

Author's Insights on B-C's New Novella Series and the Role of Novellas in the Classroom

I feel incredibly fortunate to help kick off this new novella series by Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers. For so long, we Latin teachers have focused on the extant texts that we do have, and they have served us well. The advent of Latin novellas, which use limited vocabulary, has offered our students new opportunities to enjoy extended, connected narratives. Moreover, these narratives have been used to transform our classroom spaces. They have added complexity to familiar narratives and have included voices and perspectives that have traditionally been marginalized or omitted.

By highlighting the multicultural nature of the ancient world and by lifting up the underrepresented voices, we allow our students more opportunities to see themselves in the past. As Rudine Sims Bishop wrote, literature can act as a door, a window, or a mirror. We can invite students to not just look into the past but to imagine themselves there. The ancient Mediterranean can act as a powerful laboratory, in which students can test hypotheses about the world or try on identities, due to the distance provided, and they can do so without the potential risks involved in trying these out by directly reflecting on current societies. Yet, being able to have narratives that act as a mirror and being able to see themselves in that world make it even easier to relate to a world that has grown ever farther from our students.

When I first began writing, because I did not have students of my own yet, I thought of the middle school students at Moultonborough Academy. Their teacher, Matthew Katsenes, had been kind enough to let me drop in and guest-teach a few times, and so I had a very clear audience in mind and a very clear goal. My goal: I wanted to create compelling material, based around Roman history, which was a topic that, up to that point, had been largely left out of the Latin novella market. That had been an entry point into the ancient Mediterranean for me as a student, and I strongly believe that it can be so for others as well. With a topic and an audience in hand, my first novella, *Sacri Pulli: A Tale of War and Chickens*, was born, followed by a series of books involving animals narrating historical events.

While first motivated by the lack of historical topics, I also began to think more deeply about the figures and perspectives which had been marginalized or omitted from our telling of history in the Latin classroom. This novella series that Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers is publishing focuses on the oft-overlooked topic of augury. The first two books in the series look at a familiar father-son narrative but also complicate the notion that everyone in the Roman world believed *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* ("it is sweet and right to die for one's country"). The third and fourth novellas, meanwhile, give women a voice by looking at their role in the familiar story of Romulus and Remus, and at the power of Tanaquil as a king-maker. When we change and challenge the perspectives of familiar stories and expand our historical lessons and discussions to the broader world around the Mediterranean, our classroom discussions can become more rich and complex.

The ancient world was just as diverse and intersectional as ours today. By not just highlighting but focusing on the complex narratives of the past, we can make our study of the past not only more

representative of what was but also more representative of what *is*. Moreover, we can start to change the narrative of who is a Latin student. We can change who feels included and welcomed in our classrooms. We can change the direction of the field. Like many things, this difficult, but worthy work is our responsibility and it begins with teachers and with the narratives we choose to bring into our classrooms. Bolchazy-Carducci with their new novella series is providing us with even more comprehensible, compelling texts to expand the bounds of our classroom libraries and to engage in this worthwhile work.

Emily Vanderpool
Springfield Honors Academy
Springfield, IL

Some Questions from the Editor to the Author

DES: How did you become interested in the classics?

I was interested in the classics because I loved reading Harry Potter and had loved how rich that world was in large part because of the author J.K. Rowling's engagement with the ancient Greco-Roman world.

DES: Which of your many classics-connected accomplishments and honors especially please you? Why?

Earning the Distinguished Teaching Award from the University of Massachusetts Amherst for my work as a Latin instructor was particularly moving. It was student-nominated and student- and faculty-supported, so this recognition meant a great deal as an early career teacher.

DES: What special nugget of advice would you give to a high school student studying the classics?

Your voice matters: what you bring to the table and to the discipline is wholly unique and valuable as there is no one else who has brought your life experiences and perspective to look at these texts. So, don't be afraid to share your insights and perspective!

DES: What special nugget of advice would you give to a new teacher of the classics?

Students can really only begin to care about people who lived 2000+ years ago when they themselves feel cared about then and there in your classroom.