The Certamen poeticum Hoeufftianum and the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902)

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The Certamen poeticum Hoeufftianum, annually organized by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences from 1845 to 1978, was undoubtedly the most important Latin poetry contest of the nineteenth and twentieth century.¹ A few rules and regulations were stipulated in the programma certaminis.² The entries, which had to be of a minimum of fifty verses, were expected, for instance, not to have been issued elsewhere and to have been posted to the Academy in Amsterdam accompanied by a sealed envelope holding the poet’s name. The choice of poetic content and form was practically free – only translations and carmina argumenti privati were not allowed. Each year the Academy appointed from its own body a commission of three judges. The best poems received a gold medal and in-house publication. Other, less accomplished but still gratifying compositions were printed after the winning opus.³

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* I wish to thank Isabella Bredenkamp, Hugh Doherty, Vincenzo Fera, Patrick Hayes, Dirk Sacré, Natália Tojo, and HNHA staff for their kind help. Abbreviations used: AKNAW = Amsterdam, Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen; CACP = Castelvecchio, Archivio di Casa Pascoli; CPH = Certamen poeticum Hoeufftianum; CCPH = Carmina certaminis poetici Hoeufftiani (Amsterdam 1845–1978); HL = Humanistica Lovaniensia; HNHA = Haarlem, Noord-Hollands Archief (call numbers have been expanded with file date and entry numbers assigned to documents); JEG = Joernal vir Eietydse Geskiedenis; VMKAW = Verslagen en mededelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen. Afdeling Letterkunde (title varies slightly over the years. The long, repetitive titles of the reports published in VMKAW are abbreviated to “Verslag”, or “Bericht”. Dutch to English translations of citations are by the author).


² See below, n. 4.

³ See CCPH, to date offering the best overview of 19th and 20th century Neo-Latin poetry; Giustiniani, Neulateinische Dichtung (see above, n. 1), 6–7, 99–108.
Anonymity reigned for all other contenders. The commission’s judgement was published in Dutch; a résumé appeared in Latin.⁴ These appraisals provide the poetic profiles of over two thousand compositions, of which about a fifth were ultimately issued in print by the Academy. Considering the importance of the *Hoeufftianum* it is remarkable that a comprehensive scholarly investigation of this large body of poetry has never been undertaken. One reason for the lack of interest is that only the prize-awarded, published pieces were assumed to have survived.⁵ But in 2012 this assumption was dramatically shown to be false, when the *Certamen* archives were discovered by the author in the Noord-Hollands Archief in Haarlem and the Academy of Sciences in Amsterdam.⁶ Effectively, the near complete series of poems for the period 1845–1978 has been preserved, viz. a good two thousand works by poets from at least eighteen countries – from Iceland to Turkey, from Lithuania to the United States, from Japan to Argentina. The papers include, moreover, many unpublished letters, judgement minutes, in-house notes, publication proofs, etc.⁷ It is beyond doubt that this documentation will provide – for years to come – innumerable opportunities for meaningful research into nineteenth- and twentieth-century Neo-Latin poetry.

At present nine poems will take center stage, written at a time the *Hoeufftianum* was increasingly acquiring a Europe-wide standing and acclaim. The compositions stand out thematically. All treat the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902.⁸ Using these works this essay will examine a key aspect of the

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⁴ See *VMKAW* 1.1–5.4 (1856–1920) for the reports in Dutch. The judgements of 1845–51 and 1921 on were issued in the Academy’s yearbook. From 1852 to 1855 the *CPH* was not held. The Latin reports, incorporated in the *Programma certaminis poetici ab Academia Regia Disciplinarum Neerlandica ex Legato Hoeuffiano* […], appeared either in *VMKAW* or the yearbook.


⁶ See *Iohannis Pascoli* […], *Leucothoe*, ed. Vincenzo Fera (Messina, 2012), 21; van Binnebeke, Fera, and Gionta, “Per una nuova edizione” (see above, n. 1).

⁷ 1) *HNHA*, 64.22–3, 40–1, 163, 233, 248, 276, 330, 354, 806–51. 64.806–51 hold the original entries for 1856–1978, (author) correspondences (for which see also 64.233), *scidulae*, in-house notes, and unpublished jury reports. 2) *AKNAW*, 385.1–6, 386, 58.1537, 586.1536. The latter two files concern 1845–51 and 1869. The former seven hold institutional documentation regarding the *CPH* (generally post ca. 1940), a few original entries, and *CCPH* proofs. Completeness: Up to 1905 only 41 original entries are lacking on 552 participating works. Some poems that are lacking, are located in other collections; several were published in *CCPH* (cf. n. 24, 33, 41 below; 1906–78 awaits quantitative examination).

⁸ War is a common *CPH* subject. Between 1900–05 nine out of 115 *Certamen* poems concern the Anglo-Boer War. They constitute a homogenous group within an otherwise thematically atomized field. Compared to earlier conflicts the Anglo-Boer War is represented by a far greater number of works. During World War I the theme is nigh to ubiquitous (cf. Dirk Sacré,