CHAPTER 1

The Authorial Voice of Occasional Literature

In the wake of reader-response criticism and reception studies, the reader's role and significance for the interpretive process has become part of an intellectual awareness that marks philological, linguistic and literary scholars alike. Ancient and medieval literature has been reconsidered from this perspective and scholars have, over the last decades, underlined the widely differing perspectives of historical authors and audiences in comparison to those of modern readers. Such fundamental differences concern, among many others, concepts like originality, spontaneity and individuality. While these were central for the romantic understanding of literature that was established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they are generally agreed to have been understood very differently in premodern contexts. Originality should be considered rather as a skilful use of conventions, creating a tension between and careful balancing of tradition and innovation. And while linguistic and rhetorical devices could be used in order to create stylistic effects that gave the impression of an original, spontaneous and individual voice – ranging from the lyric expressions of Sappho to the vernacular works of Chrétien de Troyes – that effect should not be confused with the romantic notion of spontaneity.

Previous generations of readers had a different approach. When Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940) – the Romanian polymath and writer, to Byzantinists known above all for his *Byzance après Byzance* (1935) – took on the task of writing a cultural history of Byzantium, he did it with a passion and open subjectivity that now would seem unusual. In the third volume of his *Histoire de la vie byzantine* (1934), Iorga devoted several pages to the twelfth-century writer Constantine Manasses, who was elaborately praised as a Byzantine Turgenev:

> Ceux qui parlent du manque de sens pour la beauté de la part des Byzantins n'ont que lire le joli morceau de Manasses, dans son récit de chasse qui présente les charmes de ce rivage de la Propontide où « la mer solitaire se

> joue avec les berges et sourit doucement au rivage », « une fête pour les yeux, une joie pour les sens ». Le spectacle dans la nuit embaumée rappelle les plus belles pages de Tourguénieff sur la beauté des orées russes dans l'obscurité.[1]

The text that Iorga refers to and cites here is an ekphrasis, the *Description of the catching of siskins and chaffinches*, which had been edited and published some 30 years earlier.[2] In addition to this text by Manasses, Iorga also discussed the *Description of a crane hunt* and the *Encomium of Emperor Manuel Komnenos*,[3] the so-called *Itinerary* (*Hodoiporikon*)[4] and the *Verse chronicle* (*Synopsis Chronike*).[5] The *Itinerary* was described in terms of 'spontaneity' and 'imagination', while the *Verse chronicle* – by Iorga referred to as a *poème historique* – was compared to the work of John Milton: 'C'est sans doute de la meilleure poésie, qui n'est pas inférieure à celle d'un Milton.'[6]

What is interesting about the enthusiastic attention that Iorga thus paid to the literary production of Manasses is not his unreserved praise of its 'beauty' or 'charm', but the way in which he brought together a number of works and noticed certain similarities that characterize them. He observed that both the hunting ekphrasis and the oration to Manuel are useful for their historical detail,[7] while the *Verse chronicle* was compared to the epic. Iorga did not make any distinction between works written in prose or verse, nor did he note any clear difference between fiction and reality in these works – it seems to have been rather, in all cases, a question of literary beauty and imagination. This distinguishes Iorga from some earlier admirers of Manasses, who had focused only on the *Verse chronicle*, such as the sixteenth-century German philologist Martin Crusius (1526–1607) or the Greek enlightenment poet Kaisarios Dapontes (1713/14–84).[8] An important reason for Iorga's wider perspective was the availability of edited texts, many of which had appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. His tendency to describe the literary qualities that he saw in Manasses by means of comparison to authors as different as John Milton (1608–74) and Ivan Turgenev (1818–83) may be seen as a wish to make

[1] Iorga 1934: 63.
[2] Sternbach 1902 and Horna 1905. See also Iorga 1934: 62, on the same ekphrasis. For the lines cited in translation by Iorga, see below, n. 13.
[3] Both edited by Kurtz in 1906.
[4] First edited by Horna in 1904, but now see Chryssogelos 2017.
[5] Iorga most probably relied on Bekker's edition of 1837, but now see Lampsides 1996.
[6] Iorga 1934: 64. [7] Iorga 1934: 62.
[8] On Crusius and Manasses, see Rhoby 2014: 392; Paul and Rhoby 2019: 1–3 and 57. On Dapontes and Manasses, see Lampsides 1969.

the Byzantine author comprehensible and relevant to modern readers, without offering classicizing references. The comparison to Milton's *Paradise Lost* thus seems to sustain Iorga's characterization of the chronicle as epic (with special attention to the opening Creation ekphrasis), while Turgenev here may mirror the idea of simple or rustic realism.

Some might argue that Iorga was neither a literary scholar nor a Byzantinist,[9] and that his ideas on the quality of Manasses' works are of no interest to today's readers. His admiring and strongly evaluative comments seem outdated to a contemporary student of Byzantine literature. However, they offer a suitable point of departure for a study of Manasses' literary production, simply because they express the first known discussion of more than one of his works: they seek to identify what is 'Manasses' in a series of different kinds of texts. In that sense there are certain similarities between Iorga's almost 90-year-old discussion and the present investigation, although my focus is not on literary quality as such but on that impression of an original, spontaneous and individual voice which was mentioned above and which Iorga attempted to identify and describe. In the case of Manasses, it is the voice of a teacher and a writer on commission, a producer of occasional literature, and as such it has often been described as having the aim of mere entertainment or self-display.[10] Occasional literature has thus been seen as inferior to romantic poetry, in which the spontaneous poet expresses his original feelings on the spur of the moment. William Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', taking 'its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity' (1798), has come to dominate modern thinking about poetics, in spite of its ideological and clearly romantic character.[11] As a result, the form of occasional texts has often been seen as 'empty', as a display of beauty with no function beyond the moment at which it is performed. According to that approach, the writer on command

[9] For an interesting and personal reflection on this question, belonging as early as in the 1940s, see Laurent 1946.

[10] See e.g. Magdalino 1997: 162, stating that Manasses 'writes only to entertain or to instruct on a very basic level', and E. Jeffreys 2012: 276: 'Most of Manasses' literary output known today consists of short pieces, in both prose and verse, written either for sponsors or for self-display.' See also below, n. 71.

[11] The source of this quotation is the preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800: 26). The first edition, a joint venture with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, had been published in 1798 but not received much attention; see Butler 2003. As early as 1919, T. S. Eliot rejected Wordsworth's definition of poetry in his *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, arguing that a writer should be impersonal and his writings devoid of personal emotion and feelings; see Eliot 1950 and cf. Ferguson 2003: esp. 101.

does not have an individual voice, but one that fits each separate occasion. The writer on command thus remains a writer, not an author.

This study takes as a point of departure the idea that writing on command privileges originality and encourages the challenging of conventions. A society in which occasional poetry and rhetoric have central positions calls for a strong and individual voice of the author, since the voice is the primary instrument for a successful career. By 'voice' I do not mean point of view or focalization in the narratological sense, but a writer's combined linguistic, stylistic and rhetorical means to express oneself publicly – all that usually goes under the term 'style'. An authorial voice should not be expected to be stylistically static, but to be flexible so that it can be used for various occasions but still be recognizable across generic boundaries and in different social contexts. Constantine Manasses is a good example of an author who projected such a voice in a society that demanded such social performances. The texts that have been preserved allow us to study his particular characteristics across different genres, in both prose and verse, in texts written for various patrons and situations. Such a study reveals not only the literary and rhetorical preferences as such, but also the compositional techniques that helped convey the individual voice: on the one hand, the insistent and elaborate use of the same or similar words, verses and phrases in different texts, on the other a series of recurring motifs and narrative techniques such as characterization or the handling of time and space. My aim is to show how Manasses used this stylistic and narrative 'author brand' as a way to promote his literary production, but also to create a winning self-representation – his own 'personal' *qua* authorial story, as it were.

Writer, Text and Occasion

In the *Description of the catching of siskins and chaffinches* (Ἔκφρασις ἁλώσεως σπίνων καὶ ἀκανθίδων τοῦ σοφωτάτου κυροῦ Μανασσῆ), praised and cited by Iorga in the passage discussed above, Manasses offers a description of a pleasure trip to the other shore of the Marmara Sea.[12] The narrator begins by explaining the reasons for leaving Constantinople and travelling across the water:

[12] The text has survived in two mss: Vat. Urb. Gr. 134 and Escorialensis Y.II.10, of the fifteenth and thirteenth century respectively. Both mss contain more than one text by Manasses.

> There was once in Constantinople a lack of hot baths and the upper side of the Propontis was crowded with people who came there to bathe. The location is pleasurable and well worth idle stays: there are gardens everywhere, thickly wooded and wide-spreading, and an abundance of clear streams; the sea plays gently with the shore and smiles with light waves at the mainland, and this becomes a feast for the eyes, a joy for the senses. I too went there, for the itching of my flesh demanded so; it was the time right after the vintage.
>
> Ἐσπάνισέ ποτε καὶ ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολις λουτηρίων θερμῶν καὶ τὸ ἀναπλεόμενον μέρος τῆς Προποντίδος ἐστενοχωρεῖτο τοῖς περαιουμένοις ἐπὶ λουτρά· χαρίεις δὲ ὁ χῶρος καὶ διατριβῶν ἀνεσίμων κατάξιος, παράδεισοί τε πανταχοῦ κατάδενδροι καὶ ἀμφιλαφεῖς καὶ ναμάτων διειδῶν ἀφθονία· θάλασσα ταῖς ἠϊόσιν ἠρέμα προσπαίζει καὶ ταῖς ἠπείροις ἡμέρῳ κύματι προσγελᾷ, καὶ γίνεται ταῦτα πανήγυρις ὀφθαλμῶν, ἑορτὴ τῶν αἰσθήσεων. Ἀνῆειν κἀγώ· τῆς γὰρ σαρκὸς ὁ κνησμὸς οὕτως ἐκέλευεν· ἦν δὲ καιρὸς ὁ μετὰ τὴν τρύγην εὐθύς.[13]

As soon as he gets off the boat, the narrator is greeted by one of his closest friends. After the much-awaited bath he spends the night in his friend's tent.[14] At dawn they are woken up by a loud noise as a group of boys and young men, accompanied by an older man, set off for a bird hunt. The hunt – a catching of small birds by means of lime and other traps – is then described in great detail. The text closes in a traditionally ekphrastic manner, as the narrator is asked by his friend to bring what he has seen onto paper. He does so 'as a favour offered to my host and for myself a way of preserving the memory of the spectacle' (τῷ ξεναγῷ χαριζόμενος καὶ ἑμαυτῷ περισώζων τὴν τῶν θεαμάτων ἀνάμνησιν).[15]

Even this short introduction raises a number of questions concerning the form, content and function of the text. Is the narrator to be identified with Manasses himself? Does the ekphrasis describe an event experienced by Manasses or is it merely a fiction, a literary pleasure mirrored in the rural pleasure of the image painted in words? For what occasion and audience was it composed – does the very good friend of the narrator exist or is he merely a pretext for the description, an ekphrastic trope? Such

[13] Manasses, *Description of the catching of siskins and chaffinches* 1–8 (Horna).

[14] On the significance of tents in Byzantine literature, see Mullett 2013a, 2013b, 2017 and 2018. As for literary and iconographic representations reminiscent of the one in Manasses' ekphrasis, note esp. the 'tent poem' by Manganeios Prodromos (Anderson and Jeffreys 1994) and the illumination to Pseudo-Oppian's *Cynegetica* in Marc. Gr. 479, f. 2^{v}, depicting a scene of bird-catching with a tent, in turn decorated with scenes of a hunt (Spatharakis 2004: fig. 4). See the cover and frontispiece of this book.

[15] *Description of the catching of siskins and chaffinches* 206–7 (Horna). I return to this text below, Chapters 2 and 5.

issues are discussed in this study in relation to the respective texts by Manasses, but my primary concern here is with this text as an example of occasional literature. That term has in Byzantine Studies often been limited to cases of epideictic rhetoric or ceremonial poetry, addressed to a specific person at a specific event, but I should like to argue that all preserved texts by Manasses were potentially occasional. So was most, if not all, Byzantine literature of the twelfth century, as were numerous texts produced in Europe up until at least the end of the eighteenth century. As noted by Volkhard Wels, employing the corresponding German term *Gelegenheitsdichtung*:

> Was also bleibt von der Dichtung der Frühen Neuzeit [*c.*1500–1800], wenn man die 'Gelegenheitsdichtung' außer Betracht lässt? – Offensichtlich nichts. Die gesamte Dichtung der frühen Neuzeit ist 'Gelegen-heitsdichtung', insofern diese Dichtung immer in einen konkreten kommunikativen Zusammenhang eingebettet ist.[16]

These concrete communicative contexts are what made texts written by Manasses and his peers occasional, or perhaps rather occasioned: they had a pretext. Importantly, this pretext – the occasion – was not the function of the text, but an opportunity to achieve its extraliterary aim. Within the basically political and social system of patronage in the twelfth century, the aim of literature was not to *be* but to *do* – to achieve something for its author.[17] Most often it was a question of social and professional advancement, achieved through a display of one's learning, but there could also be other reasons for writing, such as socio-political and/or personal rehabilitation.[18]

While the significance of patronage in the Komnenian period has been acknowledged and frequently referred to since Margaret Mullett's pioneering article in the 1980s,[19] the poetics of occasional literature have been largely avoided both within and beyond the field of Byzantine Studies. Mullett's interest in genre, author and performance has often taken her in the direction of the occasional, as in her study of the intersection between

[16] Wels 2010: 20–1; cited by Kubina 2020: 167.
[17] Cf. Tompkins 1980 on patronage in the Renaissance, applying the necessary reader-response perspective. I return to this issue below.
[18] As in the case of Anna Komnene, whose *Alexiad* was not occasioned by a specific event or written with the aim of financial support, but still part of a system in which literature had extraliterary functions.
[19] Mullett 1984 was followed by several studies on the topic, considered from various angles, see e.g. Mullett 2007; Theis, Mullett and Grünbart 2014; Drpić 2016. For a discussion on literature and patronage in eleventh-century Byzantium, see Bernard 2014: 291–333. I return to the issue of patronage below, esp. Chapters 3–4.

immediate occasion and inherited form,[20] but the term 'occasional poetry' has most often remained a designation for ceremonial or courtly poetry and rarely taken into consideration orations or other performative pieces in prose.[21] Wolfram Hörandner's definition of an occasional poem underlined the 'special purpose' of literature in Byzantium, but by bringing in the term *Gebrauchstexte* he also conveyed the confusion between use and function inherent in that concept.[22] As noted by Krystina Kubina, both *Gelegenheitsdichtung* and *Gebrauchsdichtung* are fuzzy terms,[23] and an important reason is exactly this unclear status of use vs function. While a text is *used* at a specific event, its *function* most often goes beyond that event.

In a recent and rare discussion of the occasional in the case of prose oratory, Emmanuel Bourbouhakis underlines (as Wels above) the concrete setting of the performance of the text: 'an actual physical and ceremonial context, an *event*'.[24] An occasional text is thus 'a text recited before a particular audience in a specific place'.[25] I agree with the importance of such a definition, but that specific place and audience – the text's performative circumstances – are in many cases lost to us as modern readers. Moreover, I am interested in the specific relation between the text's literary construct and the occasion (the pretext or use), on the one hand, and the occasion and the aim (function) on the other. My own understanding of the occasional is accordingly less categorical and includes both commissioned and uncommissioned works,[26] that is, also self-promotional works produced in the hope of future commissions, performed before an audience (or intended for such performance), written in either poetry or

[20] Mullett 1992.

[21] See e.g. Hörandner 1987 and 2003 and cf. 2017: 91–116. As for Hörandner's distinction between court poetry and poetry on commission, cf. Zagklas 2018. See also Lauxtermann 2003: 34–53 on the function of poetry and the relation between poet and patron. Agapitos 2007: 6 uses the term occasional poetry for a book epigram, but without any discussion or definition of the term. For an excellent critical discussion of occasional poetry in the case of Manuel Philes, see Kubina 2020: 163–287.

[22] Hörandner 1987: 236: 'The German term, rather en vogue of late, is "Gebrauchstexte", texts intended for use. Consequently, these poems are characterized in disposition and contents by their function.'

[23] Kubina 2020: 165: 'Der zweite oft verwendete Begriff, "Gebrauchsliteratur", ist noch unschärfer und unmöglich zu definieren, da er alle Texte umfasst, denen eine Zweckhaftigkeit zugrunde liegt.' Kubina here offers a useful survey of the term *Gebrauchsdichtung* and its background in German philology of the 1970s.

[24] Bourbouhakis 2017: 47*. [25] Bourbouhakis 2017: 59*.

[26] Cf. Kubina 2020: 235–8 on 'Externe und interne Motivation', including uncommissioned poems ('ohne Bestellung').

prose, in a short period or over a long period of time.[27] But how can we move on to define the concept and avoid the 'fuzziness' that seems to haunt the term?

With the exception of some work on ancient, Renaissance and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century circumstances, occasional literature has on the whole attracted little interest from modern scholars, not least in critical discourse.[28] It seems that there are difficulties in defining or situating occasional texts because they somehow lack what is demanded – according to the romantic definitions referred to above – by 'poetry proper': an individual voice. Occasional literature, according to such romantic notions, is most highly valued when it gives up its own status and so to speak merges with the occasion, but in pre-romantic contexts it is exactly the occasion that lends the texts their status. The occasion offers the writer, the artist or the composer a pretext to display their craft and, moreover, an opportunity to reach a more specific goal (a reward, fame, perhaps another commission) – which is ultimately the function of the work. This is one of the reasons why the occasional fell into disrepute in the nineteenth century: political and social conditions changed and literary patronage largely disappeared from the public sphere, or at least in the form that was known before. In practice, patronage is an important agency in the cultural sphere even today.

Writing in a period when the inferior value of occasional literature had already been established, Friedrich Hegel reflected on its status between 'poetry' and 'reality' in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835–8). Hegel's interest in the occasional stemmed from his concern with art's relation to human existence (*Dasein*) and must therefore be seen in the wider perspective of his philosophical understanding of aesthetics, but his brief comment offers considerations that are relevant also for the present discussion. Hegel first notes that occasional pieces (*Gelegenheitsgedichte*) express most amply the 'living connection with the real world' (*die lebendige Beziehung zu dem vorhandenen Dasein*) in the form of 'occurrences in public and private affairs' (*privaten und öffentlichen Angelegenheiten*).[29] While such a description could designate most poetic works, he continues, the more narrow

[27] On the synchronic vs diachronic aspects of occasional literature, see further below, Chapter 6.

[28] For a recent exception, see Küpper, Oster and Rivoletti 2018. Note also Tompkins 1980; Keller et al. 2010.

[29] Hegel 1970: 269. The passage in which Hegel comments on the occasional is placed in a section on 'Das freie poetische Kunstwerk', a subsection of 'Das poetische und prosaische Kunstwerk', in turn part of the larger section on 'Das poetische Kunstwerk im Unterschiede des prosaischen'. For Hegel, the difference between the poetic and the prosaic was not primarily a question of form, but one of art's relation to human existence; he saw the world of the ancients as fundamentally poetic (a world in which poetry was not merely written, but lived), while his own age was prosaic (a world prosaically understood in scientific terms). For a detailed discussion, see Shapiro 1975.

sense indicates 'Produktionen . . . welche ihren Ursprung in der Gegenwart selbst irgendeinem Ereignisse verdanken, dessen Erhebung, Ausschmückung, Gedächtnisfeier usf. sie nun auch ausdrücklich gewidmet sind.' Then follows a brief but significant explication of the close connection between 'the poetic' and 'the real', which according to Hegel is what has lent occasional literature an inferior position:

> Durch solch lebendige Verflechtung aber scheint die Poesie wiederum in Abhängigkeit zu geraten, und man hat deshalb auch häufig diesem ganzen Kreise nur einen untergeordneten Wert zuschreiben wollen, obschon zum Teil, besonders in der Lyrik, die berühmtesten Werke hierher gehören.[30]

The contradiction that Hegel notes at the end of this passage is significant. The lack of prestige of occasional literature is due to an 'entanglement' (*Verflechtung*) with life, by means of which it falls into a position of 'dependence' (*Abhängigkeit*). And yet, the great lyric poets of the past, such as Pindar, composed their works under exactly such circumstances, without being accused of dependence and empty flattery.[31] Hegel's notion of 'entanglement' with life is central for the way in which occasional poetry has been understood (as something primarily dependent and low) from the nineteenth century onwards, but the question is to what extent that entanglement should be seen as a problem. Or to put it differently: does occasional literature really give up its own status? Do writers on commission relinquish their own voice?

Let us return to the ekphrasis by Manasses and my definition of it as an occasional piece – a piece that has an extraliterary end and by which the author wishes to achieve something. Ekphraseis are often not read in this manner, but as representations of objects or events.[32] It is, however, likely that such descriptions were performed in twelfth-century Constantinople before an audience at a specific occasion, which means that their function could be occasional.[33] Many of Manasses' preserved texts display such

[30] Hegel 1970: 269–70.

[31] Cf. the definition in *DNP* (s.v. Occasional poetry): 'A form of poetry created for a specific occasion, not as a result of the poet's autonomous desire. From a perspective that privileges original thinking, occasional poetry (OP) is often regarded as inferior . . . but this is unjustified since large parts of ancient poetry from the earliest periods on are OP in a broader sense, as can be seen – in what appears to be self-reflection – in the song of Demodocus in Hom. Od. 8,250ff. Homer himself is attributed with OP in the biographical tradition.' In spite of such scholarly insights, Homer and Pindar are usually not portrayed as occasional or 'dependent' poets in literary history.

[32] For a recent survey of ekphrasis scholarship from the art-historical perspective, see Foskolou 2018: 72–6.

[33] Cf. Macrides and Magdalino 1988: esp. 80–2. For a discussion of such functions of ekphrasis, going beyond the merely representational, see below, Chapter 2.

characteristics, even when they are not explicitly epideictic. For a teacher hoping for social and financial advancement, even grammar exercises could have the aim of self-promotion, especially if they were later recycled and used for other occasions in imperial or aristocratic court settings. Self-promotion could lead to commissions, which in turn led to other assignments.[34] The circumstantial character of such a literary production is often misunderstood for its function, but a commission is not a function – it is merely a characterization of the circumstances under which a certain text was produced. Most such situations vary from case to case so that the function of each individual text is different, even if they all may be said to fall within the wider category of self-promotion aiming at social advancement.

The ekphrasis in question accordingly has a function that reaches beyond that of mere representation of an event; its specific occasion is not known to us, but it still conditions the way in which the text should be understood not as passive or self-referential, but as active and referential – a potentially powerful tool. This brings us back to the implications of Hegel's passage: that occasional pieces somehow fall between 'the poetic' and 'the real', between the imaginary and the referential. Literature's representation of the real has since been subject to numerous discussions and it is beyond the scope of the present study to offer a detailed survey. A basic assumption here is that all literature could be seen as 'entangled' with reality or 'suggested by real life', since all artistic expression is necessarily based on human experience. Moreover, literature is seen as a sphere in which human existence can be imagined and negotiated, offering an important tool for commenting on and relating to 'reality'; in the words of Gregory Jusdanis, 'the role of literature ... is to highlight itself as a separate realm of human practice wherein we can imagine alternative possibilities of human relationships and political institutions'.[35]

To what extent is occasional literature then different from any literary expression? How can it be seen as particularly 'entangled' with life? The answer may lie in its referential character, which offers a more direct connection to a specific event, rather than human experience in general. But here we need to provide Hegel's notion of entanglement with a distinction between two kinds of referentiality: on the one hand, the text's

[34] See Zagklas 2014 on the case of Theodore Prodromos and the different settings of court poetry as 'communicating vessels'. Cf. the situation of Renaissance poets who would typically dedicate various versions of their work to a number of potential patrons in the hope of securing recognition and remuneration; see Lytle and Orgel 1981. See also further below, Chapters 5 and 7.

[35] Jusdanis 2010: 5.