

fishermen's huts' (p. 87) and that it is the venue for 'aqua aerobics' (p. 90) led by Julius' old friend, Pliny the mouse. It is, of course, not fair to criticise this book for creating its own ancient world, but it does mean that it is not the place to turn for an accurate overview of Greek history or mythology. The book is clearly, however, based on a careful understanding of the ancient world, and one might learn about classical realities from some of the incidents narrated – for example the charming description of how to use an oil lamp (pp. 114-115). Additionally, after the story's conclusion, there is a section on Roman numerals, a glossary, and an explanation of the links between planetary names and Greek gods, as well as some details about Greek hoplites and vase-painting in pages encouraging art and craft work, which, while being presented in a similarly light-hearted way to the story, are certainly educational.

It is as a work of entertaining fiction that this book is most successful. It is intended (according to the publisher's website) for ages seven and above, and children will surely enjoy the animal characters and their escapades. They and older readers may also enjoy seeing how the author has skilfully adapted well-known Greek myths to create his story. There are also moments that seem designed to appeal to adult readers, for example Julius' comment 'We're going to need a bigger army' – presumably adapted from the well-known line from *Jaws* – on first seeing the Minotaur. The story is engagingly told by a mixture of printed text and cartoons containing dialogue in speech bubbles; every page of the story includes at least one cartoon, and occasionally one occupies a whole double-page spread. The language in which the story is told is lively and child-oriented, with frequent use of capitalisation for emphasis – as shown, for example, by this description of the Labyrinth (p. 109): "PEEYOOO!" he cried, desperately trying to catch his breath. "This place flippin' STINKS!" Parents might not be thrilled if their children learn terms such as 'FLIPPIN' 'ECK!' (p. 71) or 'cocky' (p. 307) from this book, but generally the tone seems right for children, even if the decision constantly to refer to skeletons as 'skellybobs' (p. 264 and elsewhere) might bemuse older readers.

There appear to be very few mistakes in the book; unfortunately, those which exist come from the factual pages that follow the story. There the name of Zeus' father is given once as 'Chronos' (p. 306) and once, as one would expect, as 'Cronus' (p. 311), Homer is misleadingly stated to be a 'writer' (p. 308), 'Hephaistos' seems oddly transliterated (p. 308), and the comments 'You will never find more than three Roman numerals in a row' and '4 is not IIII' (p. 305) are potentially confusing, with the second overlooking the fact that four can sometimes be written in this way.

An epilogue to the story suggests that there may be more adventures in store for Julius Zebra – which would be no bad thing on the evidence of this book. Whilst the antiquity it presents feels like a compilation of elements from across the Greco-Roman world, this book deserves praise for bringing the ancient past so entertainingly to life for young readers, whom one hopes it will excite to find out more about ancient Greece.

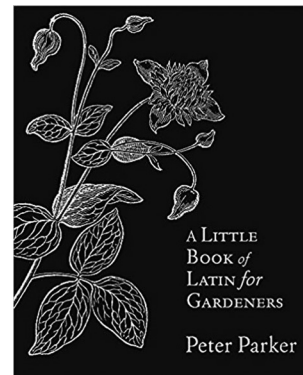
doi:10.1017/S2058631020000252

## A Little Latin Book for Gardeners

Parker, P. Pp.322. Little, Brown. Hardback, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-4087-0616-9

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A brief look at the first few pages of this guide to the nomenclature of horticulture will be enough to convince the reader of the author's zeal and his appetite for research. For classicists perhaps, the most interesting feature is his account of the major players in the history of plant classification.

Most readers of this journal, for example, will know of the Athenian writer Theophrastus from his 'Characters', first popularised in English when included by Penguin with Vellacott's translations of Menander. But Theophrastus also counts as the first classifier of plants, and it is through/from him that we get the names pelargonium, geranium, anemone, peony and antirrhinum, among others.

Then much later we learn of John Ray, apparently self-taught as a botanist, whose *Historia Plantarum* (1686-1704) runs to over 2000 pages in three large volumes. He it was who placed some 6000 plants into 125 families and laid the foundations of modern nomenclature.

It was entirely natural, within Europe at least, for Latin to reign supreme as the language of plant classification. It simply remained for the astoundingly industrious Swede, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) to make his indelible mark on the history of botany via his *Systema Natura* – already in its 10<sup>th</sup> edition when the author was 51. His binomial system, as Parker is quick to point out, has proved both invaluable and enduring, neatly reducing the name of the Hoary Plantain (for instance) from *Plantago foliis ovato-lanceolatis pubescentibus, spica cylindricali, scapo tereti* – 'plantain with downy narrow oval leaves tapering to a point at each end, a cylindrical head and a smooth stem' – to the succinct *Plantago media* – 'intermediate plantain'.

With its relentless torrent of information and anecdote, allied with many comprehensive word lists, this book is really for the enthusiast, nay fanatic. It is no doubt instructive to learn, for example, that the adjective *alpinus* indicates 'above the tree-line' whereas *alpestris* indicates below it. But which general reader, even one with a penchant for making their back garden into a mini-Paradise, really needs the exhaustive story of the naming of the flowering quince that fills page 91?

doi:10.1017/S2058631020000264