

# **Vitsentzos Kornaros**

## **Erotokritos**

Erotokritos is a romance poem composed of 10.012 verses by Cretan Vitsentzos Kornaros in early 17th century. It is written in the Cretan dialect of the Greek language; around the central theme of love, it revolves themes such as honor, friendship, bravery, courage.

The plot is twisting around the love of Aretousa, the daughter of the King of Athens and Erotokritos the son of an adviser of the King. As Erotokritos is from an inferior social class to the princess, any relation between them was impossible. Therefore he disguises himself and starts singing erotic songs under her window. So the princess falls in love with the unknown singer. At some time Erotokritos flees away and tries in vain to forget his love. When the unknown singer stops singing under her window, Aretousa, discovers that she loves him and falls in deep sadness. To cheer her up the King organizes fights of joust. Erotokritos participates, wins the fight and taking courage from his victory, he dares to ask her father, King Iraklis to give him Aretousa in marriage. The king gets furious, exiles Erotokritos and orders his daughter to marry the successor to the throne of Byzantium. Aretousa refuses and the king confines her in a dark, humid dungeon. After a number of years, the king of Vlahias declares war on Athens and invades with his army.

Erotokritos after drinking a magic liquid that changes his appearance, he goes to help his homeland. He saves the life of the old King and the war is concluded in a duel between Erotokritos and the nephew of the King of Vlahia. Erotokritos wins but gets seriously wounded. He is brought to the royal palace, where he stays until he is cured. The King offers to adopt him and assign to him half of his kingdom, but Erotokritos refuses. Instead, he asks the king to release Aretousa and allow him to marry her. At first the princess refuses to be married to a stranger, but then Erotokritos reveals his real identity and the marriage takes place.

## ***Excerpts***

### ***first lines***

"The Cycles with their trails that rise and fall;  
Time's Wheel that knows the height and depth of All,  
That bears Fate's whims and turns not back again  
But whirls with Good and Evil in its train,  
The clash of war; the spur of hate and spite;  
The rapt embrace and languorous kiss by night;  
All these now haunt my mind and bid me tell  
The accidents and fortunes that befell  
A princess and her lover in the link  
Of a romance in which no guile could slink."

[...]

When the cool night gave rest to every mortal,  
and every beast sought to find a place to sleep  
he took his lute, went out silently  
and plucked it sweetly opposite the palace.

His hand was a sugar.

He has a voice like the nightingale.

On hearing him every heart sobbed and wept.

He recounted and told of the suffering of passion:

how he was entangled in love  
and how he languished and withered.

At such an exceedingly sweet voice every heart,

Even if it was like snow, was kindled when it came near.

He tamed everything wild. What was hard grew soft.

What he sang lingered sadly in one's mind.

[...]

Have you heard of the sad news Aretousa?

Your father has exiled me far away

He has given me only four more days to stay,  
and after that I must go alone away

And how am I going to be separated from you,  
and how am I going to live into exile without you?

My end is coming, know it my lady  
they will bury me away, my remains will be there

I understand that your father is going to get you married soon,  
seeking a son of a king and nobleman worthy of you.

And you cannot resist the wishes of your family,  
they defeat your mind and alter your desire.

Only one favor I am asking you, my heart's ruler,  
and after that I would happily be done with my life;

The moment you will get engaged sigh deeply  
And when you are a bride, when you change to a married woman

Let your tear drop and say "Poor Erotokritos  
what I promised you I forgot, what you wanted exists no more".

Once every month in your room think what I have suffered  
feel sorry in your heart for me

And take this painting from the drawer  
And the songs I sang to you, that you enjoy so much

And read them, look at them and think of me  
that I was exiled far away for you

And when they tell you I am dead, feel sorry for me and cry  
and the songs I created, burn them in fire.

No matter where I end up and how long I live,  
I promise you, another woman never to see.

And let ill-fated me vow that I never saw you,  
you were like a lit candle extinguished in my hands.

Better to be with you in death than with another one in life,  
it is for you that my body was born into this world!

[...]

### ***last lines***

Vitsentzos is the poet's name and his family's Kornaros  
He might have no sins when his death arrives  
In Sitia he was born, in Sitia he was brought up  
And there he wrote the verses you read  
At Kastro he got married as nature it demands  
And God will decide where he will die