

IT IS NOT WHAT IT APPEARS TO BE: A NOTE  
ON THEODORE PRODROMOS' *AGAINST A LUSTFUL OLD WOMAN*<sup>\*</sup>

by

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**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses Theodore Prodromos' work *Against a Lustful Old Woman*, which is a satire directed against a proverbial older woman who despite her age attempts to find a younger lover. This paper offers a new interpretation of the poem according to which Prodromos while using traditional literary topoi of depicting “‘a crone in heat again’” discusses in fact a much more serious problem of *hypokrisis*. This is one of the recurring themes in Prodromic works where *hypokrisis* is understood as ‘playing a part’, ‘pretending’ and ‘mimicry’ – people play their parts in life, pretend that they are somebody else.

Theodore Prodromos' satire *Against a Lustful Old Woman* (Κατὰ φιλοπόρνου γράος, here abbreviated as *Adv. an. libid.*) is a curious text<sup>1</sup>. It consists of 102 verses and tells a very simple story – the narrator furiously attacks an older woman, who despite her age and social expectations, attempts to have an erotic life. He showers the protagonists with elaborate invectives whose origins go back to ancient times<sup>2</sup>. After deriding her sexual past (76 f.: Πάλαι ποτ' ἦς χρήσιμος

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the poem (no. 150 in HÖRANDNER's catalogue) was preserved in fifteen manuscripts and erroneously ascribed to Manuel Philes in the nineteenth-century edition by MILLER, see E. MILLER (ed.), *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, vol. II, Parisii 1857, pp. 306–311. There exists also an earlier edition by Thorlaciuss from an unidentified manuscript, which also ascribes this poem to Manuel Philes. Thorlaciuss provided a summary/translation of the text into Latin, bowdlerising the work and omitting all sexually-oriented passages; see M.B. THORLACIUS, *Proclusiones et opuscula academica argumenti maxime philologici*, vol. III, Hauniae 1815, pp. 65–68. The first modern edition (as yet unpublished) was prepared by T. MIGLIORINI, *Gli scritti satirici in greco letterario di Teodoro Prodromo: introduzione, edizione, traduzione e commenti*, diss. Università di Pisa 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance: Ἀτλαντικὸν πέλαγος, Αἰγαῖον βάθος, / Πόντε, Προποντίς, ὠκεάνειον στόμα, / Θάλασσα ταύτης πάμπαν ἀλμυρωτέρα / [...] / Ὡ τέλμα πηλοῦ καὶ βαθύτης ἰλύος, / Τῆς ἐγγέλυος οἴκε καὶ τοῦ βατράχου (“O, Atlantic Ocean, Aegean depth, / Sea, the Fore-Sea, mouth of the ocean, / Sea wholly saltier than sea itself / [...] / O, muddy swamp and depth of mud, / O, house of eel and of frog!”, 9–11 and 14 f.). This type of nautical erotic imagery also has a very long history reaching back to archaic Greek poetry (e.g. Alcaeus fr. 73; Archilochus fr. 196a WEST) and Greek comedy; see J. HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse. Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, New York–Oxford 1991, pp. 161 f.