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Drosilla and Charicles: an Instance of the Ambivalent Classical Conception of Literary Emulation in Middle Byzantine Context

Abstract: Nicetas Eugenianus' novel *Drosilla and Charicles* is the product of mimesis in two ways. First, it is modelled on classical novels and as an imitation of the novel *Rhodanthe and Dosicles* by Theodore Prodromus. Second, another characteristic is even more important than this change in the established genre. In the work of Prodromus, namely, there are numerous items from classical novel-writers, which were never marked as such. In the Eugenianus' text, however, there are two explicit allusions to a couple of classical novels whose protagonists are mentioned. Since this is a rare instance in Byzantine literature, its characteristics are worth analysing.

Key-words: Byzantine novel, ancient romance, mimesis, Classical rhetoric.

As is well known among the classicists, it is still an open question if and to which extent the classical Greek novel, in capacity of a literary *genre* – as a whole or in part – originated from epic poetry, New Attic comedy, mythological narratives, or historiography.¹ Yet, if we examine closely the *genre's* texts which have been preserved to date, we will observe that the literary allusions appearing in them relate to all afore mentioned *genres* and reflect them. Among others, C. Müller was the first, to my knowledge, to become aware of this kind of relation and define it, in the framework of the Vogt's *History of Greek Literature*, as the "aesthetics of reception".² Namely, just as the contemporary Lucianic satire, the classical novel too, to great extent, represents a sort of patchwork made of literary and mythographical allusions. Likewise, we can assume that the same *procédé* was especially attractive to the Byzantine authors of novels, since the imitation of literary artefacts was truly more important for them than the Aristotelian principle of imitation of the reality. To this Byzantine novels' specificity we can add another dimension, insofar as the classical novels themselves represent an important supplementary source of possible references for the 12th century Byzantine novelists.

In other words, late Classical representatives of what we today primarily call narrative form, the novels, have not yet found their place on a genealogy

¹ Cf. Perry: 3-43; Reardon: 292-4; Steiner: passim; Hägg (1971): 334-5.

² Müller: 389.

tree of Greek literary history. Nevertheless, these old-new love stories, originating from the end of the Middle Byzantine period, still represent continuators of the Classical cultural heritage and literary technique. At the same time, owing to the identical means of expression, these new novels were tied to *mimesis* and literary reproduction that imposed very narrow boundaries of creativity to the Byzantine writers in the works written in bookish archaizing language.³ Precisely this novelistic *genre*, that is a group of thematically homogeneous works, became paradigmatic for the entire sector of literary production which was related, at least partially, to fiction and which set itself a goal to entertain the audience.⁴

As far as the subject matter is concerned, these Middle Byzantine novels – in accordance with what crystallized itself as a privileged plot of fictional narrative since the Hellenistic period – present stories of love and adventures. Apart from the constant love-theme, as something mutual with Late-Antique Greek novel, these works written in literary language have also the use of the same rhetorical means, which would be as follows: insertion of opulent artistic descriptions, long rhetorical speeches, letters, monologues, lamentations, and the similar. All these means show evidence of the persistence and continuity of certain narrative techniques and, more generally, of the strength of a typically Byzantine tradition of education and culture. However, the relevant continuity of stylistic modes and forms is followed by some – albeit slight – innovations in the area of thematic and narrative structure.

Generally speaking, the similarities of plot between each of the three entirely preserved novels on the one hand, and their classical models on the other, are probably too often overestimated. Still, luxurious introductory descriptions, like those of Prodrômus' *Rhodanthe and Dosicles* and of Eugenianus' *Drosilla and Charicles*, indicate directly to the „opening“ scene of the Heliodorus' novel *Ethiopics*⁵ and, through it, to the Homeric descriptions of Helios' chariots⁶. Specifically, Prodrômus uses the dusk as the ambiance for the sudden and incomprehensible pirates' attack on the port.⁷ On the other hand, Eugenianus, for the same purpose, uses the depiction of dawn⁸, but, this time, it is, incidentally, the attack of brigands on the city's surroundings –. In this manner these descriptions reveal to us the nature of the text with which we are dealing and plot of which we start to unravel. The realistic de-

³ Cf. MacAlister, 275.

⁴ Cf. Agapitos – Smith: 36–7.

⁵ Heliod. *Aethiop.* I, 1, 1–4.

⁶ E.g. Hom *Il.* V, 5–6; XIX, 1–2.

⁷ Theod. Prodr. *Rhod. et Dos.* I, 1–9 (ed. Conca).

⁸ Nic. Eugen. *Dros. et Char.* I, 1–16 (ed. Conca).

scription at the beginning of Macrembolites' novel *Hysmine and Hysminias*⁹ also has similar importance, because it refers to Achilles Tatius' classical novel *Leucippe and Cleitophon*¹⁰, albeit implicitly.

Likewise, more or less direct references to the Classical literary texts abound in all three complete Byzantine novels, so that they have been used for the achieving of comical effects, too. An extraordinary sequence of this kind of references can be found in *Drosilla and Charicles*, i.e. in a speech, more than 200 verses long, spoken by a rude character, Callidemus, inside the 6th book of the novel. He is attempting to seduce the female protagonist by way of persuasive *plaidoyer* and is comically parading encyclopaedical examples of great love affairs taken from the Hellenistic *répertoire*.¹¹ As was already noticed by Hägg and Alexiou, this Eugenianus' character's tirade cites or alludes to the texts of Homer, Heliodorus, Plato and Longus, mentioning the episodes concerning the vicissitudes of Hero and Leander, Polyphemus and Galatea, Paris' judgement, Tantalus, Niobe, Zeus' love-connected metamorphoses, Semiramis, and so on.¹²

On the other hand, the emphasized treatment reserved for the poetry of Theocritus has to be mentioned as especially important, bearing in mind that the whole episode of the novel is set in the rural surrounding. An instance for the appropriation of Theocritus' poetry (in this particular case: *Idyll XII*, 16)¹³ in Eugenianus is provided by his repeated usage of the verb ἀντιφιλιῶ, for example in the phrase «φιλούμενον γὰρ ἀντιφιλεῖν οὐ θέλει» (*Dros. et Char.* VI, 455), where the Byzantine author redirects the description of the love desire from Hellenistic, homoerotic, to heteroerotic context, but not without certain ambiguities.

Inside the afore mentioned persuasion-speech of the secondary character Callidemus, there are two instances which are very rare, if not unique, in the Byzantine narrative literature of all periods. These instances are the explicit citing and naming of some fictional characters taken as exemplary authorities together with other, non-novelistic and mythological examples. The examples of fictional characters are found in the novels by Heliodorus – the secondary characters of Arsace¹⁴ and Achaemenes¹⁵ from the 7th book, and Longus – the

⁹ Eust. Macremb. *Hysm. et Hismin.* I, 1,1–6,1 (ed. Conca).

¹⁰ Ach. Tat. *Leuc. et Cleit* I, 1,1–1,13 (ed. Hercher).

¹¹ Nic. Eugen., *op. cit.* VI, 329–558. For a more detailed discussion on the episode, see Roilos: 74–5.

¹² Hägg (1983): 38–9; Alexiou: 37.

¹³ «ὁ κἀντεφιλησ' ὁ φιληθείς» (ed. Cholmeley).

¹⁴ Heliod. *Aethiop.* VII, 1–VIII, 15

¹⁵ *Ibid.* VII, 16–VIII, 5.

protagonists Daphnis and Chloe¹⁶. The reason for this procedure lies, to my mind, in the rising appreciation of Heliodorus' literary work from the time of Photius in the 9th century, through Psellus in the 11th, all the way to Philippus Philagathus in the 12th century.

As it was already mentioned, the best way to trace the reception of Heliodorus' novel in the 12th century Byzantine novels is by analyzing the introductory sequences of Prodromus' and Eugenianus' novels. We might say with Agapitos that these introductory sequences, in the new context, are transformed by taking into account the Psellus' principle of the construction of «ἐπεισόδια διηγήματα». (This principle was presented in his essay on the comparison of characteristics of Achilles Tatius' and Heliodorus' novels.) This procedure in Prodromus' novel implies that the writer, instead of scattered sections of narration, binds together some shorter narrative and descriptive scenes with an apparently important reason to achieve an effect of rhetorical pathos.¹⁷

If we now turn our attention to the analogous scene in the Eugenianus' novel, even in a superficial way it becomes clear that here we are dealing with the standard conception of literary emulation, as it was adopted by the Greek practice of demonstrative rhetoric, at least from the times of the Second Sophistic onward. In other words, we can see how Eugenianus reverses the Prodromus' already inverted sequence of narrative sections, thus coming nearer to the primary model of both of them, that is to say Heliodorus, particularly by applying the stylistic figures of *antithesis* and *aposiopesis*. Yet, in other sections of his novel, too, Eugenianus is parodying Heliodorus' text much more than Prodromus is. What is more, he gladly includes some other models, primarily the poetic texts written by Theocritus¹⁸, and prosaic ones by Longus¹⁹. In that manner, the applied procedure of rhetorical amplification and the narrative redimensioning become obvious.

The difference between the two novelists can further be observed in displaying the effect of love suffering on the protagonists' looks. This effect is less visible in Prodromus²⁰, while Eugenianus gives himself more liberty, although only when the secondary characters are concerned, and he sometimes alludes to the corporal changes caused by the love passion. The above-mentioned character Callidemus, for example, attempts to incite Drosilla to become more

¹⁶ In: Nic. Eugen., *op. cit.* VI, 440–51.

¹⁷ Agapitos: 234–5.

¹⁸ E.g. Nic. Eugen., *op. cit.* VI, 507, 516, 523; VI, 526 ~Theocr. XI, 30-1, 51-3, 36-7; I, 27-30.

¹⁹ E.g. Long. *Daph. et Chl.* I, 18,1, II 7,1, 7,7~ Nic. Eugen., *op. cit.* VI, 358, 376, 378.

²⁰ E.g. Theod. Prodr., *op. cit.* III, 236.

compassionate towards him by describing his own body as being ruined by the destructive force of love²¹. It is important to note here, as another contribution to the thesis on Eugenianus' double imitation, that this description of Callidemus owes its contents to the imitation of Heliodorus' description of Chariclea in *Aethiop.* III, 19, 1.

On the other hand, as far as the displaying of bodily sufferings is concerned, in Eugenianus' novel a certain reduction of their significance would be manifested. Namely, if we exempt the sufferings of captivity, to which the author refers in the same allusive manner as it was done by Prodrōmus, the only serious temptations mentioned are Drosilla's fall into the sea and her later starving, immediately before she would be rescued by the old Baryllis²². Likewise, Prodrōmus is continually alluding to the absence of carnal congression between Dosicles and Rhodanthe. Moreover, only a small number of passages in his text gives out indecent tones. On the contrary, the same cannot be said about Eugenianus, who surely underwent a strong influence of Hellenistic love poetry. He evidently does not hesitate to let his characters indulge in love pleasures.

A great difference between the two novelists will be clearly shown by comparing some of the garden-scenes written by them. In Prodrōmus' text Dosicles takes an opportunity to remain alone with Rhodanthe in Glauco's garden, in order to beg the girl to "become a woman"²³. She refuses by appealing to an apparition of the god Hermes, who had announced to her that the couple's marriage would be consumed only after their return to the town of Abydos. Thereafter, Dosicles desists from his primary intention²⁴. The circumstances in Eugenianus' novel are somewhat similar, but this time Charicles is much more eloquent during his proposal to Drosilla, as he tries to convince her to imitate the behaviour of birds, which are mating nearby, and to submit herself to the universal power of love. Even after the girl refused to give up her virginity, he continues to insist, in the measure that she finally ends up angrily reproaching him.

This bold elaboration of Prodrōmus' sober episode clearly points to a more concrete distinctiveness, that Eugenianus intends to attribute to his main characters. This new trend is obvious in Drosilla's first appearance also, which is more complete and more repleted with erotic tension, because the writer does

²¹ Nic. Eugen., *op. cit.* VI, 341-3.

²² *Ibid.* VI, 105; VI, 185-6.

²³ Theod. Prodr., *op. cit.* III, 65.

²⁴ *Ibid.* III, 76-7.

not decline to speak, among other, of her neck, chest, legs and arms²⁵. Another passage, still, reveals even more Eugenianus' desire to endow his main characters with flesh and blood. The beginning of the novel's 5th book²⁶ is a realistic scene within which the heroine's body acquires complete existence within the narrative. The actions of the protagonists, too, are more frequently stressed by Eugenianus than by Prodrumus, insofar as the gap between the main and the secondary characters, present in Prodrumus, becomes less pronounced in Eugenianus.

Therefore, the procedure of narrative reduction, rhetorical amplification and tragediographical rearrangement can be traced all along the texts of the two novels. While Prodrumus gives the impression of staying in a close intertextual correspondence with Heliodorus' text, Eugenianus, on the other hand, writes whether in accordance with Prodrumus, or contrary to him. Besides, he often involves other texts in order to correct or to subvert the already „Heliodoric“ novel of his predecessor.

Now, returning to the Callidemus episode, it can be argued that it fairly well reflects the Eugenianus' attitude toward his models: he shares the same attitude with most of the other writers of *belles-lettres* in the Comnenian period, and not only then. It could succinctly be defined, as was already done long time ago primarily by Hunger and Garzya, among others, as imitation that does not imply mere copying of the original, but reviving the model in a new context and adapting it to the contemporary taste and particular personal style.²⁷ Similarly, the Eugenianus' application of the principle of emulation becomes visible in his treatment of the motif of festival, during which the protagonists' couple meets and when the patron divinity of the sanctuary bestows its protection over the recently enamoured couple. In this case the divinity is Dionysos, chosen by the author in conformity with the famous classical example found in Longus' pastoral novel, but differing from all other pieces of the novelistic *genre*, not only those from antiquity, but also the contemporary ones.²⁸

In conclusion, I would only like to underline that the Eugenianus' repetitive use of erotic imagery and his often realistic rendering of the protagonists' emotions lead us to assume his desire to partly liberate himself from the traditional conventions of his predecessors,²⁹ but at the same time we see that he

²⁵ Nic. Eugen., *op. cit.* I, 120-58.

²⁶ More precisely *ibid.* V, 8.

²⁷ Hunger (1969-1970): *passim*; Garzya: 1030.

²⁸ Merkelbach: *passim*; Schönberger: 172f.

²⁹ Despite some earlier contrary opinions, notably Hunger (1978): 134.

stays within the boundaries of the *genre* thanks to his refined stylistic playfulness, based on the principles of literary imitation. Finally, it goes almost without saying – as it is the case with the self-restraint (σωφροσύνη) of the protagonists – that our author never entirely breaks the basic rules of the *genre*, and that in doing so he receptively meets the expectations of his audience.

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Резиме: Већ је одавно установљено да антички роман, као жанр, углавном представља неку врсту колажа, начињеног од различитих књижевних алузија које се догичу античке митологије, историографије, епске поезије и комедије, те да делимично одражава све ове жанрове истовремено. Овај тип књижевних упућивања веома прикладно је описан изразом „естетика рецепције“ (К. Милер). С друге стране, исти литерарни поступак се, такође, у великој мери може приписати и византијским писцима тзв. учених романа из 12. века, будући да је за њих аристотеловско начело подражавања стварности било много мање значајно од мимезе књижевних дела по себи. Ову особеност романа из доба Комнина, што је такође уочено, допуњује још једна карактеристика, а то је да се у њима може наћи и на одраз књижевних алузија преузетих из њихових античких узора.

Сва три у потпуности сачувана византијска романа – тј. *Роданта и Досикле* Теодора Продрома, *Дросила и Харикле* Никите Евгенијана и *Измина и Изминија* Евстатија Макремволита – обилују мање-више јасним реминисценцијама на истоврсне античке књижевне саставе, али велики број таквих алузија, боље рећи крипто-цитата, може се наћи нарочито у другопоменутом роману. Конкретно, реч је о говору из шестог певања Евгенијановог списка, дужине од преко 200 стихова (овде, као и код Продрома, метар је јампски триметар, одн. византијски дванаестерац), који читаоцима износи неотесани младић, по имену Калидем, у покушају да заведе јунакињу романа; да би то постигао, као аргументе убеђивања он употребљава широк репертоар чувених љубавних догодовштина из класичног и хеленистичког доба, чије набрајање поприма комично дејство, имајући у виду да је овај говор замишљен као формална беседа у складу са свим правилима реторике. Најзанимљивија особеност овог пасуса је та да Калидем овде, осим Хомера, Платона, Мусеја и Теокрита, непосредно цитира или алудира још и на два античка, тзв. софистичка романа, која потичу из позноримског периода хеленске књижевности, а то су Хелиодорови *Теаген и Хариклеја* и Лонгови *Дафнид и Хлоја*: њихови протагонисти, као и неколики споредни ликови, наиме, изричито су употребљени у својству примера, чија је сврха убеђивање, у некој врсти поигравања са старијом традицијом жанра. У овом прилогу учињен је покушај да се овакав поступак у

оквирима античког романеског жанра доведе у везу са осталим средњовизантијским књиженоисторијским и књижевнокритичким вредновањима неколиких представника истог жанра, која су износиле личности таквог значаја као што је Михаило Псел, у свом огледу о Хелиодору и Ахилу Татију, али и неки мање утицајни писци, какав је Филип „Философ“, у свом алегоријском тумачењу *Етиопске новести* (под условом да га поистоветимо са Филагатом из Керамија и, тиме, овај његов *opusculum* датирамо у 12. столеће). С друге стране, што се Лонговог романа тиче, много је теже наћи разлог за овакво поступање, будући да су *Дафнид* и *Хлоја* далеко ређе коментарисани и да ни изблиза нису доживели онако разгранату рукописну предају као, примера ради, Хелиодор или Ахил Татије; али, чини се вероватним да је интертекстуална употреба Лонговог списа од стране Евгенијана била условљена буколском атмосфером која преовладава у *Дросили* и *Хариклу*. Коначно, изгледа да није безразложно закључити како Евгенијаново знатно ослањање на теме и мотиве код Теокрита одражава почетак обновљеног занимања византијских писаца за буколску поезију, чији ће утицај у наредним столећима расти, првенствено захваљујући њеном читању у алегоријском кључу.