

Beauty and Desire in *Erotokritos*

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This paper is meant not only as a small offering towards the commemoration of three hundred years since the first edition of Vitsentzos Kornaros's *Erotokritos* (an occasion providing the added pleasure of coming back to Cambridge and meeting old friends); it is equally meant as a tribute to David Holton's pivotal contribution to the study of the text, especially its language, style and poetics.¹ The title suggests an over-ambitious attempt at a comprehensive treatment of the two fundamental constituents of an ideal love story. In fact it will set out to offer comments and raise questions of poetics relating to the presentation of desire, sensuality and beauty in *Erotokritos*, in the hope of contributing to a fuller understanding of the text's subtleties.

The various demonstrations of desire, the private or even intimate communication between lovers are, needless to say, central in a romance. Among the most characteristic features of the genre is the depiction of the various stages of courtship from the declaration of love to its fulfilment (if possible), and more specifically the ways in which the lovers strive to unite in mind (and in body, if possible). Especially in a poetic work, this process is presented through the lyrical idiom and tone of the lovers' private conversation (either in direct dialogue or in writing).

¹ This contribution is a slightly modified version of the paper given at Cambridge in February 2013 with the addition of the necessary footnotes. The edition used for references and excerpts is: Stylianos Alexiou, *Βισσέντζος Κορνάρου, Έρωτόκριτος*. Κριτική έκδοση, εισαγωγή, σημειώσεις, γλωσσάριο (Athens: Ermis 1980, reprinted with corrections 1986 and 1994). For *Voskopoula* I have used the edition by Stylianos Alexiou, *Η Βοσκοπούλα, κρητικό ειδύλλιο του 1600*. Κριτική έκδοση (Heraklion: Etairia Kritikon Istorikon Meleton 1963).

Closely connected with the expression of desire is the representation of the body, especially the depiction of beauty.

Beginning with the love dialogues, one can start with the observation that, only on very limited occasions does Kornaros's reader have the opportunity to penetrate into the private channel of communication between Erotokritos and Aretousa and thus receive an immediate account of their plaintive or playful amorous exchanges. The painful feelings of obstructed desire are exposed in dialogues, which are in effect debates on love. Indeed, there are many dialogues on the subject, amplifying its torments (rather than its delights). In this sense, the discourse of love is abundant in Kornaros's romance. However, while the two protagonists have lengthy discussions on love and its torments with their confidants (Polydoros and Frosyni), and while ample commentary and observations are offered by the narrator, there are no solitary monologues expressing passion.² When Erotokritos and Aretousa voice their feelings (usually in the presence of the confidant), the emphasis is on the tormenting effort to suppress desire, rather than on the liberating outpouring of feeling.³

Additionally, the narrative contains no direct erotic dialogue, and, even more intriguingly, the songs that made Aretousa fall in love with Erotokritos are never disclosed. As a result, the representation of the couple's most intimate moments is limited,

² As Massimo Peri has observed: "The dialogues in *Erotokritos* can be read as a kind of *psychomachia* in which the protagonist impersonates erotic impulse while his/her confidant impersonates self-control. It is for this reason (contrary to what happens in the western tradition of *Erotokritos*'s model *Paris et Vienne*) that each confidant converses only with the respective protagonist; [...] and for the same reason, when the protagonists stop resisting love, the dialogues between Aretousa and Frosyni become very rare and those between Rotokritos and Polydoros cease altogether" (my translation). See: *Του πόθου αρρωστημένος. Ιατρική και ποίηση στον Ερωτόκριτο*, trans. Afroditī Athanasopoulou (Heraklion: Panepistimiakes Ekdoseis Kritis 1999), p. 165. Peri offers a most stimulating analysis of the therapeutic function of the dialogues in *Erotokritos* on pp. 148-65.

³ I shall not be discussing the dialogues between Erotokritos and the imprisoned Aretousa in Book V, as these sections contain very few elements relating to desire.

and in most cases filtered and controlled by the narrator.⁴ The secret nocturnal meetings of the young lovers are not rendered in any detail, and most importantly, they are not dramatized. Aretousa's initial words at the first meeting with Erotokritos are presented, but the remainder of the exchange is summarized and, at the same time, reconstructed through the interpretative intervention of the narrator (III 615-18):

Τά 'λεγε, τ' άνεθίβανε, κάθ' ἕνας πού διαβάζει
 Κι όπου 'κουσε κι όπου 'καμε, μπορεί νά τά λογιάζη·
 δὲ θεὸ νά χάνω τὸν καιρὸ κι ἄγνωστο νά μὲ πῆτε,
 νά λέγω ἐκείνο π' ὅλοι σας μὲ τὴν καρδιά θωρεῖτε.

In general, the lovers' experience, especially the bodily aspect of erotic torment is not exposed through lyrical monologue or dialogue (as mentioned above). On the contrary, the narrator invites his experienced, emotionally mature readers to recreate the feelings and words themselves, on the basis of their personal knowledge on matters of love. When Aretousa abandons her initial shyness and dares to express her thoughts and feelings (III 657-64), direct speech is, once more, absent:

Ἦρθε τὸ σκότος κ' ἤϊρε τους, τὴν ὥρα τως κατέχου·
 πᾶσι στὸν τόπον τως κ' οἱ δύο, χαρὰ μεγάλην ἔχου.
 Ξανακινοῦν τὰ πάθη τως καὶ τότες ἡ Ἀρετούσα
 πλὴ λειότερα καὶ σπλαχνικά τὰ χεῖλη τῆ ἐμλοῦσα·
 ἤρχισε κ' ἐφάνερωνε τοῦ Ρώκριτου, νά μάθη
 ἀπὸ τὰ βᾶθη τῆς καρδιάς παραμικρὸ ἀπ' τὰ πάθη.
 Νύκτες πολλὲς τσι πόνους τως στὸ παραθύρι λέσι
 κι ὥρες γελοῦν, ὥρες μλοῦν κι ὥρες σωπώντας κλαῖσι.

The dialogue between the two young lovers is dramatized only in the separation scene in Book III. As Rotokritos's departure is imminent, the atmosphere is dominated by anxiety and grief.

⁴ For more details, see Tina Lendari, "Ο Ἐρωτόκριτος καὶ ἡ ἑλληνικὴ δημώδης μυθιστορία τοῦ Μεσαίωνα: ὁ λόγος τῆς ἐπιθυμίας καὶ ἡ ἀπουσία του", in: Stefanos Kaklamanis (ed.), *Ζητήματα ποιητικῆς στὸν Ἐρωτόκριτο* (Heraklion: Vikelaia Vivliothiki 2006), pp. 51-8.

His words are full of resentment, sadness and despair, leading him to cruelly doubt Aretousa's love and devotion; adding insult to injury, he asks her to remember him when she becomes another man's bride. In this very section he alludes to bodily desire and sexual contact (III 1377-80):

ΡΩΤ. Κι ὄντε σ' ἀγάπη ἀλλοῦ γαμπροῦ θές δώσης τὴν ἐξά σου
καὶ νοικοκύρης νὰ γενῆ στὰ κάλλη τὰ δικά σου,
ὄντε μὲ σπλάχνος σὲ φιλή και σὲ περιλαμπάνη,
θυμήσου ἐνὸς ὅπου γιὰ σὲ ἐβάλθη ν' ἀποθάνη.

Aretousa's indignant response is a remarkable composition, combining strong rhetorical features and a sophisticated array of imagery and metaphors.⁵ Her verbal and emotional eruption illustrates her anguish, simultaneously marking a clear indication of her malady, the disease of love; the aggravation of her symptoms is due to Erotokritos's unjust accusations which lead her to exclaim in a famous (and, according to some, daringly sensuous) line: γιὰ σέναν ἐγεννήθηκε στὸν κόσμο τὸ κορμί μου (III 1400). This bold allusion to her body is a sign of her sensuality, which surfaces as a result of the excruciating situation she finds herself in (III 1407-10):

Δὲν ἔμπορεῖ πλιὸ ἢ Ἄρετὴ ἐτοῦτα ν' ἀπομένῃ
κι ἀγκουσεμένη εὐρίσκεται καὶ ξεπεριορισμένη
καὶ λέγει του νὰ μὴ μιλή, πλιότερα μὴ βαραίνῃ
μὰ λαβωμένη τσ' ἐρωτιάς, τοῦ πόθου ἀρρωστημένη;

After the conclusion of this scene with the exchange of rings and vows, and before Erotokritos is separated from his beloved, one would expect to find the very words of love exchanged by the lovers at this critical stage. Instead, the narrator intervenes once more, appealing to those educated in love, to attempt a reconstruction of their words (III 1499-1510):

⁵ See David Ricks, "The style of *Erotókritos*", *Cretan Studies* 1 (1988) 250-1; Lendari, "Ὁ Ἐρωτόκριτος καὶ ἡ ἐλληνικὴ δημώδης μυθιοστορία", pp. 63-5.

Ὅποιος δουλεύει τῇ φιλιᾷς κ' ἔχει καημὸ μεγάλο,
 ἄς τὸ λογιᾷση ἴντ' ἄλεγεν ὁ ἕνας μὲ τὸν ἄλλο·
 ἄς τὸ λογιᾷση κι ἄς τὸ δῆ κι ἀπὸ δικοῦ του ἄς κρῖνη
 ἴντ' ἀποχαιρετίσματα ἦσαν τὴν ὥρα κείνη
 κ' ἴντα καληνυκτίσματα πρικιά, φαρμακεμένα,
 λόγια μὲ λουχτουκίσματα καὶ δάκρυα ζυμωμένα·
 θωριᾷς μὲ τ' ἀναστεναμοὺς καὶ τῇ καρδιάς τρομάρες
 καὶ συχνιαναντρανίσματα κι ἀγάπης λιγωμάρες.
 Μὲ πόνους τὰ κανάκια τως, μὲ δάκρυα ὅ,τι μιλοῦσι,
 σὰν ὄντε οἱ μάνες τὰ παιδιὰ νεκρὰ ἀποχαιρετοῦσι.
 Ὡς τὴν αὐγὴ ἐμλούσανε, ὡς τὴν αὐγὴν ἐκλαίγα
 κι ὡς τὴν αὐγὴ τὰ πάθη τως καὶ πόνους τως ἐλέγα.

This practice of controlling amorous discourse and avoiding the recording of love lyrics results in a moderation of the sensual element. This practice may well be connected with the absence of a full description of the heroine, a fairly standard *topos* of the romance genre. Even though Kornaros composes the finest psychological depiction and praise of Aretousa's noble character and warm feelings, he consistently prevents his character from becoming fully "visible" to the reader. The readers are informed that Aretousa is exceptionally beautiful and gracious from the beginning of the work, but only a few of her features are mentioned. Several components of her physical appearance are integrated in various comments relating to action, which are scattered throughout the text (e.g. I 125-8).⁶ The synthesis of these elements results in a partial portrait: a lovely body, red lips, white hands and blonde hair. Aretousa's marble-white hands are mentioned in three instances (the most commonly mentioned of her bodily features), while there is also a passage exclusively dealing with her hair. As has repeatedly been pointed out, the colour of her eyes is not revealed. Except for the description of her beautiful hair, which shall be discussed below, all these passages are placed in the first three books of the romance (those dealing with the first

⁶ For the specific details of physical appearance, the presentation and distribution in the text see Michalis Lasithiotakis, "Οἱ περιγραφές στὸν Ἐρωτόκριτο: ἀφηγηματολογικὴ καὶ ὑφολογικὴ προσέγγιση", in: Kaklamanis (ed.), *Ζητήματα ποιητικῆς*, pp. 83-102.

stage of the young couple's love, the stage of ardent, youthful passion).⁷

The absence of a structured and concrete *ekphrasis* (i.e. an external description or portrait) of Kornaros's young heroine, has by now received ample attention and discussion.⁸ Massimo Peri suggests that Kornaros does not care to employ either the brief or the long type of traditional *ekphrasis*, while Giorgos Kallinis believes that Kornaros is not ignorant of this type of rhetorical device but, instead, makes a deliberate choice in ignoring it. His analysis concludes thus (my translation):

The brief or extensive portraits of women in Medieval and Renaissance romance, as well as the fragmentary presentation of feminine beauty in lyrical poetry [Kallinis refers here mainly to the models of Petrarchan poetry], belong to a common *topos*, the *locus* of female beauty, as seen *by* the male gaze and intended *for* the male gaze. The idealization of women through portraiture is part of the process of dehumanization. Theorists attribute this attitude to the male fear of the female body, which conceals the desire for unbridled sexuality. If this is true, then by abandoning the Medieval and Renaissance models, the narrator in *Erotokritos* intends to create a different type of heroine, who is no longer passive, who is not simply the projection of male desire and male dominance on the female body. So, he creates the portrait of Areti (Virtue).

⁷ The passages relating to Aretousa's appearance in Book V do not praise her beauty, but rather describe its withering (vv. 319-20), her miserable and tearful aspect (vv. 963-70, 1071-4), and the restoration of her loveliness after *Erotokritos* reveals his own true form (vv. 1116-24).

⁸ See Peri, *Του πόθου αρρωστημένος*, pp. 110-11; Giorgos Kallinis, "Τὸ «προτρέτο» τῆς Ἀρετῆς. Ἀπὸ τίς «προσωπογραφίες» ὡραίων γυναικῶν τῆς μεσαιωνικῆς καὶ ἀναγεννησιακῆς μυθιστορίας στὴν ἀπουσία τοῦ γυναικείου σώματος στὸν *Ἐρωτόκριτο* τοῦ Β. Κορνάρου", in: Kaklamanis (ed.), *Ζητήματα ποιητικῆς*, pp. 119-29; Lasithiotakis, "Οἱ περιγραφές στὸν *Ἐρωτόκριτο*", *ibid.*, pp. 93-6; Vicky Panayotopoulou, "Τὸ ὡραῖο στὸν *Ἐρωτόκριτο*: οἱ ἀναγεννησιακῆς αἰσθητικῆς ἀντιλήψεις στὸν Κορνάρο", *ibid.*, pp. 83-102; Tina Lendari, "Ὁ *Ἐρωτόκριτος* καὶ ἡ ἐλληνικὴ δημόδης μυθιστορία τοῦ Μεσαίωνα", *ibid.*, pp. 65-7.

While I am happy to agree with many of the observations made by Kallinis, as well as some of the theoretical tenets put forward, it cannot be readily accepted that the narrator (in this case one should rather speak of the author) intends to liberate the female body and the female image from the dominance of the male gaze and male desire. By general consensus, Kornaros is most probably familiar with and subscribes to the Renaissance artistic claim that true beauty is beyond depiction (as Kallinis himself acknowledges). Besides, the notion of beauty must be seen in close connection with the Neoplatonic view of the ennobling potential of women; nonetheless, this should not be seen as the basis on which the author aims to negotiate or explore a more radical approach to gender roles. In any case, the adoption of such a drastic ideological position would entail a more complex treatment of gender roles – which, nonetheless, remain quite traditional, if not decidedly stereotypical in *Erotokritos*.

Therefore Kornaros is not necessarily trying to liberate his heroine from the male gaze; while possibly paying tribute to a literary, aesthetic and philosophical ideal, he imposes a sense of decorum in order to shield his noble, virtuous and pure female character, preventing the reader from perceiving her as a sensual object of desire (whether passive or not).⁹ When he does refer to Aretousa's appearance, the imagery is in most cases subtly mingled with action or the expression of feeling, aiming to create a particular effect (as will be discussed below).¹⁰ Vicky Panayotopoulou has also commented on the depiction of her beauty, also stressing that the overall impression created in the text underlines her modesty.¹¹

⁹ See Lendari, “Ο Έρωτόκριτος και ή ελληνική δημόδης μυθιστορία”, pp. 65-7.

¹⁰ See also Tina Lendari, “Τὰ βέλη τοῦ ἔρωτα καὶ τὰ μάτια τῆς Ἀρετῆς: τὸ decorum τοῦ βλέμματος στὸν Ἐρωτόκριτο”, in: Tasoula M. Markomichelaki (ed.), *Ο Κόσμος του Ερωτόκριτου και ο Ερωτόκριτος στον κόσμο. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου (Σητεία, 31/7-2/8/2009)* (Heraklion: Dimos Siteias 2012), pp. 89-103.

¹¹ Panayotopoulou, “Τὸ ὠραίο στὸν Ἐρωτόκριτο”, p. 106.

It is fairly easy to see that the control of desire and sexuality is achieved through the application of subtle poetic devices; among which an alternative treatment of the standard *topos* of the heroine's portrayal which aims at promoting the idea of Aretousa's ideal beauty combined with virtue. At the same time, should one seek to juxtapose the description of Erotokritos's beauty to that of Aretousa, the comparison reveals that the relevant passages are not extensive, although in effect the emerging portrait of the former is much fuller.¹² After all, he is presented in all his splendour during the joust in Book II (especially as the reader is invited to observe him not only as a neutral onlooker, but also through Aretousa's loving eyes). In contrast to Erotokritos who receives public admiration for his appearance as well as his deeds, Aretousa remains both visible and invisible throughout the work.¹³ She can see and observe, but cannot entirely be visualized by the reader, tending to become an ideal, almost abstract form.¹⁴

Relevant to the question of Aretousa's visualisation through description and the connection of beauty and sexuality is the function of vision and ocular exchange, which can further illuminate the treatment of beauty and desire in the romance. Aretousa's eyes may not be used as weapons aimed at the lover; however, she does communicate her feelings through her glances, demonstrating grief, sympathy, virginal modesty, prudence, wisdom (all telling signs of her impeccable virtue). When the lovers look into each other's eyes, flaming passion is never described as the

¹² See Lasithiotakis, "Οί περιγραφές στὸν *Ἐρωτόκριτο*", p. 87 and n. 15, and Panayotopoulou, "Τὸ ὄραίο στὸν *Ἐρωτόκριτο*", pp. 111-12.

¹³ The "invisibility" of Aretousa is pointed out by Panayotopoulou, "Τὸ ὄραίο στὸν *Ἐρωτόκριτο*", p. 108, who also notes that the heroine is not presented as an enchantress (see below, p.102). Furthermore, she correctly remarks that, as the princess avoids exchanging glances with the warriors at the joust, all these young men are not impressed by her beauty: "as they have no opportunity to look into her eyes, Aretousa remains almost invisible" (my translation). In my previous publication, "Τὰ βέλη τοῦ ἔρωτα", due to an editing oversight, I failed to acknowledge Panayotopoulou's contribution on the subject.

¹⁴ In the sense that Kornaros is creating an abstraction out of Aretousa, I would agree with Kallinis.

dominant feeling. Actually, Aretousa and Erotokritos only exchange furtive glances and the heroine's gaze is always modest and tender; for example (I 2153-68):

ΠΟΙ. Ἐκρουφοαναντρανίζασι κ' ἔκρουφοσυντηροῦσα·
 γέλιο δὲ δείχνει ὁ γεῖς τ' ἄλλοῦ μηδὲ ποτὲ ἐμλοῦσα·
 ἐδέτσι ἐπέρναν ὁ καιρός· τὰ μάτια ἦσανε μόνο,
 πὺ ἐμολογοῦσαν τῆ καρδιάς τὰ πάθη καὶ τὸν πόνο.
 Τὸ ἀνάβλεμμα τῆς Ἀρετῆς εἶναι στὸ ναι κ' εἰς τ' ὄχι·
 μὲ φρόνεψη τὸ κάρβουνον εἰς τὴν ἀθάλη τό 'χει·
 δὲ θεὸ νὰ δείξη κ' εὐκόλα ὁ πόθος τὴν ὀρίζει·
 μέσα εἶχε βράση καὶ καημό, κὶ ἀπ' ὄξω δὲν καπνίζει.
 Καὶ μ' ὄλο πὺ ὁ Ρωτόκριτος ἐγνώριζε κ' ἐθώρει
 πὺς σπλαχνικὰ συχνιὰ συχνιὰ ἀναντρανίζει ἡ κόρη,
 ποτὲ του δὲν ἀποκοτὰ λόγο νὰ τῆς μιλῆση,
 γιὰτὶ ἤθελε πλιὰ φανερὰ τὴν κόρη νὰ γνωρίση.
 Κὶ ὅλα τ' ἀναντρανίσματα πὺ 'διδε ἡ Ἀρετούσα,
 ἡ τάξη κ' ἡ γλυκότητα πάντα τὰ συγκερνούσα
 κὶ ὀγιά τιμῆ κὶ ὀγιά εὐγενειὰ κὶ ὀγιά μεγαλοσύνη
 νὰ τὴ γνωρίση ἔτσι καλὰ ἀκόμη δὲν ἀφήνει.

It is important to emphasize that Aretousa's sense of decorum is closely connected with, or rather dictated by, her sense of pride and nobility (κὶ ὀγιά τιμῆ κὶ ὀγιά εὐγενειὰ κὶ ὀγιά μεγαλοσύνη, v. 2167).

Finally, with regard to the eroticism conveyed through visual contact, one should recall that the couple's secret meetings take place at night, in a setting that precludes the description of eyes and gazing. Moreover, the idea of mental στόρηση as a superior version of beholding the image of the beloved holds a central position in this relationship; the protagonists suffer in order to conquer true affection. Visual experience is the trigger of love but cannot reproduce true beauty as well the eyes of the soul. As Aretousa herself declares, the eyes can see only the surface of forms, not their true essence. She is able to capture the true portrait (στόρηση) of her beloved in her mind – a proof of her immaculate love and a portrait far superior to that of any

professional painter, as she proudly owns (III 1422-40).¹⁵ By the same principle, the true form of Aretousa's beauty is intended to be captured in a similar way.

Moving on to other features of the text which are characteristically connected with the treatment of beauty and desire, one should mention the transformation or avoidance of specific imagery pertaining to the engendering of passion. To be more specific, since Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, falling in love has often been depicted through the imagery of arrows piercing the lover's heart or eyes. The image of Eros/Cupid the archer is certainly known to Kornaros, who employs it frequently.¹⁶ The characters often describe Eros in their speeches (e.g. Erotokritos comments: Πολλά μεγάλην ἀφεντιά, πολλά μεγάλη χάρη / ἔχει τ' ὀλόγδυμο παιδί πού παίζει τὸ δοξάρι, I 274-5). The archer image appears more often in the speeches of Aretousa – mostly with reference to Erotokritos, for instance:

I 1667-70

APE. Ἐρωτας στέκει ἀνάδια μου κι ἄδικα τυραννᾶ με,
 μ' ἄρματα φοβερίζει με καὶ μὲ φωτιὰ κεντᾶ με·
 μὲ τὸ ξιφάρι μου μιλεῖ, μὲ τὴ σαίτα λέγει,
 τὸ δίκιο του μ' ἀναλαμπὴ καὶ φλόγα τὸ γυρεύγει.

III 315-18

APE. Κ' ἐγώ, Φροσύνη, πῶς μπορῶ καὶ λές μου πῶς κερδαίνω
 νὰ πολεμήσω ἔτσι γδυμνὴ ἕναν ἄρματωμένο,
 ὅπου βαστᾶ στὰ χέρια του σαίτες καὶ δοξάρι,
 νικᾷ ἔτσι τὸν ἀνήμπορο σὰν καὶ τὸ παλληκάρι;

¹⁵ See Ricks, "The style of *Erotókritos*", pp. 251-3; Michalis Lasithiotakis, "Ὁ Ἐρωτόκριτος καὶ τὰ ἰταλικά «trattati d'amore»", *Μαντατοφόρος* 39-40 (1995) 5-39 (specifically, pp. 15-17).

¹⁶ On the variety of forms in which Love/Cupid is depicted, see David Holton, *Erotokritos* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press 1991), p. 81, and "Romance", in: idem (ed.), *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), p. 234.

However, it is worth mentioning that the imagery of the Eros as archer and/or his arrows is not associated with Aretousa's eyes. Erotokritos falls in love with the princess of Athens because of her beauty, but not as a result of her captivating gaze. Aretousa, as has been repeatedly pointed out, falls in love with him by listening to his songs. The heroine is not portrayed as actively inciting Erotokritos's passion; direct and intense ocular exchange is not used as the focal point of the *innamoramento*.¹⁷

It is also worth pointing out that direct eye contact, as a starting point and an integral part of the *inamoramento*, is a central theme in one of Polydoros's exhorting speeches to Erotokritos (I 111-52).¹⁸ In his attempt to discourage Erotokritos from any expectation of reciprocated affection, he stresses the point that the princess would never condescend to cast an eye on Erotokritos, much less to return his gaze. He insists that ardent or playful looks are a clear sign of requited love. However, when visual contact becomes a means of communication between Erotokritos and Aretousa, their gaze is not described as conquering, mischievous, or lustful. Aretousa's modest look is also directly linked to her prudence and nobility.¹⁹

Polydoros's theory on love born through the exchange of glances seems to be more appropriate for people who have ways of life permitting them to experience direct visual contact. Freedom of movement and access to open spaces, enables one to see others and be seen (of course, Aretousa, as a princess, is seldom exposed to the looks of commoners). The element of exposure to

¹⁷ For the treatment of visual exchange in *Erotokritos* see Michel Lassithiotakis, "Traitement de 'la scène de première vue' dans *Erotokritos*", *Revue des Études Neo-helleniques* 1 (1992) 53-76, who offers a different, but nevertheless illuminating, perspective on the subject. On the importance and uses of the erotic gaze see Lasithiotakis, "Ὁ Ἐρωτόκριτος καὶ τὰ ἰταλικά *trattati d'amore*", pp. 9-15 and idem, "Πετροαρχικά μοτίβα στὸν Ἐρωτόκριτο", *Θησαυρίσματα* 26 (1996) 146-8 (with ample bibliography).

¹⁸ It must be pointed out that Polydoros is also alluding to the long literary tradition of this *topos*.

¹⁹ See also Lasithiotakis, "Ὁ Ἐρωτόκριτος καὶ τὰ ἰταλικά «*trattati d'amore*»", pp. 9 and 14.

common view, and the ability to have unimpeded visual encounter is a key element of erotic submission. Interestingly enough, many elements of Polydoros's theory relate to an altogether different couple and a contrasting love story. It is perhaps not coincidental that the specific imagery of a woman's eyes functioning as weapons is used for the wife of the Cretan warrior Charidimos.

Charidimos falls in love at first sight when he beholds the girl sitting at the window. Her beauty is described in a structured and very compact description which emphasizes the power of her blue eyes (II 607-14). The anonymous young woman embroidering at the window (which provides an imaginary portrait frame for the presentation of her lovely face),²⁰ exposes her beauty to passers-by, and thus suffers herself to be desired; it is not disclosed whether she blushes so to be admired – to attempt an awkward paraphrase of a line from Edmund Waller. The girl possesses irresistible charms – even though she may not be aware of the fact that her eyes function as deadly weapons (the narrative is tacit on this point). Her eroticism is manifested through the powerful image of the darts shooting from her eyes (καὶ τοῦ ἐφάνιστη ὡς τήνε δὴ καὶ σαῖτιά τοῦ δῶκα / κ' εἶχε τὸν πόθο στὸ χωνί, τὸν ἔρωτα στήν κόκα, II 613-14). The feature of the female gaze, combined with the arrow imagery, suggests yet another perspective from which the story of the Cretan can be seen as a counterpart to the story of Erotokritos, illustrating the negative aspects of a passionate relationship and how “love at first sight can end tragically”, to borrow David Holton's wording.²¹ The antithesis between the two stories is highlighted even more acutely through the use of the specific *topos*. The general *ethos* of each relationship (combined with the particular imagery) implies a prescribed course towards happiness or catastrophe.

In general, desire seems to be given a rather free rein in the Cretan's relationship. This love affair is based on passion created at first sight, does not meet any difficulties, is not subject to social

²⁰ The contrast to the dark, barred window through which Erotokritos's meetings with Aretousa take place is pronounced.

²¹ See Holton, *Erotokritos*, pp. 24-7.

control or criticism (even though the narrator discreetly hints at Charidimos's lack of parental support or of proper guidance in his choice).²² The couple are free to enjoy their love in an idyllic atmosphere, away from the restrictions and conventions of organized society. Matrimony seems to be the gateway to the fulfilment of passion. After his marriage, the Cretan king retreats to the valleys of Mount Ida, away from his seat and from society. Elements such as the condensed but sensual description of the girl with the arrow-shooting eyes, the subsequent depiction of the idealized bucolic setting, and the care-free life that the couple enjoys there (clearly, a utopia), suggest a much more liberal attitude towards love and marriage. Initially the story seems to promote the idea of marital union as a free personal choice, dictated mainly – or even solely – by desire. At the same time, the idyllic backdrop suggests the absence of rigid social control on desire and eroticism; the superficially “perfect” and uninhibited relationship proves to be fragile, leading to a sad end; in allowing envy and suspicion to take root, the bond between Charidimos and the girl is presented as unable to withstand trial. Nevertheless, the narrative seems to have provided several warning signs from its very opening, among which the fatal erotic glance.

The idea of the fragility of a union which is founded on impulse and desire also appears in the pastoral poem *Voskopoula*. In *Voskopoula* the imagery of the actively erotic, potentially lethal female gaze is subtly utilized. Even though the shepherdess appears to be an innocent girl, she is acutely aware of the power of her playful glance, which inflicts mortal wounds. The shepherd falls victim to the arrow-shooting Cupids in the girl's eyes (vv. 17-32):

Στρέφομαι καὶ θωρῶ τῆ μὲς στὰ μάτια
 κ' ἐρράγην ἢ καρδιά μου τρία κομμάτια,
 γιατί ἔρωτες εἶχαν κ' ἐδοξεῦγα,
 καὶ νὰ μὲ σαϊτέψουν ἐγυρεῦγα.

²² See II 617-20.

Κι ὡς μ' εἶδασιν οἱ ἔρωτες κοντά τως
 μὲ προθυμῶν ἀπλώσα στ' ἄρματά τως
 καὶ πᾶνουσι σαῖττες καὶ βερτόνια
 γιὰ νὰ μοῦ δώσουν κρίση τὴν αἰώνια.

Καὶ στὴν καρδιά ἢ σαίτα τως μὲ σώνει·
 εἶπα καὶ τὸ κορμί μου δὲ γλυτώνει·
 τὸ φῶς μου καὶ τὰ μάτια ἐθαμπωθῆκα
 καὶ σὲ καημὸν ἀρίφνητον ἐμπήκα.

Κι ὀμπρὸς στὴ βρῦση πέφτω λιγωμένος
 κ' ἡ κόρη ἐθάρρειε κ' εἶμαι ἀποθαμένος.
 Λέγει: «Τῶν ἀμματιῶ μου τὰ παιγνίδια
 ἐθανατώσαν τὸ βοσκὸν αἰφνίδια».

There are several common elements between the Cretan's story and the pastoral poem.²³ In *Voskopoula* desire is directly fulfilled, the girl – despite some manifestations of modesty – plays an active role and shows no resistance to the shepherd's advances (it is true that the couple take symbolic vows but both of them, especially the girl, are anxious to take advantage of the absence of parental control). The couple engage in passionate embraces soon after their first encounter in an idyllic landscape. In *Voskopoula*, as in the Charidimos story, the relationship which begins as an ardent passion, proves unable to survive the challenge of separation and the accidents of fortune. The sad conclusion thus seems unavoidable.

With this in mind, one can revisit the theme of the arrows of love in *Erotokritos*, whose heroine is anything but an enchantress with arrow-shooting eyes. There is a single instance in which the arrow imagery is employed with reference to Aretousa – albeit significantly modified. The wounding power of the love arrows is transposed from the eyes to the hair. Used in the scene where Iraklis cuts his daughter's golden tresses and throws her to prison,

²³ On the similarities between the two texts, especially the love-at-first-sight theme, see David Holton, “*Ερωτόκριτος* καὶ *Βοσκοπούλα*: μία συγκριτική ἀνάλυση”, in: Kaklamanis (ed.), *Ζητήματα ποιητικῆς*, pp. 273-90.

this description constitutes one of the most extensive passages relating to Aretousa's appearance (IV 467-76):

ΠΟΙ. καὶ μ' ἀπονιὰ κι ἀγριότητα εἰς τὸ δεξὸ του χέρι
 τυλίσσει τὶς πλεξοῦδες τῆς κρατῶντας τὸ μαχαίρι
 καὶ κόβγει τοι καὶ ρίχνει τοι σύγκρατες δίχως πόνο,
 οἱ ρίζες τῶ χρουσῶ μαλλιῶ τῆς ἀπομείνα μόνο.
 Μαλλιὰ ποῦ ἐρίχτα σαίτιες καὶ τὴν καρδιά ἐπληγῶνα
 στὴ γῆν ἐσκορπιστήκασι κ' οἱ σκόνες τὰ κουκλῶνα·
 μαλλιὰ ποῦ ἐλάμπαν πλιότερα παρὰ τοῦ ἡλιοῦ τὸ ἀκτίνες
 λύπηση δὲν τῶς εἶχασιν οἱ μάνητες ἐκείνες·
 κ' ἡ κεφαλὴ ποῦ σ' ὁμορφιά ποθὲς δὲν εἶχε ταίρι
 κουτρουλευτὴ τὴν ἤφηκε τὸ ἀλύπητο μαχαίρι.

Kornaros devises an original, as well as powerful, transformation of the familiar image. By removing the traditional association of the arrows of love from the eyes to the hair, he emphasizes both the potency of the girl's beauty and the father's attempt to diminish or destroy it. In a demonstration of anger and cruelty most unexpected of a wise ruler and an affectionate father, Iraklis makes a demonstration of royal and paternal authority. He is motivated by pride and principle (as much as by resentment), and confirms his royal and parental authority by physically humiliating and disgracing his daughter. At the same time, his act is but a violent attempt to deprive Aretousa of her sexuality; symbolically, it refers to the shearing of nuns' hair, the ritual through which a woman forsakes feminine identity in order to enter the cloister. By refusing to accept her father's choice of a husband, Aretousa enters an alternative (albeit degrading) version of cloistered life: incarceration – a condition of bodily and emotional confinement which is simultaneously deliberate and enforced. The sense of irony created in this instance by the attack on beauty is indeed acute and the arrow imagery is one of the components effectively used to this end.²⁴

²⁴ In general the visual element in *Erotokritos* deserves a much fuller treatment; among other aspects, the theme of blindness is particularly interesting.

In connection with all the above, one should not fail to take into account the lyrical idiom of the work, especially the vocabulary of love and the variety of its uses. Michel Lassithiotakis has made a thought-provoking contribution to the subject,²⁵ attempting an examination of the terminology of love, passion and nobility in *Erotokritos*. Guided by his approach, which has shed light on the system of values embedded in the work, one might further observe that the vocabulary of love and desire ἔρωτας, ἀγάπη, φιλιά, πόθος, ἐρωτιά, is used mainly in the first three Books, which cover the ardent, youthful stage of the attachment (as mentioned before). Throughout the work, the noun ἔρωτας is clustered with φιλιά and πόθος (as in the Prologue), and the most commonly associated substantives denoting desire are πόθος and ἐρωτιά (which actually form the most frequent combination).²⁶ All the references to ἐρωτιά (the strongest synonym of desire) appear in the first three books, while the words ποθῶ, πόθος are rarely used in Books IV and V, usually in a more neutral sense (the commonest meanings being the simple “wish”, “wish for”). After the departure of Erotokritos from Athens and Aretousa’s imprisonment, the only strongly charged use of πόθος is found in Book IV when the imprisoned Aretousa reflects on the happy fate of poor people who are free to enjoy their love. However, the contemplation of erotic bliss and the dream of happiness are drastically conditioned by the atmosphere of incarceration and by her own despair. This seems to be the last spark of bodily desire as a major driving force in the romance (IV 725-8):²⁷

²⁵ Michel Lassithiotakis, “«Τὸ εὐγενεῖας τὰ δῶρα»: passion, vertu et noblesse dans Erotocritos”, in: Bernard Pouderon – Cécile Bost Pouderon (eds.), *Passions, vertus et vices dans l’ancien roman. Actes du colloque de Tours, 19-21 octobre 2006, organisé par l’Université François-Rabelais de Tours et l’UMR 5189, Histoire et Sources des Mondes Antiques* (Lyon: Presses de la Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée 2009), pp. 223-39, reprinted in: Michel Lassithiotakis, *Littérature et Culture de la Crète Vénitienne* (Paris – Athens: Daedalus 2010), pp. 420-40.

²⁶ Lassithiotakis, “«Τὸ εὐγενεῖας τὰ δῶρα»”, pp. 421-3.

²⁷ Also, the idea of bodily pleasure marks a strong contrast with the girl’s bodily suffering in prison.

Φτωχή φτωχὸν ἀγάπησε καὶ πόνο δὲν ἐγροΐκα,
 Μὰ φτωχικὰ ἐπεράσασι, τὸν πόθον ἐχαρήκα,
 δίχως κιαμῶν ἐντήρηση γῆ φόβο νὰ τοὶ κρινῆ,
 ἀέραν εἶχαν καὶ δροσὰ σ' στ' ἀγάπης τὸ καμίνι.

When the word *πόθος* reappears in Book V, it is qualified by the adjective *ἐμπιστικὸς* (τὸν πόθον τὸν ἐμπιστικὸν ὅπου τοῦ βάστα ἢ κόρη, v. 302),²⁸ and therefore its meaning is crucially modified, becoming a synonym for the emblematic *μπιστικὴ φιλιὰ/ἀγάπη*, which forms the dominant notion of love in the whole work.

As the outcome of the plot – in combination with the projected system of ruling values – confirms, passion, bodily desire and eroticism are moderated and eventually controlled by the virtues of devotion, constancy, perseverance, temperance and chastity —which are fundamental for the final triumph of love.²⁹ Kornaros's technique is crucial in projecting this complex system without pedantry or insipid didacticism. After the highly charged encounter in Book III, the love of Erotokritos and Aretousa acquires a different dimension and passes on to a higher sphere in order to reach the state of ideal love and true affection.

Among the virtues or qualities celebrated in the work, there is one that has not been brought fully into the discussion: nobility.³⁰ Aretousa's qualities, natural or inherited, combined together, represent the consummate ideal of feminine nobility, which will be complemented by the manly and social virtues Erotokritos represents after he returns as a triumphant warrior. Up to Book III, Erotokritos presumed to become Aretousa's husband by his beauty, courteousness, scholarship, poetry, music, horsemanship, and, of course, his passion. All these endowments, as well as his

²⁸ See also V 661, where the meaning is “longing”, “passion”, without sensual/sexual overtones. Erotokritos spends sleepless nights in his exile: *κι ὁ λογισμὸς τῆς Αρετῆς ὀλίγον δὲν ἀφήνει / νὰ κοιμηθεῖ, γιατί ἀγρυπνᾷ σ' τς ἀγάπης τὸ καμίνι* (IV 1009-10).

²⁹ On strength/fortitude and courage (Erotokritos's attributes), which are also decisive to the final outcome, see Lassithiotakis, “«Το' εὐγενειᾶς τὰ δῶρα»”, pp. 429-35.

³⁰ Lassithiotakis, “«Το' εὐγενειᾶς τὰ δῶρα»”, pp. 432-7.

love, will have to be tested on a larger scale, and in the end they have to meet with the king's recognition. Having matured in courage/strength and wisdom, the triumphant warrior is praised by the king: Δὲν εἶναι ρήγας σὰν ἐμᾶς, μὰ ἡ χάρη του εἶναι τόση / ποὺ ρήγα τότε κρᾶζουσι σὲ δύναμη καὶ γνώση (V 1423-4). These are precisely the qualities that were not fully developed when he was exiled from Athens.³¹

Iraklis's authority is never doubted by the saviour of his kingdom, even though Erotokritos has finally gained the higher moral ground by proving himself a valiant warrior, and a true champion of both Athens and Aretousa. Indeed, it is only after receiving final approval from the king, that Erotokritos can enjoy the pleasures of marriage and, subsequently, kingship. Therefore, recognition of nobility is the ultimate stage towards achieving fulfilment in love.

After the marriage has taken place, for the first time the narrator offers playful and genial commentary, though discreetly limiting himself to decorous suggestion; his remarks on matrimonial love come as a reward both for the protagonists and for the readers, after the firm control on sensuality that has been exercised as the story evolved. The allusion to the protagonists' trials is a proper justification for allowing just the slightest glimpse into the bedchamber. At the same time the narrator appeals to the readers' response to the events previously narrated (and indirectly to their appreciative reception of the literary construct) as well as their personal experience in order to reconstruct the scene (V 1495-1502):

κι ἀργὰ ἔμεινε τ' ἀντρογόγυνο στὴν κάμερον ἐκείνη
 ποὺ ἔτον ἀρχὴ κ' ἐμπήκασι σ' τὸ ἀγάπης τὴν ὀδύνη.
 Σήμερον ἄς λογιᾶσουσιν ὅσοι κι ἂν ἔχου γνώση
 ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἐγενήκασιν ὥστε νὰ ξημερώση.

³¹ Of course, γνώση would also suggest that he has also matured emotionally. For the development of characters following the organization of the plot, see David Holton, "Πῶς οργανώνεται ὁ *Ερωτόκριτος*", *Cretan Studies* 1 (1988) 157-67, and idem, *Erotokritos*, pp. 17-19.

Ἐγὼ δὲ θέλω καὶ δειλιῶ νὰ σάσε πῶ μὲ γράμμα
 τῇ νύκτα πῶς ἐδιάξασιν, ἴντ' ἄ' πα κ' ἴντα ἐκάμα.
 Μπορεῖτε ἀπὸ τὰ παρομπρὸς πού 'χετε γροικημένα
 ἐσεῖς νὰ τὰ λογιάσετε καὶ μὴ ρωτᾶτε ἐμένα.
 Τὰ 'πασι, τὰ μιλῆσαι κ' εἰς ὅ,τι κι ἂν ἐγίνη
 κιανεῖς δὲν ξεύρει νὰ τὸ πῆ μόνον οἱ δύο τως κείνοι.

At the point where the narrative draws to a close, the ideals endorsed are those of marital bliss, harmony and, above all, social order, rather than social elevation or sexual gratification.³² After the marriage has taken place, the narrative swiftly leads the readers away from any thoughts of sexual love to the couple's subsequent royal and family duties, informing them that Erotokritos and Aretousa lived on to a happy old age and that Aretousa became a mother and a grandmother (μᾶνα καὶ κερὰ λαλά, V 1516). As the story concludes with a leap forward in time, she is no longer presented as a beautiful, desirable maiden, but as a fully developed woman, entrenched in her traditional gender role. She has emerged a much stronger, loving woman, a worthy queen, the true personification of virtue and nobility.

The brief examination of the depiction of beauty and desire in *Erotokritos* attempted here may further help the appreciation of its complexity and sophistication. Instead of a conclusion, I should like to present some suggestions for further thought: Erotokritos and Aretousa eventually emerge as a couple whose adventures and marriage are a dynamic illustration of strength, wisdom, beauty, nobility and chastity. Their adventure seems to be an in-depth narrative realisation of the potential, the interaction and the combination of these virtues, as the irrational powers of desire and fortune come into play. It is perhaps not fortuitous that these virtues are symbolized by the royal couple of Athens, Iraklis and Artemi (Hercules and Diana),³³ who were introduced at the begin-

³² See also Giorgos Kallinis, "Τί εἶναι ὁ *Ερωτόκριτος* ἢ πῶς τον διαβάζουμε. Το γένος καὶ τὸ εἶδος", in: Markomichelaki (ed.), *Ὁ κόσμος τοῦ Ερωτόκριτου*, pp. 43-61 (p. 60).

³³ Lack of space prevents me from going into detail about the symbolism of Hercules and Diana, which I hope to treat in another paper. It is quite

ning of the romance.³⁴ Love/desire (that will have to run its course to maturity) and fortune combine in order to turn around the abstract wheel, an emblem not only of time and change, but also of fictional narrative itself.

likely that the specific names were not randomly chosen as they carry significant symbolic and allegorical weight that should not be ignored. For the reception of the Hercules figure in European literature, see Karl G. Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme. The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1972) and more recently, Karl Galinsky, “Hercules”, in: Anthony Grafton – Glenn W. Most – Salvatore Settis (eds.), *The Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Ma. – London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2010), pp. 426-9. However, D. Holton’s suggestion that the name Iraklis alludes to Heraclius is a possibility that should be borne in mind. See David Holton, “«Ηράκλη τον ελέγασα»: Ο βασιλιάς της Αθήνας στον *Ερωτόκριτο*”, *Cretan Studies* 3 (1992) 113-29 (where the reader will also find references to previous literature).

³⁴ Perhaps enriched with some of the affectionate, more human, qualities of Erotokritos’s own parents.