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.

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Homer: the Very Idea

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

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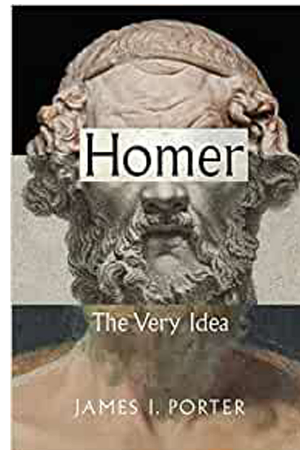

This book does not try to solve the 'Homeric question' of who Homer was and when (and how) he/she/they composed, although it does discuss the issues raised. Nor is it a book of literary criticism or a simple analysis of the poems' reception. What Porter offers us instead is a 'cultural history … of an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

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elderly Homer, and sees envy behind all the critique: 'Homer had undeniable cachet. But with cachet comes envy … and even hostility' (p.91). Homer also provoked competition and emulation: most obviously in Virgil, but also in writers such as Dictys and Dares under the Roman Empire who tried to discredit him with their own accounts of the Trojan War. Other Greek and Roman poets used Homeric tropes, paying him the compliment of assuming that their readers would recognise the references. Was Homer a divinely inspired and godlike figure or else a godless and highly flawed poet? The jury stayed out.

Chapter four (What did Homer see?) shows how Homer made Troy and Troy made Homer. The Trojan War was the 'ground-zero of recorded human history' (p.151), the last time when gods and men intermingled. It marked the end of the heroic age and the bridge between myth and history. The archaeology of Troy is neatly summarised (pp.152–4) and illustrated with a diagram, but then has its importance qualified: 'any or all of these phases before 700 BCE could have contributed to the image or memory of Troy in its former glory and later demise' (p.155). Troy vanished while the texts lived on, and Troy became a 'theme-park-*cum*-museum' as historians and archaeologists clambered over the sites and struggled to locate the poet's topography on Turkish soil, wanting proof that the poet was somehow an eyewitness.

The final chapter (Why war?) looks at the problematic violence in the *Iliad* and its 'PTSD offspring' the *Odyssey*. Is Homer condemning or celebrating brutality? The jingoistic reading of Homer as a naive philhellene celebrating the victory of the west over eastern barbarism is neatly smashed (p.180). What Homer loathes is not 'the east' but rather war itself. Can we justify the violence with the aesthetic pleasure of the poetry? Porter adduces two examples from the *Iliad* to illustrate Homer's 'self-resistant poetics of war': 3.371-2 where the lovely chinstrap is strangling Paris, and 9.186-9 where Achilles has a lovely lyre which was taken as spoils of brutal warfare. Is value found in 'deathless fame' or Vernant's 'beautiful death'? Sarpedon's death (16.638-44) is hardly beautiful and Achilles himself (9.308-429) takes down the 'everlasting fame' point in what Jasper Griffin once called 'the most splendid speech in Homer'. Porter takes us through several versions of the quest to justify the content from the form: Nietzsche showing the Apollonian gloss on Dionysian darkness, Simone Weil's essay on the centrality of force, and Auerbach's work on similes seeing the poems as unruffled surfaces which exist to divert the eye from the grim reality underneath. The book ends with a refusal to accept more modern 'reparative' readings in which the poetry conveys the pathos of vain human effort.

Porter's tone is strident in places and many of his assertions will provoke dispute, not least because many of his arguments need more development to carry conviction: this is especially so in his discussion of the philosophers (ancient and modern). There are also gaping holes in the texture: why does Porter barely mention Greek Tragedy, which made enormous (and challenging) use of Homeric material? Why does he not compare Homer with the many other cases where history becomes literature within a few generations? The book is inexpensive, well produced and proof-read, and has a useful timeline, a guide to further reading, a full bibliography and a general index. Quotations from Homer are given in Lattimore's translation and the style is brisk and energetic. Students (and teachers) will find much here to provoke thought and argument about the literary, cultural and moral issues which find expression and exploration via the pages of this most enigmatic of poets.

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Rome: An Empire of Many Nations: New Perspectives on Ethnic Diversity and Cultural Identity

Price (J. J.), Finkelberg (M.) and Shahar (Y.) (eds.)
Pp. xiv + 410, b/w & colour ills, colour maps.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
Cased, £90. ISBN: 9781-1108785563

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As the blurb of the book claims, scholarship about the Roman world has been moving away from a highly centralised discussion of the role of the emperor and the Eternal City, to a more holistic engagement with the provinces and the ideas around identity. The deep dive into the relationship between Rome and the Jewish people, their religion and culture that forms the third part of the book is a particular highlight. The exploration of the topic of Jewish identity through different periods within Roman history on a macro and micro level, and through different source material, is effective and captivating.

For teachers, chapters of this book are of particular usefulness when delivering content ahead of national exams in Key Stage 4 and 5. Finkelberg's chapter on the 'Roman Reception of the Trojan War' and Brelaz's chapter on 'Claiming Roman Origins: Greek Cities and the Roman Colonial Pattern' provided supplementary information and perspectives for some modules within the Latin and Classical Civilisation GCSEs and A Levels; however, they cannot be described as essential reading for those courses. Nonetheless, the book as a whole can provide teachers with excellent materials and topics for discussion to stretch students of all ages beyond what the curriculum can offer. The relevance to contemporary debates around identity in all its forms, including ethnicity, nationality, race, culture and religion, can be found throughout all of the contributions. This central theme gives the reader a strong sense of connectedness and continuity throughout the whole collection.

With students being more engaged with the broader movement around decolonisation and diversity within scholarship, in particular engaging with their subjects from different perspectives, this book presents them with the opportunity to do so effectively. While written in an academic register perhaps inaccessible to Key Stage 3 students, those interested in the Roman world, and looking

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