



AP Latin Vergil 2000 Student Samples

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In book 2 of the Aeneid, Dido, Queen of Carthage, holds a great feast, in which she implores Aeneas, this wanderer but stranger who has come to her kingdom, to tell his tale of misfortunes. During the feast, Aeneas relates the fall of Troy. In this passage, through the words of our hero, Aeneas, Vergil shows Priam and Hector in the final moments before the invasion of their home.

The passage begins "forsitan et Priami fuerit quae fata regium" - And you may inquire, perhaps, what was the fate of Priam. Immediately, Vergil interests the reader, and begins to build drama as the action unfolds. In lines 2 & 3, Vergil evokes our sympathy for Priam and his kingdom. "Urbes uti captae casum... vidit" As he watches his captured city fall, "... penetralibus hostem." and the penetrating enemy. The reader feels Priam pain, and is of course, on his side, hoping, somehow, he will persevere. However, Vergil describes a weak man, trembling in his old age. "... senior... tremantibus." But Priam is proud, and will not go down without a fight. He girds himself, in vain, with his "weapons, for a long time unused" - line 4 "arma diu..." This may be implying that Priam has unfortunately been an ineffective ruler for the past ten years as the Trojan War has been waged, and that this is too little, too late. Nevertheless, Priam "bares for the enemy to die" in line 6 "... fertur moriturnus in hostes."

Next in the passage, Vergil presents Priam's wife, Hecuba, and their daughters. The scene is described: there is a great altar "ingens ara" (8) in the middle of the house "in mediis" (7) which is shaded by an ancient laurel tree "veterenna laurus incumbens arae atque umbra..." (8, 9). Vergil describes these characters, too, as weak and helpless, using a simile in line 11, "praecipites atrae ven tempestate columbae." Vergil compares Hecuba and her daughters as doves, blown down in a black thunder storm. Again, Vergil is drawing out our sympathy and compassion for these characters.

The passage concludes with a short speech from Hecuba to Priam in which she reveals her feelings concerning the fall of the city. Hecuba begins to speak in lines 13-14, when "Priamum iuvenalibus armis ut vidit," she sees Priam putting on his armor as a young man. She then speaks to him, asking what madness has taken hold of him, "Quae mens tam dira?" In line 16, she tells him "Non teli auxilio nec defensoribus istis tempus eget" It is not time for such help or defenses. Hecuba believes that the city is lost, and that nothing can be done, not even if her son, Hector was present (17). Finally, she begs him to join her at the altar, and she tells him "haec ara tunc bitur omnes, aut mori er simul" Either the altar will save all of us, or we will die together. Such Hecuba spoke.

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Her speech revealed Hector's deep-rooted religious faith and also her doubt and dislike for fighting. We see Priam as a weak, but proud man, and we know his attempts to fight will be in vain, but we still hope he can do the impossible. All of these emotions, Vergil skillfully plays upon in this passage from Book 2.

Vergil generates sympathy for the royal couple of Troy as their city falls both with his use of imagery, and his use of language.

Vergil shows us old Priam trying to gird his armor, which hasn't been used for a long time, in a final futile attempt to save his people. "*arma^{div} senior desueta trementibus aevo circumdat nequiquam umeris*"

The image of the pathetic old man brushing years of dust off his armor in order to defend his wife and children against an invading army generates sympathy in the audience by calling perhaps on an image of the reader's grandfather, brandishing a useless sword (*invenitur inutile ferrum cingitur*) and trying to fight a Herculean enemy, in vain.

Another pitiable image is that of Hecuba and her daughters (supposedly 100 of them) surrounding the sacred tree which serves as an altar to the household gods, ^{praying} ~~but in vain~~ in vain. "*Hic Hecuba et natae nequiquam altaria circum*" The image of women and children huddled together in fear is always a powerful one. Thus Vergil uses 'natae' to describe Hecuba's daughters, who probably are mostly grown to adulthood, considering Hecuba's age.

Finally, the image of Hecuba discouraging her husband from fighting is the ultimate gut-wrenching image. Here she tells him that not even if Hector himself were there could they be saved, and thus he should await death at the altar with her. When the defenseless old woman ~~has~~ has given up, all hope, there is nothing

the audience can do, save pity her and her husband and daughters as they wait around the family altar for death to knock down their door.

Vergil's choice of words throughout this passage is often just as powerful as his imagery. For example, he uses the word 'neququam' or 'in vain' twice within the passage. This word alone implies that there is no hope for any saving grace, nothing to be done. The first time he uses the word, it describes Priam girding his armor and preparing to fight; so immediately the audience knows that he is doomed. The second time, it follows directly Heleuba and her daughters, textually, so that without even knowing what they are doing, the audience knows there is no hope for them either.

Other examples of this powerful language include 'inutile' or 'useless' in regards to Priam's sword; 'miserrime' or 'most miserable' referring to Priam; and 'concede' or 'give up', which Heleuba directs her husband to do. The first follows suit with 'neququam', ~~no~~ drilling the fact that anything Priam does is for naught into the audience. The second word evokes pity by describing the great ruler of Troy as the most miserable soul. This contrast with the image of Priam most readers would like to remember, also helps evoke pity. The final word, 'concede' ~~concedere~~ is the word we least like to hear, especially coming from the Queen of Troy. We like to hear 'keep trying' or 'never give up', not 'concede', and

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so we automatically pity Priam, as he is being encouraged to do the one thing that no man ever wants to do, and that is, surrender.

Thus Priam and Hecuba's reactions to their final moments, as seen through Vergil's excellent use of imagery and language, evokes pity from the reader, for the ill-fated couple.

Vergil tends to appeal to his audience on emotional levels through his use of war descriptions. In this passage, the reader has the opportunity to see how devastating the anticipation of war really is. Hecuba & Priam are a loving couple that do not wish to be separated, but they are required to leave one another by fate (*fata requiras*). Priam, although not a young warrior, has such devotion to his people & home that he is willing to prepare himself for combat (*circumdata nequiquam umeris et inutile ferrum cingitur*). The reader pities Priam & his futile efforts. At the same time that Priam is girding himself for battle, Hecuba is recovering the penates & pleading for help (*sedebant amplexae divum simulacra*). It is somewhat ironic because Hecuba is not willing to give up prayer, but she has essentially decided that fighting the intruders is a lost cause. Priam does not wish to succumb to fate, but Hecuba urges him that the notion is not sane (*Quae mens tam dira*). Hecuba loves her husband, obviously, & the reader feels sorry for the couple who will soon be separated by death. In Vergil's time, it was more honorable to die in battle than to surrender, so the "miserable husband" (*miserrime coniunx*) does just that. The last two

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epitomize the ~~heart~~ couple's sorrow as Hecuba & Priam share one last kiss (sic ora effata recepit). Vergil's use of alliteration here (sese. ~~et~~ sacra. septe) makes the event seem even more important by thus calling attention of the reader to the final words.