

Book Review

REVIEWED BY NATALI MILLER

*“Three blind mice, three blind mice,
See how they run, see how they run!
They all ran after the farmer’s wife;
She cut off their tails with a carving knife;
Did you ever see such a sight in your life
as three blind mice?”*

We all know how this nursery rhyme goes, but not many of us may have thought about what it would look like in Latin. Dr. David Noe of Patrick Henry College has recently taken this familiar ditty and expanded it into a Latin story for young readers. As Latin has made a significant comeback, there has been a corresponding increased interest in Latin materials for children. Translators have taken favorites from *Winnie the Pooh* to *The Cat in the Hat* to (more recently) *Harry Potter* and rendered them into Latin. While these texts have been a welcome addition to many a classroom, they are perhaps a bit too advanced in grammar or too abundant in unfamiliar vocabulary for some students. Noe has sought to craft a story accessible to a younger or less advanced crowd, by using a more limited vocabulary and by incorporating more advanced syntactical structures when the context of the story can help clarify them.

Noe has altered the somewhat gruesome original to add a moral to the story. The three mice, named Infelix (“Unlucky”), Miser (“Wretched”), and Contentus (“Happy”), live in the house of a very nice farmer and his very cruel wife. One day she comes after them with her knife (the story does not specify whether her attack is unprovoked or not, while the original nursery rhyme indicates that they chased her first). Infelix and Miser quickly succumb to despair and give up, and she euphemistically “tickles” their tails with her knife. However, Contentus is not to be found, for the resourceful mouse has run into the nice farmer’s hand for safety.

Teaching Latin always involves deductive and inductive elements, and a language cannot be taught without a healthy mix of both. One inductive tool the teacher can use is to have students read something they are familiar with or can easily predict what will happen. This provides the teacher with an opportunity to teach grammar in context, e.g. if stu-

dents memorize the Lord’s Prayer in Latin, they already know what the English says, and can thus more easily see the relation of the Latin structures and words to the English ones. In his version of “Three Blind Mice,” Noe is doing this very thing: starting with something familiar so that the unfamiliar Latin is not overwhelmingly so. He has incorporated nouns and adjectives from

Tres Mures Caeci

by David Noe

Patrick Henry College Press, 2005, 48 pages, \$12

three declensions, several tenses, the verb of being (once it is even implied—good practice for students who will one day translate “real” Latin), and several more advanced grammatical structures.* Many of these are on the more complicated side of Latin grammar, but are not “scary” because the flow of the story—and the illustrations as well—help the reader out. However, should the young reader be stymied, Noe has included a full translation in the back in addition to the complete glossary. Another nice touch is that even the page numbers are Roman numerals, introducing young Latinists to counting Roman style.

Parents or teachers of young children seeking to supplement their beginning Latin curriculum with a fun and accurate story can now add *Tres Mures Caeci* to their list of sources. It is fairly but not overly simple, and will expose students to new words and grammatical structures while they read about the farmer’s wife, the farmer, and the three mice.

*These include a potential subjunctive and a subjunctive in a cum clause, a passive periphrastic with dative of agent, a compound verb taking the dative, a relative clause, and indirect statement. He also introduces the superlative and the participle, although both are glossed in the back.

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Miss Miller toured Italy with the Vergilian Society in 2000, and studied the Italian tongue at the Università per Stranieri in Perugia, Italy, in the summer of 2001. She has since made traveling across the Great Pond to sites cultural, historical, and linguistic something of an annual habit.

In addition to her work at New Saint Andrews, she taught Greek and Latin at Logos School, Moscow. She is the author of Pattern of Courtship (Canon Press, 1997).