Erotokritos and the history of the novel*

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Erotokritos has long been recognised as the masterpiece of the Venetian-inspired literary and cultural Renaissance in Crete. The heyday of that Renaissance has generally been identified with the period of almost a century that separates the Battle of Lepanto (1571) from the fall of the last of the Cretan cities, Candia, to the Ottomans in 1669. But in reality, rather like the exactly contemporary heyday of the Elizabethan theatre in England, the heyday of the Cretan Renaissance seems to have been concentrated into a much shorter period.

The Venetians, who had ruled Crete since 1211, began pouring resources into the island after the loss of Cyprus to the Ottomans in 1571; the victory at Lepanto ushered in a period of heavy investment in this major outpost in the eastern Mediterranean; the spectacular fortifications of Candia (modern Heraklion) were strengthened. And it was in the last twenty years of the sixteenth century, and just into the first years of the seventeenth, that most of the surviving literary works of the Cretan Renaissance were written. The playwright Georgios Chortatsis, born in 1545, wrote his plays between 1580 and about 1601; Vitsentzos Kornaros, the author of *Erotokritos*,

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was eight years Chortatsis's junior, born in Siteia in 1553. The current consensus places the composition of *Erotokritos* somewhere between 1590 and 1610,[1] though I confess to a hankering for a slightly earlier date.[2]

Although not all specialists are equally convinced of the identity of the poet, all the evidence that has accumulated in the last twenty years confirms that, of the many recorded individuals with the name Vitsentzos Kornaros, this was indeed the author of *Erotokritos*. If so, he was a member of the Venetian-descended aristocracy, well connected with the Venetian government and with learned circles in Candia. His first language was the Cretan dialect of Greek, but he would have been more or less bilingual in the Venetian dialect of

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[1] The range 1600-1610 is proposed by the text's most recent, and authoritative, editor; see Stylianos Alexiou, "Introduction", in idem (ed.), *Βιτσέντζος Κορνάρος, Ερωτόκριτος* [pocket edition], (Athens: Ermis 1988), p. xvii [hereafter Alexiou 1988]; cf. Stylianos Alexiou *Βιτσέντσος Κορνάρος, Ερωτόκριτος: κριτική έκδοση* (Athens: Ermis 1980), p. xc [hereafter Alexiou 1980]. For the wider range 1590-1610, see David Holton, "Romance", in idem (ed.), *Literature and society in Renaissance Crete* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), p. 212 and n. 9; idem *Erotokritos* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press 1991) [Studies in Modern Greek], p. 5: "the last few years of the sixteenth century or the first decade of the seventeenth;" in any case after *Erofili*, probably completed c. 1595.

[2] Against Alexiou, Holton, and others, I would argue for a literal reading of the epilogue, which states that the poem had been in circulation for some time before this epilogue was written, and strongly implies that the poem itself had been written in Siteia *before* the poet's marriage (which we know took place in 1590) and his move to Candia. (At least, the references to Siteia are misleading, as well as inconsequential, if this is not the meaning.) Secondly, I would invert the well-established close relationship between *Erotokritos* and Chortatsis's tragedy *Erofili* (c. 1595), on the grounds that there is surely a marked and consistent evolution from the language, rhetoric, and versification of *Erotokritos* to the much denser, more complex and hugely more sophisticated usage of Chortatsis in *Erofili* (and also in the still later *Katzourbos*). On the other hand, exactly the same case has been made for the relation of *Abraham's Sacrifice*, now believed to be by Kornaros, and *Erotokritos*; but the Italian source for *Abraham's Sacrifice* was published as late as 1586 (Alexiou 1980: xc-xcii).

Italian and could write poems in the literary form of that language. The language of his formal education would have been Latin; there is no evidence that any of the writers of the Cretan Renaissance had more than a smattering of ancient Greek. Finally, although this has been little remarked, this branch of the Kornaros family belonged to the western, Catholic faith.[3]

The story of *Erotokritos* is briefly told (although the text runs to almost 10,000 lines). Boy meets girl; both fall in love. But there is an obstacle. Although both are well-born, she is the daughter of the king, he of the king's trusted counsellor. They cannot therefore marry. She is called Areti, which means "virtue"; she is also frequently called by the affectionate diminutive of her name, Aretousa. His name is Erotokritos, which means "tested by love", but on all but one occasion in the text this is abbreviated to Rotokritos (the form I will use here) or Rokritos. Aretousa pines for her secret love; to cheer her up, the king arranges a tournament in her honour. Rotokritos of course wins the tournament, but still cannot declare his love; Aretousa is to be married to another, a prince of royal blood. In the central episode of the story, the young couple meet clandestinely on a series of nights – chaperoned not only by the girl's nurse but also by the bars of the palace window that keep them apart. Despite this, they exchange rings and a secret engagement takes place.

Rotokritos now persuades his father, against his better judgement, to beg the hand of the king's daughter for his son. The king reacts as might be expected. Rotokritos is banished; Aretousa, refusing to marry the suitor of her father's choice, is thrown into prison. Five years pass before Rotokritos can return, disguised with the help of a magic potion, to save king and country from disaster in war. Finally, having almost lost his life and having delayed the long-awaited recognition scene

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[3] Alexiou 1988: xiv.

longer than is decent, Rotokritos is reconciled to the king, reunited with Aretousa, and the pair live happily ever after.

In English, *Erotokritos* is easily characterised as a "romance". The term is useful, because unlike the term "novel", the definition of "romance" does not specify a work in prose. In English studies there is a well-entrenched tradition of using these two terms contrastively: the "romance" is something different in nature from the novel, which emerges out of the former in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a form of negative response. This is the thesis of Ian Watt's celebrated *The rise of the novel* (1957); since restated in more elaborate form by Michael McKeon in *The origins of the English novel, 1600-1740* (1987; 2002). According to the opposite view, which I share, there is no opposition between these terms; the history of the novel is one and indivisible, although many-faceted, and runs more or less continuously from the earliest prose fiction known to us, written in Greek in the first century of our era, down to the best-sellers and Booker Prize winners of today. This was the view of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose long essay, "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel: Towards a historical poetics", charts the diachronic development of the genre. And the same view has been more recently championed by Margaret Anne Doody in her magisterial survey of the whole genre, *The true story of the novel* (1996).[4]

Neither of these, nor any other study that I am aware of in English, finds room in the story for *Erotokritos*. The Greek bibliography on Kornaros's work, which is understandably much larger, barely mentions the novel. No doubt reflecting the higher prestige of poetry in Greek culture until recently, it is

[4] M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel: Towards a historical poetics", in: M. M. Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination: Four essays,* ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin, Texas 1981), pp. 84-258; Margaret Anne Doody, *The true story of the novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP 1996; London: HarperCollins 1997).

normal in Greek to refer to *Erotokritos* as a "poem" and its author as a "poet". The work has also often been called an "epic" – wrongly, but not without some justification with regard to details (such as the long "epic" similes, for instance, and the accounts of fighting). The most recent editor, Stylianos Alexiou, somewhat awkwardly, but accurately, classifies *Erotokritos* as "a novel in verse",[5] but the implications of this apparent oxymoron are not discussed by him or by anyone else. Only in French, where the term *roman* is helpfully inclusive, has *Erotokritos* earned its natural and justified place in the history of Greek fiction, in the study by Henri Tonnet of Greek fiction from Hellenistic to modern times.[6]

In this paper I aim to place *Erotokritos* within the context of the historical development of European fiction, from its Hellenistic origins to the establishment of the "bourgeois" novel in prose in the eighteenth century.[7] The paper falls into two parts. In the first, I situate Kornaros's work both in relation to its Hellenistic and medieval precursors, and then in relation to two "landmark" developments of the period of the Renaissance in the west. In the second, I sample some of the qualities of Kornaros's narrative that can with hindsight be recognised as "novelistic".

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[5] Alexiou 1980: lxx-lxxiii; 1988: xxvii.

[6] Henri Tonnet, *Histoire du roman grec des origines à 1960* (Paris: L'Harmattan 1996), pp. 49-55. Greek translation: *Ιστορία του ελληνικού μυθιστορήματος* (Athens: Patakis 2001), pp. 64-71.

[7] The background is usefully and accurately sketched by Holton, "Romance", pp. 207-9. See, in particular, his comment, "These two separate strands of Greek and western narrative fiction come together in the *Erotokritos*" (p. 209). See also idem, "*Erotókritos* and Greek tradition," in Roderick Beaton (ed.), *The Greek novel A.D. 1-1985* (London: Croom Helm 1988), pp. 144-55. For Kornaros's knowledge of verse romances in vernacular Greek, written outside Crete in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Tina Lendari's paper "O *Ερωτόκριτος* και η ελληνική ερωτική μυθιστορία", to be published in the proceedings of the 2003 conference "Ζητήματα ποιητικής στον *Ερωτόκριτο*".

1.1. Hellenistic and medieval precursors

Whether Kornaros knew it or not, the broad plot of his romance is inherited from the Hellenistic origins of the genre. This was the common inheritance also of his immediate source, the fifteenth-century French prose romance, *Paris et Vienne* by Pierre de la Cypède, which he is assumed to have known via one of several Italian translations which circulated during the sixteenth century.[8] As is generally recognised, Kornaros transformed this work, organising its disparate material into a much tighter, more economical, plot; imposing to a large extent the pseudo-Aristotelian "unities" of place, time (with the exception of a briefly elided five-year gap), and action; and even evoking contemporary drama in the division of his work into five parts.

But at the same time there are significant elements retained, or restored, which go back beyond this immediate source and can be regarded as almost obligatory elements of the romance (or novel) as it developed from its Hellenistic origins.

One of these is the chastity of the lovers. This rule, which had been elevated to an almost mystical pitch by Heliodoros in the *Aithiopika*, is often flouted in the western medieval genre, including Kornaros's source, *Paris et Vienne*, but is rigorously restored in *Erotokritos*. Another is the motif of wandering and travel. Kornaros's Aristotelian structure does not allow much room for manoeuvre here, but the motif survives in attenuated form nonetheless. Rotokritos is exiled from his native Athens to the nearby island of Euboea (called here Egripos); as David Holton has convincingly shown, even with the unity of space largely maintained, the concept of exile runs through the whole work.[9]

[8] Holton, "Romance", p. 211; cf. Alexiou 1988: xxvi.

[9] David Holton, "Exile as theme and motif in the *Erotokritos*," *Antipodes* 21 (1987) 37-43; idem, "Romance", pp. 219-20.

Similarly, the inheritance of the Hellenistic genre is visible in the role assigned in *Erotokritos* to Chance and Fate.[10] Nor is the supernatural power of Love, represented by the semi-divine figure of Eros, absent. But these expected, traditional elements of the genre are retained only to be subverted in the course of the narrative. In *Erotokritos*, neither Chance nor Fate has the last word. The power of both is subordinated to the workings of a mechanism deeply embedded in the nature of things, whose effects seem to be accepted with stoical resignation by author and characters alike. This is already adumbrated in the opening lines of the poem, with their celebrated evocation of Fortune's wheel, a conventional idea of the medieval west. But the alternations that time brings, as the wheel turns in *Erotokritos,* are subtler, and more subtly conceived, than the traditional sudden, random reversals of Fortune. Aretousa, at a testing moment in the fourth part, when she has just been thrown into prison, begins to understand it like this:

> These things are flowers and blossoms, they come and go,
> the seasons change them and often undo them;
> like glass they crack, like smoke they vanish,
> they never stand still, they run and disappear.
> The higher the position Fate grants a man,
> the more it hurts him to be cast down from there;
> and those things that bring him greatest pleasure
> become his greatest enemies when the time comes to lose them.
> The more he is acclaimed as lord and hailed as king,
> just so much more must he fear, the more must he be afraid;
> because this is the nature of Fate's game,
> to take with one hand what the other gives.
> Whoever has been brought up in poverty, never touches
> the courses of the wheel, the way it likes to turn;
> but walks always without a care, eating and sleeping
> without ever fearing the jealous rage of fate.[11]

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[10] In the Hellenistic genre, respectively Τύχη and Είμαρμένη. The equivalent terms in the language of Kornaros are Μοίρα and ριζικό.

[11] Τούτά 'ναι ανθοί και λούλουδα, διαβαίνου και περνούσι
και μεταλλάσσουν τα οι καιροί, συχνιά τα καταλούσι·

Even the tyrannical power of Eros is invoked, only to surrender its supremacy in the imagined world of the poem to what we can only call, after Freud, the internal drives of the protagonists.

Another survival from the Hellenistic origins of the genre is the apparent death of each of the lovers, known to modern scholarship by the German term first applied to it by Erwin Rohde in 1876: *Scheintod*. In the fifth part of *Erotokritos* the hero, expressly ignoring the rhetorical pleas of the narrator, persists in testing Aretousa's loyalty to him by visiting her in prison in disguise, and giving her a graphic account of his own death (V 883-984). There are two further instances, earlier in the narrative, in which Rotokritos has also been presumed dead. The third part closes with his parents weeping over his departure for exile, as though he had been already dead (III 1745-60). And the fifth part opens, in the aftermath of his single combat with the enemy champion Aristos, whom he has killed, with all the bystanders supposing that Rotokritos, too, has lost his life (V 4-8).

So, on no fewer than three occasions, in *Erotokritos* just as in its distant Hellenistic avatars, the hero's love for the heroine is tested to the extreme point of passing apparently through even death. The corresponding motif of resurrection, that has

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σαν το γυαλί ραγίζουνται, σαν τον καπνό διαβαίνου,
ποτέ δε στέκου ασάλευτα, μα πιλαλούν και πηαίνου.
Κι όσο πλια η Μοίρα στα ψηλά τον άθρωπο καθίζει,
τόσο και πλιότερα πονεί, όντε τονε γκρεμνίζη·
κ' εκείνα οπού τον κάνουσι συχνιά ν' αναγαλλιάση
μεγάλοι οχθροί τού γίνονται την ώρα οπού τα χάση.
Κι όσο πλια αφέντης κράζεται και βασιλιός λογάται,
τόσο πλια πρέπει να δειλιά, πλιότερα να φοβάται·
γιατί έτσι το 'χει φυσικό τση Μοίρας το παιγνίδι,
να παίρνη από τη μια μερά, στην άλλη να τα δίδη.
Αμ' όποιος σε φτωχότητα αναθραφή, δε γγίζει
του κύκλου τα στρατέματα, ως θέλει, να γυρίζη·
μα πάντα ανέγνοιος πορπατεί, κι αν τρώγη κι αν κοιμάται,
του ριζικού την όργητα ποτέ δεν τη φοβάται (IV 605-20).

often been associated, since, with the idea of secular love as the equivalent of a mystical revelation, is also not lacking in *Erotokritos*, though understated. Rotokritos, presumed dead, revives. So too does Aretousa, whose first response to hearing the false report of her fiancé's death, supposedly devoured by wild beasts, is to faint. For the space of a dozen lines, and for several minutes in the imagined time of the narrative, she appears dead in the eyes of Rotokritos and her nurse Frosyni, who are present.[12]

Finally, whether or not he knew he was doing so, Kornaros finds an ideal solution in *Erotokritos* for an underlying narrative problem throughout the previous history of the genre. In the Hellenistic novel the protagonists, especially the men, are excessively passive. This may be functional, designed to reflect the nearest to a generic characterisation for the novel that exists in Greek before the nineteenth century: *pathos erotikon*.[13] But it has created difficulties for later readers, who have often been frustrated by the inability of these talkative playthings of Chance and Fate ever to *do* anything. On the other hand, in the western chivalric tradition, which stems from the Old French romances of Chrétien de Troyes, written in the 1170s and 1180s, the pure love interest tends to be subordinated to the *gestes* of the male hero, exploits whose overt purpose often seems to be nothing other than display.[14]

Between the earliest known novel, Chariton's *Callirhoe*, whose seventh book manages this rather well,[15] and the

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[12] For Rotokritos's "resurrection" see *Erotokritos* V 470; V 751-4. Aretousa appears dead: V 957-69.

[13] Chariton, *Callirhoe*, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press 1995) [Loeb Classical Library], 1.1.

[14] See e.g. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The representation of reality in western literature,* trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1953), pp. 133-4, 140; Bakhtin, "Forms of time and of the chronotope", pp. 152-4; W. T. H. Jackson, "The nature of romance", in: *Approaches to Medieval Romance. Yale French Studies* 51 (1974), pp. 12-25.

[15] Chariton, *Callirhoe*; see esp. 7.5.12, where at the climax of the plot the rivals for Callirhoe are each respectively victorious on land and sea.

eighteenth century, it is hard to find a perfect balance between the passivity of love and the activity of warlike deeds. But this is exactly what Kornaros achieves, with his thematic division of *Erotokritos* into five parts, in which each theme alternately dominates.[16] In this way Rotokritos, like Chariton's Chaereas a long time before him, and like Fielding's Tom Jones some time after, is at once tested to the limit by his experience (*pathos*) of love and elevated *by his love for Aretousa* to the highest pitch of manly action that is possible in the world of the story.

1.2. Renaissance landmarks in the genre

I want now to place *Erotokritos* in relation to two prose romances (or novels), one of the early Renaissance period in Italy, the other almost the exact contemporary of Kornaros's romance at the other end of Europe, in England. In both, in different ways, the transition from the thought-world of the Middle Ages to that of the Renaissance has been traced, exactly as is the case also with *Erotokritos*.[17]

It is likely that Kornaros knew something of Giovanni Boccaccio, whose career in Naples and Florence, spanning the middle third of the fourteenth century, coincides with the first period of the Italian Renaissance. That career begins, effectively, with two long works, each of which is a reworking of a late medieval romance, a genre to which the prolific Boccaccio never returned, though he would quarry it extensively later, in his *Decameron*. Both these early romances of Boccaccio are works of the 1330s; both have titles which are pseudo-Greek.

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[16] On this aspect of the romance's structure, see further below.

[17] Antonio Enzo Quaglio, "Introduzione" [to *Filocolo*] in: Vittore Branca (ed.), *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Vol. 1 (Milan: Mondadori 1967), pp. 47-59; see p. 49: "il 'rifacimento' rinvigorisce così l'incerto, quasi decadente mondo della fonte." That *Erotokritos* belongs fully to the spirit and thought-world of the Italian sixteenth century has been demonstrated conclusively by Alexiou (1980: lxxi-lxxiii and elsewhere); cf. Holton, "Exile", p. 42: "Kornaros opens with a traditional and medieval concept of the wheel of fortune... But the closing image of the poem is very different... Human endeavour has a purpose and a goal."

Filocolo, which is probably the earlier of the two, is in prose, and reworks the well-known tale of *Floire et Blancheflor*, a work which perhaps not entirely coincidentally has close similarities to Kornaros's source for *Erotokritos*, *Paris et Vienne*. The second, *Filostrato*, is in verse, and is best known in English as the source for Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Other links can be established between *Filocolo* and *Erotokritos*. Boccaccio, too, imposes a five-part structure on the disparate material of his source, although in his case, in the 1330s, the influence of Aristotelian theory can probably be discounted, and Boccaccio if anything outdoes his predecessors in the florid medieval digressiveness of his plot. Still, the precedent was there for Kornaros to adopt, from his own different perspective almost three centuries later. Not only that, but Boccaccio too, particularly in the second and third parts of *Filocolo,* shifts the focus from the traditional external adventures of the hero and heroine to explore their inner worlds, as Kornaros would also do later. Common ground between the two romances can also be found in the inclusion in each of the inserted tale of Cephalus and Procris, which derives from Ovid, although Boccaccio does not seem to have been Kornaros's immediate source for this.[18] Finally, the closing conceit, which compares the completed work to a ship brought safely home to harbour after passing many dangers, is again common to both *Filocolo* and *Erotokritos*, although that too goes back to Ovid and is to some extent traditional in the period.[19]

But the most telling link with *Filocolo*, and also with *Filostrato*, has to do with their Hellenising titles. "Filocolo" is the name that the hero of that romance, Florio, adopts when he goes in search of the heroine, Biancifiore; the false name is

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[18] See Anna di Benedetto Zimbone, "Κέφαλος e Χαρίδημος. Il mito di Cefalo e il principe di Creta", *Θησαυρίσματα* 26 (1996) 178-95; see p. 183.

[19] Boccaccio, *Filocolo* 5.97 (cf. also 1.2); for the source in Ovid see editor's note 3, p. 968; *Erotokritos* V 1527-32.

explained by the narrator. Supposedly made up of two Greek words, it means "labour of love".

> "Filocolo" is made up of two Greek nouns: *philos* and *colon*; and *philos* in Greek means in our language the same as *love* and *colon* in Greek similarly gives in our language *effort/labour*: from which, linking them together one might say, switching round the components, *labour of love.*[20]

As commentators have pointed out, Boccaccio at this stage in his career knew little or no Greek, and this piece of hocus-pocus confirms it. Similarly, the title *Filostrato* is explained by the author as a reflection of the tragic fate of its hero, Troilo, with the meaning, partly again derived from Greek, of "ruined by love".

> Filostrato is the title of this book, and the reason is this: because this fits exactly the effect of the book. Filostrato is equivalent to a man conquered and ruined by love.[21]

Even if he had not read them, it is hardly likely that the Greek-speaking Vitsentzos Kornaros, bilingual in Italian, would not have *heard* of these illustrious predecessors in the genre in which he was writing. What better title could he find for his own fiction, and what better name for his own hero, than to "translate" these pseudo-erudite inventions of Boccaccio back into the language from which they allegedly came? The meaning of "Erotokritos" ("tried, tested in love") stands almost exactly midway between the meanings that Boccaccio

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[20] Filocolo è da due greci nomi composto, da "philos" e da "colon"; e "philos" in greco tanto viene a dire in nostra lingua quanto "amore" e "colon" in greco similemente tanto in nostra lingua risulta quanto "fatica": onde congiunti insieme, si può dire, traponendo le parti, *fatica d'amore. Filocolo* 3.75, ed. Antonio Enzo Quaglio, in: Branca (ed.), *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio,* Vol. 1.

[21] Filostrato è il titolo de questo libro, e la cagione è questa: per ciò che ottimamente si confà con l'effetto del libro. Filostrato tanto viene a dire quanto uomo vinto e abbattuto d'amore ... *Filostrato*, ed. Vittore Branca, *Tutte le opere*, Vol. 2 (Milan: Mondadori 1964): title page.

claims for his cod-Greek coinages: "labour of love" and "ruined by love".[22]

My other point of comparison for *Erotokritos* in the western literature of the Renaissance is the prose romance (or novel) *Arcadia* by Sir Philip Sidney. Born in 1554, Sidney was just one year younger than Kornaros; he died at the age of 32, in legendary circumstances, of wounds received while fighting against the Spanish in the Netherlands. *Arcadia* was necessarily therefore a youthful work, and seems to have been completed by 1580. Shortly afterwards Sidney decided to rewrite the book, on a grander scale and in a more lofty style; as has aptly been argued recently, the rewrite was an attempt to shift his ground from his earlier classical model, Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, to that of Heliodoros's *Aithiopika*, which was then coming into fashion.[23] This second version was left half-finished at Sidney's death in 1586; it was published four years later, in 1590; then in 1593 what was to become the definitive version appeared, in which the unfinished "New" Arcadia was completed by tacking on the final portion of the original version. It was in this form that Sidney's novel was known to readers and scholars until the early twentieth century. The original, complete version was rediscovered in 1907, and published for the first time in 1926. It is with Sidney's original version, the so-called *Old Arcadia*, that *Erotokritos* may be compared – and indeed with which its writing may have been more or less exactly contemporary.[24]

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[22] For the meaning of "Erotokritos" see the first philological edition by Stefanos Xanthoudidis (Athens 1915), p. 368.

[23] Robert H. F. Carver, "'Sugared invention' or 'mongrel tragi-comedy': Sir Philip Sidney and the ancient novel", *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel*, Vol. 8, ed. H. Hofmann and M. Zimmerman (Groningen 1997), pp. 197-226.

[24] Katherine Duncan-Jones (ed.), *Sir Philip Sidney: The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994) [World's Classics series]; for publishing history see "Introduction," pp. vii-x. References to *Arcadia* are to this edition. For the "New" Arcadia, see Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, edited with an introduction and notes by Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1977).

Sidney's romance, like *Erotokritos*, is set in a composite, imaginary ancient world, whose geography is fairly vague. At times the account of peaceful, pastoral Arcadia may be intended as "probably a covert eulogy of England, uniquely peaceful among Northern European countries in the late sixteenth century".[25] But while the action lasts, this fictional Arcadia is not particularly peaceful, still less is it idyllic; indeed the conventions of literary pastoral are consistently debunked, to humorous effect (though for this last there is no counterpart in *Erotokritos*).[26] Just as in *Erotokritos*, in *Arcadia* the time and place of the action are presented as remote, the customs of its ancient inhabitants are often alien, alienating, sometimes indeed surprising even to the characters themselves, who might be thought to have known better.[27]

Sidney too, just like Kornaros, retains, if playfully and only just, the chastity of his lovers. The Aristotelian unities are consciously preserved by Sidney too: the action takes place within the space of a few days, and even if the traditional elopement of one pair of lovers does go ahead, it is conveniently frustrated before they can cross the boundaries of the fictional space designated by the book's title; with neat irony, the near-transgression of pseudo-Aristotelian rules coincides with the near-transgression of the rule of chastity, and both are frustrated by the same agency: the apparently random, actually authorially contrived irruption upon the scene of a group of savages.[28]

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[25] Duncan-Jones (ed.), *The Old Arcadia*, p. 369, n. 4; cf. "Introduction", p. xi.

[26] See e.g. *Old Arcadia*, 27, 33, 36 and all the scenes involving the "pastoral" characters Dametas, Miso and Mopsa. This element of robust parody is much reduced in the "New" Arcadia.

[27] *Old Arcadia*: 9-10 (scene-setting); e.g. 46, 114 ("then" distinguished from narratorial present); e.g. 24, 42, 113, 250 ("Greece" as somewhere different); 251 and 381 (editor's note *ad loc.*: the surprise discovery that sex outside marriage is punishable by death in Arcadia). For the fictional world of *Erotokritos* see Holton, *Erotokritos*, pp. 45-72; Alexiou 1980: lxxiii-lxxxii; Alexiou 1988: xxi-xxiv.

[28] *Old Arcadia*, 175-7.

But the most striking coincidence between these two Renaissance reworkings of the traditional genre, at opposite ends of Europe, is the adoption by Sidney, just as by Kornaros, of a five-part structure. In the case of *Arcadia* this is explicitly presented as analogous to that of contemporary drama. Each part is introduced by a subtitle: *The First Book or Act*.

The point of this comparison is not, of course, to suggest a direct link between Sidney and Kornaros. It is rather to show that each, at about the same time, and in response to some of the same literary precedents, took a definitive step in advancing the romance genre forward from its medieval, Hellenistic and Latin precedents, so as to refashion it in an enduring form for their own time, and for several centuries to come. Indeed there are significant parallels between the reception histories of the two works: *Arcadia*, in its hybrid, posthumously published form becoming staple reading for a wide cross-section of the English reading public until being ousted by the rise of the realist novel in the eighteenth century; *Erotokritos* being similarly staple reading throughout the Greek-speaking world through repeated editions published in Venice, from the belated *editio princeps* of 1713 down to the nineteenth century.

But while Sidney's achievement has always since been recognised as a significant milestone along the evolutionary path that leads from the first novels of antiquity to the successors of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, the history of Greek-speaking lands precluded any such recognition for *Erotokritos*. Most of Crete was lost to the Venetians and the Greek-speaking upper classes who had benefited from an Italian education, when the Ottomans overran the island in 1645. The process was completed in 1669, with the surrender of the fortifications of Candia, which had held out under siege for 21 years. As a result, there was to be no direct successor to *Erotokritos* in the history of fiction in Greek.

2. "Novelistic" qualities of Kornaros's narrative

In the first part of this paper, I attempted to situate Kornaros's fictional narrative in relation to the earlier and contemporary history of the genre. Here, I consider his text synchronically, anachronistically if you will, in order to identify in it qualities that, at least with the hindsight of today, might plausibly be claimed to link *Erotokritos* with the techniques of the novel, as the genre is now understood. These qualities are of two kinds: first structural, in the management of the links from one book, or part, to another, particularly when these generate suspense; secondly, I focus on what might be termed "human touches" of a kind not, of course, confined to the novel, but all of which would not be out of place in the genre today, and most of which, I think, have not been noticed before.

2.1 Narrative structure

As we just saw, the five-part division of *Erotokritos*, just like that of the *Old Arcadia*, provides an immediate link to Renaissance drama. A consequence, as we have already noticed, is to bring about a formal alternation between the two great themes of the work – some would say, the two great themes of all literature – namely love and war. This aspect has been most fully documented by David Holton in his paper "How is *Erotokritos* organised?"[29] At the same time as he emphasised, rightly, the importance of this thematic alternation, Holton was sceptical about some of the actual divisions between one part and another, pointing out, for instance, that the opening scene of Part III follows on with the same characters and without any apparent sign of a break in time from the closing scene of Part II.[30] In what follows I shall try to answer this point, among others.

[29] David Holton, "Πώς οργανώνεται ο *Ερωτόκριτος*;" *Cretan Studies* 1 (1988) 157-67, reprinted in idem, *Μελέτες για τον Ερωτόκριτο και άλλα νεοελληνικά κείμενα* (Athens: Kastaniotis 2001), pp. 87-102; cf. idem, "Romance", pp. 205-37; cf. Alexiou 1980, lxx-lxxii.

[30] Holton, "Πώς οργανώνεται", pp. 158-9 (reprint: 89).

Each of the first four parts ends, to varying degrees, with a traditional "cliffhanger" moment of suspense: as a defined episode comes to a close, the principal characters are left in an ever-more desperate situation, from which the reader can see no obvious way for them to extricate themselves. At the same time, the closing lines of each book cunningly shift the perspective onwards from the dominant theme of the book just ending (alternately love or war), either to adumbrate specifically the new theme that will dominate in the next, or to anticipate a later development in the narrative to come.

By the end of Part I, the mutual love of Rotokritos and Aretousa has been established. Being young and naive, they think they can keep up appearances at the palace merely by being able to see one another every day; things need go no further. So they think, but the narrator enlists the worldly knowledge of the reader. Whether they know it or not, the young lovers are on the brink. As around them preparations begin for the tournament that has been announced, and that will be the warlike subject of Part II, the narrator warns that the lovers, too, are about to be thrown into "war" and "battles", with their emotions, of which they have as yet no inkling:

> Although it is the first time and they have no experience,
> they have some idea of what is necessary in such dealings:
> Rotokritos shows the way and Aretousa for her part
> wisely hides her desire as though already an adult;
> and as if they had previously found themselves
> in such a *war*, they sense the demands of such a *battle*.[31]

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[31] Μ' όλον οπού 'ναι η πρώτη τως και μάθηση δεν έχου,
το κάνει χρεία σ' έτοιες δουλειές γνωρίζου και κατέχου:
Δάσκαλος είναι ο Ρώκριτος κ' η Αρετούσα πάλι
κρύβει τον πόθο φρόνιμα σα να 'τον και μεγάλη·
κι ωσά να θέλασι βρεθή άλλη φορά και λάχει
εις έτοιον *πόλεμο*, γροικούν ίντα ζητά έτοια *μάχη* (I 2211-16, my emphases).

At the end of Part II, with the tournament over and Rotokritos victorious, the "happy end" of this part is deftly turned aside in the final lines. While Aretousa hears the acclamations of Rotokritos's prowess on the field, her thoughts turn once more to her unrequited feelings for him, which have been in suspense, in effect, throughout the whole of Part II and will return to dominate Part III:

> and she, the more she hears [Rotokritos] praised,
> the more strongly desire lays siege to her heart;
> her pains increased, no longer can she conceal
> the fire of passion but must reveal it to Rotokritos.[32]

This third part, in its turn, ends with the lovers in a yet more difficult situation. They have secretly engaged rings and vows, but all their hopes seem to have been dashed with the king's furious banishment of Rotokritos. At this moment, the narrator ends on a sombre note, but one that in hindsight will be seen to have heralded two further moments of suspense in the narrative to come. As he leaves to go into exile, Rotokritos in his despair prays that he may be devoured by wild beasts (III 1716). Naturally, no such fate will befall the hero of the romance in reality; but in the scene in the final part where he will cruelly test Aretousa's constancy by falsely reporting his own death, it is exactly in this way that Rotokritos will supposedly have died (V 883-957). A few lines on, Part III concludes with the departing Rotokritos being mourned by his parents as though he was already dead. Not only does this create an ominous moment of suspense, as the focus is about to change away from the hero, and from love once more to war; it exactly foreshadows the ending of the following part, in which another hero will be mourned and Rotokritos's own fate will be left hanging in the balance.

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[32] κ' εκείνη τα παινέματα όσο και πλια τ' ακούει,
τόσον ο πόθος στην καρδιά πλια δυνατά την κρούει·
οι πόνοι τση επληθύνασι, πλιο δε μπορεί να χώση
τη λάβρα και του Ρώκριτου θα να τη φανερώση (II 1461-5).

Part IV focuses once more on war and conflict; and here the conflict is not only on the field of battle. Aretousa's struggle against her father's cruelty, which takes up the first third of this part, is also described by the narrator as a "war" (IV 679). Once we come to the actual fighting, the narrator's handling of suspense is firmer than ever. Approximately a hundred and fifty lines before the end of Part IV, the single combat of Rotokritos and the Vlach champion Aristos ends with both combatants apparently fatally wounded. With the exception of a single verse couplet, awkwardly expressed with a rhyme so perfunctory as to make one wonder if it really belongs here, no clue is given for the remainder of the hundred and fifty lines of Part IV as to whether Rotokritos is alive or dead. The offending couplet is given in italics:

> ... [Aristos] strikes Rotokritos a blow at that moment
> that pierced his breastplate, his chain-mail shirt,
> just below the nipple, close to the heart,
> where men's breath and life reside.
> The iron penetrated some way into the flesh,
> more dead than alive it left him then,
> *he was almost taken by Charos [Death],*
> *but lived and was cured with many aches and pains.*
> The kings [of each side] rush to see them, in fear and trembling,
> and all of them reckon Rotokritos has lost his life.[33]

Rotokritos is not mentioned again until the beginning of Part V, while the moment of suspense is dragged out with the protracted laments for his opponent which take up the

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[33] ... του Ρώκριτου μια κοπανιά δίδει την ώρα κείνη
και την κοράτσα επέρασε, το σιδερό ζυπόνι,
εις το βυζί αποκατωθιό, εις της καρδιάς τον τόπο,
εκεί που βρίσκεται η πνοή κ' η ζήση των ανθρώπω.
Μέσα στη σάρκα κάμποσο το σίδερον εμπήκε,
πλια παρά ζωντανό, νεκρόν ετότες τον αφήκε
κι ολίγο λίγον ήλειψε να τονε πάρη ο Χάρος,
μα 'ζησε κ' εγιατρεύτηκε με πάθη και με βάρος.
Τρέχου οι ρηγάδες να τους δου, τρομάρα τούς επιάσε
κι όλοι τως το Ρωτόκριτο λογιάζου πως εχάσε (IV 1876-85).

remainder of Part IV. In this way, both Part III and Part IV end with laments; one for Rotokritos, metaphorically dead as he departs for exile, the other literally for Aristos, while the actual fate of Rotokritos remains unknown. Even once Part IV begins, we have to wait for a further twenty-five lines before we know that Rotokritos, apparently dead, is in fact alive; and it will be some time before the severely wounded hero will be out of danger.

In this way, I argue, the five-part structure of *Erotokritos* proves not only the broadly Renaissance, dramatic, and rationalist structure of the work, but also Kornaros's narrative artistry in managing the transitions from one large unity to another, so as to achieve both an effect of suspense and a seemingly effortless, natural transition between the work's two overarching themes.

2.2 "Human touches"

Finally, and only very indicatively, I want to point out incidental qualities that emerge at moments of the narrative and which can be read, retrospectively, as pointers towards aspects of the novel particularly, but not only, as it has developed since Kornaros's time. Here I invoke a characterisation of the genre, across its whole long history, thrown out by Doody: "A novelist's primary calling is to give *a representation of what it feels like to be alive*."[34]

This is not the place to repeat what others have already said on the representation of characters in *Erotokritos*.[35] But it is worth emphasising, because this has become an important issue in more recent fiction, that all the major characters of the

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[34] Doody, *True story*, p. 282, original emphasis. Of course, this formulation alludes to an aspect of all literature which goes back at least as far as Aristotle's *Poetics* and is not the unique prerogative of the novel. Cf. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 191: "Imitation of reality is imitation of the sensory experience of life on earth – among the most essential characteristics of which would seem to be its possessing a history, its changing and developing."

[35] Holton, "Romance", pp. 220-4; idem, *Erotokritos*, pp. 45-56.

story are divided against themselves. This is most obviously true of Aretousa, who early in the story explains to her nurse Frosyni how she is tormented by the irreconcilable forces that govern her thoughts and feelings: on the one hand shame and fear of her father, on the other the new and terrifying force of her feelings for Rotokritos:

> Can't you see what torment I'm in
> what wild beast has me in its maw and won't let go?
> I hold to two opposite things, my life's in danger,
> all my effort is to reconcile them, I try and try,
> but I see it is impossible...[36]

But Rotokritos, too, for much of the narrative is pulled in diametrically opposite directions: by love for Aretousa on the one hand, and his duty as loyal subject of his king on the other. It is his achievement, carefully paced by the narrator throughout the five long parts of the narrative, finally and against all expectation to reconcile the irreconcilable: first in the tournament, without immediate result, then in the war between the Athenians and the Vlachs, in which he comes close to losing his life, Rotokritos is able finally to demonstrate that it is his *disloyal* love that gives him the strength to become the king's most *loyal* and effective defender. This is more than a conventional matter of divided loyalties. Rotokritos, like Aretousa, for much of the narrative is really two people; each is required to act out a given role in the life of the court. And each, without ever renouncing that role, is required also to live a completely different life, as the clandestine lover of the other.

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36 Σαν πώς θαρρείς και βρίσκομαι και σ' ίντα παίδαν είμαι
κ' ίντα θεριό στο στόμα του μ' έβαλε και κρατεί με;
Σε δυο πράματ' αντίδικα στέκω και κιντυνεύγω,
να τα συβάσω και τα δυο ξετρέχω και γυρεύγω
και βάνω κόπο, μα θωρώ και μπορετό δεν είναι... (I 1643-7).

I turn now to smaller touches, to what the poet Yannis Ritsos once called, in a different context, the "insignificant details".

There is a particular tenderness in the way in which the relationship between Aretousa and her nurse is described. Aretousa is a child, only just emerging into adolescence; the older, experienced woman sees this, and treats her like her own child:

> Not as her mistress but her cherished child she speaks to her;
> she comes close and rests her cheek on [Aretousa's] head. ...
> All night [the two women] are tormented and do not sleep,
> when day breaks they see the light of dawn.
> The day dawned bright, they rose and sat
> each with her cheek cupped in her hand,
> they looked like two blind deaf-mutes
> while they sat and weighed up many sorts of things.[37]

At various points, despite the general "romantic" colouring of the narrative, there come moments of unexpected realism. In Parts II and IV, with their descriptions of jousting and war, this is not entirely unexpected. Rather different is the simile with which the narrator describes Rotokritos's sudden shock at discovering the loss of his most cherished, and also most dangerous, possession, the drawing he has made of Aretousa. In one of the long "epic" similes for which *Erotokritos* has justly been admired, his feelings are compared to those of a mother nursing an infant, who suddenly finds it has died in her arms:

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[37] Ωσάν παιδί τση σπλαχνικό, όχι ως κερά μιλεί της·
σιμώνει και το μάγουλο βάνει στην κεφαλή της. ...
Ολονυκτίς πειράζουνται δίχως να κοιμηθούσι,
όντε τα ξημερώματα το φως τσ' αυγής θωρούσι.
Ήρθεν η μέρα η λαμπυρή, σηκώνουνται, καθίζου,
στη χέρα τως το μάγουλο κ' οι δυο τως τ' ακουμπίζου
κι ωσά βουβές κι ωσάν κουφές κι ωσάν τυφλές εμοιάζα
και πράματα πολλώ λογιών εστέκαν κ' ελογιάζα (I 1611-12; 1693-8).

as when a child falls asleep in its mother's arms,
a much-loved only child, dearly cherished,
and when she comes to put it to the breast she finds it dead;
she jumps up, and loses her mind at the sudden discovery,
to see dead in her arms the child who was sleeping...[38]

Elsewhere this unexpected access of realism functions differently. The account of Aretousa's condition, in Part V, in the prison where she has languished for five years, is genuinely shocking, and the shock is the greater because it is her father who is speaking. Addressing the "stranger", who is of course Rotokritos in disguise, he tells him:

They tell me she's turned ugly,
utterly changed and unrecognisable, filthy and disgusting;
I'd like you to go by the prison so you can see for yourself,
because I've heard she's too revolting even for the flies.[39]

At the other end of the spectrum lies the gentle irony with which the narrator often treats his characters, and their all-too-human weaknesses.[40] My final example belongs loosely in this category. In Part IV, Rotokritos is about to embark on the most hazardous adventure of his life, to take part in the war between Athens and the Vlachs, even though under sentence of death if he should return. It is naturally important that his disguise should be effective. To this end, he enlists the services of a witch. In one of the few intrusions of the supernatural into the story, the witch sells him a magic potion, which will turn his face, and presumably also the rest of him, black. To be

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38 ... σα όντε κοιμηθή παιδί σ' τση μάνας τη μασκάλη,
πολλά ακριβό και μοναχό, πολλά κανακεμένο
κι ως θα του δώση το βυζί, το βρίσκη αποθαμένο,
σηκώνη, ξαφορμίζη ο νους στο ξαφνικό μαντάτο,
να δη νεκρό στα χέρια της παιδίν οπού εκοιμάτο... (I 1810-14).

39 Μα λέσι μου πως άσκημη είναι καταστεμένη,
ασούσουμη κι ανέγνωρη, άτσαλη, βρωμεσμένη·
κ' ήθελα, ομπρός, στη φυλακή να κόπιαζες να πήγες,
να τηνε δης, γιατί 'κουσα σιχαίνουνταί τη οι μύγες (V 235-8).

40 Holton, "Romance", pp. 234-6; *Erotokritos*, pp. 83-5.

exact, she sells him *two* potions; the second will restore him to his former colour. Although this is not made explicit, it must be equally important to Rotokritos that *both* will work; he has not only to win the war for Athens but also to reclaim Aretousa. So before he sets out, Kornaros gives us a delightful, one-line vignette, of the hero testing the witch's magic thoroughly, changing his face to black and back again.

> In a little flask she gave him another potion to keep
> and told him, when he wanted to change his appearance [again]
> and become white as before, regaining his former good looks,
> he should put this second potion on his face.
> And before he departs [for Athens], he tries these potions out,
> some of the time his face shines like the sun, the rest it's black.[41]

Conclusions

The first part of this paper has suggested how Kornaros's masterpiece, more often admired for its lyrical and dramatic qualities than as narrative fiction, can be situated in relation both to the long tradition of the novel before the late sixteenth century, and also, in the case of Sidney's *Arcadia*, alongside a close contemporary. In the second, I have given just a few instances of an advanced narrative technique and a grasp of complexity and of detail in representing both characterisation and what Doody has called "the experience of being alive".

This reading does not, of course, propose to devalue the poetic qualities of *Erotokritos*. One of the remarkable achievements of Kornaros is the extraordinary synthesis of elements from different genres.[42] But while other components of that mix have had their share of attention, less has been said about

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[41] Σ' ένα φλασκάκι άλλο νερό του δίδει να φυλάξη
και λέγει του, όντε του φανή τη στόρηση ν' αλλάξη,
να 'ρθη στην πρώτη του ασπριγιά, να 'ρθη στα πρώτα κάλλη,
εκείνο το 'στερο νερό στο πρόσωπό του ας βάλη.
Και πρι μισέψη, τα νερά ετούτα δικιμάζει
κι ώρες το πρόσωπο ήλαμπε κι ώρες το σκοτεινιάζει (IV 903-8).

[42] Alexiou 1980: lxxi: "daring mixture of genres"; cf. Holton, "Romance", p. 213.

Erotokritos as narrative fiction. According to this reading, Kornaros was a true originator. Who knows, if the history of Crete and of the Venetian empire had turned out differently, how influential this artful and humane mingling of genres might have proved?