

Teaching Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* in an upper-level Latin class

When choosing Latin prose to teach, it is harder, at least for me, to find texts that involve women and gender issues in a significant way than when choosing Latin poetry. During the COVID-19 pandemic I started attending Zoom sessions of Lupercal's "Cozy in the Wolves' Cave," something that I likely would not have made time for in a busy schedule without the virtual format and without an added desire for collegial interaction to combat the isolation of pandemic times. In the "Cave," lives of women from Boccaccio's *About Famous Women / De Mulieribus Claris*, written in the 14th century CE, are read and discussed in Latin. This experience gave me exposure to the lives, which I knew little of before. In addition, it gave me repeated practice listening to Latin and discussing in Latin. I also had the opportunity to lead two sessions myself on Boccaccio's life of Medea, which ramped up my practice in and confidence in my speaking abilities, which lagged, as is natural from what we know of second language acquisition, behind my aural comprehension skills.

My presentation will discuss my choice to read selections from *DMC* with my Fall 2021 upper-level Latin class and to conduct part of each class in Latin. During my presentation I will share portions of Boccaccio's life of Medea in Latin to introduce it to those who may not be familiar with it and to show how it can be read as a meaningful late Latin reception. In addition, I will share some twentieth century reception of Medea from the performance arts that my students viewed in conjunction with their Latin reading about Medea. Finally, I will share my rationale for what we did in Latin rather than in English during class time.

It can be exciting, if challenging and a bit scary, to get out of one's comfort zone as a teacher. But frankly, without such challenges I would not enjoy being an academic. A desire to

read some prose that would better include some of my interests in and work on women in antiquity led me, because of the chance circumstances and virtual opportunities of the pandemic, to take on a text about which I knew little beforehand and to radically increase the amount of class time spent in the Latin language. One of the best things I was reminded of by the Lupercal sessions is that it is OK not to be perfect and know everything and that our roles of teachers and learners are intertwined and shifting. Without learning again, I would never have taken this on this new (for me) venture in teaching.