Melancholy Destroys Andromache
Depression, Fear, and Hallucinatory Mourning in Seneca’s *Troades*


1A Why, sad lot of Phrygia, do you tear your hair, beat your wretched breast, and wet your cheeks with boundless tears? Trivial were the misfortunes we endured then if we suffer our present woes with tears.

1B Ilium fell for you just now, for me she fell long ago, when the brute with his fast car seized my limbs, and the wheels from Mount Pelion groaned a heavy groan and shook with the weight of Hector. I was ruined then, and utterly destroyed. Now I bear whatever comes stunned backwards and lost consciousness.

2. Melancholy and Temperature: excerpted from Aristotle *Problemata* 954a 14-39

For this reason, black bile becomes both very hot and very cold...Now black bile (melancholy), which is naturally cold and not on the surface (of the body), when it is in the state described, if it is in excess in the body, results in apoplexy or torpor, or despondency or fear; but if it gets too hot, it produces cheerfulness with song, and ecstasy, and the breaking out of sores and so forth.


But she approached the ramparts and the men gathered there. She stopped at the wall and looked out to see him dragged away from the city. The swift horses dragged him unburied to the hollow boats of the Achaeans. But black night covered her eyes and she fell backwards and lost consciousness.

4. The Workings of the Mind and Hallucinations: Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 1.132 -35

And what thing terrifies our minds while we are awake and diseased or buried in sleep, so that we seem to see and to hear as though next to us those who have met with death, those whose bones the earth holds in an embrace.
5A Then all of a sudden Hector stood before my eyes, not like he was before when he brought war against the Argives and attacked the Greek ships with torches from Mount Ida, and not like he was when he raged against the Danai with slaughter aplenty and carried off Achilles’ real armor from a fake Achilles. His face did not spread a brilliant radiance, but it appeared exhausted and downcast, heavy with weeping and gloomy like my own, covered with filthy hair. I was happy to see him nonetheless.

5B My Hector used to have these features, such was he in gait, such was he in posture, just so did he bear his strong arms, just so did he carry his shoulders high, just so the dangerous menacing expression on his brow, when he shook his flowing hair, his neck thrown back.

5C Here is my son, there are the sacred ashes of my husband—which one will win out? I call to witness the cruel gods and the true gods, the shades of my husband. In my son there is nothing except you that pleases me. Let him live, so that he might reanimate your face—but will your ashes be torn from the tomb and drowned? Shall I allow your bones to be thrown out and scattered in the vast waves? Let this one meet his death instead. Will you, his mother, be able to look upon him given over to a heinous death? Will you be able to see him thrown and spinning from the high roofs? I can, I will endure and bear it, as long as my Hector is not thrown down after death by the conqueror’s hand...but this one can feel his punishment, and death holds that one in safety. Why can’t you make up your mind? Decide which one you will save from pain. Are you hesitating, ungrateful woman? Your Hector is over here— you are wrong, Hector is on both sides: this one is alive, and will perhaps be a future avenger of his dead father. It is not possible to save both. What are you doing?

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