

(No response.)

Do you have any idea what you're saying, Herr Stiefel?

(Moritz is too mortified to respond. Melchior rises.)

MELCHIOR: If you please!

HERR SONNENSTICH: Pardon me?

MELCHIOR (*Covering gracefully*): If you please, Herr Sonnenstich . . . can't we at least consider "multum olim" as a plausible conjecture for how the text might read?

HERR SONNENSTICH: Herr Gabor. We are hardly here today to conjecture about textual conjectures. The boy has made an error.

MELCHIOR: Yes. But an understandable error, sir. Indeed, if we could only entertain the fitness of the conjecture—

HERR SONNENSTICH: "Multum olim"?!

MELCHIOR: Look to the fresh rhetorical balance—"multum olim" introducing "*multa quoque*"—a parallel, sir, between what Aeneas has already suffered in war and those sufferings on land and sea just ahead.

HERR SONNENSTICH: Herr Gabor, since the days of Servius, Aulus Gellius, and Claudius Donatus—nay, since the moment of Virgil's death—our world has been littered with more than sufficient critical commentary on textual conjecture.

MELCHIOR: With all respect, sir, are you then suggesting there is no further room for critical thought or interpretation? Why indeed, then, do we even—

HERR SONNENSTICH (*Striking Melchior with his teacher's cane*): I am suggesting no such thing. I am confirming that Herr Stiefel has made an error. And I am asking—nay, demanding—that you emend his faulty text and proceed from there. Do I make myself clear?

(Melchior's jaw locks.)

Herr Gabor?

(No response. He strikes Melchior more forcefully.)

Herr Gabor, do I make myself clear?

MELCHIOR: Yes, Herr Sonnenstich: "litora multum ille."

HERR SONNENSTICH: All of you—together with Melchior Gabor:

"Laviniaque venit . . ."

BOYS:

. . . litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
vi superum saevae memorem Iunonis ob . . .

(*The Boys' recitation grows louder, more insistent, more numbing—as if somehow we were entering into Melchior's psychic experience of it. A bit of contemporary, electronic music drifts through. Shimmering song light finds Melchior. He turns out and sings—like a rocker in concert:*)

MELCHIOR:

BOYS:

All that's known	. . . iram;
In History, in Science,	multa quoque et bello
Overthrown	passus, dum conderet
At school, at home,	urbem . . .
by blind men.	

You doubt them,	Arma virumque cano, Troiae
And soon they bark	qui primus ab oris
and hound you—	Italiam, fato profugus,
Till everything you say	Laviniaque venit
is just another bad	litora, multum ille et terris
about you.	iactatus et alto
	vi superum saevae memorem

All they say	Iunonis ob iram;
Is, "Trust in What Is	multa quoque et bello
Written."	passus, dum conderet
Wars are made,	urbem . . .
And somehow that is	
wisdom.	

Thought is suspect,
And money is their idol,
And nothing is okay unless it's scripted in their Bible.