



You have downloaded a document from  
**RE-BUS**  
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

**Title:** Of false philosophers and inept teachers: Theodore Prodromos' satirical writings (with a translation of the poem Against the old man with a long beard)

**Author:** Przemysław Marciniak

**Citation style:** Marciniak Przemysław. (2020). Of false philosophers and inept teachers: Theodore Prodromos' satirical writings (with a translation of the poem Against the old man with a long beard). "Byzantina Symmeikta" (T. 30 (2020), s. 131-148), doi 10.12681/byzsym.20889



Uznanie autorstwa - Użycie niekomercyjne - Na tych samych warunkach - Licencja ta pozwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie w celach niekomercyjnych oraz tak długo jak utwory zależne będą również obejmowane tą samą licencją.



UNIwersYTET ŚLĄSKI  
W KATOWICACH



Biblioteka  
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Ministerstwo Nauki  
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

## Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα

Τομ. 30



**Of false philosophers and inept teachers: Theodore Prodromos' satirical writings (with a translation of the poem Against the old man with a long beard).**

MARCINIAK Przemyslaw

<https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.20889>

Copyright © 2020 Przemyslaw T. Marciniak



### To cite this article:

MARCINIAK, P. (2020). Of false philosophers and inept teachers: Theodore Prodromos' satirical writings (with a translation of the poem Against the old man with a long beard).. *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα*, 30, 131-148.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.20889>

INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
SECTION OF BYZANTINE RESEARCH  
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION



ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ



# BYZANTINA ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA

ΤΟΜΟΣ 30 VOLUME

PRZEMYSŁAW MARCINIAK

OF FALSE PHILOSOPHERS AND INEPT TEACHERS:  
THEODORE PRODROMOS' SATIRICAL WRITINGS

ΑΘΗΝΑ • 2020 • ATHENS

PRZEMYSŁAW MARCINIAK

OF FALSE PHILOSOPHERS AND INEPT TEACHERS:  
THEODORE PRODROMOS' SATIRICAL WRITINGS  
(with a translation of the poem *Against the old man with a long beard*)\*

Theodore Prodromos, an ingenious 12th century writer, has been referred to as “the Byzantine Lucian”<sup>1</sup>. However, this compliment only partially reflects Prodromos' literary activities, as he authored far more than merely satires, which were only a fraction of his oeuvre<sup>2</sup>. Some of his works were created in connection with his educational undertakings, and this could come in the form of literary exercises for his students (e.g. the *Κατομνομαχία*, *Βίων προᾶσις* [*Sale of Lives*], schedē)<sup>3</sup> or texts meant to advertise and perhaps even defend Prodromos' teaching methods (e.g. the *Ἀμαθής*, *Φιλοπλάτων*). The poem *Κατὰ μακρογενείου γέροντος* (*Against the old man with a long beard*,

---

\* This text has been written as part of the National Center for Science Project UMO – 2013 /10/E/ HS 2/00170. I am deeply grateful to anonymous reviewers for their remarks and corrections.

1. A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge 2008, 251 and 258.

2. A full list of Prodromos' works can be found in W. HÖRANDNER (ed.), *Theodoros Prodromos, Historische Gedichte* (WBS 11), Vienna 1974, 37-78. On the comic elements in the 12th century literary production see K. ΧΡΥΣΟΓΕΛΟΣ, *Κωμική Λογοτεχνία και γέλιο του 12ο αιώνα: η περίπτωση του Κωνσταντίνου Μανασσή*, *ΒυζΣυμ* 26 (2016), mainly 141-144.

3. On the *Κατομνομαχία* see recently P. MARCINIAK – K. WARCABA, *Katomyomachia* as a Byzantine version of mock-epic, in *Middle and Late Byzantine Poetry: Text and Context*, ed. A. RHOBY – N. ZAGKLAS, Turnhout 2018, 97-110; on the *Sale of Lives* (*Βίων προᾶσις*), P. MARCINIAK, *Theodore Prodromos' Bion Prasis – a Reappraisal*, *GRBS* 53.1 (2013), 219-231; on Prodromic schedē see P. A. AGAPITOS, *New Genres in the Twelfth Century: The Schedourgia of Theodore Prodromos*, *Medioevo Greco* 15 (2015), 1-41.

as it is usually referred to), which is translated in the appendix, belongs to the latter group. It shares its purpose with, and evokes the same literary motifs and traditions as other, hitherto unstudied, works by Prodrornos, such as the *Ἀμαθής*, and the *Φιλοπλάτων*. The main focus of this contribution will thus be on two interconnected issues – a competition between *γραμματικοί*, and an ensuing *ὑπόκρισις*, i.e. pretending to be somebody else.

The poem *Against the old man* draws heavily on Lucianic imagery – perhaps most importantly, it should be noted how the self-proclaimed philosopher is contrasted with Menippos, who himself performed the role of “a self-parodic preacher making fun of supernatural attempts to get at the truth”<sup>4</sup>. Menippos, a character from Lucianic texts (vv. 25-26), might forcibly cut both the beard and the lifted eyebrows of the impostor. This imagery serves several purposes simultaneously. To begin with, when taken in tandem with the reference to Thoukritos as the symbol of old age, it roots the text in the Lucianic tradition, and more specifically the tradition of anti-(pseudo)philosophical discourse<sup>5</sup>. Such discourse has a long tradition, and was also popular with the Latin authors of the Imperial age such as Fronto, Gellius, and Apuleius. Additionally, as with Prodrornos, the figure of the false philosopher in their writings symbolized a general concern of their age, “a deep concern about the prevalence of teachers who engaged in higher education without displaying any inclinations or qualities relevant for those who should be an intellectual and moral example to their pupils”<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the reference to Menippos also dictates the tone of the text, which could be read as a “Menippean satire” – as Northrop Frye has noted: “The Menippean satire deals less with people as such than with mental

4. J. C. RELIHAN, Vainglorious Menippus in Lucian’s “Dialogues of the Dead”, *Illinois Classical Studies* 12.1 (1987), 189.

5. On Lucian’s relationship with philosophy and philosophers see M. CASTER, *Lucien et la pensée religieuse de son temps*, Paris, 1937, 9-122; see also G. ANDERSON, *Lucian. Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic*, Leiden 1976, 113-135; C. P. JONES, *Culture and Society in Lucian*, Cambridge, Mass. 1986, 24-32. In a forthcoming paper, Nikos Zagklas argues that the students of this poem tend to overlook the influence of the epigrammatic tradition on the text, see N. ZAGKLAS, Satire in the Komnenian Period: Poetry, Intellectualism, and the Ancients, in *Byzantine Satire and Parody*, ed. P. MARCINIAK – I. NILSSON (forthcoming).

6. W. KEULEN, Gellius, Apuleius, and Satire on the Intellectual, in *The World of Aulus Gellius*, ed. L. HOLFORD-STREVENSON – A. VARDI, Oxford 2005, 230.

attitudes”<sup>7</sup>. Thus, Prodrornos’ text becomes a mixture of both social and intellectual satire. It addresses both a real social problem facing his times (a surplus of teachers vying for the attention of potential students)<sup>8</sup> and also highlights the problem of intellectual frauds, who twist the definitions of wisdom, rhetoric, and philosophy. Prodrornos thus (re)creates a Lucianic world populated by frauds, false prophets and charlatans, which mirrors his own concerns as a twelfth century *γραμματικός*.

This short work is usually paired with a second verse invective authored by Prodrornos, *Κατὰ φιλοπόρονου γραός* (*Against an old lustful woman*)<sup>9</sup>. While these two texts bear some similarities on the level of diction (e.g. the use of the Lucianic figure of Thoukritos), their purposes appear to be rather different. While the invective against the old hag looks like yet another *réécriture* of the old literary *τόποι* that can be found in ancient Greek poetry<sup>10</sup>, the poem against an old man is a form of Prodrornos’ educational manifesto, in which he both defends his teaching method and attacks the false philosophers and *γραμματικοί*<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, while the poem against the old crone is indeed a collection of invectives taken from ancient Greek poetry, comedy and the epigrammatic tradition, the other work is built on a completely different principle. Instead of merely piling up abuses, Prodrornos collects anecdotes and comparisons, and these ultimately serve the purpose of extolling his own knowledge, rather than simply ridiculing the opponent. Therefore, the poem can be surmised to be closer to two other satirical works by Prodrornos: the *Lover of Plato or the leather tanner* (the *Φιλοπλάτων ἢ Σκυτοδέψης*) and the *Uneducated man, or the false grammarian* (the *Ἀμαθής ἢ παρὰ ἑαυτῷ γραμματικός*). In the *Φιλοπλάτων*, Prodrornos’ monologue opens with lavish praise of Plato, who seemingly has but one flaw: he was not gifted with attributes of a non-existent tenth Muse

7. N. FRYE, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton 1971, 309.

8. On such competition between teachers in the 11th century see F. BERNARD, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry 1025-1081*, Oxford 2014.

9. On this text see P. MARCINIAK, Prodrornos, Aristophanes and a lustful woman. A Byzantine satire by Theodore Prodrornos, *ByzSlav* 73 (2015), 23-33.

10. See for instance J. HENDERSON, Older Women in Attic Old Comedy, *TAPA* 117 (1987), 105-129.

11. See J. KUCHARSKI - P. MARCINIAK, The Beard and its Philosopher. Theodore Prodrornos on philosophic beards in Byzantium, *BMGS* 41.1 (2017), 9-10.

described as *ἐμπνευσίλογος*<sup>12</sup>. This is a *ἄπαξ λεγόμενον*, which can be roughly translated as “the one who is the inspiration for reason/thinking”. This obscure passage might in fact hold the key to the interpretation of this piece – even Plato, *quia* his works, does not have the power to breathe inspiration and knowledge into a person who has just begun to read them (*οὐ μὴν καὶ γνῶσιν ἐμπνέειν ἔλαχες τοῖς ἐκ πρώτης, ὃ φασιν, ἀφετηρίας πελάσασί σου ταῖς βίβλοις*). This is the Prodrōmos *γραμματικός* speaking – everyone needs proper guidance, and a proper teacher. What follows is a stinging attack on a person who claims to be well-versed in Platonic philosophy but, in fact, knows nothing about it. At the same time, it is also a warning against being misled by a bad teacher: *Εἶτα ἵνα σε, Πλάτων, παραλιπὼν ἐπὶ τὸν ὑβριστὴν σου τῆς βίβλου τράπωμαι, καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀποτενοῦμαι τὸν λόγον. [...] Οὐ παραπαίεις εὖ μάλα οὐδὲ μελαγχολᾷς, ἀνθρώπων ἀπάντων ταλαιπωρώτατος, εἰ παντάπασιν ἀμελετήτως ἔχων μὴ ὅτι γε τῆς κατὰ Πλάτωνα φάναι φιλοσοφίας [...] ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς κατὰ προσωδίαν αὐτῆς ἀναγνώσεως καὶ οὐδὲ ταύτης τῆς ἐντριβῆς*<sup>13</sup>.

However, the *Φιλοπλάτων* is much richer in sophisticated abuses than the poem *Against the old man*. The self-proclaimed specialist in Plato’s philosophy is called the ass of Cumae (*κυμαῖος ὄνος*), rural Praxiteles (lit. Praxiteles from barley, *κρίθινος Πραξιτέλης*), and Mud-Plato (*Πηλοπλάτων*). However, all these invectives are elaborated allusions to fables, Lucianic texts or other literary sources. For example, “rural Praxiteles” alludes both to the famous sculptor and the phrase *κρίθινος Δημοσθένης* (Herm. *Id.* 2.11), the ass of Cumae refers to the proverbial story from Lucian’s *The Fisher* (c. 32) wherein the ass pretends to be a lion. The nickname “Mud-Plato” was given to a Greek rhetorician, Alexander of Seleukia (Philostr. *VS* 2.5.1). According to tradition, one of his listeners is supposed to have said that after Alexander’s speech, instead of Plato he found *πηλός* (mud).

12. *LBGr*, s.v.: Denken einhauchend.

13. (“So, having left you, Plato, aside, I will turn to this person who offended your book and my speech will be directed to him. [...] Aren’t you completely crazy and insane, the most wretched of all people since, as an ignorant, you are obviously not capable of discussing Plato’s philosophy [...] but as far as I can see you cannot even read it aloud properly). If not stated otherwise, the translations are my own (ed. T. MIGLIORINI, *Gli scritti satirici in greco letterario di Teodoro Prodromo: Introduzione, edizione, traduzione e commento*, Pisa 2010, 69).

Therefore, the *Φιλοπλάτων* creates the impression that its main purpose is not to denigrate the pseudo-specialist but to rather demonstrate Theodore Prodromos' knowledge and promote him as the true (and better) teacher of Plato's philosophy. Perhaps the list of philosophers mentioned in the *Against the old man* also has a deeper purpose. Not only does it refer to real philosophers who did not need an extravagant beard to be called wise (such as Plato, Aristotle, Empedokles, Pythagoras, and Socrates)<sup>14</sup>, it also announces Prodromos' own versatility when it comes to teaching philosophy.

What is even clearer is how Prodromos expresses his programmatic educational statements in the *Ἀμαθής*<sup>15</sup>. This work is directed against a (false) *γραμματικός*, who is apparently lacking the necessary basic scholarly competencies required to teach. However, instead of simply hurling invective against the *γραμματικός*, Prodromos delineates what looks to be a part of the *curriculum studiorum*<sup>16</sup>. Prodromos' list includes a discussion regarding the definition(s) of grammar (or more precisely, a division between elementary and advanced) and their relationship to both *ἐμπειρία* and *τέχνη*. His arguments go back to Plato and Aristotle (who are both mentioned by Prodromos), but he also alludes to the works of Dionysios the Thrax and

---

14. It would be tempting to conclude that this list is arranged according to some criteria such as Prodromos' personal preference or the importance of the philosophers mentioned in the poem.

15. Prodromos also reveals both his educational methods and the content of his teaching in other texts, see N. ZAGKLAS, *Theodore Prodromos: The Neglected Poems and Epigrams. Edition, Translation and Commentary*, Vienna 2014, unpublished PhD thesis, 75 and passim.

16. On Byzantine "secondary education" and the content of teaching see S. EFTHYMIADIS, *L'enseignement secondaire à Constantinople pendant les XI e et XII e siècles: Modèle éducatif pour la Terre d'Otrante au XIIIe siècle*, *Νέα Πώμη* 2 (2005) 259-275; A. ΜΑΡΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *De la structure de l'école byzantine. Le maître, les livres et le processus éducatif*, in *Lire et écrire à Byzance*, ed. B. MONDRAIN, Paris 2006, 85-96, and IDEM, *Teachers and Textbooks in Byzantium, Ninth to Eleventh Centuries*, in *Networks of Learning. Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c. 1000-1200*, S. STECKEL et al., Zürich-Münster 2014, 3-15; A. ΓΙΑΝΝΟΥΛΙ, *Education and Literary Language in Byzantium*, in *The Language of Byzantine Learned Literature*, ed. M. HINTERBERGER, Turnhout 2014, 52-71. For a brief survey of "higher education" see A. ΜΑΡΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *In search of 'Higher Education' in Byzantium*, *ZRVI* 50 (2013), 29-44.



Philo of Alexandria<sup>17</sup>. Next, he moves on to the issues of etymology, by criticizing a way of teaching it: the self-proclaimed grammarian, arguably following some unmentioned ancient authority, explains the name Xenophon as “the one who was killed in foreign lands”<sup>18</sup>. Finally, Prodrōmos discusses *σύγκρισις* (here exemplified by the comparison between Homer and Hesiod). This is, however, by no means a random list: Prodrōmos, under the guise of an insult, demonstrates to the listener/reader the whole array of his teachings – this starts from the basics (what is grammar? how should teaching therefore be structured?) to linguistic issues, and finally to a discussion of the poets (what is earlier described as advanced grammar) and more specifically to the *σύγκρισις* being one of the *προγυμνάσματα*. Similar to the *Φιλοπλάτων*, the entire text is an educational manifesto that is designed to display Prodrōmos’ knowledge and educational programme.

All three texts, albeit different in form, tackle the same topic – education – and all of them also contain an elaborated insult. However, it might be naïve for us to believe that the antagonists: a false philosopher, a self-proclaimed *γραμματικός*, and an incompetent teacher of Plato, might have been real people. Jean François Boissonade, in his edition of the poem *Against the old man*, went as far as to suggest that the name of the false philosopher was Thoukritos<sup>19</sup>. While it cannot be excluded that the literary protagonists had some real-life counterparts, or were inspired by real people at the very least, it is equally possible to surmise that they were just figments of Prodrōmos’ imagination. In the 11th century, some of the invective poems penned by literati and *γραμματικοὶ* provide testimony for what is called *λογικοὶ ἀγῶνες*. These formalised contests were supposed to showcase the skills of both students, and of teachers who hoped to attract pupils<sup>20</sup>. I argue that the satirical/education texts by Prodrōmos do not reflect real contests (or any formalised rivalry) between teachers. They are rather imaginary

17. On the ancient definitions of the art of grammar see M. SEPPÄNEN, *Defining the art of grammar: Ancient perceptions of γραμματική and grammatica*, Turku 2014 (unpublished doctoral thesis).

18. On the etymology of the name Xenophon see *Etymologicum Gudianum*, s.v. *Ξενοφῶν*, ὁ ἐν τοῖς ξένοις νήφων, τουτ’ ἔστιν εὐχόμενος ἢ ὁ ἐν τοῖς ξένοις τόποις φονευόμενος. Perhaps Prodrōmos mocks such a naïve, but popular, explanation.

19. *Anecdota Graeca*, v. 4, ed. J. Fr. BOISSONADE, Paris 1832, 430.

20. BERNARD, *Writing and Reading*, esp. 253-290.

*ἀγῶνες*, where the opponent is not of importance, and most likely does not exist at all, but rather this is an opportunity to display the author's knowledge and underscore the attractiveness of his teaching programme that needs highlighting. In a highly competitive society, such a presentation of the teacher, his offer and his competences could be construed as more attractive and convincing.

#### A LIFE AMONGST ΥΠΟΚΡΙΤΑΙ

One of the recurring themes in some of the Prodromic works is *ὑπόκρισις*, which is understood as 'pretending' and 'mimicry'. These also occur, while not immediately connected to his activities as a teacher, in works such as *Against an old woman*. Similar to Lucian, Prodromos often explores what it means to 'imitate' and 'to lie'. Lucianic preoccupation with mimicry and pretending goes as far as to draw attention to 'the artificiality of his own first-person voice'<sup>21</sup>. In a prose treatise 'On those who blaspheme against Providence on account of poverty', Prodromos explores this topic by describing how certain appearances can be deceitful (PG 133, 1296). He concludes by stating: Ὅρας ὡς ὑποκρίσει ζῶμεν ἄνθρωποι τὰ πολλά· καὶ πλανώμεθα περὶ τὸν ὄνον τῆ λεοντικῆ καὶ τῆ νυμφικῆ στολῆ περὶ τὴν γαλῆν. [...] οὕτω σκηνὴ βαθεῖα περὶ ἡμᾶς καὶ παίζομεν ἑαυτοὺς καὶ παιζόμεθα<sup>22</sup>.

This is more than just a worn-out metaphor of life being parallel to a stage<sup>23</sup>. Rather, this is a programmatic statement, which Prodromos

21. J. KÖNIG, *Greek Literature in the Roman Empire*, London, 2009, 40.

22. ("See how we people for the most part live in hypocrisy. And we are deceived by the ass disguised as a lion and the weasel disguised as a bride. [...] In this way we are on the big stage and we put on a performance for others and we are played").

23. Such imagery is to be found previously in Epictet's *Ἐγχειρίδιον* 17: Μέννησο ὅτι ὑποκριτῆς εἶ δράματος οἶον ἂν θέλῃ ὁ διδάσκαλος. ἂν βραχύ, βραχέος ἂν μακρόν, μακροῦ ἂν πτωχὸν ὑποκρίνασθαι σε θέλῃ, ἵνα καὶ τοῦτον εὐφυῶς ὑποκρίνη ἂν χολόν, ἂν ἄρχοντα, ἂν ιδιώτην. σὸν γὰρ τοῦτ' ἔστι, τὸ δοθὲν πρόσωπον ὑποκρίνασθαι καλῶς. (Remember that you are an actor in a play, which is decided by its producer: if short, [it will be] short; if long, [it will be] long. If he wants you to perform as a beggar, so you perform even that in a skillful manner, as with a cripple, a ruler or a citizen. Because this is what you should do: to perform the role that is given to you well.) In the later period, this imagery was extensively used by Theodore Metochites, see W. PUCHNER, *Greek Theatre Between Antiquity*

consequently develops, especially, but not exclusively, in his writings categorised as satirical.

Prodromos' description of social interactions based on theatrical imagery is also reminiscent of Edwin Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, which was later adopted and developed by other scholars<sup>24</sup>. According to this model, social interactions are understood in terms of how people live and behave, akin to actors performing on a stage. These performances (presentations of self) are designed to convince the audience (other people), and to make a specific impression on them<sup>25</sup>. A successful performance means that the audience is convinced by the actor and does not challenge the presentation. Prodromos, in his works, positions himself as a member of the audience, and questions the social performance of the objects of his attack (whether these are imaginary is irrelevant at this juncture) and seeks to expose their act (in Goffman's model, this would roughly –but not completely– correspond with the role of a “spotter”, a person who has more insightful information about a performance and reveals these insights to the audience). In his writings, Prodromos uses vocabulary and imagery designed to underscore the act of pretending, and to illustrate the attempts being made to convince others of the possession of skills and wisdom that one does not really have.

Prodromos almost obsessively refers to Aesopian fables in his texts, and uses tales which tell the story of dissimulation and pretending to possess certain talents and qualities: the story about a donkey disguised as a lion (Perry no. 188); a weasel turned into a man by Aphrodite (Perry no. 50); a raven cheated by a fox because he believed in the fox's deceitful praises (Perry no. 126). In the *Ἀμαθῆς*, not only does he openly state that the self-proclaimed grammarian “plays/imitates a teacher” (εἶδ' οἶδ' ὄτι,

---

*and Independence. A History of Reinvention from the 3rd Century BC to 1830*, Cambridge 2017, 67.

24. E. GOFFMAN, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Edinburgh 1956. For a survey of similar readings of life in theatrical terms see R. TRONSTAD, Could the World become a Stage? Theatricality and Metaphorical Structures, *SubStance* 31.2/3.98/99, 216-224. The application and usefulness of this metaphor was recently criticized, see P. SCHULTE, The World as Stage and Representation: Notes on the Theatrum Mundi Metaphor, in *Metaphors shaping culture and theory*, ed. H. GRABES – A. NÜNNING – S. BAUMBACH, Tübingen 2009, 179-193.

25. GOFFMAN, *The Presentation*, 10: “They [observers] are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess [...]”.

τὸν διδάσκαλον ὑποκρίνοιο) but he also reverts to using a theatrical comparison. According to Prodromos, even the mimes have to train in order to be able to perform and dance the κόρδαξ. Given the usual disdain for and low status of scenic performers, in addition to the thoroughly negative connotations of the κόρδαξ, this comparison is meant as an obvious insult<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, it could be assumed that Prodromos, by bringing forth this type of performative analogy, sought to highlight the imitation performed by the γραμματικός. In the *Φιλοπλάτων*, the act of reading and interpreting the writings of Plato by the unqualified teacher is also described as a performance: ἔπειτα τὸ πλατωνικὸν ἀναπτύσσεις βιβλίον καὶ τοῦτο κατὰ κεφαλῆς, νῆ τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ καθιζάνεις ἐπὶ τοῦ γόνατος καί, τὸν πῆχυν ἐπερείδῃ τῆ παρειᾷ καὶ παντοίως τὸν ἀναγινώσκοντα σχηματίζῃ, οἷς τε ὑποψήλλεις<sup>27</sup> τὸ χεῖλη καὶ οἷς τὰ βλέφαρα ξυγχαλᾷς<sup>28</sup> [...] <sup>29</sup>.

This excerpt illustrates how the pseudo-specialist does not actually read – he just assumes the role of somebody who reads by re-creating the bodily posture and movement. Such a bodily performance reaches its extreme in the poem *Against an old lustful woman*, as the piece focuses on describing how the protagonist attempts to conceal her age and her old looks, along with how she plays a young girl when she is no longer able to attract young lovers. She uses makeup in order to deceive spectators and to appear younger<sup>30</sup>. In other words, the body of the old hag becomes a corporeal performance that is presented to play with potential spectators<sup>31</sup>. However, the machinations of an old woman will still be uncovered, and her efforts to conceal her true age,

26. J. KODER, Kordax und Methé: lasterhaftes Treiben in byzantinischer Zeit, *ZRVI* 50 (2013), 947-948.

27. According to *LSJ* ὑποψήλλω means “to sing”. However, here it is probably meant as murmuring, silently speaking senseless things.

28. Lit. “loosen eyelids”.

29. ed. MIGLIORINI [as in n. 13], 69 (“And then you open the Platonic book and, for heaven’s sake, upside down, and you put it on your lap, you press [your] fists against your cheek and you in every aspect assume the position of someone who is reading: you both murmur with your lips and squint your eyes”).

30. Ὡ γράϊς ὄχρὰ κᾶν πλανᾶς ψιμμυθίω!

[O, old pale crone, even though you deceive with white lead (v. 26)].

31. On similar corporeal performances in a holy context see S. CONSTANTINOY, *Female corporeal performances. Reading the body in Byzantine passions and lives of holy women*, Uppsala 2005.

as well as her attempts to seduce a younger lover using material means, will fail. As the narrator states proverbially, only someone very stupid would eat dung mixed with honey or would marry a pig covered with gold<sup>32</sup>, and this statement underscores the fact that external qualities *qua* ornaments which do not correspond to someone's character, age, and education make him or her simply look hilarious. Similarly, Prodromos speaks in the *Philoplaton* about a ruby on a pig, a golden ring worn by a monkey, and a weasel in a purple robe, while in the *Ἀμάραντος*, or *the passions of an old man*, he tells the story of an older philosopher, Stratokles, who marries a young girl and uses extensive makeup and a haircut to hide his age and act as a young groom<sup>33</sup>.

However, the most misused prop in these performances is the philosophical beard<sup>34</sup>. The protagonists of Prodromos' stories refer to it as having the power to transform them into philosophers, teachers, and wise people. In the *Ἀμαθής*, when the false *γραμματικὸς* puts on a performance, he lets his beard loose (*χαλάσεις μὲν τὴν ὑπήνην*), while in the poem *Against the old man*, the beard plays a central role, as it becomes the most important sign of the old man's wisdom. The act of having it shorn off by Menippos, Lucian's *porte parole* (vv. 21-29) could perhaps be conceived as the act of revealing the truth with the help of satirical, Lucianic, writing. However, what is most interesting would be how the beard defines Stratokles in the *Ἀμάραντος*. Before his transformation into a groom, Stratokles presents himself as a philosopher: *Ταῦτα ὁ μὲν ἔλεγεν ἐθανυμάζομεν δὲ ἡμεῖς καὶ ἔμακαρίζομεν καὶ τῷ ὄντι εὐδαίμονα ἐκαλοῦμεν, τῇ τε διδασκαλίᾳ τῶν ὄτων οἷον ἐξαιωρούμενοι δεινότητος γὰρ εἰπεῖν ὁ ἀνὴρ—καὶ τῇ ιδέα πιστεύοντες ἢ τε γὰρ ὑπήνη καθεῖτο μέχρι καὶ ἐπὶ γόνατον καὶ ὁ τράχηλος ἐσιμοῦτο καὶ συνέσπαστο ἢ ὄφρῦς καὶ ἢ ὄχρα περιεπλανᾶτο τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ τὸ ὄλον εἰπεῖν φιλόσοφον αὐτὸν καὶ τοῖς ἀγνοοῦσι*

32. Ἦ τίς φάγοι μέλιτι συμμιγῆ κόπρον, / Ἦ χρυσοπάστῳ συζυγῆ δελφακίῳ, / Εἰ μὴ βλαβεῖη τὸν τε νοῦν καὶ τὰς φρένας (vv. 68-70). See also P. MARCINIAK, It is not What It Appears To Be: A Note on Theodore Prodromos' *Against a Lustful Old Woman*, *EOS* 103.1 (2016), 109-116.

33. Recently on the *Amarantos* see E. CULLHED, Theodore Prodromos in the Garden of Epicurus: the *Amarantos*, in *Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Late Byzantium*, ed. A. CAMERON – N. GAUL, Abingdon 2017, 153-166 (where the performance of Stratokles is also discussed).

34. See J. KUCHARSKI – P. MARCINIAK, The Beard and its Philosopher [as in n. 11], 50-53.

τὸ εἶδος ἐκήρυττεν. Ἄλλ' ἢ χθές, ὃ φιλότις, τό τε δράμα ὑφείλετο καὶ περιείλετο τὴν σκητὴν καὶ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἐξεπόμευσεν<sup>35</sup>.

The appearance of Stratokles was just a performance designed to convince the audience that he was a philosopher. However, he changed his appearance when his aims were redefined – instead of playing a philosopher in order to impress listeners, he turned himself into a groom: he wore heavy makeup, his beard was cut in a way that was inappropriate for a philosopher. Performing the self does not exclude mutability, and therefore a person's identity is not unchangeable, and could be remade as the person interacts with others – this is exactly what Stratokles does when he reinvents himself to interact with his bride and wedding guests. Amarantos, one of his former students, however, sees this new performance as fundamentally contradictory to the previous one, and consequently he believes that the earlier Stratokles merely impersonated a philosopher/teacher. Nevertheless, Stratokles' new appearance is also described with the help of theatrical imagery (ὄθεν ἡμῖν εὐρεθείη οὗτος ὁ μῖμος), and thus supports the suggestion that this is indeed just a new performance.

Enacting a performance, however, goes beyond corporeal presentation. In the *Sale of Lives* (*Βίων προαίσις*), one of the auctioned characters is Hippocrates, who promises to turn the potential buyer into a successful doctor<sup>36</sup>. Hippocrates' advice is to recite the titles of his works and as many maxims as possible. This is more than just a re-use of a traditional *τόπος* of an incompetent medic, and Hippocrates' instruction is reminiscent of the superficial knowledge that is displayed by the self-proclaimed grammarian in the *Ἀμαθής*, and the incompetent teacher of Plato in the *Φιλοπλάτων*. The doctor from Kos is not teaching how to be a real doctor but how to *perform* as one.

35. T. MIGLIORINI, Teodoro Prodromo Amaranto, *MEG 7* (2007), ch. 8, 85. (“He said this, and we admired him, praised him and called him fortunate indeed, and we were all ears when he taught, because the man is a terrific speaker, and we trusted in his appearance. For his beard fell down to his knees and his neck was bent, his eyebrows were drawn together, and ochre was all over his face and, generally speaking, his look indicated that he was a philosopher even to those who did not know him. But yesterday, my dear, unveiled the drama and took away the skene and revealed the truth”).

36. Ὅμως μέντοι τοῖσι πολλοῖσι τῶν νῦν ἰητρῶν ἐμφερέα σε ποιέειν οὐ χαλεπὸν (“However, it is not difficult to make you similar to the modern doctors”).

Understandably enough, Prodromos embeds the notion of a *ὑπόκρισις* within the theatrical imagery – through bodily movements, makeup, and even props. This theatrical/dramatical connection was more thoroughly explored by Eustathios of Thessalonike in his oration *On simulation* (*Περὶ ὑποκρίσεως*), wherein the contemporary *ὑπόκρισις* was presented as a corrupted offshoot of the ancient dramatical art<sup>37</sup>. Eustathios discusses various manifestations of this phenomenon, including false friends, politicians, and even wives who pretend to be happy in a marriage (*Γυνὴ γὰρ ὑποκρινομένη τὸ τῆς συζυγίας εὐάριστον, οἴστροηλατεῖται εἰς μοιχικόν*, ed. TAFEL 9.19). Bishop's treatment of a *ὑπόκρισις* is both wider and more general than that of Prodromos, as he is more concerned with morality and the moral implications of falsehood, lying and pretence. Prodromos, as stated earlier, is perhaps less troubled by the moral consequences and more so by the immediate effect of a *ὑπόκρισις* on his own well-being.

#### CONCLUSION

Prodromos seems to be obsessed with people who pretended to be someone else, or to use an anachronistic description, with con-men who had social motivations. As stated earlier, a surplus of literati who sought positions as teachers, or a job in the state administration, or who sought to secure a commission from a wealthy patron in twelfth-century Constantinople, thereby resulted in fierce competition between them. Moreover, it was not only knowledge or innovative methods that counted. Rather, it was likely that the ability to present one's skills –to *perform*– was also a factor. As Emmanuel Bourbouhakis notes, “competition among rhetors in Byzantium was not decided on the basis of texts alone; the brilliance of a speech was a function of the performance it enabled”<sup>38</sup>. This must have led to situations where less skilled teachers and literati relied more on their performative

---

37. On this text see a recent paper by B. van den BERG, *The Excellent Man Lies Sometimes: Eustathios of Thessalonike on Good Hypocrisy, Praiseworthy Falsehood, and Rhetorical Plausibility in Ancient Poetry*, *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 3 (2017), 15-35. On this work see also P. ROILOS, *Amphoteroglossia. A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel*, Cambridge-London 2005, 233.

38. E. BOURBOUHAKIS, *Rhetoric and Performance*, in *The Byzantine World*, ed. P. STEPHENSON, London-New York 2008, 175-178.

skills than on their knowledge. Greater importance was attached to external, unimportant symbols and appearances, such as the ‘philosophical beard’, rather than real wisdom and experience.

A closer reading of texts, many of which are concerned with similar issues such as teaching and *ὑπόκρισις*, suggests that Prodrimos, similarly to Lucian, recycled his own motifs, ideas, and imagery by creating new works out of old ones. This multiplying of works on seemingly identical topics should, however, be construed as a conscious literary technique, where similar problems were given varied literary forms. Prodrimos was “the new Lucian”, but this descriptor should be understood as much more than simply a superficial comparison. Rather, what makes the Byzantine author a true successor to the Syrian satirist was the use of similar motifs and imagery to express his own opinions and social fears.

#### TRANSLATION

*Against an old man, who thinks himself wise because of his long beard*

Yow ow ow!<sup>39</sup> That bushy beard,  
 which that decrepit, putrid old man, Thoukritos<sup>40</sup>,  
 lets fall, all the way down to his breast.  
 Yow ow ow! That smell, that stench of goat!  
 5 Oh, that burden so enormous of the beard!  
 How big is its length, its width how big,  
 how big, quite simply, all its dimensions.

39. “Yow ow ow” gr. *ιαταταιάξ*; a interjection defined by the ancient and Byzantine lexica as expressive of sorrow (*θρηνητικὸν ἐπίρρημα*; Suda s.v.); used in Old Attic Comedy (Aristophanes, *Τραγῆς* 1); the translation “Yow ow ow” is Jeffrey Henderson’s. Prodrimos used the same word once again in a satirical/comical context in the song of the chorus in the *Κατομνομαχία* (v. 193). I am grateful to Janek Kucharski for his help in preparing the commentary. Some fragments of the translation were used in J. KUCHARSKI – P. MARCINIAK, *The Beard and its Philosopher* [as in n. 11].

40. Thoukritos is a protagonists of the *Dialogi mortuorum*, 16. This dialogue tells the story of a young legacy hunter, Terpsion, who squandered his own means and health striving to inherit the wealth of the nonagenarian Thoukritos, and ultimately died before him; the name Thoukritos is never before associated with such a figure in extant literature; Prodrimos’ protagonist is also very old, and elsewhere he uses the name as a byword for old age, see *Against an old lustful woman* 3.



That's why you're stooping down, old man.  
 And yet you carry this hump and you bend your back<sup>41</sup>:

10 For that beard is pulling your neck downward,  
 As it is big, and of immoderate weight.  
 Trim that hair of the upper lip, you wretch,  
 depilate your face, you miserable one,  
 make use of razors, scissors, naked axes,

15 swords, blades, may there even be a saw.  
 Liberate your jaw from the burden,  
 liberate your neck from the weight.  
 You see, how the poor thing bents downward,  
 and makes you look like a suppliant,

20 begging to be freed from this burden.  
 Cut off, you fool, that enormous hair.  
 For if you won't hurry to shave it,  
 Menippos is close, and you know the dog,  
 he carries a well-sharpened shipwright's axe;

25 for the sweet Syrian will provide us with it,  
 having drawn it from his writing tablets.  
 And should the dog come first, woe to you, wretch;  
 for he will not only cut off your beard,  
 but also with it a part of your eyebrows<sup>42</sup>.

30 You're foolishly deluding yourself, old man,  
 taking the exuberance of your beard  
 to be a sign of philosophy.  
 Indeed, the man from Athens, the great one,  
 the glory of dialogues<sup>43</sup>, the theologian,

35 the purest reason, nature above nature,  
 the son of Ariston, whose name was Plato,

---

41. See Diodorus. Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 2.51 and 2.54 where camels are described.

42. Bushy beard and lifted eyebrows were signs of Lucianic philosophers, cf. *Timon the Misanthrope*, ch. 54 where Thrasycles the philosopher is characterized as having bushy beard, lifted eyebrows and hair thrown back from his forehead. This entire passage should be probably read as a threat – the false philosopher will be exposed with the help of satire.

43. In the *Φιλοπλάτων* Prodromos credits Plato with the invention of the dialogue.

and the greatest student of nature, Aristotle,  
 the greatest offspring of Stageira<sup>44</sup>, and Empedokles, who played with  
 fire<sup>45</sup>,  
 40 and Pythagoras, the Samian by descent,  
 and Sokrates, sown by Sophroniskos,  
 if they had indeed<sup>46</sup> let their beards grow down,  
 all the way to their ankles,  
 and reeked the stench of he-goat,  
 45 and bore resemblance to bearded stars  
 –by virtue of the beard and not of the light–,  
 would we not call them philosophers, or wise,  
 or just, or noble and decent?  
 And what if some man, replete with arrogant slanders  
 50 ugly to behold, and even uglier in his way of life,  
 stupid, ignorant, another Archibiades,  
 of whom Plutarch tells us elsewhere<sup>47</sup>,

44. Migliorini translates “l’estrema fioritura” as he understands this line differently – Aristotle was supposed to be the last famous son of Stageira, which was destroyed by Philipp of Macedonia.

45. According to tradition Empedokles threw himself into Mount Etna (Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 8.69.5). The word *πάρεργον* may mean offshoot, secondary work. A similar expression is to be found for instance in Euripides, *Helen* 925: *πάρεργον δοῦσα τοῦτο τῆς δίκης* (this addition ... to my fate). Perhaps then this passage should be translated “Empedokles who became an addition to fire”.

46. “If ... indeed” (εἰ μὲν) – following Mangelli’s conjecture (E. MAGNELLI, *Prodromea* (con una nota su Gregorio di Nazianzo), *Medioevo Greco* 10 (2010), 120-21); the MS reads “if they had not” (εἰ μή).

47. “There was a certain Archibiades, nicknamed Laconistes, because in imitation of the Spartans, he let his beard grow to an extravagant size” (*πώγωνά τε καθειμένος ὑπερφυῆ μεγέθει*), always wore a short cloak, and had a scowl on his face. Phokion was once interrupted in the council, and called upon this man for testimony and support in what he said. But when the man rose up and gave such counsel as was pleasing to the Athenians, Phokion seized him by the beard (*ἀψάμενος αὐτοῦ τῶν γενείων*) and said: “O Archibiades, why then didst thou not shave yourself” (*τί οὖν οὐκ ἀπεκείρω*), Plutarch, *Φωκίων* 10.1 (tr. B. Perrin; Loeb); the point here is that Phokion himself was considered a stern laconophile (more in terms of *mores* than foreign policy) and expected support from an apparently kindred spirit; with his hopes frustrated, he questions the laconizing stance of Archebiades (J. KIRCHNER, *Prosopographia Attica*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1901), 1302; *A Lexikon of Greek Personal Names* II 2, 4) by asking him to shave off the beard he wore in a Spartan fashion; the whole story seems highly anecdotal, and its authenticity has been questioned.

is blessed with abundance of facial hair?  
 Should he now be called wise, and even a great wise man?  
 55 And here, all ready is the noble Phokion,  
 to grab the hairiest with both hands.  
 If only I were a new Phokion, the general,  
 an enemy to you, the Archibiades of our times.  
 If I would grab this accursed thing, old man,  
 60 quickly I'd show your entire chin bare.  
 But tell me, Thoukritos, five times as old,  
 already the age of Iapetos and Kronos:  
 if a runaway slave, one deserving a good whipping, came to you<sup>48</sup>  
 not knowing even one bit of speech, as the saying has it<sup>49</sup>,  
 65 and yet he would carry the burden of an enormous beard,  
 what would you think about him? That he is an expert in reasoning  
 (*logos*)?  
 – Oh my, what an insolence against wise teachings! –  
 What a person purchased for one mina could be?  
 – Oh my, what an insolence against a long beard! –<sup>50</sup>  
 70 It seems to me that you assign philosopher's grace  
 rather to the flocks of goats  
 if you're defining reason by the beard:  
 for it is goats that grow a big beard.  
 But let us not give reason to the beard,  
 75 nor count goats among philosophers:  
 Just like among intelligent men no one would be called wise  
 having put on a himation which reaches to his feet,  
 or at least girded around the waist<sup>51</sup>.

48. Interestingly enough the motif of a runaway slave appears also in the *Βίων προᾶσις*.

49. Migliorini, *Gli scritti satirici*, 26 sees this line as an allusion to Aristophanes, *Πλοῦτος* 17: καὶ ταῦτ' ἀποκρινομένω τὸ παράπαν οὐδὲ γρῦ (with scholia). However, the text itself refers to a proverb and the possible source is Zenob. 5.56: Οὐδὲ τὸ Δίωνος γρῦ (E. LEUTSCH – F. G. SCHNEIDEWIN, *Corpus Paroemiographorum Græcorum*, v. 1, Göttingen 1839 (repr. Hildesheim 1965), 142-143).

50. Or perhaps “what an insolence of a long beard”.

51. It is rather difficult to make sense of Prodromos' vision of ancient Greek fashion. He seems to refer here to the χιτών, which could have been girded around the waist.

As Plato ungirded in yesterday's times  
 80 came to the heart of the Academy  
 and spoke these words to his students:  
 "if Plato gird himself today, and spoke girded,  
 he would be no better than of yesterday<sup>52</sup>;  
 for it is not garments that distinguish men of knowledge,  
 nor the changing fashions of belts and sandals,  
 85 but spirited nature and learning from books,  
 and great eloquence in argument and inquiry".  
 Thus long beards have nothing to do with judging  
 the intellect of both student and teacher.  
 My good man, even if the entire philosophy  
 90 did indeed hang from your beard,  
 you ought to cut it nonetheless,  
 so that you would avoid its ugliness;  
 since the beauty of limbs comes from due proportion,  
 of hands, legs, –simply speaking– the entire body<sup>53</sup>,  
 95 while all contractions and dilations  
 bring ugliness, just as vices do,  
 so does the dignity of the beard lie in proportion.  
 "Moderation is the best thing", as the old saying goes<sup>54</sup>.  
 But, my dear beard, do grow even more,  
 100 cut your way forward in every direction, in width and in length<sup>55</sup>  
 and drag down along with you the back of that decrepit one,  
 until you break him down completely.

52. Following the sense suggested by MAGNELLI, *Prodromea*, 122; the source of the anecdote is unknown. Perhaps Prodromos alludes to the Roman custom of wearing an ungirded tunic when a person was at home or resting and thus creating a difference between a working and resting person. However, Plato's philosopher remains a philosopher regardless of what he is wearing (and how).

53. Well-proportioned limbs were one of the most important features, which constituted a Byzantine ideal of physical beauty, see M. HATZAKI, *Beauty and the male body in Byzantium. Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text*, New York, 2009, 8-14.

54. *Μέτρον ἄριστον*. This is a saying attributed, like many others, to Kleoboulos of Lindos.

55. lit: 'grow in width and grow in length'.

ΨΕΥΔΟΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΑΔΕΙΣ ΔΑΣΚΑΛΟΙ:  
ΤΑ ΣΑΤΙΡΙΚΑ ΚΕΙΜΕΝΑ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΥ ΠΡΟΔΡΟΜΟΥ

Ορισμένα από τα σατιρικά κείμενα του Θεοδώρου Προδρόμου (όπως ο *Φιλοπλάτων*, ο *Αμαθής*, ή το ποίημα *κατά μακρογενείου γέροντος*) μπορούν να θεωρηθούν ως οι διδακτικές του προγραμματικές δηλώσεις. Επιπλέον δείχνουν πώς αντιλαμβανόταν ο Πρόδρομος την «*υπόκρισιν*», να προσποιείται δηλαδή κάποιος ότι είναι ένας άλλος.