Rohde’s Theory of Relationship between the Novel and Rhetoric and the Problem of Evaluating the Entire Post-Classical Greek Literature

Evaluation criteria, hitherto applied to almost the entire corpus of post-classical Greek literature, are closely examined on representative samples such as the Greek novel and sophistical rhetoric as seen through Rohde’s prism of an uninterrupted and never-ending negative trend of falling into decadence and decay. The above-mentioned criteria have turned out to be not only erroneous but also very harmful to future research work, in so far as they could by no means be applied to the newly detected symbolic features in the poetics of the Greek novel, something that quite unexpectedly became associated with creativity itself. Deciphering symbolic fields has ultimately proved to be the only efficient way to understand both the poetics of the novel and the entire post-classical period of the world’s most important literature.

Keywords: Greek novel, Byzantine novel, Rohde, Symbolism, Post-classical Greek literature, Second Sophistic, Socratic plasma, Platonism

Introduction: the Importance of Having an Eye for Detail in the Studies of Literature and Philosophy

Rohde’s famous monograph Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer could for a number of reasons be regarded as a classical example of a scientific work, among other things, because some of its key theses, such as that one dealing with the relationship between the novel and so-called sophistical rhetoric seemed to have stood the test of time, not even having, for almost a century and a half since their first appearance, lost much of their relevance and actuality for present-day research work, thus ending up being a force to be still reckoned with. Rohde’s scientific construction of colossal proportions also seemed to have been both erected upon quite a sturdy foundation and built from materials resistant enough to sustain every kind of seismic shock as well as to take the full brunt of the explosion.

As this kind of fuse built into both the foundations and walls of the above mentioned theoretical construction could be regarded two starting points of Rohde’s theory which boil down to attributing a decisive importance for understanding the poetics of the Greek novel to both the subdivision of narration in the grammatical and rhetorical handbooks of late antiquity and the stylistic tendencies coming to the fore in the period of the Second Sophistic. While confronted with Rohde’s comprehensive approach to the phenomenon visible in his attempt to supplement the already wide range of original

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1The first edition appeared in 1876, with a second one ensuing in 1900; the third, with an important appendix by W. Schmid, was printed in 1914 and reprinted in 1960.
2The point in question is the third chapter entitled Die griechische Sophistik der Kaiserzeit (pp. 310 – 387).
3Rohde’s account of relationship between the novel and rhetoric was regarded by Norden (1915: 275) as absolutely perfect.
materials with complementary ones borrowed from the field of archeology, ethnology, history of art and painting, we have an unavoidable feeling of a detailed and all-encompassing analysis of the phenomenon as well as of the mentioned edifice’s imposing and massive blocks being in perfect harmony with each other.

A problem arose at the moment when small, “despised” details with the destructive force of dynamite came into play, with Rohde’s monumental theoretical construction thus being, despite its reliable starting points, leveled with the ground and only one of its cornerstones, according to widespread opinion, remaining in its place as something to be reckoned with in the course of the research work yet to be carried out in the future. Before giving our due consideration to the only remaining cornerstone referred to above, first, due to the complexity inherently present in the methodological approach to the phenomenon, we shall concentrate on the detail owing to which Rohde’s attempts to shed light on drama and plasma as the novel’s genre terms making their first appearance not until the mid and late Byzantine period by means of evidence found in the ancient theory of narration and, above all, the definition of its third type in both Cicero (De inv., 1, 27) and the author of Rhetorica ad Herennium (1, 12) – have convincingly been disputed.

In purely practical terms, Rohde got into trouble by losing sight of the key fact that the strong evidence concerning both the birth of the novel and its poetics could be derived from the complicated subdivision of the third type of narration as presented in the works by the two Latin authors referred to above, only if all instances of the use of drama and plasma in the Greek novel as well as in works by leading exponents of the Second Sophistic were subjected to some kind of microscopical, i.e. hermeneutical analysis. Some of the key meanings of the above-mentioned genre’s terms, such as mythical subject, symbol, aetion, aenigma, concept (concetto), metamorphic states of body and mind, every type of reversal, especially that one characterized by a happy ending could thus be brought to light enabling us to draw the far-reaching conclusion consisting in the fact that the three types of subdivision, including

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5 That was not, as was asserted in Giangrande’s excellent study (125), Alexandrian love elegy.
6 Cf. our studies: Il termine drama nelle Eikon e di Filostrato (2016: Invigilata Lucernis 38, 99 - 117), Drōma, plēsma e māqoj nei romanzi di Achille Tazio e del Macrembolita e i fondamenti filosofici del genere (2016: Classica et Christiana 11, 123 - 178), Die Gattungsbezeichnung drama und der Symbolismus in Makrembolites’ Roman (2018: Classica et Christiana 13, 63 - 148), Zu einer philosophischen Poetik des Romans Rhodanthe und Dosikles von Theodoros Prodromos (2019: Classica et Christiana 14, 105 - 164). If our name appears more often here, it is because our attention was focused on certain aspects of literary works neglected in the course of studies carried out so far.
7 Barwick (1928: 282) noticed two of them, namely a subdivision based on the criterion of truthfulness of what is narrated (fabula, historia, argumentum) as well as that one founded on the criterion of the narrating person (genus in personis positum), whereas we (2016) detected the remaining, i.e. third one, determined by the type of ending such as a happy ending (iucundo exitu rerum), namely a subdivision in which the key elements of both the plot and poetics of the Greek novel such as life and fate reversals (fortunae commutatione) as well as metamorphic states of body and mind (festiuitas ... confecta ex animorum dissimilitudine, grauitate lenitate, spe metu) also found their reflection. The very failure to notice this third type of subdivision was the reason behind the decision taken by almost all researchers to return to Rohde’s
one based on the nature of ending were indiscernibly amalgamated with one
another in the complicated division of the third type of narration in the above-
mentioned Latin authors, something by which the phenomenon of happy
ending in the plot of the Greek novel could convincingly be explained, a
phenomenon that was regarded by Rohde (307) as some kind of a brutal,
unpoetical element, due to which the Greek novel, as it seemed to him,
deserved to be placed at the lowest level on a scale of values, even beneath
silly and puerile fairy tales, which could be explained by his lack of the faintest
idea hinting at the possibility that this kind of happy ending might also be
deeply founded on Plato’s concept of happiness understood as eudaimonia,
just the way it was manifesting itself at the very end of the myth of the winged
chariot in Phaedrus (255e), with polar, contrasting feelings such as mania and
sophrosyne continuously pulsating and being closely intertwined with each
other in the soul of the lover and his beloved, something that in the context
just referred to was regarded as a guarantee of their happiness or rather
blissfulness in this world, and, on a purely methodological level, had its
tangible parallel with mania and logos being in Plato’s own work united in an
organic and indivisible whole.

Only in this way, i.e. on condition that the above-mentioned assumption
was fulfilled and Platonic origin of the subdivisions of the third type of
narration noticed, could be fully understood an uncommon and at the first sight
a slightly strange definition of what is called dramatikon (argumentum) in 11th
century Byzantine rhetoric, namely in Doxapatres’ Homeliae in Aphthonium,
where the above-mentioned type of narration is defined as an adaptation of the
poetical subject-matter for the exigency of prose composition in the schools of
rhetoric (2, 201, 10 W.). As we shall see somewhat later, this was the definition
that, contrary to all expectations, infallibly led us in our attempt to solve the
riddle called the birth of the Greek novel and its poetics, only on condition that
light has previously been shed on the relationship between a poetic, or rather,
mythical subject-matter and Plato’s style and method.

All preconditions were thus fulfilled for focusing our attention on the only
cornerstone of Rohde’s monumental edifice spared by the blast and still
believed to be worth preserving. What it is all about are his theses on
relationship between the novel and sophistical rhetoric which many thought
were as a proven scientific result protected from all kind of shock in the future

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Cf. Buddensieck (2007: 116). With regard to the fact that we encounter emblematic concepts of Plato’s philosophy widely applied in Makrembolites’ novel and that in the form of barely visible symbols, we seem to be fully entitled to suppose for the third subtype of division within the third type of narration to be also, like the previous two ones, of Platonic origin, unlike Rostagni (1955: 223) who related it to both Theophrastus and the Peripatetic tradition.

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until another small, “despised” detail of enormous blasting potential found in Lucian’s implicit poetics came into play.

Lucian’s self-interpretation as the implicit poetics of all authors of the Second Sophistic

That the sudden appearance of the poetic subject-matter in Doxapatres’ definition of *dramatikon* was linked with some higher purpose than that usually associated with the expressiveness of a poetic word, was more than clearly pointed out by Lucian’s three canons of both distinguished authors and exemplary works of art found in the dialogues known under their Latin titles *De saltatione*, *Lexiphanes* and *Imagines*, all of which could with good reason be regarded as his self-interpretation, being at the same time an implicit poetics as far as all the other leading exponents of the Second Sophistic are concerned. The full sense of the expression *poetical subject-matter* in Doxapatres’ definition will begin unraveling to us only when we ascertain what represents a constant in the canons. The points in question are Homer and Hesiod, represented as the best poets, tragedy and comedy (as far as the latter is concerned, Lucian seems to have had in mind that of Aristophanes) and Plato himself, the only exception being Thucydides presented as a canonical author in *Lexiphanes*.

Thus, Plato’s name appears in a very indicative context, where a close relationship has been established between his work and that of the authors dealing with the poetic, or in other words, mythical subjects, which could sufficiently be explained by his apparent aspiration to visualize mythical patterns when his concept determined by *logos* could not be developed any further, with just this conceptualization of the mythical imagery explaining Socrates’ exceptional appearance, along with the great men of plastic art, Homer and Hesiod, as an exemplary painter himself in the canon given in *Imagines* (17), because he “painted with love,” something that helps us understand the large space reserved for the descriptions of paintings and sculptures in the plot of the Greek novel as well as the profound philosophical dimension underlying it. With that, a very close relationship has been established between both the poetic image and the pictorial (sculptural) concept on the one side, and the Platonic idea on the other, something that was otherwise more than clearly suggested by an illustrative instance in Lucian’s above-mentioned work, wherein painting the portrait of Panthia, a woman of divine beauty and on top of that inspired by men’s aristocratic ideal of kalokagathia, was chosen as an example to serve a purpose of visualizing for the needs of rhetorical instruction the two basic principles of the new rhetoric.

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11Thucydides’ exceptional appearance among Lucian’s canonical authors could thus be explained, in so far as his conceptual treatment of real, historical events may have been regarded as a supplement to Plato’s own method applied to a diametrically opposed, polar subject-matter, such as a myth.
outlined in *Phaedrus* (266b), namely the analytical partition of a phenomenon
(*diaireseis*) and synoptic reduction of the partitioned to the only idea
(*synagogai*), with both of them being in a somewhat embarrassing manner
modified in the *paradeig mata* and *archetypa* in Lucian’s dialogue (*Pro im. 10*)
closely connected with *Imagines*, whereby the relationship established between
archetype, Platonic idea and poetic image has thus become even more apparent
(*Im. 15*).

Our stepped ascent to a higher realm of knowledge has thus assumed the
characteristics of a spiral one, in so far as the description of Panthia’s portrait
made us clearly see what the use of the above-mentioned principles (*diaireseis*
and *synagogai*) in the schools of rhetoric looked like. What this is all about is
the method that could best be denoted as *assembling* or, in other words,* montage*, whereby the essence of things is furthermore being blurred due to the
fact that nowadays montage itself is thought of as something on a large scale
associated with the entire spectrum of purely technical skills and disciplines all
too craftsmanslike in character. However, the paradox consisted in the fact that
under the influence of Platonic philosophy the method referred to above was in
Lucian’s epoch, unlike our own time, linked to achieving sublime, lofty
objectives in the field of art and literature, as can be inferred from the fact that
Lucian’s own painting, i.e. the assembling of Panthia’s portrait, was
represented as if the greatest names of plastic art shared the task of portraying
with each other and consequently shaped that part of her figure which they
were thought to be peerless in the elaboration of (*Im. 6 - 7*). An even greater
paradox consisted in the fact that the products of this seemingly dead art
originating in what is called *montage* are, far from being dead and lifeless,
truly immortal, in so far as their life in eternity is guaranteed by nothing else
than the method itself. In order to make understand how it is at all possible that
an eternal life pulsates with might and main in something seemingly dead, light
must previously be shed on the phenomenon of an old Socratic *plasma* and its
symbolism the way it came into prominence in both Lucian’s and Philostratus’
work.

**Lucian, old Socratic plasma and the principles of the new rhetoric and new
art in *Phaedrus***

Lucian’s description of painting the portrait of Panthia contains two key
messages, with the first of them being that the above-mentioned principles are
by themselves capable to make a divinity of a mortal woman, as was actually
the case with Panthia after being happily turned into an artist’s model, and the
second one not so easy to decipher due to the somewhat unusual milieu it was
transmitted from and, what’s more, something that at first sight was purely
craftsmanslike in character. This second message was for yet another reason
hardly detectable, and what it is all about is its implicit character manifesting
itself in the fact that Lucian left over to his readership to draw conclusions by
raising the logical question as to what a potential must necessarily possess the
above-mentioned method when it comes to making a god of an artist, i.e.
author, if what seemed to be an ordinary artist’s model acquired, thanks to it, characteristics of immortality.

The answer to the question what this is all about can be found in the passage of an emblematic character from the second part of *Phaedrus* (266b-c) where we come across Socrates’ plain-spoken acknowledgement given in the form of the allusion to a Homeric verse (*Od. 5, 193*) and reading he personally regards anyone capable of looking at the same time towards One (*synagogai*) and many (*diaireseis*) as a god, something that makes him enthusiastically follow in his footsteps (266b). Just this kind of *following in someone else’s footsteps*, as we shall see somewhat later, will turn out to be the keywords when it comes to shedding light on the phenomenon of the Greek novel as well as the better part of post-classical Greek literature. The key message we get from Lucian’s painting the portrait of Panthia with the characteristic features of *montage* reads the author made known to his readership in a somewhat picturesque and enigmatic way that he also keeps following in Socrates’ footsteps, looking on him in some kind of religious devotedness as a divinity, something that, on the other hand, has clearly been visible from the scenic elements of his dialogues being irresistibly reminiscent of their Platonic models.

The essence of the method characterized by *montage*, being itself, as it seems, inseparable from *following in someone else’s footsteps*, can best be seen when the above-mentioned method is confronted with its very opposite, such as *invention*, something that will shed light on and help us understand what at first sight seemed to be quite unusual aesthetic and evaluation criteria coming to the fore in later times, such as those of the Second Sophistic, and turning out quite unexpectedly to be substantially based on both the key premises of Platonic philosophy and its emblematic images. We come across such an emblematic image conceived in the spirit of Platonic philosophy in Lucian’s fairly brief work known under its Latin title *Prometheus es in verbis*, showing in a terse as well as vivid manner the core of the relationship between the two opposite methods referred to above, with the invention itself, explicitly denoted as *plasma*, being therein symbolized by Promethean figures made of clay and becoming living creatures as soon as Athena breathes into the mud, thereby helping make the clay models live, which is why the creation resulting from such a method assumed, one would say quite expectedly, characteristics of a full-blown, truly living art (*empsycha plasmata*). On the other hand, the *assembling* itself, being in a decisive measure based on the archetype (*archetypon*), was in Lucian’s work referred to above also denoted by the generic term *plasma* and yet additionally characterized by the attribute *archaioteron* (*archaioteron ti tou plasmatos*), with the author’s purpose to honour the method itself, as can be inferred from the fact that Lucian proudly underlines his devoutness to the montage while using for the invention itself disparaging expressions like *kainotes*, *kainopoiein* and *kainourgon* understood as *novelty* and being as such to a high degree delimited to the present moment in time. What we have now is only a presentiment that the seemingly dead art originating from the process of assembling is of a higher order than the one which has sprung up from invention, and what we still need to be completely...
assured of the veracity of our initial surmise is yet another emblematic image
now concerning the concept of assembling, i.e. montage itself.

As such an image could not be found in Lucian’s work, we were forced to
make a detour leading us to the same spiritual milieu and one of its most
representative works such as Philostratus’ Eikones, where we ended up coming
across it. The finding itself surpassed all our expectations in so far as
Philostratus’ description of a painting representing Daedalus’ workshop (1, 16:
Pasiphae) subsequently proved to form – together with Lucian’s emblematic
image of Prometheus’ modeling human figures in clay – some kind of a
methodological diptych, with its constituent parts standing in sharp contrast to
each other. That on the painting referred to above Daedalus is represented as
Socrates and his workshop as that of Socrates, can be inferred from the fact
that he speaks in the Attic dialect, being, moreover, barefooted and yet clothed
in tribon as a characteristic Socratic overcoat. That the point in question here is
an allusive technique, being both subtle and elegant, can also be deduced from
the fact that before starting on modeling his figures, Daedalus is represented as
looking intently at the intelligible reality exceeding by far the cognitive powers
of the human mind (1, 16, 1: hypespophon ti kai ennoun blepon), something
that more than clearly points to the famous passage from the myth of the
winged chariot in Phaedrus dealing with hyperuranion (247b-248a), i.e. a
place beyond heaven as a perfect realm of Forms, which could by itself be
regarded as yet another clear indication that Philostratus thereby wanted to lay
particular stress on his devoutness to the ideals of a new art based on the key
postulates of Platonic philosophy.

In favour of the fact that life itself pulsates with might and main in this
seemingly dead art originating from montage, more tellingly than anything else
speaks what is going on in the workshop referred to above, with figures
including that of a bull being present in it in all their developmental phases, e.
g. from a rough draft and its somewhat elaborated version to the shapes already
giving an inkling of motion and gradually coming out of the workshop, thus
covering all the stages in their life progress, from, so to speak, a bud to a
ripened fruit, so that the impression about a specific sea of life overflowing
from the workshop of Daedalus, Socrates’ legendary ancestor, could in no way
be avoided. There is no more doubt that Lucian’s old plasma is nothing else
than Socrates’ plasma, with the quintessence of this new art determined in a
decisive measure by montage, consisting, unlike Promethean plasma and its
narrow, time-limited span of life, just in palingenesis, namely in a never-
ending process of rebirth of the same mythical and poetical concept in the form
of plasma and its eternal life in metamorphose, something that has in an
exemplary way been reflected in the fact that the concept itself, although
substantially the self-same, keeps ever more assuming new appearances,
whereby the mighty streaming of diversity through thematic uniformity and
monotony has been attained, which by itself represents atopon, with one and
the same poetic motive simultaneously being the same and different, as was the
case in another painting by Philostratus (2, 2) representing Achilles as a child
and his ethos. Thus, some kind of an extremely sharp contrast between
Promethean plasma and its time-limited span of life, on one hand, and the old
Socratic plasma, on the other, with its daemonic potential capable of providing it with a life in eternity has been quite unexpectedly brought to light, something that in and of itself also points to the same daemonic plasmatic potential present in Greek literature as a whole, not to be found in any other world literature.

We can get the full picture of the art symbolized by Daedalus’ workshop only by microscopically reading, along with Lucian and Philostratus’ work, Plato’s early dialogues, where we come across a whole series of artisan terms and expressions in an attempt by the above-mentioned authors to vividly paint a toilsome exertion of shedding light on, elaborating and putting finishing touches to a detail found in the archetype such as forging by the craftsman’s hammer in the blacksmith’s workshop in Lucian (Demosth., 14: empsychon kai sphyrelaton epoiše ton logon), sawing, boring and polishing with the cutting edge in Philostratus (Im., 1, 16, 2: prion, trypanon, skeparnon) or again, kindred expressions like scraping (knesmata), filing (knesmata), whetting and cutting to small pieces (peritmemata tou logou kata brachy dieremena) in Plato’s Hippias (304b), something that in the best possible way explains the closeness to life of such an art, in so far as its creations cover a long distance from a bud to a ripened fruit, or, more precisely, from a rough draft to the final, polished version. A passage from Lucian’s fairly brief work Prometheus es in verbis speaks more than tellingly about the essence of such an art, namely a passage that will bring us closer to the ideal of life and aesthetics as well as evaluation criteria, both of them closely connected with the phenomenon of Socrates’ old plasma, without which it is not at all possible for us to understand either the poetics of the novel or the better part of the corpus of post-classical Greek literature.

The song of the Sirens: old Socratic plasma at its best and its reflection in the Greek novel

In spite of all that has hitherto been said about the main aesthetic and methodological principles coming into prominence in both Lucian’s canons and his emblematic images including those of Philostratus, we need yet another key detail with the help of which a magical attraction inherently present in the old Socratic plasma could convincingly be explained, an attraction made, however, already visible by the fact that in some kind of religious devotedness the above-mentioned authors followed in Socrates’ footsteps, being, as one would say, themselves inspired by the above mentioned celebrated message from Phaedrus and, as a result, looking on the legendary philosopher as a divinity, something that, as we shall see somewhat later, will turn out to be only an incentive for developing an ideal of both aesthetics and life, with its full-blown glory being finally achieved in the later periods of the Second Sophistic.

We can get the answer to the question concerning the irresistible attraction of Socrates’ plasma being itself in Alcibiades’ speech in the Symposium (216a) compared, among other things, to the songs of the Sirens, only when
establishing a connection between the critical judgments of two authors, who were, as far as ancient literary criticism is concerned, the only theoreticians of style that hit the mark and noticed an ironical, comical note in Socrates’ or, to be precise, Plato’s way of speaking and writing, as can be inferred from Aristotle’s assertion [Rh. 3, 7 (1408b) 11 sq.] that Plato by using in Phaedrus the one and the same stylistic device such as dithyrambic compounds managed to achieve diametrically opposed, contrast effects, such as pathos and humour, and what Aristotle seemed to have alluded to was most probably Socrates’ second speech on love as well as its emblematic feature, the myth of the winged chariot. This assertion gains in both sharpness and impressiveness if supplemented by the statement we encounter in Lucian’s writing known under its Latin title De domo (4) about Socrates poking fun at Phaedrus of Myrrhinus in the sublime context referred to above as if Phaedrus himself – one could freely supplement his words – were a small, snotty child.

Thus the myth of the winged chariot turned out to ultimately represent, in keeping with Norden’s favourite term, a specific Signatur of Socrates’ style, in so far as both taking flight to ethereal heights – and the sublime lyric connected to it – and the refined comicality reminiscent of childish silly tales were in a particularly characteristic blend so indiscernibly intermingled in it, that the human eye – to use Philostratus’ celebrated analogy (Im., 2, 2, 4) – would by no means be capable of discerning where the sublime ends and the comical begins and what, after all, is so laughable in an absolutely lofty subject-matter like this12. Just this amazing kind of amalgamating the contrast, polar elements in style was regarded, due to its daemonic characteristics, as something absolutely beyond any imitation, just the way any attempt to remain indifferent to this type of creation, termed by us Socratic plasma and reminiscent of a specific song of the Sirens, was deemed next to impossible. As a tangible proof of how peerless this feature of Socrates’ style was could be adduced Lucian’s work itself, in which the process of both interweaving the polar, contrast elements such as the serious and the laughable and their uniting in an organic whole was marked by the highest possible harmony and symmetry (Prom. verb., 5), and yet despite all of it, the above-mentioned constituent parts might be separated from each other if some kind of a surgically precise operation was to be performed on the text, so that an attentive reader, in keeping with Philostratus’ analogy referred to above, could almost without difficulty ascertain where the serious ends and the laughable begins.

So, men of letters had, as a result, only some kind of substitute left at their disposal, such as imitating other features of Socrates’ style, with the allusive and symbolic character of his word distinctly standing out from the rest of them, as can be inferred from a particularly characteristic passage from the early dialogue Laches (188b) containing the explicit statement that as a rule, Socrates’ speech on children imperceptibly grows into one about men, something that recommended him for the teacher of both children and adults

12 On the mixture of the serious and the laughable as a widespread ideal of life and aesthetics in late antiquity and the Middle Ages cf. Curtius (19613, 419 – 434). It is also worth mentioning that Platonic origin of the mixture itself wasn’t even touched upon in his summary presentation of the phenomenon.
and by the same token of the entire Greek world, which will, as we shall see somewhat later, find its clear reflection in both the novel and the works of the leading exponents of the Second Sophistic. The second characteristic of Socrates’ style such as dithyrambic compounds, poetical images and analogies, coming, like the aforementioned one, into prominence in his speeches in Phaedrus to such an extent that the entire phenomenon could with good reason be regarded as a philosophical poetry (Reale 2000: 14) seemed at first sight to be both much easier and more suitable to be set as a model for imitation.

So, a combination of the last two mentioned features of Socrates’ style sprang by itself to mind as an ideal solution, in so far as this kind of philosophical poetry seemed to be closely related to the symbol and thus leaving ample room for men of letters to exalt the glory of Socratic or, rather, Platonic philosophy with the noble aim to make it, in keeping with the key message of Socrates’ political testament in Alcibiades (105d), continuously resound like a specific song of the Sirens for centuries to come, something that, as far as the men referred to above are concerned, might, after all, be achieved by playing a specific game of hide-and-seek with the analogies, consisting in an endless multiplication of archetype. That the above-mentioned testament might have played an important role in the process of conceiving the poetics of both the Greek novel and the literary products of the Second Sophistic, is more than clearly indicated by the fact that for the men of letters referred to above, Platonic philosophy, Socratic style and its marvelous plasma were, however paradoxical it may sound, more important than their own writings, as can be inferred from Lucian’s explicit statement (Pisc., 6), something that could by itself be regarded as guidelines how to read their own oeuvre, including that of the novel authors themselves.

The two great exponents of the genre in the age of Komnenoi, such as Makrembolites’ and Prodromos’ novel, tell us more than clearly, and that through symbols, about what could be regarded as a purpose of a higher order that both the origin and the poetics of the genre are to be associated with, with the only remaining difficulty being posed by hardly visible symbols which could be deciphered only by means of a comparative microscopic analysis requiring a lot of repeated reading of the same text. An additional problem consists, however, in the fact that the symbols referred to above are fully masked by what seemed to be disconnecting formulations making at first sight no sense, something Rohde (561) could not help labeling barbarian given his misunderstanding of the phenomenon. Ironically enough, what at first sight seemed to be a senseless formulation turned out to have not only its logical place in the composition of a whole but also a capacity of making that whole assume, in keeping with the key principles of Lucian’s poetics, characteristics of both harmony and symmetry. As far as the composition itself is concerned, the key passages from Makrembolites’ novel, i.e. those introductory, central and concluding, marked in a decisive measure by the emblematic images of Platonic philosophy, point more than anything else to just that kind of conclusion, which could not at all be drawn if the compositional aspect was overlooked, with the above-mentioned images being, as a consequence of this
kind of failure, inevitably reduced to nothing else than sheer platitude and inflatedness.

Already in the introductory passages from Makrembolites’ novel we come across the scene wherein the novel protagonist is in his own words compared to both divinity (1, 3, 1) and Socrates (1, 3, 2). The names of Socrates’ legendary ancestors, Daedalus (1, 5, 6) and Hephestus (1, 5, 6), are also mentioned in the same context and, moreover, associated with the making of bird figures placed on both the well tube and its rim in the garden in Aulikomis, a well whose motionless water surface is said – because of the wonderful effect produced by white island marble, laid in its bottom and dappled with dark nuances – to make, through the artist’s skillful intervention, an impression of running like a stream, with stormy sea waves (1, 5, 7) at times seemingly arising on its surface, something which in itself represents a well-hidden allusion to both the emblematic characteristic of Socrates’ speeches equated in Hippias (373a) with making muddy the discussion, and the daemonic power of his word reminiscent of a truly poetical, i.e. Homeric, utterance, capable of provoking storms even on the river of the dead in the underworld, as can, after all, be inferred from a passage from Lucian’s œuvre (Cont. 7). There is in the same context yet another emblematic image, this time borrowed from Ion (533d – 534b) and featuring the poet as an ordinary channel, with his only purpose consisting in letting the daemonic force of poetry, streaming from the divine, celestial heights, pass through himself and thereby creating the possibility for that force to both reveal itself to the world and people and consequently make them dance to the beat of its lovely rhythms capable of galvanizing anyone. In a specific game of hide-and-seek, the archetypal creation in Ion was in Makrembolites’ novel (1, 4, 3 – 4) subjected to the extreme kind of a metamorphose thus turning out to be almost irrecognizable, in so far as the men featured in the original concept were substituted in the last mentioned work with the trees said to be broadening their branches in the rhythms of a choral song in order to form a vault of crowns impenetrable to sun-beams, otherwise reaching to the ground only when Zephyrus creates some kind of a channel by slightly moving their leaves with his whiff, something that in an allusion to the celebrated Iliad verse (8, 19) was characterized by the novel’s protagonist as chrysea seira standing in Lucian (Demosth., 13) for the heavenly love and by the same token for maniacal-enthusiastic origins of poetry, closely connected to the realm beyond heaven as depicted in the myth of the winged chariot.

We also come across a reflection the two metaphors of emblematic character appearing in the second part of Phaedrus, such as writing in the black water (276c: ouk en hydati melani grapsei) and planting the garden of letters (276d: en grammasi kepous ... grapsei) found in the concluding passages from Makrembolites’ novel, where the author gives vent to both his and his dearest’s desire for their love adventures to be written in a kind of indelible script so as to be eternized, and it is, on account of what follows, also worth noting that the metaphors referred to above were used by Socrates to demonstrate to Phaedrus all the impotence of the script when confronted with the living and breathing word and its daemonic potential to imprint itself on the soul of the listeners. It was, however, not as difficult to notice the reflection of the metaphors referred
to above in Makrembolites’ novel, given that we find them therein slightly modified and changed into metaphors of both painting on water (11, 21, 4: en hydati katazographon) and painting by means of plants and their floral adornment [11, 22, 2: tois phytos katazographousa (said of the mother Earth)]. It was, however, much harder to fathom out their meaning, in so far as it was, first of all, necessary to establish a logical relation between the key words appearing in the same context, such as the names of the mythical personalities Icarus, Daphne and Hyacynth including the emblematic metaphor of living speech as a sculpture in Plato’s Republic (540c: hosper andriantopoios), being itself in Makrembolites slightly altered by the inclusion of an adjective (11, 22, 4: andrianta katachryson). Only thus, i.e. by making a detour, was it possible to draw the conclusion that the author, by using the above-mentioned key words, makes known to his readership in a rather implicit manner that his own story might also be eternized only if it, like Socrates’ life and speech, assumes the features of both the myth and the legend, something that would be possible if the continuously mentioned principles of the new rhetoric, diaireseis and synagogai, were applied to his own written compositions and if both his own way of acting and that of his protagonists would be modeled to the last detail upon Socrates’ life, something that, after all, found its own reflection in the way of life enjoying, as we shall see somewhat later, widespread popularity in the later periods of the Second Sophistic covered by Eunapius’ Vitae.

That what was alluded to here was a Socratic model, is indicated by the final message placed at the very end of the novel (11, 23, 1 – 2), with the genre’s term drama (11, 23, 3; to kath’ Hysminen drama kai ton Hysminian eme) being not at all, as it may seem at first sight, present in it by sheer chance, a term by which an essential connection might, contrary to all expectations, be established between the allusive character of Socrates’ word, symbolism and the novel as a genre. The message itself is fully masked by the fact that the protagonist and at the same time, the narrator, is simultaneously recommending his own and his darling’s adventures to the mutually opposed parts of the reading audience, as represented by those already seized by erotic mania as well as by those whose attitude to love is determined by continence, i.e. sophrosyne, while, with regard to the whole context, decisively marked by the emblematic images and metaphors of Platonic philosophy, it is pretty clear that the message itself was in an enigmatic way conveyed to the entire readership, just because in the adventures referred to above both mania and sophrosyne were, in keeping with the final message from the myth of the winged chariot, mixed up and interwoven in a kind of perfect unity and proportion, something that was regarded as a guarantee of a blissful life still attainable in this world.

That the final message, conveyed by the author at the very end of his work referred to above, should be read in a symbolic key, is more than clearly indicated by yet another scene, this time placed almost at the end of Prodromos’ novel (9, 317 - 330), with the key principles of old Socratic plasma or, rather, new rhetoric, diaireseis and synagogai, being in it visualized, as was, after all, the case in Lucian. What is featured in the scene are the embraced figures of both the protagonists and their fathers at the moment of the highest possible delight such as being definitely united with one another in the garden
of Kratandros’ house in Cyprus after so long a period of time marked by endless wandering and suffering. The form of the embraced figures intertwined with each other and characterized as *plasis*, gives the impression as if four bodies either coalesced into one head or one head ramified into four bodies, with Socratic plasma’s key principles now imperceptibly modified and changed into *diaireo* and *synizano*, thus being in a specific religious devoutness both visualized and eternized in the form of a sculpture, and yet in the key passage, such as the end of the novel. We are, as it seems, fully entitled to speak of some kind of *religious devoutness*, on account of the fact that one of the key terms of Pythagorean philosophy denoting a perfect number [*tetraktys* (9, 327)] was used in the same passage from Prodromos’ novel, something that might be associated with the author’s noble aim to achieve perfection in a symbol-based elaboration of detail.

The central part of Makrembolites’ novel, or more precisely its fourth book (4, 3 – 20, 5), containing the description of the ensemble of three large scale paintings depicted on the garden wall in Aulikomis, speaks more clearly than anything else of the author’s aspiration to achieve perfection in terms of composition. What this is all about is a series of wall paintings with Eros’ boyish figure represented as both naked and disproportionately large and yet placed right in the middle of the cycle so as to be framed, on the one side, by allegorical representations of Virtues and, on the other, by those of months of the same character, symbolized by the human figures standing for time and season-limited occupations, such as those of soldier, gardener, ploughman, shepherd and hunter, to mention just a few. The meaning of the whole might be deciphered only on condition that the allegorical figures of the Virtues and those of the months are equated with the world of gods and world of men respectively, whereby a necessary precondition would thus be created for Eros’ central position in the ensemble of the pictorial representations to be interpreted in keeping with the key message of Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium*, with Eros himself being therein identified with the daemon filling the void between these worlds by both transmitting and interpreting messages coming from the world of gods to that of men, and conversely (202e). Thus the cycle of paintings referred to above, with the key thesis of Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium* being therein visualized, turned out quite unexpectedly to symbolize nothing else than the daemonic power of the old Socratic *plasma*, which, like Eros himself, transmits messages from one world to another.

On the basis of factual evidence gained through deciphering symbols, we are in a position to conclude that the old Socratic plasma was identified with the song of the Sirens even in so late a period such as the epoch of the Komnenoi. This trend could not be fully understood without the evidence found in Eunapius’ work about the spiritual aspirations in the period of the Second Sophistic, an evidence related to the leading exponents of the movement in its later, second phase, such as, to name just a few, Chrysanthius, Edesius and Prohaeresius who made efforts to imitate Socrates’ life to the last detail, with this kind of zeal going in Prohaeresius’ case so far as to induce him to spend cold winters in Gaul barefooted (492) and yet clad in a tiny threadbare cloak as well as to drink nearly freezing water of the Rhine regarded as the
height of luxury (492), and all of it, as it seems, with the aim to surpass his master’s legendary achievement during his military episode in ice-cold Potideia (Plat., Symp. 220b). This later period of the Second Sophistic covered by Eunapius’ Vitae is of paramount importance for understanding the phenomenon of the Greek novel, just on account of the fact that even the female exponents of the movement, such as Sosipatra, follow, full of enthusiasm, in Socrates’ footsteps, which of itself explains in the best possible way the role played by the female protagonists in the plot of the Greek novel, something Rohde was unable to find an explanation for, despite the fact that it was quite within his reach.

The life of Libanius, as depicted in Eunapius’ Vitae, shows us what vast proportions the aspiration to imitate Socrates’ way of life might have yet assumed, and what it is all about is his effort or, more precisely, “a mission impossible” undertaken with the noble aim to transfer daemonic features of Socrates’ style with the contrast, polar elements alternately pulsating in it to the point of imperceptibility, to his own way of acting. As it was very hard, as far as Socrates’ style is concerned, to ascertain where the serious ends and where the laughable begins and what it is at all so laughable in quite a lofty subject-matter, so Libanius himself was in a similar way regarded as a second self by all those admitted to his teaching despite the fact that they were pursuing modes of life opposed to one another, with the consequence that everyone applauded in him qualities that were opposite, something that can be explained by the fact that all possible temperaments were pulsating in Libanius’ personality, including those contrasting with each other and mutually exclusive.

Conclusion: the forthcoming battle for symbols

Due to limited space, we will now focus only on some of Rohde’s particularly characteristic theses presented in the famous chapter referred to above, so as to be, on the basis of what has been said so far, additionally convinced of all their deficiencies and by the same token, point to the exigency of reappraising the entire corpus of post-classical Greek literature, all the more so because the above-mentioned theses have done, as we have already seen, a great injustice to the Greek novel by lowering it to the level of barbarism, caricature and what’s more, silly children’s fairy tales.

That something was wrong with Rohde’s theses could be inferred from the hitherto expounded subject-matter suggesting the direct opposite of what Rohde thought, namely the fact that the Greek novel could now with good reason be regarded as a specific hymn to both Platonic philosophy and the legendary Socratic plasma, something that of itself urges the need for the theses referred to above to be reviewed, because they, erroneously considered undisputed, found their reflection in large-scale syntheses and monographs on literary history, rhetorical prose and the novel as a genre, such as those of Lesky (1971), Norden and Bachtin (1976), respectively. Taking a retrospective look at Rohde’s theses seems to be important for yet another
reason, because as a result of their revision, a key principle of great relevance to modern-day literary studies will be brought to light, something that also holds true for an imperative of great significance for the research work yet to be carried out in the future, as far as poetics of both the novel and the entire post-classical Greek literature is concerned.

All deficiencies of Rohde’s theses were evident from the fact that the ephemeral motives such as glory, a splendid outward appearance and riches were presented as the three mighty Sirens exercising a decisive influence upon both the world view and the literary activity of the leading exponents of the Second Sophistic, while, on the contrary, they were inspired by the lofty ideal to follow in Socrates’ footsteps by dancing in a kind of corybantic élan setting in motion his speeches in *Phaedrus*, so as to be able to revive in the most impressive way possible his old *plasma*, regarded by themselves, as was also the case with Alcibiades, as a rapturous song of the Sirens. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that he characterized the rhetoric of the period referred to above as nothing else than the notorious Asiatic oratory (311: *die unter dem Namen der asiatischen übel bekannte Beredsamkeit*), with just the qualifier *Asiatic* being therein conspicuous for its disparaging use, in so far as it, instead of a geographic term, became an evaluation criterion now standing for literary creation of the worst possible kind, equated with the greatest possible evil and in other passages from his monographs characterized as an eloquence bereft of emotions (348: *diese Art empfindungsloser Schönrednerei*), immense vanity (*eine, zuweilen ganz maßlose Eitelkeit*) as well as rhetorical emptiness (380: *diese rhetorische Leere*). Rohde was, unfortunately, unaware of the far-reaching outcome his thesis would necessarily have had if the question were raised of how it was at all possible for such evil to both continue to exist for an entire millennium and yet experience its resplendent renaissance in an epoch as late as that of the Komnenoi.

In the last analysis, all the deficiencies of Rohde’s attitudes towards the Greek novel turned out to originate from the fact that his research work, relative to the theory of narration and quite rightly regarded as a strong starting point, was not brought to an end, in so far as it was not extended to the Byzantine period, more precisely to both 11th century rhetoric and the work of one of its most prominent exponents, with the poetical subject-matter appearing all of a sudden in his definition of the third type of narration, which, from a purely formal point of view, could explain a great proportion of poetical elements in the Greek novel’s prose narrative. As a result, Rohde had no choice but to postulate the thesis about the omnipotence of the rhetoric manifesting itself in its centripetal force, strong enough, in his view, to suck in all other genres including both poetry and philosophy itself. A satisfactory explanation for this state of things could yet be found in Eunapius’ *Vitae*, whose evidence Rohde didn’t dare to take into account because of its, as he erroneously thought, barbarian character, something that in the last analysis turned out to be an utter failure. Just on the basis of evidence provided by Eunapius, a far-reaching conclusion of paramount importance for the poetics of the Greek novel could be drawn pointing to *Phaedrus*, the two Socrates’ speeches in it and their astonishing *plasma* as the driving force behind all the ideals the
Greek renaissance of later times including those of the Second Sophistic drew its inspiration from, a *plasma* that could in the best possible way explain the process of blending and amalgamating poetry, philosophy and rhetoric with the noble aim of creating an organic whole. It is time now for the general conclusions to speak for themselves against the backdrop of Rohde’s defective theses as presented in this brief survey. First, one could with good reason claim that the Greek novel still remains largely unread, something that also remains valid for the better part of the post-classical Greek literature, as far as a microscopic text analysis is concerned.

Second, the importance and actuality of the Greek novel for both the contemporary reading audience and modern-day literary studies seems to have already been announced by what was only implicitly present in both the plot and its symbolic fields, namely that a literary work bereft of a profound philosophical poetics is not worth a great deal.

Last but not least, a major breakthrough in understanding the poetics of the novel can only be achieved through an unrelenting battle for symbols.

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