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# Novel and theatre in the byzantine twelfth century as vectors of casting doubts on dogma

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NOVEL AND THEATRE

IN THE BYZANTINE TWELFTH CENTURY

AS VECTORS OF CASTING DOUBTS ON DOGMA

Two groups of byzantine twelfth century texts, apparently intended for readers' entertainment, are produced by three authors belonging to one or another circle of scholars regulars in emperor's Manuel One Komnenos court. Components inside each of these two groups of texts are closely related by their genre and their topics. So the corpus is made up on one hand of three novels focused on love and adventure whose heroes are eponymous of the titles, on the other hand of two fables looking like little plays and sharing their pattern of action, a fatal fight between cat and mouse.

The three adventure and love novels, these of Eustathios Makrembolites, *Hysmine and Hysminias*, Theodoros Prodromos, *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, Niketas Eugenianos, *Drosilla and Charikles*<sup>1</sup>, have besides as a shared feature the insertion of heroes' adventures in the polytheistic context of Ancient Greece. So they revive the genre of novel born in Ancient Greece during the imperial roman period, dead at the time Antiquity ended and then for which the Christian genre of hagiography has been gradually substituted. The two fables-little plays, both of the same author, Theodoros Prodromos, however are opposed regarding their religious context : polytheistic in the *Katomyomachia*, openly Christian in the *Schede tou muos*, a little play in two acts, each of them entitled « σχέδος »<sup>2</sup>.

It's very obvious that in the four texts set in a polytheistic scene (*Hysmine and Hysminias*, *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, *Drosilla and Charikles*, *Katomyomachia*, the *Katomyomachia* being inspired by the *Batrachomyomachia*, first century B.C. anonymous

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<sup>1</sup> Makrembolites : M. Marcovich ed., *Eustathius Makrembolites, de Hysmines et Hysminiae amoribus libri XI*, München-Leipzig, 2001 ; Prodromos : M. Marcovich ed., *Theodori Prodromi, de Rhodantes et Dosiclis amoribus libri IX*, Leipzig-Stuttgart, 1992 ; Eugenianos, *Drosilla and Charikles* in F. Conca ed., *Il romanzo bizantino del XII secolo*, Turin, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Text and translation of *Katomyomachia* and *Schede tou muos* in F. Meunier, *Théodore Prodrome. Crime et châtement chez les souris*, Paris, 2016, p. 117-159 et 288-295.

work), at a distance of more or less one millenium the data of antique polytheism cannot be reproduced as they stood, cannot be transfered exactly. They are, intentionally or not, in an open way or not, modified through the authors' Christian eyes. So each of the three authors interprets, and reallocates them in his own way. The result is the transformation of polytheism in Makrembolites' novel in – I have coined this word - an « hyperpolytheism » characterized by fusion in only one work of all the components – divine figures and actions, worship – collected in together the five ancient greek novels which have inspired the authors. This hyper-characterization indicates that religious context of *Hysmine and Hysminias* is the context of an artificial polytheism. In Eugenianos' novel the polytheism is turned into what I name a « duotheism » - I have coined this word too – founded on active presence of the only Eros and Dionysos. While in Prodromos' work the polytheism is changed into a deism, the gods' individualities being most of the time obliterated to the advantage of a divine entity encompassing them<sup>3</sup>. But the situation is not the same in Theodoros Prodromos' *Katomyomachia*. Zeus shows himself in this play the only god who is acting, and so polytheism can be there in concrete terms resolved into a monotheism.

Such a methodical deconstruction of the ancient Greek polytheistic scheme alters thus signification of these four texts, it means suggests not to read and interpret in a literal way the data of the religious context in these four novels and play. Regarding the *Schede tou muos* this work is presented unambiguously as a Christian text from the questions about monasticism which are raised and from the use of *Old Testament* passages during jousting between cat and mouse.

Actually in Prodromos *Katomyomachia* the question is also clearly the Christian monotheism, and that suggests what kind of interpretation may be favoured about changing the ancient polytheism into monotheism. Similarly in Prodromos' novel *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* Christian data appear in the text and are treated in the same way as in the *Katomyomachia*, it means way of parody. Parody concerns indeed passages from *Old Testament* (*Genesis*) and from two Byzantine works, the *Hexaëmeron* of George Pisides (seventh century) and the letter number four of Gregory the Theologian sent to his friend Basil the Great. In all passages parodied by Prodromos the parody process is the same : making alterations to the hypotext so much so that its significance is wholly twisted. As well as in Prodromos', in Eugenianos' work *Drosilla and Charikles* Christian data are clearly parodied. But instead of altering other authors' text, parody here is focused on concepts of which content is falsified. « Content », it means terms which have a basic significance. They are mocked because their usual religious context is distorted. In Makrembolites' novel, *Hysmine and Hysminias*, at the same time the hyperpolytheism is

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<sup>3</sup> F. Meunier, « Polythéisme et christianisme dans le roman byzantin du XIIIe siècle », *Les hommes et les dieux dans l'ancien roman*, Actes du colloque de Tours, CESR, 22-24 Octobre 2009, B. Pouderon ed., Lyon, 2012, p. 305-326.

indeed on display, nevertheless some biblical episodes are distorted in that way : the storyline is preserved, but basic constituents of this story are changed according to the characters and their part in the novel. I'll tell you below about only one of these episodes<sup>4</sup>.

So in the five works *Hysmine and Hysminias*, *Drosilla and Charikles*, *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, *Katomyomachia* and *Schede tou muos*, some questions about Christian dogma are raised in a quite mocking manner. Which questions and what is the conclusion to be drawn from their treatment ?

On the one hand Godhead is affected in regard to both representation and action ; on the other hand are affected the basic christological principles, from the peculiar circumstances of Christ's birth (parthenogenesis and Incarnation) until his Resurrection succeeding his sacrifice.

Godhead's efficiency in his proceeding and action is questioned in both the two Theodoros Prodromos' works *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* and *Katomyomachia*. In a key episod of the novel about a banquet among Barbarians, a Barbarian leader is showed as a real rival of God in his function of Creator. He is said to be able to go against rules of natural procreation and to transmute the elements so as the living species (book IV, 134-172). According to this process, indeed not only he is competing with God, but even gains supremacy over him by disrupting and neutralizing the basic processes that God had set up<sup>5</sup>.

There is no marging of error of interpretation about this banquet episode. God himself acting in the book of *Genesis* is here implicit in question. To describe indeed the Barbarian leader's Great Work, Prodromos parodies two lines (lines 843 and 1082) from the *Hexaëmeron* of George Pisides (VIIIth century), an extensive celebration of God's intelligence and power in the process of creating. One could raise the objection that the parody of divine Creation<sup>6</sup> must not here be taken seriously, since the demiurge's action is imputed to a Barbarian leader by his subordinate glorifying his power. But the novel narrator, a credible figure, says himself the line which closes the work (book IX, line 486) and sums up soberly the heroes' wedding night in a quotation of *Genesis*, chapter 4, verse 1:

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<sup>4</sup> The other episodes : Petephres' wife, *Genesis*, 39, 6-20, and master's wife, X, 6, 2-4 ; Hysmine washing herald's Hysminias feet, I, 12, 3, and a repentant prostitute washing with her tears Jesus' feet : *Luke*, 7, 36-50. F. Meunier, « Les romans de l'époque comnène : des réminiscences bibliques ? », *Revue des études byzantines*, 69, 2011, p. 205-217.

<sup>5</sup> F. Meunier, « Les citations chrétiennes chez les romanciers du XIIe siècle : une manipulation ? », *Erytheia*, 30, 2009, p. 129-140.

<sup>6</sup> *Hex.*, 843 : Ἔλκων μετέλκων ἄντιβόλλων τὰς φύσεις : Merging **inverting** their natures.  
*Rh. and Dos.*, IV, 172 : Ἔλκων, μετέλκων τῇ θελήσει τὰς φύσεις : Merging, **according to his will** the species.

« Adam knew his wife Eve », a quotation whose subject and object he inverts : « Rhodanthe knew her husband Dosikles »<sup>7</sup>. So the attention is focused on the heroine, the woman, instead of the man who is the subject in book of *Genesis*. In this way is brought about a line of separation from the *Old Testament*, it means that is called into question the couple pattern set by God all-mighty Creator. The model relationship of dominator / dominated is destroyed, which is issued and set up in *Genesis* from the peculiar way of creating man and woman as much as from the responsibility for the original sin imputed to the woman. Indeed at no time in the novel the heroine plays the part of a tempter. On the contrary the hero himself plays this tempter part.

In a parallel way, in Eugenianos' novel, *Drosilla and Charikles*, each of the two heroes successively is distorting the same passage of *Genesis* about creation of man and woman, but through a different process, in playing with basic terms of dogma. The hero defines so in book VI, line 84, his intensely close relationship with the heroine : « ἐν πνεῦμα, νοῦς εἶς, εἶς λόγος ... » : « one breath, one mind, one voice ... ». But the three Greek terms νοῦς, λόγος, πνεῦμα, precisely define the Blessed Trinity : Father, Word, Spirit. Moreover in the previous line, line 83, the Greek substantive ἕνωσις, « union », which employs Charikles, refers usually in the Church Fathers' works and in the councils proceedings to the relation between the two essences, divine and human, inside the only one person of the Christ. In the book I of the novel, line 327, the heroine, Drosilla, was defining too her close relationship with the hero through a christological terminology : « ἐν σῶμα, διπλῆν τὴν ἐνέργειαν φέρον », « one body, possessing a double energy ». Telling it so, the heroine is repeating content of the affirmation from the Constantinople 3 Council (year 681) that there are two energies in the only one person of Christ. The choice made by the author, Eugenianos, of borrowing a series of terms belonging to the theological corpus in order to illustrate the conception of man's and woman's fate expressed in simple and concrete terms in *Genesis*, 2, 24, after God had finished creating them : « And they will be both one alone flesh », appears all the less innocent here as the question about the meaning, either literal or metaphorical, of these biblical words is fully topical on the theological and societal levels in the Byzantine twelfth century. Eugenianos treats this question in his own way. He deprives the Deity of his transcendency by using the terms which define him as features of a profane love.

In the *Katomyomachia* as much as in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* the confrontation between the political and divine fields comes to a reversal of the traditional power system, it means the Deity's submitting to the temporal sovereign. The question of both efficiency and representation of Zeus, the only god who is acting in the *Katomyomachia*, is raised in a caricatural manner, but the matter here is not the Creator function. The hero of the play, a

<sup>7</sup> *Genesis*, 4, 1 : Ἀδάμ δὲ ἔγνω Εὐαν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ.  
*Rh. and Dos.*, IX, 486 : ἔγνω Δοσικλῆν ἢ Ροδάνθη νομφίον.

mouse who reigns over mice, treats Zeus with contempt, to such a point that he humiliates him by inverting their roles and imposing his own will on him. The god must so promise the mice monarch's victory over the cat on pain of sacrilege (*Katomyomachia*, lines 87-107). Which link with the Christian God ? Besides the fact that instead of polytheism a monotheism is actually presented in the play, since Zeus is the only god acting there, the Christian God's presence can be inferred, as soon as the play is beginning, from a parody of the letter number 4 in the Gregory the Theologian's correspondence. In this letter Gregory comments on a monastery foundation by his friend Basil the Great who wants to dedicate himself to God. So the Christianity is there in the play long before the polytheism appears : one mention of Hades line 19, but it's only from the line 81 (out of 384 lines in total) that the data about polytheism are inserted and functional in the text. Consequently it's quite possible to understand that through Zeus God's omnipotence is questioned.

Besides negation of his omnipotence, there's devaluing in representation of the divine person through the physical similarity between Zeus, whom the hero has seen in a dream, and the play figures. Zeus looks like a mouse. So he is losing prerogative of his transcendent majesty as well as prerogative of his power.

In regard to Godhead's efficiency and representation, the *Schede tou muos* form a diptych with the *Katomyomachia*. They are both complementary and symmetrical to the *Katomyomachia*. Complementary, for presenting the other face of the temporal power, the face of ... cat instead of a mouse. The data are inverted in the *Schede*, the mouse steps aside in favour of the cat in treating the divine power with contempt. The cat, inside various passages from *Old Testament* (*Hosea*, 6, 6 ; *Deuteronomy*, 32, 14 ; *Psalms*, 18, 11 ; 88, 21 ; 91, 11 ; 22, 5 ) which he parodies by altering the text, is taking the place and the function of God. For not only he replaces him as a speaker, but also he mocks him in imitating his language so as to modify skilfully the text of the *Old Testament*, and in imitating one of his holy gestures : anointing David's head with oil. Identity substitution of divine person for a figure of cat is beforehand confirmed in a group of passages from *Old Testament, Psalms*, selected by the very mouse addressing the cat and exactly quoted with one exception. The mouse transformes indeed the first word of the psalms, in the vocative case, the masculine Greek word Κύριε, «Lord», used by David addressing God, into Κυρία, feminine vocative for the Greek substantive ἡ αἰλουρίς, «the cat», is a feminine one<sup>8</sup>. So to Zeus with a mouse's head in the *Katomyomachia* corresponds in the *Schede tou muos* God with a cat's head. Cat's omnipotence the mouse his victim recognizes to the exclusion of God's power.

<sup>8</sup> *Psalm* 6, 2, David addressing God :

« Κύριε, μὴ τῷ θυμῷ σου ἐλέγξης με / μηδὲ τῇ ὀργῇ σου παιδεύσης με ».

« Lord, being angry don't accuse me / being furious don't punish me ».

*Schede*, 1. 73-74, the mouse addressing the cat :

« Κυρία μου, μὴ τῷ θυμῷ σου ἐλέγξης με μηδὲ τῇ ὀργῇ σου παιδεύσης με ».

« My lord, being angry don't accuse me being furious don't' punish me ».

The cat, that avatar of God, exerts cynically and with impunity – with impunity since he has taken the place of God – his power of life and death on the mouse. So the lesson, the moral which emerges from the fable and little play of the *Schede tou muos* is to understand as a triumphant celebration of the victorious evil incarnated in the cat. This moral is all the more underlined as the cat is not taking the place of God full of anger in the *Old Testament* but full of pity in the Book of *Hosea* from which is extracted the main quotation altered by the cat.

The presentation of christology in a parodying way doesn't concern the *Schede tou muos*, since the only *Old Testament* is made the target of the parody. It's in the novel of *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* that the parthenogenesis is held up to ridicule, through a parody of line 1082 context in the *Hexaëmeron* of George Pisides. I have mentioned above the line 1082, for Prodromos parodies there God as Creator. In the novel text, by means of inverting the process set up by God, men instead of women are pregnant, and spontaneously. This passage of *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* (book IV, lines 166-72) is caricaturing the principle of spontaneous reproduction among vultures praised by Pisides who considers it a symbol announcing that in such a peculiar way the Christ will be conceived (*Hexaëmeron*, lines 1077-1078). The very principle of Incarnation – the Word made flesh – and no more its process is mocked in Eugenianos' novel *Drosilla and Charikles*. For in a sacrilegious employment the Greek verb βροτόω which in Gregory the Theologian's and his commentators' works refers to this Incarnation principle, in a speech of a Barbarian woman is used to characterize a so-called power held by mythological Sirens to give life to stones and conversely to change humans into stones (*Drosilla and Charikles*, book V, line 203). It can be noticed that Eugenianos, besides parodying Gregory the Theologian as Prodromos himself does in the *Katomyomachia*, in order to tone down the gravity of a sacrilegious employment of βροτόω, has chosen the same process as Prodromos parodying the divine Creation and the parthenogenesis : attribute to a Barbarian figure a speech which is likely to arouse suspicions of heresy about the author.

Parody of Christ's Sacrifice and Resurrection takes place in the same Barbarian context in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, within the banquet episode among Barbarians. This parody is based on the same passage from the *Hexaëmeron* of George Pisides. Vultures, according to Pisides, give their fledglings to drink their own blood so that they could save them from death. The connection with the Christ's sacrifice is here all the more easy to make as some lines before (1077-1078) Pisides had presented the parthenogenesis among vultures as a prefiguration of the peculiar Christ's conception. Such a vultures' consent to sacrifice which

Pisides extols<sup>9</sup>, in the Prodrornos' text is turned into an anxious question about means of breast-feeding concerning a man whom the Barbarian and demiurge leader would have made auto-pregnant<sup>10</sup>. In the *Hexaëmeron*, soon after the praise of vultures Pisides gives that of phoenix, programmed by God, according him, as a paragon of resurrection (*Hexaëmeron*, lines 1106-1111). In Prodrornos' text also, parody of resurrection (book IV, lines 226-252) is nearly immediately following parody of vultures' sacrifice. In this parody of resurrection after which comes a parody of exit from hell, the protagonist is a sort of court jester. He comes back to life by order of his leader – the demiurge –, after he pretended to stick a sword in his own throat and then sank to the ground lying in a pool of his own blood. Such a parody may well be interpreted here as parody of Christ's Resurrection. Why? First, because of the identity of the character who gives order, the Barbarian leader-demiurge, similar to God the Father in that function<sup>11</sup>. Secondly because this parody is presented through two Greek verbs, one of them in a compound form, ἐγείρω and ἐξανάστημι<sup>12</sup>, which are in a recurrent manner used in the *Gospel* about Christ's Resurrection<sup>13</sup>. But also because the risen man, after he came out of hell, pretends to be a prototype of risen humans (book IV, lines 251-252). Nevertheless let us not forget that this episode of Resurrection parody takes place among Barbarians as a show presented by a sort of court jester. In such a context it may not be considered a serious matter for reflection.

In contrast an episod of Makrembolites' novel *Hysmine and Hysminias* narrated by the hero (book VII) is to read as a parody of Jonah's sacrifice and « resurrection » in *Old Testament* (*Jonah*, chapter 1, verse 1-16). Parody there is not based on inversion of *Old Testament* data, but on their conversion into love terms – even quite racy. From a storyline apparently the same – tempest, expiatory victim singled out by means of chance, sacrifice of the expiatory victim thrown overboard – the circumstances of the « resurrection » are different but stay in *Hysmine and Hysminias* in the field of religion. On the one hand Jonah, buried inside the whale's stomach for three days and three nights, what is a prefiguration of Jesus' death and resurrection, is rescued by God ordering the whale to throw back him. On the other hand Hysmine is thrown naked overboard before the very eyes of the hero, Hysminias. Then in a dream of Hysminias (book VII) which reality confirms partially (book XI), Hysmine is finally rescued by Eros, naked, who from the sea depths carries her to the shore, and lays her in the hero's arms. Since it's a matter here of resurrection, surely it's too

<sup>9</sup> *Hex.*,1081-82:... ἡματωμένοις /γάλακτος ὀλκοῖς ζωπυροῦσι τὰ βρέφη :They **revive** their fledglings by **gulps** of milk of blood.

<sup>10</sup> *Rh. and Dos.*, IV, 185 : γάλακτος ὀλκοῖς ἐκτραφῆναι τὰ βρέφη : **feed** the newborn by **gulps** of milk.

<sup>11</sup> *John*, 5, 21 : « My Father resurrects dead people, raises them to life ».

<sup>12</sup> *Rh. and Dos.*, IV, 237, the Barbarian leader says :

« ἄνθρωπε » « ἐξανάστα καὶ βίου » : « human » « stand up and live ! ».

*Rh. and Dos.*, IV, 239, the story narrator says :

Ἐγείρεται γοῶν εὐθέως : So he rises immediately.

<sup>13</sup> In total these two verbs are used 19 times about Christ compared with 7 times about humans.



the hero's desire resurrection. The hero, while he thought his beloved dead in the sea depths, finds her alive and moreover naked !

By contrast the question of resurrection in general, it means that of humans, is treated in the three works *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, *Drosilla and Charikles*, and *Katomyomachia* under other circumstances, in a tragic way and three times by credible figures. At the ending of *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*, a third quotation from George Pisides (*Hexaëmeron*, line 1288<sup>14</sup>), in a serious employment here, is used, with one modification concerning the verb choice, to support the idea that dead people cannot « rise ». Only alive people lost in the sense of « temporarily absent » can figuratively « rise », like the bird which Pisides shows, line 1288, when it comes out of a tree hollow where it was hibernating. The ending of the novel indeed presents through the narrator's eyes and commentary the heroes at long last coming back home, in Abydos<sup>15</sup>, while their parents had doubted that they could see them once again still alive. But by quoting *Hexaëmeron* line 1288 apart from its context, Prodromos is pushing aside celebration of dead's resurrection which comes (lines 1258-1266) before the figurative example of the bird apparently dead / again alive. Beforehand in the novel of Prodromos (book VI, lines 430 and 435) the interpretation of resurrection notion according to IX, 467, had been confirmed by the hero's friend assuring that « It's not possible for the departed to see again the sunlight ». In a similar way in the *Katomyomachia* the mice chorus reminds their sovereign's wife whose son has just died devoured by the cat, that « Nobody can make the dead rise (ἐξεγείρω) from the grave » (*Katomyomachia*, line 269). In that case as in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* ending (ἐγείρω) the employment of Greek verbs ἐγείρω and ἐξεγείρω makes the challenge about dogma more perceptible by connection with the biblical text expression : ἐγείρω, « to rise », is the verb used in the *Acts of Apostles* to refer to resurrection of the dead, the humans.

But in Eugenianos' novel, *Drosilla and Charikles*, a character made ridiculous in talking out of place to the heroine about love, questions he too the notion of resurrection : book VI, line 587 : « Who can make alive someone once he's dead ? » (in Greek : « Τίς τὸν θανόντα / ζῶντα δεικνύειν ἔχει ; »). This line refers directly to the hero's death announced untruthfully by that Drosilla's lover to prompt her to accept his love. Three lines below (line 590) he describes himself as a living dead (in Greek : νεκρὸν τὸν ζῶντα) while Drosilla is despising his love. Together the lines 587 and 590 suggest that Drosilla alone is able to make alive again her disturbing lover in returning his love, but there is not any kind of resurrection apart from this metaphoric one. The point of view is identical to that of the narrator in ending of *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* : a resurrection concerns only alive people temporarily absent from the circle of those who love them.

<sup>14</sup> *Hex.*, 1288 : Ὡς οἷα νεκρὸς ἐκ ταφῆς ἀνηγγμένῃ : Like human dead coming out of the grave.

<sup>15</sup> *Rh. and Dos.*, IX, 467 : ὡς οἷα νεκροῖς ἐκ τάφων ἠγεγερμένοις : Like dead risen from the grave.

Six episodes in total questioning the resurrection notion and supported by parodies of parthenogenesis, Incarnation and Christ's sacrifice are they attesting an authors' will to destroy as a whole the Christ's message by challenging its ultimate finality ? Since parody affects as much process of divine Creation and what makes it possible, I mean divine omnipotence, it's in the end the whole content of the *Bible, Old and New testament*, which mockery concerns about dogma. Have the authors to be taken seriously regarding this work deconstructing the doctrinal principles ? It quite seems so. First recurrence in attributing challenge about dogma more often to credible figures, protagonists and/or narrators of the story, than to despicable figures<sup>16</sup> is full of significance. Secondly, Theodoros Prodromos, the boldest of the three authors by recurrence as much as intensity of passages « suspect » on a doctrinal level, is precisely the author who had to answer in public an accusation of heresy made not only about the fact that he was reading pagan authors but too about a basic dogma question : his conception of the Trinity. Prodromos answers this accusation in a poem-defence aimed at the accuser, and so entitled « Against Barys »<sup>17</sup>. The accusation must have been significant, for Prodromos has felt the need to devote in the « Against Barys » around thirty lines (l. 137-167 on 301 in total) to glorify the Trinity while showing obviously his thorough knowledge of the matter, as if the doctrinal knowledge could prove undeniably the genuineness of his orthodox faith. Third it's evident that three authors belonging no doubt at the same period to one or another circle of scholars regulars in emperor's Manuel Comnenos court, make the same choice in mocking the basic principles of the orthodox doctrine and what's more in the same kind of texts belonging to genres not serious – novel, little play as fable - assigned to reader's entertainment. Such an established fact leads me to the conclusion that it's a matter here of a movement constituted by at least together these three authors and not of individual researches which a sheer coincidence would make convergent. Unity of this movement comes therefore from the authors' approach (a challenging approach) and from this approach object (orthodox beliefs). Would a doctrinal consensus underlie this approach ? Would it be a Platonic or Neoplatonic trend ? About one of the three authors this question can clearly be asked. Regarding the two other authors there's not any indication in this direction. Indeed the title of Makrembolites' novel, *Hysmine and Hysminias*, can refer to Plato's *Banquet* through the symbolic homonymy of the heroes : one only person divided in two principles, male and female. It's a matter of love here. But in this novel beginning (book II, paragraphes 2-6) the description of a wall fresco representing the four cardinal virtues, if examined in great detail and with relation not only to the Platonic tradition but too Judaic and Christian ones, leads me to the conclusion that there's no influence of these three traditions<sup>18</sup>. So the description of cardinal virtues is a Makrembolites' creation entirely original. The matter here is apparently the doctrinal field,

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<sup>16</sup> Challenge attributed 7 times to credible figures versus 5 times to despicable figures.

<sup>17</sup> W. Hörandner, *Theodoros Prodromos Historische Gedichte*, Wien, 1974, Gedicht LIX.

<sup>18</sup> F. Meunier, « Eustathe Makrembolitès, *Hysminè et Hysminias* : des Vertus peu orthodoxes », *Erytheia*, 31, 2010, p. 133-144.

no more that of love, and in this doctrinal field there's neither Platonic nor Judaic nor Christian influence.

Since it's not possible – for the moment – to go beyond recognizing a free – or liberated – expression about orthodox dogma in the five works subject of this paper, it's yet possible to try explaining the authors' approach. Would it express an exasperation due to overflow of theological debates in the twelfth century under the reign of Manuel One ? The emperor himself had a great part in this inflation of debates for he was so fulfilling his own inclination for reflection about dogma, what's more in assuming the right of final decision in the matter in place of the theologians and clergymen. Or else the modifications concerning meaning and objects of the most important dogma questions, presented out of the reality field, in literary genres where fiction predominates, would they less superficially concretize the choice of turning away from the constituent principles of a religion perceived as oppressive, even stifling, plethora of theological debates and political hold on them being tangible manifestation of this kind of oppression ? The question is staying open.