

Modernisme / Modernism

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MODERNISME / MODERNISM

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DEEL 1.
MODERNISME / MODERNISM

THE NEWNESS OF MODERNISM: READING MODERNISM TODAY

Ben De Witte (KU Leuven) & Emma-Louise Silva (University of Antwerp)

It is common lore to introduce the advent of literary modernism in the English-speaking world with statements such as Holbrook Jackson's, who suggested in his 1922 review of *Ulysses* that James Joyce 'knows also that he is saying it in a new way' (200). Two years later, Virginia Woolf implied that 'on or about December 1910 human character changed' (1924: 4), and by 1927 Wyndham Lewis wondered whether it was 'the voluminous curtain that fell, belated (with the alarming momentum of a ton or two of personally organized rubbish), upon the Victorian scene' (109). Modernism had clearly kicked its way onto that scene. Claims to modernist newness had also appeared on the European continent, much earlier at that; another commonly cited feat of literary history is that Arthur Rimbaud inaugurated a modernist bidding to say 'Adieu', claiming that in all senses possible 'il faut être absolument moderne' (1892: 147). Throughout the western world, a rapid succession of avant-garde movements would soon afterwards take the first decades of the twentieth century by storm with a credo of 'newness', jumpstarting a more general understanding of 'modernism' as a promotional moniker for self-conscious innovation across a range of literary and artistic expressions.

Scholarship has played no small part in perpetuating modernism's claim to newness, experimentation, and iconoclasm. Matei Calinescu, for instance, in his well-known *Five Faces of Modernity*, qualifies modernism as 'an aesthetic of transitoriness and immanence, whose central values are change and novelty' (1987: 4). Calinescu's placement of modernism at the heart of a wider set of cultural preoccupations with modernity as an 'irreconcilable opposition' (5) between past and present, tradition and newness, obsolescence and urgency, etc., is exemplary for the manner in which scholarship has bestowed broader relevance and legitimacy on literary modernism as an object worthy of serious scrutiny. The study of literary modernism took shape accordingly. In that regard, Mark Wollaeger observes in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* that in the North-American context the field of modernist studies was defined, from its inception, by a particular historical period (roughly between 1895 and 1945) and a particular body of literature, generally viewed in terms of its formal complexity and aesthetic difficulty. The rise and consolidation of modernist studies in Anglo-American academia is often associated with the heydays of literary theory: first and foremost, New Criticism declared it a venerable object of study, but deconstruction also embraced modernism's liking for representational scepticism. Yet from the 1970s onwards, literary theory (especially in its more politicized – Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, etc. – guises) would gradually cast a suspicious light on modernist doctrines of aesthetic autonomy and diffi-

culty that seemed to condone, or even encourage a retreat into elitist inner recess. Nonetheless, while Wollaeger points out that ‘By the 1980s, the study of modernism had become relatively suspect, especially on political grounds’ (2012: 8), recent developments in literary studies reveal that modernism has all but lost its appeal to professional readers; a close association between modernism and literary theories persists till today, assuring its prestige as a source for new, wide-ranging methodological and theoretical investigation.

Fast-forwarding to 2008, the notion of modernism’s ‘newness’ is again revived, albeit on specifically disciplinary grounds, when Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz date the birth of *new* modernist studies ‘on or about 1999’, not only pointing to the creation of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA), but also mentioning new journals such as *Modernism/Modernity* and *Modernist Cultures*, alongside an array of publications exploring new methodologies (737). In their seminal article entitled ‘The New Modernist Studies’, Mao and Walkowitz proffered that when ‘seeking a single word to sum up transformations in modernist literary scholarship over the past decade or two, one could do worse than light on *expansion*’ (2008: 737 italics in original). Mao and Walkowitz saw the field of modernism studies traversing into ‘temporal, spatial, and vertical directions’ (2008: 737). As for the pendulum of the temporal aspect, what was previously deemed the ‘core period of about 1890 to 1945’ (Mao & Walkowitz 2008: 738) seemed to have swayed towards the mid-nineteenth century one way, and towards the middle of the twentieth century the other way. The spatial fabric wrapped itself around the four corners of the earth (instead of merely the anglophone northern hemisphere), while an encompassing verticality stretched from low-brow via mid-brow to high-brow. Indeed, the myth of the writer locked up in the modernist ivory tower was beckoned to its quietus, loosening or revising associations with elitism. Instead, new approaches to modernist studies have brought into relief how popular media propelled the trajectories of ‘words and images in less time, across bigger distances, and to greater numbers of people than ever before’ (Mao & Walkowitz 2008: 743).

This *Cahier voor Literatuurwetenschap* aims to establish that the ‘new modernist’ wind is also in flux throughout Flanders and Brussels, albeit from a different position in today’s global economies of scholarship. Our location as scholars in Belgium invites probing into where ‘new modernist studies’ are at in Flanders and Brussels as a comparative question: how, if at all, has the latest scholarship on modernism produced at our universities responded to the ‘new modernism’ story? Have scholars at work in Belgium staked a self-conscious position vis-à-vis trends set by new modernism’s predominantly Anglophone provenance? ‘New modernism’ in Flanders, judged on our contributions, sustains both resonances and refractions with Anglo-American scholarship, as was felt during the conference held by the Flemish Association for Literary Theory and Comparative Literature (VAL) in 2019. The call for papers ushered in the VAL’s wish to ‘focus even more strongly on what it regards as its core task, namely bringing together – across linguistic, generational and institutional divides – young and early career literary scholars who are

active in Flanders and Brussels and inviting them to convene around themes of common interest' (VAL-Symposium 2019').

The VAL conference revealed that the field of modernist studies, as currently practiced at Belgian universities, suggests its own 'new' set of questions and objects of study. The conference, organized with Dutch and English as lead languages, covered a range of topics and approaches to modernist literatures from various European contexts. This *CLW* special issue on 'Modernisme / Modernism' accordingly reflects a broad and comparative scope. Covering European literatures from the modernist period, this issue far from repeats 'old' modernism studies, but shows a field in full action and expansion that crosses national boundaries as well as disciplines and media. Although not every essay in this collection claims a part in the unfolding history of 'new modernism' *per se*, as a whole our contributions' wide breadth of subjects, contexts, and methodologies do invite comparison with Mao and Walkowitz's expansion of the field.

As for the 'spatial expansion' of the subjects discussed in this volume, the contributions present case studies from German, Dutch, Austrian, Italian, British, Irish, American, and Eastern European vantage points. Most articles operate within the 'temporal expansion' of the broader modernist period, with Nicholas De Sutter's focus on Neo-Latin texts on the one side of the pendulum (pre-'core' period) and the US minimalist orientation of Carolien Van Nerom's essay on the other (post-'core' period). This *CLW* does 'vertical expansion' at its best, with new genres emerging as objects of study, such as pantomime (Mathias Meert), hybrid lowbrow and popular novels (Fatima Borrmann and Robrecht De Boodt), travel essays (Chiara Zampieri), the short story (Phyllis Boumans), and radio plays (Pim Verhulst). Furthermore, older genres that have undergone a revamp have also claimed their place in this volume. The modernist novel, a longstanding *locus classicus* of scholarship, still prevails, albeit through the prism of philosophy of mind (Emma-Louise Silva) and less trodden paths in modernist literary criticism (Tilde Geerardyn). Notably, nearly all contributions deal directly with the era's self-conscious construction of modernist novelty in and through a variety of ideas, forms, and discourses. By doing so, our contributors unearth and mobilize new archives of unexplored materials; canonical authors are approached from previously unexplored or forgotten texts, or popular culture is considered through new prisms. Therefore, these papers fuse and converse with one another on the basis of a shared theme: what is 'modernist' (as modernist knowledge – modernist state and culture, or community – modernist gender and race – modernist nationalism and cosmopolitanism, ...)? Many of our contributors historicize modernism itself as a phenomenon that is up for reevaluation (see 'new' modernist studies): they investigate how local (which in this volume means European) contexts have responded to, and produced their own modernist ideas, allowing for a more nuanced picture of literary and cultural history.

This collection opens with a contribution by Nicholas De Sutter, who finds an unexpected archive of modernity in mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century

Neo-Latin poetry. De Sutter aims to provide a more complete historiography for a body of verse that conversed with the modern world through the prism of antiquity. Then follow two articles that deepen our understanding of the modernist period's intertwining of medical science with literary form: first, Fatima Borrmann explores how motherhood was reimagined in British and German novels from the 1890s and early 1900s by Sarah Grand, Helene Böhlau, Mona Caird and Dolorosa (Maria Eichhorn) that link cultural ideas surrounding 'the New Woman' to the emerging pseudo-science of eugenics. Then, Robrecht De Boodt's contribution focuses on the depiction of medical knowledge in colonial literature, by analysing the western gaze in two literary texts that feature sub-Saharan African colonial territories as backdrops, namely *Tropenwee* (1904) by Belgian writer Henri Van Booven and *Germanin* (1938) by German doctor Hellmuth Unger. From there on, this volume takes us to a variety of modernist settings and contexts, ranging from Central and Eastern Europe to Southern Europe and Ireland. Mathias Meert discusses the role of pantomime theatre within the framework of (German-language) modernist aesthetics. Contextualizing his findings through the analysis of Carl Einstein's pantomime *Nuronihar* (1913), Meert addresses the narrative and intermedial features of Einstein's dance-oriented silent pantomime. Next, offering a Slavic perspective on the cultural history of modernism, Tilde Geerardyn hones in on the ideas of Slovene literary critic Janko Lavrin, who in his writing during the interwar years in London actively promoted a novel 'psychocritical approach' to theorize modernist culture within a comprehensive European framework. Chiara Zampieri offers a very different view on European modernity: her contribution identifies a British perspective that eagerly looks for the sources of a new and better modernity in the Etruscan past, while discussing the literary imagination of modernity in David Herbert Lawrence's travel essay *Etruscan Places* (1932) and Aldous Huxley's novel *Point Counter Point* (1928). That also the familiar 'classics' of modernism continue to inspire the development of new literary theory is suggested by Emma-Louise Silva's contribution, which applies impulses from the field of philosophy of mind, namely 4E – or embodied, embedded, extended and enactive – cognition to reassess the so-called 'inward turn' of Joyce's modernist fiction. We stay in Ireland with Phyllis Boumans, who gauges the Irish middlebrow magazine *The Bell's* (1940-1954) indebtedness to modernist aesthetics through the lens of the short story. Boumans argues that *The Bell*, in the contemporaneity of the short story form, found an adequate means to bring a culturally impoverished middle class into contact with a revitalised modern literature. Pim Verhulst discusses why modernist studies failed to bestow significance on radiophonic experimentation before the advent of 'New Modernist Studies'. After sketching the current state of affairs in radiophonic studies of modernism, Verhulst points to the continued relevance of the 'inward turn' for the Anglophone post-war period in his analysis of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1954), Samuel Beckett's *Embers* (1959) and Caryl Churchill's *Identical Twins* (1968). Carolien Van Nerom closes this collection with a contribution that points to the vivid afterlife of modernism, by zooming in on Philip Glass' opera *The Trial*

(2014), which is based on Franz Kafka's *Der Prozess* (1925). Van Nerom provides a musical and narratological analysis of Glass's opera, examining, via a focus on female characters, the reception of Kafka's novel in a new cultural context and medium.

Taken together, these essays illustrate the wide variety of subjects and approaches joined under the banner of this *CLW* special issue on 'Modernisme / Modernism'. The once sharp disjunction in scholarship between highbrow and lowbrow literatures of the modernist period has lost its polemical edge, giving rise to new productive directions that have reshaped and re-energized the field and its objects of study. The essays in this collection reveal that 'new modernism' has claimed modernism as a privileged terrain for conceptualizing media and intermedia, as well as historical incursions into modernist literatures, knowledges, and technologies of all stripes. It is also clear that modernism remains a privileged place for developing new literary theories: the approaches based in philosophy of mind, cognitive narratology, and intermedial studies point to new interaction with existing paradigms of formal and historical analysis. To sum up, the contributions in this *Cahier voor Literatuurwetenschap* demonstrate the notion that modernism proves to be up for multiform transvaluation, whether it be in time, in space, or in genre and tone. In 'Madame Grows Older: A Journal at the Dangerous Age', Djuna Barnes writes that '[t]ime and space are my enemies. If it were not for time, I should not be dangerous, and if it were not for space, I should not feel so limited!' ([1924] 2019: 33-34). It must be said that even though Madame Modernism 'grows older', it is striking how the field of modernist studies is still keen on surpassing modalities and on reinventing its own claims to newness.

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THROUGH THE PRISM OF ANTIQUITY

Towards a History of the Latin Poetry of the Modern Age (ca. 1845-1922)

Nicholas De Sutter (KU Leuven / Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek)

Introduction

Although Neo-Latin is generally defined as including all writings in Latin from Petrarch until the present day, scholarship has traditionally focussed the lion's share of its attention on the production of Latin verse and prose during the early-modern period, the 'golden era' that tapered off into the eighteenth century, when Latin lost its pre-eminence as the supranational language of learning, literature, and education. Yet this is not to say that writers suddenly and completely stopped composing in the language of Vergil and Cicero altogether in the wake of the French Revolution. For even though the active use of this 'dead' language was irrevocably caught in a downward spiral on account of a multitude of historical factors, this (d)evolution was a very gradual process. The longstanding tradition of Latin verse and prose composition, therefore, though increasingly moving towards the fringes of the literary landscape, enjoyed much more continuity than it is usually given credit for, and still resulted in a wealth of works produced in Latin during the (late-)modern period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Until quite recently, forays into this literary phenomenon would often fall through the cracks of modern disciplinary boundaries – i.e. regularly brushed aside within Neo-Latin studies on account of its peripheral status and mostly neglected in classical reception studies on account of the language barrier – yet scholarship on Latin's 'twilight years' (see Sacré 2014; Money 2014) and all its forms and functions has clearly been gaining momentum in recent years. In addition to the surge in historiographies of Latin devoting considerable attention to the language's final phase (Waquet 1999; Strohm 2007; Leonhardt 2009; Bloemendal 2016; Korenjak 2016), Neo-Latin studies as a discipline seems to be re-embracing the founding fathers' broad conception of the field (Ijsewijn & Jacobs 1961; Ijsewijn 1977; see Bertiau & Sacré 2019).¹ Thus, recent scholarship includes studies ranging from the Neo-Latin representation of Napoleon (Krüssel 2011; Krüssel 2016) to the various uses and abuses of Latin and its cultural legacy during the age of Italian Fascism (Lamers &

1. It remains telling, however, that of the three recent Neo-Latin 'companions' (Ford, Bloemendal & Fantazzi 2014; Knight & Tilg 2015; Moul 2017) that explicitly aim to build on the foundations laid by Ijsewijn 1977 and Ijsewijn & Sacré 1998, only the first one pays a respectable measure of attention to Latin beyond the eighteenth century (i.a. Haskell 2014; Minkova 2014; Money 2014; Sacré 2014). For a recent reflection on the broadening of Neo-Latin scholarship, see Coroleu 2019.

Reitz-Joosse 2016). Even so, it is still quite difficult to get a good overview of modern Latin as a whole, so an encompassing approach to the literary production in Latin in the late-modern period – as opposed to the early-modern period – remains a desideratum to this day (see Bertiau 2017). If, in other words, Neo-Latin is a ‘lost continent of literature’, as James Hankins put it (2001: 22), ‘largely excluded from the story of Western literature’, then the late-modern era clearly constitutes the farthest, largely unexplored reaches of this literary Atlantis.

This contribution offers a first look at and some preliminary results of a new research project which aims to offer a step towards a more complete historiography of modern Latin literature, focussing on poetry from the mid-nineteenth century until the early-twentieth century.² It does not propose to study all Latin poetry produced during this period, of course, but precisely that body of verse that entered into dialogue with the rapidly changing world around it. For while the entire corpus of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin literature is still too vast to be encompassed in one study and still includes an endless stream of religious and occasional poetry, there also is a particularly interesting subset of compositions dedicated to contemporary society.

In an age when the effects of the Industrial Revolution started being felt in everyday life as science and technology continued making rapid progress, and in an age when the modern nation state, scrambling for empire, came into being, many of Europe’s classically educated still turned to Latin in order to reflect on this changing reality. The tension between the modern world and the ancient language used to reflect on it – which in its turn evoked an entire cultural universe dating back thousands of years – is what characterises this type of poetry most, and forms the common thread running through the study. This prism of antiquity through which Neo-Latin poets saw contemporary society manifested itself in a variety of ways, ranging from entire epics that sing the (re-)birth of the Italian nation as an Ovidian metamorphosis or that use the *Aeneid* as a hypotext to praise colonial enterprises in Africa, to Juvenalian and Horatian satires on Darwin or the suffragettes, to Lucretian didactic verse dedicated to the most recent inventions and discoveries. Though one could say that modernity sparked anti-modernity in this respect in terms of form – the language and genres have remained more or less unaltered – this does not automatically mean that the choice of Latin was predicated on reactionary, anti-modern sentiments. It does not exclude it either, of course, as there certainly is a conservative undertone present in at least part of the corpus. However, Latin compositions singing the praises of the miracle of aviation or the advantages of electricity and steam technology, to name but a few examples, clearly testify to a genuine admiration for the advances of contemporary society.

This last element also shows how the literary phenomenon ties in with what is often called ‘*Latinitas viva*’ (living Latin), a movement with its roots in the mid-

2. FWO research grant n. 64346 (‘Through the Prism of Antiquity: the Reception of Modernity in Late-Modern Latin Poetry (1845-1922)’).

nineteenth century, promoting the active use of Latin as the international language *par excellence*. By using perfectly Vergilian hexameters and Ciceronian periods to comment on contemporary events and issues, modern Latin writers also tried to show that Latin was more than capable of resuming its position as *lingua franca*, or that it had never really lost its place as the universal language of both learning and literature to begin with.

In its core, this phase in Latin literature is not much different from previous centuries: it is simply the hallmark of Neo-Latin that it uses a petrified, age-old language to reflect on contemporary issues and events. It is therefore pointless, to a certain extent, to try to force this separate ‘course’ in the history of Western literature into the framework of literary movements in the vernacular. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Latin poetry cannot, for instance, be situated within the context of modernism very easily, as it simply does not seem to show any signs of wanting to ‘make it new’ or to break from traditional forms of writing or modes of representation. If anything, Neo-Latin is quintessentially an expression of Neo-Classicism, at least as to its traditional formal characteristics and ancient frames of reference. Yet this does not alter the fact that, in wanting to shine a light on its own times like any literature, the virtually unstudied Latin poetry of the era under consideration was faced with particularly dynamic times – the long nineteenth century as an era of almost blind faith in progress, the rapid advance of science and technology, the rise of nation-states, urbanisation, industrialisation and secularisation in the west – which it actively sought to capture in its own way, thereby giving rise to the anachronistic juxtaposition of the ancient and the modern.

The main reason why modern Latin poetry has been studied so sparingly is not so much for a lack of material or the quality thereof, as it is a question of finding it and getting a decent overview (see Sacré 1996: 67). Inherently international, the Latin production of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been difficult to chart, since the primary sources are often hard to bring together – spread as they are across journals, leaflets, and rare booklets – and encompassing bibliographies are generally lacking.³ One exception is France, where previous bibliographical work (Jalabert & Sacré 2010) has recently enabled a thorough examination of nineteenth-century Latin poetry, predominantly within the context of the French educational system (Jalabert 2017). Surprisingly little work has been done, for instance, to map Latin culture in modern Italy, though without question the largest supplier of Neo-Latin verse throughout the period, in spite of Vito Giustiniani’s excellent first impulse (1979). In fact, scholarship has almost exclusively focussed on the Latin oeuvre of Giovanni Pascoli, who is considered the most influential Latin poet of the era. Though this qualification is more than justified, the exclusive attention that comes with it somewhat obfuscates the existence of hundreds of other (Italo-)Latin poets active in the same period.

3. We are better off with regard to the twentieth century in terms of bibliographical surveys (see IJsewijn 1961-1964; Sacré 1990-2002).

A recent discovery, however, offers a way out of this heuristic quagmire: in 2012, the complete archives of the *Certamen Hoeyffianum* (Hoeyff contest), the most prominent international competition for previously unpublished Latin poetry, which was organised in Amsterdam from 1845 until 1978, were rediscovered in Haarlem (see Fera et al. 2017). In the spirit of the burgeoning *Latinitas viva* movement, contests in the art of composing in ancient languages – Latin and/or Greek, prose and/or poetry, original and/or translations – started mushrooming in nineteenth-century Europe, and became one of the main institutional platforms for modern Latin as such (see Gionta 2006). In time, the *Certamen Hoeyffianum* – named after Dutch Neo-Latin poet Jacob Hendrik Hoeyff (1756-1843), whose last will and testament provided for a competition for original Latin poetry – grew to become the international forum for Latin poetry *par excellence*, even sparking a modest but significant mini-renaissance lasting until the early-twentieth century, which some contemporaries liked to label ‘neo-humanism’ (see Bartoli 1935). Lying at the very centre of this neo-humanist microcosm, the contest brought together poets from all over the globe to compete for a gold medal and a prestigious publication of their compositions, inspiring new generations of poets to do the same (on its importance, Giustiniani 1979: 5-7).

The contest and its archives provide an ideal vantage point from which to study modern Latin poetry as a whole, both methodologically and in terms of content. For on the one hand, the corpus solves the noted heuristic problem in that it offers a representative cross-section of modern Latin poetic culture, since the contest united the *fine fleur* of contemporary Latinists from a wide range of nationalities. On the other hand, since the *Hoeyffianum* did not impose any mandatory topic – as opposed to most other competitions – contestants were completely free to write about any subject of their own choosing. Accordingly, explorations of the corpus have revealed a deep fascination for all things modern, consistently framed against a classical backdrop.

In order to paint as complete a picture as possible of the Latin poetry of the period under examination, the initial Hoeyff corpus must, in a second step, be supplemented by specific searches in the three other main outlets for Latin poetry at the time – journals, poetry collections, and other competitions – based on the findings and trends discerned in the *Hoeyffianum*. For the purposes of this introductory article, however, I will limit myself to fleshing out case studies from the Hoeyff corpus.

By demarcating the period under examination from 1845 to 1922, finally, the project also dovetails with a chronological gap in scholarship, which – apart from the steady stream of Pascoli studies – has hitherto mainly focussed on either the early-nineteenth century (Krüssel 2011-2015; Jalabert 2017; Bertiau 2017), or the age of Italian Fascism (Lamers & Reitz-Joosse 2016). At the same time, the two dates also represent two key moments in the history of modern Latin itself: 1845, the first *Hoeyffianum* contest and the symbolic dawn of this final revival, and 1922, the rise to power of the Fascist regime in Italy (1922-1943), which gave rise to a vast

corpus of Fascist Latin literature, as is currently being investigated in several research projects at the universities of Groningen and Oslo.

Texts and contexts

As noted above, the current inquiry into the Latin poetry of the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries zooms in on the novelties and trends of the era as they were experienced by contemporary classicists, who still took delight in reflecting on these matters via the art of verse composition and through a classical lens. The modern change that so fascinated these poets is built around clusters of the most salient recurring themes identified in the Hoefufft corpus, betraying the celebration of industry, nationalism, empire, and (social, political, technological, scientific...) progress so typical of the time. The following section of the article introduces these clusters and offers some illustrative case studies from these categories spanning the entire period under examination.

Science and technology

In the cluster around the various manifestations of ‘progress’, firstly, light is shed on the classically-inspired reactions to a variety of aspects concerning the continually changing world of the long nineteenth century. This drastic change had been kick-started by the Industrial Revolution, the effects of which on everyday life only really started making themselves felt – and hence only started being reflected on in literature – on a substantial scale around 1840 (Hobsbawm 1996: 27), aligning perfectly with the start of the project. The rapid advancement was first and foremost one of a technological and scientific nature, but this modernisation of course also affected a great deal of socio-economic change (not to forget political change, which is treated separately). In addition to Neo-Latin reflections on e.g. the steam engine and the telegraph – the driving technologies behind globalization – the corpus therefore also includes poetic commentaries on women’s and workers’ rights, to name but a few examples.

Judging by the submissions to the Hoefufft contest, modern technology fascinated contemporary Latin poets immensely. For there was quite a flood of compositions, often didactic, about all kinds of inventions. To the modern ear, this juxtaposition of didactics and poetry sounds quite contradictory, which dates back to the Romanticist poetics of anti-didacticism. In the Neo-Latin tradition, however, even in the post-Romantic era, didactic poetry never lost its superior position in the generic hierarchy (see Wiegand 1984). The Latin fascination for the advances of technology clearly started with the steam engine. In fact, the second person ever to win the *Hoefufftianum* – Giuseppe Giacoletti, Pascoli’s poetic mentor – obtained the gold medal with a lengthy and complex *carmen didascalicum* in dactylic hexam-

eters dedicated to the steam engine itself: *De lebetis materie et forma eiusque tutela in machinis vaporis vi agentibus* ('On the metal, shape, and safety of the boiler in steam powered engines'). As is customary in didactic epics – the Latin models being Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Vergil's *Georgica* – the poem starts out with a proem invoking the Muse and stating its subject matter:

Materiem Musa aggreditur describere aheni
 Ac formam, quo fervescens parit unda vaporem,
 Fabrili ostenta in ludo terraque marique
 Promentem: siquidem pariter quodcumque metallum
 Haud prodest operi, quaecumque aut forma legatur,
 Arx veluti quosvis haud fraenat quaelibet hostes.
 Quippe aggressa foris flamma, intus lympha vaporque,
 Perdere conspirant iuncto ceu foedere molem.⁴

Yet the classical background against which the recent invention is discussed here is not limited to the didactic tradition and its exigencies in terms of form only. Very often, modern Latin poets also harked back to ancient mythology as a prism through which to analyse their changing surroundings. Giacoletti tried to do the same. As the poet already signalled in the proem, steam technology is not without risk, as the pressure building up inside the boiler can result in explosions when left unchecked. Hence the importance of the safety valve, which can let off the excess steam. It is the machine operator's responsibility, therefore, to remain ever vigilant. Here, Giacoletti took the opportunity to make a mythological digression, which, like the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in Vergil's *Georgica*, had become part and parcel of the genre. In book X of the *Odyssey*, the titular hero is given a bag by Aeolus, 'the keeper of winds', containing all the headwinds, which would allow them to sail to Ithaca unhindered. When Odysseus is fast asleep, however, his companions mistakenly open the bag and unleash a violent storm, blowing them completely off course. In a lengthy mythological digression, Giacoletti recounts these events and urges steam engine operators to be mindful of this cautionary tale, likening the steam-filled engine to the magical bag of winds:

Commissa ergo tibi, custos, fac limina molis
 Gnaviter observes, posita neu lege recedas.
 Incautos vafri socios reminiscere Ulyssis,
 Tot mala qui ventis temere excivere solutis,
 (...)

4. Giacoletti 1863: 5 (all translations are my own). 'My Muse attempts to describe the matter and form of the vessel in which boiling water brings forth steam, which in its turn brings forth miracles in a display of craftsmanship, both on land and at sea. For not any type of metal is equally suitable for this enterprise, and not just any form can be chosen, just as not every stronghold can restrain every type of enemy. For the flame that makes its way out and the water and the steam inside all conspire, as if they made a pact, to destroy the engine'. Giacoletti's work has recently been anthologized in Pasero 2015 (including *De lebetis materie...*).