratus presents in the *Heroicus* differs in some important particulars. There are, in fact, two lyric hymns related in the *Heroicus*. The first is sung by Thessalian worshippers traveling to the shrine of Achilles on the island of Leuke in the Black Sea, and therefore sung by living mortals in the normal course of events. It is a hymn to Thetis and speaks mostly in praise of Achilles. The second is more germane to this treatment, since it is likewise a new composition sung by a dead hero. In Philostratus’ dialogue, the vinedresser relates the poem as told to him by Protesilaus, the hero of the Trojan cycle with whose ghost he has a special relationship. Unlike the Island of the Blessed in Lucian, in the *Heroicus* Achilles and Helen have an island to themselves in the middle of the Black Sea. It is not thick with other heroes, although other heroes periodically visit, as do living worshipers as we saw above with the Thessalians. Achilles spends his time in much the same way as he did by his ships when he

\(^{70}\) “Λουκίανος τάδε πάντα φίλος μακάρεσσι θεοίσιν εἴδε τε καὶ πάλιν ἡλθε φίλην ἐξ πατρίδα γαίαν.” One Lucian, whom the blessed gods befriend, Beheld what’s here, and home again did wend. (trans. Harmon, Loeb Vol. I, 333)
removed himself from battle: he sings songs to the lyre (Iliad 9.189). Like Lucian’s heroes, his favorite songs are those of Homer, in which Achilles himself plays such a grand role. But Achilles is not content only to sing the songs of Homer. He also composes new songs. Unlike the tantalizing “lost” poems of Lucian’s Homer, Philostratus records in its entirety one of the new songs that Achilles has written (according to the hero Protesilaus) “just this year” (πέρυσι)—a hymn to the goddess Echo.

Achilles’ new hymn acts as a perfect foil to Thecla’s. Both are lyric hymns within larger prose works, and in particular, within dialogues. There is also a striking concurrence in singer. Achilles is a hero enjoying a blessed life after his death. Thecla is also post-death, enjoying a banquet and the company of fellow virgins. While Achilles celebrates with Helen, Thecla celebrates with the other virgins. But I argue that the parallel between Thecla’s Hymn to Christ the Bridegroom and Achilles’ “Hymn to Echo” goes beyond setting, into a radical involvement that both express with time.

Philostratus’ Heroicus is concerned to revive the past for the purpose of reactivating it in the present. Achilles’ poem is part of the same project.

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71 According to Plutarch, Alexander the Great was particularly taken with the idea of Achilles playing the lyre. See Life of Alexander XV, when Alexander tours Troy and rejects the offer to see the “lyre of Paris”: “For that lyre,” said Alexander, “I care very little; but I would gladly see that of Achilles, to which he used to sing the glorious deeds of brave men” (trans. Perrin, Loeb 263). Another version of the same story is found in On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander the Great 331D. For the continuation of this theme in Latin poetry, see Statius I.188-94, and a reflection on this scene in Heslin 2005, 86-93.

72 “One thing the juxtaposition of heroic ghosts and Homeric criticism allows Philostratus to explore is the relationship between the present and the heroic, Homeric past. As Tim Whitmarsh has remarked, the emphasis on the heroic epiphanies and interventions can be seen as a re-assertion of the importance and power of archaic energies, which still maintain their strength millennia later [Whitmarsh 2004, 245; Whitmarsh 2009.] In this sense, Protesilaus plays a key role as a link between the present and the past…These works center on figures who function as living embodiments of the past and speak to the Second Sophistic desire to travel back in time: Dio’s rustic Euboean hunters and primitive, archaic [198] Borysthenites, and Philostratus’
The hymn turns out to be not about Echo at all, but primarily about Achilles. Achilles seems to have no unease promoting his own praise. Homer has already done it for him, and all he needs to do is sing the songs that have been previously written. Achilles’ lyre sings Echo. Echo sings Homer. Homer sings of Achilles. Achilles sings of himself, but only through the tradition, through the mouths of others.

The last line of the poem summarizes the nostalgic nature of the entire enterprise: κλέος ἠρατο κοῦ πέσε Τροία: Achilles’ glory has risen and Troy has not fallen. The balance is perfect in an unending loop stuck in the past. There is no conclusion to the story, no climax or completion. However, it is also true that echoes of the past sound different when they strike the ear of a modern listener, sounding different because of what has come immediately before it. Nostalgic repetition cannot be simple replication of the past, but takes on new meanings in its new context.

‘Cynic Superman’ Agathion. The fascination with these individuals stems from their preservation of archaic attitudes, values, and even language, untainted by the corruption of the modern era…Protesilaus provides immediate access to a long lost past, an intimate and powerful connection that goes far beyond that enabled through material remains and artifacts. In him, the vast temporal distance separating the heroic past from the contemporary world is collapsed.” (Kim 2010, 197-198)
As has been extensively investigated by Graham Miles, the poem composed by Philostratus and put into the mouth of Achilles can be read as a statement about Philostratus’ own aesthetic allegiances. It is emphatically a new song, composed by Achilles only this year (πέρυσιν), which points to Philostratus’ own pride in his innovation (and there is the hope of re-performance, perhaps, since the vinedresser makes a point to say that Protesilaus knows the hymn by heart and often sings it—it is popular, at least among the dead heroes). Although new, the hymn is an invocation of Echo, and is in praise of the works of Homer. Clearly there is playfulness in hearing Achilles praise Homer instead of the other way around, but it is playfulness at the service of a deeply serious purpose. Philostratus is suggesting that his own dialogue, concerned as it is to bring the dead heroes of Troy back to life again to communicate directly with the present, is also part of the echoing activity common to the aesthetic of the Second Sophistic. Lawrence Kim’s *Homer Between History and Fiction in Imperial Greek Literature* investigated the implications of this hymn for Philostratus’ relationship with the legacy of Homer. Contrasting it with Lucian’s depiction of Homer in the *True Histories*, which Kim believes to be a deliberate fictionalization of Homer, in the *Heroicus*, “Philostratus has collapsed the distant past and the immediate present…Philostratus crosses those Homeric orders into the uncharted territories of heroic fiction” (Kim 2010, 213).

The similarity in positioning between Philostratus’ hymn and Methodius’ hymn is met by an initial similarity in content. The first line of Thecla’s hymn also alludes to an echo. Or rather, not quite an echo, but a noise that looks suspiciously like an echo.

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\text{Ἄνωθεν, παρθένοι, βοής} \\
\text{ἐγερθεῖνεκρος ἤχος ἤλθε νυμφίῳ λέγων} \\
\text{πασσυδὶ ύπαυγαίειν λευκαίσιν ἐν στολαῖς} \\
\text{kai λαμπάσι πρὸς ἀντολάς· ἐγρεσθε πρίν φθάση}
\]

73 Miles 2005, 72
Arousing us from death, o virgins, came the sound of a cry from above, telling us to meet the bridegroom with all our force, wearing white robes and with our lamps to the east. Awaken before the lord arrives and enters the gates before you!

Whereas in Philostratus, Echo was swirling about the waters of the Pontus, emphasizing horizontality, the dead-rousing noise (ἐγερσίνεκρος ἡχος) comes from above, calling the virgin singers to ascend. Once again, as in the discussion of the shifted chronotope of the Symposium in Chapter 2, the vertical is emphasized in preference to the horizontal. Hymns are typically calls for the presence of a god, calls for epiphany. There is a sense of journeying. While that is true in Methodius’ poem as well, the journey is fundamentally one of the hymnists themselves and not only the god. The god is telling the worshippers to move, to approach, to enter, in a parallel movement with his own arrival. In contrast to Achilles’ song, this sound is not a singer asking for songs about himself, stuck in the past, but rather has a divine origin and is an invitation for action, for movement forward.

**Liturgical Time, Teleology and Repetition**

As soon as Thecla begins the second verse, the readers are in for another surprise. It begins with “Βροτῶν,” and that “beta” immediately brings with it the suspicion that this poem is going somewhere specific. An alphabetic hymn has a teleology—it presses on towards Omega. Bart Keunen, in his expansion of the Baktinian concept of chronotope, has suggested that all works of literature can be divided into two basic chronotopes, the teleological (which he also calls monologic) and the episodic (which he calls dialogic) (Keunen 2011, 9). Another way of

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74 Christ is the Alpha and the Omega in the book of Revelations.
phrasing the difference between Methodius and other non-Christian Second Sophistic writers such as Philostratus could be that Methodius’ work is part of a tradition of teleological aesthetics. But the questions remain: must teleology insist upon closure? Is it right to make a connection between teleology and monology as Keunen does so easily?\textsuperscript{75} Or is it possible to imagine a teleology that is still open and deeply dialogic?

Methodius’ teleology impacts his literary choices, but I have argued in the rest of this dissertation that such a teleology need not be closed and monologic. Perhaps such a teleological, yet non-closural narrative can be explained using the theological terminology of the post-modern theologian Catherine Pickstock. Her interest lies in the ways in which Christianity’s specific (liturgical) forms of repetition might be able to move beyond the backwards-looking recollection found in Plato. Methodius’ \textit{Symposium} suggests just such a repetition that is teleological, i.e. it has a narrative, but is also productive and developing, not bound to repeat the “same sameness.”

…the time of the liturgy is not that of a measurable “advance” away from a magnificent past which it nonetheless years to reclaim identically, nor does it offer the satisfaction of a spatial accomplishment, which, in the case of immanentism, mimics a pagan attempt to return to an anteriority prior to time. Rather, liturgical time is tilted away from any delimited or inscribed attainment, and, in its prefatory casting, implicitly offers a critique of the violence of an immanentist construal of time which claims to obtain an “arrival,” and perforce closes off the \textit{potential} of human action. (Pickstock 1998, 221)

Pickstock’s insistence that the Christian experience of time is non-nostalgic also implies non-closure in the future, but she goes farther than Methodius would perhaps like in suggesting the fundamental importance of non-arrival. After all, the virgins in Methodius’ dialogue eagerly anticipate a moment when someone will come, when they

\textsuperscript{75} I do not have time here to do justice to Keunen’s ambitious project, which attempts to map out all chronotopes in the history of literature onto changing moral universes. A longer treatment would certainly involve interacting with his idea of “eschatological narrative,” which he sees as one of the most important turning points in the history of teleological chronotopes (Keunen 2011, 91-92).
will in fact enter into the divine wedding banquet with him and will not have to move beyond it to a further symposium. Yet, the sense of continued activity persists, the idea that what they are doing in their symposium *now* will be something akin to what they will be doing in their symposium *then*: creating harmonic offerings to God with ever-changing variation.

In Pickstock’s concluding words to her book, she summarizes the new sense of time thus:

> And, again, fetishization is prevented because the resurrection story has neither beginning nor end. However, this “openness” of plot does not betoken a dissolution into the formless void, nor narrative nothingness, since it is precisely because death and life are here no longer held in opposition that there can be analogous repetition, which thus realizes this story as one of quintessential form, compatible with infinity and non-closure. This is a constitutive incompleteness which genuinely welcomes the other in an ecstatic presence, in contrast to the postmodern void which is trapped within the illusion of the same sameness. The analogous identity is always transcendent, and so there is always more to come: “Eternity is the true repetition.” [Kierkegaard] Such an identity, unlike that attained through backwards recollection, would always remain to be completed, but is not thereby rendered incoherent. Rather, this incompleteness is precisely the ceaseless rediscovery of a positive but unanalyzable proportion between time and eternity.” (Pickstock 1998, 266)

The Christian participation in and re-presentation of the resurrection (for Pickstock, this is particularly played out in the repeated Eucharist) is a teleological dialogue, remaining open because of the non-identity of each participant, and their creatureliness, which stands in constant interaction with the uncreatedness of God. The speeches of the virgins are all different even though they are praising the same virtue and the same God. The individual remains, both in the dialogue and after death, as argued in Zorzi 2003b. Even though each virgin becomes wedded

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76 One of Methodius’ primary eschatological concerns is to show that not only the soul, but also the body will be resurrected. It is fundamentally important for Methodius’ theology that the body, as an integral part of the human, also is united with the soul in the resurrection. The body was made by God in the beginning, and was meant to persist. And as such, variation among
to the Bridegroom and is willing to join in the singular verbs of the hymnic refrain, they are not identical repetitions of one another.\textsuperscript{77}

Repetition is an ambiguous concept, which can be oriented either towards the past or to eternity. Achilles’ Echo poem keeps us in the past through its repetition of the story of the Trojan War, while the repetition of Methodius’ \textit{Symposium} (which is an image, and therefore a repetition of the future, divine symposium) repeats in order to drive forward to the future, to the on-going completion of the story in continual non-identical repetitions. The difference can be brought out through thinking about the refrain in Methodius’ hymn. When the virgins perform the hymn, they form a circular chorus around two figures, Thecla and Arete. Their hymn is antiphonal, Thecla singing the verses and the other virgins responding with the refrain.

When she had finished, Theopatra said, she bade everyone to rise from table and, standing underneath the chaste-tree, to sing a becoming hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord; and she asked Thecla to begin and lead the way. And when they stood up, she said that Thecla took her position in the midst of the virgins, with Arete on her right. She then began to sing beautifully; and the other maidens stood around her in a circle, thus forming a choir, and joined her in the refrain. (Musurillo 151)\textsuperscript{78}

The poem appears to be repetitive in the fact that it has a refrain at all, and the repetition might be symbolized in the circular stance of the chorus. But the return to the refrain is also a commitment to continued movement, avoiding the dangers of eternal looping found in Achilles’ hymn, both because of the narrative story of journey embedded in the poem but also because of bodies (and not only souls) will also persist. These arguments form the content of his dialogue \textit{On the Resurrection}. For an analytic summary, see Mejzner 2011, 14-43.

\textsuperscript{77} Pickstock further develops the idea of non-identical repetition as a fundamental concept in Pickstock 2013.

\textsuperscript{78} Ταῦτα οὖν εἶποῦσαν ἑφη κελεύσας πᾶσας ἀναστῆναι τὴν Αρετῆν ἢ Θεοπάτρα, καὶ στάσας ὑπὸ τὴν ἄγνον εὐχαριστήριον πρεπόντως ὑμῖν ἀναπέμψαι τῷ κυρίῳ, ἐξάρχειν δὲ τὴν Θέκλαν καὶ προφητεύειν. Ὡς οὖν ἀνέστησαν, τὴν Θέκλαν μέσην μὲν τὸν παρθένον ἑφη, ἐκ δεξιῶν δὲ τῆς Ἀρετῆς στάσας κοσμίως ψάλλειν, τὰς δὲ λοιπὰς ἐν κύκλῳ καθάπερ ἐν χορῷ σχήματι συστάσας ὑπακούειν αὐτῇ.
the alphabetic structure.\textsuperscript{79} In addition, we are in a complicated situation where, although Thecla sings each verse alone, different voices from the past fill out the refrain: each of the exempla in turn “cry out” the promise of movement toward the coming Bridegroom. There is variation in the similarity.

**Monovocality and Polyvocality:**

It is now time to return to an issue that exercised us in the first chapter, to look again at the familiar passage from the introduction to *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity*. Simon Goldhill claims that Thecla’s chorus-leading is a sign of the fundamentally closed nature of Methodius’ dialogue in opposition to pagan dialogues which are genuinely open to polyphonic voices.

The second-century [sic] Syrian [sic] Christian Methodius writes a *Symposium*, where a group of virgins ‘discuss’ the benefits of virginity: it is clearly modeled on Plato as well as the sympotic tradition and aims to replace the Platonic image of desire with a Christian repression of desire. **But in the piece, each virgin gives a set speech, and they end by singing hymns [sic] together: it is a dialogue without conversation.** It inevitably—and proudly—lacks the dangerous thrill of a drunken Alcibiades crashing into the party, flute girl on each arm, to relate his failed attempt to seduce Socrates. (Goldhill 2006, 5)

Goldhill focuses on the end of the internal narration as a key place to see whether the dialogue is opened or closed, and he is surely right to look for closural motifs here, and to see how they may differ from Methodius’ model, Plato’s *Symposium*. Stepping back from the reading I put forth in

\textsuperscript{79} It is suggestive that a theological concept for precisely this sense of eternal eschatological movement would be developed by Gregory of Nyssa in the generation following Methoidus. Jean Daniélou, in particular, has picked out the concept of *ekeptasis*, or stretching forward, as a vital concept in Gregory of Nyssa’s eschatology (Daniélou 1944, 309-326.). For Nyssen, perfection is not a state to be attained, but consists in continual progress, even after death. The eschatology of Methodius, although not stated in a systematic way, has been well-studied by Mejzner 2011. Methodius nowhere explicitly states the same idea as Gregory Nyssa, but the expectation in the Symposium seems to imply a similar idea (and we know that Gregory was influenced by Methodius, especially in his works on the resurrection of the body, see Patterson 1997, 186-196).
the first chapter of this dissertation, I would like to say here that there is a certain amount of merit in Goldhill’s analysis. At this point in the story, as Thecla ends her song, there is indeed a strong sense of closure. Ending the internal narration of the *Symposium* with this hymn provides a nice counter-weight to various voices in competition throughout the dialogue. Thecla sings each verse and the rest of the virgins join in on the refrain on cue. The polyphony of dialogic voices finally gives way to the unity of the refrain. Although they each made their way up the mountain and through Arete’s gates separately, they pray to enter their future bridal gates together. Although they gave different speeches and were willing to compete with each other rhetorically (see Chapter 3), their true union of endeavor shines forth in their common song at the end. As Plutarch suggested, music often plays a unifying role at symposia (*QC* 7.8).

However, there are multiple reasons that simple monovocality is difficult to assert, even looking to the end. First of all, within the poem there is a constantly changing voice of the speaker. Thecla is purportedly singing the verses, while the rest of the women sing the refrain, but often the speaker’s identification is blurred. For example, there is a switch between the singular and plural in stanza zeta, even though the refrain continues in the singular. Even more important than the confusion over the number of speakers is the ventriloquism that fills the hymn. The chorus of virgins take on different personas as they “cry out” the refrain in the exemplum section. The virgin chorus joins a much larger diachronic chorus that has been singing this refrain since the second generation of humanity, since the blood of Abel cried out to heaven. This cuts both ways. On the one hand, Methodius adds more voices to his song, voices

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80 Plutarch is talking: “The best occasion for musical entertainment is a party where the waves of strife or rivalry are rising towards a crest. There it can drown out name-calling; it can check a discussion that is deviating into an unpleasant squabble or a contest in sophistry; or if the discussion is moving in the direction of political and legal controversy it can keep it in hand until the company settles down to a fresh start quiet and free from gales of eloquence.” (trans. Minar, Sandback and Helmbold, Loeb Vol. 9, 91)
from the distant past as well as the present.\textsuperscript{81} On the other hand, he combines all of those voices into one song, united across time, gender, and level of belief in the value of virginity and the person of Christ.

Secondly, in addition to the complication of voice, a simple monologic reading is complicated by the structure of the poem as a lyric composition composed in stanzas. Just as in the dialogue there were subsequent speeches that were obliquely related to each other, requiring interpretation, so too in the hymn each stanza follows the next often with no connective tissue.\textsuperscript{82} Variation continues as a vital element in Methodius’ literary aesthetics. The reader must strive to make sense of the multiple units of thought or remain content to let the connections among the sections of the song remain allusive. Having two concurrent divisions in a twenty-four stanza poem produces a certain amount of syncopation and pleasing variation. I argued above that the variety in the metrical form of the stanzas is an intentional organizational tactic for the poem. The reader’s expectations are developed and teased to feel the combination of the two divisions right before the final set of six stanzas. This syncopation contributes to the poem’s sense of polyvocality and requires a sophisticated response from its auditors. Yet this syncopation unites at the end with the last set of six stanzas. Like the rest of the dialogue, the hymn contains elements of both unity and variation.

Finally, even if the poem functions as something of a closural device for the internal narration, the point made in the first chapter must be recalled: the hymn is not the end of the dialogue, but is followed by the re-opening of discussion by the framing narrators. The poem function as a mini-closural device, as a close to the episode, but any belief that it is utterly final

\textsuperscript{81} For the idea of a symposium as a particularly appropriate place to have “dialogues with the dead,” see König 2012, 40-52. 
\textsuperscript{82} We spoke about the arrangement of speeches in Chapter 3, and about the arrangement of stanzas earlier in this chapter.
is a false expectation, which becomes apparent when Methodius refuses to end his dialogue at the fade-out. The type of closure Methodius offers is one that simultaneously allows for constant progress forward, and for the continuation of variety. After this dialogue, a different dialogue starts, with a new topic, inspired by, but not the same as, the one that came before. Methodius offers a type of closure that embraces his eschatology, his theology of how humans end, or rather, do not end. Just as there is room for another dialogue to begin (with the promise that it will be continued tomorrow, an on and on), so the virgins have every reason to believe that the symposium that they are going to enter upon the return of the bridegroom will continue to be filled with a variety of voices. A reason that Goldhill might mis-characterize the spirit of the Symposium is because he cannot hear the new type of “dangerous thrill” that Methodius offers in his new theology, although it comes without a drunken Alcibiades. Methodius and his virgins do not think of Christianity as a way of life for those who want the comfort of certainty, but for those who are caught by adventure. Even while remaining brides, the women in the dialogue are given the opportunity to become philosophers and heroes.

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83 The final words of the dialogue contain this promise: “Gregorion: ‘Yes, that is true, and I should like to discuss this further with you. So, if you like, I shall come back tomorrow and listen again to these matters. But now, as you see, it is already time to go and give attention to the outer man.’” (Musurillo 162)
Conclusion

My dissertation examined the literary repercussions of a change in world-view in a central text of a non-central author of the Imperial period, Methodius of Olympus. Rather than presenting a strictly theological or a strictly literary reading of his Symposium, I have explored the intersection of these two themes. An interest in the literary expression of theology seems particularly legitimate for an author such as Methodius, who was so interested in beauty, form and variation in his literary creations. This dissertation has asked how literature can be used to reorient readers’ expectations and assumptions about the world. In an easily recognized genre like the Symposium, innovation is particularly highlighted. Since one can clearly see how each practitioner uses it differently to highlight their particular orientation, the Symposium is a useful genre through which to track change over time.

My interest in Methodius’ literary form is a reflection of the ways in which some of his earliest readers read his text. The first papyrus discovered that preserves any text of Methodius was published in 2012 and belongs to a private Spanish collection (P.Monts.Roca inv. no. 731). It is a long, narrow strip of scrap parchment. The handwriting most likely dates from the late fifth or early sixth centuries, only two hundred years or so after Methodius penned his dialogue. While one side contains extracts from Methodius’ Symposium, the other side contains “gnomic sentences” of unknown provenance. The passages from the Symposium are take from two speeches, Thecla’s eighth and Thalia’s third: 8.16.72, 3.14.35, 3.8.60 and 3.9.18. Not only is it strange that the compiler skips backwards from Thecla’s eighth speech to Thalia’s third speech, but also that he recreates the extracts from Thalia’s speech out of sequence. In addition, wedged

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1 Torallas Tovar and Worp 2012
2 As argued in Chapter 3, Thecla and Thalia share parallel positions, as the highlighted center of their halves, and they both have external narration after they have finished.
between the extracts from Thecla and the extracts from Thalia comes a fragment not found in our version of the *Symposium* at all, a short sentence about the rising of the Nile.

The passage from this collection most interesting for the project of my dissertation reproduces 3.14.35: not the heights of theological harmony for which Thalia’s speech was so notable, but, rather, the interstitial dialogue of Eubulion and Gregorion after Thalia’s speech has ended.

In Musurillo’s edition:

[Ἀλλ’ ἵθι καὶ] τὰ λοιπὰ ἐφεξῆς μνη-μονεύσαντες ὡς ἐτὶ ἐναυλιὸν τὴν ἀκρόασιν ἔχειν μοι δ[οκῶ,] πρὶν ἀπο-πτῆναι κ(αί) δι[α-] φυγεῖν εὐθε-ξάλειπτοι γὰρ νέον ἀκουσμάτων μνήμαι γερόντων. (Torallas Tovar and Worp 2012, 767)

GREG. [But come,] let us try to recall and consider the rest of the banquet in order, repeating it as faithfully as we can, while I still feel I have the sound of it ringing in my ears. Otherwise it may all fly away and disappear:

For easily erased is news that is fresh
From the memory of the aged. (Musurillo 74)

At least one early reader, then, was interested not only in the virgins’ ascetic theology or creative exegesis, but also the dramatic technique of the dialogue itself.\(^3\) In particular, this reader chose

\(^3\) Another one of the fragments seems equally interested in style over substance: 3.9.18 “…because I am so dull-witted, I am unable to speak as its dignity and grandeur deserves.”
to copy out a line where Gregorion exhorts remembrance and recollection, which was necessary for the fictional creation of the dialogue in the first place. Additionally, the extractor has preserved one of the few small poems of the dialogue—one a line and a half of otherwise unattested iambic trimeter. As we examined in Chapter 4, Methodius’ poetic talent is one of the ways that he expresses his commitment to aesthetic variety at the service of harmony. Of course, it is highly speculative to imagine exactly what the person who copied out this text was doing (simple handwriting practice? notes for later use?), but it is at least suggestive that the literary reading of Methodius put forth in this dissertation is not without precedent in the earliest tradition.

Methodius’ corpus, which is only now finally being edited and made available to the wider reading public, is a rich site for further investigation into the literary productions being composed in a historically transitional time. Perhaps in a society where there were fewer opportunities to perform in political settings, where there is little political stability and therefore little possibility of intercession with political powers (especially for marginalized Christians), new venues were opening up for rhetorical production. But simultaneous to the growth in the possibilities found in the auditorium of a church, there was also a continuation of the philosophical-rhetorical schools that we know from Origen and Philostratus.

It should also be recalled that Methodius is only one point on a long, continuing web of literary influence. As Averil Cameron’s ongoing work is showing, the philosophical dialogue has an exceptionally long life, well into the Byzantine period. The Imperial era, however, proved a particularly transitional time in its development, and it is during the first to third

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4 Musurillo suggests that it is either from a lost work, or is Methodius’ own creation, like the cento of Thecla or the concluding hymn (Musurillo 205).
5 The editing of Methodius’ Slavonic corpus is the current research project of a group at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität in Jena, Germany, headed by Prof. Katharina Bracht.
centuries that it was experiencing some of its most radical changes. For instance, this time saw a
decrease in the importance of the mimetic construction of the situation, and interlocutors began
to be reduced to abstractions.  

Two collections of themes in particular run throughout the four chapters, both of which interact with contemporary literary concerns of the Second Sophistic. The first is Methodius’ resistance to the literary nostalgia for the past that often typifies the literature of the Second Sophistic. Rather than the past, Methodius chooses to orient himself and his readers towards the future. He finds ways of expressing this change in orientation through literary styling, most especially in the change in setting for his dialogue and the emphasis on the role of the imagination not to bring forth ekphrases of past events, but ekphrases of those that are yet to come. Christians are meant to spend time imagining their future lives, and Methodius’ project is to aid their imagination by presenting a fetching world that partially participates in the full version yet to come. His sympotic aesthetic is an aesthetic of hope.

The second cluster of themes central to this project is the role of variation and harmony within the dialogue. This touches on issues of consensus and closure more broadly, which have been topics of interest to those researching the ancient dialogue. How varied are the voices of those participating in the competition? Does staged difference, with a unified ending, work in the same way as genuine difference? Is it possible to say that these women really “do” dialogue at all, if they are fundamentally in agreement and are all potentially ventriloquizing the voice of Methodius? I argued that Methodius insists on maintaining variety on a multiple of levels, and

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6 This was to flower in the following centuries. For example, see Theodoret of Cyrrhus’ Eranistes (mid-fifth century), analyzed in Cameron 2014, 44-51. Theodoret describes how he will forgo the tradition of using personas to make his argument, and instead call his speakers by their position, e.g. Orthodoxus and Eranistes, so that the argument will be easier for readers to understand.
that, moreover, he believes that variety will persist even into the *eschaton*, when the arrival of the Bridegroom allows the virgins to enter into a more real symposium of which their current symposium is only an image. The harmonization of this variety is part of the on-going interaction between openness and closure, between unity and diversity, that is one of the characteristics that makes Methodius’ *Symposium* such a complex and fascinating text.
## Appendix A:
### An Alphabetic Translation of the Hymn of Thecla
with Metrical Comments

### I. Thecla’s Hymn:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refrain:</th>
<th>Υπακοή</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am pure for you, and holding in hand the light-bearing lamps, o Bridegroom, I go to meet you.</td>
<td>Αγνεύω σοι καὶ λαμπάδας φασεφάρους κρατοῦσα, νυμφίε, ὑπαντάνω σοι.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Αναθεν, παρθένοι, βοής ἔγερσινεκρος ἢρος ἦλθε νυμφίω λέγων πασσοῦτ ὑπαντάνει λευκαίσιον ἐν στοιλαίς καὶ λαμπάσι πρὸς ἀντόλας ἕγρευθε πρὶν φθάσῃ μολεῖν εἴσοι θυρῶν ἀνας.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Βροτῶν πολυστένακτον ὄλβον ἐκφυγοῦσα καὶ βίου τρῳφὴν ἄδονας τ’ ἔροτα σας ὑπ’ ἁγκάλαις ἔξωφροις ποηθε σκέπεσθαι καὶ βλέπειν τὸ σὸν κάλλος διηνεκῆς, μάκαρ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>Γάμων λυποῦσα θνητά λέκτρα καὶ δόμον, ἀνας, διὰ σὲ πολύχρυσον, ἦλθον ἀσπίλοις ἐν εἵμαιν ὑπὸς φθάσω κἀγώ πανολβίον θαλάμων εἴσοι σὸν σοι μολεῖν.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>Δόλως δράκοντος ἐκφυγοῦσα μυρίους, μάκαρ, θελετηρίους· ἔπλην δέ καὶ πυρὸς φλόγα καὶ θηρίων ἀνημέρων ὁμίας βροτοθῆρος σὲ προσμένους’ ἀπ’ οὐρανῶν.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsilon</td>
<td>Ἐλαθόμην πάτρας ποθοῦσα σὴν χαρίν, λόγε, ἐλαθόμην τε παρθένον ὁμηλίκων χοροῦς μητρὸς τι καὶ γένους φρίγαμα· πάντα γὰρ σὺ μοι αὐτὸς σὺ, Χριστέ, τυγχάνεις.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeta</td>
<td>Ζωῆς χαραγῶς, Χριστέ, χαίρε φῶς ἀνέσπερον· ταύτην δέδεξο τὴν βοὴν· χορὸς σε παρθένων προσενέπει, τέλειον ἀνθὸς, ἀγάπη, χαρά, φρόνησι, σοφία, λόγε.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eta</td>
<td>Ἡνοιγμένας θύραις, ἀνασά σα φαινόκοσμε, δέδεξο θαλάμων εἴσοι χ’ ἡμᾶς, ἁραντόσωμε, καλλίνικε νῦμα, καλλίτου· μέλπουσαι σὸν γάμον, θάλος.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theta</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavily-groaning maidens now bitterly lament outside the gates of the bridegroom and they cry out mournfully because having extinguished the light of their lamps they did not enter in time the treasure-house of grace.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Θρηνοῦσι νῦν βαρύστοιν κόραι πυλῶν πυρηνίων νυμφῶν έξω καὶ βοάδι γορέως, ότι τό λαμπάδιον ἀποσβέσασας φῶς οὐκ ἔθάσαν χαρᾶς οἰκείας εἰσελθέν.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Iota</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Into easy paths, having turned from the holy road, the wretched women neglected to procure enough oil. And carrying lamps bereft of brilliant fire, they groan internally, from their minds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ἡ ιερᾶς ὀδὸς γὰρ ἐκτραπεζία πρὸς βίου πόρους κτήσασθ’ ἐλαίαν ἡμέλησαν ἄλλα πλέον. νεκρὰς δὲ φλογερὸν πῦρς φέρουσα λαμπάδας στένουσιν ἐνόν ἐκ φρενῶν.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Kappa</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kraters of nectar, full of sweetness, lie before us Let us drink! It is a heavenly drink, virgins, which The bridegroom set for those who have been called With the worthy into the wedding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Κρατήρες αὐτοληθέσει πρόκειται νέκταρος· πίνομεν· οὐράνιον ἐστὶ πόμα, παρθένειν, ὁ νυμφὸς ὑπὲρ τέθεικε τοὺς μετ᾿ ἀξίας εἰς τὸν γάμον κακλημένους.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Lambda</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luminously, Abel was a type for your death, O blessed one, he said, looking into heaven, dripping blood, 'Receive me, pitilessly wounded by a relative's hand I beg you, Word.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Λαμπρὸς σου θάνατον Ἀβελ προεκτυπών, μάκαρ, ἔλεξεν αἰματοσταγής βλέπον εἰς οὐράνιον. Ἀνηλεῖος με συγγόνου τετρωμένον χειρὶ δέζαι, λιτάζομαι, λόγε:</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mu</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A majestic prize of purity Gained Joseph, your strong child, O Word. For the woman forcefully dragged him into a lawless bed burning with passion. But having turned aside not one bit he fled naked, crying out:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Μέγιστον ἄθλον ἀγνείας· ὁ κάρτερος σου παῖς, λόγε, Ἰσσήρ ἀνειλατό· γυνὴ γὰρ αὐτὸν εἰς ἅθεμα λέκτα βίαιος ἔλλεικ φλογομενή πόθος, ὁ δ’ οὐδὲν ἐκτραπεῖς ἔφευγε γυμνὸς ἐκβοῦν·</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Nu</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>His newly-slaughtered daughter Jeptha offered as a sacrifice to God, like a lamb around the altar, ignorant of man. But she nobly fulfilling the type of your flesh o blessed one, cried out with strength:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Νεοσφαγὴ· ὁ Ἱερείας κάρνης ἀνήγε θείαιν θεῶν ἀπειρον ἄνδρος ἀμφι βομόν ἀμινάδος δίκην. Ἡ δ’ εὐγενός σου τὸν τύπον τῆς σαρκὸς, οὔ μάκαρ, τελεῦσ’ ἑκραζε καρτερῶς.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Xi</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courageous Judith overcame the general of foreign hoards with wiles, bewitched him with the impressions of beauty and did not besmear the limbs of her body, but she said with victory-bearing cries:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ξένων στρατηλάτων όχλων εὔτολομος εὐστόχιος Ἰουδίθ θάλασσας καρατομήσασα, κάλλεσσι τύποις θέλωσα τοῦτον οὐδὲ χράνατα σώματος μέλη, νικαφόρος δ’ ἐσθη βοαῖς.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Omicron</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On looking upon the beautiful form of Suzannah’s web two judges, crazy with erotic love, said, 'O woman, we have come desiring the beds of your secret marriages, girl.' But she said with trembling cries:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ὄραντες εἶδος εὐπρεπῆς ψῆφης δὸ κριταί Σοῦσάννας ἐμμαχαζές ἐροτὶ λέξαν· οὐ γύναι, κρυπτῶν σου γάμων λέχη ποθοῦντες ἤκουεν, φίλαι. νικαφόρος δ’ ἐσθη βοαῖς.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Pi</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Preferable it is by far for me to die than to betray my marriage bed for you, o women-crazy men, and to suffer eternal judgment under the flaming justice of God. Save me now, Christ, from these men!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Πολλῷ με καταθαναίν ἀμινίνον ἐστιν ἡ λέχη προδοδαν, ὁ γυναιμαχαζε, ὠμήν αἰονίαν δίκην ὑπ’ εμπυρίως θεοῦ τιμωρίας παθεῖν. Σῶσόν με, Χριστέ, τὸν τὸν νῦν.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Rho</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restoring the crowds of mortals with cleansing streams, your forerunner, blameless of evil towards men, was led to slaughter because of purity. But as he wet the dirt with red gore, he cried out to you, blessed one:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ῥοάς καθαρσίοις λούουν πλήθη βροτῶν ὁ σῶς πρόδρομος ἁμοίῳ κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρὸς εἰς σφαγήν ἤχθη δί’ ἀγνείαν, λόθρῳ δὲ φοινίῳ κόνιν δεύον ἔκραζε σοι, μάκαρ.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Metrical Analysis:

The Meter of the Stanza:

The meter of the poem is basically iambic, with three and a half metra per line. The final line of each stanza is an iambic dimeter. Pellegrino, Meyer, Maas, and others point to the frequent corruption of syllable length throughout the poem. In fact, Pellegrino notes that 32 of the 72 lines of three and a half metra havemetrical variations that would not be acceptable in

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1 Meyer 47-49, Maas 1962, 14, Pellegrino 1958, 30-32.
Classical iambic rhythm (Pellegrino 1958, 30). Each of these scholars hold up Thecla’s hymn as evidence of the shift from Classical quantitative rhythm to Byzantine accentual rhythm, and also as evidence that knowledge of correct quantities was beginning to slip. Although there may be some evidence of a shift to accentual rhythm, there is still quite a difference between this poem and, for instance, the slightly later Christian abecedarian poem in the collection of the Amherst Papyri. This poem, written in an iambic meter as well, has a firmly standardized paroxytone accent at the end of each partial line, which we do not see in Methodius’ poem.

The Meter of the Refrain

The meter of the refrain follows nearly the same pattern as the final two lines of each stanza. The difficulty is that there are fifteen syllables in the first line (instead of the regular fourteen in the stanza lines) and the second line, at first glance, seems to have too many short syllables.

\[
\text{Ἡγνεύω σοι καὶ λαμπάδας φαεσφόρους, κρατοῦσα,}
\]

\[
\text{νυμφίε, ύπαντάνω σοι.}
\]

---

2 “The earliest false quantities in the verse of educated writers occurs in the works of Methodius of Patara, Areius, and Gregory Nazianzen, all Christians who did not expect their public to have an ear for rhythms belonging to the heathen past,” Maas says provocatively (Maas 1962, 14)! Meyer insists that these “false quantities” are not due to ignorance, but to changing aesthetics, and the rise of accentual rhythm (Meyer 48). Pellegrino follows him in this interpretation, pointing to 21 places where “false quantity” could be caused by tonic accent (Pellegrino 1958, 31).

3 The second papyri in the collection of Grenfell and Hunt, called by them “Christian Hymn” and dated to the early fourth century. “The hymn belongs to a period of transition when the old principles of prosody were giving way, and the new ones were asserting themselves, but as yet everything was fluctuating and uncertain. The same conflict between quantity and accent is to be seen in progress in the Παρθένιον of Methodius…but in our hymn the tonic principle is already on the path of victory. The strongest characteristic of the scheme is the accented penultimate…” (Grenfell and Hunt 1900, 23-24)
The first line is an iambic tetrameter catalectic, and the second an iambic dimeter catalectic. The first metron has an unacceptable long third foot, but this is often seen in Methodius. The two shorts in the second beat of the second line can be understood as a resolution of a long. Therefore, apart from the long omega in Ἀγνεύω, the refrain follows typical iambic rules.

Other readers are not so sure that the refrain can be nicely molded into an iambic meter as it stands, and suggest emendations. Meyer’s suggested emendation rearranges the second half, getting rid of the catalectic nature of both lines (Meyer 46, cited in Pellegrino 1958, 37):

-- -- -- / -- -- u -- / u -- / -- --
Αγνεύω σοι καὶ λαμπάδας φαεσφόρους, κρατοῦσ’,
u – u -- / -- -- u x
ὑπαντάνω σοι, νυμφίε,

The benefit to this emendation is that the refrain would more closely mimic the strophes, which have three lines of fourteen beats followed by one line of eight. But there are resolutions elsewhere in the strophes (e.g. the dactyl πασσυδὶ at the beginning of alpha 3, and the anapest θαλάμων, at the beginning of gamma 4), creating a different number of syllables per line, so a simple syllabic count should not be a determining factor in scanning Methodius’ rhythm.

4 E.g. The long third beat happens three times in the alpha stanza alone (alpha 1, 3, 5). With such a high incidence, even with vowels that are unambiguously long, it seems more likely that Methodius has a different conception of acceptable iambic meter rather than that he is continually confusing the length of his syllables. A more thorough investigation would see if the long third foot occurs more often in the first metron than at other locations in the line (which is my sense), providing us with a better understanding of what Methodius felt was good poetics.

5 Pellegrino becomes confused with the division of feet in the second line, seeing it as trochee—pyrrhic—trochee—spondee rather than dactyl—iamb—iamb—catalectic iamb.

6 Despite the evidence of these resolutions, most commentators have persisted in wanting to see beat count as fundamental both because of the multiple false quantities and because of what they see as the movement to accentual rhythm. See Meyer 45 and Pellegrino 1958, 31.
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