

own conclusions about the significance of these comparisons, such as the shields of Achilles and Aeneas, with the result that the book could stimulate intertextual debate but does not 'spoon-feed' students. Her final chapter rings this nascent comparison by suggesting that Virgil picked up Homeric characters to raise a new question, as to whether imperialism is worth the human cost.

Her interpretations could provide useful points for discussion in the first lesson on any given book from the *Iliad*; for example, she views the divine quarrel in book 1 as a less serious parallel to argument among the Greek leaders. Here she could be more precise in her point that Hephaestus is 'clowning' but overall, her interpretation of this particular book is convincing. Furthermore, her presentation of Helen as a sympathetic figure in the 'telescopy' scene could stimulate profound discussion about the character (although one might suggest that she could refer to contrary opinions such as that of Bettany Hughes). Her comparison of Agamemnon in book 9 to 'a modern politician' could prompt a debate about which modern politicians exactly and why. Furthermore, she uses contextual theories and evidence effectively. Firstly, her discussion of Hesiod and the Athenian council gives an enlightening view of the divine arguments in Book 15 and their possible political interpretation by Ancient Greeks. Secondly, she brings up Greek drama to propose that Patroclus is tragic hero in the Aristotelian sense. For myself, I am not convinced that Patroclus has a *hamartia* (tragic flaw) in the full sense of the concept, but her proposition is thought-provoking nonetheless. On the other hand, one might suggest that she could be more critical about Jonathon Shay's book on instances of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) in Vietnam and Achilles' psychology; for example, it's not clear that Agamemnon's rupture of bonds of *aidos* (respect) between *philoï* (allies) mirrors the modern generals' apparent betrayal of their men.

Moving to the second half of Parker's book, she introduces the *Odyssey* with a summary and projects her own interpretation: the hero loses his identity as a commander over the course of his journey and narrative, catharsising his traumas. Parker takes Shay's research again to propose that Odysseus' story-telling and initial distrust of his household are similar to the actions of PTSD sufferers. For example, she interprets Odysseus' tears on hearing the bard sing about Troy in book 8 as a purge of his memories to reform his identity; although this is an engaging argument, it would be more convincing if she provided more direct comparisons and contrasted other scholars' such as Charles Segal (on 'Kleos and its Ironies', 1983). Moreover, one could argue that she takes this too far when discussing Odysseus' return to Ithaca, since she explains his disguise as a form of new identity without reference to his need to avoid death at the suitors' hands. She is also a little unconvincing when she extends her argument that identity is a dominant theme in the second half of the epic to Penelope, perhaps underestimating the significance of sleep as a form of comfort to the character as well as an opportunity for self-renewal.

The only deeply unconvincing section is her summary and analysis of *Odyssey* book 19. Here, she potentially confuses the reader by alternating between discussion of the boar hunt scar and Penelope's dream. Furthermore, she even errs when she says Penelope compares herself to a mother who killed her daughter, when in fact this mother killed her son. This distinction is important because the simile thus implies that Penelope is betraying her son by not sending away the suitors, an implication that Parker does not discuss.

I would say that the most convincing and original part of her argument concerns books 16–18. She links Eumaeus' greeting of Telemachus 'like a father' to Argos' deterioration to Penelope's lament

for her looks which have been wasted by years of longing for her husband. Parker identifies, in each case, the ravages of time and shock to the hero's memory. Consequently, this section would encourage any A level student to think more deeply beyond the superficial purpose of survival behind Odysseus' disguise in these books.

To any A level student studying the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Classical Civilisation, the book provides a clear introduction and the 'key word' sections are especially illuminating about the heroic code, with appropriate examples to highlight their meaning and profound discussion of where each belongs in the 'epic layers.' The summaries could be set as preparatory reading in homework before studying each book in class, much more effective than internet summaries available.

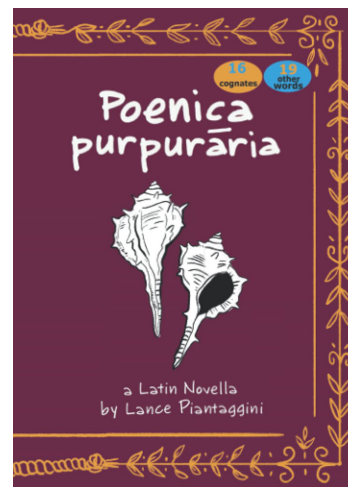
doi: 10.1017/S2058631022000216

Poenica purpuraria. A Latin Novella

Piantaggini (L.) Pp. 76, Poetulus Publishing (Independent), 2020. Paper, US\$7. ISBN: 9798686005020

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When was the last time you read a new Latin text without a dictionary to hand? There are many new Latin texts published over the past five years which have not been reviewed in this journal. These are in the new genre of Latin 'novellas' which are aimed at those who are in the earlier stages of Latin. Over 100 have been self-published, and more are coming out every month. They are little known in the UK – as far as I can see only two have been reviewed in *JCT*. They are a manifestation of the

transformation of Latin teaching in some schools in the USA. The driving force behind them is the theory of Comprehensible Input – the belief that a person's acquisition of a language is improved by reading (or hearing) large quantities of text for comprehension at a level that is not much beyond their current level. For a fuller survey, see Hunt (2022)¹.

Piantaggini is a leading exponent of this approach, and he has himself written and self-published 19 novellas so far. He has extensive experience of teaching first year Latin in a USA High School (equivalent to UK Year 10) to the full ability range and he

¹Hunt, S. (2022). *Novellas and Free Voluntary Reading: an overview and some starting points for further research into practice*, Journal of Classics Teaching, 27 May 2022, pp. 1-8.

has thought extensively about new approaches to make Latin fully inclusive (see his blog at <https://magisterp.com> and 'Input-Based Activities' in *JCT* Spring issue of 2019).

In looking at P's *Poenica purpuraria*, we need to take into account what level he is writing for, and the fact that he decides to shield (i.e. limit) vocabulary but not grammar. But more than anything, we need to consider whether the content is 'compelling', that is appeals to his target audience so they want to continue reading.

The story centres on an independent, single woman called *Poenica*. She runs a purple-dyeing business and despite being blind is also a skilled tightrope walker. In the novella, she has four customers, all having their own special dyeing requirements. The last customer is a gladiator – who brings an unexpected twist to the story.

The story, some 1,600 words in length, aimed at early beginners, is told using 16 cognates (Latin words with identical meaning to the English word) and 19 other Latin words. It uses line drawings liberally to help establish and remind the reader of meaning. There is a complete list of vocabulary at the back, which includes each inflected form. The typeface is large, with each clause starting on a new line. The text is divided into 11 chapters so the episodes are clearly delineated.

Given these severe constraints, can P. tell a good story? P. shows some skill in developing the storyline using such limited vocabulary. The succession of customers means that there is scope for repetition in each initial encounter. Some of the quirks of characterisation are of the kind that will appeal to the average 15 year old. I can imagine ideas of this kind arising in some of P's classes but it would not work in every class. There is some charm in the detail and ingenuity in giving shape to the simple narrative.

How does he achieve comprehensibility for his inexperienced readers? While he does not shelter grammar, he does provide a translation in a footnote where the meaning would not otherwise be immediately apparent. The vocabulary is very limited and repeated a great deal, which helps make new words stick so they do not need to be formally memorised. The clauses are all very short – few have more than five words – and the longer sentences (which are relatively rare) are coordinated rather than subordinated.

The novella is at the opposite end of the spectrum from most textbooks which use a very wide range of vocabulary to bring interest to the narrative. The repetition may grate to some readers and the style of Latin may be a barrier for many teachers. The words are not infrequently arranged in a subject-verb-object word order which some may consider to be a useful compromise in the initial stages of learning the language. Some of the expressions are more rooted in modern speech than in idiomatic Latin, and some of the cognates do not read well: and the repetition makes this more noticeable to a reader more attuned to a classical Latin style. This may not be noticed by students if they are focused on the characterisation of *Poenica* and her customers, but some teachers may be concerned by exposing students to non-standard Latin at an early stage. They may agree with Erasmus in his *de copia verborum ac rerum*: 'Itaque plurimum errant qui nihil arbitrantur interesse, quibus verbis quae res efferatur, modo utcunque possit intelligi'. (Those who think it makes no difference with what words a matter is expressed, provided that it can be understood in some way or other, make a very big mistake.)

Could this novella be used in the UK? Most schools have nothing like the timetabled time of USA high schools, and so it might seem out of the question. However, reading at a more normal speed without having to translate everything can be a liberating experience and encourage students. It may certainly be worth

trying novellas as an additional resource for a student who routinely finishes work quickly as something that can be read independently, or at the end of the year after internal exams. However, I suspect that most teachers in the UK would want to look at a level which was above this novella.

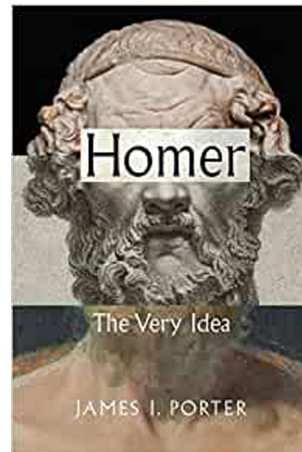
doi: 10.1017/S2058631022000332

Homer: the Very Idea

Porter (J.I.) pp. xiv+277, ill. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021. Cased, US\$27.50. ISBN: 978-0-226-67589-3

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This book does not try to solve the 'Homeric question' of who Homer was and when (and how) he/she/they composed, although it does discuss the issues raised. Nor is it a book of literary criticism or a simple analysis of the poems' reception. What Porter offers us instead is a 'cultural history ... of an idea', in which Homer is 'a peculiar cipher'.

Homer comes out of nowhere and for these poems to exist with no information as to their provenance is partly what makes them so fascinating. In chapter two (Who was Homer?) Porter

examines the 'biofeedback' of visualisations of Homer both in the ancient world and more recently in the painting *L'Apothéose d'Homère* (1827) by Ingres. From the earliest times potential biographers were happy to 'enter into a literary Wild West' (p.65) as people speculated on his real name, his life story and his character. Ancient biographers had him falling in love with a woman called Penelope, advised by the Delphic oracle, mocked by clever children, and dying after falling in mud. Admirers speculated that his origins were divine, some detractors denied that he existed at all. The one thing they all agreed on was that they could not agree on anything about the source of this remarkable poetry. 'Homer was treated as both real and fictional at the same time' (p.71). He was everywhere and nowhere, looming large in Greek culture but disappearing like smoke when anyone tried to grab hold of him (to borrow an image from *Iliad* 23.100).

In chapter three (Apotheosis or Apostasy?) we see some damning appraisals. Xenophanes accused the poet of blasphemy, Heraclitus was said to recommend that Homer be beaten with a staff, while Plato wanted him thrown out of his republic for showing heroes behaving like emotional beings. Porter makes much of the story (known from the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* §18 and even found on a wall painting in Pompeii) about children mocking the