

50 short poems by Martha Marchina

Translated into English & French, with notes

Preface

The following collection of poems corresponds to a selection proposed by Skye Alta Shirley, founder of *Lupercal*, to read: one poem each day, for 50 days, beginning November 8, 2020 through January 1, 2021, with a group of women composed of eager, passionate Latinists. This was the “Martha Marchina Challenge” in which we - Mercedes Barletta, Rachel Beth Cunning, Elspeth Currie, and Claire Mieher - are so grateful and happy to have participated.

The poems, all of which were composed in elegiac couplets (though Marchina did write poems in other meters), have been cited as found in the 1701 edition of the work titled *Musa Posthuma*, which, as its name suggests, was published after the death of its author. We do not know if she herself decided the order of her poems; the editor’s preface indicates that he (Macedo) provided the titles, which, in turn, often contribute to how the poems’ subjects, or how (particularly Biblical) quotes, are addressed or illustrated. In this edition, we indicated observations about spelling or punctuation in the footnotes, explaining in some cases what we would have done in a modern edition.

We have benefited greatly from discussions during the “challenge” with our community of fellow Latinists. Our translations have been carried out separately from our French translation team: this is why, in comparing the English and French-language versions of these 50 poems, you will perhaps find differences and even, at moments, different interpretations. Of course, the two versions reflect one another more often than not, as do our notes, which echo these rich group discussions.

The work of bringing Martha Marchina’s poems to a larger audience is only just beginning. We hope that, as we continue to read her work every day, as we have since November 2020, we will be able to contribute to others’ understanding of these poems. To that end, we will continue to translate more of Marchina’s poems into English and to provide resources which can be introduced into classes and curricula. For now, a fantastic teachers’ guide by Rachel Cunning can be found on her site, “Bombax press”, at this link: <https://bombaxpress.com/teachers-guide-to-martha-marchina-2/>. Additionally, to familiarize others with Marchina as a poet, several members of our reading group worked to create a Wikipedia article dedicated to *Musa Posthuma* which can be found here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martha_Marchinae_Virginis_Neapolitanae_Musa_Postuma

The poems in this work of translation have been organized by us according to the following themes:

- Martyrs and Saints
- The Virgin Mary
- Biblical Narratives and Spirituality
- Christmas and the Epiphany
- Places
- Call-Outs and Shout-Outs
- Words and Writing

