

**A Modern Myth in Classical Dress:
The *Titanic* Disaster in Contemporary Latin Verse**

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INTRODUCTION: MODERNITY AND NEO-LATIN POETRY

Even though the position of Latin was in steady decline from the eighteenth century onwards, the language of Virgil was still far from dead when the *RMS Titanic* collided with an iceberg and sank to the bottom of the ocean during her maiden voyage on 15 April 1912, still prompting some members of this peculiar literary microcosm to commemorate the disaster in classical verse.¹ In fact, from the end of the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, the production of Latin poetry in particular was going through something of a mini-renaissance.² International journals and contests proved to be the main and fertile providers of a forum for the production and circulation of Latin verse at the time.³ One competition in particular, the Amsterdam based *Certamen poeticum Hoeffftianum*, organised annually from 1845 up to 1978, was without a doubt responsible for this very last revival of Neo-Latin poetry. By the end of the nineteenth century, the appeal of the contest had been growing rapidly as more and more of the most distinguished poets of their day – pride of place goes to the Italian bilingual poet Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912) – started vying for the prestigious gold medal. Thus, the *Hoeffftianum* became the veritable centre of this microcosm.⁴

The rules of the contest were simple: anyone was free to send in one or more Latin poem on a topic of their own choosing, as long as it was original – i.e. previously unpublished and not a translation – and consisted of at least fifty lines.⁵ The submissions had to be anonymous and accompanied by a motto and a sealed envelope containing the identity of the participant. Then, a panel of three judges, usually Dutch professors of classics, would assess the submissions, rank them, and publish their findings in a report, both in Latin and in Dutch. The highest ranking participants – i.e. the gold medallist and those awarded '*magna laus*' – would also be allowed to publish their poems in the much coveted booklets published by the Amsterdam Academy. All other poems, so the organisation claimed, would be burned ('*Vulcano tradentur*', 'surrendered to Vulcan'). The year the *Titanic* sank, for instance, the *Hoeffftianum* received thirty-seven submissions, with no fewer than four of them dedicated to the *Titanic* tragedy, one of which, Hendrikus Padberg's *Titanicae interitus*, was among the seven *magna laus* laureates.⁶ The gold medal went to the Italian Raffaele Carrozzari (1855-1918), for his Pascolian poem *Amaryllis* about the confiscation of Virgil's estate after the civil war.

If the authors of unsuccessful submissions did not choose to publish their compositions elsewhere, it was assumed that these poems (such as the other known compositions about the *Titanic*) were lost to the fires forever.⁷ In 2012, however, a century after the *Titanic* disaster, the near complete archives of the *Hoeffftianum* were rediscovered in the Dutch city of Haarlem, boasting over 2000 mostly unknown Latin compositions by poets of almost 20 different nationalities.⁸ In other words: it is only now, with the rediscovery and gradual opening up of this vast corpus, that we can fully study and assess the Latin poetry of the Late Modern Age.⁹

As for the content of the poetry submitted to the *Hoeffftianum*, given the free choice of topic, there was a wide variety of subjects. What was especially recurrent, however, was the topic of 'modernity' itself, ranging from poems on women rights and slavery to Darwinism and the Industrial Revolution. Much like the Futurists, it seems, the Latin poets of the *Belle Époque* were also absolutely fascinated by (scientific) progress and technology. Poems on electricity, cars, trains, submarines, or aeroplanes and the miracle of aviation would be submitted almost on an annual basis.¹⁰ The jury on their part were often favourably inclined towards participants who were able to describe the modern world in perfect Latin throughout the entire history of the competition, even though these poems were rarely considered 'poetic' enough to win first prize.¹¹ Unlike the Futurists, however, these Latin poets did not celebrate modernity in any radically modern form. Quite the contrary, their poetry was as classical as could be. Instead, *Hoeffftianum* participants often chose to describe their own, rapidly changing world through the prism of antiquity and the classical tradition. A particularly common technique of theirs, for instance, was to revive a figure of antiquity – often one of the classical poets – and to confront them with and have them comment on the modern world.¹² This is perhaps best exemplified visually by the cover of Anacleto Trazzi's (1866-1940) poem *Vergilius redux*, which he had submitted to the *Hoeffftianum* in 1929 and subsequently published at his own expense in a revised version in 1930.¹³ On the lithograph cover by 'Dal Prato

A.', we see Virgil back among the living, gazing at a landscape inhabited by the 'monsters of modernity': electricity poles, a car, a train, an aeroplane, a zeppelin, and a steamboat.¹⁴



Fig. 1: Anacleto Trazzi, *Vergilius redux seu de vita recentiore*, Asuli, Scalini et Carrara, 1930 (cover)

In a wider context, this revival of Latin poetry with a clear focus on modern and contemporary topics ties in neatly with what is often labelled the *Latinitas viva* movement ('Living Latin'). While Latin had effectively lost its position as the *lingua franca* of education, government, and diplomacy, and the discipline of classics itself was moving towards a more passive approach of studying Latin, aimed solely at reading and understanding the ancient texts, there were some who tried to counteract this by promoting the active use of Latin as a modern and universal means of communication.¹⁵ By publishing prose and poetry on modern subjects in journals and competitions, spearheaded by the *Hoeufftianum*, supporters of this movement tried to show that it was indeed feasible to reach this ideal of a revitalised Latin.

THE HUBRIS OF PROGRESS AND THE *TITANIC* AS A MODERN MYTH

So given the times of technological progress and some of the competitors' preference for modern topics and contemporary events, it is no wonder that the 1912-1913 competition received no fewer than four submissions about the sinking of the *Titanic*, which was after all a mainly technological catastrophe.¹⁶ This tragedy of the purportedly unsinkable liner – the biggest ship ever built at the time – meeting its doom by colliding with an iceberg, costing the lives of over 1500 of its passengers, was a perfect recipe for a compelling piece of poetry. At the same time, the event also served as the symbolic embodiment of the downside of progress, 'a monumental icon of the aspirations and anxieties of modernity' (Bergfelder and Street 2004: 1).

The *Titanic* tragedy quickly became what scholarship has termed a 'modern myth', a story which was constantly 'appropriated to articulate and justify a wide spectrum of ideological positions on issues such as class, gender, national identity' and so much more, 'inspir[ing] a great wealth of representations across different art forms and media' (Bergfelder and Street 2004: 1). As such, it has remained ingrained in our cultural consciousness ever since. Yet as happens with myths, facts were instantly fused with fiction: 'many – or even most – of the best known stories about the ship are disputable or even demonstrably false' (Howells 1999: 45-46). Among these myths are the story of the string ensemble directed by Wallace Hartley which kept on playing the hymn 'Nearer, My God, to Thee' while the ship was going down, which experts agree did not happen; or the fact that the *Titanic* had been heralded as an unsinkable ship, which is an obvious case of retrospective projection, as the label of 'unsinkability' had never circulated among the general public before the ship actually sank.¹⁷ Legend also had it that captain Smith and his crew, as well as most passengers, had been exemplars of Stoic composure, standing by their posts and facing death with dignity. The conventional narrative of the *Titanic* tragedy, therefore, was one which perpetuated a romanticised 'tale of first-cabin male heroism' and 'chivalric self-sacrifice' (Biel 1996: 23), encoding a typically male, upper-class, and Anglo-Saxon world view, which various types of counter narratives subsequently tried to debunk.¹⁸

TITANICA LATINA: A MODERN MYTH IN CLASSICAL DRESS

As a rule, the *Hoefftianum* jury would assess the submissions and rank them according to three categories, ranging from poems which were plain bad and simply acceptable in the lowest category, over those which were good but just not good enough for publication in category two, to the great and excellent ones which merited being published.¹⁹ Of the four *Titanic* related submissions, one ranked as acceptable, two as good, and one as great. The first merely 'acceptable' poem with the somewhat prosaic title *Navale duellum* I have been able to identify as being by the hand of Josep Fonts (1877-1930), a Catalan priest of mediocre talent and a regular participant of the *Hoefftianum*, yet never with any success.²⁰ The two 'good' poems, *Heroum* and *Mortis hymnus*, were submitted by more successful regular participants: the Dutch professor of classics Pieter Helbert Damsté (1860-1943) and the Italian teacher Carlo Vignoli (1878-1938) respectively.²¹ Both decided to publish their poems themselves afterwards. Finally, the 'great' poem, *Titanicae interitus*, by the Dutch Jesuit priest Hendrikus Padberg (1881-1926) – who, as far as we know, participated only once – was a serious contender for a medal, yet this was thwarted by Giovanni Pascoli's death that year.²² Instead, the jury decided – and admitted as much in their report – to pay their respects to the seasoned *Hoefftianum* medallist by rewarding two of the many poems submitted in honour of the deceased poet with bronze and silver (Sacré 1999: 191-192).²³

As mentioned, the *Titanic* disaster presented the *Hoefftianum* participants with the perfect marriage of two of their most favourite subjects: modernity and the classical tradition. For not only was it a tragic tale about the ramifications of mankind's unquenchable thirst for progress, it was also a testament to man's Promethean hubris towards nature and the gods, which much like the name '*Titanic*' itself almost automatically evoked a sense of classical mythology. In a way, the tragedy could be interpreted as Nemesis' retribution for man's hubris 'of daring to defy the elements by building an 'unsinkable' ship' (Howells 1999: 58) and for naming it after the prototypically god-defying Titans.²⁴ Yet, rather surprisingly, as Richard Howells (1999:145) has noted with regard to the British literary context to the *Titanic* tragedy, there was hardly any mention of such classical key concepts as 'Nemesis', 'hubris', or even just 'Titan'.²⁵ Latin contemporary production, by contrast, avidly tapped into this vein.²⁶

Josep Fonts' *Navale duellum* delved into this type of rhetoric most thoroughly by literally presenting the disaster as a 'maritime conflict' between the classical god Neptune and the haughty *Titanic* as a product of human ingenuity ('*Ingenium*').²⁷ At the beginning of the poem, Fonts portrays Neptune as a cruel tyrant reigning over the seas with an iron fist. The poet even hopes that the merciless god will be overthrown one day soon:

Nautis quot curis semper gelidoque pavori
 Est trux Neptunus! Sceptrum sibi poscit aquarum,
 Subsidiisque ferunt Tempestas, Fulmen et Horror,
 Horrendo fremitu gravis unda, tonitribus aether,
 Horriferi furiae Boreae, Zephyrique Notique.
 (...)
 Ter felix a quo tandem frangatur in aevum
 Barbara Neptuni petulans licentia (...)

Fonts, *Navale duellum*: 1-19²⁸

Savage Neptune is always a source of so much trouble and bitter anguish! He claims power to rule over the seas, supported by Storm, Lightning, and Fear, by the waves which come crashing down with horrible noise, by the thundering sky, and by the terrible furies, the North, West, and South winds. (...) Thrice blessed is he who finally breaks Neptune's barbarous and wanton licence!²⁹

The poem then zooms in on the *Titanic* as it is being constructed. Human '*Ingenium*', it seems, has decided to build a ship which can withstand even Neptune's wrath, and which is to reign as the new and unsinkable queen of the sea:

Firmis mirandam trabibus solidaque carina,
 Neptuni nulla superandam vi neque fraude,
 Ingenium statuit pollenti texere navem
 Arte, maris tandem reginam iure futuram.
 Summo cymba potens semper gaudebit aquarum
 Imperio, poterit nec mergi fluctibus atris;
 Et si pugna datur, succensa bile tumentis
 Sceptra Neptuno tollet saevumque tridentem.
ibid. 31-38

Ingenuity has decided to employ its mighty skill and construct a ship which is to become the queen of the sea one day; she is a sight to behold with her firm beams and solid keel, unable to be subdued by Neptune's force or guile. The mighty ship will forever delight in her supreme command over the seas, and the dark waves will not be able to sink her; and if a conflict occurs, she will break out in rage and take over Neptune's sceptre and savage trident.

The god of the sea is of course furious at this blatant display of hubris, especially when he senses that his erstwhile loyal subjects, water and wind, are starting to question his supremacy as well. Hearing the people applaud the ship as it is setting sail, the troubled god decides to enlist the help of Nemesis, rendered in Latin as '*Vindicta*'. Much like Juno's supplication to Aeolus in the *Aeneid*, Neptune begs Nemesis to found the insufferably proud ship:

Magnas Ingenii vires acremque laborem
 Aeternis odiis atro Neptunus ab antro
 Afficit, invidiaque afflatus, dira precatur.
 (...)
 Ipsi obiurganti surdum sensim dare tergum
 Incipiunt fluctus, venti, unda, potensque procella,
 Audaces olim nimis addictique ministri.
 Dentibus infrendens, invitis auribus ipse
 Exaudit populi laudes plaususque, superbe
 Queis, non visa prius, celebratur machina tanta.
 Huc illuc volvens oculos, effusus in iras,
 Impavidae currit festinus ad ardua tecta
 Vindictae, cui iam longo coniungitur usu.
 (...)
 "O Vindicta potens! Odium cui tempora lauri
 Frondibus exornat, multis et laudibus effert
 Ira: meum pelagi, per navem nomine Titan,
 Nititur Ingenium priscum nunc tollere regnum."
ibid. 52-71

Envious and cursing from his dark cave, Neptune harbours lasting hatred towards Ingenuity's great powers and hard effort. (...) While he is swearing, the waves, winds, water, and powerful storms, his erstwhile loyal and spirited minions, slowly start turning their backs on him. Grinding his teeth, he reluctantly hears the praise and applause of the people in awe of the unprecedented vessel. Furiously looking around him, he rushes to the lofty abode of fearless Nemesis, an old acquaintance of his. (...) "O mighty Nemesis, whose brow Hatred adorns with laurel wreaths, and whom Wrath praises to the skies, Ingenuity is aspiring to end my olden reign of the sea with a ship going by the name of *Titan*."

After a description of the ship's opulent luxury, Nemesis heads North and unleashes the iceberg, which eventually collides with the *Titanic*. Interestingly, as opposed to all other *Hoeufftianum* competitors, Fonts did not choose to highlight any kind of heroic or admirable behaviour among passengers or crew, though a core aspect of the *Titanic* as myth.³⁰ Instead, the poet focussed on the horror and the chaos that ensued. Instead of a stoically calm captain, for instance, Fonts described a frightened captain Smith who is completely at a loss. As the ship is sinking to the bottom of the ocean, the poet's concluding remark is crystal clear: man's arrogance (*'mens superba'*) is kept in check by God, who still is the one true ruler of the world:

Altum sed ruit in fundum sensim gravi aquarum
 Pondere strata ratis... Terrentur pectora, certa
 Naufragii tradi funestis faucibus. Atræ
 Mortis in aerumnas vertuntur gaudia prima;
 Irrequietus ad ima dolor delabitur ossa
 Atque aedes omnes gemitu et clamore resultant.
 (...)
 Deficit ars, animique cadunt. Rector pavet ipse,
 In verbis haeret, nec quid iubeatve velitve
 Pandit confusus (...)
 Qui tumidos cohibet fastus mentemque superbam,
 Est Deus aeternus: terrae coelique Creator,
 Cui marium constans est et suprema potestas.
ibid. 160-198

Overcome by the immense mass of water, the ship slowly sinks to the bottom of the ocean. The people are terrified and certain that they are being led to the deadly jaws of a watery grave. What first was happiness now turns into the horror of a tragic death; frightful anguish settles in their very core, and every cabin reverberates with lamentation and shrieking. (...) Technology has let them down; everyone loses courage. The captain himself is quaking with fear, at a loss for words, confused, not giving any command or making any request. (...) Eternal God, the Creator of heaven and earth who has the constant supreme command over the seas, is the one who keeps in check arrogant minds swelling with pride.

In essence, Fonts' mythological reimagining is remarkably similar to a Latin fable which the Italian Jesuit poet Lorenzo Rocci (1864-1950) later wrote about the *Titanic*.³¹ As far as we know, Rocci never participated in the *Hoeufftianum*, though he was an ardent advocate of the *Latinitas viva* movement.³² Less known as a poet than as a lexicographer and grammarian, Rocci was one of the few and last practitioners of the genre of the fable in Latin.³³ He was particularly fond of writing fables about modern inventions, and coming up with Greek-inspired neologisms for describing such objects as cars, submarines, aeroplanes, and telephones. His fable about the *Titanic* entitled 'Jupiter, the Titan, and the Iceberg' (*'Iuppiter, Titan et Mons glacie concretus'*), which is short enough to be cited here in full, ties in neatly with these predilections. Here, the personified ship has committed hubris by boasting that she is unsinkable, viz. that 'not even Jupiter's lightning bolt could stop her'. Yet hubris always leads to Nemesis. Thus, the king of the gods unleashes his wrath (again, *'vindicta'*) in order to teach humanity a lesson. But Nemesis does not come in the form of a lightning bolt; instead, Jupiter has his quickest monster send a giant iceberg to despatch the Titan to its watery grave. As the ship is sinking, the iceberg echoes a message from the gods – so typical of the genre –: mankind should know its place.

Titan navis erat summae magnitudinis
 lisque rebus cunctis ornatissima,
 Quas fastus populi valde clari opulentia
 Potuerat congerere. Europae de litore
 Petens Americam, quinque dierum circulo
 Se dixit perventurum, non ipsum Iovem
 Iter umquam posse praepedire fulmine.
 Iratus Iuppiter: "Hunc ego"³⁴, ait, "spectaculum
 Meae faciam vindictae, nec tamen operam
 Impendam fulminis." His dictis celerrimum
 Monstrum accersit de Cyllenes culmine,
 Cui talia mandat ex Olympi vertice:
 "Mons glacie concretus, hyperboreis ex locis,

Natans descendat, et iam iam terras procul
 Titana prospicientem, mole ruens sua,
 Ceu cuspide belli, nigram feriat ad necem."
 Iussa facit uterque; cumque ictu fractus gravi
 Ad ima vergit Titan, Mons ita reboat:
 "Iustitiam discant homines nec temnant deos."
 Rocci, *Carmina varia* 1926: 69

The *Titan* was a ship of enormous size, fully equipped with all of the objects which the wealth of the extremely rich and arrogant could bring together. It claimed that it could reach America from Europe's coast within five days, and that Jupiter himself would never be able to interrupt its course with his lightning bolt. Enraged, Jupiter said: "I will make this ship a showcase of my wrath, yet I won't bother with my lightning bolt." This being said, he summoned the quickest monster from Cyllene's peak and gave it the following command from the summit of mount Olympus: "Let a drifting iceberg descend from the far north and let it send the *Titan* to its gloomy death just as it is spotting land in the distance by crashing into it with all its mass, as if driving a spear straight through it." Both did what they were told, and while the heavily ruptured *Titan* was sinking to the bottom, the iceberg echoed as follows: "mankind should learn what justice is and should not scorn the gods."

Compared to *Navale duellum*, Vignoli's *Mortis hymnus*, which lies somewhere halfway between Fontes and Rocci's mythological account and Padberg and Damsté's focus on the heroism aboard the sinking ship, is a better poem in terms of *Latinitas*. As in *Navale duellum*, the run-up to the accident is expressed in terms of a conflict between the *Titanic* as the epitome of mankind's hubris and a vengeful god. In this case, however, that god is a goddess, namely Death ('*Mors*') herself.³⁵ The poem starts *in medias res* as the giant luxury liner is speeding across the ocean. All of a sudden, the goddess of Death addresses the ship from the depths of the sea, threatening it for having the audacity to challenge Neptune and Death. Subsequently, the iceberg appears and founders the ship:

Cursu defertur rapido permagna per undas
 Navis, quae populo par urbi et mole videtur,
 (...)
 In puppi mittit caelatum lumina nomen,
 Navi conveniens tam magnae tamque potenti,
 Quae audeat et noctem pelagusque lacessere: Titan.
 (...) Sed terrae Dea quae sane imperat usque³⁶
 Quae regum turres parvas inopumque tabernas,
 Verba hominum atque preces iactans, aequo pede pulsat,³⁷
 Taetro Mors dudum vultu speculatur, aduncam
 Dexteram et ignaros fati iam tendit in illos.
 Oceani ex imis surgit submissa latebris
 Vox, quae Titanem dictis affata severis:
 "Dic mihi, quo tendis, Titan? Reputasne, superbe,
 Neptuni indomitum te posse impune furorem
 Irritare? Una Libitinam, stulte, lacessis!
 Concretas nescis moles, contemnis abyssos,
 Undarum et furias! Mortem pontumque caveto!"

Vignoli, *Mortis hymnus*: 1-34

A giant ship, which due to its mass looks like a city in the people's eyes, is rapidly speeding across the waves. (...) Its name, fitting for such a big and mighty ship daring to disturb the night and the ocean, is chiselled onto the ship's stern: *Titan*. (...) Yet the goddess of Death who rules unopposed over the earth, who kicks in the towers of kings just as she does the huts of the poor, casting aside the people's words and prayers, has been spying on the ship for a while now with a dreadful expression on her face and is reaching out her hooked hand towards them, unaware of their fate. A voice rises from the depths of the ocean, addressing the *Titan* with the following harsh words: "Tell me, where are you headed, *Titan*? Do you think, arrogant ship, that you can provoke Neptune's untameable wrath with impunity? You fool, you also aggravate Death! You do not know of the icebergs, you defy the ocean's depths and the fury of its waves! Beware of Death and the sea!"

As noted, most accounts of the *Titanic* disaster wilfully glossed over the grim reality of the chaos which must have occurred that night. Of the Latin poets, Damsté and Padberg would continue in the same vein. Vignoli, like Fontes, also tried to shed some light on the dark side of the events. For instance, the *Titanic* infamously had far too few life boats to possibly save all passengers. According to 'the rule of the sea', then, it was 'women and children first'. When Damsté describes this moment in his typically glorifying style, the men who had to stay behind are all stoically calm; there is no pushing or pulling, not even any verbal aggression; nor was there any need for weapons:

Stat collecta manus, stat celso ponte magister.
 "Eia in aquas", ait ille, "viri, demittite cumbas,
 Quas cum pignoribus conscendat femina turba!"
 Non armis opus est, non verba minantia dantur.
 Imperio parent omnes: discedere lintres
 Densa phalanx videt atque imperturbata virorum.
 Damsté, *Heroum*: 45-50

The crew is gathered around, the captain is on the bridge, shouting: "Come on men, lower the lifeboats into the water; let the women embark with their children!" There is no need for weapons, no threats are issued. Everyone obeys the command: a dense and calm band of men watches as the rafts go off.

Vignoli, by contrast, addresses the issue that there actually must have been quite a tussle of men fighting for a place in one of the life boats. The poet describes how fear had got a hold of people, who started fighting and killing each other to save their own skin, and how the *Titanic's* own crew even had to shoot at people to safeguard the other passengers.³⁸

Iamque brevi paucae complentur tempore cymbae:
 Ingens est coetus, pauci parvique phaseli,
 Ad quos accedit minitans nunc turba virorum.
 Hic alii tentare alius certamine atroci,
 Armatis luctans manibus, contendere sedem;
 Illic en alius cite se demittere in undas,
 Cymbarum ut possit latera amplecti atque tenere;
 Enecat et se alius; nimium audentesque magister
 Occidit. Fluctus navis sed crescit in alvo.
 Effera tunc rabies, insanus terror in omnes
 Invadunt, propius mortem impendere tuentes
 Quocumque et fugitant; ascendunt mala³⁹, capessunt,
 Ob vitam facti nunc hostes, arma; cruenta
 Pugnant, inque vicem letum properatur acerbum.
 Vignoli, *Mortis hymnus*: 68-81

The few lifeboats are full in no time: there is a huge crowd and the boats are few and small. A threatening throng of men is approaching the boats: here someone gets into a vicious and armed fight over a seat; there someone else quickly jumps into the water in order to hold onto the sides of the lifeboats; another person commits suicide, while an officer kills those who step out of line. Yet the water level is rising in the belly of the ship. Now, seeing that death lurks wherever they run to, everyone falls into a frenzy and goes mad with fear; the climb onto the masts and, having become enemies for the sake of their own lives, take up arms, fight cruelly, and hasten each other's bitter end.

However, for the second part of the poem, Vignoli adheres to the conventional narrative and paints a picture of some of the most famous instances of *Titanic* heroics. First, he dwells rather long on the radio operator-*heros* Jack Phillips, who kept on transmitting SOS signals while the water was already at his waist.⁴⁰ Yet the most popular myth is undoubtedly 'the band that kept on playing'. Allegedly, the band was playing the nineteenth-century Christian hymn 'Nearer, My God, to Thee' by the English poet Sarah Adams (1805-1848).⁴¹ To conclude his poem, Vignoli gives his free translation of this '*mortis hymnus*', this 'hymn of death', into classical meters, of which I offer the first two stanzas.⁴²

Iam, quod nomen erit tibi dandum, vasta carina?
 Victricem molem, robora quale decet?
 Tu classis regina! Soror quoque Olympica cedit,
 Maior te natu, viribus illa minor.
 Quid? – Nonne adfectasse ferunt Titanas Olympum?
 Tu 'Titanica' eris! Dat tibi nomen opus!⁴⁵
 – O mihi membra tremunt: Titanum corpora dira
 Mox iacuisse aiunt obruta mole sua.

ibid. 37-44

Now, what shall we name you, you vast ship? What name suits your victorious stature, your sturdiness? You are the queen of the fleet! Even your sister, the *Olympic*, makes way for you; she is older than you, but less powerful. – What? Does not legend have it that the Titans tried to overthrow Olympus? You will be the *Titanic*! Their work gives you your name! – O how my bones tremble: they say that the ill-fated bodies of the Titans were soon prostrate, crushed under their own weight.

After the collision, Padberg goes on to describe the typical tales of heroism we have come to expect by now. Interestingly, in a note, the poet explicitly refers to his sources: Philip Gibbs' *The Deathless Story of the Titanic*, an 'In memoriam' issue which was, as Richard Howells (1999) has made abundantly clear, one of the earliest and most influential texts actively seeking to enshrine the *Titanic* as a modern myth, offering an incredibly romanticised account of the events. Padberg's reliance on the text is most clear from the description he offers of the *Titanic*'s luxury, where we can see the poet faithfully following *The Deathless Story* in describing the 'Café Parisien' with its artificial sunlight, the 'racquet court for ladies and gentlemen', the Turkish baths, the dining- and ballrooms, ...:

Here any passenger might sit in a tropical verandah restaurant, where vines grew upon the lattice work of windows through which there streamed – artificial sunlight! It was called the Café Parisien, and here at night the band played the gayest tunes of life (...). Here was a gymnasium, splendidly equipped, so that men might counteract the effects of luxury by strenuous exercise. There was a racquet court for ladies and gentlemen of active mood. Turkish and electric baths and a great swimming bath, luxuriously appointed, were provided for first and second class passengers. The dining-rooms, staterooms, and common rooms were furnished in various periods and styles, copied faithfully from old models (...).

Gibbs, *The Deathless Story*: 4

Scandebat Luxus, scandebant Gaudia, Risus,
 – Tot fortunatos ecqua carina tulit? –

(...)

Gallica complentur tunc diversoria mira,⁴⁶

Sole ubi conficto fallitur uva tumens.

Hic pila rete cavet recreans utramque iuventam,

Grata quibus lassis balnea Turca parat.

Regia regificis hic fulgent atria festis,

Aulas magnificas sera chorea tenet.

Padberg, *Titanicae interitus*: 53-64

Luxury climbed aboard, as did Fun and Laughter – was there ever a ship which carried so many fortunate passengers? (...) The wonderful French cafés, where a swollen grape tricks the eyes with artificial light, started filling up. Here a ball avoids the net and offers exercise to youths of both sexes, who can relax in the Turkish bath when they are tired. Here royal halls lighten up during sumptuous balls, and a dance late at night holds the splendid courts in thrall.

In addition to the heroic captain Smith and radio-operator Phillips, the Jesuit poet also added a seldom highlighted tale of valour: that of the two Catholic priests, the Englishman Thomas Byles (1870-1912) and German Joseph Peruschitz (1871-1912), who prayed with a group of people while the ship was going down.⁴⁷ The Jesuit has them pray to Mother Mary at great length, after which he ends his poem, once again, with a Latin rendition of Sarah Adams's 'Nearer my God to Thee', which he refers to as 'a truly Titanic hymn' ('*vere Titanius hymnus*').⁴⁸

Prope o magis te, te propius Deus!
 Crucis cruentae ligno ego sublever,
 Carmen resultans usque canto
 Te propius, propius Deus te!

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Three!
 Even though it be a cross that raiseth me,
 Still all my song shall be near, my God, to Thee,
 Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!

Noctis tenebris obrutus in via,
 Fessum reclinans in scopulum caput,
 Somni volantis tollar alis
 Te propius, propius Deus te!
 (...)

Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,
 Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;
 Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to Thee,
 Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer, to Thee.
 (...)

ibid. 243-250

The hymn also became the main focus of the shortest of all Latin *Titanica* submitted to the *Hoeufftianum*, Damsté's *Heroum*, which was explicitly dedicated to the memory of Wallace Hartley, the ship's bandmaster.⁴⁹ Following a description of the unsinkable, city-like ship, its collision and the heroic reactions of passengers and crew alike, the poet offers his version (into elegiac couplets) of the mythical hymn.

Te propius, Genitor, mihi mox accedere detur!
 Sint Tua per duras Regna adeunda cruces,
 Suppliciter clara semper Te voce precabor:
 Te propius sistas me, Pater Omnipotens!

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Three!
 Even though it be a cross that raiseth me,
 Still all my song shall be near, my God, to Thee,
 Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!

Ut premar aerumnis, atra ceu nocte viator,
 Et pro pulvino sit mihi nuda silex,
 Occiduo iam sole tamen solatia perstant:
 Mi Pater, in somnis vivere Te propius.
 (...)

Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,
 Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;
 Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to Thee,
 Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer, to Thee.
 (...)

Damsté, *Heroum*: 71-78

Yet the poem does not end here. For despite the absence of a vengeful Greco-Roman god or an analogy with the Titans, Damsté still tries to bring this modern myth into the realm of antiquity by transforming the wreck of the *Titanic* itself into a 'heroum', from the Greek 'τό ἥρωον'. Centres of the many and popular hero cults in ancient Greece, these *heroa* were sanctuaries for honouring deified heroes, often even containing their supposed tomb (Campbell 2007: 559-560). Opposing the wreck to London's Westminster Abbey, where many British notables have been laid to rest, the poet praises the *Titanic* as a modern *heroum*, an eternal monument to honour and duty:

Anglia, Londini est templum tibi nobile et ingens,
 Heroi quod idem vice fungitur, utpote iusta
 Reddere ibi solita es illis sedemque sepulcri,
 Quos bene promeritos de te iam fata tulerunt;
 Religiosa domus, nec abest sua cella poetis.
 At vero procul inde heroum surgit in imis
 Oceani, quod, non nitido de marmore structum,
 Donec erit tellus aetas venerabitur omnis;
 Nec nisi nudato transibit vertice nauta.
 Sunt hic nempe siti placidaque hic pace quiescunt
 Qui novere animo constanti linquere lucem,
 Praecepti memores, quod Nelson tradidit olim,
 Verbis pro tumidis classi cum tessera missa est:
 "Officio iam quisque suo fungatur oportet."

ibid. 105-113

England, in London there is a noble and immense temple which also functions as a sanctuary, since it is here that you usually honour and give a final resting place to the dead who served you well; it is a holy house, not without its Poet's Corner. Yet far from here a sanctuary looms in the depths of the ocean which is not built with shining marble and which every generation will honour for as long as the earth exists; seamen will only sail over it bareheaded. For this is where those who knew to die bravely –

mindful of the command which Nelson once gave to his fleet instead of any swollen rhetoric, when the die had already been cast: “every man is expected to do his duty”⁵⁰ – lie and sleep in quiet peace.

Finally, while Damsté imagined the wreck of the *Titanic* itself to have become a lasting monument to honour and duty, there are of course a number of actual monuments which were erected in the wake of the disaster, at least one of which also acted as a catalyst for the creation of Latin verse. For quite soon after the events, a committee was set up to raise funds for constructing a memorial in Liverpool specifically dedicated to the marine engineers who went down with the ship. As the conventional narrative went, these engineers slaving away in the bowels of the sinking ship all died as heroes while dutifully staying at their posts, making sure that the engines kept running and the lights kept burning for as long as possible. In response to this initiative, the Englishman William Rann Kennedy (1846-1915) wrote a number of elegiac distichs in Latin (with English translation) in honour of the engineers, which were published in several journals.⁵¹ Not particularly known as a Latin poet, Kennedy was a high-ranking magistrate (Lord Justice of Appeal) at the time, and the typical result of a thoroughly classical upbringing: like many of his family members before him, he had been a prestigious ‘senior classic’ and had won several prizes for his compositions in Latin and Greek during his time at Cambridge.⁵² It seems that the *Titanic* disaster reawakened his Latin muse, though he abided by the conventional narrative by lauding the engineers’ self-sacrifice as the epitome of heroism and duty.

The poem itself is without a title, but bears a self-explanatory dedication: *In memoriam duorum et triginta artificum nauticorum qui, quum navis, in qua mare Atlanticum navigabant, massae glaciali collisa, fluctibus mergebatur, fideliter usque ad finem laborantes, suo exitio aliis salutem praestiterunt* (‘A tribute to the memory of 32 marine engineers serving on board the *RMS Titanic* on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic, who, whilst their ship, struck by an iceberg during the night of April 14, 1912, was sinking, worked gallantly to the end and went down with her, willing to sacrifice their own lives in order that others might be saved’). A brief snapshot of the ship’s final moments, the poem zooms in on the heroic engineers: while the passengers run to the lifeboats, they stay at their posts and courageously toil away. As the gushing water extinguishes the fires of the machinery and darkness engulfs the engine room, the engineers are fearless in the face of death, gladly giving their lives for their comrades:

Nox erat; icta latus cursuque iacebat adempto
 Navis, Atlantei dum maris alta secat,
 Quam subito in tenebris moles glacialis euntem
 Laeserat; in vulnus prora bibebat aquas.
 Confugit ad lintres vectorum turba; pudori
 Cui foret in tali clade petita salus?
 His aliter visum est. Periturae navis in ima
 Parte suum impavidus quisque laborat opus.
 Ante oculos letum est, tamen haud deterret imago
 Ne fidi maneant in statione, viros.
 Ossa tegit pelagus; nullo mergetur in aevo,
 Gloria pro sociis sic voluisse mori.

‘T was night; with riven hull, the iceberg’s prey, | their giant ship inert and helpless lay; | her prow sinks slowly to the sea’s embrace, | from hold to hold invading waters race; | passes to lowered boats a parting crowd – | well might such scene the boldest heart have cowed; | but these it moved not. At his post below | each stood and toiled. They marked the ceaseless flow | that drowned the fires, brought Death. But Duty called | and they met Death, in darkness, unappalled.

At least according to one of the articles in which the elegy appeared, these distichs were actually meant to be placed on the Liverpool monument itself.⁵³ Yet Kennedy would not live to see his verses inscribed: while the memorial to the *Titanic*’s engineers in Southampton was already inaugurated in 1914, the Liverpool memorial was only completed in 1916, one year after Kennedy had died. In fact, the poem would never be inscribed at all: in the midst of the war, it was decided that the scope of the monument should be broadened to include ‘marine engine room heroes’ in general. Kennedy’s *Titanic* poem was simply too specific, and could therefore no longer serve as a suitable Latin inscription.

EPILOGUE: THE LAST LATIN TITANICA

The story of the *Titanic* has remained ingrained in the world's cultural consciousness, and Latin poems have even been dedicated to the story long after its immediate aftermath and outside the context of the *Certamen Hoeufftianum*. Apart from Lorenzo Rocci, whose fable we have already discussed, three other poets have tried their hand at a Latin *Titanic* poem.

The first of these we have already met: Josep Fonts. Despite never being able to secure a victory in the *Hoeufftianum* competition, the Catalan priest still published a booklet of his Latin poetry under the title *Tentamina hexametri* in 1927. This booklet contains a long poem, *Ingenium et mare* ('Ingenuity and the Sea'), about the *Titanic*.⁵⁴ However, as Sacré (1999: 198-199) has made abundantly clear, this poem is a case of blatant plagiarism, as it simply copies the style, structure, and imagery of Padberg's *Titanicae interitus*.⁵⁵ Of its 377 verses, some 60 have more or less been directly taken from Padberg's prizewinning poem. A large part at the end of the poem, for instance, consists in a prayer by a Catholic priest.⁵⁶ Moreover, the discovery of Font's *Navale duellum* in the *Hoeufftianum* archives now establishes once and for all that *Ingenium et mare* is simply an elaborated version of *Navale duellum* in which Fonts has abandoned the mythological framework altogether, having remodelled it after *Titanicae interitus* instead. The following scene of the ship setting sail should suffice to illustrate the degree of indebtedness.⁵⁷

Iamque vale longus clamor palmaeque sonorus
 Plausu, qui calcant vel tandem littora linquunt,
 Aethera diffuso feriunt nigrefacta vapore.
 Quantis deliciis turgebant pectora, primos
 Vixdum cymba gradus dedit aequoris illa per undas!
 Sic etenim maris et terrae bona plurima iunxit,
 Urbs ut magna natans sibi possit nomen habere.

Fonts, *Ingenium et mare*: 163-169

Longi iam murmur vale palmarumque sonorus
 Plausus, qui calcant, laeti vel litora linquunt,
 Aethera dimisso feriunt nigrefacta vapore.

Fonts, *Navale duellum*: 109-111

Plausibus o quantis resonabant litus et ora,
 Quantis turgebant pectora deliciis,
 Primos quum factura gradus Titania proles

Padberg, *Titanicae interitus*: 45-47

Sic maris et terrae Titanica munera iunxit,
 Urbs ut magna natans nomen habere queat.

ibid. 65-66

In its wake, the disaster produced a deluge of songs, plays, poems, novels, and other *Titanica* until the outbreak of the Great War, when the matter remained dormant for a while until it was rediscovered as a commercial phenomenon in the 1950s (Biel 1996: 147-148).⁵⁸ The next Latin poem on the subject dates from this second period, from 1969 to be exact, when the Italian poet Olindo Pasqualetti (1916-1996) won the silver medal in the *Certamen Vaticanum* (1953-2010), a poetry competition organised by the Vatican and modelled on the *Certamen Hoeufftianum*, with his heartfelt poem *Audit mare puer* ('A Boy Listens to the Sea').⁵⁹ Like Rocci, Pasqualetti was a firm believer in the *Latinitas viva* movement, dedicating many a Latin poem to modern subjects.⁶⁰ His *Audit mare puer*, too, starts out in a modern setting. Devised as a monologue of the sea addressed to a young boy, the poem opens with the sea asking the boy to gaze at all the people having fun at the seaside: some are sunbathing, while others are water-skiing or scuba diving. This is all well and good, the sea boasts, but at times, I can be rough and cruel too; no ship has been strong enough to weather my storms. It then asks the boy to hold a conch shell to his ear: not only will he be able to hear the gentle crashing of the waves, but he can also hear the weeping and wailing of all those who died at sea.⁶¹ At this point, about half way (vv. 83-157), the poem turns into an account of the *Titanic* disaster as a prime example of the sea's destructive powers. After a typical description of the ship's appearance, of passengers enjoying themselves late at night, and of the fatal collision, the sea eventually asks the boy whether it is not too hurtful to reminisce about the catastrophe. The boy's answer, in what is once again a brief, Pascolian conclusion, takes the reader by surprise:

His puer admota concha non immemor auri
 Respondet: "Memini: nam voces inde parentum
 Accipio, navis quos et nox abstulit atra;
 Hos, mare, non unquam puero placabile reddes;
 Sed nunc picta rubris vitreisque coloribus umbrant
 Florea serta tuo tumulos sub gurgite maestos."

Pasqualetti, *Audit mare puer*: 158-163

To this the boy replies, remembering to put the conch to his ear: "I do remember, because I am hearing the voices of my parents, who were taken away from me by that ship on that dark night. You will never give them back to me, o sea; but now wreaths of red and green flowers adorn their sad graves in your depths."

The third and most recent wave of renewed interest in the *Titanic* started with the discovery of the ship's wreck in 1985, only to intensify with James Cameron's 1997 movie *Titanic*. It is during this period that we have to situate what is probably the very last Latin *Titanic* poem, Giuliano Papini's *Titanic*, which won second prize in the *Certamen Capitolinum*, another competition modelled on the *Certamen Hoeufftianum*, in 2008.⁶² Interestingly, the narrator claims that it was precisely the latest *Titanic* movie which prompted him to write about the event in the first place:

Illinc egressum, species ubi luce moventur
 Proiectae mire lintea tenta super,
 Me sequitur presse permagnae navis imago
 Sors male quam quondam mersit in Oceano.

Papini, *Titanic*: 1-4

Upon leaving that place where moving shapes are wondrously projected onto a screen, I was haunted by the image and tragic fate of the immense ship which sank to the bottom of the ocean a long time ago.

Not a particularly original poem, it simply gives an account of the disaster from start to finish, without looking at the events through any classical lens or focussing on the typical feats of heroism like its contemporary counterparts. It is, however, the only poem which pays attention to the rescue operation by the *Carpathia*, with which I will end this survey:

Carpathiae formam tandem monstravit horizon;
 Summa laetitia cymbula quaeque sonat.
 Erecti tendunt agitantes lintea dum vox
 Spargitur in clamans: arida febris inest.
 Singulus in pontem mira subtollitur arte;
 Potatu calido solvitur algor iners.
 Viribus inde novis vestigat quisque pererrans
 Per constrata alacer, qualibet atque oculos
 Tendit cognatos quaerens vultus. Rara ridet
 Dexter a sors. Saepe quaestio vana cadit.
 Uxores viduae, proles orbata parentum,
 Matres et flentes, funera amara ibi sunt.
 Haec tristissima magnanimam spectacula tangunt
 Carpathiam, pretii gratia cui satis est.
 Illa novi mundi speratas vergit ad oras,
 Adpellat portum somnia fracta ferens.
 Interea portant undae per aethera vectae
 Duram notitiam: pectora fixa rigent.
 Ut discedentem Titanic, multa salutat
 Carpathiae ingressum copia nunc populi;
 Non risus, lacrimas videas tamen hic variare
 Vultus: anxietas imperat atque dolor.
 Felix cui caros amplecti gaudia donat,
 Infelix sed qui pignora nulla videt.

Linquent dein portum tristes aut ore sereni:
Omnes vita trahit, cras erit altera lux.

Papini, *Titanic*: 181-206

At last the shape of the *Carpathia* appeared on the horizon; every lifeboat reverberated with shouts of immense joy. They stand up and waive their handkerchiefs, shouting that they are dehydrated. Each person is raised onto the bridge with wonderful skill; the chilling frost is solved with a hot beverage. Having regained strength, everyone quickly searches the bridge, scanning everywhere to find the face of a relative. Rarely does fortune smile upon them; their quest is often in vain. Widowed wives, orphaned children, weeping mothers: there is bitter grief. These profoundly sad sights touch the *Carpathia*, for whom gratitude is reward enough. She sets course for the desired coast of the new world and arrives at the port with broken dreams aboard. Meanwhile, radio transmissions deliver the grim news; people's hearts skip a beat. Now a large crowd of people greets the incoming *Carpathia*, just as they had greeted the departing *Titanic*. Yet you would see faces burst into tears, not into laughter: distress and pain reign supreme. Happy is he who rejoices in embracing his loved ones, yet unhappy he who does not see any loved one at all. Later, they leave the harbour with sad or calm faces; life goes on; tomorrow will be another day.

CONCLUSION

Libraries are laden with books about the *Titanic*, both as a historical event and as a cultural phenomenon. In the latter respect, the *Titanic* myth has become a permanent part of our vocabulary, among other things as a cautionary tale concerning the limits of technological progress. This formation of the *Titanic* as a modern myth happened almost overnight: 'by the time the survivors reached shore', Biel claims, 'the myth was firmly in place' (1996: 25). It also immediately called forth a rush of commemorative poetry, yet it is a little known fact, both to scholars of Neo-Latin and of *Titanica*, that it also gave rise to a number of poems in Latin, both in the immediate aftermath of the event and during later surges of interest. Building on Sacré 1999, I have tried to offer a complete overview of all Latin *Titanica* known to date.

These contemporary Latin poems are to be situated during the very last revival of Latin poetry from the 1890s onwards, which mainly took place within the context of the *Certamen Hoeufftianum*, where there was a distinct focus on modernity and issues of progress, often viewed through a classical lens. In this respect, the modern myth of the *Titanic* also lent itself to a reimagining within the framework of classical mythology. It made sense, after all, to bring this narrative suffused with archaic notions of epic heroism aboard a 'Titan', this metaphor for hubris, into the realm of antiquity, with which these poets were most familiar. To be true, vernacular literature may have in passing referred to the disaster as a 'classic Greek tragedy' or described the ocean as 'Neptune', but no one tapped into this vein as thoroughly as did the Latin poets of the day.⁶³ They did so, of course, to various degrees: Fonts, Rocci, and Vignoli brought back to life Nemesis, Olympian gods, and monsters, Padberg conflated the fates of the *Titanic* and the ancient Titans, while Damsté transformed the wreck itself into a modern *heroum*. On the other hand, they also adhered to the myth in its modern sense, i.e. the conventional narrative, to various degrees: whereas Damsté, Padberg, Vignoli, and Kennedy joined in on the romantic glorification of the heroics aboard the sinking ship (Hartley's hymn, the stoic calm of captain Smith, radio-operator Phillips, the two praying priests, the brave engineers...), Fonts and all later poets chose to emphasise the horror and chaos of the event, and to highlight the *Titanic* disaster as a failure of modernity, rather than a celebration of self-sacrifice.

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¹ The seminal scholarship on Latin *Titanica* is Sacré (1999), yet as an article written in Latin itself, it is not particularly accessible to the non-Latinist scholar and audience. Moreover, the overview is incomplete, partly because it was written prior to the rediscovery of the *Hoeufftianum* archives: Vignoli's *Mortis hymnus*, Font's *Navale duellum*, Rocci's *Iuppiter, Titan et Mons glacie concretus*, Pasqualetti's *Audit mare puer*, Papini's *Titanic*, and Kennedy's elegy are missing from the survey.

² On this revival, which is sometimes labelled 'Neo-humanism', see Sorbelli (1922: v-xxiv); Bartoli (1935); IJsewijn and Jacobs (1961); Giustiniani (1979); Sacré (2006).

³ At the turn of the century, the most important of these international, wholly Latin periodicals were *Alaudae* (L'Aquila, 1889-1895), *Praeco Latinus* (Philadelphia, 1894-1902), *Vox Urbis* (Rome, 1898-1913), and *Civis Romanus* (Frankfurt, 1901-1909, which continued as *Scriptor Latinus* from 1910 to 1917), run by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), Arkád Mogyoróssy ('Arcadius Avellanus', 1851-1935), Giuseppe Fornari (1868-1942), and Waldemar Lommatzsch respectively. For a recent overview of Latin journals between the end of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth centuries, see Slednikov (2017).

⁴ On the *Certamen poeticum Hoeufftianum*, see Sacré (1993) and Gionta (2006). On Pascoli as a Latin poet, with recent bibliography, see Paradisi (2014).

⁵ The rules could be found in the '*programma*' which the competition published each year, both containing a brief summary of the verdict and an invitation for the contest of the following year. Just as the full-length report, the *programma* was published in the Academy's *Verlagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen. Afdeling Letterkunde*, Amsterdam (henceforth 'VMKAW'; the title varies over the years). Poems had to be submitted by 31 December, and the results of the contest would be announced in the spring. This is why I refer to 'the 1912-1913 competition', for example: the poetry had actually been written and sent in in 1912, for the contest which was officially held in 1913.

⁶ See VMKAW (as in note 5) 1913, 102-109 (report) and 110-111 (*programma*).

⁷ Cf. Sacré (2009: 416-417).

⁸ On the rediscovery, see Fera (2017) and Van Binnebeke (2018).

⁹ The number of studies on late-modern Latin poetry is on the rise, also outside the context of the *Hoeufftianum*, e.g. Krüssel (2011) and (2015); Lamers and Reitz-Joosse (2015); Jalabert (2017); Sanzotta (2020).

¹⁰ On this fascination for technology, see Giustiniani (1979: 13-17) and Wiegand (1984).

¹¹ As such, therefore, the *Hoeufftianum* archives are a largely unexplored treasure trove of Latin didactic verse as well. The second poet to win the competition and one of Giovanni Pascoli's mentors, Giuseppe Giacoletti (1803-1865), won the 1863 competition with a poem on the steam engine, *De lebetis materie et forma eiusque tutela in machinis vaporis vi agentibus carmen didascalium*. Pascoli himself, however, was never a fan of such technical, didactic poetry (cf. Morabito (1979: 313)). The following is a non-exhaustive selection of poetry on modern subjects from around the turn of the century which were published by the Academy: Antonio Giovannini's *Inventa et mores* (1893); Ludovico Graziani's *Bicyclula* (1900) and *In re cyclistica Satan* (1902); Franciscus Xaverius Reuss' *In hodiernum progressum* (1900); Alberto Salvagni's *Vulcanus* (1902); Pietro Rosati's *De telegrapho acrocodilo* (1904); Francesco Sofia Alessio's *Vis electrica* (1908); Gennaro Aspreno Rocco's *Aeronavis* (1909); Carlo Bianchini's *Davi reditus ad inferos* (1921); Ercole de Lorenzi's *De velivolo curru* (1922); Hermann Weller's *Daedalus et Elpenor* (1924).

¹² Cf. IJsewijn and Jacobs (1961: 68).

¹³ Haarlem, Noord-Hollands Archief, Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam (henceforth: 'NHA' and 'KNAW'), 33, XIX. According to the remarks of a *Hoeufftianum* judge (Carl Wilhelm Vollgraff (1876-1967), judging from the handwriting) on the submitted typescript, it contained too many formal mistakes to be taken into consideration ("In dit lange gedicht komen te veel fouten voor, dan dat men er aan zou kunnen denken het te laten drukken"). As its subtitle suggests (*saeculo vicesimo a P. Vergilii Maronis ortu exeunte*), the poem should also be situated in the context of the bimillenary celebrations on Virgil's birth in 1930. For more on Trazzi's *Vergilius redux*, see Ziolkowski (1993: 200-203).

¹⁴ Presumably Alessandro Dal Prato (1909-2002). This scene reflects the second part of the four-part poem, entitled '*De vitae commoditatum profectu ac de morum defectibus*' ('On the progress of the comforts of everyday life and on moral decay'), in which Virgil rather pessimistically voices his concerns about modern progress. In the fourth part of the poem, '*De arte recentiore eiusque vitiis*' ('On modern art and its flaws'), Trazzi even has Virgil criticise Futurism ('*futuri temporis ar[is]*').

¹⁵ Minkova (2014: 84-85); Money (2014: 877); Sacré (2014: 898). On the history of Latin in the late-modern period, see Waquet (2001).

¹⁶ The interest of *Hoeufftianum* competitors in contemporary events was particularly evident with regard to catastrophes of all kinds, such as natural disasters and wars (see e.g. Sacré (2012) on earthquakes in southern Italy; Van Binnebeke (2018) on the Boer War; and the flood of poetry on the First World War, which is the focus of an ongoing research project at KU Leuven). Of course, the matter was also discussed in prose in contemporary Latin journals (e.g. in *Vox Urbis*, 15/5 (May 1912), 78-79; *Scriptor Latinus*, 9 (June 1913), 130). The focus here, however, is on *Hoeufftianum* poetry with the *Titanic* as its main subject matter. I have found one reference in passing to the disaster in another *Hoeufftianum* poem, Alessandro Monti's 1928-29 submission *Polum versus* (NHA 64, 832, V; resubmitted in 1930 (NHA 64, 834, XVI); and later published as *Ad Polum versus* in his *Carmina* (Cuneo, 1933)). In line with the mentioned predilection for modernity, there were quite a few submissions on the Polar expeditions as well: e.g. Alfredo Bartoli's *Andreius sive de axe explorando* (NHA 64, 813, XVIII (1897-98) and XVI (1898-99); 825, XL (1921-21); published in 1898); Francesco Sofia Alessio's *Polus* (815, IX (1902-3)); Angelo Nardi's *In Amundsen* (829, XVIII (1925-26)); and Quirino Ficari's *Malmgreen* (832, XXVII (1928-29)). Monti's (*Ad Polum versus*) is a lengthy poem on the same subject; the poet concludes a long fragment on icebergs with a reference to the *Titanic*, which has of course experienced the danger posed by icebergs first-hand (vv. 228-234 in the 1933 edition): "*Tum iusto librata situ mare navigat altum | immanis moles, cunctis quae pareat undis; | inferne est fluviis, ventis agitata superne. | Navibus hi cumuli extremae sunt causa ruinae; | quod mirum quantum nosti, Titania navis, | quam subito cumulus mediis in fluctibus ursit | submersitque mari, rebusque virisque sepultis.*" (Having found the right balance, the giant mass floats across the open seas, as all water yields before it; it is propelled by the currents below and the winds above. These masses are the cause of utter ruin for ships. You know this all too well, *Titanic*: an iceberg was suddenly upon you in the middle of the ocean, and foundered you with all hands).

¹⁷ On the myth of the hymn and the 'retrospective mythogenesis' of the *Titanic*'s unsinkability, see Howells (1999: 120-152).

¹⁸ On these myths and counter-myths (fuelled by feminism, socialism, racial equality etc.) in popular culture from an American perspective, see esp. Biel (1996). For an anthology of these texts, see Biel (1998). Foster (1997) and Howells (1999) study the reception of the phenomenon more from an English/Irish perspective.

¹⁹ In the Latin *programma*, these three categories were usually articulated as follows: '*statim seponenda*'; '*seposita post aliquam dubitationem/deliberationem*'; '*restant carmina egregia*' or '*optima quae libenter publici iuris facimus*'.

²⁰ On Josep Fonts I Surinyach and for further bibliography, see Medina (1996: 217-227) and Alturo i Perucho (2013). We know of at least 14 submissions of his, all unsuccessful. In 1927, for example, he sent in a *Tacitum duellum* (KNAW 64, 830, XXII), the title of which should be quite familiar.

²¹ Pieter Helbert Damsté won the gold medal twice, in 1901 for his *Patria rura* and in 1903 for his *Feriae aestivae*; he obtained *magna laus* another four times, for his *Hymenaea* in 1902, *Duo signa* in 1904, *Codex* in 1905, and *Alma quies* in 1913. His *Heroum* (consisting of 122 hexameter lines) was first published in the Latin journal *Scriptor Latinus* (9, June 1913, 130) with the subtitle *elogium in memoriam Hartleyi, symphonicorum in Titanica nave magistris fortissimi*, and was later republished under the same title in Damsté (1915: 50-57) and Damsté (1940: 5-8). Carlo Vignoli never won the gold medal, but did obtain *magna laus* three times, in 1914 for his *Gabriel*, in 1916 for his *Tumulus vacuus*, and in 1924 for his *Ad cunabula*. He published his *Titanic* poem in his *Carmina* (*Materna corda – Mortis hymnus*) – *Fabulae*, Veroli, 1913, 15-22.

²² Padberg does not seem to have published any Latin poetry. He mainly published on contemporary Dutch literature (Frederik van Eeden, Multatuli, Guido Gezelle).

²³ Silver went to Pietro Rosati's *In funere Johannis Pascoli* and bronze to Adolfo Gandiglio's *Alumnus Vergilii*. Gold, as mentioned, went to Raffaele Carrozzari, who, like so many of his fellow Latin poets from Italy, tried to follow in Pascoli's footsteps. On Carrozzari, see Renna (2014).

²⁴ On the *Titanic* and Greek mythology, see also Forster (1997: 36).

²⁵ The ideas behind these terms did, of course, occur, cast in a Christian mould (e.g. pride as a Christian sin; Christian retribution as Nemesis) (cf. Howells (1999: 146) and Forster (1997: 58)).

²⁶ A nice example from vernacular literature which, like some contemporary Latin poetry, confronts a figure of olden times with these modern inventions, is Henry Brenner's epic *Titanic's Knell: A Satire on Speed* (St. Meinrad, 1932), where none other than Christopher Columbus takes the narrator (in a dream) on a tour to the *Titanic's* wreck, similarly to Virgil leading Dante around in Hell (Biel (1999: 146)).

²⁷ In Alberto Salvagni's *Vulcanus* (see note 11), another typical poem where Virgil is confronted with modernity (mainly by way of steam trains and steam boats), Denis Papin and Robert Fulton, two of the earliest inventors known for experimenting with steam boats, are also represented as having entered into a war with Neptune ("*cupidus substernere pontum | propositique tenax, rursus bella aspera movit | Neptuno*") (He wanted to conquer the sea and was resolved to do so, starting a terrible war with Neptune again). The sea god is once again portrayed as an enraged tyrant, bent on the demise of these haughty trailblazers (cf. Salvagni, *Vulcanus*, Amsterdam, 1902, 20-21).

²⁸ Unless mentioned otherwise, I refer to the verses, not the page numbers, of the poems.

²⁹ Unless mentioned otherwise, all translations from Latin are mine, and I cite from the most recent edition of the poem (with minor changes as to punctuation and orthography).

³⁰ As is made clear at the end of the article, Fontes later adapted his poem significantly by plagiarising Padberg's *Titanicae interitus*. After this fusion, the mythical heroics are of course amply present.

³¹ See Sacré (2017); the fable can be found both in Rocci's *Carmina varia* (Milan-Rome-Naples, 1926), 69 and in his *Nuove favole latine* (Rome, 1927), 96-97.

³² Not to be confused with Gennaro Aspreno Rocco, who did participate several times.

³³ Fables were usually too short to meet the *Hoeufftianum's* minimum requirement of 50 verses. Some circumvented these rules by submitting entire booklets of fables. Giovanni Mazza (1877-1943), for instance, obtained *magna laus* in 1930 for his *Fabularum liber primus* (Sacré (2017: 3)). He also submitted a *Fabularum liber alter* in 1930 and 1932, without any success (on this, see Sacré (2016: 429, 435)). The second booklet of fables did win *magna laus* at the *Certamen Ruspantinianum* (1923-1943), a short-lived Latin poetry competition in Rome based on the *Hoeufftianum*, in 1934, after which Mazza published the booklet as *Fabularum liber alter* (Naples, 1934). Both booklets were included in Mazza's collected *carmina* (Maglione and Scognamiglio (1988: 57-77 and 78-91)). Carlo Vignoli also wrote fables (*Nympha carmen – Fabulae* (Veroli, 1912); *Carmina (Materna corda – Mortis hymnus) – Fabulae* (Veroli, 1913)). Some of these fables he had also submitted to the *Hoeufftianum* unsuccessfully (e.g. *Violae*, NHA, KNAW 64, 820, XXVIII (1912-13)). The First World War also gave rise to a number of fables: Giuseppe Pellegrini, *Beluae hominum sollicitae* (Lucca, 1916; which he also submitted to the *Hoeufftianum* as *Beluae pro hominibus sollicitae* the same year (KNAW 64, 822, XVI)); Pietro Tosi, *Villicus, Pastor et Lupus* (Florence, 1917, published under the pseudonym 'A. Titus Persius'); Raffaele Castelli, *Belli origo. Fabula* (in *Alma Roma*, 5, 1918, 140) (cf. Cristini (2016: 60-61)).

³⁴ "*Hunc ego*" echoes Neptune's famous aposiopesis "*Quos ego*" from the *Aeneid* (1.135).

³⁵ Death as the great equaliser and equality in the face of death was a recurring theme in *Titanica* with regard to the topic of class (see Biel (1996: 44-46) and Howells (1999: 97-98)).

³⁶ In the original *Hoeufftianum* submission, the verse went as follows: "*Illa at terrae quae profecto imperat usque.*"

³⁷ A reference to Horace, *Carmina* 1.4.13-14: "*Pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas | regumque turris.*"

³⁸ In terms of race, the main narrative often identified these 'lowly rebels' as 'Latin' or 'Italian', as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon descent of the 'true British heroes' aboard the *Titanic* (see Biel (1996: 46-50) and Howells (1999: 105-112)). As a Latinist and Italian, Vignoli of course did not perpetuate this myth.

³⁹ It seems that Vignoli confused *mālus*, *māli* (mast) with *mālum*, *māli* (apple (tree)).

⁴⁰ After describing how the wireless operator transmits emergency signals until the water is too high, Vignoli focalises the bloodbath through Phillips' eyes: "*In navis parvum aversis conclave repostum est, | in quo sidit homo, nullis stipantibus, aetas | pulchra cui ridet. Mira illum est machina propter | atque potest iuvenis procul hac dimittere verba, | Italiae genitus nam alas mentemque potentes | illis donavit. Tranquillus munere fungens, | dum frustra fugitant omnes sua fata, moratur, | nec tamen ignorat iam praesens ille periculum, | parvas atque pedes tacite undas lambere sentit. | Dulcia, tam lenes sunt, blandimenta videntur, | attamen atrocem permulcentes ita mortem | adducunt, humiles sed perstat nec timet heros, | qui impavidus mittit constanti verba manuque. | quoquo versus eunt, perrumpunt longe tenebras, | trans mare discurrunt, implorant: "Ferte iuvamen!" | Assidue atque iterant: "propere nunc ferte iuvamen!" | Sensim sed crescunt fastigia semper aquarum; | iam genua et lambunt; etiam nunc machina fluctus | incursu et reticet; solum invitatusque recedit | tunc heros, navis constratum et scandit in altum. | Horrendam cernit caedem, – Mors regnat ubique – | atque mari exanima gelido innant corpore passim. | Infans, ne extinctus quidem, amicum linquere matris | vult gremium et placidos somnos dormire videtur; | vestibus hic praestans et formae virgo decore: | illic, confectus senio, vir liber amictu; | atque revincta viro complexu nupta supremo | palantur, tremulis et pulsifluctibus undant, | accedunt propius, collidunt, seque vicissim | propulsant. Toto horrescens modo corpore vertit | lumina: dein ingens miserum turba excipit illum | qui saeva Mortis victi gravitate, dolere | non audent, etenim nullam sperare salutem | possunt atque furor mentes et corda relinquit.*" (vv. 82-115).

⁴¹ In English, as well, many *Titanic* poems conclude with the hymn scene (Biel (1996: 121)). Damsté, Vignoli, and Padberg each offer their own Latin version of the hymn. Following Damsté's poem in *Scriptor Latinus*, editor Lommatzsch also added another Latin version by František Palata (1870-1946), which is included in the latter's *Anthologia poeseos Bohemicae latinis numeris aptata* (Třebíč, 1936), of which the first two stanzas go as follows: "*Ad Te ferre gradum fas mihi sit, Deus! | Pressus mole gravi sollicitudinis, | os sublime tamen pulvereo solo | tolle, Dive, tibi laetus et incino: | ad Te ferre gradum fas mihi sit, Deus! | Solis dulce iubar cum cadit in mare | caligoque viae me premit inscium: | impono lapidi vel rigido caput | declinansque levi lumina somnio | ad Te mi videor ferre, Deus, gradum!*".

⁴² The classical metre is a 'glyconic stanza', a combination of three glyconics and one pherecratean, as can be found in Catullus 34, for instance.

⁴³ In the first draft of the poem, the last four verses of this fragment went: "*Titanica est! Victrix pelagi classisque magistra | Titanica, audacis clara tropaea studi! | Titanica est, plaudente Europae iam procul ora; | Titanica, Americae iam prope litus ovans.*"

⁴⁴ The *Titanic* was part of a trio: the *Olympic*, *Titanic*, and *Gigantic*, in chronological order of construction. However, the *Gigantic*'s name was changed to *Britannic* in the wake of the *Titanic* disaster (it was only put to water in 1915) (Howells (1999: 194)).

⁴⁵ Originally: "*Titanica! Alta sonans hoc tibi nomen erit!*".

⁴⁶ Originally, and even more close to the source text: "*Tum fuga fit Parisina in diversoria mira!*".

⁴⁷ "*Iam navis nutat iamque aufugit ultima cymba, | iam summa in puppi mors fera scepra tenet. | Attamen ista sua modo corpora falce domabit, | aeternas animas vita beata manet! | Byles et Peruschötz, Romanus uterque sacerdos, | officii memores nunc super omne gravis, | prosiliunt, quaerunt peccati vulnere laesos, | inventos sanant ut Samarita pius [originally: Samaritanus uti]: | vinum purificans, permulcens stillat olivum, | inque animos mundos pax revocata redit. | Tum circumdantes hominumque Deique ministros | "Sancta Maria", preces supplice voce ferunt, | "Mater nostra, tuis mors instat proxima natis, | terribilis natos hora suprema vocat. | Auxilio propera; barathri ferus imminet hostis, | bella parat nobis ultima debilibus; | quaesumus o propera, succurre tenerrima Mater, | arce, arce natis infera tela tuis!" | Vergit prora magis, necdum lux prospera prodit; | undique per pontum nox tenebrosa manet. | Umbras per tacitas propius mors dira propinquat, | horror corda gelat, privat et ora sono. | Ast supra nitido in tranquillitatem tegmine caeli, | lumina matris uti, sidera blanda micant. | Suscipiunt miseri, nova spes pia pectora replet. | "Sancta Maria" – iterum – "Lucida Stella Maris, | lux tua nunc radiet; tu fac, ne corpore merso | spiritus aeternus naufragus intereat; | nunc radiet tua lux, ut de letalibus undis | cunctas mox animas caelica ripa vocet." – | Dulces hasce preces alii quoque mente resumunt, | intrat corda quies, suspiciuntque polum. | O adsunt multi non sueti poplite flexo | coniunctis manibus labra movere pie; | forsant sunt – fallor? – quos stulta superbia duxit, | temnere supremum proque vocare Deum, | Titanes! – At nunc extincto lumine vitae | mortis per tenebras vera videre licet; | nunc Dominum credunt, qui resque hominesque creavit, | solus qui nostrum cor satiare potest; | nunc sontes aequam formidant ludicis iram, | incipiuntque Patris nunc meminisse*

sui. | Stella Maris radiat! Nunc, o circumspice, quaeso, | fit mare delubrum, fit ratis ara Dei; | nunc curvare genu, nunc laevam iungere dextrae, | nunc orare: "Mei tu miserere, Pater!" (vv. 191-236).

⁴⁸ The metre is an Alcaic stanza.

⁴⁹ See note 21. Damsté's original submission did not contain an explicit dedication to Hartley, whereas all later versions contained the dedication "*In memoriam Hartleyi, symphonicorum in Titanica nave magistri fortissimi.*"

⁵⁰ Lord Nelson famously flagged the message "England expects that every man will do his duty" to the rest of his fleet at the start of the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

⁵¹ I cite the version offered by *The Johnian* ("In memoriam, April XIV, MCMXII", vol. 27, no. 1, February 1913, 12), which mentions that the poem was originally published in *The Times* during the Christmas holidays of 1912. This article was not accessible to me. The poem was also published in *The Marine Engineer and Naval Architect* ("*Titanic Engineering Staff Memorial*", vol. 35, February 1913, 251) and *The Dominion* ("*Titanic Engineering Staff Memorial*", vol. 6, no. 1702, 9 March 1913, 5).

⁵² He is not mentioned, for instance, in Bradner (1940). Kennedy won the Browne Medal for Greek and Latin Epigrams in 1865, and the Prize for Latin Hexameters and the Browne Medal for Greek and Latin Epigrams in 1867. The prize-winning poems of these competitions were consistently published in the *Prousiones Academicæ* series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Apart from this, Kennedy also published a translation of Aristophanes' *Plutus* in 1912: *The Plutus of Aristophanes. Translated into English Verse with an Introduction and Notes by William Rann Kennedy*. London: J. Murray.

⁵³ *The Dominion* ("*Titanic Engineering Staff Memorial*", vol. 6, no. 1702, 9 March 1913, 5): "Lord Justice Kennedy, who was in his day senior classic at Cambridge, and who has always taken a deep interest in everything concerning our mercantile marine, has written a beautiful set of Latin elegiacs, which are to be placed on the monument to the engine-room heroes on the Titanic at Liverpool".

⁵⁴ Fonts (1927: 163-188).

⁵⁵ As the plagiarism dispute between Alfredo Bartoli and Francesco Sofia Alessio shows, the pre-Romantic days of harmful *imitatio* were over (see Fera *et al.* (2006: 241-291, 311-335)).

⁵⁶ Fonts (1927: 183-188 (= vv. 278-366)).

⁵⁷ For more details and examples, see Sacré (1999: 198-199).

⁵⁸ Of particular importance for this revival was Walter Lord's 1955 best-selling novel *A Night to Remember* and its subsequent screen adaptation from 1958. On this, see Biel (1996: 149-173).

⁵⁹ The poem, consisting of 163 hexameter lines, was first published in the journal *Latinitas* (17/1, 1969: 16-20) and was included in Pasqualetti's collection of poetry (Nepi (1987: 165-171)). Pasqualetti did participate in the *Hoeffftianum* regularly, but not with this poem, it seems. For more on him, see Pasqualetti (1998) and Bajoni (2006).

⁶⁰ E.g. on modern agricultural machines (*Nova de re rustica inventa*, 1957; *magna laus* in the *Hoeffftianum*); nuclear explosions (*Pyrobulo vi atomica disploso horrificum spectaculum de repente obicitur oculis*, 1960; second prize in the *Certamen Vaticanum*); cars (*Raeda automataria*, 1965; second prize in the *Certamen Vaticanum*); smog and air pollution (*Venefica nubes*, 1976) etc. See Nepi (1987: xi-xii).

⁶¹ "*Oceani vitreum spoliū, puer, accipe, sodes | cui procul aucto des nomen ab aequore conchae; | hanc ubi forte tuae ludens admoveris auri, | non modo, quae cieo, fremibundus murmura pontus, | sed voces capies quoque, quas ad litora Manes | mittunt illorum, quibus institit effera fati | per freta totque meas stridentes Parca procellas*" (vv. 53-60). (Boy, please take the ocean's bright trophy. You may call it a 'conch', brought to you from distant seas. When you happen to hold it to your ear while playing, you will not only hear the sounds which I, the murmuring sea, produce, but also the voices sent to the coast by the shades of those who are haunted by the savage goddess of Fate across my waters and many roaring storms).

⁶² The poem, consisting of 214 lines in elegiac distichs, was included in Papini (2013).

⁶³ See Biel (1996: 121, 154, 194-195) and Howells (1999: 117-119).