
Minkova, Milena and Terence Tunberg. *Mater Anserina*.

Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2007. ISBN: 978-1-58510-193-1. Includes a CD-ROM with performances by William du Casse, Milena Minkova, and Terence Tunberg.

Mater Anserina reaches out to learners of all ages. The text comes in a convenient 62-page hardcover edition that includes a useful table of contents and consists of twenty-eight popular nursery rhymes, each presented in English and Latin translation. Of the twenty-eight rhymes, twenty-three are well-known favorites such as *Hey, diddle, diddle* and *Jack and Jill*.

The Preface explains that many of these songs and rhymes have been around since the eighteenth century: “When several printed collections were published” (1). The authors explain, furthermore, that both American and British selections are included.

A further historical note is included in the preface touching on the contrast between the classical quantity (long vowel/short vowel system) and medieval

accentual verse. The former is known primarily to the Latin and Greek students of the world. The latter, by contrast, is very familiar to the modern world and is a reason those who have had the good fortune of learning medieval Latin feel a joyful affinity with this time period. Jovial Christians of the Middle Ages, in most cases, speak to us today with their simple and down-to-earth humor.

Of equal historical interest to the uninitiated is the fact that “this accentual and rhyming medieval Latin poetry was used for themes ranging from the light-hearted and jocular to the sacred” (1).

Two sources offering expertise on accentual Latin versification are mentioned: Charles Beeson’s *A Primer of Medieval Latin* (originally published in 1926) and Dag Norberg’s *An Introduction to the Study of Medieval Latin*, a contemporary work in translation from 2004.

The medieval technique, based on word accents and rhyme, is the format for this text. Classical lyric poetry relied on the alternation of long and short vowels, by way of contrast. The rhyming technique is the friendlier choice, actually. The more familiar is more appealing to the general public. The classical model of short and long syllables would unnecessarily limit the audience to those with a fourth- and fifth-year (Virgil, Catullus, and Horace) high school preparation.

A five-point explanation of the accentual model chosen wraps up the concise and informative preface. In a footnote, Minkova and Tunberg take credit for the respective poems each composed. In reference to their collaboration, they mention how “both benefited...from their continuous mutual advice and support” (2).

Ten of the twenty-eight selections are illustrated with color prints and capture perfectly the main subject of each rhyme. For example, on page 11 one finds the picture of *Little Miss Muffett* eating her curds and whey. The spider is lurking nearby. Jack and Jill, interestingly, have been turned into *Iuliana and Ioanna*, two little girls who, on page 21, look all undone in the aftermath of their tumble down the hill, the pail overturned, the water spilling out.

Anyone with any background in Latin, say, at least two years of high school study, will be curious to know how the titles of the nursery rhymes translate into Latin. All rhymes named after the principal subject, such as *Little Bo Peep* and *Humpty Dumpty*, are rendered in Latin with the prepositional phrase *de* plus the ablative of name: e.g., *De Humphrido Dumphrido* and *De garrula parvula*. That a Bo Peep can be rendered into a Latin proper noun meaning “chattering” is instructive, assuming that this follows an etymology suggesting that Bo Peep was a chatterbox in the first place.

Even the *Itsy Bitsy Spider* becomes *De parva aranea textrice*. *Textrice* actually means “weaver” and was chosen as a figurative name for the spider, as the footnotes generously reveal. Therefore, that makes the two-ending consonant stem third declension feminine a poetic license type of lexical choice.

In *De parva aranea textrice*, the preponderance of alliteration with harsh sounding *p* and hard *c* sounds suggests the disgust that we humans feel for this poor spider. The frequent hissing *s* sounds onomatopoeically associate in our subconscious with a snake, the reptile we most despise. *Parva...pluvia...parvula*

(little...rain...bitsy) appear together with (*Ecce...tunc...siccavit*) (Look!... then...dried out).

De parva aranea textrice (15) also illustrates the authors' stated intention of holding to the original syllabification when possible. *Itsy bitsy spider* in six syllables is matched with *Ecce textrice parva*, also in six syllables. "Down came the rain" in four syllables is rendered in four Latin syllables as *pluvia tunc*. Diminutives like *parvula* from *parva* add a special Latin flavor to the song, appealing to the child, large or small, fortunate enough to hear, read, and sing these songs in Latin. "Down came the rain" contrasting with the Latin *pluvia tunc* (literally "rain then") shows the economy of the Latin, which seems to suggest more with fewer words. The more cerebral and terse classical grammar system of Latin displayed here shows a major reason why Latin became the language of scholarship, learning, science, and diplomacy throughout the Middle Ages. In Latin one can say a lot in fewer words. Pitch the Augustan poet Horace, master of terseness, versus Victorian Edgar Allen Poe, master of profuseness, in a tag team match of wit and power of suggestion. Thus you have the Latin version versus the English original for a comparison.

Rendering *Here we go round the mulberry bush* into *Circa morum illam* must have been a tedious joy, a *festina lente* (make haste slowly) exercise. This rhyme has always seemed to be long-winded and wordy — exactly what the doctor ordered for a loquacious Lucy like Little Bo Peep, Minkova and Tunberg's *Garrula Parva*.

Splende, splende, stellula shows the imperative of the verb *splendere* (to shine) which clarifies the English *Twinkle, twinkle*, which has always looked more like an adjective. The reduplication in *stellula* (from *stella*) shows the diminutive in action — a one-word modification of the original in Latin, where English requires two words ("little star").

In *Circa morum illam* (*Here we go round the mulberry bush*), the authors utilize the Passive Periphrastic, which literally translates "ought to be done." In English, the phrasing appears as the simpler declarative: "this is the way we wash...this is the way we iron." The Latin version, rendering the idea of necessity (something that ought to be done), is both instructive and economic in light of the rhyme schemes. For example: *ferro premenda lintea sunt* (with an iron they need to be ironed). So it becomes: *vestes lavandae* (clothes to be washed); *lintea premenda* (linens to be pressed); *solum purgandum* (floor to be swept); *panes coquendi* (breads to be baked).

De Iuliana et de Ioanna (*Jack and Jill*) turns the tables on the original rhyme. Instead of beginning with "Jack and Jill," the Latin version begins with "were climbing up" (in the imperfect tense) followed by the subject. The variation facilitates the rhyme scheme (*tumululum scandebant tum Ioannes, Iuliana*) and changes the tone of the poem a bit. The emphasis is more on the climbing (offset later by the falling which makes "climbing" a type of foreshadowing) than on the characters. This rhyme is also about two girls, not a boy and a girl. A little poetic license is allowable, surely.

Circa montem ducetur (*She'll be coming round the mountain*) takes three themes and runs with them, just like the six white horses driving the coach. The themes in English are: coming around the mountain, driving six white horses, and we'll all go out to greet her. The Latin counters with: *circa montem mox ducetu, albis equis sex vebetur* (the passive voice of the verb “to carry” with an ablative of agent for the horses), and, finally, *tunc a nobis salutetur* (same pattern of passive of the verb “to greet” with the ablative of agent *a nobis*, “by us”). In the sense of taking a few simple ideas and then driving them home with a rhyme scheme and catchy tune, how is this classic rhyme not unlike a modern pop song?

Unde pueruli et puellulae facti? (*What are little boys made of... What are little girls made of*) shows the economy of thought of Latin once again where “made of” can be rendered by a perfect passive participle, leaving out the “sunt” form of the verb “to be.” *Unde* is a powerful descriptive word also meaning “from where.” Since *unde* appears as the first word for both verses you might say *unde* is just as much the main idea here as the “little boys” and “little girls” spoken of.

The CD that accompanies the hardcover book contains all of the book entries, some of them sung or chanted, as befits the particular rhyme. The voices are those of the two authors, Minkova and Tunberg, plus that of William du Casse, who capture admirably the poetry of the texts presented.

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Publisher's Response

This intelligent and insightful review reflects well the abilities of two of the brightest Latinists I know, Terry Tunberg and Milena Minkova. As a publisher, I was looking for material, especially in Orberg's *Lingua Latina* mode, that young children could (and would) use just to have fun with Latin and learn the language in a way that young learners do so well — by playing and memorizing.

Ron Pullins
Focus Publishing