

JOAN B. BURTON: *Niketas Eugenianos: A Byzantine Novel. Drosilla and Charikles*. Translated with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes. Pp. xxvii, 207. Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers Inc., 2004 Paperback., \$ 29  
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The ‘revival’ of the ancient Greek novel in twelfth-century Constantinople, resulting in the four so-called Komnenian novels that have come down to us (three complete, one in fragments), has in the last few years gained an increasing interest. The growing number of studies of literary and socio-cultural aspects of the Komnenian novels has now finally been followed by the first English translation of one of the texts, *Drosilla and Charikles* by Niketas Eugenianos. The need for and usefulness of such a translation for anyone interested in ancient or Byzantine narrative is unquestionable and it is thus a great pleasure to present it here.

The present volume is a bilingual edition, presenting a reprint of Fabrizio Conca’s edition (see further below) along with Joan B. Burton’s new English translation. The volume also contains an introduction (pp. ix–xxviii) and explanatory notes (pp. 195–202), as well as lists of characters, mythological figures and places (“Characters in alphabetical order”, p. xxi; “Characters by relationship”, p. xxiii; “Gods and legendary figures mentioned more than once”, pp. xxv–xxvi; “Select places and peoples”, p. xxvii), and a select bibliography (pp. 203–207).

Burton’s introduction with its ten pages is rather short but full, basically satisfying the needs both of scholars and of uninitiated readers. Along with the select bibliography it offers a fine overview of recent research. One could now add to this overview the selection of papers from the latest International Conference of the Ancient Novel (ICAN 2000), published as *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*, ed. by S. Panayotakis, M. Zimmerman, and W. Keulen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), which contains three contributions on the Byzantine novels (R. Harder, “Der byzantinische Roman des 12. Jahrhunderts als Spiegel des zeitgenössischen Literaturbetriebs”; I. Nilsson, “Static Imitation or Creative Transformation? Achilles Tatius in *Hysmine & Hysminias*”; W. J. Aerts, “The ‘Entführung aus dem Serail’-motif in the Byzantine (vernacular) Romances”). The forthcoming *SO Debate in Symbolae Osloenses*

79 (2004), comprising Panagiotis Agapitos' "Genre, Structure and Poetics in the Byzantine Vernacular Erotic Romances" and responses from other scholars, will also be of interest to readers of the Komnenian novels.

The introduction aims at presenting the reader with a background to the present translation, and thus discusses the Greek so-called sophistic novels as primary models of Komnenian texts, the revival of the genre in the twelfth century, and the cultural context of the novelists working at the Komnenian court.<sup>1</sup> Only two pages (xvii–xviii) are devoted to Eugenianos' novel, giving a brief description of the text's plot elements and general characteristics, along with some references to the use of Christian imagery. In spite of the importance of a thorough discussion of the genre's background and rebirth, the reader would, in my view, probably have profited from a stronger focus on the text itself. A presentation of *Drosilla and Charikles* and its plot (in its own right, and not only in comparison with Prodromos) might have been more useful to a first-time reader than the presentation of different interpretations of the novel from socio-cultural or Christian perspectives. Such a presentation would not have pre-empted "the joy of discovery", but instead prepared the reader for "its special pleasures" (p. xviii) better than the introduction and lists of characters in fact do.

This is of course a question of readership; to whom is the introduction addressed?

The aim of the translation is described by Burton as follows: it is "intended for use by students and teachers of ancient and medieval literature, the novel, as well as medieval culture and society" (p. x). One must then assume some readers altogether unfamiliar with the ancient and Byzantine novels, readers who have never heard of Heliodoros or Theodoros Prodromos. Details on the *in medias res* opening of *Drosilla and Charikles* as an imitation of Prodromos' opening of *Rhodante and Dosikles* (in its turn an imitation of Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*), or the mention of the direct reference in *Drosilla and Charikles* to ancient novels and love-stories (6.382–551) may turn out to be confusing rather than enlightening. Eugenianos' curious reference to ancient love narratives is indeed one of the most striking and inter-

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<sup>1</sup> To the discussion of the dating of the novels (p. xii and n. 12) one may add H. Hunger, "Die Makremboliten auf byzantinischen Bleisiegeln und in sonstigen Belegen", *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 5 (1998) 1–28, which contains information with implications for the dating of *Hysmine and Hysminias* and, accordingly, all four of the Komnenian novels.

esting features of the novel, but its significance may not be fully grasped by the reader when it is mentioned towards the end of the introduction, especially if the reader is not familiar with the ancient texts in question.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to these seemingly high demands on the reader, the list of “Gods and legendary figures” seems to be written for someone who never heard of Zeus or Aphrodite. It is one thing to inform the reader that Aphrodite may be referred to also as Cypris or Paphia, and another to assume that students or teachers of ancient or medieval literature or culture could not (or should not) be supposed to know Zeus, “ruler of the Olympian gods” (p. xxvi). Furthermore, the combination of these very basic explanations about Greek mythology with seemingly advanced references to classical literature and modern scholarship appears a bit odd. For example, Eros, “god of love, often represented as a beautiful winged youth, with bow and arrows”, comes with references to, among others, Moschos, Apollonius Rhodius, and Simonides (p. xxv). In the list of “Select places and peoples”, Parthians are appropriately described both as a historical people and as appearing in Eugenianos, followed by a reference to Corinne Jouanno’s article on barbarians in the Komnenian novels (p. xxvii). Such references to ancient literature or modern scholarship indeed provide relevant information, but belong, in my view, to an extensive commentary. The mixing of basic facts with scholarly references is easily confusing. A reader should be neither under- nor overestimated, he or she should never feel let down by the author. This is a difficult balance, but also an issue that translators and writers of commentaries should keep in mind. I shall return to this problem in my discussion of the explanatory notes, but let us first take a look at the translation.

As already mentioned, the parallel Greek text is a reprint of Conca’s edition as it appeared in a volume including all the Komnenian novels along with Italian translations (*Il romanzo bizantino del XII secolo*, Turin 1994, 305–497), that is, without the critical apparatus established in his edition of 1990 (Nicetas Eugenianos, *De Drosillae et Chariclis amoribus*, Amsterdam 1990).<sup>3</sup> The inclusion of a parallel Greek text is of great importance and renders the volume especially valuable. Even if the absence of a critical ap-

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<sup>2</sup> The passage is discussed also in the explanatory notes, basically with the same references to scholarship (Burton and Jouanno); see further below in my discussion of the notes.

<sup>3</sup> The mysterious note on p. 52 of the present translation (*D&C* 3.208) is a remnant from the 1994 volume, as is the curiously short pages 128–129 (where Conca has a long note at the end of the page).

paratus in this volume may seem irritating to a philologist, the complete edition is easily available in most libraries. The interested reader may also benefit from the ‘nota critica’ of Conca 1994, 52–56, which includes a short presentation of the manuscripts.

To review a translation is a tricky task, since any translation involves interpretation and can rarely be said to be ‘wrong’. Burton is an experienced philologist, familiar both with translating in general and with the text in question,<sup>4</sup> and I would therefore like to avoid discussing interpretations of isolated passages and instead focus on some more general principles related to translating, using examples drawn from this new translation of *Drosilla and Charikles*.

The aim of the present translation is “to translate the Greek into a natural, readable English that also preserves the spirit, style, and thought of the original Greek”, but also to aim at an “accuracy of translation that might help readers of the Greek” (p. xviii).<sup>5</sup> This is probably a fair description of what any translator of ancient texts would like to achieve. An additional difficulty with this particular text is that it was composed in twelve-syllable verse. Like many translators, Burton has chosen to render the verse novel in prose, but unlike, for example, Conca’s translation of the Komnenian novels into Italian or Gavin Bett’s translation of the Palaiologan romances into English (*Three Medieval Greek Romances. Velthandros and Chrysandza, Kallimachos and Chrysorroï, Livistros and Rodamni*, New York & London 1995), *Drosilla and Charikles* has the graphic appearance of ‘free verse’ with each Greek verse having a corresponding line in the translation. This arrangement reasonably solves two problems: first, the (translator’s) painstaking difficulties involved in translating into verse, and second, the (reader’s) problems with finding the correct corresponding verse in a prose translation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See the translations of Theocritus’ Idylls 2, 14 and 15 included as Appendix I in Burton, *Theocritus’s Urban Mimes. Mobility, Gender, and Patronage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1995). For Burton’s work on Eugenianos, see the select bibliography in the reviewed work.

<sup>5</sup> To Burton’s list of “useful dictionaries”, p. xix, n. 2, may be added *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, besonders des 9.-12. Jahrhunderts* (=LBG), ed. E. Trapp, Vienna 1994–; though, perhaps, not so useful for Anglo-American students, it is the only dictionary of Byzantine Greek which includes a number of the neologisms and compounds used exclusively by the Komnenian authors.

<sup>6</sup> This has, in Conca’s and Bett’s translations, been solved by the insertion of verse numbers in the translation’s prose text.

It is, however, a solution which in turn entails some other problems, the first of which, at first sight, seems to be of a merely graphic character, but which, I think, may have extensive consequences for the understanding of the translated text. I will quote one passage in translation (trusting that my readers, if interested, have access to the Greek text) and point out some of the aspects I find problematic. The section in question is the novel's first description (ekphrasis) of a garden, a central topos in both ancient and Byzantine novels and conspicuously placed by Eugenianos in the first part of book 1.

In the middle of this field was a very pleasant meadow,  
 with lovely laurels all around  
 and cypresses, plane-trees, oaks,  
 and, in the middle, delightful fruit trees,  
 along with an abundance  
 of lilies and lovely roses.  
 The roses' calyxes, being closed  
 or rather a little opened,  
 shut the flower within like a maiden in her chamber.  
 One must certainly regard the sun's warming ray  
 as the cause of this,  
 for whenever the sun's ray—at a fitting time—  
 penetrates with its heat among calyxes,  
 the calyxes open to reveal the rose's fragrant beauty.  
 Water from a spring was flowing there,  
 cold, clear, and sweet as honey.  
 In the middle of the spring stood a pillar,  
 skilfully hollowed within,  
 like a long pipe,  
 through which the flowing water rose.  
 But an eagle received this water  
 (for a bronze eagle had been artfully placed on top)  
 and released the liquid from its mouth to flow back down again.  
 In the middle of the lovely spring's white rocks  
 stood a circle of well-carved statues,  
 the works of Pheidias,

Zeuxis, and Praxiteles,  
the finest creators of statues. (1.77–104)

My first reaction to a passage like this is basically aesthetic. The extremely varying length of the lines is not only disturbing to the eye but, more seriously, breaks off the narrative flow of the text and creates a ‘limping’ impression which the original Greek does not have. If one wishes to preserve the spirit and style of the original, rhythm must be taken into account, especially when dealing with a versified text. The rhythm of this translation would, in fact, have come out much better written as normal prose. Consider, for example, verses 1.93–96 written as follows: “In the middle of the spring stood a pillar, skilfully hollowed within, like a long pipe, through which the flowing water rose”, which reads just fine when the eye is not disturbed by the graphic representation. Since a translation by definition is always a sort of paraphrase, especially when we cast verse into prose, we need to find different ways to represent the original’s spirit and style. In the case of *Drosilla and Charikles*, I think that prose would indeed be the right form to represent the novel in a modern language. Contrary to his reputation as the most ‘poetic’ of the Komnenian novelists, Eugenianos’ language and style are fairly simple and prosaic, especially in comparison with Makrembolites’ highly poetic language and prose structure. When we deal with narratives, the preservation of the narrative flow and rhythm is of crucial importance, and even simple, basically graphic aspects, such as keeping the lines to the same length or representing them as prose, may make a big difference.

I would also like to discuss another problem related to narrative flow and structure, namely the relation of a translation to the original Greek’s particles and use of punctuation. It seems to have become more and more common not to take these things into consideration when translating Greek into modern languages, even though both devices uphold the structure of the text, and the elimination of them often contributes to a sense of confusion. In the passage quoted above, the structure of the Greek original is of particular importance, since the section is not only part of a narrative text, but constitutes an ekphrasis, the structure of which by necessity follows strict rhetorical rules. The focus of a garden-ekphrasis traditionally moves from the periphery towards the centre, and this description thus opens with a look at the large trees surrounding the smaller fruit trees (vv. 1.77–80), before moving on to the ground, beholding the flowers (vv. 1.81–90). The description of the flow-

ers comprises first a general comment on their kind and location (in the middle of the meadow the ground is filled with roses and lilies) and then a closer look at the roses and the sun's effect on their blooming (the sun makes the roses open up their calyxes to show off their fragrance and beauty). The Greek text has a full stop after the first four verses, describing the trees (v. 1.80: καρποφόρα), and then a semicolon after the general description of the flowers (vv. 1.81–82: Πόα τε κρίνων καὶ πόα τερπνὴ ῥόδων / πολλὴ παρῆν ἐκέϊσε, λειμῶνος μέσον·) followed by the closer examination of the roses and the sun's rays (vv. 1.83–90).<sup>7</sup> The translator's inclusion of vv. 1.81–82 in the first sentence of the passage, connecting the flowers with the trees, is fully comprehensible to a reader of the translation, but breaks up the ekphrasis' internal structure and thus disturbs the rhetorical and literary effect.<sup>8</sup>

An 'accurate' translation presented with a parallel text, each verse represented by one line in the translation, may indeed appear as helpful to students or other readers of the Greek (cf. p. xviii quoted above), but a free translation of textual structures, as the one described above, may confuse rather than help an inexperienced reader (see also, e.g., vv. 1.301–320 with a structure somewhat strangely represented in the translation). If one does not aim at a literary translation, and not even at lines of approximately the same length, one may as well follow the text really close, translating each word instead of, for example, replacing nouns or names with pronouns or synonyms in order to avoid repetition. This too may disturb, for no good reason, the literary effect of the text. For example, the carefully constructed vv. 289–290,

‘ψυχὴ φίλη’ λέγουσα ‘Χαρίκλεις ἄνερ,  
ἄνερ Χαρίκλεις μέχρις οὖν φωνῆς μόνης,

<sup>7</sup> As for the translation itself, as already mentioned, I do not intend to go into any detail. Let me just say that I do not agree with the translation of v. 88: καὶ καλῶς οὕτως ἔχει, “at a fitting time”, referring to the sun's rays penetrating the rose calyxes. I think this means simply “and this is good”, i.e. “this is the way it should be”, which makes more sense. Burton reads the verse like Conca, who has “e avviene a tempo opportuno”.

<sup>8</sup> A similar problem occurs a few lines later, vv. 96–97, where the semicolon of the Greek text has been replaced by full stop in the translation, breaking up the description of the fountain. For a disturbing breaking up of the structure on a sentence level, see vv. 234–236, which have been sadly distorted in the English translation. For examples of problematic omissions of particles, see e.g. v. 1.269–270 and 1.292–293.

translated as

and said, ‘Charikles, beloved soul, husband  
(though in name only)

does not render at all the spirit of the Greek.<sup>9</sup> Repetition is an important rhetorical and literary characteristic of *Drosilla and Charikles* (and of all the Komnenian novels) and should, if possible, be kept in the translation. This is of importance not so much for students, who have a teacher to point out the features of the Greek to them, as for readers who do not know Greek but wish to obtain an impression of the literary character of a Byzantine novel. Since the Komnenian novels are literary products where the structure and language are as important as the content and the plot (if not even more so), special care should be devoted to these aspects in a translation.

Let us proceed to the explanatory notes (pp. 195–202). These are not many, about 50 notes for the approximately 3650 verses of the novel. Like the lists of characters, and so on, discussed above, they tend to mix very basic information with selected scholarly references. We read, for example, that “the Sirens were mythological females whose song lured sailors to their death” (2.203; p. 195) or that Homer was “the epic poet credited with the two great ancient Greek epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*” (6.345; p. 199). The notes also tend to include somewhat confusing references to recent research instead of offering concise explanations of the passage in question (see e.g. the notes to 4.381–86 or 6.389–90). The need for further help is most apparent in the notes of book 6, which, as mentioned above, is both interesting and difficult, and deserves further attention (see esp. 6.503–46, 6.585–86). The reader should not be always expected to have access to the latest articles on the subject in order to understand what he or she is reading. Few of the notes (5) deal with the Greek text.

My opinion is that any modern translation of a Byzantine text, especially texts as unknown to a broader audience as the Komnenian novels, which

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<sup>9</sup> I would suggest this simple solution:  
beloved soul, she said, my Charikles, my man,  
my man, my Charikles, only, though, in name.

have not already been copiously edited, translated and commented upon, should appear with a proper commentary.<sup>10</sup> Now, what a commentary should contain is a matter of dispute, but if we aim at an audience of students, teachers and scholars of other fields, it needs to offer, I think, some basic comments on the text, its structure and plot, and its relation to other texts in the same genre. An issue that accordingly should have been addressed is that of the internal relationship between the novels, the closeness which is not only contextual but also textual, with the same imagery, sources, expressions, and so on. The garden-ekphrasis we examined above, for instance, being such a central literary and narrative element of any ancient or Byzantine novel, should have been one of the things to be commented on first. Such comments would also have been useful for future translations of the other Komnenian novels, opening up a general line to follow.

In spite of the problematic aspects pointed out above, I am very pleased to see *Drosilla and Charikles* appearing in English, and very glad at the prospect of translations of the other Komnenian novels to follow. Translating is an important, though little appreciated task of philologists, and I hope that eventually it will be acknowledged how valuable translations in fact are to our field. Therefore, they should be made with care, preferably presented with Greek parallel text and thorough commentary, so that they can be enjoyed by students, scholars, and any interested reader alike. There is no need, as I see it, to try and present texts, such as the ancient or Byzantine novels, as texts that make for ‘easy reading’, either by telling the reader who Zeus is, or by publishing *Drosilla and Charikles* under the title “A Byzantine novel” (cf. also Betts’ *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 1995).<sup>11</sup> The Komnenian novels are carefully structured narratives aiming at entertainment both from a romantic and from a rhetorical point of view, and now that they slowly begin to become available in editions and translations whose purpose is to

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<sup>10</sup> Conca’s edition of *Drosilla and Charikles* contains no commentary, nor does his translation into Italian (1994). There is now a new German translation by Karl Plepelits, which purports to have explanatory notes (I have not had the opportunity to look at it myself): *Niketas Eugenianos. Drosilla und Charikles. Eigeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert von Karl Plepelits* [Bibliothek der Griechischen Literatur 61], Stuttgart 2003.

<sup>11</sup> One suspects that the publishing houses rather than the translators themselves are responsible for this kind of presentation of ancient or Byzantine literature, a benevolent although misdirected attempt, I suppose, to make the texts appear ‘lighter’ or more easily accessible to a general audience.

reflect their particular character, they will eventually, I am sure, be seen as individual works of literature worthy to be called by their own names.