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INTRODUCTION

The image on the cover of this volume and on the plate shows a first-century BC or AD relief, currently housed in the Princeton University Art Museum, on which a poet of New Comedy – most likely Menander – carefully thinks about what masks, i.e. roles, he should put on stage in his next play. This constitutes a fitting visual metaphor for the theme of the *65th Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique*, for which the Fondation Hardt welcomed us so very warmly, both meteorologically and socially speaking, last August: namely the "Formes et fonctions des langues littéraires en Grèce ancienne". Just like Menander on the relief, *all* the writers and poets of Ancient Greece not only thought about *what* they wanted to communicate, but also *how* they might best do so – and thus, about the 'roles', 'voices', or 'codes' they had to choose in order best to capture the full attention of their various audiences. In one way, of course, this observation is painfully banal; but if it is, it then only becomes all the more surprising that the underlying 'big idea' of our series has rarely, if ever, been pursued before, and that we are still lacking today – no less than, say, fifty or a hundred years ago – a true 'linguistic history of the literary genres of Ancient Greece'.

Quite obviously, there is no shortage of histories of classical literature in general, ranging from traditional diachronic accounts, in which texts are primarily related to their authors in a chronological sequence, to more exploratory treatments intending to present integrated sceneries and to grasp the 'spirit' of entire epochs and/or genres. And yet, for all their intrinsic diversity these tend to be united by how forgetful they are of the linguistic media through which messages, or ideas, were conveyed. We have learned to accept this as normal, and so we rarely ask, for instance, whether we truly gauge the novelty of Thucydides'

historiography before we also understand what new mode of expression he crafted for it; whether the deep divide between the ethical worlds of Aeschylean and Euripidean tragedy is not also reflected in the different ways in which the two tragedians handled language and – as we know thanks to Aristophanic comedy – were *perceived* to handle language; whether the linguistic conventions inherited from archaic epic poetry did not at the same time act as a constraint and a challenge to innovate for a Hellenistic scholar-poet like Apollonius; or whether we may not learn much about the changing status and social role(s) of rhetoric in ancient life by comparing the style of Antiphon's and Lysias' speeches with that of Demosthenes only a few decades later, or the experimental para-poetry of Gorgias with the experienced (or, dare we say, dull) non-poetry of Isocrates, let alone Aristides. To be sure, none of this has gone completely unnoticed and sometimes lip-service is in fact paid to it; but so far there is no comprehensive and systematic investigation of these form-function relationships, and of the many ways in which authors *and* genres select, retain, and reshape their codes of communication in response to audience expectations as much as to shifts in individual and sociocultural circumstances and ideologies.

Though obviously unable to fill this huge gap as such, the *Entretiens* whose proceedings are presented here were meant to at least start mapping this largely uncharted territory and, more fundamentally, to investigate to what extent our understanding of literature in the Greek world may be enriched if, for once, we see in its language(s) not just a diffuse recording instrument, but an artistically manipulated tool for the creation of meaning. In doing so, the contributors were encouraged to pay particular attention to both (1) the interaction of diachronic and synchronic factors determining linguistic variation and (2) the opposing pulls of generic convention on the one hand and individual experimentation on the other.

With regard to the diachronic side of the first point, it is clear that account must be taken of continuities as much as

changes. It is often tempting to overvalue comparatively minor innovative features, without asking how to distinguish between organic evolution and disruptive innovation. To give just one example, it is easy to see the differences between the ways in which Old and New Comedy employ language in order to make their audiences laugh, but it is equally important to acknowledge that their linguistic codes are nevertheless both anchored in a very similar variety, the language of Athenian everyday life. Meanwhile, the synchronic side is equally vital for an adequate interpretation of the data in their cultural contexts. For instance, in diachrony the emergence of the Attic dialect in historiographical literature represents a major paradigm shift away from the genre's Ionic beginnings, but the significance and impact of this change must not be seen in generic isolation: it is comparable to identical innovations in other 'scientific' genres on the one hand and to a parallel emergence of Doric prose on the other. When we try to provide a sociocultural rationale for it, we must therefore transcend the synchronic boundaries of both genre and locality.

As for the second point, although classical scholarship has no doubt suffered in the past from its focus on the individual genius, and more recent secondary literature has justifiably sought to correct this, it remains true that, just like modern ones, ancient authors too had to negotiate their cultural position and status by reference to both tradition and originality; and the fact that already in classical times there was considerable awareness of style as a distinctive feature of auctorial individuality demonstrates that linguistic choices played a crucial role in this respect as well. If, for example, there are noticeable differences between the ways in which Pindar and Bacchylides linguistically encoded their epinician odes, this is probably not because one poet was more 'competent' than the other or because they wrote with fundamentally different kinds of audiences in mind, but because they marketed themselves differently. It thus follows that, for all the importance of generic registers, whose study is again only in its infancy, a linguistic

history of classical literature must not forget the individual either.

While being asked to keep these general perspectives in mind, the contributors to the *Entretiens* were given considerable freedom to develop their personal take on the matter. In order to avoid overlap, and to maximise the diversity of viewpoints and approaches, each speaker was simply assigned one (macro-)genre to look at; but by forming three triads with an overarching thematic and chronological focus – the poetic codes of the archaic and classical age, the language of prose in the formative period of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, and the varied post-classical responses to the earlier literary varieties –, an attempt was also made to facilitate the emergence of common themes and questions in the ensuing discussions. Within this overall framework, speakers were tasked to identify a representative piece or corpus of primary evidence and to situate it in a wider generic picture, providing both linguistic and extra-linguistic (social, cultural, and/or literary) contextualisation. As the following contributions show, this brief was readily accepted by everyone, and at the same time interpreted in as many different ways as it was meant to be, so as to convey something of the variety and vitality of classical linguistics.

In the opening contribution, Albio Cassio sheds light on the post-Homeric reuse of epic language by minor poets about whose identity we know next to nothing but whose creative output, for all its deficiencies, reveals much of their way of reading and appropriating the Homeric code. Because the evidence is epigraphic here, we do not encounter the intriguing difficulties posed by the history of transmission that are central to Lucia Prauscello's subsequent exploration of the dialectal character of the Pindaric text. Such strictly dialectal matters, in turn, are only one minor aspect of my own attempt to understand the fundamental principles that hold together tragic language on all levels, from its grammar and lexicon to the pragmatics of its dialogue. And just as tragedy thus begins to develop its *differentia specifica* among the poetic genres of the classical age, so

does historiography gradually 'learn', as Luuk Huitink shows, by acquiring new narrative modes for the creation of *enargeia*. In certain ways, the immediate audience engagement that results here is reminiscent of what any type of oratory also has to strive for; but Alessandro Vatri's quantitative approach to the latter genre equally demonstrates how much internal variation and differentiation there still is even between texts whose linguistic surface looks deceptively similar. That this is, by and large, conditioned not by random auctorial choices but rather by external determination – each orator being guided by what makes his text maximally effective among the principal addressees – is of course intuitive in the case of orally delivered speeches, but it is no less true in what is possibly the least oral kind of ancient literature, technical writings: only that here, Francesca Schironi argues, the subject matter itself imposes additional strictures as each author has to find the optimal way of linguistically mastering the world of scientific discovery. The degree to which any of this is a consciously reflected process may certainly vary, and is often difficult to ascertain, but given the final outcome – the extremely varied landscape of the Greek literary languages –, it is unsurprising if we eventually come across some explicit responses as well, both in the realm of literary practice itself and in more theoretical literature. The former are here exemplified, first, by Francesca Dell'Oro's paper on the linguistic evolution of the inscriptional epigram, where the emancipation from, and the continued attraction to, an 'epic' matrix go hand in hand, and, second, by S. Douglas Olson's piece on a type of experimental literature that emerges in the imperial period when the Atticist paradigm dictates what is to be considered 'good' or 'bad' stylistic practice. The theorists' own concerns, meanwhile, deserve the attention given to them in Olga Tribulato's wide-ranging contribution at the end of the volume not only because they remind us that we are not the first to think about these matters in an analytical way, but also because the ethical and aesthetic judgments that sometimes emerge under way forcefully illustrate how, ultimately, there

will always be an inseparable unity between the reception of literature and the way in which it is encoded.

This being so, it should be uncontroversial that the competence to 'read' the language as much as the text itself will need to be retained and refined in the future as much as it has been in the past. The present volume may thus also serve as an appeal at a time of crisis, where the linguistic study of the ancient languages is increasingly marginalised in the world of classical scholarship. The reasons for this decline are manifold and complex. In part at least, it may be due to the fact that linguistics is a fairly technical discipline, which progresses in small steps and which does not therefore adapt itself so easily to the ever faster movement of academic production. But in part it is also because the linguists themselves have sometimes forgotten the need to participate in a dialogue, and to actively contribute to the cultural and literary exploration of the ancient world as a whole. Together with the colleagues whose papers are assembled in this volume, I am very grateful to the Fondation Hardt for having given us the space and the opportunity to re-engage in this dialogue – in a modest way, it is true, but with sincere enthusiasm. If we continue on this path, I believe that nothing will stop us from recreating an *Altertumswissenschaft* in which everybody works together, and from which everybody therefore benefits.

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Relief d'un poète assis (Ménandre) avec masques de la Nouvelle Comédie.
1er s. av. J.-C.-1er s. ap. J.-C. Marbre blanc d'Italie (?).
Princeton University Art Museum.