

## Dusting off the Classics: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Richard Sacks – Handout #2 (for class of 9/11/24)



Enrichment Program

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1

### A. Hamlet's intro to & his beginning of the Pyrrhus speech (2.2.404-11)

2.2.404 ... One speech in't I chiefly loved, 'twas **Aeneas'**  
2.2.405 **tale to Dido**, and thereabout of it especially where he speaks of  
2.2.406 **Priam's slaughter**. If it live in your memory, begin at this line, let  
2.2.407 me see, let me see –  
2.2.408 "The rugged **Pyrrhus**, like th'**Hyrceanian** beast' –  
2.2.409 'Tis not so; it begins with Pyrrhus –  
2.2.410 "The rugged **Pyrrhus**, he whose **sable** arms,  
2.2.411 **Black as his purpose**, did the night resemble...'

### B. The Player's continuation of the Pyrrhus speech (2.2.445-52)

2.2.445 '... So, after Pyrrhus' pause,  
2.2.446 A rousèd vengeance sets him new a-work,  
2.2.447 And never did the **Cyclops' hammers** fall  
2.2.448 On **Mars's armour**, forged for proof eterne,  
2.2.449 With less remorse than Pyrrhus' **bleeding** sword  
2.2.450 Now falls on Priam.  
2.2.451 Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods,  
2.2.452 In general synod take away her power...'



### B1. "Cyclops hammers fall[ing] / on Mars's armour"

The Cyclopes worked at the forge of the god Vulcan (Greek Hephaestus) who was married to Venus (Greek Aphrodite); she famously committed adultery with Mars (Greek Ares), half-brother of Vulcan (cf. the story of their adultery can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4.167ff.) as well as in Homer's *Odyssey* (8.266ff.)

### A1. "Aeneas' tale to Dido ... where he speaks of Priam's slaughter"

In both Virgil's *Aeneid* and Marlowe's (along with Nashe?) *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, we witness scenes in which **Aeneas tells Dido his version of the fall of Troy**, including his own escape thanks to his mother, the goddess Venus. The context is that Aeneas, having fled Troy, lands in Carthage where Dido is queen – **she had fled there after her brother murdered her husband**. When Aeneas lands there, Venus (worried about his safety) instructs her son (Amor/Cupid) to use his arrows to ensure that **Dido falls in love with Aeneas, the ultimate result of which is that she commits suicide** when Aeneas leaves her (via divine instructions) to continue his journey to reach and found Rome. Both versions of Aeneas' narration include **Pyrrhus (also called Neoptolmus and the son of Achilles) murdering old Priam, the King of Troy, to avenge his father's (Achilles') death** (caused by an arrow shot by Priam's son Paris).

### A2. 1573 translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (2.469-473), T. Phaër and T. Twyne (trns)

Before the porch all ramping first at th'entry dore doth stand  
Duke **Pyrrhus** in his **brasen harneis bright** with burnisht brand.  
And glistring like a serpent shines whom **poysonid wéedes** hath fild.  
**That lurking long hath vnder ground** in winter cold ben hild.

### A3. Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, 2,1,213-5

At last came **Pyrrhus**, fell and full of ire,  
His harness dropping blood, and on his spear  
The mangled head of Priam's youngest son...

### A4. Hyrcanian (2.2.408) in *Aeneid*: Dido to Aeneas as she curses him in 4.365-7

(this is Dryden's translation from later in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; the manuscript from which the online version of Phaër and Twyne's 16<sup>th</sup> century translation was scanned (at U-Michigan) is missing this page)

"False as thou art, and, more than false, forsworn!  
Not sprung from noble blood, nor goddess-born,  
But hewn from harden'd entrails of a rock!  
And **rough Hyrcanian tigers gave thee suck!**..."

### A5. "sable" (2.2.410) elsewhere in *Hamlet*

"sable" essentially refers to "blackness" – cf. *OED* and Schmidt's *Lexicon*

1.2.240-1: 'It [= the Ghost's beard] was as I have seen it in his life / A sable silvered'  
3,2,115-6: 'let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables'  
4.7.79-80: 'his sables and his weeds, / Importing health and graveness'

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2

### C. The Player's conclusion of the Pyrrhus speech (2.2.458-76)

*Hamlet*

2.2.458-9 Say on, come to **Hecuba**.

*1 Player*

2.2.460 'But who – ah woe! – had seen the **mobled** queen –'

*Hamlet*

2.2.461 The **mobled** queen?

*Polonius*

2.2.462 That's good, '**mobled**' queen' is good.

*1 Player*

2.2.463 'Run barefoot up and down, threat'ning the flames

2.2.464 With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head

2.2.465 Where late the diadem stood, and, for a robe,

2.2.466 About her lank and all o'erteemèd loins,

2.2.467 A blanket, in th'alarm of fear caught up –

2.2.468 Who this had seen, **with tongue in venom steeped**

2.2.469 'Gainst Fortune's state would treason have pronounced.

2.2.470 But if the gods themselves did see her then,

2.2.471 When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport

2.2.472 In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,

2.2.473 The instant burst of **clamour** that she made,

2.2.474 Unless things mortal move them not at all,

2.2.475 Would have made **milch** the burning eyes of heaven,

2.2.476 And passion in the gods.'

*for 2.2.462, Q2 has only "That's good."*

### C1. "Hecuba" (2.2.458) – also 3x at 2.2.510-11)

Priam's wife who witnesses his slaughter by Pyrrhus in both Virgil's *Aeneid* and Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. Note also a passage in Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (circa 1594) in which the poem's tragic heroine Lucrece, in her agonies, stares at a tapestry telling the story of the fall of Troy in general, and **she pauses especially on the suffering of the "despairing Hecuba"** (Luc.1443-9):

1443 To this well-painted piece is Lucrece come,

1444 To find a **face where all distress is stell'd**.

1445 Many she sees where cares have carvèd some,

**1446 But none where all distress and dolour dwell'd,**

1447 **Till she despairing Hecuba beheld,**

1448 Staring on Priam's wounds with her old eyes,

1449 Which **bleeding under Pyrrhus' proud foot** lies.

### C2. "mobled" (2x or 3x in 2.2.460-2)

See Hirschfeld's gloss of "muffled" (in some kind of, perhaps, elegant clothing) which is what it seems to mean from later attestations, but Shakespeare's is the first. Note that here the description of Hecuba poignantly and ironically emphasizes her being anything but well dressed and covered, much less "muffled" in her "clamour" (2.2.473).

I would suggest a simultaneous play on "mo'bled", that is "more bled" – cf. in the Pyrrhus speech e.g. 2.2.415-16 "Now is he [=Pyrrhus] **total gules** ['the heraldic name for red' as Hirschfeld puts it, despite the blackness of Pyrrhus], horridly tricked / **with blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons...**" and 2.2.449 "**With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword...**" Or later in 3.4, first with Hamlet lecturing his mother at 3.4.68-9 "at your age / **The heyday in the blood is tame**" or pleading with her at 3.4.126-9 "Do not look upon me, / Lest with this piteous action you convert / My stern effects. **Then what I have to do / Will want true color: tears perchance for blood.**"

### C3. "milch" (2.2.475) – from the OED:

*(etymologically likely from the same root as "milk")*

1. Of an animal, originally and usually a domestic animal.
2. Of a woman: lactating; frequently in milch nurse, milch woman, a wet nurse. Also of the breasts or teats: giving milk. Cf. A4 above on **Hyrceanian** in the *Aeneid*.
4. figurative. Fertile; providing abundantly, nourishing.

Note the "milk" root earlier in the Pyrrhus speech (2.2.443-7): "for lo, his sword, / Which was declining on the **milky** head / Of reverend Priam, seemed i'th'air to stick..."