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PREFACE

The present volume is the result of a very fruitful “coopération franco-allemande” between Daniel Melde, PhD candidate and research assistant at Freie Universität Berlin, and Sandra Provini, maîtresse de conférence at the Université de Rouen-Normandie.

Sandra was invited as a visiting scholar to Freie Universität Berlin in October 2019 on behalf of the Research Group 2305 *Discursivisations of the New. Tradition and Innovation in Medieval and Early Modern Texts and Images*. This group, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), consists of eight subprojects from the fields of German, English and Romance studies, Greek and Latin studies, as well as art history. In addition to Freie Universität, the list of participating institutions includes the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, the University of Zurich and the Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf.

The research group, whose director I am, investigates the complex relationship between ‘old’ and ‘new’, seeking to conceptualise this relationship not in terms of strictly linear diachronicity, but rather as the result of intricate temporal entanglements. *Discursivisations of the New* as suggested in the group’s name are understood as processual categories that are meant to transcend static old-vs.-new dichotomies and to overcome simplistic teleologies of progress. The central object of the collaborative research is constituted by European texts from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. The research group aims to achieve a redefinition of cultural dynamics that goes beyond the theoretical opposition of rupture and continuity. The project takes its departure from the observation that what is ‘new’ in epistemological, social or cultural terms is frequently coupled, in complex processes, with existing textual and generic structures.

The project pursued by research assistant Daniel Melde and myself, “Mars and his Pistol. Contemporary Novelty and Epic Tradition in Early Modern France”, is one of the subprojects of the group. Daniel’s and my work examines a corpus of epic texts in French and Latin from the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries. The texts we are focussing on employ the established conventions of the classical epic tradition, while simultaneously dealing with highly contemporary issues: each of them engages with actual historical events, which date back a hundred years at most, and sometimes only a few months (*Aktualitätsepike*). The project's goal is to outline the generic profile of *Aktualitätsepike* with greater precision by examining the genre's convergences and divergences with the contemporary discourse of practical historiography and historical theories concerning the writing of history. In so doing, the objective is to establish a clearer definition of the epic's subject matter and methods of textualisation within its immediate temporal context. What is more, unravelling the complex entanglements of 'old' and 'new' in the individual epics elucidates the historical conceptions of the epic as a genre that inform these texts – texts which deliberately select and perpetuate certain elements from the reservoir of epic tradition, while rejecting and discarding others.

Most of the work of the subproject has concentrated on epic poetry on the French religious wars, i.e. on the second half of the 16th century and the very first years of the 17th century. While working on these texts, however, we realised that the development of the genre needs to be considered against the background of the preceding epic production around the year 1500, which likewise responds to various then current or recent political and military events. This earlier tradition involves texts that tend to be neglected by scholars dealing with French Renaissance epics.

To address this lacuna, Daniel turned to Sandra Provini who is a highly esteemed specialist on these texts. Sandra has been very committed to this cooperation, for which we would like to thank her most sincerely. She spent a two-week research stay at Freie Universität Berlin during the second half of October 2019, funded by the Dahlem Junior Host Programme of Freie Universität. This programme specifically supports projects by young researchers at FU that are developed in cooperation with young colleagues from abroad.

At the centre of this very fruitful cooperation was the joint organisation of the workshop "The Rediscovery of Epic Writing in France around 1500. Negotiating Genre in a European Humanist Context", which took place in Berlin on 17 and 18 October 2019.

This is the list of questions that was circulated to all participants prior to the workshop:

What kind of ‘epic strategies’ do the French court poets apply to their texts? What is the epic formula’s function in the depiction of historical events that are highly contemporary to the authors? Which traditions of historical epic poetry are present to the authors (deriving from classical and late antiquity, the Middle Ages or recent literary developments at the rise of Early Modernity)? To what extent can we conceive the ‘epicization’ of contemporary history as a European humanist phenomenon with multiple transregional entanglements? How can we determine the relation between ‘poetry’ and ‘history’ in this specific socio-historical context? Which poetological debates, not only in France but also across Europe, played a major role (e.g. Germain de Brie’s *Antimorus* or Giovanni Pontano’s *Actius*)? Are there tendencies of poetical heroization in other genres such as the historiographical chronicle, travel records, or occasional poetry (*silvae*, odes, etc.)?

These questions raised by Daniel Melde and Sandra Provini led to a number of exciting papers given by contributors from France, Germany, Italy and Canada. The present collection ties together the edited versions of all presentations, as well as the results of the lively discussions the papers inspired. As the director of the research group and as head of the aforementioned subproject, I may say that I am extremely pleased with this publication. I would like to thank Sandra and Daniel very much for their commitment to this important volume and congratulate them, also on behalf of the entire research group, on their achievement.

We would like to express our sincere thanks for material support to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the Dahlem Humanities Center, the Centre d’Études et de Recherche Éditer/Interpréter of the Université de Rouen and to FU’s Italienzentrum. We are particularly grateful to Béatrice De March and Sabine Greiner for the organisational support of the joint workshop, and, for the preparation of this volume, to Rebecca Zeil and Mélanie Bost-Fievet.

Berlin, September 2021
Bernhard HUSS