

*Through Vergil's Eyes: the Certamen Hoefftianum
and the Revival of Figures from Antiquity
in the Latin Poetry of the First World War*

Introduction: the Great War and Latin Poetry

Judging by the endless stream of publications alone, First World War poetry continues to capture the imagination to this very day. Scholarship on the subject is vast, as is the corpus of the primary material itself. A particularly unknown section of this corpus, however, is the contemporary production of war poetry in Latin¹.

¹ The secondary literature on the subject is scarce: T. Sorbelli, *Riflessi della Guerra Mondiale nella letteratura latina contemporanea*, in *Atti del III Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani*, a cura di C. Galassi Paluzzi, 5 voll.: vol. IV, Cappelli, Bologna 1935, pp. 138-164; T. Deneire, *Four Latin "poeti e guerrieri" of the Great War*, in D. Sacré, J. Tusiani (iuvante T. Deneire) (ed. by), *Musae Saeculi XX Latinae*, Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome, Brussel-Roma 2006, pp. 107-132; D. Sacré, *Latijnse gedichten uit Wereldoorlog I: het Duitse kamp*, «Prora» XX, 3, 2015, pp. 10-17; Id., *Latijnse gedichten uit Wereldoorlog I: de geallieerden*, «Prora» XX, 4, 2015, pp. 11-20; Id., *Een Latijnse versnovelle over de Grootte Oorlog: Faverzani's Aedituus (1919)*, «Prora» XXII, 2, 2017, pp. 5-14; A. Luceri, *Il carme Quinque Sorores di Camillo Morelli nel centenario della pubblicazione (1918-2018)*, «Latinitas» VI, 1, 2018, pp. 87-116; M. Cristini, *Bellum mundanum. Il latino e la Grande Guerra*, Gaspari, Udine 2019 (which was published after this article had been written).

For although the golden era of Neo-Latin had come to a close during the eighteenth century and despite the evolution of classics as a discipline towards a more passive approach, Latin was still far from dead as a literary language when the war broke out. As a matter of fact, it had even been going through what was likely its very last revival from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, which contemporaries liked to label ‘neo-humanism’². The role of international competitions and journals devoted to Latin prose and poetry was of paramount importance for this remarkable mini-renaissance³. Pride of place went to one poetry competition in particular, the Amsterdam based *Certamen Hoeufftianum*, funded by the legacy of Jacob Hendrik Hoeufft (1756-1843) and organised from 1845 until 1979⁴. The fall of the Fascist regime

² On neo-humanism and contemporary Latin poetry, see T. Sorbelli, *Alphonsi Mariae Casoli e S.I. Mutinensis Lyricorum liber*, Novissimi poetae Latini, 2 voll.: vol. I, typis Vincentii et nep., Modena 1922, pp. v-xxiv; A. Bartoli, *Il movimento neo-classico dell’ultimo cinquantennio*, in *Atti del III Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani* cit., vol. IV, pp. 228-242; J. IJsewijn-J. Jacobs, *Latijnse poëzie van de twintigste eeuw*, De bladen voor de poëzie, Lier 1961; V.R. Giustiniani, *Neulateinische Dichtung in Italien, 1850-1950. Ein unerforschtes Kapitel italienischer Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1978; D. Sacré, *La poesia latina moderna e contemporanea: un’introduzione ed un invito alla lettura*, in Sacré et al. (ed. by), *Musae Saeculi XX Latinae* cit., pp. 15-67. For an overview of twentieth-century Latin poets, see J. IJsewijn, *Conspectus poetarum Latinorum saeculi vicesimi*, «Euphrosyne» 3, 1961, pp. 149-190; D. Sacré, *Conspectus poetarum Latinorum 1900-1960: supplementum*, «Humanistica Lovaniensia» 39, 1990, pp. 328-339 and Id., *Conspectus poetarum Latinorum 1900-1960: supplementum alterum*, «Humanistica Lovaniensia» 51, 2002, pp. 301-310.

³ On the *Certamen Hoeufftianum* and the phenomenon of Latin (poetry) competitions in general, see D. Sacré, *Et Batavi sudamus adhuc sudore latino? Het Certamen Hoeufftianum*, «Hermeneus» 65, 1993, pp. 120-124; D. Gionta, *I Certamina di poesia e prosa latina nell’Ottocento e nel Novecento*, in V. Fera et al. (a cura di), *La poesia latina nell’area dello Stretto fra Ottocento e Novecento*, Centro interdipartimentale di studi umanistici, Università degli studi di Messina, Messina 2006, pp. 195-240.

⁴ The *Hoeufftianum* archives have only recently been rediscovered. They are located in the Dutch city of Haarlem (Noord-Hollands archief, henceforth ‘NHA’; fund ‘Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen te Am-

in Italy, to which so many contemporary Italian poets had paid lip service with their Latin verse, eventually heralded the end of this short-lived renaissance.

So, when the First World War broke out, Latin poetry was actually thriving. Not surprisingly, the international journals and competitions which were serving as the backbone of this neo-humanist revival started receiving a flood of war poetry in Latin as well. It should be borne in mind that by 'war poetry', I am espousing a broad understanding of the concept, encompassing all poetry related to the war *sensu lato*⁵. It does not limit itself to the increasingly criticized notion of war poetry as 'combat poetry' or 'trench poetry', which has led to the formation of a very narrow canon of poetry exclusively written by soldiers who experienced combat first hand⁶. My subject, therefore, is poetry written in Latin and in any way related to the Great War, by soldiers and

sterdam', henceforth 'KNAW'. On the discovery of the *Hoeufftianum* archives, see X. van Binnebeke *et al.*, *Per una nuova edizione dei Carmina*, in V. Fera *et al.* (a cura di), *Pascoli e le vie della tradizione, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Messina, 3-5 dicembre 2012*, Centro internazionale di studi umanistici, Università degli studi di Messina, Messina 2017, pp. 265-400.

⁵ Cfr. Deneire, *Four Latin "poeti e guerrieri" of the Great War* cit., p. 110; E. Vandiver, *Stand in the Trench, Achilles. Classical Receptions in British Poetry of the Great War*, University Press, Oxford 2010, pp. x-xi.

⁶ For a critical overview of the formation of this canon, see J. Campbell, *Combat Gnosticism: the Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism*, «New Literary History» 30, 1999, pp. 203-215; on the definition of war poetry (and the inclusion of civilians in this definition), see C.W. Reilly, *English Poetry of the First World War: A Bibliography*, St Martin's, New York 1978. On the negative impact of the definition of war poetry as 'trench poetry' (*i.e.* the so-called 'old paradigm', according to which all 'good' war poetry is anti-war poetry, and all 'true' war poets shifted from genuine idealism to bitter disillusionment), see Vandiver, *Stand in the Trench, Achilles* cit., pp. 1-9. In fact, First World War poetry in Latin ties in very neatly with Vandiver's criticism of the old paradigm in that it simply was not true: many Latin war poems were genuine in their praise of duty, honour, and glory. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* was very often used in non-ironic ways; the obligatory mottoes which had to accompany *Hoeufftianum* submissions are an excellent litmus test in this regard...

non-combatants alike, both during the war and in its immediate aftermath⁷.

At the same time, this approach to war poetry from a Latin perspective ties in neatly with the more recent comparative approach to the literature(s) of the First World War. This internationalism advocated by such scholars as Jay Winter and Geert Buelens opposes the conventional focus on the cultural reception of the war from the perspective of individual countries, proposing instead to break open this single-sided (and often Anglo-Saxon based) paradigm and to address the phenomenon across national boundaries⁸. Latin, at least to the eyes of those who still practiced it, continued to serve its purpose as the supranational language *par excellence*, especially within the context of an international competition like the *Hoeyffianum*, which will be the main focus of this article. It remains an established fact, however, that the Italians dominated the Latin literary scene during the neo-humanist revival.

It is true that the Great War has been commonly referred to as a watershed in Western culture, a catalyst sparking modernism with its experimental modes of thought and expression, and its aversion to everything ‘old-fashioned’, like the classics. Yet this is not the complete picture. For at the very same time, scholars like Winter nuance, the war also engendered traditionalism, in cul-

⁷ On Latin war poets who actively participated in the war themselves, see Deneire, *Four Latin “poeti e guerrieri” of the Great War* cit. Latin poetry about the Great War kept being written until well into the 1930s. Not counting the very exceptional pieces of poetry written about the war in Latin today (e.g. B. Walton, *After the Raid*, «Vates» 4, 2011-2012, pp. 3-6), one of the latest specimens of Latin war poetry with regard to the Great War is G.B. Pigato, *De milite redivivo*, «Latinitas» 18, 1970, pp. 136-140.

⁸ J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History*, University Press, Cambridge 1995; A. Prost-J. Winter, *Penser la Grande Guerre. Un essai d’historiographie*, Seuil, Paris 2004, pp. 53-68 (46); G. Buelens, *Everything to Nothing: The Poetry of the Great War, Revolution and the Transformation of Europe*, Verso Books, London-New York 2015 (and the original version in Dutch: G. Buelens, *Europa Europa! Over de dichters van de Grote Oorlog*, Manteau, Antwerpen 2008).

ture both high and low⁹. In other words, in addition to inspiring a generation of modernist artists to flout all forms of convention, it equally led to a spontaneous, almost escapist return to more traditional frames of reference. This can also be said with regard to war poetry in particular. A prime example of this with regard to classics is Elizabeth Vandiver's *Stand in the Trench, Achilles*, which studies in great detail the reception and appropriation of the classical tradition in British war poetry¹⁰. This excellent study confirms that the war truly did «trigger an avalanche of the 'unmodern'», as Winter put it, and that classics was one of these 'unmodern' formats onto which the various possible reactions to the war were mapped¹¹. What Vandiver did not discuss in any great detail, however, is the fact that, even among the British, there was an even more extreme form of viewing the war through the prism of antiquity, viz. writing in the ancient languages themselves¹².

Winter also applied his theory of traditionalism to war literature, in particular to the phenomenon of apocalyptic imagery and the recurrent theme of the return of the dead. The latter will also

⁹ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* cit. These two theories of traditionalism and internationalism go hand in hand, since the former is an equally international phenomenon (*i.e.* the fact that people turned to frames of reference from the classical, romantic, or religious traditions to come to grips with the meaninglessness of the war was not specific to any particular nation). On this revival of conservative and traditional frameworks in the first half of the twentieth century within a literary context, see also E. Sánchez Costa, *The Catholic Revival in Modern European Literature (1890-1945)*, Peter Lang, New York 2018.

¹⁰ Vandiver, *Stand in the Trench, Achilles* cit.

¹¹ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* cit., p. 178.

¹² This is, of course, not her primary focus. She only offers a few examples of original compositions in Latin (*e.g.* Vandiver, *Stand in the Trench, Achilles* cit., pp. 22, 66-68). Original compositions in Greek were extremely rare: one comes across Greek mostly in the form of translations or of classical Greek text fragments transported into modern contexts (for an example of an original Greek composition, see Vandiver, *Stand in the Trench, Achilles* cit., pp. 80-81).

be the angle from which I will approach a specific subset of Latin war poetry, since a surprising number of these poems brought back to life figures of antiquity as a lens through which to view the war.

While Neo-Latin literature has always been characterized by a tendency to read current events in ancient structures, this marriage between antiquity and modernity seems to have been particularly present in neo-humanist Latin poetry. On the one hand, many of these Latin poets were fascinated by progress and modernity in all its aspects. The *Hoeufftianum*, for instance, was continually flooded with submissions on modern inventions, but also on such topics as industrialisation, Darwinism, women rights, and just about every contemporary war and disaster the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed. On the other hand, neo-humanism was also the result of the aesthetics of Romanticism finally breaking through into Latin poetry, which led Latin poets to hark back to the one past they had in common: Greco-Roman antiquity¹³. They often did so, moreover, in an entirely new genre created by Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912), who dominated the *Hoeufftianum* from the 1890s onward: the Romantic novella, narrative, almost cinematic poems full of intimate sentimentality about dramatic episodes in the lives of real or fictitious ancient characters¹⁴. Classical poets, predominantly the four chief Latin poets Vergil, Horace, Ovid, and Catullus, often took centre stage

¹³ IJsewijn-Jacobs, *Latijnse poëzie van de twintigste eeuw* cit., pp. 20-28. On the prominence of Rome and general absence of Greece, see p. 23 (the oeuvres of Hermann Weller, Giuseppe Morabito and Vincenzo Polidori, for instance, are the exception).

¹⁴ The bibliography on *Pascoli Latinus* is vast: for a recent overview, see P. Paradisi-A. Traina, *Pascoli e la poesia neolatina del Novecento*, in A. Battistini et al. (a cura di), *Pascoli e la cultura del Novecento*, Marsilio, Venezia 2007, pp. 125-178 and P. Paradisi, *Contributi alla storia del Pascoli latino: il poeta 'Hoeufftianus'*, «Camenae» 16, 2014, pp. 1-66. On the Pascolian *poemetto*, see Giustiniani, *Neulateinische Dichtung in Italien* cit., pp. 20-30.

in these Pascolian novellas¹⁵. At times, as we will see, these two trends came together in poetry addressing modern issues through the eyes of figures from antiquity¹⁶.

I will conclude this introduction by briefly presenting two non-war-related *Hoeufftianum* poems to illustrate this phenomenon of 'modern meets ancient'. In doing so, I anticipate the two-part structure of the rest of this article, which will focus on the return of the classical gods, on the one hand, and of ancient mortals (poets, in particular) on the other.

The prototypical example of a poem in which the gods revisit the world in the twentieth-century is the 1932 submission *Venus cum Apolline terram invisunt* ('Venus and Apollo Visit the Earth')¹⁷. As Venus and Apollo descend towards the earth, they can hardly believe their own eyes. How the world has changed, and not for the better! Monuments are hidden behind the horrid buildings and smog of modern industry, which is ruining nature as well; the sea and the sky are infested with smoking, iron monsters, while the land is riddled with railroads:

ex alta nuper caeli regione petebant
pulchra Venus mater cum nobili Apolline terram,
ut num regnet Amor scirent, num pulchra colantur.
offensis (heu!) vix oculis di credere possunt.
nam, ut currum fulgens liquit dea, tracta columbis,
quadrigamque nitens iussit consistere Apollo,

¹⁵ Pascoli's *Liber de poetis* (1891-1910), containing eleven poems on the lives of Vergil, Catullus, and Horace, was very influential in this regard. On the figure of Horace, for instance, see G. Morabito, *La figura di Orazio nella poesia latina moderna*, Istituto di studi romani, Roma 1938. Cfr. G. Garavani, *L'Italia e le gare di poesia latina*, in *Atti del IV Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani*, a cura di C. Galassi Paluzzi, 5 voll.: vol. IV, Cappelli, Bologna 1938, pp. 128-135 (130).

¹⁶ The phenomenon was first described in IJsewijn-Jacobs, *Latijnse poëzie van de twintigste eeuw* cit., p. 68.

¹⁷ NHA, KNAW 64-851, n. XXIX (cfr. *supra* note 4 for these abbreviations). The poet, who remains anonymous (the poem was unsuccessful), is most likely a Dutchman, based on the envelope.

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horrore adspiciunt odiisque furentibus orbem
funditus impletum magnoque dolore gementem.
obstupet et lacrimans exclamat primus Apollo:
quis nunc agnoscit terram, quis credere posset
hanc olim pulchris naturae fuisse decoram
et magnis hominum gestis, divisque placentem?
heu! Fumis monumenta latent horrentque caminis
magnae urbes pagique vomuntque sub aethera nubes.
vana mare et montes vallesque industria laedit.
en rigido scindit campos via ferrea tractu!
aerea perturbant fumantia monstra quietem,
et sine equis agitant currus ardentibus urbes.
ferra navis aqua vehitur nec vela dat Euro¹⁸.

Mother Earth then sullenly responds: indeed, mankind is slowly destroying her. They are no longer interested in the beauty of nature or art. The mind has made way for the body: all they want is ease and comfort. Hence the mechanisation of modern life:

nec rapidis laeti, quam plurima commoda quaerunt,
machinaque exstruitur nova, post nova machina surgit.
machina nunc amens operi fere sufficit omni;
machina mentem hebetat, meditates machina turbat;
simplicis ingenii vires velocius haurit.
machinae ubi crescunt, homines minuuntur et artes¹⁹.

After Venus has had her say as well, bemoaning the lack of love and beauty in the world, the gods leave the earth with tears in their eyes.

This type of confrontation between antiquity and modernity, only less pessimistic, was also the main theme in the 1901 submission *Vulcanus*²⁰. The poem by the hand of the Italian poet Alberto Salvagni also ended up being more successful than *Venus*

¹⁸ NHA, KNAW 64-851, n. XXIX, vv. 1-19.

¹⁹ NHA, KNAW 64-851, n. XXIX, vv. 38-43.

²⁰ NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. IX.

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cum Apolline terram invisunt, as it was awarded *magna laus*²¹. The year is 1900: in the dead of night, the shade of Vergil rises from the dead. He is greeted by the muse Calliope, who proposes to guide him through the night, since he desperately wants to visit his dear *patria*. She warns him, though: the world has changed since he walked the earth together with Dante. Apollo has made way for Vulcan (*i.e.* technology trumps art). Together they soar across the sky. All of a sudden, Vergil is stopped in his tracks by the screeching sound of what seems to be coming from a terrible monster in the mountains. Then he sees a giant, pitch-black, fire-breathing snake crawling through the valley, emitting clouds of smoke like an erupting volcano:

sed gravibus subito quatitur rumoribus aer,
ceu resonant, lupis canibusque ululantibus, antra
noctibus hibernis; sonitus per saxa resultans
bombo altas complet simulante tonitrua valles.
constitit extemplo vates, intendit et aures.
[...]
monstrum invisum, immane, ingens, cui lumina flammae²²,
incessu serpens, taetrum piceumque colore,
praecipitante pede et sinuosa volumina torquens²³
orbibus immensis valles camposque pererrat.
sibilat horrendum, crassumque e pectore anhelo
eructat flatum; densi volvuntur ad auras
orbes, ceu nubes, qui crebris ignibus ardent.
non secus ac vasto montem si forte Vesevus
excitus inferna rabie discidit hiatu,
sulphure fumantes pingui et candente favilla
iactat nocte globos, cineres calidosque lapillos²⁴.
pendens insequitur vates miracula visu.

²¹ Giovanni Pascoli won the gold medal with his *Centurio* in 1902: it was published by the Amsterdam academy with five other poems, *i.e.* *Vulcanus*. As far as we know, Salvagni, who was a school teacher at a 'ginnasio' in Larino, participated only once.

²² Cfr. Vergil, *Aeneis*, IV, 180.

²³ Cfr. *Aeneis*, XI, 753.

²⁴ Cfr. *Aeneis*, III, 572-574.

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sibilat et fugiens anguis se condit in antro
dum crassus lente fumus vanescit in auras²⁵.

Terrified, he asks Calliope what kind of bloodthirsty monster this is. The muse smiles and explains to him that what he has just witnessed is a train, a harmless mode of transportation invented by mankind. She then goes on to explain the power of coal and steam engines at great length²⁶. The procedure is repeated with regard to steam boats, after which the two fly away to visit Rome.

Ancient Foreshadowing: Hermann Weller's Daedalus et Elpenor (1924)

The first poem under discussion, *Daedalus et Elpenor* by the German poet Hermann Weller (1878-1956), which won first prize in the *Hoeufftianum* in 1924, is a somewhat isolated case, as the story is still situated in antiquity itself. Nevertheless, the poem, which was written on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the war's outbreak, should be read against the background of the Great War.

The 1920s heralded the golden years of Weller's Latin poetical activity, as he was the first to secure a constant string of victories in the *Hoeufftianum* ever since Pascoli had passed away in 1912²⁷.

²⁵ A. Salvagni, *Vulcanus. Liber primus*, Apud Io. Mullerum, Amsterdam 1902, pp. 11-12 (vv. 71-93).

²⁶ The poem effectively becomes didactic at this point, but maintains a poetically elegant style.

²⁷ On Weller, see H. Brückner *et al.* (hrsg. von), *Weite Horizonte. Hermann Weller 1878-1956, Klassischer Indologe, Lateinischer Dichter, christlicher Humanist*, Einhorn, Schwäbisch Gmund 2006; U. Dubielzig, *Die neue Königin der Elegien. Hermann Wellers Gedicht "Y"*, in E. Kessler *et al.* (hrsg. von), *Germania latina – Latinitas teutonica. Politik, Wissenschaft, humanistische Kultur vom späten Mittelalter bis in unsere Zeit*, Fink, München 2003, 2 voll.: vol. II, pp. 855-878; M. Lobe, *Lux verae humanitatis effulgeat. Zum sechzigsten Todesjahr des schwäbischen Horaz Hermann Weller (1878-1956)*, «Forum Classicum. Zeitschrift für die Fächer Latein und Griechisch an Schulen und Universitä-

Much of Weller's verse, which is very classical and Ovidian in style, is marked by his wartime experience²⁸. In fact, Weller even belonged to the select group of Latin trench poets, *i.e.* those who had seen active combat and wrote about their experiences in Latin. As he noted in the preface to the first edition of his Latin poetry, the first poem he ever submitted to the *Hoeyffianum*, his *Psittacus et Passer* from 1917, had been «born in a trench in France while the bombs were exploding all around him» (*circumtonante bombardarum fragore in ipsa fossa Gallica natum*)²⁹.

Most of Weller's war related poetry, however, dates from the 1920s, and clearly voices his pessimistic beliefs that the world had not learned anything from the war³⁰. The same goes for his *Daedalus et Elpenor*, a 244 line long elegy prophesying the dangers of rampant technological progress. The titular protagonist Elpenor is a young and brilliant scientist from ancient Sicily who applies his talents to military inventions³¹. Having created an invincible war machine, he gives thanks to Apollo, the god of science:

ten» 4, 2016, pp. 196-205. Weller won the gold medal 12 times and *magna laus* another 11 times in the *Hoeyffianum* between 1918 and 1946. He published most of his poetry (H. Weller, *Carmina latina*, second edition, Laup, Tübingen 1946, the first edition dates from 1938).

²⁸ Nevertheless, many of his other poems square with typically neo-humanist interests, such as the lives of ancient characters (*e.g.* *Hegesias, Europa, Natale Solum, Hospes Tarentinus, Vestalis, Fabius et Cornelia, Lucius...*).

²⁹ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., p. IV. On Weller as a trench poet, see De-neire, *Four Latin "poeti e guerrieri" of the Great War* cit., pp. 112-115.

³⁰ Some of his poems which show a connection with the war are the following, all of which are included in his *Carmina latina: Natale solum, Daedalus et Elpenor, Venus et Mars, Epistula Castrensis, Medicus Miles, Commilitonibus XLmum consecrationis diem solemniter peragentibus*. Although Weller was a very active *Hoeyffianum* competitor, he did not submit all of his poetry. The last three poems, for instance, had not been submitted. *Epistula Castrensis*, for instance, is a particularly interesting Latin war poem, as it is one of the very few compositions about life in the trenches from a German perspective (it was written «anno 1917 in Francogallia Augusto Steinhauser» and deals with his job as a radio operator).

³¹ He does not seem to bear any relation to any 'real' person from Greek antiquity: he is not, for instance, the Elpenor who joined Ulysses on his quest.

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tu mea sacra foves inventorumque dedisti
 artem, tuque mihi dulce iuvamen eris.
te duce veloces inveni, Phoebæ, quadrigas,
 rexisque meas, lux reverenda, manus.
iam fuge, Sicaniam quisquis premis hostis amoenam,
 iam remove celerem, dux inimice, gradum!
Phoebus enim socius; Phoebæ comitante quadrigam
 in te dirigimus, dira caterva, novam.
solis ut invictus celsum petit aethera currus,
 diruet illa suis agmina densa rotis³².

He is lauded by the people as a second Daedalus and is urged to go and seek the approval of the real Daedalus, who is living on the island as well, as an old recluse³³. The young man then travels to the fabled craftsman's palace of solitude and asks for the latter's seal of approval with regard to his military inventions³⁴. Daedalus recognises himself in the young inventor, but must let him down: he would be happy to help him with anything but this. He truly understands Elpenor's exhilaration, but he has also learned that mankind will always abuse technology, which contains the seeds of man's own destruction³⁵. People will never stop looking for new ways to destroy each other; one day, machines will even soar through the air as Daedalus has himself, but they will bring war and leave only death and destruction in their wake:

³² I cite from Weller's 1946 edition of his *Carmina latina* (pp. 33-42), vv. 31-40.

³³ *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 55-66: «sed quoniam superi tibi non vulgare dederunt | ingenium, quoniam Daedalus alter ades, | illius artificis cur non petis, optime, laudem, | quo nihil in toto clarius orbe viget? | ille tuae iudex et cognitor optimus artis, | ille tui princeps auctor honoris erit. | is tibi si plaudet, sero celebraberis aevo, | sic demum veniet gloria vera tibi. | ille tuas artes, tua sacra tuebitur ille, | semper et auxilio te reget ille tuo. | illius instinctu stimulisque movebere gratis, | et tua te felix altius ala feret».

³⁴ *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 123-126: «ille viae causam pandit verbisque modestis, | quae nova fabрили fecerit arte, refert. | "auctor eris mihi summus" ait "sine te mihi laudum | munera sordebunt, qualiacumque feram!"».

³⁵ *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 165-168: «est aliquid, sane, nova lumina promere caecis | et prius intactas artis inire vias. | prava sed inventis hominum natura maligne | utitur ac demens in sua fata ruit».

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sacra fames inventorum requiescere nescit,
invenientque novos saecula sera dolos.
caelestesque vias iterumque iterumque secabunt,
sed mala cum pennis bellaque saeva ferent.
miraque erit moles venturi machina saecli,
sed veniet multis exitiosa viris.
asperior pardis gaudebit caede cruenta,
et cadet immiti victima multa dolo³⁶.

Upset by his own prophesy, Daedalus suddenly faints, at which point Elpenor leaves the palace and sits down at the beach to ponder the old man's words. As he is staring in front of him, he sees a wave splashing high into the air, which is immediately followed by an eagle fearlessly soaring up even higher. The young man interprets this as an omen and is strengthened in his resolve to create the flying machines Daedalus has warned him about, even if they will bring fire and death:

«alta petam, mortes saevas tentemus et ignes,
aggreddiar vitae munere maius opus!
me vocat aetherii melior fortuna Promethei;
ardua me virtus, me via celsa vocat!»
dixit et erectos vultus convertit ad astra
inque suas artes et sua sacra redit³⁷.

Thus, Weller's *Daedalus et Elpenor* closes on a dark and pessimistic note, with a very clear subtext: Elpenor's decision to flout Daedalus' warning has sent humanity down a path which will eventually lead to the mass slaughter of the Great War, the first conflict in which aeroplanes were used on such a large scale.

Mars in the Trenches: the Great War and the Classical Gods

The same pessimism permeates another one of Weller's elegies, *Prometheus*, which he submitted for the *Hoeufftianum* com-

³⁶ *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 185-193.

³⁷ *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 239-244.

petition of 1934, on the eve – not coincidentally, I believe – of the twenty year anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War³⁸. Only this time, the despair is voiced by a divine being, the Titan Prometheus³⁹.

Prometheus opens with the titular Titan waking up, chained to the Caucasus for having stolen fire from the gods and given it to mankind. Still, he is comforted by the belief that his gift will have enabled humanity to perfect itself⁴⁰. Eventually liberated by Hercules, the Titan is set on visiting mankind to witness the miracles of the progress which he set in motion. And although he sees that fire truly has been a blessing for mankind in some regards, it also turns out to have become a curse. His attention is quickly turned to the dark side of his gift, for fire has also led to destruction and, eventually, war:

³⁸ The gold medal was not presented to anyone that year. Weller was the only one to obtain *magna laus*.

³⁹ As a symbol of progress, Prometheus was a recurring character in *Hoefftianum* submissions. This is the case, for instance, in the 1923 submission *Promethei vaticinium* (NHA, KNAW 64-827, n. XXXIX, probably by the Brazilian Ercole de Lorenzi), where the chained Titan is mocking Jupiter while the latter's eagle is eating from his body: one day, mankind will soar through the sky in aeroplanes, speed across the continent in trains, and rush across (and beneath) the ocean in boats, all because of his gift to them (*i.e.* fire). With the invention of electricity, they will brandish their own lightning bolts and defy Jupiter as well. The poem truly brims with optimistic trust in progress. Eventually, they will even defeat death itself, as 'another Prometheus' (*Alter Prometheus, i.e.* Christ) will save them and establish a new world order, putting an end to Jupiter's tyranny. In 1920, someone submitted a poem under the title *Prometheus alter* (NHA, KNAW 64-825, n. XII), celebrating the Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi (surprisingly, with regard to a rock drill he invented, not the telephone). The simile is even taken so far that Marconi would end up being chained to the Caucasus for lack of appreciation...

⁴⁰ I cite from Weller's 1946 edition of his *Carmina latina* (pp. 113-120), vv. 31-34: «non adeo cecidi: sunt et solatia nobis | nec mea nox omni, credite, luce caret: | fit genus humanum nostro iam forte labore | perficietque pium, quod bene coepit, opus».

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instimulat gentes et in urbes incitat urbes
in populosque odii semina dira iacit.
defuerint causae, praebent mendacia causas,
et citius iaculis verba dolosa volant.
arma fremit caeco petulans ardore iuventus:
arma fer: inficiet sidera celsa cruor.
quae modo securo fabricarant rastra colono,
tristia non cessant cudere tela manus.
et superant montes fluviosque incendia belli,
ipsius pelagi transgrediuntur aquas.
horruit aerisono strepitu perterritus orbis
totus inauditis ingemuitque malis⁴¹.

The heartbroken Titan admits his defeat: man's bloodthirsty nature is definitive proof of Jupiter's victory over Prometheus⁴². Yet the latter's pessimism is balanced by the closing part of the poem, which is a monologue of the Fates: Prometheus was the bringer of fire, not of light; he has given man technology, but not morality⁴³. Yet one day, divine light will descend from heaven itself, and mankind will live in peace⁴⁴. Thus, Weller's deep-rooted pessimism from *Daedalus et Elpenor* is offset in *Prometheus* by the promise of eternal peace brought by Christ.

Yet both poems are still situated in antiquity itself. In the rest of this section, we will look at Latin war poetry as it brings back to life the gods of classical antiquity in modern times. The prototypical example of this type of poetry is, once again, an elegy by Hermann Weller, entitled *Venus et Mars*. Two years after he had won a gold medal for *Daedalus et Elpenor* in 1924, Weller again won first place with his *Venus et Mars*, in which the titular gods

⁴¹ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., pp. 113-120, vv. 139-150.

⁴² Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 177-178: «“vicisti” dixitque “Tonans: monumenta triumphphi | pectora sunt magni sanguinolenta tui”».

⁴³ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 189-192: «ignifer in terras fatalia dona tulisti: | non poteris vere lucifer esse tuis. | nunc tellure procul lux est divina; sed ipsa | de caelo veniet, sit modo lucis amor».

⁴⁴ Cfr. *supra* note 39, where Christ is referred to as *alter Prometheus*.

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are engaged in the Great War themselves, just as they had been during the Trojan war⁴⁵.

Set in 1918, the poem starts out with a description of Venus, the Roman goddess of love. It seems that she is inconsolably sad: no one from her entourage has been able to cheer her up, so they have all left. Even Cupid has laid down his bow and arrow. Then the poet divulges the reason for her sadness: it has been four years now since Mars has plunged the whole world into a terrible war.

Cypria sublimi tristis recubabat in arce
non leve magnanimo pectore vulnus alens.
nec pepulit divae curas alata caterva,
lusibus et lepidis usque parata iocis.
Idaliae frustra tentant praebere sorores
lenimen dominae blandaque verba suae.
[...]
omnia luctus habet, nymphae satyrique silentes
diffugiunt, silvis incubat alta quies.
ipse pharetratus sua neglegit arma Cupido
nec curat solitum desidiosus opus.
innumeros sic diva dies noctesque iacebat
perpetuo gemitu fata sinistra querens.
saepe suos vernum tempus renovarat odores,
saepe novum dederat bruma nivosa gelu.
ex quo terribilis Mavors fera moverat arma
et tulerat cunctis acria bella plagis
ver aderat quintum [...] ⁴⁶.

She decides that it has been quite enough and embarks on a long tirade against Mars. Is this the kind of relationship that they have, with her powerless while he reigns supreme? Will there come no end to this unprecedented bloodshed? It seems that mankind is no longer capable of love, and that the goddess is consequently

⁴⁵ From 1922 to 1927, Weller always won first place. Of course, *Mars* and *Pax* are ubiquitous terms in Latin war poetry, but mostly as concepts (*i.e.* war and peace in general), not divine characters.

⁴⁶ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 1-21 (the poem spans pp. 50-56).

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withering away. She has had enough and gets ready to go to her father Jupiter and to ask him to send some giants in order to restrain Mars:

«experiar» dixit «numen si flectere possim
regis, ut imperio nunc regat ipse suo.
in Martem fortasse novos immittet Olympi
rector Aloidas, qui fera membra doment,
ut post tot curas paulum requiescere terrae
detur et Idaliae restituantur opes»⁴⁷.

Yet just as she is about to leave, the doors fly open and Mars himself enters. Venus is dumbfounded, but quickly realizes that she now has a chance to end this war once and for all. As he leans in for a kiss, the sly goddess submits willingly: she leads him to a comfortable bed, and has food and wine served in abundance. While the exhausted Mars is taking off his armour, Venus sends for Somnus, the god of sleep. The latter eventually arrives in the form of a nightingale and secretly sings Mars to sleep with a soporific tune:

illa fuit non dura viro, nec restitit igni:
id suadebat amor calliditasque simul.
et rata sic hostem devinci posse superbum
ad mollem lectum duxit amica deum
apposuitque dapes. Fulgebant munera Bacchi,
quae dabat Euphrosynes officiosa manus.
cena placet Marti; clipeum deponit et hastam
et capiti dempta casside demit onus.
[...]
Cecropiae simulatus avi consederat orno
Somnus et haec dulci carmina voce canit:
«bellice, paciferam cape, Mars, post arma quietem
et caput in molli nunc age conde toro.
iucundo requiesce diu languore solutus;
grata soporato somnia multa feram.
hic, Gradive, cubes longos sopitus in annos;

⁴⁷ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 81-86.

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hoc bibe Lethaeas fonte quietis aquas.
hic placide dormi, donec pia mater Amoris
te Venus e somno suscitet ipsa tuo»⁴⁸.

As her entourage is tying down tightly the sleeping god of war with chains made of roses, Venus decides to visit the earth, which is quickly restoring from the war. Weller then offers a lengthy description of nature in bloom, a trademark of his Romantic style. Peace has returned, as has Love, both in nature and among mankind. As a result, Mars' battleground has turned into a fragrant garden («Martia iam tellus hortus odoratus erat»)⁴⁹. So in the end, it is Venus, not Mars, who has won the greatest victory ever («cedite Romanae, Pellaeae cedite palmae: | nullus adhuc victor tanta tropaea tulit. | ipsa Venus lauro ducebat vincta triumphos»)⁵⁰. Yet once again, Weller's typically prophetic voice comes through near the end of the poem. For a warning has been issued by the oracle of Delphi: do not celebrate this victory too early or, most importantly, too loudly. Mars may be fast asleep now, but no sleep lasts forever. Even Venus' well-meant celebrations could wake him up. Besides, his chains of flowers are very easily broken:

illis temporibus Phoebi praesaga sacerdos
edidit hos tremula Pythia voce sonos:
«indomiti Martis video devincta sopore
lumina, sunt teneris membra ligata rosis.
sancta queis nunc sit, celeres submittite voces;
quisquis eris, lingua nunc animoque fave.
quam facile est taciti nexus divellere somni:
corpora non firma compede sarta ligant.
iurgia nunc absint, absit funesta simultas:
displicet Idaliae rixa nefasta deae.

⁴⁸ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 95-126.

⁴⁹ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., v. 162.

⁵⁰ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 149-151.

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sancta quies nunc sit, placidi ne mater Amoris
belliferum somno suscitet ipsa deum»⁵¹.

Weller's message is clear and proved to be painfully ominous: in a post-1918 world, it will be difficult to maintain peace, which could even be broken by the most peaceful of intentions. Much of Weller's poetry carries a similarly prophetic charge: especially his *Somnus hibernus* and *Regnum paupertatis*, which obtained *magna laus* in 1920 and 1921 respectively, have as their central theme the teeming social injustice in the aftermath of the war as a result of mankind's collective stupidity⁵².

In the same context, the *Hoeufftianum* received an interesting submission near the end of 1918 entitled *De Baccho inimico hexametron* ('Poem on Bacchus, the Enemy')⁵³. Now that the war is over, the as yet anonymous poet claims, the tyranny of Mars has simply been replaced by the terror of yet another ancient deity: Bacchus, the god of wine⁵⁴. After a description of the recent terrible bloodbath and the 'closing of the gates of war', the poet warns about the dangers of peace itself («attamen ipsius metuenda pericula pacis») ⁵⁵. For peace celebrations go hand in hand with drinking: Bacchus has now become the new Mars, an enemy promising fun, but eventually leaving only death and disease in

⁵¹ Weller, *Carmina latina* cit., vv. 181-192.

⁵² Cfr. Lobe, *Lux verae humanitatis effulgeat* cit., p. 201. One of Weller's most infamously prophetic poems is his elegy Y, written on the eve of the Second World War, dealing, as Uwe Dubielzig has convincingly argued, with antisemitism in Nazi Germany (Dubielzig, *Die neue Königin der Elegien* cit.). Weller uses the genre of the *bellum grammaticale* and has (in a dream of the narrator) the letter 'A' (i.e. Adolf or Aryans) incite the rest of the alphabet (i.e. the German population) against the foreign and inferior letter 'Y' (i.e. Juden, das Jüdisches Volk) (cfr. Sacré, *La poesia latina moderna* cit., pp. 48-49).

⁵³ NHA, KNAW 64-823, n. XXXIII. The poem itself is dated 13 December 1918 («Dat. Idibus Decembr. MCMXVIII»).

⁵⁴ The as yet anonymous poet (probably a priest) was a regular contender in the *Hoeufftianum*, though never with any success. His poetry was never of any high literary quality.

⁵⁵ NHA, KNAW 64-823, n. XXXIII, v. 16.

his wake⁵⁶. Men get drunk, enter into fights, go home and beat their wives and children. More and more, Bacchus is attributed with characteristics typical of Mars: he rages, inflames parties on both sides, and incites conflict and bloodshed⁵⁷. The poet then urges these men to stop drinking, for the sake of their families, their country, and God: during the war, you have shown that you are brave, so please do not partake in this new war led by Bacchus («heu fugite, heu quaeso, Bacchi turpissima bella, | qui ludo Martis monstrastis pectora fortes!»)⁵⁸. Thus, apart from being a puritan indictment of alcohol(ism) in general, *De Baccho inimico hexametron* is also one of the rare instances of a shell-shock reference in contemporary Latin war poetry.

The very same participant had also submitted a poem to the *Hoeufftianum* in 1914 entitled *De Caede Serajevisi*, on the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, the spark that ignited the Great War⁵⁹. Yet he had most likely written the poem prior to the actual outbreak of the war, which, as one member of the jury remarked, gives a certain ironic ring to a number of verses⁶⁰. After calling upon the muse to aid him in

⁵⁶ NHA, KNAW 64-823, n. XXXIII, vv. 19-27: «hostis Bacchus hic est, tacito clangore tubarum, | qui repit, suadetque viris per verba dolosa | indulgere mero, libantes pocula divo, | formas assumens varias; quandoque lagenae | vel latet indutus spumantia dolia musto, | vel sedet in lautis ampulla aut amphora mensis. | laetitiam viresque bonas promittit amicis, | qui incauti captique dolis potare venena | festinant, morbosque sibi mortemque parare».

⁵⁷ NHA, KNAW 64-823, n. XXXIII, vv. 37-39: «sic furit in pravis bibulis Semeleia proles, | accendens mutuas iras et sanguine terras | spargens, assuetus pugnas lacessere acerbas».

⁵⁸ NHA, KNAW 64-823, n. XXXIII, vv. 52-53.

⁵⁹ NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. XV. In 1912, he had also submitted an unsuccessfully poem on the Italo-Turkish war (*De Bello Libyco*, KNAW 64-820, n. XVIII). The transcription offered by Cristini (*Bellum mundanum* cit., pp. 103-104), is marred by a number of errors (e.g. v. 7 *tribuens*, not *tribueus*; v. 74 *cadente*, not *cedente*).

⁶⁰ Cfr. the jury report of the 1915 competition in the Academy's *Verslagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen. Afdeling Letterkunde* (the title of which varies over the years; henceforth 'VMKAW'): VMKAW 1915, p. 327: «De laatste regels, waarin de vorstelijke slachtoffers van

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singing of this horrendous crime, the poet sets the scene: together with his wife, Franz Ferdinand, the sole heir of his father's throne, has come to pay a visit to Sarajevo, arriving to the thunderous applause of the local population:

da mihi, Musa dolens, verbis horrere nefandum
 crimen, quod virum luget in orbe genus.
impia, quod saxis nuper feriora pararunt
 pectora, perfecit quod scelerata manus⁶¹.
lugete, o gentes Slavorum stirpe creatas,
 in quibus haec sceleris tristis origo fuit.
dum iuvenis Princeps cum Sponsa visitat urbem,
 spes gentis, tribuens munera, verba bona;
circumstat laetus populus, plaususque secundos
 ingeminat, spargens floribus omne solum.
vive diu nobis, clamat, multosque per annos
 esto Bosniacae gentis amica salus⁶²!

It is a beautiful summer day, yet all of a sudden, darkness fills the sky, spread by Pluto, the god of the underworld. Apparently, the god has left hell and is bent on the destruction of the happy couple. Under the cover of this darkness, a band of assassins, referred to as a 'company from hell' (*tartareum agmen*), carry out the attack on Pluto's behalf: first with a bomb, then with a fatal gunshot. As husband and wife die, the terrorists make their escape through Pluto's darkness:

iam sol arduos radios mittens, ac luce coruscus
 aestiva, mediam currit in axe viam.
invidus at Pluto tenebris egressus Averni,
 principibus iustis cogitat exitium.

den moordaanslag, die door den titel is aangegeven, aldus worden toegesproken [...]. Ja, nu klinken ze als bittere spot, maar toen ze werden neergeschreven gaven ze aan het slot heel wat relief [*sic*] en... eind goed, al goed!».

⁶¹ The reference to Princip's band of terrorists as *scelerata manus* is quite apt, given that the group (*manus*, also meaning 'hand') was known as the 'Black Hand'.

⁶² NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. XV, vv. 1-12.

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ante diem quartum Phoebus signare Kalendas
Quintiles pergit, dans benefacta globo.
haud mora; tartareum properans en ingruit agmen,
innocuis promptum funera ferre viris.
ore vomens Pluto et iaciens ad sidera fumum,
contegit obscura nube repente diem.
infames socios urget, quos Serbica pridem
terra nefasta dedit, Tartareusve locus.
machina terrifico disploditur aenea bombo;
igneus inferna mittitur arte globus.
invisi fugiunt tenebrosa nocte scelesti;
icta cadunt tonitru pectora sancta ducum.
spargitur et pariter fatali sanguine currus,
atro Mors velo volvit utrumque caput⁶³.

The rest of the poem is an emotionally laden indictment of the crime and a description of the transportation of the victims' bodies.

The final poem I would like to discuss in this section is a *Hoefftianum* submission sent in from Serbia in 1922 entitled *Fama*⁶⁴. This curious poem consisting of 1200 hexameter lines, most likely written by Franjo Elezović (*Franciscus Elezovitch*), a professor from Belgrado, is probably what comes closest to a Latin epic about the Great War⁶⁵. It is, in short, a very elaborate historical

⁶³ NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. XV, vv. 17-34. This is a relatively correct account of the events: it was a sunny day (28 June), and the attack was carried out with a bomb and a gun. Yet, not all assailants managed to escape, as the poet seems to claim; Gavrilo Princip, for instance, was arrested.

⁶⁴ It was first submitted in manuscript form in 1922 (NHA, KNAW 64-826, n. XXXVIII) and resubmitted in typescript in 1926 (KNAW 64-830, n. XIV), with minor stylistic adaptations on the level of the verses, without any significant changes to the overall structure or content of the story itself. Unless mentioned otherwise, quotations come from the first submission.

⁶⁵ The poem was disqualified upon its first submission, since it had not been anonymised: the envelope in which it was sent contains the following information: «Paul Baitch, Kralj Milanova 42, Belgrade (Serbie)» (cfr. VMKAW, 1923, p. 134). This otherwise unknown Paul Baitch probably sent in the poem on behalf of Elezović, whose name can be read through the envelope accompanying the second submission of the poem from 1926. Elezović also

description of the war from start to finish and from a bird's-eye-view, or more precisely, from the perspective of Fama, the classical all-seeing goddess of rumours. It comes close, therefore, to an epic in terms of its sheer length, its scope and its style – the poem is rife, for instance, with Homeric similes – yet there is no typically epic hero in the centre of the story. Instead, the main characters of the poem are the *Socii* and *Foedus*, i.e. the Allies and the Central Powers as such, whose conflict is witnessed by Fama, who in turn spreads news about the conflict at large. The scope is, therefore, quite universal, although the poet clearly pays comparatively more attention to the Eastern front and the Balkans⁶⁶. In fact, it is quite obvious that as a staunch supporter of the Serbian war effort, Elezović was on the side of the Allies⁶⁷. This is most clear when he delivers a long eulogy of the Serbian soldier:

immani qualis fauces leo pandit hiatu
et rugit ingentique rigens horrore iubarum
prosiluit infestus per agros ac sternitur ungue

sent in an as yet unopened letter to the *Hoeufftianum* in March 1923 (it was sent from the same address: «Fr. Elezovitch, prof., Kralj Milanova, 42. Belgrado, Serbie»). IJsewijn mentions Elezović in his *Companion to Neo-Latin Studies* (University Press, Leuven, 2 voll.: vol. I, 1990, p. 91) with regard to the latter's translation of Monti's *La Bellezza dell'universo* into Latin (Elezović contributed this translation, *Rerum universitatis pulchritudo*, to the *Raccolta di scritti in onore di Felice Ramorino*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1927, along with a dedicatory poem, *Felici Ramorino, Doctori nobilissimo*, pp. 179-184). He also published a school commentary on Ovid: *Komentar uz izabrana mesta iz Ovidija: za srednje škole*, G. Kon, Beograd 1910. On the fate of Latin epic in the twentieth century, see IJsewijn-Jacobs, *Latijnse poëzie van de twintigste eeuw* cit., pp. 68-73.

⁶⁶ Latin war poetry from Eastern Europe is very rare indeed. Along with *Fama*, I only know of one other such war related submission to the *Hoeufftianum*: *Incendium carmen*, submitted in 1918 (NHA, KNAW 64-823, n. XXV), about an old Serbian woman and her daughter whose house is bombed during the war. They are saved by a soldier, who has to go to the front. He is promised the hand in marriage of the woman's daughter when the war is over.

⁶⁷ As such, therefore, the submission could have never won in the *Hoeufftianum*. Even if it had excellent literary qualities, the jury would never let a blatantly biased poem be published.

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victima pressa ferae, sic obvia promptus ad arma
serbicus in medium campum se conicit heros.
praesidium patriae, clarissima gloria gentis
magnanimae, proles oculos deiecta decoros!
pectora, nobilitatis honor, fortissima bello!
invicti iuvenes et formidabilis hosti
cuivis, quem penetrare nequit nec rumpere, murus!
sanguinis heroi, suboles, cui copia grandis⁶⁸!

This goes on for quite a while. Elezović touches on a plethora of subjects (too many to be discussed here in any detail): he describes how the war breaks out and gradually reaches a global scale and how the armies prepare for battle; he offers a catalogue of war crimes by the Central Powers (occupied cities, deportations, prison camps) and of the horrors of modern warfare (submarine warfare, zeppelin bombings); he describes the Russian revolution and its impact on the ongoing conflict; he sings the praises of various Allied commanders (Foch, Persting, Haig, Diaz, Misić) and describes the gradual weakening of the *Foedus*, as well as the subsequent Armistice and peace negotiations etc.

All of this is woven together by the goddess Fama, who flies over Europe and observes the war in all its complexity. Not only is she an observer, but she also spreads news about the conflict across the entire world. The only problem is: this news does not always seem to be correct, for Fama tends to distort the truth! Remarkably, therefore, one of the central themes of *Fama* is actually the issue of 'fake news' during the Great War. This is already clear, for instance, in the proem, where Fama is introduced and described in action: a swift goddess with a hundred eyes, mouths and ears, constantly on the move, spreading news both true and false. Yet mankind is always eager to take in any kind of rumour, and is therefore easily misled. Happy, therefore, is he who can sort fact from fiction:

⁶⁸ NHA, KNAW 64-826, n. XXXVIII, vv. 78-88.

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carpit iter caelo properans patiensque laboris
aeternumque volat rapida velocior aura;
cum rerum vario mundum clamore fatigat:
consurgunt homines arrectisque auribus astant⁶⁹;
fit rumor circum rogitantque novi quid ab alto
Fama ferat, notum strepitus latura per orbem
cras iterum, somni, veluti si, semper ut expers,
viribus attritis, nulla regione quiescat.
illi sunt oculi centum, quibus usque licebit
cernere cuncta super terra totidemque renident
ora modis voces audentia promere miris
quaeque simul capiunt audita extrinsecus aures.
indefessa legat spatium pernicibus alis,
hoc sua fata volunt adeatque palatia regum
non secus ac fundum domini admoveatque susurros
tectis agricolae. Tum versicoloribus ales
auspiciis, falsi pariter quam stridula veri,
aggreditur magis expertos et fallere numquam
desinit; ast aeger populus cito visere ubique
compita cum vicis properat; novitate laborat
decipiturque novi quid detur in urbe rogando
stirps hominum semper. Felix, qui possit in ista
tanti operis fabrica verum dignoscere falso⁷⁰!

So Fama is a force to be reckoned with and has a profound impact on the course of the war. For although Vergil had described her as a mighty being in the *Aeneid*, if he were alive today, Elezović claims, he would attribute her with even greater powers⁷¹. Her influence is far-reaching: one thing she does, for instance, is spread misinformation about numbers during the war. For one reads in the newspaper that this many people have been taken captive, that many people have been killed, and this many rockets have been fired... Yet one should always take these numbers with a grain of salt, unless one reads quality newspapers. A wise man always tones such numbers down:

⁶⁹ Cfr. Vergil, *Aeneis*, I, 152.

⁷⁰ NHA, KNAW 64-826, n. XXXVIII, vv. 1-24.

⁷¹ See Vergil, *Aeneis*, IV, 173-190.

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romanus nostris si viveret ipse diebus
vates, maiorem plumis et corpore Famam
fingeret insigni cultu potioris et aevi
artibus innixus. Quam plura canenda videret!
pugnantes inter quaedam lex, inter et arma
praesidet innatus quidam belli modus, ex quo
Fama notabit ovans adversa et prospera. Quare,
si tibi testatur, lector, tot milia captos
pagina totque neci missos tormenta que mille,
spectandum artis opus desideriumque locorum,
hostibus erepta in campo, fuge credere, sodes,
res meliore foro nisi sit pretiosius empta.
miraris forsitan decies centena superque
milia; de magno prudentem demere acervo
fas est et licuit bello: mendacia sceptrum
qua tenere suum, terras pelagusque potenter
nunc scandunt; tantam numeri vim corripere, lector⁷².

Hundreds of verses are dedicated to this: misinformation, mankind's fallible nature, fearmongering, hostile propaganda... Fama's gift to man truly is *inextricabilis error*⁷³. When the war is finally over and the troops are heading back home, the poet concludes with a final confirmation of Fama's omnipotence: as long as there are empires, she will lead them towards their doom, like slaves with their hands tied behind their back.

intrarunt portus reduces victricia signa
aequato in patriam portantes agmine classes.
miles, io, festa clamavit voce, triumphe!
quisque coronari circum sua tempora fronde
a consorte tori, puero, tum passus amico est
amplexusque dedit dulces in limine primo.
nocte dieque manus docilem post terga revinctum

⁷² NHA, KNAW 64-826, n. XXXVIII, vv. 108-124.

⁷³ NHA, KNAW 64-826, n. XXXVIII, vv. 188-190: «illa super librans agilem se altaria pennis | blanditur gestu promitque novissima quaeque | dona, quibus cognomen inextricabilis error».

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Fama gregem traxit, dum grandia regna manebant,
non missura quidem sonitus cum illa ipsa peribunt⁷⁴.

Through Vergil's Eyes: Ancient Romans Revived

Yet classical god and supernatural beings were not the only ones who were being transported to the modern days of the Great War: Latin war poetry also revived ancient mortals to act as mouthpieces for criticism of the war and anti-modern sentiments. The classical poets, who had always been the favourite protagonists of neo-humanist poetry in the Pascolian vein, were particularly popular in this respect. In this last section, I will discuss four poems by Italian Latin poets who applied this technique.

The first of these poems, *Davi reditus ad inferos* ('The Return of Davus to the Underworld') by Carlo Bianchini (1847-1925), almost managed to secure a victory in the *Hoefftianum* competition of 1921, but the comic satire steeped in Horatian *bonhomie* eventually came in second after Francesco Sofia Alessio's *Asterie*⁷⁵. It brings back to life Davus, an ordinary ancient

⁷⁴ NHA, KNAW 64-826, n. XXXVIII, vv. 1192-1200.

⁷⁵ On Bianchini, see H. Tondini, *De Carolo Bianchini*, «Latinitas» 6, 1958, pp. 50-51 and D. Sacré, *Cultor maiorum. Lusus: An Allegedly Lost Poem by Antonio Faverzani*, «Humanistica Lovaniensia» 66, 2017, pp. 501-511. He was a lawyer from Rome who became a priest at the age of 77, a year before he died. As far as I know, Bianchini participated in the *Hoefftianum* four times, mostly with war related poetry: in 1915, he submitted an elegy on the sinking of the *Lusitania* titled *Lusitaniae fatum* (NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. VII, cfr. *infra*, note 80); in 1916, he submitted two compositions: *Militis mater* (NHA, KNAW 64-822, n. XIII), a short elegy about a worried mother, waiting at home while her son is off to war, hoping to receive a letter of his; and *Senex mendicus* (NHA, KNAW 64-822, n. XIV), the title of which is self-explanatory; and in 1920 he submitted *Davi reditus ad inferos* (KNAW 64-824, n. X), with which he obtained *magna laus*. He never published his Latin poetry (apart from the *Hoefftianum* publication of *Davi reditus ad inferos*, his *Senex mendicus* was published and discussed by Tondini (cfr. *De Carolo Bianchini* cit., pp. 50-51, the poem precedes the article, on pp. 48-49).

Roman⁷⁶. For some reason, Pluto had allowed him to leave the underworld to revisit the earth for a couple of days. The poem opens with his return to the underworld, where his fellow shades have flocked around him to enquire after the situation above: «is life any good up there?»; «what's new in Rome»; «is the Subura still as crowded?»...

longum iter emensus, Stygiae non sponte paludis
litora iam repetit, Plutonis vernula, Davus;
cui venia haud multis ab hero concessa diebus
ex Erebo discedendi Romamque adeundi.
ergo, vix illum exposuit conferta Charontis
cymba, revertenti occurrit, diversa requirens,
servorum atque ancillarum densissima turba.
hinc in clamatur: «salvum Davum remeare
gaudemus»; rogitant alii: «bene vivitur illic?...»
«nilne novi Romae?...». «Semperne referta Suburra est?»⁷⁷.

Davus is clearly disappointed: Rome has changed, but not for the better. The city is in ruins and has lost all of its former splendour⁷⁸. Davus then tells the deceased about the wonders of modern progress (trains, modern industry, aeroplanes, motorcycles, electric lights, telecommunication etc.), and eventually gets to the topic of war⁷⁹. Actually, he claims, he does not even need to tell

⁷⁶ 'Davus' was a common name for a slave. There are many 'Davi', for instance, in classical Roman comedy. Given the Horatian mood of the poem, Bianchini may have been inspired by the Davus who narrates Horace, *Saturae*, II, 7, exposing various of his master's moral and mental inconsistencies. However, there are no concrete indications that Bianchini wanted the reader to identify his Davus with Horace's outspoken slave.

⁷⁷ NHA, KNAW 64-824, n. X, vv. 1-10. The Subura was a quarter in Rome infamous for its prostitution.

⁷⁸ NHA, KNAW 64-824, n. X, vv. 11-15: «at Davus: "veteri a Roma quam dissidet ista! | marmoreas aedes et templa, Palatia, thermas | frustra quaesivi: nam rudera sola supersunt, | et iuxta eversas aras fractasque columnas | per noctem feles queribundo indulget amori"».

⁷⁹ He also touched on warfare in the context of the newly invented phenomenon of cinema. For some silent films dealt with war as well: «vivas effi-

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them anything about the horrors of modern warfare, as the underworld is teeming with the spirits of those who have recently witnessed the carnage themselves first-hand anyway. Apparently, Charon had to work overtime... Not surprisingly, it is the modern technology and the unprecedented scale of the bloodbath that was the Great War which Davus laments: entire armies were mown down in one fell swoop, and innocent citizens fell victim to bombs dropped by aeroplanes and torpedoes launched by submarines. To top it all, this type of butchery is occurring in a world where religion preaches love and charity:

quidnam de bellis memorem? Iam plurima nostis
a caesis, quorum ad sedes huc nuper Averni
desiluit stipata phalanx mussante Charonte.
quae clades, et quam furiosa cupido necandi!
faucibus ignivomis egestum missile plumbum,
confertas delens infanda caede cohortes,
vesanam haud explet rabiem: innocui quoque cives,
armorum licet expertes, caedantur oportet!
hos super abiciunt mox displosura volantes
pondera, quae fundunt late excidiumque necemque,
et dum feminea turba puerisque redundans,
nilque verens celeri cursu secat aequora navis,
parva ratis, pisces aequans, se sub mare mergit,
indeque navis iter speculata sub undis,
terrificum telum, vocitat quod nauta silurum,
conicit, illo ictu navis disrupta dehiscit,
funduntque insontes diffiso in gurgite vitam⁸⁰!

gies tabulam altera trudit ad albam, | quam lux inlustrat rutila (obtegit umbra
theatrum); | rivum ibi defluere atque homines incedere cernes; | aut armis
confligunt arma et vulnere caesus | procumbit miles, ficto dum terra rigatur |
sanguine [...]. | fabula sic agitur sine voce, favente popello!» (NHA, KNAW
64-824, n. X, vv. 40-48).

⁸⁰ This fragment on torpedoes and submarine warfare actually allows us to attribute another hitherto anonymous war poem to Carlo Bianchini, viz. the 1915 *Hoefftianum* submission *Lusitaniae fatum* (NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. VII), on the sinking of the *Lusitania*. In this unpublished poem, the words used to describe the nefarious torpedo strikes are uncannily similar to the ones which Bianchini would eventually use in *Davi reditus ad inferos*: «parva ratis, piscis

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anne putas haec barbaricas patrasse trucesque
gentes, humano vesci quae sanguine gaudent?
haec immo fiunt ubi religione iubetur
quisque suo simili ut vinclis sit iunctus amoris⁸¹!

The poem then comes to a close as Davus replies to the question related to the Subura. Oh yes, he exclaims, prostitution is running rampant indeed! Yet it is difficult to tell these ladies of ill-repute apart from honourable women, since the latter have adopted the former's promiscuous sense of fashion. With this remark, however, it seems that Davus has overstepped his mark, for he is immediately arrested by the police on account of having offended queen Proserpine. Apparently, while he was away, the queen of the underworld had also adopted the mode of dress against which he has just fulminated so strongly⁸².

demersa modo, infandumque | exitium meditans, aequore delituit; | indeque,
Lusitania, iter speculata, carinam | missilibus telis eminus aggreditur: | telis quae
vocitant navali more siluros | ictu quaeque necem perniciemque ferunt. | saucia
consistit navis, mox ima dehiscit» (NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. VII, vv. 23-29).

⁸¹ NHA, KNAW 64-824, n. X, vv. 67-87.

⁸² The Dutch professor of classics and Latin poet Pieter Helbert Damsté (1860-1943), who also was a regular *Hoeufftianum* participant, wrote a satirical poem in the same vein entitled *De capillamento muliebri hodierno queritur umbra Apulei*, in which he has the shade of the Roman author Apuleius complain about the 1920s vogue of women with bobbed hair (published in «Mnemosyne» LV, 3, 1927, pp. 318-320 and in his *Carmina minora*, Druk van A.W. Sijthoff's Uitg.maatschappij, Leiden 1927, pp. 42-44). As Apuleius is pacing up and down the banks of the river Styx, he sees Charon preparing to drop off a new batch of the recently deceased. The poet is shocked as he notices that they all have short haircuts: what horrible disease has caused so many young boys to die all at once, he wonders. Then he sees that there are also women, young and old alike, among the crowd, at which point he goes into a rant against the horrendous hairdo. The conservative Roman criticises the long haircut, and urges contemporary women to let their hair grow long once again, as in the olden days. Remarkably, that very year, Cesare De Titta (1872-1948) also wrote a Latin poem entitled *In muliebrem tonsuram*, in which he voiced his disapproval of the same bobbed hair style within a classical framework (C. De Titta, *Carmina*, in aedibus G.C. Sansoni, Firenze 1952, pp. 71-73).

Whereas Bianchini was still working with an imaginary protagonist, the rest of the poets discussed in this section brought to life actual historical figures. Two years after Bianchini sent in his *Davi reditus ad inferos*, for instance, the *Hoeufftianum* received a poem entitled *Somnium Vergilii* ('Vergil's Dream') by the Italian poet Giovanni Latini, which he resubmitted a year later under the title *Vergilii reditus* ('the Return of Vergil')⁸³. Latini was a teacher in a 'liceo classico' in Ancona and participated in the *Hoeufftianum* more than once, often with poems on classical subjects, though never with any success⁸⁴. He published most of his Latin poetry, including *Somnium Vergilii*, later on⁸⁵.

While the First World War is raging on, Vergil is suddenly revived by some divine power (*numen; diva voluntas*). Although the Roman poet is intent on revisiting his native country, he has actually been brought back to life to help humanity come to its senses. Accompanied by a band of spirit guides, Vergil flies over the Alps and gets a first glimpse of the vast scale of the war, at which point he delivers some verses of his own oeuvre: «unholy Mars truly is raging all over the world»:

numen, quod leni nostrum circumvolat ala
mundum, quod gentes perituras tempora volvit
ad meliora, pacem quod laetam inspirat et artes,
– atrox dum bellum furit insanitque per orbem –
Vergilium lecta cum turba evadere ad auras
vitales iussit. Perlustrant aequora, terras,

⁸³ NHA, KNAW 64-826, n. XVIII and 64-827, n. X respectively.

⁸⁴ Some poems of his on classical subjects: *Lesbiae dolor*; *Syrillus seu Lesbiae passer*; *Roma post Cannas*; *Error Paridis*; *Clitumni fabula*; *Convicium Neronis*; *Flacci error et poena*; *Iani nuptiae*; *Navis Vergilii*; *Infida coniunx* etc. He submitted many of these to the *Hoeufftianum*, and, since they were all unsuccessful, published many of them individually, before collecting them in *Itala tellus* in 1930 (cfr. *infra*).

⁸⁵ It was first published as G. Latini, *Somnium Vergilii: latinum carmen, con la versione italiana dell'autore*, Tip. Tuderte, Todi 1924. He later included it (under the title *Somnium Vergilii*) in G. Latini, *Itala tellus*, Atanòr, Todi 1930, pp. 101-119.

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et pugnas odiumque movent taetra agmina Averni.
lumina Vergilius flagrans animumque revisit
Ausoniae fines, vivaci carmine laetos.
[...]
vati sed paulum fas est haec litora circum
sistere, sed, Genium sacra comitante cohorte,
humanos properat sensus – haec diva voluntas –
insinuare animis. Traiectis Alpibus, almam
quae patriam vallant, alto de vertice montis,
aspicit horrescens pugnas clademque nefandam
et labiis resonant veluti suspiria versus:
«vicinae, ruptis inter se legibus, urbes
arma ferunt; saevit toto Mars impius orbe»⁸⁶.

Then follows a typical catalogue of the various horrors of modern warfare as witnessed by the Roman poet, continually interlaced with quotations from his own works. As we have already seen, the confrontation between ancient and modern often revolves around the progress of military technology and contemporary weapons of mass destruction such as submarines and aeroplanes. In the following fragment, for instance, Vergil complains about the thousands of flying ships (horrid war machines, ‘*belli fera machina*’) soaring through the air and pouring down a rain of fire:

heu quantum reperit sceleratae mentis acumen,
– improba pugnat enim mens – est bona norma necandi.
mille secant glaucum veloces aethera naves,
igneus unde ruit, belli fera machina, nimbus,
horribilique tonans strepitu late omnia vastat⁸⁷.

While this chaos continues, Vergil does what he has been sent to do and spreads love and compassion wherever he goes («at pietas oritur Vates quo labitur ala»⁸⁸). So the ancient poet effec-

⁸⁶ Vv. 1-20 (I am citing from the 1930 *Itala tellus* edition). The quotation is Vergil, *Georgica*, I, 510-511.

⁸⁷ Vv. 30-34.

⁸⁸ V. 54.

tively acts as a kind of guardian angel, instilling love and affection into the hearts of men. The middle part of the tripartite poem translates these effects of Vergil's *pietas* into the description of the goings-on at a military hospital somewhere in Italy, far away from the turmoil of the war⁸⁹. As a matter of fact, military hospitals had already been the subject of a prize-winning *Hoefftia-num* war poem submitted in 1915, *Pacis in bello ministri* ('Agents of Peace in Time of War') by the Alsatian (but mainly Rome based) priest Franciscus Xaverius Reuss (1842-1925), which sang the praises of several unsung heroes at the front: chaplains, medics, litter-bearers, and nurses⁹⁰. In painting several scenes of love and kindness in the Italian military hospital, Latini also starts out by praising the pious throng of nurses (*pia turba*), ever active providers of motherly care:

matronae miseris adsunt lectaeque puellae
certatim, niveo indutae velamine membra;
pectore crux ardet, sublimis amoris imago.
advolat huc illuc vigilans pia turba vicissim.
hic iuvenis matrem languens implorat, et illa
accurrit solers et munere fungitur almo⁹¹.

⁸⁹ Vv. 57-59: «en procul immani surgunt certamine Martis | tecta quibus pietas humana et cura medendi | solamen praebent gratum mortalibus aegris». In the 1924 and 1930 editions of this poem, Latini added subtitles to the three parts: *Bella, horrida bella* for the first one, *Humana pietas* for the middle part, and *Somnium* for the final part.

⁹⁰ NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. V. It obtained *magna laus* in the 1916 competition, which was won by Antonio Faverezani's *Aviae lychnus*. Reuss included the poem in his *Nova tentamina poetica*, Cuggiani, Roma 1922, pp. 10-14.

⁹¹ Latini, *Somnium Vergilii* (from *Itala tellus* cit., pp. 105-106), vv. 60-65. Reuss also describes nurses as *pietas* incarnate (NHA, KNAW 64-821, n. V, vv. 88-110): «huc tamen e caelis Pietas descendit, et aedes, | luctus ubi regnat, dominatrix occupat alma. | imperat hic, mitis regina, libensque grabato | assidet aegrorum: nec vultu semper eodem. | [...] | induit et formam matronae, cuius in armis | mascula stat proles, inimicis obvia telis; | quae reputans genitrix, peregrinum quemlibet aequae | diligit atque fovet, suus ac si natus adesset. | os habitumque tamen Pietas sibi saepius aptat | virginis edoctae studiis

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One of the mini-scenes in the hospital starts with a number of soldiers staring sadly at one of the hospital beds: their companion Ennius, still in the flower of his youth, is drawing his final breaths. He has taken a bullet for his commanding officer like a true *heros*. The officer in question is standing at the end of Ennius' bed, presenting his rescuer with a medal of honour, while tears gather in his eyes:

cur taciti parvum spectant miserumque cubile
nec lacrimis parcunt comites? Heu flore iuventae
Ennius effundit generoso pectore vitam!
crudeli nuper leto se obiecerat heros
hostili ut tegeter ductoris vulnere corpus.
ductor adest lacrimans et fortem corde salutat:
Ennius aspectat morienti lumine laurum,
patria quam iuveni, virtutis praemia, donat⁹².

From a bed nearby, another soldier is watching the scene closely. Yet it appears that he is not an Italian: he is an Austrian soldier (*miles agminis adversi*) who was taken captive while he was lying in wait and brought to the hospital. Craving to go home to his parents, the Austrian feels sorry for Ennius, who will never be able to see his parents again, dying far from home. He is so touched by the scene that he would gladly give his own life to bring Ennius back to his mother alive and well:

haud procul e lecto haec miles spectacula cernit
agminis adversi. Nostri tulere struentem
insidias vallo, laesumque benigna tulere
in loca, queis robur, redeunt solacia menti.
aspiciens iuvenem, dulci percussus amore;
«o mihi sorte datum salvo carosque parentes

valedicere saeculi, | fluxas cuius opes et inania gaudia sprevit. | sic, pudibunda,
caput velat fluitante mitella, | inceditque stola circumvestita nigrante; | parva
super pectus radiat crux; annulus unum | e digitis ornat, pia sacri foederis
arrha; | ex oculis gravitas tranquilla, serena, benigna | spirat, grata Deo,
iucunda nepotibus Hevae».

⁹² Latini, *Somnium Vergilii* (from Latini, *Itala tellus* cit., pp. 101-119), vv. 72-79.

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et patriae – volvit – dulcesque revisere fines,
Ennius at (miserum!) patria amplexuque parentum
en procul occumbit. Maerenti o reddere matri
fas esset natum mihi caro et munere vitae»⁹³.

These and other scenes of humanity comfort the angelic Vergil, who believes that his work is done there as he flies off to fulfil his final task⁹⁴. For the last part of the poem, then, Vergil travels to his native Mantua, where he falls asleep near a babbling brook and dreams of a world in peace. When he eventually wakes up, the world is still at war, yet Vergil returns to the underworld filled with hope:

excutitur somno, victus dulcedine, Vates:
somnia grata cadunt... Saevit Mars impius orbe,
at spe Vergilius laetus descendit ad umbras⁹⁵.

Yet the poet would be brought back among the living again in other Latin poetry as well. In 1929, for instance, on the eve of the celebrations of Vergil's birth 2000 years before, a Mantuan priest named Anacleto Trazzi (1866-1940) submitted a long poem with the tell-tale title *Vergilius redux*⁹⁶. When the poem was dismissed on account of its many formal mistakes, Trazzi had an extended

⁹³ Vv. 80-89.

⁹⁴ Vv. 110-112: «hoc pietatis opus divino dulce poetae! | qui, placidum miseris orans mortalibus aevum, | munus ad extremum properat fatale per auras».

⁹⁵ Vv. 152-154.

⁹⁶ NHA, KNAW 64-833, n. XIX, published as A. Trazzi, *Vergilius redux seu de vita recentiore*, Scalini et Carrara, Asuli 1930. On this, see T. Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns*, University Press, Princeton 1993, pp. 200-203; S. Tacoma-M. de Vries, *Stralen als gelijken: de Augustalia (1937) van Anacleto Trazzi. Fascistische ideologie in de spiegel van antieke idealen*, «Roma Aeterna» II, 1, 2014, pp. 73-78 (73-74); Sacré, *Cultor maiorum* cit., pp. 505-506. On the Fascist appropriation of Vergil's bimillenary: see L. Canfora, *Fascismo e bimillenario della nascita di Virgilio*, in *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1985, 6 voll.: vol. II, pp. 469-472. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Giovanni Latini republished his *Somnium Vergilli* in his *Itala tellus* in 1930.

version of it published himself – without really correcting many of the poem's deficiencies – in 1930, the year of the bimillenary festivities themselves⁹⁷.

This time, however, Vergil appears to the poet in a dream, and is far more outspoken than in Latini's imagination⁹⁸. In Trazzi's lengthy, four-part poem, Vergil acts as a mouth piece for various of Trazzi's (ideological) beliefs, not in the least his Fascist convictions⁹⁹. After introducing Vergil *redux* in part 1 of the poem (*De laudibus Vergilii ac de eius monumento novissimo*), Trazzi has the poet typically voice his opinions on the novelties of the modern world in part 2 (*De vitae commoditatum profectu ac de morum defectibus*). Just like in Bianchini's *Davi reditus ad inferos* – Dirk Sacré has very correctly pointed to the clear influence Bianchini must have had on Trazzi – the ancient Roman discusses a list of modern inventions, starting with trains and ending with electricity (lighting and telecommunication), before arriving at the subject of modern warfare¹⁰⁰. Once again, the unprecedented appli-

⁹⁷ Though he submitted quite a lot of poetry to the *Hoeufftianum*, Trazzi only managed to secure a victory once, in 1933, with his *Ruris facies vespere* (gold medal). He never obtained *magna laus*. On Trazzi and the *Hoeufftianum*, see X. van Binnebeke, *Hoeufft's Legacy: Neo-Latin Poetry in the Archives of the Certamen poeticum Hoeufftianum (1923-1943)*, and D. Sacré, *The Certamen Hoeufftianum During the ventennio fascista. An Exploration*, in *Fascium decus superbum: Neo-Latin in the ventennio fascista*, Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia, University Press, Leuven (forthcoming).

⁹⁸ Trazzi uses the literary device of a narrator or character who has been slaving over a book or text, subsequently falls asleep as a result of all the hard work, and finds himself in a dream state in which the literary world has come to life. Hermann Weller, for instance, uses the same technique in his *Y Elegia*, in which the narrator has fallen asleep whilst reading Horace.

⁹⁹ Cfr. Tacoma-de Vries, *Stralen als gelijken* cit., pp. 73-74 and Sacré, *Cultor maiorum* cit., pp. 505-506. As mentioned, many neo-humanist poets from Italy actively supported the Fascist regime. On Fascism and contemporary Latin poetry, see H. Lamers-B. Reitz-Joosse, *Lingua Lictoria: The Latin Literature of Italian Fascism*, «Classical Receptions Journal» VIII, 2, 2015, pp. 216-252.

¹⁰⁰ Sacré, *Cultor maiorum* cit., p. 505. Before arriving at the topic of war itself, Vergil had already touched upon the miraculous (yet nefarious) nature of submarines: Trazzi, *Vergilius redux* cit., pp. 23-24 (I will always cite from the

cation of modern technology as an instrument of death during the Great War is at the centre of a diatribe put into the mouth of a classical character. Upon concluding his catalogue of wonderful inventions, Vergil suddenly exclaims: «All well and good, but behind this façade of progress, there is something truly rotten!» For what is the use of these scientific breakthroughs (*Naturae studia; haec inventa; vestra scientia*) if all mankind does is turn them into instruments of death (*morti servire iubentur*)? Surely it is not Mars, but the Furies who have taught modern man to wage war, given the cruelty of poisonous gas (*ad praefocandas animas*) or air strikes carried out on innocent citizens exiting a church where they have just prayed for peace...:

cuncta peregre! Facies pulcherrima visu,
sed taetro putore scatent interna sepulchri.
haec etenim, reliqua ut taceam, testantur aperte
quanto, in Naturae studiis, aetatibus actis
aetatis vestrae sollers industria praestet.
atque ego prosequer, cum plausu, laudibus ultro
splendida si semper vitam haec inventa iuarent?
at prope fit contra: quam foede, pro pudor! Heu quam
saepe, coacta quasi, morti servire iubentur!
quam graviora modo studio fecistis et arte,
igne, cruore, fuga, per se nimis horrida bella!
Eumenides certe, non Mars, contendere telis
vos docuere, puto, si vestra scientia nuper
ad praefocandas animas vel protulit auras;
si modo confectis tanta arte volucris usa

1930 edition): «[...] quasdam | vero (ni videat nemo unquam credere possit) | immanes potius mergos fulicasque rearis | tam facile merguntur aquis iterum-que resurgunt. | quae levis hic visu summis perlabitur undis | si quas infensas navis conspexit in alto, | protinus abripitur, pelagique in sedibus imis | (cum tamen, arte nova, per vitrea prismata, rerum | reflexis formis, ibi nauta palam omnia cernat | quae supra) monstrum, procurrens, missile laxat | (nomine sed piscis vestri dixere silurum) | interiore quod igne crepans, subvertit et hostis | incautam classem, breviter reditura sub auras, | queis agilis volat, en, pelago sublimis et inter | horrendae cladis fragmenta et corpora pergit...» Here one might also see Bianchini's influence (e.g. NHA, KNAW 64-824, n. X, v. 81: «terrificum telum, vocitat quod nauta silurum»; cfr. *supra*, note 80).

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mortem supra urbes inopinam spargit inermes.
vix templo egressos, ubi numina sancta rogantes
institerant pacem, passim puerosque senesque
atque puellarum choros matrumve cohortes
ignivomus premit ecce globus, deflagrat et, inter
clamores gemitusque ac foemineos ululatus,
fit fuga, sed plures foeda sternuntur arena¹⁰¹.

This allows Trazzi to segue into the second part of his program: having Vergil criticize moral decay (*de morum defectibus*): «You honestly do not believe that humanity has reached the pinnacle of its existence by the grace of these technological advancements?»¹⁰². In the rest of the lengthy poem, Vergil propagates various Fascist policies, such as the promotion of agricultural self-sufficiency, prefers life on the countryside over modern urbanisation (part 3: *De vita urbana et rustica*), and fulminates against all forms of modern art (part 4: *De arte recentiore eiusque vitiis*). Eventually, the narrator is woken up by cannon fire (*tormenta bellica*), which turns out to be blanks inaugurating the festivities in honour of Vergil himself¹⁰³.

It is a little known fact that Trazzi actually repeated the same procedure of reviving Vergil in a later poem of his, *Formicae*

¹⁰¹ Trazzi, *Vergilius redux* cit., pp. 29-30.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*: «ah, miseros cives, en quomodo et optima quaeque, | natura horrente, in pravos convertitis usus? | quis vero? Miseræ huic vitae quod tanta parastis | commoda et ingenii tot iam documenta dedistis, | num vitae cultus apicem tetigisse putatis, | cordaque vesano pascetis turgida fastu?».

¹⁰³ Trazzi, *Vergilius redux* cit., pp. 81-82: «[...] plura ac digna locutus, | ut reor, esset adhuc Vates, mihi cum fragor aures | perstrinxit reboans. Quid erat? Tormenta tonabant | bellica, quae Ipsius prima Poetae | laeto signa dabant strepitu (sed sulphure tantum | ac nitro) magno circum resonantia Vati: | nil igitur mihi tandem, nil nisi somnia visa? | scilicet hoc unum: somnus me ceperat arctus | scripta super Vatis; mihi sic, tum, visa Maronis | forma simul raptim tenuari, ac denique Vates | (vel potius divina mihi sed inanis imago) | expergiscenti in tenues evanuit auras. | dixeris at tamen Illum ipsum rediisse sub umbras».

Magistrae ('The Ants, Our Teachers'), albeit to a lesser extent¹⁰⁴. Having submitted the poem to the *Hoeufftianum* without any success in 1934, Trazzi reworked and published his *Formicae Magistrae* in 1940, when the world was engulfed in yet another world war¹⁰⁵. The central theme of the poem is that mankind has clearly lost its way and can learn so much from these hardworking tiny insects¹⁰⁶. It had been an apparition of Vergil that inspired the narrator to sing the praises of the ant – as he himself had done for the bees in the *Georgica* – in his Latin verse¹⁰⁷. For

¹⁰⁴ The work is not mentioned, for instance, in Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns* cit. or Tacoma-de Vries, *Stralen als gelijken* cit.

¹⁰⁵ NHA, KNAW 64-848, n. XXXIV, published as A. Trazzi, *Formicae magistrae. Carme latino con versione italiana di Giuseppe Ferrari*, Tipografia del seminario, Padova 1940. Interestingly, Trazzi has Vergil sing the praises of the *Hoeufftianum* itself, which, like a Vestal virgin, is keeping the flames of Latin poetry alive (vv. 56-62): «adspice, spemque fove; en, en, quam laetabile signum | luminis adridet mundo melioris et aevi! | dum situs obscurant ac turpis inertia gentes | numinis immemores, cordata Batavia nave | curat adhuc Latiis, vigil ut Vestalis, in orbe | ne misere Musis flamma exstinguatur avita. | nunc igitur cape et hoc, vivens, tantummodo gaude». Trazzi removed this part in the later edition. Of course, the outbreak of World War Two prompted Trazzi to change the poem significantly. In the 1940 edition, for instance, he refers to the dark clouds looming over Europe after the Munich Agreement (pp. 16-17): «post Monachi pactum iam gentes inter acerba | causa simultatum modo sperabatur adempta, | nubibus atque nigris feliciter undique pulsus, | tandem Iris coelo fulgens oritura sereno: | ast, heu, non ita post multo, magis ecce timendi | exsurgunt nimbi populis peiora minantes. | numque ergo, Europa infelix, trepidare quiesces? | numquam certa tibi pax orietur inermis?».

¹⁰⁶ It is very likely that Trazzi was inspired by Giovanni Pascoli's *Myrmedon*, a didactic poem about ants and their 'advanced society', which won the gold medal in the *Hoeufftianum* competition of 1895.

¹⁰⁷ NHA, KNAW 64-848, n. XXXIV, vv. 1-4: «quem iuvenis coepi mitem celebrare Maronem, | cum patrii vagus erraret prope flumina Mincii, | ipse mihi quondam calamum donavit agrestem: | "nunc cape, ait Vates [...]"». In the 1940 edition, the introduction of Vergil is preceded by the narrator pondering whether he should sing of the rebirth of Italy under Mussolini. The country used to be the laughingstock of the world and could not even provide food for its population. Now, however, Fortuna smiles favourably on the rising empire. Vergil then persuades the poet to sing of smaller things instead (though,

the rest of the poem, however, Vergil fades into the background. One thing mankind can learn from the industrious ants, for instance, is agricultural self-reliance: it is clear that Fascist ideology (such as the ‘battaglia del grano’ policy) is even more prominent in *Formicae magistrae* than it was in *Vergilius redux*. Everyone, even the authorities, should follow the example of these small insects. It is in this context that Trazzi touches on the topic of war. Unlike ants, people go to war because they are led by blind ambition. In describing the horrors of modern warfare, Trazzi echoes Vergil’s words from *Vergilius redux*, and clearly still has the Great War in mind when he refers to poison gas (‘vapours from hell’) as the epitome of these wicked inventions:

quod peius vero (o Divum iustissima poena!)
commoda cum renuant optatae agnoscere pacis,
torvis immo oculis sese tueantur iniqui

indirectly, still about the greatness of Fascist Italy); Trazzi, *Formicae magistrae* cit., pp. 7-8: «cum veteri forte Italiam si conferat istam | quis non iure stupens mox ad miracula clamat? | quae prius haud fecunda satis nutrire colonos | vix poterat, messe en ubivis exsultat opima; | en etiam vitae flendum plerumque tenorem | vestibis ac domibus civis iam quisque levavit, | unde simultatum series desivit et inter | cives pax regnat simul et concordia firma. | nil igitur mirum Ausonides si pace fruentes, | ipsis dum vultu ridet Fortuna sereno, | uribus ornandis instant, commercia vulgant, | aera struunt et cuncta parant sibi commoda vitae. | quid? Qui paucis ante annis virtutis avitae | oblitus, omnino quin belli et rebus inepti | contemnebantur et erant ludibria cunctis, | quis putet, Europa invita livore metuve, | nostrates solos, septem modo mensibus usos, | imperium Italiae quadruplum potuisse creare? | quae “Defunctorum tellus” ipsa Itala tellus | iam penes externos appellabatur aperte, | qua subito fieri potuit virtute pavenda? | o, velut in similiae massam si quando vel hilum | fermenti indideris subito fervere cernis, | calfit et inflatur proprium variatque saporem, | haud secus ut primum Vir (nunc super aethera notus) | nomine ovante Ducis Patriae suscepit habenas, | arcana arte sua populi cuncti illico mentes | atque voluntates ad se convertit inertes | cunctorumque animos animum conflavit in unum. | haec animo reputans et cuncta poemate digna | rite ratus quondam Aonio deducere canit | Calliope incensus plaudensque mihi statui, et iam | sumptam epicam ipse tubam labiis aptare paravam, | cum subito apprensus pernotata Maronis imago | atque aurem vellens “O quid agis, dulcissime rerum?”».

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Mavortisque opus adsidue meditentur acerbum,
arma parare student, tormenta vibrantia glandes
ignivomosque globos et quidquid denique morti
inservire potest, volucres funesta minantes,
arte vel infanda abductos Acheronte vapores¹⁰⁸.

Equally steeped in Fascist ideology is the final poem under discussion, *Italicum carmen* by Aldo Grossi (1885-?), who was a teacher at a liceo in Terni¹⁰⁹. Although Grossi participated in the *Hoeffftianum* several times, he does not seem to have submitted his *Italicum carmen*, which he published in 1923, «eight years after Italy declared war on Austria» (*Anno post bellum Austris indictum octavum*)¹¹⁰. Grossi's fascinating poem, written in the context of the burial of the Unknown Soldier in Rome in 1921, brings back to life a host of characters: not only several classical poets such as Simonides, Vergil, and Horace, but even entire ar-

¹⁰⁸ NHA, KNAW 64-848, n. XXXIV, vv. 188-195. Even here, the massive loss of lives during the Great War is considered within the framework of the 'battaglia del grano': all those soldiers could have been put to better use on the fields! (vv. 197-201: «innumeraeque manent promptae in statione phalanges | quae poterant agros melius coluisse [...]. Heu miseris gentes [...] | quis nec respirare datum nec vivere plane!»).

¹⁰⁹ We know that Grossi became a member of the Partito Nazionale Fascista in 1930; see M. Bernardini, *La classe dirigente negli anni del fascismo. Il caso viterbese (1920-1945)*, Università degli studi della Tuscia, Viterbo 2008, PhD thesis, p. 205, available online. Grossi's *Italicum carmen* is briefly mentioned in Sorbelli, *Riflessi della Guerra Mondiale nella letteratura latina contemporanea* cit., p. 157 and Cristini, *Bellum mundanum* cit., pp. 94-95.

¹¹⁰ A. Grossi, *Italicum Carmen*, Casa Editrice del Lauro, Teramo 1923; it was reprinted in 1926 with an Italian translation by Raffaele Janni (the Latin text remained identical): A. Grossi, *Italicum Carmen. Con traduzione di Raffaele Janni*, Tip. O. Valenti, Narni 1926. We know of at least two submissions of his to the *Hoeffftianum*: he sent in *Amor - mors* in 1923 (NHA, KNAW 64-827, n. XXXI) and *Convivium* in 1925 (KNAW 64-829, n. III). When these failed in the *Hoeffftianum*, he submitted them to the *Certamen Locrense*, a smaller, short-lived competition in Locri modelled on the *Hoeffftianum* (see D. Guarneri, *Cose di Locri. A cura dell'autore. Con due saggi di G. Incorpora e i verbali dei "Certamina Locrensia" forniti dalla famiglia Tavernese-Triunviri*, Amministrazione comunale di Locri, Locri 1988).

mies of dead Italian soldiers¹¹¹. Only in this case, the dead do not rise from the grave in order to haunt the living for not valuing their sacrifice, like in the final scene of Abel Gance's 1919 film *J'accuse*¹¹². Quite the contrary: unlike all previous poems, which use the revived character as a mouth piece to indict the unprecedented, senseless slaughter of the war, this poem simply wants to pay homage to the fallen for their sacrifice. The confrontation between ancient and modern is resolved, not used to denounce the myth of progress. In other words, the ancient poets have been brought back to life to praise the soldiers as only they can, not to be appalled by the dark side of modernity.

It starts out with the apocalyptic image of a heavenly trumpet calling forth Italy's fallen soldiers, urging them to awake and gather at the river Piave, where the Italians had won a decisive victory over the Austrians, tipping the balance of the war in their favour. Every soldier, from the highest in rank to the lowest foot soldier, from those fallen in the mountains to those drowned at sea, lamented and unlamented, is to raise his rotting body and go to the banks of the Piave:

surgite vos omnes, rapuit quos pulchra recenti
mors bello iuvenes, surgite de tumulis!
namque tubae sonitus niveis ex Alpibus ingens
Sicaniae extremos advolat usque sinus,
atque idem praeco, qui quondam bella canebat,
cum facta Europa est tota cruenta nece.

¹¹¹ On the Unknown Soldier in contemporary Latin poetry, see N. De Sutter, *Ignoto militi: the Italian 'Milite Ignoto' and the Certamen Hoeufftianum*, in S. Weise (hrsg. von), *Litterae recentissimae: Formen und Funktionen neulateinischer Literatur vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Comparanda. Literaturwissenschaftliche Studien zu Antike und Moderne, StudienVerslag, Innsbruck-Wien-Bozen (forthcoming). A number of the poets discussed in this article also dedicated Latin poetry to the Milite Ignoto, e.g. A. Trazzi, *Ignoto Militi*, in Id., *Carmina*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1936, pp. 51-56 and G. Latini, *In sepulchrum Ignoti Militis*, in Id. *Itala tellus* cit., pp. 53-55.

¹¹² Cfr. Cristini, *Bellum mundanum* cit., p. 95. On *J'accuse*, see Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* cit., pp. 13-29.

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vos ad concilium patriae vocat ante silentes
dilecti ripas quas Plavis unda lavit.
sumat quisque suum corpus, iam tabe peresum,
vi super impositam dividat auctus humum,
et properate: duces, etiam quos laude receptos
ex caudis terris marmora rara tegunt,
et pedites, quorum cineres in montibus exstant,
ignoti aut quorum sparsa sepulcra latent,
et quos praecipites placidum mare fluctibus hausit,
cum navis telo corruit icta novo,
fleti atque infleti, extincti sine sanguine raptim
vel lento oppressi vulnere membra diu,
currite, nec quisquam timeat male dicta per urbes,
aut probri voces, aut sine voce minas¹¹³.

After a brief digression on the rebirth of Italy as a Fascist nation in the wake of the *biennio rosso*, Grossi continues to describe the journey of the army of the dead¹¹⁴. The unsightly army passes through a landscape abloom with fragrant flowers; one soldier is rotting and covered in blood, another one is missing a hand, one is blind, while another can barely keep his head on his shoulders. Yet all of them are endowed with a bright, almost aureole-like *nobilitas*¹¹⁵. Eventually they reach the Piave, where a boulder with an undying flame on top of it looms over the river. It appears to be an altar: all of a sudden an old bearded man comes

¹¹³ Grossi, *Italicum Carmen* cit., p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Grossi, *Italicum Carmen* cit., p. 4 (this goes on for a while longer): «tempus triste fuit saevo cum caeca furore | omnia miscebat plebs, inimica suis, | et fratres, bello reduces famaue decoros, | oderat, immodici stulta ministra mali; | sed vix Italiae, quae dicta est, stella refulsit | et tutam docuit luce corusca viam, | lictorum fasces iterum delecta iuventus | sumpsit et ex umbris fortiter exsiluit [...]».

¹¹⁵ Grossi, *Italicum Carmen* cit., p. 5: «quid refert si trunca suis sunt corpora membris, | singula si foedat pectora tabe cruor? | oh, sacra turba! Manu hic mutilus procedit utraque, | iste pedes diro saucius ense trahit; | hic scissos ictu ballistae continet artus, | iste oculis captus tentat iter manibus; | effossas habet hic costas pectusque revulsum, | vix humeris iunctum sustinet iste caput; | at nitido frontes omnes ornantur honore; | qui vultus reddit nobilitate pares [...]».

forward and welcomes the army of the dead. He turns out to be the Greek poet Simonides, famous for having commemorated the fallen Spartans at Thermopylae. Now, it is their turn to be honoured by the classical poet. At the end of his eulogy («through him, Greece, the mother of heroes, raises them to the stars»), Simonides even breaks his lyre on the altar: after this, he simply could not praise anyone else¹¹⁶. Then Vergil comes to the fore and delivers a speech on behalf of Rome («through him, great mother Rome marks them with her light»). Vergil situates their sacrifice within the framework of Anchises' prophesy of Rome's greatness to his son Aeneas in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, since the Italian soldiers have truly brought peace and vanquished their enemies (the famous «pacique imponere morem | parcere subiectis et debellare superbos»)¹¹⁷. Thus, he establishes a line of continuity with ancient Rome – a recurrent motif in Latin war (and Fascist) poetry, of course –:

at cito Vergilius succedit candidus ore
et, iuncta numeris voce, secundus ait:
«omnes tum, fratres, vidi procedere longo
ordine vos Erebi regna per atra, memor,
cum, Aeneae celebrans Romam gentesque futuras,
Anchises animas enumerabat avus.
nec pater ille senex mendaci voce canebat
vos fore magnificum nobilitate genus;
a vobis etenim cecidit prostrata minacis
hostis nequities et data pax populis.
[...]
per me vos, hodie, multis elata triumphis,
signat magna parens lumine Roma suos»¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ Grossi, *Italicum Carmen* cit., p. 6: «qui patriam sacrum, heroes, servastis ad annem | aeternos, vates, vivere laude cano. | nullus erit posthac tantis qui cingere possit, | astrorum radiis, tempora miles adhuc. | per me vos, hodie, solemni Graecia signo, | heroum mater, tollit ad astra suo».

¹¹⁷ Vergil, *Aeneis*, VI, 852-853.

¹¹⁸ Grossi, *Italicum Carmen* cit., p. 7.

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After having received the blessings of ancient Greece and Rome themselves, the Italian fallen are addressed by mother Italy, who grants them eternal life as true heroes¹¹⁹. For the final part of the poem, the scene then shifts to Rome, where the festivities of the burial of the Unknown Soldier are under way. The soldier is buried at the foot of the Altare della Patria, which is also where all *patres* (going from Romulus, Scipio, and Horace to Leopardi, Garibaldi, and Carducci) gather and watch over the fate of Italy («hic patriae coetum Patres miscentur in unum | fata suo vigili tutantes nostra favore»)¹²⁰. As the spirit of the Unknown Soldier himself is welcomed among this august collective, Horace breaks into a new *Carmen Saeculare* (with ample references to the original one), the words of which are echoed by the marble monument, while the babbling waves of the Piave and Tiber join in...

Conclusion

The classical tradition undeniably influenced the poetry of the Great War, whether it was in the vernacular or in Latin. As Vandiver has shown for British war poetry, the classics were continually used, transformed, and appropriated to represent and analyse the war in all its facets. All kinds of attitudes, both pro- and anti-war, were mapped onto the format of the classical tradition. This sometimes spontaneous association equally led to the composition of war poetry in the classical languages themselves, mostly in Latin.

One could try to trace back this phenomenon of Latin war poetry to a certain sense of Romanticist escapism, in that poets would

¹¹⁹ Grossi, *Italicum Carmen* cit., pp. 7-8: «nunc tandem accipio heroas, nunc libera possum | dicere quae ex animo longa cupido trahit | [...] ergo ante hanc aram, patriae quae surgit imago [...] | vos ego, vos, pariter pugnando vulnera passos, | pro vita extinctos, magna caterva, mea, | aeternae mater vivissima consecro vitae, | quam trahet ipse meo spiritus usque sinu».

¹²⁰ Grossi, *Italicum Carmen* cit., p. 10.

leave the horrors of the unprecedented bloodbath behind them and flee into a pristine, mythological past. This is also the main point of Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*: in order to make sense of the meaninglessness, people were prone to hark back to traditional frames of references. In some ways, however, the opposite could also be said to be true: rather than run away into the past, some poets transported the past into the present, by way of contrast, in order to emphasise the horror instead. In this article, I have tried to give an overview of a selection of Latin war poets who did just that by reviving figures from antiquity and dropping them in an unfamiliar environment: Europe circa 1914-1918. In doing so, I have also tried to show the international or supranational scope of Latin war poetry: by discussing Latin poets from Germany, Italy, and Serbia, I have also covered three frontlines from the First World War. Still, one cannot deny the dominant presence of the Italians on this international scene.

Some saw the classical gods at work during the war: Pluto instigated the war, Mars perpetuated it, Venus eventually subdued him, only to awake a new tyrant in Bacchus holding sway over the shell-shocked. In the meantime, Fama changed the course of the war by spreading rumours and distorting the truth. Others revived mortal characters from antiquity, either fictional or historical ones. In doing so, they reversed the classical *katabasis* – a recurrent theme in vernacular war poetry as well – and turned their attention to the *anabasis*: instead of modern-day people descending into the underworld, the focus was on a classical character leaving it. Typical of neo-humanist poetry, preference was often given to the classical poets, Vergil in particular. Whereas the ancient visitors are amazed at mankind's progress over the centuries while marvelling at trains or telephones, this amazement quickly turns into dismay when they notice the dark side of these inventions: their military application. The ancient's revulsion is predominantly directed at modern instruments of aerial or (sub)marine warfare, the origins of which are equally traced back to antiquity (*e.g.* Elpenor and Prometheus). While the classical character mostly functions as a passive witness and critic, he is sometimes also given a more active role: in Giovanni Latini's im-

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agination, for instance, Vergil acted as a type of angel of piety, instilling love and compassion into the hearts of the otherwise callous belligerents. In the days of Fascism, moreover, the ancients tended to be transformed into mouth pieces of the regime's policies as well. At other times, lastly, the ancient characters are not used as a means of contrast at all, but, like in Grossi's *Italicum Carmen*, rise from the dead only to aggrandize the tribute paid to those fallen in battle.

Abstract.

This article explores a particular subset of the overlooked body of Latin poetry related to the First World War, in which figures from antiquity – either fictional or historical – are brought back to life during or shortly after the war. This literary technique combines two central aspects of contemporary Latin poetry: its fascination for everything modern and its Romanticist penchant for harking back to ancient times. Instead of escaping from the war into the past, these poems – selected predominantly from the vast corpus of poetry submitted to the *Hoefftianum* competition, the centre of this literary microcosm – transported the past into the present and used classical characters as a prism through which to critically analyse the unprecedented war. Often critical of modernity's myth of progress, the Latin poets under discussion mainly sought to target instruments of modern warfare as the epitome of technological progress run amok.

Keywords.

First World War, War Poetry, Neo-Latin, Certamen Hoefftianum, Classical Reception.

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