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The Historical Present Tense in Vitsentzos Kornaros' *Erotokritos*: Narratological and Philological Insight

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Abstract

The present article explores the usage of the historical present tense in the narration of the Early Modern Greek romance *Erotokritos*. Focusing on both the shape and the semantics of present indicatives designating past events in a narrative context, the analysis investigates the phenomenon from the perspective of diegetic and mimetic narrative modes and the respective discourse-pragmatic functions. First, the examination demonstrates the diegetic quality of the historical present tense in summary narratives to foreshadow cognitively salient events in the story and focalize referents important to the plot. Second, it elucidates the tense's mimetic ability in scenic narratives to create a dramatic atmosphere, and third, it illuminates the static dimension of this technique with the tendency to express mental states and psychological expressions of the protagonists. The analysis provides evidence of the use of the historical present tense as a cultivated literary device from both narratological and philological points of view, shedding new light on the diachronic development of this phenomenon.

Keywords

Early Modern Greek romance, historical present tense, diegetic-mimetic narrative mode, focalization, orality-literacy continuum

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and editors for their helpful suggestions and insightful comments that improved this article significantly. All errors and omissions in the text, if any, remain my own.

1. The present tense for past state of affairs

The term *historical present tense* (henceforth HP) denotes the use of verbs in the present tense to designate past events in oral and written narration.¹ Specifically, it is a narrative technique used in discourse as an optional replacement for the past tense with a wide range of specific textual, expressive, and metalinguistic functions at different text levels.² Narration in the present tense with a referential meaning of the past initially occurred in the oral tradition of ancient and early vernacular languages, and it continues to be used in modern literature, mass media, and present-day oral narratives.³ However, as Monika Fludernik states, “in the process of narrative development from the written codification of oral storytelling via the written composition of texts on an oral model towards a purely writerly conception of narrative structure, the shape and function of the [HP] necessarily undergo equivalent changes”,⁴ thus establishing a significant number of features and specifics for this phenomenon. Consequently, we can observe differences between oral and written patterns in the use of the HP. The oral pattern is based on dynamic tense-switching in discourse with an episodic narrative structure originating in early vernaculars. In contrast, the written pattern turns this structure into a teleological narrative and replaces the narrative episode with a series of scenes (nineteenth-century fiction and historical writings and beyond); since the nineteenth century, it has even included sustained narrative sections in the HP.⁵ Reasonably, depending on the HP's shape (switching with past tenses, creating sequences and sustained narrative sections), its function varies markedly. The HP serves to ground the plot of the story,⁶ it regulates the pace of narration either by accelerating or decelerating the plot, it serves as a means of internal evaluation,⁷ and it is also used as a means of internal focalization.⁸

1 Accordingly, this analysis does not include non-narrative uses of the present tense: the present in direct speeches, indirect questions, metanarrative passages, commentaries by the narrator and the present for expressing general truths. I am aware that an analysis conceived in this way can be perceived as fragmentary but since *Erotokritos* is an extensive work, I consider it appropriate to focus in the present article exclusively on the HP and devote to the present tense designating past events in a non-narrative context the deserved space elsewhere.

2 These functions, as listed, have been researched meticulously by Fleischman (1990, especially 118–150, 151–183, 184–217).

3 See Fludernik (1991: 365–367; 1996: 92–128).

4 Fludernik (1992: 77).

5 See *ibid.*, 77–78.

6 See Fleischman (1985).

7 See Labov – Waletzky (1967), Fleischman (1986).

8 See Fleischman (1992), Damsteegt (2005).

Although the importance of the HP for the functionality and effectiveness of narration is unquestionable, it has come closer to the centre of scholarly interest only in the past century, particularly under the influence of narratology and linguistics. The most extensive research on this narrative technique in premodern literature has been conducted on French⁹ and English literature.¹⁰ Regarding the corpus of Greek literature, the HP has been explored up to now to a significant extent in various genres of Classical literature¹¹ and in the gospels of the New Testament.¹² Similarly, there have been some studies of the HP in Modern Greek narratives,¹³ but what is almost entirely lacking are observations of the HP in Byzantine vernacular and Early Modern Greek texts.¹⁴ In an attempt to fill this gap, at least partially, this article investigates the use of the HP within the narration of the romance *Erotokritos* – a masterpiece of Cretan Renaissance literary production (mid. 14th–17th century).¹⁵

Within the Greek literary heritage, *Erotokritos* is viewed, on the one hand, as the continuation and completion of the development of the Byzantine romance¹⁶ and, on the other hand, as the starting point of the Modern Greek literary tradition. It was written at the turn of the seventeenth century (1590–1613) in the East Cretan dialect of the Greek language and consisted of 9,982 fifteen-syllable iambic verses with couplet rhyme. The story takes place in ancient Athens; however, the displayed world does not correspond to any particular historical period. The poet narrates the trials and tribulations suffered by two young lovers, Rotokritos,¹⁷ the son of an advisor to the king, and Aretousa, the king's daughter.

Although the plot of *Erotokritos* follows the principles of a chivalric romance, in its structure the work presents some particularities and features derived from other literary genres.¹⁸ Apart from lyric and epic elements, the

9 See Fleischman (1985; 1986; 1990).

10 See Richardson (1991), Fludernik (1992; 1996: 68–96).

11 For the HP in historical writings, see Lallot et al. (2011); for the HP in rhetorical works, see Nijk (2013); for the HP in dramatic plays, see Rijksbaron (2015) and Boter (2012). On the grammar of the HP in Ancient Greek, see Sicking – Stork (1997).

12 See Campbell (2007), Leung (2008), Runge (2011).

13 See Paraskevas (1994), Georgakopoulou (1997), Thoma (2011). Thoma also drew evidence from Early Modern Greek but from semi-oral narratives, which is not the case of *Erotokritos*.

14 Except for Shawcross (2009: 167–180).

15 See Alexiou (ed.) (1997).

16 Holton (1991b: 209).

17 There is a distinction in names: *Erotokritos* for the romance, Rotokritos for the protagonist.

18 For more on the discussion about the literary nature of *Erotokritos*, see Kallinis (2012) and Paschalis (2012).

presence of dramatic features is also intense. The five-part structure of the romance reflecting classical drama is also underscored by extensive dialogues and monologues.¹⁹ Moreover, although *Erotokritos* is the work of an educated poet acquainted with contemporaneous French²⁰ and Italian literary production,²¹ its direct ancestors are the late Byzantine vernacular romances and Neo-Latin literary production of the West.²² Furthermore, it displays affinities with vernacular poetry by earlier Cretan poets.²³

Based on these elements and influences, the question arises of how the HP is used in *Erotokritos*. The use of the HP in the romance is no less interesting for exploration from the perspective of the orality-literacy continuum.²⁴ For example, both of the renowned scholars Suzanne Fleischman and Monika Fludernik, while observing the diachronic development of the HP, considered as a cultivated literary HP, in contrast to its medieval ancestor, only that of nineteenth-century novels and historical writings.²⁵ But what about the time period in between (the 15th–18th centuries)? I believe that the established view of the diachronic development of the HP requires refinement; the transition from oral to cultivated literary usage of this narrative technique is likely to have been smoother. I argue that the romance *Erotokritos* could provide early seventeenth-century evidence of this transition for several reasons. For example, the HP is used in this romance in such passages as a psychological study²⁶ of the protagonists, scenes with a remarkably high degree of narrative mimesis,²⁷ and

19 Holton (1991b: 213).

20 The romance *Paris et Vienne* (1432) – the primary model for *Erotokritos* – was translated from the Provençal by Pierre de La Cépède (15th century) and delivered to Kornaros in a prosaic Italian version as *Innamoramento di Paris et Vienna*.

21 Especially with the romance *Orlando furioso* (1532) by L. Ariosto (1474–1533) and T. Tasso (1544–1595) and the poetry of F. Petrarca (1304–1374) and G. Boccaccio (1313–1375).

22 See Kaklamanis (2015: 27–29).

23 *Erotokritos* relates to the early vernacular Cretan poetry of S. Sachlikis, M. Faliros, Bergadis, and Achelis in rhyme in particular (Holton 1991a: 38).

24 For more on different aspects of the oral tradition in *Erotokritos*, however, without reference to the HP, see Holton (1990) and Roilos (2002).

25 See Fludernik (1992: 77–78), Fleischman (1990: 286–287). For more information on the diachronic development of narrative structure, including several remarks on the HP, see Fludernik (1996: 68–96).

26 Fludernik observed this feature in the medieval English romance *Floris and Blanche-flour*. For more information, see Fludernik (1996: 87).

27 Narrative mimesis is understood in terms of different modes of narrative discourse. From a cognitive point of view, it implies “an active engagement”, which means that the narrative is construed in such a way that to process it feels similar to processing immediate experience. On the other hand, diegesis implies “a distance to the story”.

masterfully organized tense-switching. Furthermore, the opinion of Monika Fludernik that the HP “seems to survive as a generic feature”²⁸ in verse narrative – without changes in diachronic development – requires revision. All in all, I argue that the HP, as used in *Erotokritos*, is relatively far from its ancestor in the Byzantine vernacular and admittedly closer to being defined as a cultivated literary rhetorical device of Early Modern Greek.

Concerning the shape of present indicatives designating past events in a narrative context, the HP is used in the romance *Erotokritos* in two ways. First, it alternates with past tenses; second, and most often, it clusters within short sequences.

2. The diegetic historical present in summary narrative

To illustrate the usage of the HP in alternation with past tenses, I would like to give an example from the first book of the romance. The following passage recounts the Athenians learning that Rotokritos is returning home from abroad to visit his sick father.

- (1) *Ἐπῆρην ὄλοι τως χαρά, μὰ πλιά ἡ καημένη μάνα
 κι ὡσάν τὸν εἶδεν, οἱ πληγῆς τοῦ λογισμοῦ τση ἐγιάνα.
 Πᾶν τὰ μαντάτα ἐδῶ κ’ ἐκεῖ, κι ἀνεβοκατεβαῖνα
 πῶς ἦρθεν ὁ Ρωτόκριτος, ὅπου ’τον εἰς τὰ ξένα·
 καὶ φέρνει ἀέρας τῆ λαλιά τούτη στὴν Ἀρετούσα·
 χαρὰ μεγάλην ἤδειξε, τ’ ἀφτιά τση ὄντε τ’ ἀκοῦσα,
 κι ἀέρας ἦτο δροσερός, στὰ σωθικά τση ἐμπῆκε,
 κουρφά-κουρφά χαираμένη περίσσα τὴν ἀφῆκε·
 κι ἀξάφνου, ὄντε τὸ γροίκησε πῶς ἦσωσε στὴ χώρα,
 ἐχλώμανε, ἐκοκίνισε χίλιες φορές τὴν ὦρα
 καὶ γιὰ νὰ μὴ γνωρίσουσιν οἱ ἄλλοι τὴ χαρὰ τση,
 μὲ σιγανάδα ἐσύρθηκε μέσα στὴν κάμερά τση. (I, 1779–1790)²⁹*

In this passage, the narrator uses two HPs, namely *πᾶν* (1781) and *φέρνει* (1783). Both provide information about the upcoming return of the main protagonist

See Nijk (2022, forthcoming). I owe my deepest gratitude to Arjan Nijk for providing me with the manuscript of his forthcoming publication (*Tense-Switching in Classical Greek: A Cognitive Approach*, Cambridge 2022).

28 Fludernik (1992: 77).

29 All the examples which illustrate the use of the HP in *Erotokritos* are from Alexiou (1997).

to the centre of events. In other words, they indicate a cognitively salient event, the narrative peak – Rotokritos' arrival. The discourse-pragmatic function of these HPs should therefore be explained as the introduction of important/new elements into the discourse³⁰ through the gradual (in respect to the addressees) repetition of semantically the same message: the first time more generally in 1781, and afterwards precisely in 1783.

To define the use of the HP as illustrated, it can be labelled the “diegetic [HP] in summary narrative” as formulated by Arjan Nijk in his comprehensive work on tense-switching in Classical Greek³¹ for two reasons. In terms of narrative movements, what can be observed is the summary, which is defined by a higher degree of abstraction and temporal compression. Moreover, it precisely mirrors Arjan Nijk's observation that “there is a minimum of concrete detail [...], and the designated event in this short piece of discourse must have taken a long time to actually occur. This mode of narrative presentation retains little of the character of immediate experience. In such context, the character of the [HP] is [...] diegetic.”³²

The analysis of the use of the HP in tense-switching reveals another discourse-pragmatic function. To demonstrate it, I would like to introduce a passage from the second book of the romance recounting the course of a jousting competition that King Iraklis organized to entertain his daughter, Princess Aretousa. The following passage describes the resolution of this competition. Although many noblemen from around the known world participate, Rotokritos is the winner.

- (2a) Ἡ σάλπιγγα, τὸ θούκινο πολλὴ βαβούρα **δίδει**,
 σημάδι πὼς ἐσκόλασε τῇ γκιόστρας τὸ παιγνίδι.
 Πολλὴ χαρὰ κι ἀμέτρητην ἤκαμε στὸ πατᾶρι
 ὁ ρήγας μὲ τὴ ρήγισσα κι ὄλοι οἱ ἀπομονάροι,
 μ' ἀπ' ὄλους τούτους σήμερον ἢ Ἀρετούσα **εἶν'** κείνη,
 ὅπου πολλὰ ἀναγάλλιασε κι ὄλο χαρὲς ἐγίνη.
 Ἐμέρωσε, ἐσυνήφερεν, ἤλαμψε ἡ ὁμορφιά της
 κ' ἐπάψαν οἱ τρομάρες τση πὺ γροίκαν ἢ καρδιά της.

30 This function of the HP has been already hinted at by Sicking – Stork (1997) and Fludernik (1992) and also resulted from the analysis by Thoma (2011: 2389).

31 A. Nijk, instead of the term *historical present*, uses a more general term, the *present for preterit* (narrative and non-narrative material); however, I have adjusted the terminology for this article by using the term *historical present* for the reasons mentioned earlier (narrative material). For more on the definition of the *present for preterit*, see Nijk (2016: 217–250, especially 220–224).

32 Nijk (2022, forthcoming).

- Τὰ θούκινα **ξαναφυσού** κ' οἱ σάλπιγγες ἐπαίξα
 κι ἀπ' ὄλους τὸ Ρωτόκριτο στὸ νίκος ἐδιαλέξα.
 (2b) Ἐπῆγε ὄμπρὸς εἰς τοῦ ρηγός, **πεζεύγει**, **γονατίζει**
 καὶ τῆ χρουσή του κεφαλῆ με τζόγια τῆ **στολίζει**.
 τῆ τζόγια ἐκείνη πιάνοντας ἡ Ἄρετῆ στῆ χέρα
στολίζει τὸν **πολυαγαπᾶ** ἐκείνη τῆν ἡμέρα. (II, 2415–2428)

In this passage, the HP occurs in both alternation with aorist forms (2a: 2415–2424) and in a sequence (2b: 2425–2428).

Let us first turn our attention to the initial part of this passage (2a). Regarding the three instances of the HP used in tense-switching, one might be inclined to believe that, especially in a verse narrative accommodating rigorous metrical and rhyming criteria, the HP could be applied simply because of formal constraints.³³ Nevertheless, as demonstrated in the previous example, the HP retains its specific semantic value and discourse-pragmatic function.

We can observe that two of the present indicatives progress the narration as illustrated in the previous example: the diegetic HP through the compression of story time introduces new referents/information into the discourse. Specifically, the present indicative *δίδει* (2415) indicates the end of the jousting competition and thus introduces the respective reaction of the audience, while the present *ξαναφυσού* (2423) indicates the election of the winner. Both of these instances foreshadow cognitively salient, climactic events in the story.³⁴ However, the diegetic HP *εἶν'* (2419) has a different function supported and underlined by the proximal time deictic *σήμερον*, focalizing Princess Aretousa in contrast to her parents and the rest of the noble audience (*ἦκαμε*).³⁵ Indeed, the princess has a unique position: she is the reason for organizing the competition, she is Rotokritos' beloved, she therefore experiences the competition most intensely, and she is the one who rewards the winner with a wreath.

To sum up, the HP in alternation with past tenses in the romance *Erotokritos* is not applied in the text structure because of formal constraints, nor is it used to

33 Especially since the last word of a line in so-called political verse must be stressed on the penultimate syllable, which might tend to privilege the present tense rather than the imperfect or aorist. This does indeed apply; more importantly, however, this analysis demonstrates that the use of the HP in *Erotokritos* is significant also in terms of semantics and narrative structure.

34 Remarkably, the narrative turns themselves, namely the end of the jousting competition (*ἐσοκλάσε*) and the election itself (*ἐδιαλέξα*), take aorist forms.

35 The claim of the narrator's subjectivity is regarded as problematic because "there is no possible way to verify whether the speaker really marked anything as memorable by using HP" (Thoma 2011: 2376).

mark narrative turns as with dynamic tense-switching in early oral narratives, but it provides two essential discourse-pragmatic functions. First, the diegetic HP foreshadows cognitively salient events in the story by introducing new referents/information into the discourse and thus progressing the plot.³⁶ Second, it provides external focalization, drawing the reader's attention to what to focus on.³⁷

3. The mimetic historical present in scenic narrative

To continue in explicating the HP's usage in short sequences, I will proceed to analyse of the second part of the above-quoted passage (2b) where a sequence of HPs following the aorist form *ἐπήγε* describes a festive moment – the incoming Rotokritos and Aretousa placing a hand-made wreath on his head. At this climactic moment in the story, the HP enhances the feeling of immediate involvement in the ceremonial event. The degree of narrative mimesis here is notable. The reader becomes acquainted with details such as Rotokritos' hair colour (*τῆ χρουσῆ του κεφαλῆ*) and Aretousa's hand (*πιάνοντας ἡ Ἄρετῆ στὴ χέρα*). Moreover, the long-awaited, joyful moment full of excitement is highlighted and foregrounded through both the repeating of the present form *στολίζει* (2426, 2428) and the speed of the action expressed by an asyndetic juxtaposition, namely *πεζεύγει, γονατίζει* (2425).³⁸

This use of the HP can be defined using another term formulated by Arjan Nijk, namely the *mimetic HP in scenic narrative*. As this passage illustrates, the scene is mainly characterized by a close relationship, possibly equality, between discourse time and story time and provides the reader with a detailed description. "In such context, we find mimetic use of [HP], which serves to highlight the present accessibility of the designated past events through the medium of a 'simulation' or 're-enactment', which is constituted by the narrative performance."³⁹

Another example of the use of the mimetic HP in scenic narrative, although with a considerably higher degree of narrative mimesis, is elucidated by the following passage describing the atmosphere before the decisive duel between Rotokritos and the Vlach champion Aristos:

36 Further evidence of this is provided, for example, by: I, 47–48; I, 1763–1764; II, 2369–2372; III, 937–938; IV, 569–570; V, 311–314.

37 Further evidence of this is provided, for example, by: I, 1309–1310; I, 2071–2072; III, 541–544; IV, 767–770; IV, 1093–1098; V, 1167–1168.

38 The HP *πολυαγαπᾷ* has nor diegetic neither mimetic function but a static dimension which is discussed below in detail.

39 Nijk (2022, forthcoming).

- (3) *Σήμερο πολεμούσινε, σήμερο ἐκαλεστῆκα*
 δυὸ παλληκάρια ὀποῦ στή γῆ ταίρι τως δὲν ἀφῆκα·
 κι ὡς ἐγροικῆσαν κ' ἤπαιξεν ἡ σάλπιγγα ἡ πρώτη,
 ἐσείστη κ' ἐλυγίστηκεν ἡ ὄμορφῆ τως νιότη.
 Στὴ μια μερὰ ἤστεκεν ὁ γεῖς, στὴν ἄλλη ἄλλος τοῦ κάμπου,
χιλιμιντρίζουν τὰ φαριά, καὶ τ' ἄρματά τως **λάμπου**·
κτυποῦν τὰ πόδια τως στή γῆ, τὴ σκόνη **ἀνασηκῶνου**,
 τὸ τρέξιμον **ἀναζητοῦν**, **ἀφρίζου** καὶ **δριμώνου**.
 Ἡ γλώσσα μὲς τὸ στόμα τως **παίζει** τὸ χαλινάρι,
 τό 'να καὶ τ' ἄλλο **ἀγριεύετο** σὰν κάνει τὸ λιοντάρι·
 τ' ἀρθούνια τως **καπνίζουσι**, συχνιὰ τ' ἀφτιά **σαλεύγου**
 καὶ νὰ κινήσου βιάζονται, νὰ τρέξουσι γυρεύγου.
 Ἡ σάλπιγγα **ἐδευτέρωσε** τῆ μάχης τὸ σημάδι
 κ' **ἐφάνιστή** σου ὁ Θάνατος τήνε **φυσᾶ** στὸν Ἄδη,
 κ' ἤτονε Χάρος ἡ λαλιά, ἡ ἀντιλαλιά ὄλον αἶμα,
 ποὺ **ἀναδακρῶσα** οἱ βασιλιοὶ καὶ τὰ φουσατά **ἐτρέμα**. (IV, 1647–1662)

This passage does not present a description of a fight scene full of action, but the last calm moments before it starts – the so-called silence before the storm; however, the intense tension achieved by the use of the HP here is so impressive that it could possibly be compared to the narration at the highest point of action. After the diegetic HP *πολεμούσινε* emphasized by the proximal time deictic *σήμερο*⁴⁰ pointing out the upcoming crucial duel, two sequences of HPs can be observed: first *χιλιμιντρίζουν*, *λάμπου*, *κτυποῦν*, *ἀνασηκῶνου*, *ἀναζητοῦν*, *ἀφρίζου*, *δριμώνου* (1652–1655); and second *καπνίζουσι*, *σαλεύγου*, *βιάζονται*, *γυρεύγου* (1657–1658).

Throughout these two sequences, the object of the narration is the same: the warrior's horses.⁴¹ By using the HP, the narrator decelerates the pace of narration and describes the scene in such detail that it gives the reader the impression of being an eyewitness to that scene;⁴² the reader becomes acquainted with

40 The deictic is applied in the line twice; unlike its first use in combination with a present form, its second use is followed by the aorist form *ἐκαλεστῆκα*. This can be explained in terms of “multiple viewpoint construction”, and “past + now construction”. For more information on this topic, see Nikiforidou (2010) and Sweetser (2013).

41 Except for the HP referring to the warrior's weapons: *τ' ἄρματά τως λάμπου* (1652).

42 This consents with the established observation on the HP as introduced in Holton et al. (2019: IV, 1933): “In the absence of a present perfective paradigm, formally imperfective present indicatives are used to comment on events taking place sequentially before the speaker's/hearer's eyes (e.g., *the emperor arrives, takes his seat and*

particularities such as τὴ σκόνῃ, ἡ γλώσσα, τὸ χαλινάρι, τ' ἄρθούνια, and τ' ἀφτιά. The deceleration of the pace of narration is palpable also in the description of horses' impatience, which is expressed by the cumulation of semantically related verbs creating a tension, namely ἀναζητοῦν, ἀφρίζου and δριμώνου (1654). The last instance of the HP (φυσᾶ) in this passage has the diegetic function.

As illustrated, the mimetic HP acquires the properties of what Fleischman labels the "visualizing present"⁴³ with the effect of evoking tension and enhancing the dramatic atmosphere. Nevertheless, note that in contrast to the diegetic HP as illustrated in the previous example (2a), where the trumpet blowing expressed by the HPs δίδει (2415) and ξαναφυσοῦ (2423) signalled a succession of important events, here the same action is backgrounded by the aorist forms ἤπαιξεν (1649) and ἐδευτέρωσε (1659) in order to foreground the scene. In my opinion, this provides evidence of a balanced distribution of narrative material.

One representative, although slightly different example of the mimetic HP to visualize the scene is the moment describing the very highest point of the fight between Rotokritos and Aristos:

- (4) **Ράσσου, ξαναγκαλιάζονται, ξανακτυποῦσι** πάλι
καὶ γεῖς τὸν ἄλλον ἤπασκε χάμαι στὴ γῆ νὰ θάλῃ.
Κατακτυποῦν τὰ σίδερα, τσι σάρκες τως **πληγώνου,**
στέκου οἱ ρηγάδες καὶ **θωροῦ, πονοῦν** κι **ἀναδακρῶν**ου.
Ἦσυρεν ὁ Ρωτόκριτος τὸν Ἄριστον ὀμπρός του
κ' ἐκεῖνος θεληματικῶς **σιμῶνει** μοναχός του
καὶ μὲ τὸ τραβοπάλεμα, ἀγκαλιασμένοι **ἐπέσα,**
τρέχει τὸ αἷμα ποταμὸς ἀπ' τὲς πληγές τως μέσα·
παραγλιστρᾶ ὁ Ρωτόκριτος, πέτρα τὸν **πεδουκλώνει**
κι Ἄριστος ἀποπάνω του **βαρίσκει** καὶ **λαβῶνει.**
παρὰ ποτὲ ὁ Ρωτόκριτος τὴ δύναμη **μαζῶνει**
τ' Ἄριστου **δίδει** κοπανιά, γιὰ πάντα τότε **σῶνει.** (IV, 1859–1870)

Except for the three aorist forms, namely ἤπασκε (1860), ἤσυρεν (1863), and ἐπέσα (1865), the entire passage is reported in the HP and, as in the previous passage, the mimetic HP also provides the function of visualizing the scene, although it creates a different impression. In the previous example (3), the

nods to his officials). [...] This type of 'historic' present is chiefly apparent in narrative texts, where it converts an account of past events into just such an eyewitness commentary."

43 See Fleischman (1990: 23–25).

sequences of the HPs achieve a dramatic effect through the description of a static scene and one element (horses) exclusively, whereas in this instance the narration in the mimetic HP describes a dynamic scene and several elements, namely *Rotokritos*, *Aristos*, and both of the kings. Reasonably, the question of focalization enters the discussion again, specifically of experiencing focalization, when “the narrator creates an eyewitness effect and increases the emotional effect of the fatal episode on the narratees”.⁴⁴

It is equally important that this passage is part of a long strand of scenes and summaries in the HP (IV, 1629–1888) recounting the plot, primarily although not exclusively in the HP. It resembles the above-quoted definition of the cultivated HP of nineteenth-century writings describing texts in which “the entire narrative or (a series of chapters, or strand of scenes) is related in the present tense as the basic narrative tempus”.⁴⁵

To recapitulate, the analysis of the use of the HP in short sequences revealed the significance of its mimetic quality in scenic narratives in particular. The analysis of passages (2b), (3), and (4) leads us to the conclusion that the HP in the narration of *Erotokritos* in scenic narratives serves as the means of experiencing focalization, providing a stunning visualization of the story with the effect of creating and amplifying the dramatic atmosphere varying from tense to exciting.⁴⁶ The observations on the mimetic HP in scenic narratives could also suggest one of the possible answers to the Panagiotis Roilos’ question, which he poses when investigating some aspects of the multifaceted interrelationship between orality and literacy in *Erotokritos*: “Which were the textual and extratextual conditions that, despite the *Erotokritos*’ composition as a greatly sophisticated and complex written text, enabled its appropriation by illiterate people and its subsequent assimilation by traditional oral poetry?”⁴⁷ In my opinion, one of the textual conditions could be provided by the mimetic potential of the HP with the effect of visualizing narration, thus involving mentally the addressees into the story world.

4. The static historical present

Lastly, one other specific use of the HP can be constantly observed in *Erotokritos*. From a semantic point of view, the verbs of perception, thinking, and emotion

44 de Jong (2014: 67–68).

45 Fludernik (1992: 78).

46 Further evidence of this is provided, for example, by: I, 1427–1432; I, 1935–1940; II, 2281–2288; IV, 1581–1586; IV, 1919–1925; V, 1379–1384.

47 Roilos (2002: 219).

constitute, by clustering into particular sequences, this important semantic component of the narration in the HP. This kind of narration mediates the states of mind and psychological expression of the protagonists, as illustrated by the following example:

- (5) Ἔτοιαις λογῆς ἡ πεθυμιά κι ὁ πόθος τοὺς **πειράζει**,
 πού τ' ἄσπρο μαῦρο **λέσινε**, τὸ δροσερό πὼς βράζει·
δὲ γνώθουσι τῇ διαφορὰν, ὅπου ἔναι πλιά παρ' ἄλλη,
 ἀπὸ ἓνα δουλευτῆ μικρὸ σὲ μιὰ κερά μεγάλη,
 μὰ **λογαριάζου** προξενιά τοῦ ἀφέντη νὰ μηνύσου,
 νὰ πὰ νὰ ξάψουν τῇ φωτιά πού **πάσκουσι** νὰ σθῆσου.
 Ἡ Ἄρετούσα τὸ **κινᾷ** κι ὁ Ρώκριτος τὸ **πιάνει**
 καὶ τοῦ Κυροῦ του νὰ τὸ πῆ στὸ λογισμό τοῦ **θάνει**. (III, 701–708)

In this passage, the *static HP*⁴⁸ functions as a means of internal focalization, specifically of explicit embedded focalization, where “a primary narrator-focalizer embeds the focalization of a character in his narrator-text, recounting what that character is seeing, feeling, or thinking, without turning him into a secondary narrator-focalizer (who would voice his own focalization in a speech)”.⁴⁹ In addition to the poetic language and metaphorical expressions, it is noticeably the use of the HP that draws the reader's attention to the complex inner world of the protagonists, as the following two passages illustrate:

- (6) Τοῦτα ν' ἀκούη ἡ Ἄρετή, ἔσειε τὴν κεφαλὴ τση
 καὶ **λέγει**, ἐκεῖνο τὸ **γροικᾷ**, **κάνει** το μοναχὴ τση·
 καὶ τση Φροσύνης τῇ βουλὴ πλιὸ δὲν τήνε γυρεύγει,
 τὸν Ἔρωτα **ἔχει** δάσκαλο κ' ἐκεῖνος τσ' **ἀρμηνεύγει**. (III, 1121–1124)
- (7) Πολλὰ ἐπεθύμα ἡ Ἄρετή ἡ μέρα νὰ περάση
 καὶ νὰ ῥθη ἡ νύκτα νὰ τσ' εὐρῆ, τὸ γάμο να συμβάση·
 ἐδέτσι κι ὁ Ρωτόκριτος, **πληθαίνει** ἡ πεθυμιά του
 νὰ τῆς μιλήση, νὰ τῆς πῆ γιὰ τὰ ξορίσματά του.
 Μὰ τῇ βουλὴ τῆς Ἄρετῆς ἀκόμη **δὲν κατέχει**,
 πολλὰ **φοβάται** καὶ **δειλιᾷ**, κ' ἔγνοια μεγάλην **ἔχει**·
λογιάζει πὼς σὰν ξοριστῆ, **λογιάζει**, σὰ μακρύνη,
 νὰ πιάση ἡ Ἄρετῆ νερό, νὰ σθῆσει τὸ καμίνι. (III, 1337–1344)

48 I have adopted this term as introduced by Fludernik (1996: 87).

49 de Jong (2014: 50).

As the examples illustrate, the static HP significantly assists the narrator in acquainting the reader with the constantly turbulent psychological motivations of the two protagonists,⁵⁰ Rotokritos and Aretousa, who are vigorously seeking a solution to the matter of unfortunately falling in love – one of the central themes of the work. Although primarily through the dialogues and monologues, the characters' psychological development is depicted via the entire range of emotions, it is also narration in the HP that significantly emphasizes the psychological aspect of the romance.⁵¹ Accordingly, my claim is that the HP used to describe psychological expression provides an ingenious poetic device, which the author uses to innovate and elevate the aesthetic qualities and ideological message of a Medieval Greek romance. In David Holton's words, "Kornaros has made substantial changes not only in the order of events, but he has altered the whole ethos of the medieval romance of courtly love to suit his Renaissance conception of society and morality [...] he has adapted the story to the thought-world of the Renaissance, enabling his characters to function credibly and dynamically and imbuing his poem with elements of humanistic enquiry, scientific interest in natural phenomena, and a penetrating analysis of the states of mind of the protagonists".⁵²

To summarize, in the narration of the romance *Erotokritos*, the following types of the HP can be recognized:

- a) the *diegetic HP in summary narrative* as a means of plot progression and external focalization,
- b) the *mimetic HP in scenic narrative* as a means of experiencing focalization and visualization of the scene, and
- c) the *static HP* as a means of explicit embedded focalization for describing the state of mind and psychological expression of the protagonists.

Conclusion

The investigation of the use of the HP in the narration of the romance *Erotokritos* leads me to the following conclusions. First, an analysis of the HP in alternation with past tenses revealed that the use of the HP in Vitsentzos Kornaros' work

50 Equally important is the use of the HP to describe the thoughts and feelings of their counterparts, Polydoros and Frosyni, as well as King Iraklis and Rotokritos' father, Pezostratos.

51 Further evidence of this is provided, for example, by: I, 451–454; I, 1959–1968; II, 2385–2386; III, 633–636; V, 451–452; V, 741–746.

52 Holton (1991b: 212–213).

does not copy the oral use of the HP as originated in early vernaculars to mark mainly narrative turns, nor is it applied in text structures primarily because of formal constraints. As a device of diegesis, it provides two irreplaceable discourse-pragmatic functions, namely plot progression and external focalization.

Second, the HP takes on a new feature regarding the degree of mimesis in a scenic narrative that excels in the degree of visualization of the described scene full of breathtaking details and dynamics. Moreover, the quality of the mimetic HP in the romance takes on a new dimension when it constitutes strands of scenes and thus assists in transforming the medieval episodic narrative into cohesive one. Thereby, it resembles to some extent its cultivated literary descendant of the modern period.

Third, the narrator, by using the HP to describe details of the story world, not only transfers readers into the scene of the spectacular events, thus allowing them to experience the dramatic atmosphere, but also invites them “behind the scenes”, particularly into the inner world of the protagonists – the plot core – where it all began. This is evident from the semantics of the particular sequences, which regularly represent the protagonists’ emotional and psychological expression from the narrator’s point of view to present to (not only) Cretan society of that time the conscious spirit of Renaissance humanism.

Finally, the use of the HP in the narration of the romance *Erotokritos* by no means represents merely a generic feature of the verse narrative. On the contrary, in the way it is applied, this narrative technique is in several respects unprecedented and extraordinarily innovative, and in terms of the orality–literacy continuum these findings are consistent with the overall picture of textual language as dialectal but cultivated literary.

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