

## Variations of the Poetics of Taste in Maironis's Works

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**Abstract:** In the works of Maironis, the primary models of many poetic genres of Lithuanian literary tradition may be recognised, as well as stereotypical self-images and the rules of alimentary code, which is related to the style of the author's epoch and sociocultural context. Maironis, who was an exclusive public figure of his time, was acquainted with Western gourmet culture and was influenced by the pretentious customs of provincial nobility of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; however, by that time he was equally passionate about the emerging national cuisine as with the formation of a classical Lithuanian literary canon. The consumption of meals and drinks is linked with the significant moments of transformation, rites of initiation, and the calendar cycle of spiritual holidays in Maironis's poetry; the poet was, in this sense, a true traditionalist. A sampling of well-prepared food is represented as the means of communication in the "epoch of banned books" (during the Russian Tsarist suppression), when other instruments of cultural education and intellectual dispute were very restricted. Maironis was a founder of a "higher style" in poetry, as well as the promoter of a "higher taste" in traditions and gastronomical etiquette within his private environment. He mentions "tasty health" in one of the most famous of his poems; this was the ideal classicist model of balance and harmonious existence. This article refers to some typical aspects of taste, as well as to the problems of alimentary morality and social distinctions between different types of national cuisine.

**Keywords:** gastronomic; alimentary code; taste; Romanticism; Classicist world-view; consumption of food; nationalism

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Maironis (Jonas Mačiulis-Maculewicz, 1862–1932) was widely acknowledged as the Lithuanian national bard who strengthened the reputation of Lithuanian-speaking lyrics and inspired the nationalist-oriented intellectual circles during

the “Awakening” period (in other words, the epoch of the ban on books, when all the public activity in the Lithuanian language was suppressed by the Tsarist authorities during the period of 1864–1904). The major work of his life, a collection of verses *Pavasario balsai* (*Voices of Spring*, 1895, revised and complemented editions: 1905, 1913, 1920) was linked to the classical balance of the aesthetical categories and to the morally constrained Catholic ethics, though he regarded himself as a genuine Romanticist, a successor of Mickiewicz, Pushkin and Goethe, as he emphasised in the dispute with the young rebels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde (Maironis, 1925, 16). Sometimes Maironis was considered as “a creator of visions from the past” as well as “a poetic chronicler of the present” (Vanagas, 1997, 83), which can encompass all fields of individual perception. In his oeuvre, one can identify stereotypical self-images that were inherent to the rural ethics and morality of the Lithuanian-speaking enlightened community of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which enshrined its visionary dreams about cultural autonomy for their self-developing nation. As an obligated Catholic clergyman, Maironis tried to conceal his own physical passions, desires and bodily senses; however, the semantics of heartaches, bitter tears, and contained pain pervade his poetical “confessions”. Maironis’s lyrical subject, being a rigorous Catholic moralist, predominantly regarded human body as aggressive, greedy and hungry, though a mortal and fragile bearer of a restless soul searching for divine salvation.

In this research we are trying to reconsider the poetics of taste in the poetic works of Maironis, taking into account that during the interwar period, this Lithuanian national bard was seen as an instigator of feelings, one who knew “how to warm up” (Eglāja-Kristšone, 2014, 309). The author’s emotional openness and responsiveness to perceptive impulses seem to characterise the Romanticist worldview; on the other hand, the semantic field of taste, sampling, consumption of food and drinks, and references to gastronomical heritage and folklore formulas of rustic etiquette are frequently attributed to the “lower style”, a satirical paradigm in the oeuvre of a classicist. There are constant metaphors of wealthy, well-off and poor, miserable living related to the semantics of food consumption in Maironis’s works, which could explain his moral principles and social worldview. Food and drinks are represented as symbolic means of social communication of emerging nationalist communities and help to reveal national customs and conventions of an exclusive agricultural patriarchal society. It is

important to decipher the gastropoetical paradigm of Maironis's semantic field and the important aspects of individual, community, and nation building, the ample repertoire of alimentary self-images which are represented in Maironis's lyrical and epic poems.

Nowadays, Maironis is one of the most extensively researched figures in Lithuanian culture. Generally, his poetic works are being analysed according to the aspects of social impact and development of historical consciousness (Speičytė, 2012); the politically determined tendencies of critical reception have been discussed (Andriukonis, 2016); a recent collective monograph encompassed many genres of his literary works and public activity (Žvirgždas, 2019); however, there are specific aspects, e.g., the problems of an alimentary code, which need detailed research. It is more convenient to gain special achievements when one can refer to the corpus of his epistolary heritage and memoirs (Žmuida, 2016). One can investigate whether the gastronomical etiquette in the poetical texts corresponds to the religious commandments of temperance or with national stereotypes. In analysing Maironis' poetical texts, we do not make efforts to distinguish and emphasise any specific genres of his oeuvre; however, it could be notable that his epic poems are richer with aspects of taste, and various forms of sensual perception are expressed more extensively when the poet's lyrical ego tries to characterise or satirise the everyday routine of his contemporaries. The semantic field of taste, tasting and gastronomical experiences could be characterised using categories of the so-called "lower style" (taking into account an important exception of sweetness, which could be attributed to the contexts of religious ecstasy and euphoric eroticism and was related to the sublime forms of the "higher style").

## **The Poet's Gastronomical Preferences**

Maironis was a deliberate representative of the "higher style" in Lithuanian poetry and a promoter of Western-style gourmet traditions in his private environment: during the period of 1910–1932, when he was concerned about his career as rector of the Roman Catholic clerical seminary of Samogitia, a close circle of contemporaries visited his luxurious residence in the centre of Kaunas, and

during these celebrations local and foreign dishes and drinks were frequently sampled, some even introduced as novelties of taste. The culinary preferences of Maironis were described in detail in the memoirs of his contemporaries, and these preferences were well-known to his guests and servants: the host of the palace did not tolerate the smell of sauerkraut, which was part of the regional menu and frequently served for the members of his household. By the way, Maironis generally was not a great admirer of culinary innovations: preferring the rustic-style cuisine, he ate breakfast and dinner with his family circle, but usually had lunch in the premises of the Seminary (memoir of Juozas Gečius, in: Žmuida, 2016, 502). He used to eat farmer cheese pancakes (*varškėčiai*), dry Christmas cakes (*kūčiukai, šližikai*) with poppy milk, and potato pancakes (*bulviniai blynai*) with curdled milk as his everyday meals (Danutė Lipčiūtė-Augienė, in: Žmuida, 2016, 492), but on more festive occasions he sampled the strong alcoholic beverage *krupnikas* (liqueur) and other drinks together with his guests, though he never took too much spirits and tried to feast with temperance (Paulius Galaunė, Teofilija Vaičiūnienė, in: Žmuida, 2016, 309, 725).

The private celebrations organised by Maironis revealed his search for new forms of socialization and efforts of remodeling culinary etiquette according to the standards of an educated “high society”. Maironis admired old-fashioned formalised ceremonies and intellectual disputes during his meals; he also tried to introduce new forms of food serving; he and his circle of guests tried to imitate selected forms of gourmet culture (as well as trends of interior fashion or decorative elements) that were known from the provincial salons of Samogitian noblemen (Jankevičiūtė, Vaicekauskas, 2019, 25); on the other hand, Maironis often demonstrated his rustic habits and preferences, as well as his culinary minimalism and predilection for solid, stodgy food (which was regarded as “healthy” and “natural”). Those preferences and self-determinations in the culinary sphere related him with the majority of agrarian-origin Lithuanians.

Special dinner-parties, called *žurfiksai* (Fr. *jour fixe*) were organised during the decade of 1904–1914 in Maironis’s apartments; the problems of Catholic relief and mass media organizations and plans of their forthcoming expansion were discussed there, at a large table in Maironis’s vast dining room. Clergymen and seculars attended these meetings, which were held according to the requirements of conspiracy; however, up to 100 public figures were sometimes invited to these events (Gaidys, 1994, 301). The primary concepts of many

Catholic and patriotic Lithuanian educational and charity associations were discussed during these assemblies. In the 1920s, diplomats and politicians often gathered in Maironis's palace, where official state banquets and important talks (especially on the regulation of the spiritual sphere) took place, since even the President's Office could not measure up to the mansion of the respectable prelate and Rector of the Seminary in the aspect of representation. For example, on 25 May, 1932 President Antanas Smetona met Archbishop Juozapas Skvireckas at Maironis's palace and discussed secular and cleric aspects after an informal dinner, under the supervision of chargé d'affaires of the Holy See prelate Antonino Arata, who documented this meeting in the letter to Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (future Pope Pius XII) (Streikus, 2010, 400). Maironis used to celebrate his name-day according to the ecclesiastic calendar in his salon during the last days of October and turned these celebrations into actions of pacification of the opposing political groups; he was appreciated by the influential intellectuals as a mediator and appeaser of secular nationalist and Christian Democratic parties. In his private environment, Maironis admired elaborate, decorative, especially silver vessels; the Maironis Museum of Lithuanian Literature, founded in the premises of his residence after the poet's death in 1936, among its exhibits contains some original sugar-bowls, tea-pots, and spoons from his private collection.

## **Land and Bread: Gastropoetic Nationalist Symbolism**

In the oeuvre of Maironis, one can identify stereotypical self-images that are common to the Lithuanian collective consciousness of the given epoch. The principles of "alimentary morality"<sup>1</sup> are linked to the epochal style, its sociocultural context, and semiotic opposition of euphoric strategies: the "taste of enjoyment" (*goût de jouir*) vs. "taste of pleasure" (*goût de plaire*), and taste as an effect of meaning and taste as a human condition (Landowski, 2011, 40–41). Maironis, as a dogmatically constrained Classicist, renounced the open representation of the physiology of taste and dissociated his lyrical ego from the field of passions,

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1 In this context, morality was defined as a personal relation to the principles of behaviour and models of order, which were given by God and community (Mačianskaitė, 2011, 97).

bodily perception, and emotions. His morally engaged subject occasionally mentioned unrealised aspirations but generally devalued and trivialised the sphere of pleasure and desires, particularly the pleasure of taste.

The tension between the body and spirit, a basic concept from theological discourse, was interpreted in a very dogmatic way in Maironis's lyrical poems: the body is aggressive, greedy and hungry, though a transient phenomenon; the fulfilment of bodily needs necessarily leads to destruction and even intervenes in social relations, radicalises the struggle for economic equality; it seems to Maironis's subject that social justice is the primary concern of those who emphasise the advantage of physical and physiological needs and desires over a theocentric moral codex and dogmatically defined imperatives of Christian virtues. The poet mentioned "the burden of sorrows and sweaty face" of a worker who toils seeking to stuff "the greedy jaw" of his body, but knows that after his death he will be the main meal in a gloomy banquet for earthworms ("Dienų sielvartai" / "Everyday Sorrows", Maironis, 1987, 140<sup>2</sup>). Intimidating scenes of physiological reactions were exposed in the neo-Classicist epic poems only as a pretext for a sympathetic tone regarding the humbled masses: "The land is sunken in the miseries. It is pointlessly waiting for the end of sufferings and vomiting the bile of damnation"<sup>3</sup> ("Suvargusiems" / "To the Weary People", Maironis, 1987, 143). The soil of the homeland was realised as a resource of food, which ensured protection against starvation for the agrarian communities for ages. The vomiting-bile land was represented as a symbol of cataclysmic poverty and infertility, an anthropomorphic reflection of the social sentiment.

In his poem *Raseinių Magdė* (*Magdė of Raseiniai*, 1909) Maironis asked enlightened Lithuanian nationalists to appreciate and love their homeland's soil (or speaking more generally, the native land), inherited from their parents: in his words, this soil feeds the body and spirit simultaneously: "Here your body draws food with its hands, / Here you'll find some healthy food for your pure spirit!"<sup>4</sup> (Maironis, 1988, 123). In the epic poem, the Lithuanian nationalist ideology of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is represented as a harmonizing force, which historically and territorially is related to the fertile and cultivated soil of the homeland, blessed

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2 The sequences of poetical texts are given in the original quotations and in word-by-word translations by the author of this paper, unless specified otherwise.

3 "Vargų varguos paskendus žemė / Tuščia kančių belaukia galo / Ir prakeikimo tulžį vemia."

4 "Čia tavo kūnas sau maistą semia, / Čia grynai dvasiai tiek sveiko peno!"

by the Divine. According to the classical definition of Anthony D. S. Smith, “[t]he solidarity that a nationalist desire is based on the possession of the land: not any land, but the historic land; the land of past generations, the land that saw the flowering of the nation’s genius. The nationalist therefore wants to repossess the land, to make it into a secure ‘homeland’ for the nation and to ‘build’ the nation on it” (Smith, 1979, 3). Maironis was concerned about the practical aspects of the newly-projected homeland; he appealed to God asking for protection against misfortunes, storms, frost, and even worms that ruin the crop (“Rusų laikais priešaušris” / “Before the Dawn during Russian Occupation”, Maironis, 1987, 97). Therefore, Maironis was concerned about the material welfare of the patriotically engaged peasantry, the substantial “food for the body” drawn from a ploughed land; his lyrical ego was looking at the cultivated fields with the attentive regard of an educated farmer, as well as with a far-sighted gaze of a geopolitician.

The rite of “looking at the rye” was inherited from archaic beliefs and folklore traditions of the pre-Christian era and was related to the symbolism of a forthcoming national revival, spring, and awakening of historical memory; a concept of fertile soil referred to the heroic deeds of ancestors; the land has creative and educational powers, and it can bring up the future national elite: “Holy Lithuania, the land of our parents! You’re more precious than fields of corn. You’re soaked up not with sweat but with bones and blood! When shall your fruits wake?”<sup>5</sup> (*Among Pains to Glory*, 1895; Maironis, 1988, 419). Divine authority equally patronises the patriotically engaged intelligentsia as well as the peasants; a poetical imagination links the efforts of nationalist self-determination and cultivation of the homeland’s fields – the corn yields well when the number of followers of the national movement multiplies. Maironis’s patriotism was supported by practical rustic ethics and by the imperatives of labour and prayer, which were promoted by the followers or the political trends of social Catholicism and the emerging political party of Christian Democrats; the main principles of this party were modelled as a “third way” between liberalism and socialism; they “had to offer a Catholicism-inspired solution to workers’ social problems, thereby drawing the working class’ attention away from being enamoured by secular or anti-religious ideologies” (Svareuskas, 2014, 403).

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5 “Šventa Lietuva, žeme mano tėvų! / Brangesnė už varpų laukus, / Prigėrus ne prakaito, – kaulų, kraują! / Kada tavo vaisiai atbus?”

The imperative of labour was directly associated with the duty of “earning the bread”. In his public speeches, Maironis (who was also a researcher of ecclesiastical law) often stressed that “bread cries while it is eaten by idlers” (Maironis, 1909, 287), and his antisocialist dialectics were based on the practical logics of higher-class peasantry and on the social programme by Pope Leo XIII. The proverb about the “crying bread” was his favourite idiom related to the slogans of primordial, archaic socialism (enrooted in the Jesuit reformism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) as well as to the teachings of the first apostles.

In Maironis’s worldview, all kinds of public activities are related to the eating of bread. “To eat bread” means “to work, to deserve one’s food”. Black bread, made of rye, is an everyday food, some kind of existential minimum, and the symbol of prudent, thrifty, economical living. Life seems to be bearable and sometimes even comfortable when somebody has enough black rye bread. One of the episodic characters in the scene of epic poem *Jaunoji Lietuva* (*Young Lithuania*, 1907) was a black bread eater, a Lithuanian peasant who sells his harvest of corn and afterwards goes to the country fair, consumes a shot of strong drink, and buys a bagel for his children (Maironis, 1988, 121). One of the negative characters of the poem *Raseinių Magdė*, a socialist activist Baltrukas, discloses social inequality in a loud tone: the priests, he says, are growing fat while eating white bread (acting as bloodsuckers and spongers); they hypocritically compel their humble parishioners (“who eat only the black crust of bread”) to observe the rules of Catholic fast strictly (Maironis, 1988, 131). A socialist sympathiser and positivist, Baltrukas had graduated from a university in Russia and was asked to contribute to the struggle of his compatriots against the oppression of the Tsarist regime, but he rejected this proposal because as did not want to destroy the perspectives of his successful career, to exchange “white bread” for “black crust”, metaphorically. The representatives of traditional patriarchal culture, whose poetical ambassador was Maironis’s lyrical ego, condemned renegades, modernists, socialists, and all left-oriented youths who wandered the foreign states in search for a “slice of white bread”. Such cosmopolitans were scorned as counterfeiters or even dehumanised beings, “monkeys” in *Magdė of Raseiniai*: “They have come from us, but they don’t belong to us”<sup>6</sup> (Maironis, 1988, 147). White bread (made of expensive wheat that was affordable only to

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6 „Jie iš mūsų, bet jau nebe mūsų.“



the higher classes) is regarded as a symbol of moral conformism, intemperate luxury, alienation and dissociation from the native community; all these features could be characteristics of the educated yet morally indifferent *nouveau riches* of peasant origin.

In the poem *Znad Biruty (From the Hill of Birutė, 1904)*, which was addressed to the Polish-speaking Lithuanian nobles, Maironis mocked the hedonist customs of high society and its characteristic slang: “They eat ‘a little bread with butter’ [a distorted, “Lithuanised” expression] in the banquets and when they want to distinguish themselves from a Lithuanian peasant, they use Polish language”<sup>7</sup> (Maironis, 1988, 275). The alimentary distinction of a complicated linguocentric identity was emphasised by the means of Lithuanian diminutive suffixes. Therefore, an unsophisticated culinary code can evoke the reminiscences in the mental memory, and these fragments can recompense the lost national identity. Such lingual vestiges (“klebutį z maslukiem” instead of Pol. “chleb z masłem”) ironically contradict the declaration of the dominating estate of nobles about their radical dissociation from the Lithuanian-speaking peasantry.

According to Maironis, who trusted in the universal imperative of labour, during peacetime only the gangs of socialist-indoctrinated idlers suffer from malnutrition. In an epic poem written during World War I, *Mūsų vargai (Our Troubles, 1920)*, Maironis, in his journalistic style, openly exposes misery in Lithuania, which was by that time occupied by German forces. The images of wartime famine were based on authentic experiences and not camouflaged by the sentimentalist rhetoric of the “higher style”. He depicted the desolation, when even worthless fishbones were charged for and a pinch of salt was worth its weight in gold (Maironis, 1988, 243). The poet expressed his sympathy to the war prisoners, whose rations during the occupational rule were miserable: they were given only black coffee and a mouthful of bread (Maironis, 1988, 246). The cause of starvation was the state of collective bondage when people were isolated from their source of nutrition and could not grow their own food but were instead at the mercy of the intruders. On the other hand, in his personal lyrics, the poet represented starvation as a metaphor of unsatisfied desires.

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7 „Na balach ‘klebutį z maslukiem’ spożywa / A chcąc się wyróżnić od chłopca Litwina, / Polskiego, powiada, języka używa.“

Unsatisfying was related to the vital dynamism and a lust for life: “When I didn’t satisfy eternal hunger [literally: starvation], I have covered it with clothes of frost”<sup>8</sup> (Maironis, 1987, 145).

## **Meals of Collective Feasts: Food as an Instrument of Social Communication**

In Maironis’s longer poems, consumption of food and beverages are most often mentioned in the contexts of important existential changes and initiations (gaining of a school certificate, matchmaking, wedding, etc.); the distinctive etiquette of gastronomic culture is linked to the calendar of religious festivities and to the mutability of the cycle of life. The consumption of sweet alcoholic beverage mead (Lith. *midus*) is represented as an act of symbolic initiation into the adult community, a celebration of graduating from a secondary school or gymnasium (Maironis, 1988, 43). Some of those ceremonies (e.g., the gastronomic rituals of matchmaking) are strictly regulated, and the “actors” are given formal roles; they cannot hesitate or improvise, but should conform with instructions: “The bride blushes, but drinks the mead. So, bake, a matron of honour, the wedding cake [Lith. *karvojus*, pol. *korowaj*] with a rue for the villagers!”<sup>9</sup> (Maironis, 1988, 121). Even the historically important Great Assembly of Vilnius (1905) was depicted as a hedonistic feast in *Jaunoji Lietuva*; its participant, an old nobleman Glinskis, ostentatiously swigged down a glass of vodka, shook himself instinctively and then made a brave public statement proposing to build a memorial to the Japanese, who won the war against the Russian Empire in 1904 (Maironis, 1988, 103).

Formal dinners often turn into patriotic manifestations; however, they are not always joyful, and not all guests have the privilege of unwinding during these gatherings, as they have to sacrifice their egocentric interests in search for compromises. Sometimes the festivities tend to drag on, and they require some patience when participation in the pompous gatherings of the nationalist elite are considered as acts of obedience to the inner voice of the community, while

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8 “Nepasotinęs amžino bado, / Jį tik pridengiau rūbais šalnos.”

9 “Jaunoji rausta, bet midų geria. / Kepk, svočia drūta! / Karvojų su rūta / kaimiečiams!”

the narrator of the epic poem identifies this reproaching voice as an imperative of conscience: “Somebody told him secretly to drain dry an unsavoury chalice of repentance here”<sup>10</sup> (Maironis, 1988, 175). Maironis often exploited the scenes of feasts and public events with tasting of food (and especially alcoholic beverages) as acts of obligation and significant oaths, revealing his intention to represent the psychological dilemmas, anxiety, and disappointment of the egocentric characters.

The tasting of food in the circles of fellows was an important part of communication of nationalist-oriented emerging Lithuanian intelligentsia; collective festivities were related to the politics of taste, informal discussions between democratic (popular, rustic) and aristocratic traditions of national cuisine. During breakfast and dinner, family members and colleagues plunge into long disputes and tea-drinking ceremonies; they taste daily local dishes and thus strengthen their relationships. In the poem *Tarp skausmų į garbę* (*Among Pains to Glory*) the youngsters are awakened in the late hours of the morning, when they smell the flavour of boiling tea from the samovar (Lith. *sauvaras*) (Maironis, 1988, 360). The samovar turns into the central point of the dining room and the network of communication is set around it. The bubbling hot water in the samovar intermingles with melodies played on the piano, while a visitor of an educated rustic family can listen to the private concerts of minor etudes of French composers. Despite the approbation of the national agrarian elite’s aspirations, Maironis felt himself bonded to the gallant Western European manor culture and expressed his will to harmonise the gastronomic and artistic interests of the nobility and peasants. The samovar was again depicted on the occasion of festivity on the occasion of a young national activist entering the cleric seminary (Maironis, 1988, 411–2). Along the table, the lively intellectual symposium begins, and the group of patriots taste tea from the samovar and read the classical Lithuanian authors Kristijonas Donelaitis and Antanas Baranauskas, as well as world-class stanzas by Friedrich Schiller, demonstrating their literary preferences and initializing the discussion on the national canon of the classics.

The highest rank among the Lithuanian dishes was given to the rustic style hotchpotch (Lith. *šiupinys*), which was eulogised in the epic poem *Our Troubles* as an ultimate example of national identity. This substantial meal arouses nostalgia

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10 “Jam liepte liepė kas slapčia / Išgert lig dugno ir tai čia / Tauraitę atgailos neskanią.”

and directly addresses the senses of taste and scent, but sometimes it provokes an euphoric amnesia of reality: “When you are wandering abroad, you won’t find a hotchpotch elsewhere; this meal indulges a Lithuanian when he finds it in his homeland, stewed well; you can even swallow your tongue! A Lithuanian will repudiate many things: his nation, language and even his surname; however, he will always enjoy a stiff hotchpotch; he might be a true fiend but when he scents the steam of hotchpotch, he will forget all other steams”<sup>11</sup> (Maironis, 1988, 163–4).

Contexts of taste, meal and hunger are disclosed in the poems which express a certain degree of social criticism. In the libretto *Kame išganymas* (*Where is the Saving?*, 1895), a disadvantaged crowd complains about hunger. More references to the basic alimentary/gastronomical needs can be found in Maironis’s satirical poems, where the semantic antithesis of “sweetness” of high ideals and abominable reality is evident. Indulgence in food is regarded negatively; it represents the physiological vulgarity and excesses of national renegades, conformists, and corrupted bureaucrats. There were many sarcastic scenes of high society of the newly created Lithuanian state that inspired the poet’s satirical tone. Maironis criticised those cynical gourmands from his idealist point of view (although he was often regarded as a member of the ruling Lithuanian political and cultural elite himself). Never-ending banquets with gambles, frauds, scandals, scenes of debauchery and excess eating and drinking violate moral principles, resent those who struggle heavily for the national ideals. The physiognomic features of those violators are mocked, their hedonistic way of being is condemned as degeneracy, a degradation to animalistic existence: the drunken functionaries are described as pot-bellied figures who wash their throats with Madera wines (Maironis, 1987, 155).

Exotic meals and drinks emphasise distance between the self-established elite and provincial masses that remain loyal to the local cuisine. The position of the author may seem ambiguous: he denounced the bacchanals of the ruling class and at the same time sarcastically encouraged the debauchers to demonstrate all their contempt and odium to the decent citizens: “Build and decorate your high palaces and put bottles on the table of banquet!...”<sup>12</sup> (Maironis, 1987, 168).

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11 „Keliauk badaudamas svetur, – / Nerasi šiupinio kitur, / Kursai taip lepintų lietuvi / Kaip Lietuvoj, kad jis antai / Garuoja šutintas drūtai; / Prarysi sveikas net liežuvį. / Lietuvis daug atsižadės: / Tautos, kalbos, net pavardės, / Bet mėgsta šiupinį jis tirštą; / Nors būtų išgama tikru, – / Užgautas šiupinio garu / Jisai kitus garus užmiršta.“

12 „Statykite, puoškite aukštus namus / Ir bonkas ant pokylių stalo!..“

## Semantic Amplitude of Taste

Considering the repertoire of gustative (taste) categories, sweetness is mentioned most frequently in Maironis's works. It is related to euphoria, creativity and fertility, religious ecstasy and spiritual enthusiasm, and derives from divine felicity and Apollonian inspiration. This euphoric mood is cogitated as mystic augury or "anticipation which talks to the heart to clearly, lively and sweetly"<sup>13</sup> (Maironis, 1987, 105). The sense of sorrow is constantly linked to the untasteful bitterness of bile – a reversed, dysphoric concept, related to the semantic of depression, destruction, violation of harmony, and chaotic archetypic images of the chthonic gods of antiquity (e.g., Dionysus, Thanatos), which are antithetic to the well-balanced, temperate worldview of Maironis: "Regarding painful and heavy sadness, the most beautiful days turned bitter like bile"<sup>14</sup> (Maironis, 1987, 96).

Insatiable desires are related to vital lust and dynamism. The erotic aspect of sweetness is reflected only in the translation of an emotionally touching hymn *Caura Pancasika* by the 9<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri poet Bilhana, where the taste of a kiss is meditated; the translator of classical verses could ignore his confessional obligations and express the hedonistic, passionate aspect of taste. He could liberate his creative imagination because he did not directly identify with the lyrical ego of an exotic poem, a pathetic prisoner of love: "The cinder of kisses dissolves on the lips like honey! I would drink the sweetness [of the lips] just like a bee drinks from a lily forever"<sup>15</sup> (Maironis, 1987, 235). The taste was also regarded as a pure aesthetical category by Maironis. In the famous stanzas of from the lyrical poem "Vakaras ant ežero Keturių Kantonų" ("Evening on the Lake of the Four Cantons"), flowers give off the scent of "tasty health" (Lith. literally: *skani sveikata*): tasteful feelings are related to the enjoyment of senses and embody the values of moderation, balance, and the golden mean: "Down from the mountains health giving roses / Their sweet perfume blew"<sup>16</sup> (Maironis, 1987, 185).

From a gastropoetic and ethic point of view, Maironis's lyrical ego represented himself as a theologically oriented classicist personality, searching for the

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13 „Juk nujautimas širdžiai šneka / Taip aiškiai, linksmi ir saldžiai.“

14 „Nuo nuliūdimo, skaudaus ir kieto, / Tulže apkarto gražiausios dienos.“

15 „Dar pabučiavimų žarijos / Ant lūpų tirpsta kaip medus! / Kaip ta bitelė iš lelijos / Jų gerčiau amžiais saldumus.“

16 „Rožių iš kalnų papūtė kvapas / Skania sveikata“; poetic translation by Peter Tempest.

Apollonian balance, denouncing any kind of excessiveness, and expressing his clear conviction regarding the categories of taste, beauty, and truth. Taste, like all spheres of physical perception, seems to be a risky topic for morally constrained Catholic ethics; therefore, the poet's lyrical ego needs rules of regulation and alimentary etiquette. In his private life, Maironis had opportunities to sample gourmet meals and drinks but remained loyal to the national rustic cuisine. In his rhetoric, one can find semantic parallelisms of land and nutrition, labour and bread, which were typical of nationalist bards and geopolitical visionaries; in his alimentary code, the euphoric "taste of pleasure" is related to the meals that integrate and unite the emerging patriotic community (e.g., hotchpotch); on the other hand, his gastropoetic program is often limited to the existential minimum and efforts to protect the patriotic community from starvation. In his poems, Maironis exposed the social antithesis of "black bread vs. white bread" and emphasised the imperative of temperance, as well as the duty to deserve one's meal. The scenes of collective celebrations commemorating various rites of passage and festivities related to the events of the ecclesiastic calendar are frequent in his epic poems. The repertoire of gustative categories seems not to be very rich: sweetness dominates as a euphoric taste, related rather to the divine perfection of the lost Eden and pure emotional enthusiasm than to sensual enjoyment (the erotic sweetness of kissing appears in the translations of exotic texts of antiquity, disguising all presumable references to personal experiences). The antithetic taste of bitterness serves as a reminder of the fragility of existence and is related to an emotional and perceptive decline, depression and dysphoria. Regarding gustative (and generally, perceptive) categories, Maironis relied on public estimations, the collective judgements related to the agrarian ethics, and Romanticist and Classicist aesthetics.

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