

26. LATIN PLAY

for

PEPPARD PRIMARY

LINGUA BARBARA

English for Roman Citizens

A SKETCH IN 4 SCENES (20 MINUTES)

by

Oliverus assisted by Valeria and Johanna

By kind permission of Barbara Bell, author of the 'Minimus' Latin Course
who also corrected the script

Dramatis Personae

Rufus, Commandant of the camp

Flora, Commandant's Wife, a native princess

Phoebea, Flora's slave

Corinthus, Teacher of English

Britannicus, British slave

Roman soldiers: Sergeant Aureus

Carolus

Imogenus

Briareus

Alexander (secretly in love with Phoebea)

Florellus

Marcus

Corinthus' dream

Narrator

Odysseus

Sailors

Sirens

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SYNOPSIS

The date is 135AD. Rufus, commander of a Roman Garrison, is worried that the camp's native slaves pretend to be loyal but tell the native chieftains too much about his movements. He discusses it with his wife who is a British princess and they decide that it is time to teach the Legion English. He sends for Corinthus, an Athenian from Greece, who speaks English, though actually very badly and tells him to start an English class.

Corinthus hates English which he thinks is uncouth and his pupils are of much the same mind when they begin to discover that unlike their own logical language, English grammar is full of irregularities.

They are only too delighted when there is an alarm in the camp and they grab their spears and their shields and go off to fight a major battle at their very gates. Corinthus cowers behind, hearing the clash of swords and the thunder of the cavalry as the Romans gradually succeed in beating off the enemy. As the sounds of battle fall away, Corinthus falls into a deep sleep and dreams of Homer's story of Odysseus and the sirens, telling his fellow slave Britannicus about it.

Next day, a little the worse for wear, the soldiers return to the classroom. They have beaten the natives, but they have also gained respect for their erstwhile foes. Flora recommends that Corinthus should be replaced by a real English speaker, Britannicus, who though no scholar is an enthusiastic singer and noble precursor of the best of Britain.

Under his leadership the soldiers decide that English, despite all its eccentricities, is well worth learning. They study hard and learn a lot and decide to give the rest of the camp a concert with a rendering of an English version of '*senex Flavius habuit fundum*'.

The audience are invited to start things off in Latin. This turns out not to be too successful, until they discover that the song is Old MacDonald and the concert warms up.

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Scene I. *In front of Curtain*

Rufus is discussing plans with wife, Flora a British princess, attended by Phoebea

Rufus quid facimus?

Flora necesse est militibus linguam anglicam discere. It is necessary to teach English to the soldiers.

Rufus quis potest?

Flora Who can do it? Why, Corinthus, your slave. He is Greek and a teacher.

Rufus huc Corinthe, veni! *Corinthus runs in.*

Corinthus salvete nobiles

Flora *Do you speak English?*

Corinthus (*Appalling accent*) Spik Anglis? Ov corse. Me spik optimum Anglis!!

Flora necesse est militibus linguam anglicam discere. You must teach the soldiers English.

Corinthus libenter, domina

Corinthus (*Aside*) lingua horribilis. lingua absurda. lingua anglica mihi non placet.

Scene II *A class-room in the camp. Roman soldiers are learning English*

Corinthus salvete, omnes!

Class salve, magister Corinthe
(Corinthus conducts)
Good morning Mr Corinthus

Corinthus Gooda morning, efrystone
hodie linguam anglicam discimus. To-day ve learn English

Class Too-deay ve lern Anglis

Corinthus hodie verbum 'esse' discimus. To-day ve learn ze verba to be

Aureus sum. I is

Carolus es You am

Marcus est He are

Briareus sumusWe is

Florellus estis Ye is

Imogenus sunt They am

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Aureus grammatica absurda est
Carolus lingua ridicula est
Corinthus non, non, minime vero. No, no, not at all. falsus, falsus. False false. omnia falsa.
Everythinga wronga. But you are righta. Anglica absurda est. lingua ridicula est.
Mihi non placet.

Enter Rufus and Flora with Imogenia.

Flora, graciously Good morning everybody. How are your English lessons?
Class (in unison) Anglica absurda est. grammatica ridicula est.
Corinthus (accent as bad as ever) The soldiers are righta. The grammar has no logica.
The wordes are deefficult. The spelling ees impossible. We should
teach the natives Latin.
Rufus non possumus. We cannot.
Flora They are too stupid, especially round Peppard. But be careful. We
hear that the natives are planning an attack.
Rufus si tubam auditis, arma sumite!
Flora. If you hear the trumpet, take up your arms.

*They leave, but Alexander catches Phoebea by the sleeve and they have a
whispered conversation.*

Alexander To-day night? vesperi
Phoebea (hesitantly) Yes. No. Yes. But it's dangerous
Alexander (urgently) Where? ubi?
Phoebea Post balineas. Behind the bath-house. Vale
Alexander Vale, mea cara

Blows a kiss.

Flora comes back and grabs Phoebea crossly

Meanwhile Corinthus has been writing on the blackboard

Corinthus nunc pluralibus studemus

Points to board : son – ox – man – child – wife – sheep – mouse – house --

Carolus	Son	Sonses
Marcus	Ox	Oxes
Florellus	Man	Manses
Carolus	Child	Childses
Briareus	Wife	Wifeses
Alexander	Sheep	Sheepses

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Imogenus	Mouse	Mouses
Aureus	House	Hice

Corinthus *storms*. falsi, falsi. omnia falsa. omnes horrendi. You are all stupid, hopeless
Peppardians

Florellus, *quietly*. stupidi non sumus. lingua stupida est. We are not stupid. The language is
stupid

Sound of an alarm. Trumpet: Ti-tum ti tum, Ti-tum ti tum

Sergeant Aureus jumps up

Aureus *urgently*. cavete omnes! barbari oppugnunt. arma sumite

Corinthus. Looka outa everyone. The barbarians are attacking. Take uppa your arms

Corinthus *hides, terrified, under the table. The soldiers rush out grabbing their arms. The curtains slowly close to a great noise of clashing arms, drums, cymbals and in the distance trumpets.*

Scene 3

The curtain reopens with Corinthus still there but in a deep sleep and snoring

Enter Narrator

Narrator. Corinthus is dreaming of Odysseus and of how he heard the sweet songs of the
sirens without crashing his ship against the sharp rocks

*Enter sailors and build the rocks. Enter sirens and drape themselves on the rocks, singing
sweetly*

Narrator Odysseus prepares his ship

Odysseus and the sailors prepare the ship, including the ship sides, oars and masts

Narrator Odysseus fills the sailors' ears with wax, then has the sailors tie him to the
mast, but his ears are not filled so that he can still hear the exquisite music

Odysseus applies the wax and is tied up, including a mouth gag

Narrator The sailors row past the rocks, but can neither see nor hear. Odysseus
struggles to free himself, yearning for the sirens.

Sweet music is heard, fading into the distance

Curtain

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Scene 4.

Next day, in the classroom. On the board is: enough-through-trough-bough-lough-though. The curtain rises on a sorry sight. The soldiers are all sitting quietly in the class-room but though they won, they have been badly mauled by the native tribesmen. One has a bloody bandage round his forehead, two have their arms in slings and one has crutches.

Corinthus, *trying not to gloat.* si mellius discitis, superabitis. Eef you learna better, you will winna.

Soldiers gnash their teeth. Enter Flavius and Flora with Phoebea.

Flavius fieri non potest. Corinthus irritus est.

Flora. Eheu! This won't do. Corinthus is useless. Lets get in Britannicus. Phoebea. Go and get Britannicus

Enter Britannicus in Scots trews. Full of zizz

Britannicus. Hi everyone. I'll teach you English, though Scots is better.

Corinthus Huh! Anglica non bona lingua est. litteras elegantes scribere numquam potest. numquam alter Homer. eheu!

Flora Never another Homer! Maybe. But great literature in English, for sure. Just you wait, Mr Corinthus

Britannicus Och Ay. The grammar's a bit sketchy and what there is, is weird, but it's a grand language for saying things.

Briareus (*arm in a sling*). scribere non possum. brachium meum fractum est

Britannicus. Let's have it in English

Carolus. He cannot write. He has broken his arm

Britannicus. If he can't write, perhaps he can sing. Let's have a sing song.

Do you know this one?

Sings 'senex Flavius habuit fundum' to the tune of Old MacDonald

Everyone euge!

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Britannicus Let's all sing it. Hey, you people out *there* (*waving to the audience*). You can sing it. But you can sing the Latin first and then we'll sing it in English. One-two.....

Aureus Careful! This lot are very thick. I don't think they can sing in any language.

Britannicus Where do they come from?

Sergeant Aureus. They are from Peppard

Britannicus eheu! What bad luck. Never mind, we up here will sing the first verse in English just to show them.

Everyone Old MacDonald had a farm E-I-E-I-O
And on that farm he had cow
With a 'Moo moo' here and a 'moo moo' there
Here a 'moo' there a 'moo'. Everywhere a 'moo moo'
Old MacDonald had a farm E-I-E-I-O

Britannicus Where on earth did the soldiers learn English? Since you're so good you can do it in Latin

Hand out Latin texts

senex Flavius habuit fundum E-U-E-U-GE
et in hic fundum habuit agnem E-U-E-U-GE
'baa baa' hic, 'baa baa' ibi
hic 'baa' ibi 'baa', ubique 'baa baa'
'moo moo' hic, 'moo moo' ibi
hic 'moo' ibi 'moo'. ubique 'moo moo'
senex Flavius habuit fundum E-U-E-U-GE

senex Flavius habuit fundum E-U-E-U-GE
et in hic fundum habuit canem E-U-E-U-GE
'bow wow' hic, 'bow wow' ibi
hic 'bow' ibi 'wow', ubique 'bow wow'
'baa baa' hic, 'baa baa' ibi
hic 'baa' ibi 'baa', ubique 'baa baa'
'moo moo' hic, 'moo moo' ibi
hic 'moo' ibi 'moo'. ubique 'moo moo'
senex Flavius habuit fundum E-U-E-U-GE

senex Flavius habuit fundum E-U-E-U-GE
et in hic fundum habuit piscem E-U-E-U-GE
'splish splosh' hic, 'splish splosh' ibi
hic 'splish', ibi 'splosh', ubique 'splish splosh'
'bow wow' hic, 'bow wow' ibi

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hic 'bow' ibi 'wow', ubique 'bow wow'
'baa baa' hic, 'baa baa' ibi
hic 'baa' ibi 'baa', ubique 'baa baa'
'moo moo' hic, 'moo moo' ibi
hic 'moo' ibi 'moo'. ubique 'moo moo'
senex Flavius habuit fundum E-U-E-U-GE

Finis – Curtain

Props

For classroom

For Corinthus' dream

Desks & Chairs for 6 pupils

Ship sides with eyes

Blackboard & chalk

Mast and rope

Table & Chair for Corinthus

Ear stops

4 spears

Stiff grey material to indicate jagged rocks

3 shields

over upturned chairs

Costumes

Rufus Tunic with Red cape

Sirens

Siren suits

Flora Tunic dress with shawl

Sailors

Blue shorts and blue trimmed

t-shirts

Phoebea Tunic dress

Odysseus

Lion-skin

Corinthus Tunic with Greek key border

Narrator

School uniform

Britannicus Tank top with tartan trews

Sgt Aureus Red tunic with helmet

Soldiers White tunics, red trim