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Telling the Truth: Fictionality and Epic in Seventeenth-Century German Literature

Abstract: Research on the history of fiction of the early modern period has up to now taken primarily the novel into consideration and paralleled the rise of the novel as the leading genre of narrative literature with the development of the modern consciousness of fictionality. In the present essay, we argue that contemporary reflections on fictionality in epic poetry, specifically, the *carmen heroicum*, must be taken into account to better understand the history of fiction from the seventeenth century onwards. The *carmen heroicum*, in the seventeenth century, is the leading narrative genre of contemporary poetics and as such often commented on in contexts involving questions of fictionality and the relationship between literature and truth, both in poetic treatises and in the poems themselves. To reconstruct a historical understanding of fictionality, the genre of the epic poem must therefore be taken into account.

The *carmen heroicum* was the central narrative genre in antiquity, in the sixteenth century in Italy and France, and still in the seventeenth century in Germany and England. Martin Opitz, in his ground-breaking poetic treatise, the *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* (1624), counts the *carmen heroicum* among the most important poetic genres; but for poetry written in German, he cites just one example of the genre, a text he wrote himself. The genre of the novel is not mentioned at all among the poetic genres in Opitz' treatise. Many other German poetic treatises of the seventeenth century mention the importance of the *carmen heroicum*, but they, too, provide only few examples of the genre, even though there were many Latin and German-language epic poems in the long seventeenth century. For Opitz, a *carmen heroicum* has to be distinguished from a work of history insofar as its author is allowed to add fictional embellishments to the ›true core‹ of the poem. Nevertheless, the epic poet is, according to Opitz, still bound to the truthfulness of his narrative.

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Shortly before the publication of Opitz' book, Diederich von dem Werder translated Torquato Tasso's epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata* (1580); his translation uses alexandrine verse, which had recently become widely successful in Germany, especially for epic poems. Von dem Werder exactly reproduces Tasso's rhyming scheme and stanza form. He also supplies the text with several peritexts. In a preface, he assures the reader that, despite the description of unusual martial events and supernatural beings, his text can be considered poetry. In a historiographical introduction, he then describes the course of the First Crusade; however, he does not elaborate about the plot of the verse epic. In a preceding epyllion – also written in alexandrine verse – von dem Werder then poetically demonstrates how the poetry of a Christian poet differs from ancient models. All these efforts can be seen as parts of the attempt to legitimate the translation of fictional narrative in German poetry and poetics. Opitz and von dem Werder independently describe problems of contemporary literature in the 1620s using the example of the *carmen heroicum*. Both authors translate novels into German, too; but there are no poetological considerations in the prefaces of the novels that can be compared to those in the *carmina heroica*.

Poetics following the model established by Opitz develop genre systems in which the *carmen heroicum* is given an important place, too; for example, in Balthasar Kindermann's *Der Deutsche Poet* (1664), Sigmund von Birken's *Teutsche Rede- bind- und Dicht-Kunst* (1679), and Daniel Georg Morhof's *Unterricht von der Teutschen Sprache und Poesie* (1682). Of particular interest for the history of fictionality is Albrecht Christian Rotth's *Vollständige Deutsche Poesie* (1688). When elaborating on the *carmen heroicum*, Rotth gives the word ›fiction‹ a positive terminological value and he treats questions of fictionality extensively. Rotth combines two contradictory statements, namely that a *carmen heroicum* is a poem and therefore invented and that a *carmen heroicum* contains important truths and is therefore true. He further develops the idea of the ›truthful core‹ around which poetic inventions are laid. With an extended exegesis of Homer's *Odyssey*, he then illustrates what it means precisely to separate the ›core‹ and the poetic embellishments in a poem. All these efforts can be seen as parts of the attempt to legitimize a poem that tells the truth in a fictional mode.

The paper argues that a history of fictionality must be a history that carefully reconstructs the various and specifically changing constellations of problems concerning how the phenomenon of fictionality may be interpreted in certain historical contexts. Relevant problems to which reflections on fictionality in seventeenth-century poetics of the epic poem and in paratexts to epic poems react are, on the one hand, the question of how the genre traditionally occupying the highest rank in genre taxonomy, the epic, can be adequately transformed in the

German language, and, on the other hand, the question of how a poetic text can contain truths even if it is invented.

1 Introduction: Epic Poems of the Seventeenth Century and the History of Fictionality

In recent theories of fictionality, the view prevails that fictionality is not an inherent quality of texts but rather a social and institutional practice. Since this practice is subject to historical change, it needs to be carefully historicized. In the present paper, we would like to elaborate on the following theses and methodical assumptions: First, in order to understand the concepts and practices of modern fictionality, it is necessary to return to the seventeenth century; second, in examining the concepts and practices of fictionality in the seventeenth century, it is not enough – as has often been the case – to refer only to the novel, which nowadays is often assumed to be the most significant fictional genre. Instead, to draw a historically adequate picture, it is essential to study the genre which was seen by contemporaries as the leading one in the early modern system of genres: the *carmen heroicum*. Third, in examining the concepts and practices of fictionality in the genre of *carmen heroicum*, it is necessary to look at relevant passages in early modern poetics and to take into account statements in the epic poems themselves as well as in their paratexts. Fourth, in doing so, a richer and more vivid picture of early modern concepts and practices of fictionality appears on the horizon than has been previously envisioned; indeed, it is far preferable to develop a historical picture as detailed and complex as possible than to rely on ›grand narratives‹. In this sense, we argue for a hermeneutic, context-sensitive approach towards the history of fictionality. Briefly put, to write a history of fictionality presupposes a historical approach towards theoretical phenomena. It means looking closely at specific phenomena and, by doing so, detecting differences between these phenomena that only from a broader perspective seem to be more or less the same.

We would like to illustrate our considerations with material taken from our DFG-funded research project in which we explore epic poems written and/or published in the German-speaking lands during the long seventeenth century. In this project, we are going to make evident that a widespread theory is wrong, namely, the claim – already propagated by early modern authors and then repeated by literary scholars in the twentieth and twenty-first century – that in seventeenth-

century German literature there are hardly any epic poems at all (e. g., cf. Stock-horst 2007, 39). In order to refute this claim, we are compiling a database in which detailed information is furnished about the most important epic poems in German and Latin, from Johann Fischart's *Eulenspiegel reimenweis* to Albrecht von Haller's *Die Alpen* (for the theoretical background of the project cf. Werle 2018; Korn/Werle/Worms 2018). More to the point, the reconstruction and analysis of poetological reflections included in the texts themselves, specifically, on their shifting status between fictionality and factuality, play a central role. Still, given that the examples studied in our research project occur primarily in a German historical context, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that the situation might be different for other cultural areas in Europe and beyond than is sketched in the following.[1]

Historians of fictionality evaluate the seventeenth century differently. Some, like Tilmann Köppe, in his contribution ›Fiktionalität in der Neuzeit‹ in the interdisciplinary handbook *Fiktionalität*, suggest that there are huge similarities between the early modern and the modern approach to dealing with fictional texts (cf. 2014). A similar view is held by Erich Kleinschmidt who asserts very convincingly that the early modern period played a crucial role in the emergence of the modern consciousness of fictionality (cf. 1982). Other scholars hold the view that modern fictionality and the practices connected with it arose only in the course of the eighteenth century and then were consolidated during the nineteenth. Others even hold that with regard to early modern literature one cannot properly speak of fictionality at all. The position that present views on fictionality are different to early modern views is held, for example,[2] by Nicholas

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1 For the genre history of the French epic poem in the seventeenth century, e. g., cf. Krüger 1986. – We are mostly grateful for the helpful comments with which Christopher Johnson (Arizona State University) and two anonymous referees of the *Journal of Literary Theory* have improved this article.
2 Further approaches by Catherine Gallagher, Hans Blumenberg, and Stefan Trappen lead in a similar direction, but also elaborate quite different, though convincing pictures of the history of early modern fictionality (cf. Blumenberg 1963; Trappen 1998; Gallagher 2006; for criticism of these ›modernist‹ positions cf. Orlemanski 2019). An equally convincing argument concerning the history of fictionality of the eighteenth century is proposed by Friedrich 2009 who maintains – at least for German literary history – that fictionality was not invented in the eighteenth century but that during the eighteenth century a crucial change in the concept of fictionality took place as a result of the shift from a *Regelpoetik* to a *Genieästhetik* (cf. 2009) – though it is worth discussing what ›the‹ ›concept‹ of fictionality actually means for Friedrich. Apart from such terminological and theoretical questions, however, it would be an even more important task for future scholarship to develop a non-reductionist, differentiated view of the history of fictionality between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which would take into account the different theories in all their diversity. In doing this, it would certainly be oversimplifying to lump together

Paige who sees the early modern ›regime‹ of poetic invention as separated from the modern ›regime‹ of fictionality by two historical steps.[3] The early modern regime is, according to Paige, characterized by the poet adding »his inventions to the renowned heroes and events of history so as to make a good plot« (2011, x). This regime is incommensurable with the modern one in which authors expect from their readers »that they accept the writer's inventions as a kind of model of reality« (ibid.). Between the pre-modern and the modern regime lies, in Paige's model, the ›pseudofactual‹ regime of the eighteenth century as a kind of transitional or intermediate phase – which in fact is the centre of interest of his book.

We contend the truth about early modern fictionality to lie somewhere in between the views of Köppe, on the one hand, and of Paige, on the other. The early modern theory and practice of poetic invention is not, as Paige suggests, incommensurable with the modern theory and practice of fictionality; but neither is the early modern theory and practice of fictionality as similar to the modern as Köppe believes. Now both Köppe and Paige, like many other scholars (some of which are mentioned in footnote 2), develop their positions on historical fictionality on the basis of the history of the novel.[4] In a recent article, however, Monika Fludernik argues against the claimed historical connection between the ›rise of the novel‹ and the ›rise of fictionality‹ (cf. 2018). We would like to support this view by pursing a genre-specific approach: In early modern poetological discourse, another narrative genre played a far more important role than the novel. When they talk about narrative literature, treatises on poetics of the seventeenth century first and foremost refer to the genre that since antiquity claimed to serve as the leading model of narrative poetry: the epic poem. In what follows, we would examine, then, statements concerning the genre of epic poems put forward in poetic treatises and poetological paratexts of epic poems of the

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all the accounts mentioned here. Paige, for example, criticises Gallagher's thesis of the ›rise of fictionality‹ during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as ›magical‹ because she considers only individual examples of texts and not representative data samples (cf. 2017). This criticism may be justified, but Paige, with his methodological account, underestimates the methodological complexity of hermeneutic text analysis and interpretation and, conversely, overestimates the worth of uninterpreted data for literary history.

3 In later publications, Paige seems to have changed his mind about the existence of ›regimes‹ in the history of fiction; cf. 2017, 523: »Though we can spot some spans of relative stability, they shouldn't be mistaken for paradigms, epistemes, regimes, or even, really, plain old periods – all those ways we have of saying that the culture of this or that moment is of a piece, a big text to be deciphered by the critic.«

4 In his detailed and worthwhile survey of the history of symptoms and signs of fictionality in narrative texts from antiquity to the early modern period, Harald Haferland, too, focuses on narrative prose and mostly disregards the field of epic poems (cf. 2014).

seventeenth century. Admittedly, it could seem a bit hazardous to use sources like these to draw conclusions about contemporary practices of fictionality; unfortunately, however, instructive sources of reader responses are rare for the seventeenth century, so we need to look at less direct witnesses of fictionality practices. And while the importance of poetic treatises and poetological paratexts concerning the emergence of a theory of the genre of epic poem has already been demonstrated by Stefanie Stockhorst (cf. 2007), we would like to demonstrate the relevance of such texts for the history of fictionality in the seventeenth century.

2 Diederich von dem Werder and the Translation of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*

Martin Opitz, the ground-breaking author of the *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* published in 1624, describes the way epic poetry relates to reality. Following the poetics of Aristotle, he clearly distinguishes between poetry and historiography:

> Das getichte und die erzehlung selber belangend / nimpt sie es nicht so genawe wie die Historien / die sich an die zeit vnd alle vmbstende nothwendig binden mußen / [...] vnter-menget allerley fabeln / historien / Kriegeskünste / schlachten / rahtschläge / sturm / wetter / vnd was sonsten zue erweckung der verwunderung in den gemütern von nöthen ist [...]. Gleichwol aber soll man sich in dieser freyheit zue tichten vorsehen / das man nicht der zeiten vergeße / vnd in jhrer warheit irre. (Opitz 1624, 29)

The epic poem, according to Opitz, takes greater liberties than historiography when narrating a course of events; and it mixes all sorts of stories and descriptions in the narration in order to arouse wonder and amazement in the minds of readers. Nevertheless, according to Opitz, one must not be tempted to doubt the truthfulness of the events described. The truth claim Opitz articulates for the epic poem is a point taken up, as we will see, by all subsequent authors reflecting on the nature of the *carmen heroicum* or trying to really create one. Further, this claim has to be understood in the context of long and entangled debates about the legitimacy of fiction and of a tradition of literature playing with the question of truth and fiction, both beginning in antiquity, continuing in the middle ages, and becoming increasingly important in early modern times (for a historical outline, cf. Nelson 1969). It might be argued that the truth claim made by Opitz on behalf of the *carmen heroicum* and then seconded by most other seventeenth-century authors supports the notion that the genre was seen as factual rather than fictional. This argument, however, seems highly counterintuitive. Moreover, it would be pointless to further discuss this question because the modern concep-

tual distinction of factual and fictional did not exist in the early modern period. What we would like to do instead is to describe how theoreticians of the seventeenth century dealt with a text genre that is most important for the history of a phenomenon we today call fictionality.

Shortly before the publication of Opitz' *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey*, Diederich von dem Werder translated into German the celebrated Italian *carmen heroicum* by Torquato Tasso, the *Gerusalemme liberata,* first published in 1580 (cf. also Stockhorst 2007, 44–46). In this poem, in the course of narrating historical events comprising the First Crusade, witches and a Muslim wizard are mentioned, and from the description of an armour, Tasso traces the mythological chronicle of the origins of the House of Este (alluding to the description of the shield of Achilles, famously described in Homer's *Iliad*). Thus, von dem Werder, a courtier from Anhalt who joined the *Fruitbearing Society* in 1620,[5] describes the text in his preface as a mixture of a true story and imaginary ornaments, just like Opitz prescribes in his treatise. In his translation, von dem Werder substituted the Italian hendecasyllable line with an alexandrine. Yet he maintained Tasso's stanzaic form, the *ottava rima*, which combines eight verses with the rhyme scheme abababcc. This scheme is not easy to be translated into German rhymes because of the triple cross-rhyme, which helps explain why all subsequent translators of Tasso's poem into German renounced the imitation of the stanza (cf. Ceresa 1973, 130–280).

Von dem Werder frames his translation with various peritexts. First, he gives a historical introduction to the First Crusade and the siege of Jerusalem. Remarkably though, he does not give a synopsis of the intricate, fairytale-like episodes of Tasso's twenty books about the female warrior Clorinda, King Tankred, the virgin Erminia, the crusader Rinaldo, and the witch Armida. Instead of sketching this complicated constellation of characters, von dem Werder begins with a historiographical introduction in prose. Immediately afterwards he discusses the difference between poetry and historical events:

> Ob nun wol unterschiedener Erscheinungen der Engel / wie auch vielerley Zaubereyen diese Poesie meldung thut / so wölle ihme der wolmeynende Leser dieselben nicht gar zu fremdd fürkommen lassen / In betrachtung / daß die Poeten nicht allein die Freyheit haben / dasjenige / was Gott auff unerforschliche arth regiert unnd ordnet / und was die bösen Geister unsichtbarer weise stifften und anrichten / sichtbarlich gleichsam zu beschreiben / und für die Augen zustellen / sondern es melden die rechten Geschichtschreiber dieser Historien sel[b]sten gar vieler erscheinungen der Engel / unnd mancherley Zaubereyen. (von dem Werder 1626, [preface] 16–17)

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5 Witkowski 1887 still offers a good overview of the biography of von dem Werder; cf. also Dünnhaupt 1974.

In this part of the text, von dem Werder justifies the independence of poetry in two ways. He claims that poets have different and even greater liberties in representation than historians. The poet is supposed to represent hidden connections of the empirical world that are difficult to recognize by ›normal‹ people. Moreover, he notes that even some historians describe the existence of phenomena like angels and witches to explain these hidden connections.

Next, von dem Werder discusses Opitz' poetics in detail, which he is able to do because the preface to his work was written more than two years after the translation was completed.[6] He insists that he did not know Opitz' poetics before he completed his translation. It was the Wittenberg professor of poetics, August Buchner, who sent Opitz' *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* to the *Fruitbearing Society* in 1625. Von dem Werder and Tobias Hübner, another courtier in the Society, who translated Guillaume de Saluste du Bartas' *La Sepmaine*, immediately recognized the significance of the book and the poetic differences to their own translation attempts using alexandrines. On the 9th of June in 1625, Hübner wrote to Buchner (Opitz 2009, 393–394):

> Celeberrimi Opitii Poeticam propterea tibi remittere differo, quod Illustrissimo Principi LUDOVICO Anhaltino, ex Hollandia propediem reduci, eam prius exhibere constitui. [...] Nobilissimus Tassi translator Werderus mecum eam perlegit. Opus ipsum præclarum, laborem utilissimum judicavimus: Sed regulas nonnullas deprehendimus exactiores, quam ut in eas impingere quandoque vel ipsi Opitio non potuerit contingere.[7]

Later, Buchner sent von dem Werder's translation to Opitz and enthusiastically praised it in several letters, although Opitz responded with reserve (cf. Opitz 2009, 470–485 [August Buchner in Wittenberg to Martin Opitz in Breslau on June 17th, 1626]). In sum, von dem Werder translated Tasso's text before he came to know Opitz' poetics; yet he partially anticipated its prescriptions. And when von dem Werder finally read Opitz' book, he saw his own poetic principles validated. Nevertheless, von dem Werder completely revised the Tasso translation over the next decade (cf. letters between Prince Ludwig and von dem Werder in Conermann 2006, 585–588, 591–592).

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6 This delay between translation and printing occurred because the famous Frankfurt engraver Matthäus Merian needed considerable time for the detailed engravings depicting battle descriptions of the Thirty Years' War (cf. Dünnhaupt 1974, 32–33). Consequently, the author had to wait two years for his text to be published.

7 »I postpone sending you back the poetics of the highly famous Opitz because I have decided to show them to the most illustrious prince Ludwig of Anhalt who will soon return from Holland. [...] The noblest Tasso translator von dem Werder has read the book together with me. We found the work itself wonderful, a very useful work. However, we thought some rules were too demanding for even Opitz not to violate them now and then« [translation D.W., U.K.].

Let us now have a look at the next part of von dem Werder's preface. Without any typographical signposts, he integrates an unfinished alexandrine poem in 26 strophes, the *Herrligkeit Christi*. This poetic praise of Jesus Christ examines the question whether writing poetry is licit for a Christian author. Von dem Werder distinguishes four types of poetry that are allowable: the poetic praise of god, the heroic poem, the poetic praise of women, and the poetic praise of war. In his own poetic experiments, however, the speaker of the poem claims to have had no success; especially not in the poetic description of the devastating consequences of the early years of the Thirty Years' War. The speaker of the poem distinguishes himself from poets of another sort: »Doch will ichs nicht auff art wie ein Poete richten | Der zu der warheit noch viel dings pflegt zu erdichten | Und besser tausendmahl rausstreichet seine Sach | Als sie nie wird geschehen auch vormals nie geschah [...]« (von dem Werder 1626 [Vorrede, Herrligkeit Christi], 23). With a gesture of emulation (*aemulatio*), the speaker then turns against Apollo and the Muses on Mount Helicon whose help he refuses. Instead, as a Christian poet, he claims to sing of Christ in heaven. Unlike the ancient poets, he writes, the Christian poet can assert a claim to truth: »Mit Demuth / Glauben / Lieb Furcht / Hoffnung angethan | Red in der Warheit ich [...]« (ibid., 24). Finally, Christ is addressed directly as a source of inspiration, as a supplement of the epic muse: »Drumb Anfang Mittel End / O Jesu / selbst regier | Weil mein werck dein werck ist [...]« (ibid., 26). Thus, von dem Werder begins the translation of Tasso's text with a praise of Christ, whereby he confronts truthful Christian poetry and the poetry of ancient authors who merely invented their stories. The *Herrligkeit Christi* can therefore be interpreted as an extended invocation of the Muses with a Christian twist – all in order to underscore the possibilities of Christian epic. The ›christianization‹ of the invocation of the Muse is an idea Tasso himself had implemented in his epic poem on the First Crusade as well. Here Tasso formulates with the same gesture of emulation (in von dem Werder's translation):

> O Musa, die du nicht ein welcken Lorbeerkrantz | Umd deine Stirne führst am Berge Helicone | Im Himmel aber trägst von Sternen und von Glantz | Auff ewigwehrend Art ein helle güldne Krone/ | Mit deiner Himmelsbrunst mein Herz entzünd mir gantz/ | Gib Klarheit meim Gesang mit Ungnad mein verschone/ | Wann Warheit ich mit schertz vermeng / und schmück zur Zier | Mit dein und andrer mehr ergetzung mein Pappier. (ibid., [Der erste Gesang], 1)

Already in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, the promise of truth is combined with the license to embellish it with poetic ornaments – a theory that, by the way, generally has to be seen in relation to the ancient rhetorical doctrine concerning elocutional *ornatus*. Directly in the following stanza, Tasso, and with him his translator von dem Werder, utilizes a poetological metaphor already introduced

by Lucretius' didactic poem *De rerum natura*. Lucretius (Lucr. de rerum natura 1, 921–950), mediated by Tasso and von dem Werder, compares literature to a »sweet juice« that hides the taste of bitter medicine.

> Ob weißt daß sich dahin am meisten sehnt die Welt/|Da man der Süssigkeit am meisten ihr einschencket/|Und wann die Wahrheit ist in Reime wol gestelt/|So hat sie offt zu sich auch ihren Feind gelencket/|Also dem krancken Kind man ein Geschirz fürhelt|Deß Rand mit süssem Safft besprengt / und es so träncket/|Betrogen unterdeß trinckt es den bittern Safft/|Und kriegt durch diese List so wieder Lebenskrafft. (ibid.)

Thus, not only von dem Werder in his preliminary remarks, but also Tasso in the poem itself, tries to justify embellishments of truth enacted by poetry.

After Tasso's poem, von dem Werder translated several parts of the *Orlando furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto and a political novel, a ›Staatsroman‹, namely, Giovanni Loredano's *Dianea*. Von dem Werder introduces the translation of this novel in a far less complex way than he does Tasso's epic poem. The main part of the preface is a lesson in hermeneutics:

> Das erstemal kan nur auf den Lauf der Geschichte; Das zweyt- und drittemal auf der Rede Ferti[g]keit / und der Sachen artige Beschreibung / genaue Acht gegeben werden. Das viert- und mermal aber müssen die Gedancken auf tieffere Verständnüsse gerichtet seyn. Denn diese und dergleichen fröliche Erfindungen halten oft Geistreiche Weisheit / fürtrefliche Rahtschläge / samt hohen Geheimnüssen wichtiger Stadsachen / in sich verborgen und pflegen mit / nicht gemeiner / lieblichen Belustigung / unter der Schale der Fabeln viel warhafte Geschichte / verdeckter Weise / mit eingewickelt zu füren. (Loredano 1644, 1)

The argument for a useful reading of the novel is partly similar to von dem Werder's defence of epic poems: they are not true, just invented, but they contain a ›true core‹. The relatively new genre of the novel could, however, be poetically defended in a relatively simple way. After reading the text three times to find different layers of meaning in it, in the fourth reading the truth behind the plot can be deciphered and adequately understood by the reader. With regard to all the witches and sorcerers that appear in Tasso's Jerusalem-poem, von dem Werder had to make a greater argumentative and rhetorical effort to defend and explain them, as we saw above, than he has to when it comes to the novel's content. Obviously, in the context of the genre of epic poems, this effort was seen as necessary to justify the translation of the text into German language. The translation of a novel, as one can see, demanded less effort to legitimate. There might be numerous explanations for this. One is that the novel in this period was a genre generally regarded less worthwhile on the scale of poetic genres and therefore demanded less poetological effort; another reason is that epic poems in the early modern period – with their classical heritage – were regarded to raise a knowl-

edge claim and at the same time they were understood as made-up stories. This seeming contradiction had to be explicated.

Von dem Werder and with him the *Fruitbearing Society* wanted to show the equivalence of the German language and poetry in comparison to other European cultures. Among the most highly valued works of antiquity and the Renaissance were many epic poems. So the German poets had to prove their artistic equality first and foremost by means of this genre. To this end, the first part of von dem Werders strategy is his historical overview of the First Crusade. He suggests that the plot of the poem is intimately related to historical truth. The second part is the Christian emulation of the invocation of the Muse in the poem *Herrligkeit Christi* where he presents himself as a god-fearing and pious author. The third part of legitimating his approach is the effort he puts into his elaborate translation. Finally, there are arguments for the importance of poetical embellishments that Tasso himself made and that von dem Werder only had to translate: the slightly different invocation of a Christian muse and the citation of the influential passage by Lucretius. While it was relatively easy for von dem Werder to defend the translation of a novel, he obviously had to work harder to justify Tasso's poetic inventions and his own translation of them.

Von dem Werder translates a *carmen heroicum* from the Italian Renaissance into German and tries to justify the seeming violations against truth claims made within this text. He does not refer directly to Opitz' remarks concerning the epic poem in the *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey*, but his literary reactions to the problem of translating a poem and Opitz' poetological reflections regarding this genre indicate (a) that both authors had to deal with a common problem, (b) that this problem was particularly troubling in the field of the *carmen heroicum* and (c) that it could not be solved simply by referring to the solutions offered by ancient epic poems or ancient poetics such as, above all, Aristotle's. It would therefore be a case of historical over-generalization to place the phenomenon reconstructed here in the category of the ›Aristotelian regime of fiction‹ together with all relevant pre-modern historical textual phenomena in general, as Nicholas Paige does (cf. Paige 2011, x, 1–33). By saying this, we do not want to imply that Paige is mistaken with his thesis; he is as little wrong as any ›grand narrative‹ may be. We instead want to argue for a historical perspective on the history of fictionality of the early modern period. Such a perspective might seem somewhat disenchanting for theoretically inclined readers because many of our historical examples might seem to fit into any ›grand narrative‹ they like. For us, however, it is crucial that the historical material has to be taken as seriously as possible in order to see small differences rather than big pictures.

3 Albrecht Christian Rotth and the Embellishment of Truth

Opitz' remarks in the *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* have subsequently become canonical in the field of German poetry; to this day it is this treatise encountered by most scholars who want to learn about the theory of literary genres in seventeenth-century German literature. In the course of this century, however, numerous other treatises on German poetics were published, and often, but not always, they have additional and different things to say about the relationship between *carmina heroica* and fictionality than does Opitz' programmatic text. An excellent guide to this field is the chapter on epic poems in Stefanie Stockhorst's *Reformpoetik. Kodifizierte Genustheorie des Barock und alternative Normenbildung in poetologischen Paratexten* (cf. Stockhorst 2008, 275–307). Stockhorst offers an instructive overview of the treatment of epic poems in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century treatises on poetics. Unfortunately though, she does not engage the claims that are relevant for a history of fictionality that can be found in the relevant passages in the texts.

Taking a closer look at Stockhorst's examples, two things can be observed. First, the explanations regarding genre history made in poetics of the seventeenth century are framed rather consistently. The claim that there are no or at least very few epic poems written in German is relatively common in the treatises. Neither examples in the German language nor contemporary Latin poems from the German-speaking lands are mentioned – even though both were really quite numerous during this period. Instead, the treatises follow ancient models, in particular Homer and Vergil.

Second, examination of relevant treatises on poetics with regard to their statements on the *carmen heroicum* reveals that not all of these treatises contain very detailed information concerning fictionality. It is, by the way, not the case that, as one might be tempted to assume, all the German poetological treatises follow Opitz' model very closely. This *is* certainly the case sometimes, for example in Balthasar Kindermann's *Deutschem Poet* (1664), in which Opitz' definition is repeated that the *carmen heroicum* deals with ›high matters‹ (»von hohen Wesen«). Kindermann, however, also elaborates this definition to argue that epic poems deal with heroic deeds, wars, and heavenly as well as political matters belonging to a virtuous life:

> Die I. Ahrt ist ein Heroisch oder Helden-Gedicht / welches gemeiniglich sehr weitläufftig / nnd [sic] von hohen Wesen / als von vortrefflichen Heldenthaten / langwierigen Kriegen / auch wol von natürlichen / Himmlischen / Politischen / und andern Sachen / so zu einen Tugendhafften Leben gehören / zu reden pfleget. (Kindermann 1664, 237)

While Opitz cites his own *Trostgedichte in Widerwertigkeit des Krieges* as an example for a *carmen heroicum* in German language, Kindermann only makes a slight variation insofar as he replaces the one poem written by Opitz with three other poems written by Opitz: the *Vesuvius*, the *Vielguet*, and the *Lobgesang des Kriegsgottes Martis* (cf. ibid., 238–240). But with this said, such a close imitation of Opitz' theories is not the rule.[8]

    Two other treatises on poetics, therefore, are of significantly more interest for us: Sigmund von Birken's *Teutsche Rede- bind- und Dicht-Kunst* published in 1679 and Daniel Georg Morhof's *Unterricht von der teutschen Sprache und Poesie* from 1682. In these treatises, epic poems and novels are presented as manifestations of one and the same literary genre.[9] Literary Scholars in the field of German Studies who are not familiar with the literature of the early modern period will not be very surprised by this fact as they are used to classifying the field of narrative literature, per Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as ›Epik,‹ which comprises all forms of narrative and is to be differentiated both from ›Lyrik‹ and from ›Dramatik.‹ However, in early modern German literature, the novel had considerable difficulties to win acknowledgement as an autonomous literary genre. Accordingly, the novel, as we already suggested, is not treated at all in Opitz' influential treatise on poetics (1624), whereas the *carmen heroicum* is classified as the most important poetic genre.[10] Around 1680, at the time of Birken and Morhof, the situation had obviously changed. Novels could not be ignored any longer as a literary

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8 Some other treatises on poetics are of less interest with regard to the history of fictionality because they define the *carmen heroicum* exclusively by the verse metre used, as does, for example, Justus Georg Schottel in his *Teutsche Vers- oder Reimkunst* first published in 1645, which merely states that in Latin the poems are written in hexameters which can be well translated into German as alexandrine verses. Schottel 1645, 179: »Sonsten aber haben wir wir im Teutschen an stat des *generis Heroici* die Heldenart; an stat des *Elegiaci* die wechselart [...]. «

9 Birken 1679, 301–307, here 301–302: »Mit diesen HirtenGedichten vergleichen sich die Helden-Gedichte oder *Carmina Heroica*: wann man / von einem Helden / zwar keine Historie / aber doch ein solches Werk schreibet / das dessen Grosthaten mit Belusten erzehlet. Solches geschihet / entweder in lauter Versen / oder in ungebundener Rede / die mit Versen untermängt ist.« Morhof 1682, 327, 330: »Wir schreiten jetzo zu den vornehmbsten Arten der Gedichte / welche von der *materia* oder *objecto* ihren Nahmen empfangen. Unter diesen hat das Helden-Gedichte / *Epicum Carmen*, den Vorzug / welches das gröste Meisterstück in der Dichtkunst ist. [...] Es ist eine andere Art der Gedichte / aber in ungebundener Rede / welche dennoch mit guten Fuge Helden-Gedichte genennt werden können. Denn sie sind von den andern nicht unterschieden / als nur bloß an dem *metro*. Es hat aber *Aristoteles* zugegeben / daß auch ein *Poema* ohne *Metro* seyn könne. Solche sind die so genannten *Romain*en / von deren Ursprunge vielerley Meinungen sind.«

10 It is worth noting in this context, however, that Opitz himself did translate the novel *Argenis* by John Barclay in 1626 and Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* in 1638.

genre: they were now integrated into the system of genres by being described as *carmina heroica* in prose.

Extensive reflections on the genre of *carmen heroicum* can be found in a treatise published some years later, namely in Albrecht Christian Rotth's *Vollständiger Deutscher Poesie* (1688), which, as Volkhard Wels has pointed out, in many respects stands in the tradition of Jacob Masen's *Palaestra eloquentiae ligatae* (1654) (cf. Wels 2009, 126–129; for Rotth, cf. also Stockhorst 2007, 42–43). Like Birken and Morhof, Rotth sees the epic poem and the novel as closely related genres – his chapter on the epic poem is immediately followed by a chapter on the novel. But even if we disregard his perspective on genre, Rotth's ideas concerning the epic poem are particularly interesting for the history of fictionality. First, the word ›fiction‹ in this treatise is explicitly used as a neutral term to signify ›made-up, invented episodes of a story‹, and not in the way typical in the seventeenth century, namely, with the negative connotations of a lie or illusion (for the history of the relationship between lie and fiction, cf. Ernst 2004). Second, Rotth's reflections on the epic poem[11] are remarkable because they – developing further ideas of his precursors – propose a model that makes consistent two basic assumptions regarding the *carmen heroicum*, assumptions that at first glance seem to contradict each other. Basic assumption 1: an epic poem is a poem and therefore made up. Basic assumption 2: an epic poem contains important truths and is therefore truthful (›warhaftig‹). Rotth solves this seeming contradiction by suggesting that a *carmen heroicum* should truthfully tell the noble deed of a historic hero embellishing it with invented episodes:

> Der Held / dessen Verrichtung zur Materie vorgenommen wird / muß berühmt und bekannt seyn (daher alhier eine erdichtete Person / wie in andern Geschichten / nicht stat findet) / doch nicht gar zu alt noch gar zu neu. [...] Die Verrichtung selbst in ihrem Wesen kann nicht wol gantz erdichtet sein / denn sonst würde sie wenig Liebe erwecken. Ist daher besser / daß man eine warhafftige Geschicht nimt und sie ausgeschmückt vorträgt. [...] Und an diesem Orthe heist ein Episodium alles dasjenige / was zu der Kurtz-gefasten Haupt-Verrichtung in der Erzehlung hinzu kömmt entweder als wenn es darzu gehörte [...] oder daß man leicht sieht es seyn *ficta*. (Rotth 1668, 278–279)

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11 Cf. his definition of ›epic poem‹ (Rotth 1688, 291): »Ist demnach ein Helden Gedichte nichts anders als ein solches Gedichte / in welchem sich ein sinreicher Poet eines vornehmen und berühmten heldens löbliche That / die endlich zu einem glücklichen Ende gediehen zu erzehlen vorgenommen / dieselbe auch durch seine sinnreiche Ordnung / Zusatz / und einmischung allerhand Neben-Sachen dermassen artig in heroischen Versen vorzutragen weiß / daß er nicht alleine den Leser immer bey der Lust erhält / sondern auch daß Verwunderung und Liebe gegen die Tugend erwecket wird.«

The hero of a *carmen heroicum*, says Rotth, should not be invented, and the reported deed should be a truthful story. This ›true core‹ should then be embellished, and Rotth calls these embellishments »*episodia* oder *fictiones*« (ibid., 271). Wels assumes that with this theory, Rotth has to be situated in the tradition of René Le Bossu's 1675 *Traité du poème epique* (cf. Wels 2009, 128). ›Fictio‹, according to Rotth, is everything which is an ›accessory‹ to the main aspect of the narration, the main action of the story: »Und an diesem Orthe heist ein *Episodium* alles dasjenige / was zu der Kurtz-gefasten Haupt-Verrichtung in der Erzehlung hinzu kömmt« (Rotth 1688, 279). To illustrate this theory, the largest part of the chapter dealing with the *carmen heroicum* in Rotth's *Vollständiger Deutscher Poesie* is occupied by a passage in which Rotth gives a detailed example of how he perceives the distinction between ›truthful core‹ and fictional embellishment, namely the example of Homer's *Odyssey* (cf. ibid., 293–347). Rotth specifies the ›truthful core‹ (›Materie‹) of the ancient epic book by book and enumerates all those ›fictiones‹ the poet adds to the core of the poem. For example, according to Rotth the ›Materie‹ of the ninth book of the *Odyssea* is the following:

> Ulysses giebt sich zuerkennen und erzehlt seine Reise von Troja, nachdem sie eingenommen worden. Daß er 1. Mit den Ciconiern bei dem Berg Ismaro in Thracien gestritten und ihre Stadt zerstöret; Daß er 2. von dannen zu dem Ltophagern [sic] kommen; daß er 3. weiter zu der Cyclopen- oder Risen-Insel angelanget. (ibid., 304–305)

The ›fictiones‹ are all the details with which the story is told. As we can see here, the distinction between ›Materie‹ and ›Fiktion‹ is drawn ambiguously: The criterion of the distinction oscillates between an epistemic level – the truthful events told in the story are embellished with invented elements – and a level of its representation which corresponds, generally speaking, to today's narratological distinction between *histoire* and *discours*. The ambiguity of Rotth's conceptual distinction becomes obvious when he summarises the ›Materie‹ of the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*: »*Ulysses* kömt zu des *Plutonis* seiner Wohnung«, and then comments: »Obwohl diese gantze Materie erdichtet ist / so ist sie doch als eine Materie dieses Buchs zum voraus zusetzen« (ibid., 311).

4 Conclusion: Towards a History of Fictionality as a History of Problems

Early modern theories and practices of fictionality as discussed in contemporary texts dealing with the poetics of the *carmen heroicum* and as exemplified in *carmina heroica* of the German-speaking lands indicate that the seventeenth-cen-

tury theory and – as far as we are able to infer from available sources – practice of fictionality are neither incommensurable with modern ones nor identical with them. Moreover, regardless of theoretical questions, the historical research on practices and theories of fictionality uncovers a vivid and differentiated picture that should not be reduced to simplistic schemes. We therefore argue with Julie Orlemanski »for a *hermeneutic* conception of fictionality« (2019, 146) because we consider it to be best suited for the reconstruction of the *history* of fictionality; further, we, along with Orlemanski (cf. ibid., 158), argue for a genre-sensitive reconstruction of this history because we think it most capable of uncovering this picture (for a similar view, also cf. Ernst 2004, 98). In the present paper, we have tried to demonstrate a hermeneutic, context-sensitive approach towards the history of fictionality. This approach would become even more differentiated if we discussed additional examples. By doing this, it would probably become even more obvious that concepts and practices of fictionality in general and especially in the seventeenth century cannot be easily reduced to a common denominator; instead, we have to take into account the concurrent existence of diverse practices of fictionality in various genres, contexts, and historic constellations (a similar claim is suggested by Gittel 2018 as well).

In the texts examined in this paper, however, a common model at least for the limited field of poetic reflections on a certain genre in a certain time period becomes visible. This model could be described as a kind of partial fictionality: *carmina heroica* in the early modern period are intended to tell of truthful matters (for the European context cf. Müller-Bochat 1966), and, to effectively do so, the narrative ›cores‹ are enriched by invented embellishments. Around 1625, Martin Opitz and Diederich von dem Werder reflect on the relationship of poetry and truth by focusing on the example of the *carmen heroicum*. Both authors describe something that could be addressed as partial fictionality. In 1688, Albrecht Christian Rotth reformulates in greater detail the thoughts outlined by Opitz and von dem Werder. Moreover, all these seventeenth-century authors contemplate problems that are usually correlated with the ›rise of the novel‹ during the eighteenth century which often »is seen to mark the emergence of fiction itself« (Orlemanski 2019, 145); but, again, they treat these problems in the context of pondering another genre, the *carmen heroicum*. Both von dem Werder and Rotth describe a phenomenon that seems to be rather similar to the one we today understand as fictionality – but they do not do so in modern terms. The fact that they use many words and various arguments in their attempts to deal with the phenomenon shows that there was something important at stake; and thus it is a critical task for historians of fictionality to understand what this was. The interesting thing here is not to claim that the ›modern‹ practice of fictionality was historically developed earlier than other scholars have claimed, but rather to understand

that the history of fictionality must be a history that sensitively reconstructs the various and specifically changing problem-constellations (*Problemgeschichte*) to which discussions about the phenomenon of fictionality react at a certain time.

For many historical constellations it is relatively difficult to say anything directly about what the leading practices of fictionality were and how they changed. What *can* be done, however, is to reconstruct the contexts of the fictionality practices and the problem-constellations to which they responded, and thus to identify the historical changes in fictionality rather indirectly. A direct way to the fictionality practices of the seventeenth century seems to be hard to find; what we can find, however, are poetological statements of different sorts that can at least serve as indicators for these practices. There is, admittedly, a methodological difficulty: Can the study of poetics teach us something about aspects of fictionality practices that are matter-of-fact behavior not implying a consciousness of problems at all? Maybe not. However, a problem-history (*Problemgeschichte*) of fictionality of the seventeenth century is better than no history of fictionality of the seventeenth century at all; and such a history will at least offer some illumination of the fictionality practices during this period. As we wanted to show in this paper, the generic and poetological problems concerning fictionality and epic poetry to which some German seventeenth-century poetics and paratexts tried to react were, first, the question of how the genre that traditionally held the highest rank in the taxonomy of genres, the epic poem, could be adequately transformed into German language and how these translations could be legitimated; and, second, the question of how a poetic text can contain truths even if it is poetically invented.

In order to further reconstruct those aspects of the history of fictionality on which this essay focused, the generic history of the *carmen heroicum* should be examined in two additional directions: First, adaptations of the ancient genre models could be interpreted more closely, both in literary and poetological texts. Second, the reciprocal influence between poetry written in the vernacular languages – Italian, French, English, German, as well as various other languages – should be considered, with the theory and practice of translation offering critical interpretative lenses. This, however, would be a task to which this article could be only a first step.

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