

Neo-Latin Literature during Italian Fascism and German National Socialism

by Katharina-Maria Schön (University of Groningen)

Vittorio Genovesi – *Imperii Via ad Clivum Capitolinum*

About the author: Vittorio Genovesi (1887-1967) was a theologian, a Jesuit priest and a Neo-Latin poet. As such, he regularly participated in the *Certamen Poeticum Hoeufftianum* (held in Amsterdam) and won a total of three gold medals. His Latin poems deal with philosophical, historical, theological and political issues. Some of them are strongly nationalistic in tone and glorify Italian Fascism, which, according to Genovesi, fulfilled Rome's civilising mission and brought Christianity to the barbaric regions of the world. After the collapse of the Fascist empire, Genovesi tried to erase all references to Mussolini and his ideology from his poems.

Imperii Via ad Clivum Capitolinum (1934): In this poem, the reader is led from the Roman Forum to the Capitoline Hill. Genovesi used a special occasion as a source of poetic inspiration, namely the inauguration of the *Via dell'Impero* in Rome on October 28th 1932, which marked the 10th anniversary of Mussolini's march on Rome. In his poem, Genovesi not only offers a panorama of ancient monuments in Italy's capital city, but he also explains their relevance for Fascist politics. In the end, the *duce* and his significance for Rome are celebrated (v. 97–116):

<p>Italae¹, plausus iterate², gentes, spem bonam vestris animis fovete, vere³ ceu⁴ primo iuvenescit omnis Ausonis⁵ ora.</p> <p>Fata nimirum sua Roma novit, Roma Divinae fidei magistra, gentibus pacis, duce, nunc sequestra⁶ Roma, BENITO!</p> <p>Undique huc⁷ cerno populos redire, quos diu fallax⁸ procul egit error lucis⁹ expertes⁹, scidit¹⁰ et cruenta¹¹ traxit in arma.</p> <p>Nostra iam vidit Batavus¹², Britannus signa inaccessos¹³ superasse¹⁴ caelos, et potens¹⁵ gazis¹⁵ America, vidit ultima¹⁶ Thule¹⁶.</p> <p>Aura fortunis Italis¹ amica spirat e caelo: sociata Christo ingeni perget¹⁷ renovare mites¹⁸ Roma triumphos.</p>	<p>1 <i>Italus</i> 3: Italian</p> <p>2 <i>itero</i> 1: to repeat</p> <p>3 <i>ver, veris</i> n.: spring</p> <p>4 <i>ceu</i> [particle]: just as if</p> <p>5 <i>Ausonis, -idis</i> f.: Ausonia = Italy (Ausonia designated a landscape in Southern Italy)</p> <p>6 <i>sequestra, -ae</i> f.: intermediary, conciliator</p> <p>7 <i>huc</i> [adverb]: to his place, here, hither</p> <p>8 <i>fallax, fallacis</i> [adjective]: elusive, treacherous</p> <p>9 <i>lucis expertes</i> [connected to <i>populos</i>]: without light</p> <p>10 <i>scindo</i> 3, <i>scidi, scissum</i>: to divide forcefully</p> <p>11 <i>cruentus</i> 3: bloodstained</p> <p>12 <i>Batavus, -i</i> m.: Dutch person</p> <p>13 <i>inaccessus</i> 3: inaccessible, out of reach</p> <p>14 <i>superasse</i> = <i>superavisse</i> [here used in an Acl]</p> <p>15 <i>potens gazis</i>: abounding in treasures, very wealthy</p> <p>16 <i>ultima Thule</i>: the island of Thule, situated at the end of the world (according to the ancient imagination this island was located in the north of Britain; it was also equated with Norway, Iceland or the Shetland Islands)</p> <p>17 <i>pergo</i> 3, <i>perrexi, perrectum</i>: to continue, to pursue</p> <p>18 <i>mitis, -e</i> [adjective]: peaceful, gentle</p>
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About the author:

Luigi Taberini (*1933) grew up in Naples and worked as a high-school teacher at the *Regio Ginnasio* in Ancona. As a Neo-Latin poet, he participated in the *Certamen Locrense* and the *Certamen Poeticum Hoeufftianum* several times, but without achieving any major success. Many of his poems are imbued with Fascist ideas, such as his odes *Fascis Lictorius* (1923) and *Dux* (1929), which he sent with a personal dedication to his German colleague Hermann Weller. Taberini also discusses the historical significance of Mussolini as a leader figure and the international role of Fascist Italy in 20th century Europe in his epic poem *Septimii Severi Somnium* (1930).

Septimii Severi Somnium (1930):

In this 283-verse poem, the author glorifies the efforts of Fascist Italy to colonise Libya. The protagonist is Septimius Severus, who was born in Libya and who ruled the Roman Empire from 193–211 AD. In a prophetic vision, he sees Mussolini conquering his home town Leptis Magna. Taberini glorifies contemporary Rome as the bringer of civilisation, invoking the artificial opposition between the ‘cultured Romans’ and the ‘African barbarians’. In the final section of the poem, a Vergilian figure enters the stage: the seeress Sibyl of Cumae appears to Septimius Severus and predicts that the Roman Empire – despite its impending downfall – will eventually have a great future (v. 259–263, 265–274):

<p>“At fortes Itali, cum bellum exarserit¹ ingens, quo² nullum gravius fuit et truculentius³ unquam, antiquos hostes vincent, fratrumque catenas frangent⁴, et terras capient urbes⁵que negatas⁵ iam⁵ sibi⁵. [...] Magnanimus, forti Romano a sanguine cretus⁶, servabit⁷ Dux, qui caelo demissus⁸ ab alto – mirum portentum⁹! – tunc esse videbitur orbi. Longum¹⁰ est¹⁰ innumeros eius narrare labores, omnia quae peraget¹¹, Patriam quo tollat ad astra. Tunc Aquila¹² et¹² Crux¹² pacatae¹³ iungentur in Urbe¹⁴. At Libya immensis cumulis¹⁵ vexata¹⁶ malorum Unica reddetur Romae provincia tandem, Et ducis imperio multum aucta, exulta¹⁷ virebit. Aspice nunc, Caesar.” Tacuit stupefacta Sibylla.</p>	<p>1 <i>exardeo</i> 2, <i>exarsi</i>: to flare up 2 <i>quo</i>: an ablative of comparison is concealed in the relative pronoun 3 <i>truculentus</i> 3: grim, brute, wild 4 <i>frango</i> 3, <i>fregi</i>, <i>fractum</i>: to break 5 <i>urbes negatas iam sibi</i>: cities that have once been denied to them 6 <i>cresco</i> 3, <i>crevi</i>, <i>cretus</i>: to grow 7 <i>servo</i> 1: to save (supplement <i>vos</i> or <i>Romanos</i> as a direct object) 8 <i>demitto</i> 3, <i>demisi</i>, <i>demissus</i>: to send down, to fall down 9 <i>portentum</i>, <i>-i</i> n.: miraculous sign 10 <i>longum est</i>: it would take too long 11 <i>perago</i> 3, <i>-egi</i>, <i>-actum</i>: to accomplish 12 <i>Aquila et Crux</i>: the legionary eagle and the Christian cross 13 <i>pacatus</i> 3: pacified, peaceful 14 <i>Urbs, Urbis</i> f.: the city of Rome 15 <i>cumulus</i>, <i>-i</i> m.: pile, heap 16 <i>vexo</i> 1: to torment, to vex 17 <i>excolo</i> 3, <i>-colui</i>, <i>-cultum</i>: to adorn</p>
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For further information on the author and his Latin works, see: <https://flt.hf.uio.no/author/101/>

About the author:

Julius Stern (1865–1942) taught Latin, Ancient Greek, German and history at two high-schools in Baden-Baden. In the last years of his professional life, he was promoted to the position of the headmaster. Even though Julius Stern had never practised his Judaism, he and his wife Berta, who had a Protestant background, were soon registered as ‘full Jews’ (*Volljuden*) by the National Socialists. The middle names ‘Israel’ and ‘Sara’ were added to their passports. As a visual stigma, they had to carry the Jewish star on their clothes. After his retirement in 1934, Stern – like many classicists at that time – participated in the *Certamen Poeticum Hoeufftianum* several times. His poems never won a prize, but they are valuable testimonies inasmuch as they express Stern’s inner emigration. In addition to criticising the National Socialist regime in a coded form, the author also incorporated a plea for more humanity and charitableness in his poems. On August 15th 1942, Julius Stern and his wife were informed that they would be deported to the concentration camp Theresienstadt in the next days. To escape this tragic fate, the couple committed suicide by poisoning.

San Remo (1938/1943):

This poem was written by Julius Stern in 1938 and was the only one of his works to be printed posthumously in the Munich-based journal *Societas Latina* (see: *SL* 11 (1943), *Fasc.* 2–3, pp. 59–60). In terms of content, it deals with anti-Semitism and the systematic persecution of Jews during Fascism and National Socialism. The setting is the harbour of the Italian city San Remo, from where many politically persecuted people fled to other countries in the 1930s, when this was still possible. In this scene, the poetic *persona* – maybe an *alter ego* for Stern – spots a ship full of people who venture out into the unknown, hoping for a better life overseas (v. 17–32):

Apparetque ingens procul – admirabile ¹ visu ¹ –	1 <i>admirabile visu</i> [supine]: a wondrous sight / remarkable to behold
Plena hominum navis turriti ² castelli ² instar ² .	2 <i>turriti castelli instar</i> : like a castle with towers
Post sequitur fumi ³ vexillum ³ lucidum et altum.	3 <i>fumi vexillum</i> : a banner of smoke
Quem petitis finem vos, quicumque omnia vestra	4 <i>mandastis = mandavistis</i>
Aequoribus falsis mandastis ⁴ sive beati	5 <i>angor, -oris</i> m.: anxiety, fear
Tristi angore ⁵ domi curis atris ⁶ que relictis	6 <i>ater, atra, atrum</i> : pitch-dark
Sive domo misere bonis ⁷ que orbat ⁸ hominum vi	7 <i>bona, -orum</i> n. pl.: personal belongings
Quaerentes patriam et sortem tutamque novamque?	8 <i>orbatus</i> 3 [+ abl.]: deprived, divested
Nympha Galene ⁹ quae maris omnia lev ¹⁰ reddis	9 <i>Galene</i> : personification of the calm sea (Greek: γαλήνη)
Tu vada ¹¹ caerula ¹² , amica silentique atque nitoris,	10 <i>levis, -e</i> : smooth, calm, even
Quae portus aperis navi ex alto redeunti,	11 <i>vadam, -i</i> n.: deep water
Serves, quaeso, omnes, ut tutam ab hostibus oram ¹³	12 <i>caerulus</i> 3: dark-blue
Fortiter et merito ¹⁴ inveniant patriamque novam, qua	13 <i>ora, -ae</i> f.: shore, beach
Iustitia adiutrice ¹⁵ dea securi habitare	14 <i>merito</i> [adverb]: well-deserved
Et fieri possint contenti homines civiles	15 <i>adiutrix, -icis</i> f.: helper, assistant
Pacis amantis ¹⁶ et virtutis praemia aventes ¹⁷ .	16 <i>amantis = amantes</i>
	17 <i>aveo</i> 2: to long for, to seek

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