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## THE RISING VISIBILITY OF WOMEN IN BYZANTINE NOVEL

### Introduction

The title of this research – the rising visibility of women – refers to the physical visibility of women in the Byzantine literature of the twelfth century, specifically the novels. The novel and the satire were literary genres especially popular in the Second Sophistic and were reappropriated in the twelfth century Byzantium, which was a period of intellectual rivalry between the court poets of the Komnenian dynasty (1081—1185 AD). The novels and the satires, as well as other learned literature of the period, are written in Atticizing Greek, i.e., hyper-correct Attic language, which apostrophizes the authors' familiarity with the ancient models, and also their audience's (or rather, the court's) preferences. Their acquaintance with ancient ambient is also beyond discussion; in the novels it is visible from the setting: the action takes place somewhere in the ancient Greek i.e., pagan past, where pagan gods interfere in people's destinies, and especially Eros, who has enormous power over humans. Nevertheless, their Christian upbringing and the specifics of the Byzantine society are visible on every level in the text. Four such novels are preserved today, all of which simulate ancient ambient and pagan culture: Theodore Prodromos's *Rhodante and Dosikles*, Niketas Eugenianos's *Drosilla and Charikles*, Eustathios Makrembolites's *Hysmine and Hysminias*, and Constantine Manasses's *Aristandros and Kallithea*, which is preserved fragmentary. They differ in form: Prodromos and Eugenianos composed in twelve-syllable verse, Manasses in fifteen-syllable, the so called 'political' verse, whereas Makrembolites wrote in prose<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The so-called Komnenian novels are modelled on the following ancient novels: *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius, *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, and *Chaereas and Kallirhoe* by Chariton.

In contrast, in the other popular genre – satire, specifically the type commonly called *nekrikoi dialogoi*<sup>2</sup>, women are visibly absent, even in the realm of Hades, at least the pagan construction of it. They are not characters in the plot, they are only mentioned in order to illustrate someone else’s flaws and inappropriate behavior. This is mainly due to the genre’s character; it is after all a satire towards the Byzantine high society. Satirizing women on high position in the court, especially women who were literary patronesses, was not a favorable act. While in other types of satire, or generally in the scopic genres, anonymous women were satirized, because they were representative of character types. Hence, they were visible because of their lustfulness and promiscuity, their love for drinking, laziness and inclination toward luxury, their ugliness and old age, combined or separately. The novels are something different. The problems that arise when there are women in the plot as characters, are always connected to their physical appearance, which leads them into unfortunate situations, such as rape, seduction, adultery, abduction, all of which are regulated by the law in the Byzantine society. These situations also make the plot intensive and juicy, but it doesn’t mean that it was a social practice. However, it does reflect some social conventions of the period. The main female characters in the novels are young girls of marriageable age, while in contrast married women or adult women have significantly smaller role in the plot, and tend to be presented as women in the invective genres. This involvement of the young girls is expected, because the Byzantine novels are love stories, where the lovers are young; the boy abducts the girl who is promised to another man; she might consent or not to the abduction, which means either it is an abduction or elopement; afterwards both of them are abducted by pirates and face a number of obstacles to fulfill their love in a holy matrimony. During their adventures and misfortunes, the young couples are expected to preserve their virginity, as a moral *sine qua non* for entering a marriage. The legal *sine qua non* is the parents’ approval, which was missing at the beginning and was the sole reason why the young lovers fled in the first place from their home. Eventually the parents approve the union, because they realize that having their children alive is the most important thing in the world.

This paper focuses on the novel of Eugenianos, *Drosilla and Charikles*, which resembles very much in language, themes, narrative and style his predecessor’s novel *Rhodante and Dosikles*. What mainly discerns *Drosilla and Charikles* from its predecessor, as well as from the other two

<sup>2</sup> The “Dialogues of the dead” (νεκρικοί διάλογοι) feature the main hero travelling to the kingdom of Hades (Ἄϊδης = the Invisible One), the God of the Underworld and the dead in Greek mythology. Anyway, the hero manages to come back in the upper world (ἀναβίωσις) - the world of the living, and afterwards to recount his adventure.

novels, are the more visible references to the ancient literary models and especially the love songs written under the influence of the Hellenistic poet Theocritus<sup>3</sup>. However, the reason why this novel is chosen for examining women is most of all Eugenianos's emphasis on marriage and marital ties, which are indicative of gender roles. The aim is not to reconstruct the historical context of gender dynamics, because *Drosilla and Charikles* is not a historical work, but to shed some light on stereotypes and gender roles in this particular literary genre, i.e., what is expected of women, what of men in a certain age. The work is divided in two parts, the first of which presents the narrative of the novel and the characters involved. The second part is dipartite, it examines the gender dynamics analyzing two categories of women: maidens and (married) women and their relations to the men in their lives, or rather the effect they have on the opposite sex. The role of the mother is almost silent.

## 1. Narrative and characters

*Drosilla and Charikles* is arranged in nine books, with a total of 3638 verses, to some extent shorter in length than Prodromos's novel of 4614 verses. The story starts *in medias res*, with the Parthians<sup>4</sup>, named also barbarians, invading the unknown city of Barzon which is the first location in the novel; their aim is not to seize the city, but only to loot and capture people outside the city walls. This activity in the Byzantine literature is often called Mysian plunder (Μυσῶν λεία), which is a proverbial expression meaning "easy prey"<sup>5</sup>, used for those whose theft and plunder would go unpunished. This is a convenient practice for love romances, because it allows the story to turn from idleness to action, which brings misfortune that needs to be overcome. There is a prehistory to the Mysian plunder in the novel, usually revealed in the books that follow in a form of reminiscence.

Every source of food is destroyed by the Parthians: the fruits from the earth and the mothers that nurse their babies. The barbarians left only the fittest as captives, among whose were Drosilla and Charikles, a young and unmarried couple from Phthia in Thessalia described as θήρευμα ξέρον "unusual price", and also the young man Kleandros from Lesbos

<sup>3</sup> On the influence of Theocritus's poetry towards Eugenianos, see Burton: 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Parthia was a region in southwest Asia, which was conquered by the Persians in the third century AD.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mazaris A.1.; Prodromos, *Rodanthe and Dosikles* 1.26, as well as many historical texts. See more Radić "The Mysian Spoils in Late Byzantine Literature (Several Examples)". This proverbial expression is mentioned in Demosthenes (*De corona* 72.2), and has its origins in the Telephos story.

who was recently separated from his loved one Kalligone. By a series of unfortunate events these young lovers were brought to Barzon, where they got themselves free from the pirates that originally abducted them, but only for a short period of time. While in Barzon they took part in the celebration of the festival of Dionysos outside the city walls, as it is explicitly said in book 1.113, but later, in 4.62 and 7.157, Charikles refers to it as the festival of Zeus. With the coming of the Parthians to Barzon, they are captured once again; the young men are put in prison and during their captivity they get to know each other and share the details of their love stories and the pain inflicted by the ruthless god Eros. The girl Drosilla, along with the other women captives, is held separately in the *gynaikeion*, the women's rooms in the palace. Kleandros' girl Kalligone somehow eloped the Parthian army, and nothing is known about her whereabouts during his time spent in captivity. Throughout the action of the novel, misfortunes follow the love couples, but only to strengthen their love, because their love, although unofficial, is eternal, as it is referred several times to Matthew 19.6: "Who could separate those whom God has joined."<sup>6</sup> (3.12; 7.264), or, "Thus Drosilla and her bridegroom Charikles were one body, one mind, and one soul."<sup>7</sup> (1.328-329). The god referred to is Dionysos, although the quotations are from the New Testament. The indissolubility of marriage was a topos in the Byzantine novels, but also a provision in the Byzantine marriage law<sup>8</sup>.

All in all, there are six couples in the romance, many of whom are only mentioned and do not participate directly in the narrative, and three singles that are of importance to the main love story. Two of these couples are young and unmarried – the already mentioned Drosilla and Charikles, and Kleandros and Kalligone; the other four couples are married with children of marriageable age: Phrator and Krystale (Charikles's parents); Myrtion

<sup>6</sup> 9.186 οὗς οἱ θεοὶ συνῆψαν ὡς νυμφοστόλοι is variation of 3.12; 7.264 οὗς γὰρ θεὸς συνῆψε τίς διασπάσοι;

All translations from *Drosilla and Charikles* are taken from Burton: 2004. The Greek text is from the same book, which is a reprint of Conca's edition - F. Conca, ed., Nicetas Eugenianus, *De Drosillae et Chariclis amoribus*, Amsterdam, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> οὕτω Δροσίλλα πρὸς τὸν Χαρικλῆν νυμφίον  
ἐν σῶμα καὶ φρόνημα καὶ ψυχὴ μία

<sup>8</sup> E.g., in the *Ecloga* II. 15, after enumerating the *iustae causae* for dissolution of marriage, the lawgiver says: "Except upon these well-known grounds the marriage cannot be dissolved, since, as the Scripture says: 'Whom God hath joined no man shall put asunder.'" (trans. Freshfield in *A Manual of Roman Law*)

Ἄνευ δὲ τῶν αἰτιῶν τούτων τῶν γνωριζομένων μὴ δύνασθαι ἀνδρόγυνον διαλύεσθαι κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον, ὅτι οὗς ὁ Θεὸς ἔζευξεν, ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωρίζεται.

However, the *iustae causae* only confirm that the indissolubility of marriage was not a legal absolute.

and Hedypnoe (Drosilla's parents); Kallistias and Kydippe (Kleandros's parents); Kratylos and Chrysilla (Kleinias's parents and Parthian rulers). Two of the young men that are presented as singles, Kleinias (Kratylos's son) and Kallidemos (son of the innkeeper Xenokrates), are love rivals to Charikles, since his loved one, Drosilla, is the only girl in the story that is visible to men – Kalligone never appears in present time, she is only visible in Kleandros's lament of her. Both of these men were smitten by Drosilla's beauty and fell in love immediately after they saw her. Because they endanger the love of Drosilla and Charikles, they suffer unfortune: Kleinias dies in a battle with the Arabs (5.435), Kallidemos suddenly gets ill from a tertian fever while plotting the abduction of Drosilla (7.68). There is also one single woman Maryllis, probably a widow, a grieving mother of a dead son, who helps Drosilla after her unfortunate fall into the sea, when travelling as a captor to the Arabian lord Chagos. Her role is of importance for the reunion of the couple.

Two of the couples suffer loss: (1) Kleandros and Kalligone, who die near the end of the novel: first the girl, Kalligone (8.185), of whose death we only hear, then the young man, Kleandros, who dies of grief and broken heart (8.313-315); (2) Kratylos – the *parthanax* and his wife Chrysilla, who die one after the other. Kratylos was poisoned by his wife Chrysilla (5.173), because she fell in love with Charikles. She was directly endangering the love of Drosilla and Charikles and met her unfortunate end – she kills herself after the loss of her son Kleinias to the Arabs (5.434-438). This is a necessary element in order to move the action into another direction and another location.

After the fall of the Parthians, Drosilla, Charikles and Kleandros were captured for the third time, this time by Chagos, the lord of the Arabs, and they were totally free from the godless love of their previous captors. Consequently, they were headed to their third location in the novel, Arabia, but not all of them got there. On her way to the Arabian land, Drosilla was traveling with the women in covered wagons separately from the men, who marched on foot. Drosilla was dragged by a branch from the wagon and accidentally fell into the sea; after some time spent in nature, she found her way in an unnamed village where with the help of the old woman Maryllis she would eventually reunite with Charikles. Charikles and Kleandros, on the other hand, were released from captivity by the mercy of lord Chagos, who was touched by their unfortunate stories, and didn't see them as a threat since they were not Parthians. So, they departed from Arabia soon after they got there, in search for the girl Drosilla. It should be mentioned that Drosilla and Charikles were also guided to their reunion by their god Dionysus who appeared in their dreams. Eventually, Drosilla and Charikles

found their way together despite the unfortunate events they come upon; from the unnamed village they came back to Barzon with a man named Gnathon, who informed them that their fathers are in search for them. After Barzon, they headed to their native Phthia to officially reunite with their parents who sanctioned the marriage.

## 2. Gender dynamics

### (1) Maidens and young men

The notion that Eros enters the heart through the eyes<sup>9</sup> which is a standard physiology of love in the novels, is also indicative of the role of the women in this type of love stories. The most important thing about women is their physical appearance, which very much depends on their age and their chastity likewise. If the woman fulfills these criteria, she can easily become an object of passion and love to some young man, who is accordingly beautiful, but never more beautiful than her<sup>10</sup>. In other words, if the woman is young, pretty and modest, she is going to be loved, and will get married eventually with the man that fell instantly in love with her, even though they haven't exchanged a word, nor do they know anything about each other. The desire appears first in the young man, and this is more important, because the girl, willingly or not, will be persuaded afterwards, only if it was God's will. That is why the accent is put on her physical appearance rather than on his.

This concept of physical appearance and love, i.e., love and young people, is not unknown in classical literature. As Plato's Agathon says (*Symp.* 196 b) "for where there is no flower, or flower is past, in body and soul and everything else, Love sits not, but where the place is flowery and fragrant there he both sits and stays"<sup>11</sup> (trans. Rouse in Plato) Eros doesn't

<sup>9</sup>"I put myself to bed since I was burning with a great fire of love (for Eros, having entered my heart through my eyes, did not stop at this in his desire to inflame me, but running about, he set all my limbs ablaze)," (*Drosilla and Charikles*, 2.119-123)

Or

"Strong-handed Eros, too, the old child, the baby born before Kronos, typically attacks through eyes as if through windows, burns up inward parts, inflames the heart, and makes the lover into a corpse as it were." (*Drosilla and Charikles*, 3.114-118)

<sup>10</sup> When Drosilla and Charikles appear for the first time in the text, she is one degree more beautiful than him: "beautiful Charikles and Drosilla even more beautiful" (καλὸς Χαρικλῆς καὶ Δροσίλλα καλλίων.) (1.74)

<sup>11</sup> ἀνανθεῖ γὰρ καὶ ἀπηνθηκότι καὶ σώματι καὶ ψυχῇ καὶ ἄλλω ὄψουσιν οὐκ ἐνίξει Ἔρωος, οὗ δ' ἂν εὐανθῆς τε καὶ εὐώδης τόπος ἦ, ἐνταῦθα δὲ καὶ ἵζει καὶ μένει.

like grey hair, as Anacreon (fr. 358) sings. Everything else was considered blasphemous, even though in reality men were much older than their wives and this was a socially acceptable phenomenon. The other way around not so much. In the fictional world of literature, though, love between unequals, such as young and old, no matter the combination, is not accepted and the older partner is accordingly punished. This is regularly corrected in the New Comedy, which is also a love story in a comical setting. As a matter of fact, the old element (may it be a character or an idea) in the comedy is an obstacle for the young couple to unite or reunite, and at the end of the play it is overcome and the story ends with marriage. This line of thinking is presented in *Drosilla and Charikles*, with some elements of the Byzantine social norms. The young women Drosilla and Kalligone were beautiful beyond words, which is described in detail by the narrator and by the characters infatuated by them. However, in New Comedy there is no description of the girls' appearance, because beauty was not a subject of this genre<sup>12</sup>. The technique of describing physical beauty belongs to other classical genres, but was reappropriated in Byzantine literature beyond the novels<sup>13</sup>. In *Drosilla and Charikles*, the narrator starts with the description of Drosilla's garments:

“The girl was like a starry sky,  
for she was dressed for the festival  
in a splendid purple-white cloak, adorned with gold.”<sup>14</sup> (1.120-122)

The narrator goes on with a lengthy description of her physical attributes (38 verses), using comparison with objects of the nature, especially focusing on the garden objects, because she is a blossoming virgin. This flowery ambient and the celestial imagery is known from archaic poetry and is appropriated as a generic marker in lyric poetry. Colors and fragrances are used when describing her appearance. In short, she had white skin as sardonyx and milk, red cheeks and lips, golden-yellow hair, dark eyes and arched brows, her teeth were like pearls, “It seemed as if

<sup>12</sup> “Comedy, as we have said, is a representation of inferior people, not indeed in the full sense of the word bad, but the laughable is a species of the base or ugly. It consists in some blunder or ugliness that does not cause pain or disaster, an obvious example being the comic mask which is ugly and distorted but not painful.” (Ar. *Poet.* 1449a) Trans. by W.H. Fyfe, 1932.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Anna Komnena used this physical description in her *Alexias*, only to describe the beauty of the characters involved in the narrative, although their description sounds very generalized and idealized.

<sup>14</sup> ὡς οὐρανὸς γὰρ ἦν ἔναστρος ἢ κόρη,  
χρυσοῦν, φαινόν, λευκοπόφυρον φάρος  
πρὸς τὴν ἑορτὴν δῆθεν ἠμφιεσμένη. (1.120-122)

Nature, like a painter, / had mixed milk with rose / and thus colored the girl's body white-red"<sup>15</sup> (1.147-149). At the end of the description, he sums up with: "Thus the maiden Drosilla was extraordinarily well blessed with beauty's grace."<sup>16</sup> (1.157-158)

Charikles later compares her to the moon in relation to the other girls, who were the stars:

"There I saw the moon down on the earth,  
moving in a circle together with the stars;  
such was Drosilla among the dancing girls."<sup>17</sup> (3.336-338)

The same parallel in different words is used by Charikles' rival, Kallidemos when he offers Drosilla his passionate love, because he was smitten by her beauty:

"You are a woman – know your own nature! -  
and a woman more beautiful than all women of our time,  
a marvelous creation of exceptional nature,  
a creature as far superior to the female race  
as the moon to the rest of the stars."<sup>18</sup> (6.420-424)

Except for the first description of the narrator, the other descriptions of Drosilla's appearance and beauty are too general. The girl is physically visible, but no different than any other girl in the Byzantine novels. Actually, there is no difference between Drosilla and Kalligone, although Kalligone is not described in such detail, but rather the effect she had on the young men with her beauty. The impression that the reader gets is that these were delicate and young girls, with soft skin and beautiful face, with beautiful yellow hair and with garments suitable to their natural beauty. Young men were not much different in appearance, as is obvious from the description of Charikles and the effect he has on the married woman Chryssilla:

<sup>15</sup> "ἔοικεν ὡς ἔμιξε γάλα καὶ ρόδα,  
καὶ συνδιεχρώσατο καθὰ ζωγράφος  
ταύτης τὸ σῶμα λευκέρυθρον ἢ φύσις"

<sup>16</sup> Οὕτω τοσαύτην ἡ Δροσίλλα παρθένος  
καινήν ἐπευτύχησε καλλονῆς χάριν. (1. 157-158)

<sup>17</sup> Ἐκεῖ σελήνην εἶδον ἐν τῇ γῆι κάτω,  
κύκλω μετ' αὐτῶν ἀστέρων φορουμένην·  
τοῦτο Δροσίλλα συγχορευούσαις κόραις. (3.336-338)

<sup>18</sup> Γυνὴ γὰρ εἶ σύ – γνῶθι τὴν σαυτῆς φύσιν -,  
γυνὴ δὲ πασῶν τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς καλλίων,  
τεράστιόν τι πλάσμα φύσεως ξένης,  
ὑπερφυῆς τι χρῆμα θήλεος γένους,  
ὡς ἡ σελήνη τῶν προλοίπων ἀστέρων. (6.420-424)



“Chrysilla at once saw Charikles,  
 was struck by the dart of desire,  
 and suffered in her heart,  
 for he was a smooth-cheeked, golden-haired lad,  
 ruddy in face and broad in shoulder,  
 with curly yellow hair that reached his loins.  
 He had slender hands with white fingers,  
 and with his beauty and the light of his face  
 he eclipsed even the countless stars spread across the sky.”<sup>19</sup> (4.77-85)

Charikles’ beauty is similar to Drosilla’s and Kalligone’s. All things considered it is a conventional description of a certain type – the young.

However, there is another feature that is desirable from the young men to be marriageable. The old woman Maryllis, who is trying to match Kallidemos with Chrysilla, not knowing who Charikles is and how important is their love, praises Kallidemos: “who’s handsome beyond all others dwelling here / and exceedingly rich in gold.” (7.15-20) Beauty and wealth were the desirable combination.

In the text we are often reminded of Drosilla’s extraordinary beauty, which at the same time is her curse. Besides Charikles, in the course of the novel two men fell in love with her, as mentioned, and were about to take action to separate her from Charikles, but destiny (God) interfered and Drosilla miraculously saves her virginity until the end of the novel. She doesn’t want to have coitus with her Charikles even when they finally get together and are not in captivity anymore, because it is against the laws as they haven’t sanctioned their relationship in a holy matrimony. This was a Byzantine convention. Until the 9<sup>th</sup> century marriage was a civil contract – the Church was not involved in the legal aspect of the marriage. Leo VI in Novel 89 (issued 893) prescribed that blessing (εὐλογία) from the Church was obligatory for entering marriage. That is why Charikles and Drosilla are going to be married by a priest of Dionysos in the end. But the question is why they fled away in the first place from their native town after acknowledging their love? Did the parents object? We know that Drosilla was promised legally to another man (3.382), but it is never mentioned why Kalligone ran away with Kleandros. What was the obstacle

<sup>19</sup> γυνή Χρυσίλλα τὸν Χαρικλῆν ἀθρόον  
 ἰδοῦσα καὶ πληγείσα τῷ πόθου βέλει.  
 Ἦν γὰρ ἄχνους τις χρυσόθριξ, ἐρυθρόχρους,  
 πλατὺς τὰ νῶτα, ξανθοβόστρυχον κόμην  
 ἔχων φθάνουσαν ἄχρι καὶ τῆς ὀσφύος·  
 χεῖρας δὲ λεπτὰς εἶχε λευκοδακτύλους,  
 καὶ τοὺς ἀμέτρως ἐκχυθέντας ἀστέρας  
 κάλλει καλύπτων καὶ προσώπου λαμπάσιν.

for entering the marriage? The reason for all misfortune that they came upon is the eye that saw and let Eros in the heart. Running away from home is a possibility when parents disapprove of the marriage, and without the parents' consent, the marriage is illegal. Lower social status of one of the partners may be indeed an obstacle for the parents' consent, but not according to law. Marriage without the parents' consent, though, was against the law. The word 'abduction' is important in the stories, and it was a crime of which the civil law mandated severe punishment. The girl's consent was immaterial, according to Leo's VI novel 35. The girl's consent does not change the punishment of the abductor; the punishment depends on the means used for the abduction<sup>20</sup>. Marriage is absolutely forbidden if an armed abduction is performed, which is considered a capital offense. Anyway, the young couple doesn't sleep together, so no seduction has taken place toward the allegedly abducted girl. From a legal point of view this girl was not seduced. There is no rape as well. According to the writings of the jurist Eusthathios Romaios<sup>21</sup> there is a difference between abduction and seduction. The first one is severely punishable whether she consented or not. The second one is considered when the man takes secretly a woman who has already offered herself to him. The seduction of a girl (*parthenos*) is corrected by marriage, only if the parents do consent, as they obviously did in Drosilla and Charikles' case at the end of the novel. The abduction is therefore an elopement, a phenomenon present on the Balkans even in recent history.

Drosilla takes an active part in the development of the events; she flirts with Charikles, the hero of the story and she agrees to elope, even though legally she is abducted by Charikles and his friends. These are literary *topoi* found in the ancient novels, but here are reworked according to Byzantine norms and laws on marriage. She kisses Charikles and this is where it stops. Drosilla answers to his begging to have sex: "Charikles, my heart [...] / you shall not obtain coition from Drosilla. / Don't complain, use force, or labor in vain, for it's not right for a chaste woman to behave shamefully." (8.139-142) "I will not give up my virginity, as prostitute does, without thought for my family, my parents."<sup>22</sup> (8.145-146) Girls that

<sup>20</sup> On the legal aspects of abduction in Byzantine society see Laiou *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage*.

<sup>21</sup> See A. Schminck, "Vier eherechtliche Entscheidungen aus dem 11. Jahrhundert," in *Simon* 224–228.

<sup>22</sup> «ὦ Χαρίκλεις, καρδία, τοῦ συνδουασμοῦ τῆς Δροσίλλας οὐ τύχης. Μὴ κάμνε, μὴ βιάζε, μὴ μάτην πόνει· ἀσχημονεῖν γὰρ σωφρονοῦσαν οὐ θέμις.» (8.139-142)  
«πλὴν ὡς ἑταιρις οὐ προδῶ τὸ παρθένον

lose their virginity before marriage are once again compared to prostitutes in Book Three, when Charikles narrates the jesting at the festival of Dionysos in Phthia, where he first saw Drosilla and naturally fell in love at first sight. Obviously, this girl is jested for her promiscuous behavior, and is compared to the famous ancient courtesan Lais. The body is sacred, and she didn't respect it:

“Another spoke directly after him:  
 ‘Ho! What about these things? The heavenly girl  
 who was on a great rampage with her beauty just now,  
 like Lais, the Corinthian, before her,  
 is afflicted by an unhappy sickness — O evil sickness! —  
 and her well-fed body, I see, has shrunk.  
 Not this; no, not this! Take strength, Body.  
 May all the wasting and bad health end,  
 for a woman's body does not perish alone,  
 but also, with it, what a great number of lovers!’<sup>23</sup> (3.152-161)

Young men are also expected to maintain their virginity until marriage, but it is not an obligation. Charikles and Kleandros, as well as the other two young men who fell in love with Drosilla, Kleinias and Kallidemos, are chaste in regards to sex; nevertheless, they didn't choose this chastity, but are compelled by the girl, who is adamant about sex before marriage. Since the young men are madly in love with the girl, they don't even think about someone else to replace her, and unwillingly abstain from sex before marriage. This is a forced symmetry.

## (2) Women

There are two women in the text, Chrysilla and Maryllis. The first one is married, the second one is without husband, probably a widow considering she had a son once. Both of them are also physically visible and active participants in the story. However, there is a difference between these older

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γνώμης τε χωρίς μητροπατρώου γένους.» (8.145-146)

<sup>23</sup> Ἄλλος μετ' αὐτὸν ἀντέφησεν εὐθέως·  
 «ἰοῦ, τί ταῦτα; Τὴν κατὰστερον κόρην,  
 τὴν πολλὰ βακχεύουσαν ἐν κάλλει πάλαι,  
 ὡς ἡ Λαῖς τὸ πρῶτον ἢ Κορινθία,  
 τρύχει νόσος δύστηνος - ὧ κακὴ νόσος -,  
 ἢ δ' εὐτραφῆς σάρξ, ὡς ὄρω, κατεστάλη.  
 Μὴ τοῦτο, μὴ μὴ τοῦτο· ῥῶσιν, σάρξ, λάβε·  
 ὄλοιτο πᾶσα τηκτικὴ καχεξία·  
 οὐ γὰρ γυναικὸς σάρξ τις ὄλλυται μία,  
 ἀλλ' οὖν σὺν αὐτῇ καὶ φίλων πληθὺς πόση.»

women's appearance and the effect they have on men and women. In Book Two, Kleandros using simile tells the difference between a married woman and a maiden:

“[...] just as  
spring is better by far than winter,  
nightingale than sparrows, sweet apple than blackthorn plums,  
a maiden than thrice-married women,”<sup>24</sup> (2.299-302)

According to Kleandros, as well as the other men in the novel, it seems that when women enter marriage, they don't just change their marital status, but also, they transform physically. Suddenly they are not beautiful, and certainly not an object of admiration. Every married woman in the novels, no matter the age (this is absolutely not important), becomes wrinkled and ugly from a young men's point of view. This is something Chrysilla and Maryllis have in common. Their physical appearance and behavior are similarly described in the invective genres, but also in the Hellenistic epigrams, which were very popular in Byzantium. So, when Charikles describes the jesting of old women at the festival of Dionysos, he introduces familiar themes and patterns:

“How immensely grateful I am to grey hair.  
It judges and decides all things well;  
it is Cypris's helper, I see,  
pursuing like a fury women haughty toward love.  
The woman who prides herself on the ornament of her curls  
sees her great plait now fall away,  
and what was yellow before has turned white.  
The woman lifting her eyebrows up high  
has now lost all the grace of her beauty.  
The girl's breast, which stood upright before,  
has fallen down; time has lowered it.  
Your voice is senile, alas, old woman;  
the lip that was moist before, how dry now!  
The brow has fallen, become unpleasant,  
and all your beauty has vanished, woman.  
What is left for you?”<sup>25</sup> (3.174-189)

<sup>24</sup> ὄσον

χειμῶνός ἐστι κρεῖττον ἐκκρίτως ἔαρ,  
στρουθῶν ἀηδῶν, μῆλον ἢ δὺ βραβύλων,  
ὄσον γυναικῶν τριγᾶμων ἢ παρθένος, (2.299-302)

<sup>25</sup> «ὡς εὐχαριστῶ τῇ πολιᾷ μυρία.

Καλῶς δικάζει καὶ καλῶς πάντα κρίνει·  
ἀρωγός ἐστι τῆς Κύπριδος, ὡς βλέπω,  
ποινηλατοῦσα τὰς σοβαρὰς πρὸς πόθον.

The last sentence “What is left for you?” is indicative of what is expected from women – to be beautiful, and they are indeed beautiful when they are young and innocent: “But a woman is an unquenchable fire in the heart / if she bears a fresh faced, youthful beauty.”<sup>26</sup> (2.354-355) When her youthful time has passed, no one will choose her.

This is true of Chrysilla, who was not chosen by Charikles, but she chose him. When she first saw him, it was love at first sight. She took action to conquer his love, but this was wrong because it was not a feminine thing to do. Her behavior is judged as inappropriate not so much for her adulterous intentions and murderous plan towards her husband, but for her age. The fact that she is a married woman who falls in love with someone else is not as important as the fact that this older woman falls in love with a young man:

“But for the wrinkled Chrysilla  
now to love Charikles with a keen love,  
doesn’t this seem terrible?”<sup>27</sup> (5.73-75)

In spite of the fact that Chrysilla has disadvantages compared to young women, Drosilla is very concerned when she finds out that Chrysilla is in love with Charikles, because she is afraid that Charikles might change his mind. Therefore, she uses the same rhetoric as young men do when speaking of old women: Don’t put me in a second place behind Chrysilla / don’t prefer an old woman to a girl! / Know that Eros who strikes, is winged - / how could a woman past her prime / seize an archer who flies swiftly?”<sup>28</sup> (5. 42-46)

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Ἡ γαυριῶσα βοστρύχων εὐκοσμία  
ὄρα τὸ μακρὸν πλέγμα νῦν διαρρέον,  
εἰς λευκὸν ἐτρέπη δὲ τὸ ξανθὸν πάλαι·  
ἢ τὰς ὀφρῦς ὑψοῦσα καὶ διηρμένη  
ἀφῆκε πᾶσαν ἄρτι τοῦ κάλλους χάριν.  
Ὁ μαστὸς ἐστὼς ὀρθίος πρὶν τῆς κόρης  
ὑπεκλίθη· καθεῖλεν αὐτὸν ὁ χρόνος.  
Γεραλέον τὸ φθέγμα, φεῦ, σοί, πρεσβύτις·  
τὸ πρὶν δροσῶδες χεῖλος, ὡς ἀυαλέον·  
πέπτωκεν ὀσφρῦς, ἦλθεν εἰς ἀηδία  
τὸ πᾶν δέ σοι παρήλθε τοῦ κάλλους, γύναι.  
Τί λείπεται σοι; (3.174-189)

<sup>26</sup> γυνὴ δὲ πῦρ ἄσβεστον ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ  
ἂν κάλλος εὐπρόσωπον ὠραῖον φέρη. (2.354-355)

<sup>27</sup> τὸ δὲ Χρυσίλλαν τὴν ἐρυτιδωμένην  
ἔρωτα πικρὸν νῦν ἐρᾶν Χαρικλέος  
ἀπευκτὸν οὐκ ἔοικεν; (5.73-75)

<sup>28</sup> ἐν δευτέρῳ με τῆς Χρυσίλλας μὴ τίθει,

Maryllis, on the other hand, represents other qualities taken from the tradition. She is old and wrinkled, as mentioned, but goodhearted as the old woman Iambe in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, especially when she invites the young people to a celebration in her home, because Drosilla and Charikles found each other: “Today I will celebrate with you, strangers. Be my guests, and I will dance with the god Dionysus, who has inseparably united those who’ve suffered pitiably.”<sup>29</sup> (7.266-269). So, the party begins, where she amuses them with her dancing. While dancing she fell on the ground and broke wind three times, and the young men were laughing unstoppably. When Kleandros was trying to help her get on her feet, he was afraid that she might soil herself, but it didn’t happen, though. She admits that this was a first time after the death of her son Chramos eight years before, that she laughed and danced. She was acting like a drunken woman in the scoptic tradition; but, her behavior at the party was not scorned by the young men, because, as they said, it was a gift from the gods. The experience she shared with them wouldn’t be strange even if they were three times as old, i.e., if they were age-matched. The age gap in this case was a safety barrier between the sexes, hence she was not scorned.

### Concluding remarks

Marriageable girls, the ones that have their virginity intact and whose beauty is beyond comparison, are for the first time physically introduced in Byzantine literature. This is of course immensely influenced by the Greek novels of the second sophistic, but it also represents the ideal of purity when entering marriage, which is not a novelty even in antiquity. Attic New Comedy also presents young couples in love, but the girls are never described physically, because beauty is not immanent to this genre. The beautiful girls are visible only in serious genres, not in invective. That is why they are not presented in the other popular genre of the Komnenian period, the satire. Women generally do not participate in the story plot of the satire *Timarion*, for example, because it is a scoptic genre where Eros has absolutely no interest. The narrative of the novel, otherwise, allows this physical presence to be shown in a most honorable way, as a praise

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μη τῆς κόρης πρίκρινε τὴν γηραλέαν.  
 Ἔρωσ ὁ πλήττων ὡς ὑπόπτερος μάθε·  
 γυνὴ παρηκμακυῖα πῶς ἂν ἰσχύσοι  
 πτηνοδρομοῦντα αὐλλαβέσθαι τοξότην;’ (5. 42-46)

<sup>29</sup> ὕμῖν συγχαρήσομαι, ξένοι,  
 τὴν σήμερον· λέγουσα ἑσμεῖς μοι  
 καὶ συγχορεύσω τῷ θεῷ Διονύσῳ  
 παθόντος οἰκτρὰ προσφυῶς ἠνωκότι.’ (7.266-269)

for beauty and Eros. This is a love story that doesn't mock the lovers, and love is only for the young and beautiful, whose physical appearance must be depicted in detail in order to understand the love passion.

By including older (married) women in the novel, the author accentuates the sexual symmetry for a healthy union: a young girl should marry a young man, equally in love with each other. Old and young is impar, and must be suffocated, even though in reality it was socially acceptable for men to be significantly older than their wives. The reflection of this reality is visible in Kleandros's depiction of Kalligone's beauty:

“but her appearance drew even old men  
(hard to excite due to excessive age) to love –  
not just ardent, active young men.”<sup>30</sup> (2.83-85)

This is not allowed for older women, as was Chrysilla in comparison to Charikles. Chrysilla is depicted with the most offending words regarding her physical appearance, and her desire for the young boy is considered more wrong than her plan to murder her husband. Her effect on the boy is what is important, not the effect of the boy on her. Generally speaking, the important thing is what effect the women (girls or older women) have on men, not the other way around.

The way the girls act and are described in the novel represents the ideal in the Byzantine society, not necessarily the reality. A shameless daughter will dishonor not just herself, but her family as well, as Drosilla explicitly says when rejecting Charikles for sex. Therefore, their upbringing, at least in the novels, is secluded in the gynaeceum or in a tower, as was Rhodante in Theodor Prodromos's novel. This way, the girls don't have much contact with the men outside the immediate family. They are expected to be brought up in innocence and purity. The age they are ready to marry does not differ from the Roman law – 12 for the girls, 14 for the boys, actually the age when they reach puberty, and this was a social reality as well. So, this is the age when Drosilla and Kalligone are abducted from their homes, as Kleandros says: *παῖς ἦν ἐκεῖνη, παῖς ἀπαλή, παρθένος*. (“she was a child, a tender child, a virgin/maiden.” 2.82). The abduction, on the other hand, although an illegal act in Byzantine law, is accepted in the novel, because the girls consented, or will consent later (in the other novels). It remains only the blessing from their parents in order to end the love story as it should be – in a holy matrimony.

<sup>30</sup> *πλὴν δυσκινήτους ἐκ χρόνων ἀμετρίας  
γέροντας εἴλκε πρὸς ἔρωτα τῇ θέᾳ,  
οὐ πῦρ μόνον πνέοντας εὐζώνους νέους.* (2.83-85)

The story ends with Drosilla's physical change, from maiden she became a woman after previously she and Charikles were married by a priest of Dionysos (ἱερεὺς Διονύσου 9.287):

“What then is left? Drosilla was joined  
to Charikles in marriage, a bride to a groom,  
and led to the family house,  
with wreaths, applause, and cymbal crashes.  
And the girl who was still a virgin in the evening  
was a woman when she rose at dawn from her bed.”<sup>31</sup> (9.295-300)

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<sup>31</sup> Τί γοῦν τὸ λοιπόν; Συζυγεῖσα πρὸς γάμον  
νύμφη Δροσίλλα τῷ Χαρικλεῖ νυμφίῳ  
καὶ πρὸς δόμους ἀχθεῖσα τῶν γεννητόρων,  
μετὰ στεφάνων καὶ κρότων καὶ κυμβάλων,  
ἐν ἔσπερα μένουσα παρθένος κόρη  
γυνὴ πρὸς ὄρθρον ἐξανέστη τῆς κλίνης.



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## THE RISING VISIBILITY OF WOMEN IN BYZANTINE NOVEL

### Summary

During the Komnenian dynasty many literary genres from the antiquity reappeared in their Byzantine context. The novels were also part of this so-called Byzantine renaissance, represented with great production. Four novels are preserved today, all of which simulate ancient ambient and pagan culture. The subject of this research are the female representatives in the novel-romance of Niketas Eugenianos, titled *Drosilla and Charikles*, and the discourse of sexuality and eroticism which is highly associated with the visibility of the female characters.

*Keywords:* Byzantine literature, Byzantine novels, female characters, Komnenian renaissance.

