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## *Genethliacon* for Barbara Bogołębska, or on the Need to Celebrate Birthdays and Anniversaries

The tradition of celebrating academic and private anniversaries (birthdays in particular), seems necessary to some, excessive to others, yet it is rarely compared to a tradition much older than the very notion of the university. Few people realise that the tradition is related to the topics particularly close to our dear jubilarian, Professor Barbara Bogołębska, as it mainly applies to literature and its specific genres: rhetoric and stylistics, and the dialogue between culture and faith.

The genre of a work written in celebration of various jubilees originated from the Greek *genethliacon*. Sadly though, few people, even those possessing academic education, know what a *genethliacon*,<sup>1</sup> in the past one of the best-known genres in the Mediterranean and European culture, truly is. How is it possible that, e.g. Polish dictionaries of literary terms, which offer definitions of even long lost and extremely particular genres such as Indian or Japanese drama,<sup>2</sup> lack even basic information on the genre which has existed in European literature (and even outside of it) for the last 23 centuries? In fact, it has been proven that the *genethliacon* is

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1 Cf. new monograph by B. Gaj, *Genethliakon – pieśń ku czci życia*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Warszawa 2018.

2 The most popular Polish dictionaries of literary terms include, e.g. a carefully developed entry regarding a "minor genre of the Indian drama" from the Mediaeval period called *goshthi* with only two dramas which have survived; additionally, a considerable amount of attention has also been devoted to Japanese mediaeval prose called *gunki monogatari*. Cf. *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich*, G. Gazda (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, pp. 365, 372–373. Cf. also *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich*, G. Gazda, S. Tynecka-Makowska (eds.), Universitas, Kraków 2006, pp. 279, 282–283.

a genre<sup>3</sup> that has existed since Callimachus (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), which was popular in ancient Rome for celebrating births and the anniversaries of births, sometimes lyrical, dramatised or rhetoric-epic, and which is practised even today in many languages of the world (in line with its traditions also in Latin or even Greek).

The *genes* or patterns of a genethliacon,<sup>4</sup> eagerly used by European Christians in various hagiographies and celebratory works, exist in other cultures outside Europe. For example, in Asia, the celebration of birthday anniversaries is more of a collective holiday and it did not develop a surviving literary genre. In various cultures and religions, then, only the birthdays of leaders, prophets and other figures subject to apotheosis are celebrated. However, due to mass culture, one could notice throughout the world at least some traces of the celebrations of birthday anniversaries, also in the form of metaphorical anniversary-birthdays of cities, institutions, companies and stores, and recently even people's befriending on social media. Finally, the English *Happy Birthday*<sup>5</sup> may be considered as the shortest yet the most popular genethliacon in global contemporary culture.

What was very common from the very beginning of the genre in European birthday-related works is that it required the inclusion of both individualism and ancient analogies between the Greek ideas of sight and birth: "to be born is to see the light of day,"<sup>6</sup> and the related gods of light: Greek Apollo and Roman Eileithya. Already the first Greek genethliacons from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC dedicated to specific individuals included extensive metaphors of light and references to Phoebus Apollo, the god of all arts. Interestingly enough, the first genethliacon in history was writ-ten for a woman, more specifically for a female new-born. Callimachus, the au-thor of the first documented genethliacon, dedicated it to his friend's newborn daughter. "I shall sing to the tiny newborn," (ἐγὼ δ' ἀεισομαι Μοῦσα τῇ μικκῆ) he declared. It is also worth taking a look at one of the first genethliacons written, also for a woman, in celebration of an anniversary of a birthday and a wedding at the same time:

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3 Cf. entry *genethliacon* in: *Der neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike. Das klassische Altertum und seine Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Hrsg. H. Cancik, H. Schneider, vol. 2, J.B. Metzler Verlag, Stuttgart 1996–2010, pp. 913–914.

4 Genes as components of a genre were discussed by, e.g. Witold Sadowski, who analysed the genre transformations of the litany. Cf. W. Sadowski, *Litania i poezja. Na materiale literatury polskiej od XI do XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2011.

5 Similar to the Latin wishes of very many years: *Plurimos annos* or the Polish: *Sto lat* (One hundred years). There are also wishes of health and all the best, e.g. the German *Alles Gute zum Geburtstag*, or in the Spanish version: "happy birthday jubilee": *Felice compleanno!*

6 Cf. F. Frontisi-Ducroux, "Oko, wzrok, spojrzanie – kilka greckich wyobrażeń", [in:] *Antropologia antyku greckiego*, P. Majewski, L. Trzcionkowski, W. Lengauer (eds.), Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2011, pp. 422, 428.

Εἶαρος ἦνθει μὲν τὸ πρὶν ρόδα, νῦν δ' ἐνὶ μέσσῳ  
 χεῖματι πορφυρέας ἐσχάσαμεν κάλυκας  
 σῆ ἐπιμειδήσαντα γενεθλίῃ ἄσμενα τῆδε  
 ἠοί, νυμφιδίων ἄσσοτάτη λεχέων.  
 Καλλίστης στεφθῆναι ἐπὶ κροτάφοισι γυναικὸς  
 λώιον ἢ μίμειν ἠρινὸν ἥελιον.<sup>7</sup>

The poem by Crinagoras could be translated as follows:

Roses used to flower in spring,  
 but we now in midwinter burst scarlet from our buds,  
 smiling gaily on this your natal morn that falls so nigh  
 to your wedding. To be seen on the brow of the loveliest of women is better  
 than to await the sun of spring.<sup>8</sup>

Anniversary genethliacons were written for princes and emperors, but also for regular people, both women and men. Leonides of Alexandria wrote a gift-composition for the ruler at his “birthday hours” (γενεθλιακαῖσιν ἐν ὥραις).<sup>9</sup> In another genethliacon, he mentioned the kinds of birthday gifts, i.e. “birthday rich gifts” (πλούτου δῶρα γενεθλιδία). Those could include crystals, silver, and yellow and green precious stones. Yet if one would compare them to the two couplets Leonides composed himself and which won in the informal competition for the best present, it would become clear that there was nothing more valuable than poetry. Leonides’ gifts were accepted more eagerly than other material gifts, and even envy, as the poet wrote (presumably the envy of other gift-givers), could not change that. Thus, birthday compositions have become a type of a special birthday gift.

Poetic works praising births and their anniversaries were also composed in ancient Rome and were known as *carmina natalia vel natalicia*.<sup>10</sup> Such works could be considered not so much as imitations of Greek genethliacons but rather as an independent and distinct genre, inspired not only by the Greek achievements in that scope, but also by local tradition. The Latin birthday song relates to the notion of *dies natalis* and, most importantly, with the transcendent figure called the *Genius natalis*. In ancient Italian mythology, every life, location or even a phenomenon had its Genius that was born with the birth of a new life, entering it as a divine element,

7 Cf. Crinagoras, *Palatine Anthology* VI, 261. Cf. also: *Anthologia Graeca*, Hrsg. H. Beckby, Heimeran Verlag, Munich 1965, pp. 1–6. Greek works or parts of those quoted in this article as fragments of the *Palatine Anthology* were taken from this edition.

8 Cf., *ibid.* English version: W.R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, London 1927.

9 Cf. Leonides of Alexandria, *Palatine Anthology* VI, 321.

10 *Carmen natale* in singular form, i.e. birthday song.

a symbol of immaterial life. Interestingly enough, those metaphysical beings were different depending on the sex of the related person or the kind of item or phenomenon. In ancient Rome, Genii were the protective spirits of men, and Junos of women. Human Genii and Junos were born when people were born, and they died when the people died. On one's birthday, people brought offerings to their protective deities to ensure their protection for the following year. The notions of Genii and Junos were vivid even in the phrasemes of Latin, e.g. in phrases which combined both the abstract and specific, such as *Genium/Iunonem suum/suam vino placare*. "Should please their Genius or Juno" meant not as much bringing offerings to a deity but rather being lenient when it came to their whims; the expression is translated as "revel in wine", "savour wine", which also confirmed the feast-related nature of any anniversary celebrations. At least since the 7<sup>th</sup> c. BC ancient Italians celebrated birthdays and other anniversaries by bringing offerings to protective deities to altars specially decorated for them with incense, wreaths, flowers and cake, and the already-mentioned wine. The celebrations were of a family nature, the so-called *feriae privatae*, and they consisted of four stages: offerings, requests, a feast, and games and merriment.<sup>11</sup> Also in those celebrations there was a place for a gift of poetry, somewhat different from Greek genethliacons, usually taking the form of an elegy. A birthday composition was one of the major motifs of the so-called Roman subjective elegy, which was developed with particular artistry and it was personalised, not just as an individual work but an integral part of artistically shaped books.<sup>12</sup> The first Roman genethliacon, i.e. a birthday Roman elegy, was Elegy I 7 written by the poet Tibullus for Messalla, celebrating the birthday of the famous chief and politician, who on his birthday won a battle against the Aquitanians and was celebrating his triumph. The distinct frame of the birthday song, which Kazimierz Morawski considered one of the most interesting elegies by Tibullus, or to quote him: an "expressive example of the profuseness of Tibullus' inspirations,"<sup>13</sup> was marked by the first and the final lines of the work. Within that frame, he introduced a praise (encomium) of the Egyptian god Osiris as the inventor of agriculture and the benefactor of humanity. Both Osiris and Bacchus were expected at the celebration of Messalla, whom the poet wished satisfaction in his sons and that they exceeded their father's deeds. The listed achievements did not only include battle deeds, but the entirety of his achievements, e.g. the founding of the road to Tusculum and Alba, for which he was adored by the local population. The composition concludes in a call to the god of the birthday to come better each year.

11 Cf. B. Nadolski, *Imieniny i urodziny w tradycji chrześcijańskiej Europy*, Wydawnictwo Święty Wojciech, Poznań 2007, p. 15.

12 H.C. Bowerman, "The Birthday as a Commonplace of Roman Elegy", *The Classical Journal* 1917, Vol. 12, No. 5, pp. 310–318, and E. Cesareo, *Il carne natalizio nella poesia latina*, Orfani Guerra, Palermo 1929. Cf. also G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy*, Methuen, London 1959.

13 Cf. K. Morawski, *Zarys literatury rzymskiej*, PAU, Warszawa 1922, p. 196.

Here is one of the most recent translations into Polish (by Aleksandra Arndt<sup>14</sup>) of the first Latin birthday composition:

W dniu tym – śpiew wzniosły Parki, przeznaczenia przędąc Nici, których rozplątać żaden bóg nie zdoła – W dniu tym nastąpi klęska akwitańskich plemion I zadrży z lęku Ataks podbity przez śmiałków. Tak stało się: niezwykły triumf rzymska młodzież Ujrzała i przegranych wodzów skute dłonie. Zaś ty, Messalo, w wieńcu laurowym na skroniach, Jechałeś na rydwanie, co z kości słoniowej. Nie beże mnie twój sukces: szczyty Pirenejów Świadkiem i santonńskiego brzegi oceanu, Świadkiem – wielka Garonna, Arar, rwący Rodan, Złotowłosych Karnutów ciemna toń Loary. Ciebie, Kydonie błękitny i milczący, sławić, Jak na mieliźnie wody rozlewasz spokojne, Czy sławić, jak wysoki, szczytem tkwiący w chmurach Taurus Cylicyjczyków żywi długobrodych? Obwieszczą, jak bezpiecznie leci przez miast wiele Ptak święty Syryjczyków – biała gołębica, A swe wieże ku morza bezkresowi zwraca	The Fatal Sisters did this day ordain, Reeling threads no god can rend, Foretelling to this man should bend The tribes of Aquitaine; And 'neath his legions' yoke Th' impetuous torrent Atur glide subdued. All was accomplished as the Fates bespoke; His triumph then ensued: The Roman youth, exulting from afar, Acclaimed his mighty deeds, And watched the fettered chieftains filing by, While, drawn by snow-white steeds, Messala followed on his ivory car, Laurelled and lifted high!  Not without me this glory and renown! Let Pyrenees my boast attest! Tarbella, little mountain-town, Cold Ocean rolling in the utmost West, Arar, Garonne, and rushing Rhone, Will bear me witness due; And valleys broad the blond Carnutes own, By Liger darkly blue. I saw the Cydnus flow, Winding on in ever-tranquil mood, And from his awful peak, in cloud and snow, Cold Taurus o'er his wild Cilicians' brood.
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<sup>14</sup> Tibullus, *Elegie miłosne*, trans., introduction and commentary A. Arndt, A. Ibek (ed.), Wydawnictwo Homini, Kraków 2015, p. 183.

Tyr, co pierwszy okręt dał w opiekę  
 wiatrom,  
 Czy raczej, jak – gdy Syriusz suchą  
 spala niwę –  
 Mimo upału wodę Nil żyzna  
 wylewa?  
 Ojczy Nilu! Czy zdołam dociec,  
 z jakich przyczyn  
 I wśród jakich obszarów chowasz  
 swoje źródło?  
 Dzięki tobie ulewy nie żądają pola,  
 Zwiędłe ziele nie błaga Jowisza  
 o deszcze.  
 Ciebie czci pod postacią Ozyrysa  
 młodzień  
 Obca, nad bykiem z Memfis płakać  
 nauczona.  
 Ozyrys pierwszy wprawną dłonią  
 pług wykonał  
 I przekopał motyką delikatną glebę.  
 Pierwszy wrzucił nasiona do  
 dziewiczej ziemi,  
 Jak i zerwał owoce z drzew dotąd  
 nieznanych.  
 On nauczył do tyczek wiązać  
 miękkie wino  
 I przycinać zielone pędy ostrym  
 sierpem.  
 On pierwszy smak przyjemny  
 w pełni już dojrzałych  
 Gron poczuł, przez niewprawne  
 wytłoczony stopy.  
 Ów trunek uczył głosy ludzkie  
 technik śpiewu,  
 W ruch wprawiał póż tanecznych  
 nieznające ciała.  
 Bachus chłopu, wysiłkiem wielkim  
 znużonemu,  
 Dał sposób na przeganie utrapienia  
 z serca.

I saw through thronged streets  
 unmolested flying  
 Th' inviolate white dove of Palestine;  
 I looked on Tyrian towers, by  
 soundless waters lying,  
 Whence Tyrians first were masters of  
 the brine.  
 The flooding Nile I knew;  
 What time hot Sirius glows,  
 And Egypt's thirsty field the covering  
 deluge knows;  
 But whence the wonder flows,  
 O Father Nile! no mortal e'er did view.  
 Along thy bank not any prayer is made  
 To Jove for fruitful showers.  
 On thee they call! Or in sepulchral  
 shade,  
 The life-reviving, sky-descended powers  
 Of bright Osiris hail, –  
 While, wildly chanting, the barbaric  
 choir,  
 With timbrels and strange fire,  
 Their Memphian bull bewail.  
  
 Osiris did the plough bestow,  
 And first with iron urged the yielding  
 ground.  
 He taught mankind good seed to throw  
 In furrows all untried;  
 He plucked fair fruits the nameless  
 trees did hide:  
 He first the young vine to its trellis  
 bound,  
 And with his sounding sickle keen  
 Shore off the tendrils green.  
  
 For him the bursting clusters sweet  
 Were in the wine-press trod;  
 Song followed soon, a prompting of  
 the god,

Bachus niesie wychnienie smutnym  
 śmiertelnikom,  
 Choćby im ciężkie pęta na nogach  
 dźwięczały.  
 Nie dla ciebie zmartwienia i żal,  
 Ozyrysie,  
 Lecz taniec, śpiew i błahe miłosne  
 doznania,  
 Lecz barwne kwiaty, bluszczem  
 opasane skronie,  
 Stóp drobnych sięgająca złotożółta  
 palla,  
 Tyryjskie szaty, słodko brzmiące  
 dźwięki tibii,  
 Lekka skrzynka, sekretnych  
 strzegąca świętości.  
 Przyjdź tu! Geniusza grami,  
 Geniusza tańcami  
 Uczcij. Zwiłż mocnym winem mu  
 obficie skronie.  
 Niech spływają olejki z jego  
 lśniących włosów,  
 Wianki z kwiatów niech zdobią mu  
 głowę i szyję.  
 Tak dziś przybądź! Kadzidło chcę na  
 cześć twą palić,  
 Placek ofiarny z miodem dać  
 attyckim słodki.  
 Zaś twe dzieci niech rosną, aby  
 czyny ojca  
 Pomnażać i z szacunkiem trwać  
 przy nim po latach.  
 Niech o dziele twym – drodze – nie  
 milczą mieszkańcy  
 Ziemi w Tuskulum i domostw  
 starych w jasnej Albie.  
 Wszak i na niej żwir twardy, dzięki  
 twym zdobyczom,  
 Ubito z odpowiednią ilością  
 kamieni.

And rhythmic dance of lightly leaping  
 feet.  
 Of Bacchus the o'er-wearied swain  
 receives  
 Deliverance from all his pains;  
 Bacchus gives comfort when a mortal  
 grieves,  
 And mirth to men in chains.  
 Not to Osiris toils and tears belong,  
 But revels and delightful song;  
 Lightly beckoning loves are thine!  
 Garlands deck thee, god of wine!  
 We hear thee coming, with the flute's  
 refrain,  
 With fruit of ivy on thy forehead bound,  
 Thy saffron vesture streaming to the  
 ground.  
 And thou hast garments, too, of  
 Tyrian stain,  
 When thine ecstatic train  
 Bear forth thy magic ark to mysteries  
 divine.  
  
 Immortal guest, our games and  
 pageant share!  
 Smile on the flowing cup, and hail  
 With us the Genius of this natal day!  
 From whose anointed, rose-entwisted  
 hair,  
 Arabian odors waft away.  
 If thou the festal bless, I will not fail  
 To burn sweet incense unto him and  
 thee,  
 And offerings of Arcadian honey bear.  
  
 So grant Messala fortunes ever fair!  
 Of such a sire the children worthy be!  
 Till generations two and three  
 Surround his venerated chair!  
 See, winding upward through the  
 Latin land,

Wdzięczny ci za to wieśniak, kiedy  
z Miasta wraca  
O zmroku i w podróży stóp swoich  
nie rani.  
Obyśmy, Natalisie, rok w rok mogli  
czcić cię –  
Pomyślmy nam i coraz  
pomyślniejszy przychodź!

Yon highway past, the Alban citadel,  
At great Messala's mandate made,  
In fitted stones and firm-set gravel laid,  
Thy monument forever more to stand!  
The mountain-villager thy fame will tell,  
When through the darkness wending  
late from Rome,  
He foots it smoothly home.

O Genius of this natal day,  
May many a year thy gift declare!  
Now bright and fair thy pinions soar  
away, –  
Return, thou bright and fair!<sup>15</sup>

However, it was not the only genethliacon by Tibullus, and birthday songs in Latin were, of course, also written by many other Roman writers, e.g. Propertius, Ovid, Sulpicia, Horace, Virgil, Persius, Statius, Martial, Ausonius, and many others. Allow me to quote one of the more interesting ones, describing the mood of the birthday morning and the actual celebrations:

Byłem zachwycony, gdy o poranku  
ujrzałem Kameny,  
Stojące przede mną u wezglowia  
w czerwieni wschodzącego słońca.  
Dały znak, że to urodziny mojej  
dziewczyny,  
Trzykroć w ręce klasnęły na szczęście.  
Niech dzień ten minie bez chmury,  
Wiatry niech staną  
w przestworzach,  
A groźne fale niech opadną łagodnie  
na suchy ląd.  
Niech nie zobaczą w dniu  
dzisiejszym cierpiących,  
I sam kamień niech słumi łyzy Niobe.  
Niech ucichną krzyki zimorodka,  
odejdą westchnienia,

I wondered what the Muses had sent  
me, at dawn, standing by my bed in  
the reddening sunlight.  
They sent a sign it was my girl's  
birthday, and clapped their hands  
three times for luck.  
Let this day pass without a cloud,  
let winds still in the air, threatening  
waves fall gently on dry land.  
Let me see no one sad today: let  
Niobe's rock itself suppress its tears.  
Let the halcyons' cries be silent,  
leaving off their sighing, and Itys's  
mother not call out his loss.  
And oh, you, my dearest girl, born to  
happy auguries, rise, and pray to the  
gods who require their dues.

<sup>15</sup> T.C. Williams, *The Elegies of Tibullus*, Riverside Press Cambridge, Boston 1908.



A matka niech nie oplakuje  
utraconego Itysa,  
Ty zaś, moja najdroższa dziewczyno,  
urodzona pod szczęśliwą wróżbą,  
Powstań i módl się do bóstw,  
pragnących hołdu.  
Najpierw obmyj się ze snu  
w krystalicznej wodzie,  
I ułóż błyszczące włosy zręcznymi  
palcami.  
Wreszcie wdziej szatę, która  
najpierw przyciągnęła wzrok  
Propercjusza,  
I nie pozwól, by głowa twa pozostała  
bez kwiatów.  
Proś, by piękno, z którego słyniesz,  
było dane ci wiecznie,  
By zawsze w mej głowie panowały  
twe królestwa.  
Potem, gdy cześć oddana kadzeniem  
na ołtarzach,  
a wesołe płomienie rozświetlą cały  
dom,  
jest czas na ucztę – noc niech płynie  
przy winie,  
a nozdrza niech maści mi olej  
szafranowy.  
Flet niech towarzyszy nocnym płąsom  
i niech słowa twej figlarności wyjdą  
na wolność,  
a słodkie ucztowanie niech  
powstrzyma niepożądany sen,  
gdy sąsiednie ulice pełne gwaru,  
niech los objawi nam się w rzucie  
kości, który Amor mocniej skrzydłami  
wybije.  
Kiedy zaś godziny miną po wielu  
szklanicach,  
Wtedy Wenus nakaze święte nocne  
obrzędy,

First wash sleep away with pure water,  
and dress your shining hair with deft  
fingers.

Then wear those clothes that first  
charmed Propertius' eyes, and never  
let your brow be free of flowers.

And ask that the beauty that is your  
power may always be yours, and your  
command over my person might last  
forever.

Then when you've worshipped with  
incense at wreathed altars, and their  
happy flames have lit the whole house,  
think of a feast, and let the night fly by  
with wine, and let the perfumed onyx  
anoint my nostril with oil of saffron.  
Submit the strident flute to nocturnal  
dancing, and let your wantonness  
be free with words, and let sweet  
banqueting stave off unwelcome  
sleep, and the common breeze of the  
neighbouring street be full of the  
sound.

And let fate reveal to us, in the falling  
dice, those whom the Boy strikes with  
his heavy wings.

When the hours have gone with many  
a glass, and Venus appoints the sacred  
rites that wait on night, let's fulfil the  
year's solemnities in our room, and so  
complete the journey of your natal day.

więc dopełnijmy dorocznych  
uroczystości w naszej sypialni,  
i tak zakończmy podróż przez twój  
urodzinowy dzień.<sup>16</sup>

Γενεθλιακός λόγος was also an important part of rhetoric, mainly epideictic, which was particularly visible in the works by Aelius Aristides (117– around 181 AD)<sup>17</sup> and Himerius (Himerios, 310/315–385/386 AD).<sup>18</sup> Aristides in particular centred his musings on the nature of that part of rhetoric, the purpose of which was to not so much spectacular composition as indicating individuality and emphasising something particular and desired in rhetoric persuasion, e.g. outstanding parents or the special circumstances of one's birth. *Méthodos genethliakón* was also defined by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the third book of *The Art of Rhetoric* (*Τέχνη ῥητορική* 3, 1–15).<sup>19</sup> Every birthday oration, including a poetic one, was mainly supposed to offer praise, beginning with adoration of the family and homeland, and then the merits of the jubilarian's body and mind, and it should conclude in a prayer-wishing for a good future and long life. In the case of a speech in celebration of a child's birth, it mainly emphasised the child's origin and the day when the baby was born. An example of a composition written in line with those guidelines was *Octogenerians* (*Μακρόβιοι*) by Pseudo-Lukian and dedicated to one Quintillus as a birthday gift. Its expression “prosero soi doron” (*προσφέρω σοι δῶρον*), i.e. “I hereby offer this as a gift” (Latin *donum do*) became the basic form of birthday inscription and it inspired Censorinus, a Latin compiler from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD, the author of *De die natali Liber*.

The longevity of those rhetoric indications, much stronger than any modifications in terms of the poetics of genethliacóns, might be confirmed by 17<sup>th</sup> c. recommendations written by Georgius Morhof, an ambitious “polymath”, who set out to describe all European literary genres:

In the case of birth felicitations, the process of searching for the topic begins with persons, i.e. Ancestors or Parents, for whom one might find laudatory rhetoric

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Propertius (Sextus Propertius: 50 BC – around 2-15 AD) Elegy III.10. Translated from Latin: B. Gaj [English version: Translated by A.S. Kline, 2008, <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Prophome.php>].

<sup>17</sup> Aristides' surviving works include 55 orations and recitations, and two rhetoric treatises. Cf. *Der neue Pauly...*, p. 914.

<sup>18</sup> 24 orations by the orator have survived. Cf., *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Διονυσίου Ἀλικαρνασέως Τά ῥητορικά, opera Friderici Sylburgii Veterensis, Francofurti 1586, p. 67. Cf. J. van der Vliet, *Studia Critica in Dionysii Halicarnassensis Opera rhetorica*, Lugduni Batavorum, Van der Hoek, Leiden 1874, pp. 14–15.

topoi. Next is time, which preceded the birth: whether there had been some prophetic signs. Thirdly, there is the birth itself and its various circumstances, kisses and song by the crib, the recollections of that joyous day, the season (e.g. abundant spring, blooming summer, mature autumn, or holiday winter). At that point, one should add embellishments on the miraculous birth from the froth of the sea, the brain or Jupiter's thighs; on being brought up by doves, Amalthea the goat; speeches towards the stars, the aurora, the homeland, the good goddess, etc. Finally, one should include best wishes for the new-born and its parents on expanding their family. If it is a boy, one should congratulate them on the fortunate heir, and wish him fame in war or science, and if it is a girl, wish her beauty and good nature, which should develop in her. In celebration of an anniversary of one's birthday, the topics apply to praising the persons with poetic additions in each point.<sup>20</sup>

Morhof listed a dozen or so names of writers of genethliacons who were famous in Europe in his time, which indicated the extent of the presence of the genre still practised in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; the only surviving printed versions of the works from the past two centuries were jubilee-related works related to the academic community. Yet it would not be justified to talk about the death of the genre when there are still, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> c., new Latin works being published in celebration of one's birthday, e.g. the genethliacon in celebration of the birth of the daughter of Nicolas Sarkozy, president of France, and Carla Bruni entitled *Genethliacum alterum cum nata est Julia, filia Carolae Bruni et Nicolai Sarkozy praesidis Francogalliae (m. Octobri)*, or the whole series of genethliacons constituting a polemic with Jan Kochanowski's threnodies.<sup>21</sup>

The pages of this volume would not suffice to discuss even in rough outline all the genethliacons which were adapted by Christianity as songs marking the deaths of saints, i.e. their "births for the heavens." The relationship between faith and culture is also visible in the many examples of the use of the genre of the genethliacon in various songs and plays related to Christmas. However, while remaining within the literary-rhetoric, cultural-religious and academic traditions of the many centuries, one should at least in celebration of a jubilee as noble as this one not only include the above few pages discussing the genre, but also write a few lines in honour of the Jubilarian:

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. Morhof, *Polyhistor, sive de auctorum notitiaet rerum commentarii, quibus praeterea varia ad omnes disciplinas Consilia et subsidia proponuntur*, Sumptibus Petri Böckmanni, Lubecae 1688, pp. 117–119. Translated from Latin into Polish by B. Gaj [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish].

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A.E. Radke, *Lanx satura memorabilium Anni MMXI*, Fundacja Nauki i Kultury na Śląsku, Opole 2012; idem, *Iubila natalicia vel antithreni (contra Threnos Iohannis Cochranovii)*, Fundacja Nauki i Kultury na Śląsku, Opole 2009.

Genethliacon  
Barbarae Bogolebskae dedicatum

Beatissima Profestrix et matrona  
Nec beatior invenitur ulla  
Universitate et locis Lodziensibus  
exsultare licet tibi, Barbara.  
Quod doctissima femina es  
rhetoricis rebus et coloribus  
atque humanitati dedita.  
Utinam sis semper felixque beata!

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Beata Gaj

## **Genethliacon Barbarze Bogołębskiej, czyli o potrzebie świętowania urodzin i jubileuszy**

### *Streszczenie*

W najpopularniejszych polskich słownikach terminów literackich, które opisują nawet gatunki dawno wymarłe i jednostkowe np. dramatu japońskiego czy indyjskiego, nie ma podstawowych informacji o gatunku obecnym w literaturze europejskiej (i nie tylko) przez co najmniej 23 wieki aż po dziś dzień. *Genethliacon* jest gatunkiem potwierdzonym od czasów Kallimacha (III w. p.n.e), który uświetnia narodziny lub rocznicę urodzin; czasami o charakterze lirycznym, dramatycznym lub retorycznym, obecnie nadal uprawianym w wielu językach świata (zgodnie z prastarą tradycją również po łacinie). Artykuł opisuje zarys rozwoju tego gatunku w tradycji europejskiej. Pierwsze piosenki urodzinowe, najczęściej odwołując się do konotacji Apollińskich, łączyły narodziny człowieka ze światłem i poezją. Co jest szczególnie interesujące, podstawowe cechy „genów” *genethliakonu* nie uległy w ciągu wieków znaczącym zmianom. Świętowanie narodzin, rocznic lub innych jubileuszy wciąż kojarzy się z życzeniami, ofiarowaniem prezentów, w tym tworzonej na tę okoliczność poezji. Być może warto zachować tak piękne tradycje, dając komuś taki samodzielnie napisany genethliacon jak np. ... *Genethliacon Barbarae Bogołębskae dedicatum*.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *genethliacon*, tradycja, jubileusz, gatunek.

## Genethliacon for Barbara Bogołębska, or on the Need to Celebrate Birthdays and Anniversaries

### Summary

The most popular Polish dictionaries of literary terms, which offer the definitions of even long lost and extremely particular genres such as Indian or Japanese drama, lack even the basic information on the genre which has existed in European literature (and even outside it) for the last 23 centuries. *Genethliacon* is a genre which has existed since the times of Callimachus (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC), which has been used to celebrate a person's birth or the anniversary of their birth. Genethliacons may be of a lyrical, dramatic or rhetorical nature, and are still practised today in various languages of the world (in Latin, in line with the ancient tradition). This article provides an outline of the development of the genre within the European tradition. Initial birthday songs, usually connoting Apollo, linked people with light and poetry. What is particularly interesting is that the basic characteristics of genethliacon's *genes* have not undergo any major changes throughout the many ages. The celebration of one's birth, anniversaries and other jubilees still entails wishes, and gift-giving, including poetry developed for the occasion. It may be worthwhile to preserve such a beautiful tradition by giving someone an originally composed genethliacon, e.g. *Genethliacon Barbarae Bogołębskae dedicatum*.

**Keywords:** *genethliacon*, tradition, jubilee, genre.

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