

# Dancing With Deconstructionists in the Gardens of the Muses: New Literary History vs ?

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In 1981 I noted that Byzantine literature has never had a good press, least of all from its own students.<sup>1</sup> It was not hard to document this assertion. The opinion of Gibbon that

not a single composition of history, philosophy or literature has been saved from oblivion by the intrinsic beauties of style or sentiment, of original fancy, or even of successful imitation. Their prose is soaring to the vicious affectation of poetry, their poetry is sinking below the flatness and inspidity of prose<sup>2</sup>

might perhaps be expected, but it found support in the views of Romilly Jenkins:

The Byzantine empire remains almost the unique example of a highly civilized state, lasting for more than a millennium, which produced hardly any educated writing which can be read with pleasure for its literary merit alone.<sup>3</sup>

Far from opposing this view Cyril Mango in the more recent of his inaugural lectures took this judgement for granted — ‘I do not wish to dispute this harsh verdict’ — and turned his attention instead to the difficulties and dangers for the historian of using Byzantine ‘highbrow’ literature.<sup>4</sup>

It is perhaps time to review the position. My original observation referred both to the curiously pejorative view of the literature expressed by holders of chairs in Byzantine language and literature, and to the low level — or non-existence — of literary

1. M.E. Mullett, *Theophylact Through his Letters: the Two Worlds of an Exile Bishop* (Diss., Birmingham 1981) 1.

2. E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. 53, ed. J.B. Bury, 3rd ed. (London 1907) VI, 107-8.

3. R.J.H. Jenkins, *Dionysius Solomos* (Cambridge 1940) 57.

4. C. Mango, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror* (Inaugural Lecture, University of Oxford 1975) 4.

criticism applied to Byzantine texts. In what ways has the picture changed over the last ten years? A recent survey<sup>5</sup> takes an optimistic view of the period 1975-1982. The word 'appreciation' in her title alerts us to Hanawalt's priorities and indeed to those of many American scholars in recent years. As early as the Bucharest congress of 1971 A.R. Littlewood<sup>6</sup> was concerned to combat the strictures of George Dennis on the letters of Manuel II. Dennis was later to write:

Manuel's letters are primarily of a rhetorical nature. . . as such they reflect the worst characteristics of the rhetoric employed by the Byzantines. There is a fundamental dishonesty; while living in one world they speak from another. It is unimportant whether or not what they say is related to reality; how they say it is what matters,<sup>7</sup>

but Father Dennis himself underwent a conversion to a 'positive' view of Byzantine literature, referring to the passage above as 'my unkind words'.<sup>8</sup> Of course some exceptions had always been made, as Mango noted when he referred to the 'frisson of mystical delight' that some experience while reading the works of Romanos the Melode.<sup>9</sup> Eva Topping is clearly one of these:

From the fourth to the fifteenth century, for a thousand years, the poet priest voiced the ideals and aspirations of Byzantium. While secular poets busied themselves with imitating ancient models only to produce correct but dry verses, the poets of the church wrote vital, original and significant poetry.<sup>10</sup>

Recent work has in fact tended to play down the dependence of the Byzantines on classical models<sup>11</sup> or at least illuminate the

5. E. Albu Hanawalt, 'Dancing with Rhetoricians in the Gardens of the Muses: Notes on Recent Study and Appreciation of Byzantine Literature', *Byzantine Studies — Études Byzantines* 13 (1986) 1-23.

6. See the fruits in print, e.g. 'An Ikon of the Soul: the Byzantine Letter', *Visible Language* 10 (1976) 197-226.

7. G.T. Dennis, *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus* (Dumbarton Oaks Texts, 4 [CFHB 8] Washington DC 1977) xviii-xx.

8. G.T. Dennis, 'The Byzantines as Revealed in their Letters', *Gonimos: Neoplatonic and Byzantine Studies presented to Leendert G. Westerink at 75 = Arethusa* (Buffalo 1988) 159.

9. Mango, *Distorting Mirror*, 4.

10. E. Topping, 'The Poet-Priest in Byzantium', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 14 (1969).

11. See for example the contributors to M.E. Mullett and R. Scott, *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham 1981).

creativity of the Byzantines' mimesis,<sup>12</sup> building on the crucial perception of Hunger, that imitation was not thought of as plagiarism but as an indication of literary skill.<sup>13</sup> There has also been a shift in perceptions of rhetoric. Although Donald Nicol could still describe rhetoric as 'the canker in the cultural blood of the Byzantines',<sup>14</sup> G.L. Kustas, writing at about the same time as Mango's 'Distorting Mirror' had already paved the way for understanding rhetoric as the expression of Byzantine ideology.<sup>15</sup> Also the publication of *Menander Rhetor* highlighted the attempt to arrive at a Byzantine aesthetic, and to enable us to evaluate Byzantines' writings on their own terms.<sup>16</sup>

In fact a wind of change has been blowing through the study of Byzantine literature. In particular Cyril Mango's lecture provided a powerful stimulus to scholars who could not accept his disparaging judgements. It became necessary to show that Byzantine literature was sophisticated, complex,<sup>17</sup> a not-too-distorted reflection of Byzantine life,<sup>18</sup> but scholars also began to ask the same questions that they would of any other literature without feeling the need to evaluate or defend. Yet even post-Hellenistic literature needed its defenders in this period, as the editors of a volume of *Yale Classical Studies* explain.<sup>18</sup> But the cause of

12. G. Moravcsik, 'Klassizismus in der byzantinischen Geschichtsschreibung', *Polychronion, Festschrift F. Dölger zum 75. Geburtstag* (Heidelberg 1966) 366-377; see also I. Ševčenko, *Études sur la polémique entre Théodore Métochite et Nicéphore Choumnos* (CBHB 3, Brussels 1962) 171, n.2; H. Maguire, 'Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art', *DOP* 28 (1974) 131.

13. H. Hunger, 'On the Imitation (μίμησις) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature', *DOP* 23-24 (1969-70) 15-38.

14. D.M. Nicol, *The End of the Byzantine Empire* (London 1979) 47.

15. G.L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric* (Analekta Vlatadon 13, Thessalonike 1974).

16. D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor, edited with Translation and Commentary* (Oxford 1981).

17. The best example is the recent work of Margaret Alexiou in the Byzantine field, notably 'A Critical Reappraisal of Eustathios Makrembolites' *Hysmine and Hysminias*; *BMGS* 3 (1977) 23-43; 'Literary Subversion and the Aristocracy in Twelfth-century Byzantium: a Stylistic Analysis of the *Timarion* (ch 6-10)', *BMGS* 8 (1982/3) 29-45; 'The Poverty of Ecriture and the Craft of Writing; towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems', *BMGS* 10 (1986) 1-40.

18. P. Magdalino, 'The Literary Perception of Everyday Life in Byzantium: Some General Considerations and the Case of John Apokaukos', *BS* 47 (1987) 23-38.

19. *Yale Classical Studies*, 27, eds. J.J. Winkler and G. Williams (1982).

Byzantine literature has been taken up in recent years by Alexander Kazhdan. In an article in *JÖB*, in his *People and Power*, in *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* and in *Change in Byzantine Culture* the message is very clear; Byzantine literature is worth reading and we should read it.<sup>20</sup>

With these developments we have left the era of professional disparagement, of ‘the literature we love to hate’ attitude. And perhaps in order to reach this position a naive response (‘the literature we love to love’) was necessary. But it is questionable whether Byzantine literature is best served in the 1990s by such a primitively evaluative approach.

Even if disparagement is no longer universal a problem which may well remain is the invisibility of Byzantine literature. Nigel Wilson wrote:

This book is intended to give an account of what happened to Greek literature from the end of the antique world until the reappearance of classical studies in Western Europe during the Renaissance.<sup>21</sup>

What happened was surely that Greek literature went on being written. Wilson’s account was different: his book is not a history of Byzantine literature, but a history of the fortunes of ancient Greek literature in the Middle Ages. Is Byzantine literature invisible in this way only when classicists write about Byzantium, or is Byzantine literature invisible because Byzantine literary studies are invisible? Is there any Byzantine literary criticism and how good is it?

The answer must be that literature is still the Cinderella of Byzantine Studies. At symposia and congresses literature is lucky to

20. A. Kazhdan, ‘Der Mensch in der byzantinischen Literaturgeschichte’, *JÖB* 28 (1979) 1-21; with G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium. An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington DC 1982); with S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge and Paris 1984); with A. W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985). Of these, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (hereafter *Studies*) is the most important, as a recently reworked set of essays written in the Soviet Union, reminding Western scholars both of the contribution of his Soviet colleagues and of the relative status of literature in their researches compared with the West.

21. N. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London 1983) 1.

be given one section; a whole colloquium on a text is a rarity. Byzantine periodicals rarely contain more than occasional studies of texts though fortunately many are willing to publish new texts. Kazhdan demonstrated in Vienna<sup>22</sup> that there is no literary history of Byzantium, despite the triple rewriting of Krumbacher's *Handbuch*. A cursory comparison (taken at random) with the neighbouring disciplines of western medieval studies and of classics shows the poverty of the Byzantine bibliography. There is today no Alastair Minnis or Peter Dronke or Francis Cairns or Woodman & West of Byzantine Studies — but there is no Curtius or Fraenkel either. Anyone teaching a survey course on Byzantine literature knows that each lecture or reading list begins: 'there is no standard work on this author/period/genre/milieu. . . I suggest taking X's study of Y and applying it to Byzantium'.

This may seem an unduly negative picture in view of what has actually been published during the last ten years. Fundamental methodological groundwork had been provided with the publication of Hunger's *Handbuch*, with the *Stilstufen* approach of Hunger and Ševčenko, and with the metrical theories of Hörandner which will deeply influence the editing of texts. New editions this decade include the great Psellos project, Gautier's *Théophylacte*, so long awaited but alas posthumous, philosophical works, saints' lives, military treatises; there is no pause in the work of editing and publishing Byzantine works. Translations also have seen great development in the decade; the Australian series, with the Liverpool series, the Classics of Western Spirituality and St Vladimir's Seminary Press continue to make Byzantium more widely known.

Compared with editions and translations literary studies are much thinner on the ground, and are rarely purely literary. This reflects both the properly interdisciplinary nature of the subject, and the uncertainty over the very basis of Byzantine literature. How literate<sup>23</sup> was Byzantine society and who wrote its literature

22. Kazhdan, *Der Mensch*.

23. For the literacy debate see R. Browning, 'Literacy in the Byzantine World', *BMGS* 4 (1978) 39-54; C. Mango, *Byzantium: the Empire of New Rome* (London 1980) 237 ff.; E. Patlagean, 'Discours écrit, discours parlé: niveaux de culture à Byzance au

and where?<sup>24</sup> The Dumbarton Oaks symposium on *Books and Bookmen*<sup>25</sup> reverberated throughout the decade; questions of patronage and social localisation<sup>26</sup> became as frequent as in art history; literature approached social anthropology in the eighties as religion had in the seventies. Studies on the borders of literature and art opened new possibilities, which were not always fully explored.<sup>27</sup> Work on women, private life and the body began to spill over into textual study.<sup>28</sup>

Certain areas flourished. One is early Byzantine historiography. In English alone studies of Eusebius, Evagrius, Ammianus Marcellinus, the fifth-century fragments, Procopius, Menander Protector and Theophylact Simocatta together with two Australian conferences on historiography and the two splendid volumes of the Malalas project make it a bumper decade. Taken with *Agathias* and work in progress on Sokrates and Theophanes it should now be the best understood area of Byzantine literature.<sup>29</sup>

VIIIe-XIe siècles', *Annales ESC* 34 (1979) 264-278; N. Oikonomidès, 'Mount Athos; Levels of Literacy', *DOP* 42 (1988) 167-178. See the forthcoming *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge 1990).

24. On the Byzantine literary class see Kazhdan and Constable, *People and Power*, 101 ff.; H.G. Beck, *Das literarische Schaffen der Byzantiner. Wege zu seinem Verständnis*, Sitzungsberichte der Österr. Akad. d. Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse 294, 4 Abh. (Vienna 1974); M.E. Mullett, 'Aristocracy and Patronage in the Literary Circles of Comnenian Constantinople', *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX-XIII Centuries*, ed. M.J. Angold (BAR, Int. Ser. 221, Oxford 1984) 173-201.

25. *Byzantine Books and Bookmen. A Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium* (Washington DC 1975).

26. For patronage see for example, E. Jeffreys, 'The Sevastokratorissa Eirene as Literary Patroness: the Monk Iakovos', *JÖB* 32/3 (1982) 63-71. A. Kazhdan, 'The Social Views of Michael Attaleiates', *Studies* 23-86, is a devastatingly efficient example of the technique of social localisation.

27. H. Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton 1981); R. Macrides and P. Magdalino, 'The Architecture of Ekphrasis: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentiary's poem on Hagia Sophia', *BMGS* 12 (1989) 47-82; E. James and R. Webb, 'To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places; Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium', forthcoming, breaks new ground.

28. C. Galatariotou, 'Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Conceptions of Gender', *BMGS* 9 (1984/5) 55-94; 'Eros and Thanatos: a Byzantine Hermit's Conception of Sexuality', *BMGS* 13 (1989) 95-137.

29. Of all this effort, the contribution of Australian scholars is perhaps the most impressive, particularly their model collaborative work. See *History and Historians in Late Antiquity*, eds. B. Croke and A. Emmett (Sydney and Oxford 1983); *Reading*

Here editing, translation and study go hand in hand. Few areas can compete. The decade has seen considerable advances on the subject of Digenes Akrites with the publication and discussion of the Escorial text, and contributions from feminism and social anthropology.<sup>30</sup> The Byzantine romance saw considerable advances. Innovative work on twelfth-century satire and parody has revealed new problems.<sup>31</sup> Hagiography has its own impetus, as has hymnography, much slowed down by the sad death of Grosdidier de Matons.<sup>32</sup> But what is missing is quite as impressive as what exists.

We lack studies of most genres at most periods. Work is in progress on homilies, the letter, epigrams, parainesis, late byzantine historiography but there is a great deal left to be done. Studies of authors which cross the genre barrier are very rare: A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1985) is a distinguished exception. We still have no full-length study of Theodore Prodromos (since Papadimitriou) and we look forward to Kazhdan's *Niketas Choniates*. We lack wide-ranging considerations of Byzantine literature, although work on the genre system and on innovation and originality is in progress. We also lack specialists in literature. It is instructive to note who are the scholars writing on Byzantine literature: few of them write only on

*the past in Late Antiquity*, eds. G. Clarke, B. Croke, and R. Mortless (Canberra 1990); *The Chronicle of John Malalas. A Translation*, by E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys and R. Scott with B. Croke, J. Ferber, S. Franklin, A. James, D. Kelly, A. Moffatt, A. Nixon (Byzantina Australensia 4, Melbourne 1986); *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. E. Jeffreys with B. Croke and R. Scott (Byzantina Australensia 6, Sydney 1990).  
30. E.g. S. Alexiou, *Βασίλειος Διγενής Ακρίτης (κάι το χειρόγραφο του Εσκοριάλ) καί το ἄσμα τοῦ Ἀρμουρη* (Athens 1984); C. Galatariotou, 'Structural Oppositions in the Grottaferata Digenes Akritas', *BMGS* 11 (1987) 29-68; P. Magdalino, 'Honour amongst Romaioi; the Framework of Social Values in the World of Digenes Akritas and Kekaumenos', *BMGS* 13 (1989) 183-318.

31. E.g. Alexiou, *The Poverty of Écriture*.

32. Hagiographic studies are still dominated by *Analecta Bollandiana* and *Subsidia Hagiographica*, but see *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. S. Hackel (Birmingham 1981), and for an interdisciplinary approach to a single dossier and cult, see *The Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia*, eds. M.E. Mullett and A.M. Wilson (BBTT, 2, Belfast, forthcoming). There is still room for the purely literary approach to hagiography. For hymns see J. Szövérfy, *A Guide to Byzantine Hymnography. A Classified Bibliography of Texts and Studies* (Brookline, Mass., and Leyden 1978-9).

literature. Apart from the polymaths of the elder generation, most are classicists slumming, neohellenists pushing back the borders of modern Greek or historians newly sensitive to the nature of the sources they use. Much of the most interesting work of this last kind goes back to the impact of Evelyne Patlagean's study of hagiography in the early seventies,<sup>33</sup> when seminar gambit 'isn't that a topos?' began to be answered by 'yes, but why is it used *here*?' Without this involvement of historians we would be without Paul Magdalino on Snobbery or Catia Galatariotou on Travel.<sup>34</sup> Yet it is surely curious that so few people would choose to identify themselves as students of Byzantine literature. There is in English a wider problem, that there is no simple parallel to the description 'art historian': 'literary historian'; 'literary critic'; 'literary theorist' are distinct designations, none of which quite adds up to the whole. ('Literary scholar' suggests dilettante scribblings.) But even to reply 'I work on Byzantine literature' to the query 'what do you do?' must be rare enough.

What this survey reveals is the rare example of a European literature which is to all intents and purposes virgin territory for the post-structuralist. There is no Old Literary History for New Literary History to replace.<sup>35</sup> For New Criticism read No Criticism. The rare examples of works with some theoretical foundation stand out starkly from their fellows: Patlagean's structuralism and *Annales*-school history as applied to texts;<sup>36</sup> Margaret Alexiou's mixture of post-Freudianism and narratology;<sup>37</sup> the Jeffreys' rigorous but ultimately unconvincing attempt to apply the Parry-Lord theory of oral composition in

33. E. Patlagean, 'Ancienne hagiographie byzantine et histoire sociale', *Annales ESC* 23 (1968) 106-126.

34. P. Magdalino, 'Byzantine Snobbery', ed. M.J. Angold, *The Byzantine Aristocracy*, 58-78; C. Galatariotou, paper given to the XXIV Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge 1990.

35. H.R. Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *New Literary History* 2 (1970) 7-37. This periodical was founded with the aim of reviving the then discredited practice of literary history, more soundly grounded in theory, rather than of replacing an older school.

36. E. Patlagean, *Structure sociale, famille, chretienté à Byzance* (London, Variorum 1981).

37. M. Alexiou, *A Critical Reappraisal*.



Byzantine texts.<sup>38</sup> These exceptions point to the fact that the study of Byzantine literature has (at least in the West) failed to take advantage of any advances made in other literatures. It is not that there is any great hostility to theory: welcoming voices have sounded from the London Institute of Classical Studies seminar on *Reading Byzantium* in 1988 and from the Australian Byzantine Studies Conference in Sydney 1989.<sup>39</sup> It is simply that the work lies ahead of us.

In some ways it is surprising that the timelessness and placelessness of Byzantine literature, so clear to Mango and so despised by Dennis, did not point long ago to a formalist analysis. What better literature for this approach than one where it is easy not to be distracted by referential detail? If 'the author is dead',<sup>40</sup> how much better to be working with a literature where apparently insoluble problems of authorship and authenticity are rife; it no longer matters whether Theodore Prodromos or Constantine Manasses wrote Theodore Prodromos. A literature accepted by all as comprehensible in terms of rhetoric should have benefited from the revival of interest in rhetoric of all kinds.<sup>41</sup> A literature thought to be so derivative of its classical forebears might have had an anxious Bloomsday.<sup>42</sup> A literature in which narrative has in practice been privileged by modern readers could have gained more from the stream of Genette-inspired works on

38. E. and M. Jeffreys, *Popular Literature in Late Byzantium* (London, Variorum 1983).

39. Roddy Beaton's paper, 'Reading Byzantine Literature', is unpublished; for Michael Jeffreys' see 'Literary Theory and the Criticism of Byzantine Texts' (abstract), *Byzantine Studies in Australia Newsletter* 24 (1990) 9.

40. R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Image, Music, Text*, tr. and ed. S. Heath (London and New York 1977) 142-148.

41. See for example at one extreme all three books of Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York and Oxford 1971); *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven 1979); and especially *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York 1984); at another the International Society for the Study of Rhetoric was founded at Zurich in 1977; see B. Vickers, *Rhetoric Revalued* (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 19, Binghamton, New York 1982).

42. H. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a Theory of Poetry* (New York and London 1973).

narrative.<sup>43</sup> Where language questions abound and intersect with levels of style, it is surprising that Saussure and all that flows from him have not been invoked. The one advantage for literary studies of the systematic disparagement of Byzantine literature is that there is no canon based on value judgments; there is a sense of a hierarchy of genres instilled by the *Handbuecher* but that is a different problem. Above all Byzantinists never expect reading to be easy: the very difficulty of their texts cries out for hermeneutic practices which take that difficulty into account. The scholar who is accustomed to the riddle-mentality of the twelfth century may find relief as well as enlightenment in Derrida.

But there are reasons why Byzantinists, unlike classicists, were unlikely to seize upon New Criticism and its aftermath even if they had seen their job as untying a text or ever been aware of what their counterparts in other disciplines were doing. Classicists after a slow start took very easily to close reading, to the critical virtues of tension and sincerity, ambiguity and irony, at least in poetic discourse.<sup>44</sup> Greek drama or Latin love elegy is after all more easily assimilable to the literary criticism of Renaissance and post-Renaissance English, the literature for which this reading practice was evolved. A literature in which poetic discourse may be located in a genre (the letter) which in the Western view of things was at best a minor art, and in which a new metre (the *politikos stichos*) was regarded as the most pedestrian of forms of discourse clearly poses problems for a New Critic, though not for a poststructuralist, with the study of film, strip cartoons, picture postcards subverting evaluative canons. And what would any Byzantinist make of a verbal icon with no prototype?

In a sense this is a pity, although I do not believe that there is any necessity to reinvent the wheel and in every literature

43. G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, tr. E. Lewin (Cornell 1980); e.g. ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, *On Narrative* (Chicago 1980-1); F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, tr. C. Goetsche (Cambridge 1984).

44. On classicists' engagement with New Criticism see M.J. McGann, 'Moral Dimensions and Critical Approaches in Horace', *Gymnasium*, Beiheft 9, eds. H.W. Schmidt and P. Wülfing, *Antikes Denken-Moderne Schule* (Heidelberg 1988) 183-6. New Criticism was already seen as on the way to being passé by C. Segal, 'Ancient Texts and Modern Literary Criticism', *Arethusa* 1 (1968) 1-25.

reproduce the gains of each critical school. But the role of New Criticism to some extent explains the difference between classicists' treatment of Ovid's exile discourse and Byzantinists' treatment of the twelfth-century episcopal epistolographers. Recently Latinists have faced up to the problem of whether Ovid ever went to Tomi;<sup>45</sup> Byzantinists continue to take as clear evidence of the writer's *attitudes in practice* every complaint and criticism of his (supposed) surroundings.<sup>46</sup> Classicists also seized very happily upon the concept of persona in poetic discourse,<sup>47</sup> while the Prodromic problem was dogged for years by scholars objecting to solutions because of *what a poet said about himself in a poem*. Only in Byzantine literature were begging poets assumed to be beggars.

But the problem goes deeper, and I suspect that though formalist strategies may help us superficially or temporarily only a historicist reading practice will answer to the expectations of Byzantinists who have for years treated the literature of the empire as a body of historical source material. I hope to explore this problem more fully elsewhere, but there is a problem in that because such a high proportion of the source material of Byzantine history is literary, privileged, historians have regarded it as something demanding historical rather than literary analysis. At the crudest level they charge through with card indexes and databases plundering for historical facts and complaining when the text's complexity or vacuity eludes their rape. At another level analysis is concerned to present an *Urtext* or to strip it of accretions and demonstrate on historian's veracity. This is the Bollan-

45. The outlines of a debate on this subject can be traced in *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 10 (1985) 19-22 (A.D. Fitton-Brown); 48 (A.W.J. Holleman); 12 (1987) 23 (H. Hoffmann). But there is more to be said.

46. For an alternative view see my 'Byzantium and the Slavs: the Views of Theophylact of Ochrid', *Miscellany in Memoriam Ivan Dujcev*, ed. A. Djourova (Sofia, forthcoming).

47. See W.S. Anderson, 'Roman Satires and Literary Criticism', *Bucknell Review* 12 (1964) 106-113 (= *Essays in Roman Satire* [Princeton 1982] 3-10); M.J. McGann, *Studies in Horace's First Book of Epistles* (Coll. Lat. 100, Brussels 1969) 96 and n.1; N. Rudd, 'Theory: Sincerity and Mask', in *Lines of Enquiry* (Cambridge 1976) 145-181. Against the use of persona: R.O.A.M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets. From Catullus to Horace* (Oxford 1980) viii.

dist approach to sources: all very well except that what these historians throw out is as important as what they leave in. *Quellenforschung* may reconstruct the history of composition, but the history of reception should be just as important, an observation which has important consequences for the editing of medieval texts, a point made long ago by David Holton. Other historians of Byzantium are deeply receptive to theory provided it is not literary. Psychology, social anthropology, marxism, feminism all have their place; but they ignore the fact that what they are using are literary texts and that a double level of theory is necessary. Others acclaim the approximation of literature and history: 'There exists at present, as there has not for some decades, the possibility of serious cooperation between the fields of history and literature'.<sup>48</sup> For Stock this lies in the popularity of the study of *mentalité* among medievalists as well as in trends in current literary theory. Literary scholars might be forgiven for treating this clarion call with suspicion: once the historians rampaged through plundering for facts; now they rampage through plundering for mentalities.

But there are encouraging signs in the development of theory; the emphasis on reception rather than the author, and thus on 'horizons of expectation';<sup>49</sup> the separation of a 'then-meaning' from a 'now-meaning',<sup>50</sup> the New Historicists' call for the demise of formalism and the proclamation of a New Literary History.<sup>51</sup> It is not at all an inauspicious time for enlisting the help of literary theory in some of the trickiest problems currently

48. B. Stock, 'History, Literature, and Medieval Textuality', *Images of Power. Medieval History/Discourse/Literature*, eds. K. Brownlee and S.G. Nichols, in *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986) 7.

49. Jauss, *New Literary History* 2 (1970) 24 ff.

50. This is a distinction of F.W. Bateson used helpfully by A. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford 1982) 263-276.

51. New Historicism has been most clearly associated with recent work in renaissance English, see E. Pechter, 'The New Historicism and its Discontents', *PMLA* 102 (1987), 292-303, but has affinities with much wider attempts to reconcile Marxism with formalism, or to seek new, historicist, alignments. See for example, E. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London 1984); F. Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (London 1980); *Poststructuralism and the Problem of History*, eds. D. Attridge, G. Bennington and R. Young (Cambridge 1989). See C. Porter, 'After the New Historicism', *New Literary History* 21 (1990) 253-272, for a critique.

assailing the student of Byzantine literature. The relation between production and reception is one of these, as is the nature of Byzantine literary society; reader-response and Rezeptions theorie must surely be brought to bear here.<sup>52</sup> The problem of intentionalism has yet to be tackled by a byzantinist although it has raised its head in readings of textual and visual sources,<sup>53</sup> it cannot be studied in isolation from other literatures. The problem of context, of the relation between the privileged discourse of our sources and the intertextual or referential reality is one of the major challenges, but so is the question of the nature of Byzantine literature itself. What was privileged text for the Byzantines? The problem of parody throws this into relief. So far attempts to isolate parody have been fraught with controversy. Alexiou's brilliant reading of the 'doux' episode in the *Timarion* has not drawn total belief from habitual readers of panegyric; Macrides' rigorous and cautious offering of the cannibal poem with its negative analysis vis a vis parody has quickly met (unfairly) with an alternative affirmative solution.<sup>54</sup> If we were more sure about the nature of literary discourse, might we not be more equipped to decide about parody? One definition of literature will certainly not do for Byzantium, even with Todorov's modifier: literature is fiction.<sup>55</sup>

52. For an excellent anthology see S. Suleiman and I. Crosman, *The Reader in the Text. Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, 1980). Surveys by R.C. Holub, *Reception Theory. A Critical Introduction* (New York 1984) and E. Freund, *The Return of the Reader. Reader-Response Criticism* cover slightly wider ground than their titles imply. G. Grimm, *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Munich 1977) taken with R. Warnung, *Rezeptionsaesthetik* (Munich 1979) is useful; classic treatments are H.R. Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, tr. T. Bahti (Brighton 1982); W. Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore 1974); U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London 1981); S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge Mass. 1980). For reception theory and classics, see *Arethusa* 19.2 (1986).

53. Many of the most interesting suggestions in R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold* (London, 1985) are intentionalist; generic analysis may necessarily be so. A new study is needed.

54. Alexiou, 'Literary Subversion'; R. Macrides, 'Poetic Justice in the Patriarchate. Murder and Cannibalism in the Provinces', *Cupido Legum*, eds. L. Burgmann, M-Th Fogen, A. Schminck (Frankfurt 1985) 137-168.

55. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 6, citing Benniston Gray and quoting Todorov as arguing that a true story can be viewed as if it were literature.

The arrival of fiction in Byzantine literature has recently been given a date,<sup>56</sup> though the relation between fiction and other kinds of narrative still remains to be considered. In particular our understanding of the revival of the novel or romance in Byzantium has seen considerable advances over the past decade. Studies of the ancient novel and of the Greek novel have allowed the Byzantine twelfth-century and Palaiologan romances to take a modest place. The subtle reading of *Hysmine and Hysminias* offered by Alexiou, too favourable for Tomas Hägg in 1983, has found support in recent scholarship, notably from Antony Littlewood.<sup>57</sup> Carolina Cupane has isolated thematic elements; Polyakova established relationships among the romances and with the medieval west,<sup>58</sup> and Kazhdan has boldly used the romances as indicators of changing ideologies.<sup>59</sup> It is however with Roderick Beaton's new book, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (Cambridge 1989) that we can see the current state of knowledge of the genre set out, and indeed far more. Besides its merits to specialists on the Byzantine romance or the Greek novel, it is an important landmark in Byzantine literary studies in general.

For one thing it is the first of several studies of groups of texts currently planned or in progress. Second, it is an uncompromisingly literary treatment of incontrovertibly literary texts. Third, although it eschews overtly evaluative terms and expresses the historicist aim of detecting 'the implicit politics of the writers and

56. See *The Greek Novel AD 1-1985*, ed. R. Beaton (London 1988) especially the contributions of Charlotte Roueche and Roddy Beaton.

57. T. Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford 1983) 75: 'Perhaps this time the pendulum has swung a bit too far in the positive direction'; A Littlewood, 'Romantic Paradises: the Role of the Garden in the Byzantine Romance', *BMGS* 5 (1979) 95-114.

58. The appearance of two articles by Carolina Cupane in 1974 was an important turning point; 'Un caso di giudizio di Dio nel romanzo di Teodoro Prodromo', *Rivista di studi Bizantini e Neellenici*, n.s. 10-11 (1974) 147-168; "'Ερωτες-Βασίλειος": la figura di Eros nel romanzo bizantino d'amore', *Atti dell'Accademia di Arti di Palermo*, er. 4, 33/2 (1974) 243-297. Of all the recent Soviet scholarship, even including Ljubarskij, that of Polyakova has come closest to influencing work in the West; S. MacAlister, 'Byzantine Twelfth-century romances: a Relative Chronology', *BMGS* 15 (1991) forthcoming, deserves serious consideration.

59. E.g. 'Imberios and Margarona; the Manuscripts, Sources and Edition of a Byzantine Verse Romance', *B* 41 (1971) 122-160; 'The Comnenian Background to the romans d'antiquité', *B* 10 (1980) 455-486. Kazhdan, e.g. *People and Power*, 108 ff.

the first readers' it is a favourable account, something remarkable in studies of the genre.<sup>60</sup> Fourth, it frees the Byzantine romance from the dead hand of the classics and an unnatural isolation from contemporary story-telling in both east and west — though it is the work of a neohellenist who prefers the term 'medieval Greek' to 'Byzantine', an alternative form of cultural imperialism? And fifth, its author is open to theory.

For the Byzantinist a major advantage of the work is his treatment of all sixteen romances from *Digenes* to *Erotokritos*, the twelfth-century and the later romances together. He first looks at the twelfth-century background, then at the literary background which involves *Digenes Akritas* (a proto-romance?) and the genesis of the revival of the genre and thematic elements before characterising the four surviving examples. He anchors them firmly in a rhetorical poetic before turning to the later group, which he sees in terms of the formation of modern Greek literature and the vernacular experiments. He then considers in turn the 'original romances' and the translations of western romances, from the point of view of story and then narrative. A chapter on the genealogy of the romances deals with the genre's relation with the Hellenistic novel and with western romance; in another on common elements he sagely weighs the theories of Jeffreys, Spadaro and Gemert/Bakker and offers his own intertextual explanation. A final chapter considers the evidence for reception in a straightforward way, while making original use of Meliteniotes as parody. His conclusion (if there can be one in such an essentially descriptive work) is a justification of the book's status as a work of literary history.

There are many excellent things in the book. His perception of twelfth-century innovation as in many ways parallel to developments in Western Europe has been foreshadowed in other

60. B.E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances. A Literary-historical Account of their Origins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1967) 103: 'the slavish imitators of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus which were written in the twelfth century by such miserable pedants as Eustathius Macrembolites, Theodorus Prodromus and Nicetas Eugenianus, trying to write romance in what they thought was the ancient manner. Of these no account need be taken'.

works<sup>61</sup> but is crucial to his reading of the revival of the genre in Byzantium. His use of eastern story-telling parallels could perhaps have been expanded with a consideration of the frame-story in Byzantium — hagiographical collections like John Moschos' *Pratum Spirituale* may perhaps qualify. His use of the *progymnasmata* of Nikephoros Basilakes is extremely apposite and challenging to any view of the relationship between 'rhetorical' and 'other' forms of literature. His analysis of the *Ptochoprodromika* is brief but helpful, and he is as always intelligent and surefooted. There are occasional oddities of detail, as when he omits references to Magdalino on sanctity and Oikonomides on Digenes, and historians may well quibble with some of his statements: he draws here and elsewhere<sup>62</sup> a fascinating picture of the ramifications of Lemerle's 'traumatisme de Manzikert'<sup>63</sup> but after Cheynet<sup>64</sup> not all will accept his simplistic view of the military impact of that battle; his acceptance of the Clucas view<sup>65</sup> of the trial of John Italos will certainly not attract general support. But these are minor quibbles in an extremely useful volume whose relationship with the colloquium publication on the Greek Novel is helpfully highlighted. His use of theory is eclectic: Jauss to explain the phenomenon of revival; Genette for his major analysis of narrative technique; Bäuml on orality; curiously Wellek and Warren in his conclusion. Without the level of theory it might have been a similar book; it would certainly have been a less thoughtful one.

All this augurs well for the future of the study of Byzantine literature. Within a decade we have moved from disparagement

61. R. Beaton, 'Courtly Romances in Byzantium; a Case Study in Reception', *Mediterranean History Review* 4 (1989) 345-355.

62. R. Beaton, 'Cappadocians at Court: Digenes and Timarion', *Alexios I Komnenos, Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine Colloquium at Portaferry*, eds. M.E. Mullett and D.C. Smythe (Belfast, forthcoming).

63. This idea was endemic to *TM* 6 (1976), and to P. Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantin* (Paris 1977).

64. J.C. Cheynet, 'Manzikert: un désastre militaire?', *B* 50 (1980) 410-438.

65. L. Clucas, *The Trial of John Italos and the Crisis of Intellectual Values in Byzantium in the Eleventh Century* (Munich 1981); R. Browning, 'Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Past and Present* 69 (1975) 3-23.



to appreciation to criticism to theory. There may soon be a stream of literary studies of literary texts which engage, as in any other European literature, with contemporary literary theory. We may look forward to thoroughgoing Jaussian analyses of X or Derridean readings of Y.<sup>66</sup> We may also be fortunate to escape both the 'Have they caught the Cambridge Structuralist yet?' attitude of classicists<sup>67</sup> and the hysterical and highly personal tirades of pro-theory neohellenists.<sup>68</sup> But one would hope that this would mean variety, debate and opportunity rather than any narrow orthodoxy. Only if this were the prognosis would it be possible to visualise in future a true pendant to John Haldon's article in this journal on history and Robin Cormack's on art history.<sup>69</sup>

In 1986 Ihor Ševčenko made his own prophecy.<sup>70</sup> 'Everything is circular', he said. 'Art historians will go back to looking at style, literary historians will edit texts and we shall all stop talking about patronage'. Cormack's critical study answers the first statement, but the two which apply to literature perhaps need consideration. One would hope that the editing of texts will continue unabated and that naive views of patronal determinism will be refined,<sup>71</sup> but any assumption that positivism is the only way

66. S. MacAlister, 'Bakhtin's Alien Speech and Twelfth-century Romances', (abstract) *Byzantine Studies in Australia, Newsletter*, 9-10 appears to be a pioneering study.

67. Classicists have taken even more slowly to 'after the New Criticism' than they did to that approach, though I know of no published condemnation of theory, and the existence of one journal, *Arethusa*, from its first issue open to theory, is significant. Hellenists, particularly those with a wider than narrowly literary approach, have been more open than Latinists, where a watered-down New Criticism is still predominant, and students of poetic discourse have been more open than students of prose. See now though, *Poststructuralist Classics*, ed. A. Benjamin (Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature, London 1988) and *History as Text*, ed. Averil Cameron (London 1989). Stimulating general treatments are P. de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Theory and History of Literature 33 [Minneapolis 1986]) and *Against Theory. Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago and London 1985).

68. E.g. V. Lambropoulos, 'Modern Greek Studies at the Crossroads; the Paradigm Shift from Empiricism to Skepticism', *JMGS* 7 (1989) 1-39.

69. J. Haldon, '“Jargon” vs “the Facts”?: Byzantine History-Writing and Contemporary Debates', *BMGS* 9 (1984-5) 95-132; R. Cormack, '“New Art History” vs “Old History”?: Writing Art History', *BMGS* 10 (1986) 223-231.

70. Unpublished address to the XVII International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Washington 1986).

71. See my *Aristocracy and Patronage* and R. Cormack, *The Byzantine Eye: Studies in Art and Patronage* (London, Variorum 1989) esp. X.

for the future should be resisted. Cyril Mango was right in 1975 about the vital importance of literary texts to all Byzantinists. We must find a way to correct the distortion of the mirror, or we shall be left with the distortions of the mirror of material evidence. It used to be fashionable to contrast the development, and searching out, of material evidence with rereading the Bonn corpus (archaeology good, Bonn corpus bad). At a time when the interpreters of visual evidence seem so far ahead of the interpreters of literary evidence, perhaps the time has come to evolve a reading practice which will make it possible to reread (and reread) not only the Bonn corpus but Byzantine literature as a whole. Yes, There is a Text in This Class.

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