

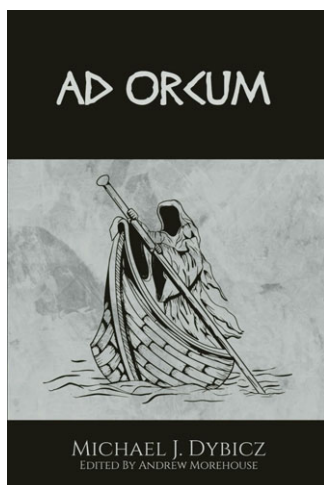
Book Review

Ad Orcum

Dybicz, M. and Ertl, N. Pp. 67, ills + map. *Domus Milvina*, 2023. Paper, £6.44. ISBN 979-8397268226

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Ad Orcum is another Latin novella from the US stable of *Domus Melvina*, self-published by Michael J. Dybicz, a US High School teacher of ten years or more.

It's based on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, which is originally encountered in Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The whole book is 64 pages long, of which 36 pages make up the adapted Latin story. The remaining pages are made up of two appendices: (A) the original Ovid text and (B) a note for teachers, which explains that the

adapted text is suitable for those pupils who are not absolute beginners and who may benefit from having read earlier novellas in Dybicz' sequence of readers. This includes a list of 15 common Latin verbs which pupils will have previously met repeatedly, in the present, imperfect and perfect tenses (these replicate verbs commonly used in *CLC* Book 1 and the first half of *Suburani* Book 1, with the addition of *possum*). Dybicz considers this novella to be at 'level B', perhaps (in my UK view) corresponding to the second half of a reading course text. At the back of the novella is a

lexicon of all the vocabulary found in the text, in all forms that they appear there, as is becoming standard practice for beginner Latin novellas.

The Latin text is in a large font and double spaced. There are three illustrations and one map. Pleasant though they are, these are what I would describe as illustrations *of* the text rather than illustrations *for* the text: in other words, they link to the story, but not in such a way that they make the story more comprehensible. It is also a pity that the illustrations stop after page 15. The Latin text itself is divided into several short chapters: *Matrimonium* (7 pages, including 1 map), *Orpheus Tristis* (6 pages, including 1 picture), *Orcus* (6 pages, including 1 picture), *Domus Plutonis* (6 pages), *Eurydice* (5 pages) and *Ad Vivos* (6 pages). Each chapter could be read with a class or by an individual in a single lesson quite easily, therefore, giving pupils a sense of achievement and satisfaction. There is additional vocabulary glossing in the margin, in the exact form that appears in the text.

The whole story is around 2,000 words long with 120 unique Latin words. This follows the principle that in order to develop a reading fluency, vocabulary needs to be repeated many times for acquisition ('flooding with vocabulary'). There are a number of more complex forms in the text that would not at this stage be familiar to the student – the subjunctive, some participles and infinitives etc. However, the reader does not need to concern themselves at this stage with these complexities, as the obvious meaning carries them over without much difficulty and all forms are glossed. A teacher who insisted on explaining or asking students to make declarative statements about these grammatical features would not be using the novella in the way that it is intended: progress would seize up and engagement falter.

I found some of the Latin to feel a little unnatural. However, the intended meaning was always clear and I imagine that a student, for whom it is meant, would be able to read along quite comfortably, but with enough challenge to make it worthwhile. The story itself has elements of humour and mild suspense – especially if you don't know the original! I am sure that it will easily find its place on the shelves of those teachers who are making use of the wide range of novellas today in the classroom.

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