AYE, AYE, LUCIAN!

A Fantasy

for male-voice chorus and solos with piano accompaniment.

Words and Music by

Peter Tranchell

1960

Based on the “Vera Historia” of Lucian of Samosata, c.125 A.D.

Written for the Gonville and Caius College Chorus.

LIBRETTO

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Editorial note: the layout of the text broadly follows the layout of Tranchell’s libretto, while reducing the number of different levels of indentation.

AYE, AYE, LUCIAN!

Part I

The Outset

Lucian My name is Lucian, and this is my story.
You may believe it if you want to.

One morning I woke.
It was after a party,
And I felt such a terrible gloom,
That I put on my cloak,
And went to the doctor,
And there found fifty of my friends
(who had also been at the party)
In the waiting-room.
The doctor declared we needed a rest-cure,
And should all go on a holiday trip.
So the same day we decided the best cure
Would be sailing away on a ship.

Chorus We sailed from the Pillars of Hercules.
Our goodly ship sped forth with a goodly breeze.
Fifty stalwarts were the crew.

Lucian And my very good friend, Lysimachus, too.

Chorus Arms and equipment, water, provisions, all in great supply;
And we raised a cheer as we bade the Mediterranean Sea goodbye.

Oh for the open main.
Oh for the shrouds unfurled.
Oh for the blast
That drives us at last
Beyond the end of the world.
Oh for the western stars.
Oh for the sun's last gold.
Oh for the dark tide
Our vessel will ride
To shores untold.

Bad Weather

Lucian The wind grew fresher, and blew a gale.

Chorus — Gale!
Caught unawares, we could reef no sail.
Rain!
Rain as thick as could be.
And we were driven before the storm,
But whither, we could not see.
Fog!

Lucian — Then for a fortnight we were becalmed in a fog.
One day the look-out boy cried from the mast:

Euscopus — Land ahoy! Sorry! False alarm! It's gone! It must have been a sea-bird perched on the rail in front of me!

Chorus — But at last the good sun returned.
Fog and mist were flown.
Out in the clear
We found we were near
A land unknown.

Lucian — Lysimachus! Can you find this land on the map?

Lysimachus — No, Lucian!

Lucian — Then plot our position, write the log, and detail twenty men to look after the ship. The rest can come ashore with you and me.
We are going to explore!

Lysimachus — Aye, aye, Lucian!

An Inscription

Lucian — We struck inland and presently found
A great bronze slab lying in the ground;
And on it was writ,
Though weathered a bit,
Some letters in Greek still clear:
"Great Hercules and Dionysus inscribed this inscription here".

Lysimachus — Probably a forgery!

Lucian — But a rock lay near, and on it we spied
Two godlike footprints side by side.

Lysimachus — One is two foot four!
The other much more!

Lucian — That proves it! These footprints suffice us!
To Hercules belonged the larger foot, the smaller to Dionysus.

Lysimachus — Very thoughtful of them to leave the prints in solid rock where they wouldn't wear out!

An Unusual Vineyard

Chorus — And as went on, we found every sign
Of what Dionysus could do;
For the rivers were flowing not water but wine,
And the fishes we caught, while tasting divine,
Were very intoxicant,
very intoxicating too.

Vine-maidens — La la la la la la

Lucian — Lysimachus! Do you hear that singing?

Lysimachus — It sounds like the voices of young women!

Lucian — My goodness, it is! — almost! But no, it's a vineyard!

Both — It's a vineyard!

Vine-maidens — Hullo! Come and kiss us! Oh come and kiss us!

Lysimachus — They speak Greek! They are friendly! What luck!
Now we shall have some fun and games!

Lucian — But no dancing! For, see! They are vines! Vines growing out of the ground and merging into feminine bodies! They are girls only from the waist upward!

Lysimachus — That's better than nothing!

Lucian — And tendrils grow out of their fingers!

Lysimachus — Then they can't scratch us!

Lucian — And the grapes grow out of their hair.

Lysimachus — Where else would you expect?

Vine-maidens — Come and kiss us!

Lucian — What forward hussies!

Lysimachus — Just a chaste peck, then!

Chorus — We kissed their lips, and in one touch
We felt as if we had drunk too much!

Lucian — But two of the crew
Were minded to do
Some rather too ardent kissing.
We could not save them from their fate,
So both of them now are missing.

A Metamorphosis

Aristarchus — Help! Help!

Pheidippides — Help! Help!

Aristarchus — My legs are growing into vines!

Pheidippides — And so are mine!

Chorus — They're taking root! They're stuck!

Aristarchus — My fingers!

Pheidippides — My fingers!

Both — They're turning into tendrils!

Chorus — They're taking root! They're stuck!

Both — Ah!

Chorus — They're stuck!

Lucian — It's too late! There's nothing we can do: their grapes are already forming. Oh what a wonderful vintage there'll be!

Lysimachus — A pity we can't wait for it!

Lucian — Goodbye my dear fellows!

Lysimachus — Excuse us not shaking hands!

Lucian — Poor old Aristarchus and Pheidippides!

Chorus — Poor old Aristarchus and Pheidippides!

Lucian — We shall miss them both. But what would be the point of uprooting them and taking them? They'll be better here, than in a pot in a conservatory!

Vine-maidens — Don't go! Stay and kiss us!

Chorus — We left them sprouting happily there,
Entwined among the Vine-maidens fair.
We took to our ship
With wine for the trip,
The wine which the rivers all poured.
So Hercules and Dionysus
Were toasted by all on board.

Vine-maidens — Don't go! Stay and kiss us!

Chorus — Were toasted by all on board.

Vine-maidens — Don't go!

Part II

A Storm

Euscopus — Thunder ahoy!

Chorus — Thunder!

Lucian — It was a terrible thunderstorm! The clouds came so low, we feared they might break the mast. We sent men up the rigging with boat-hooks to fend them off.

Euscopus — Lightning ahoy!

Chorus — Lightning!

Lucian — The lightning passed right under the ship and up on the other side. It boiled the waves, scattering spray, and throwing upon the deck a convenient rain of fried fish! Just then a whirlwind,

Chorus — Ah!

Lucian — A whirlwind tore the vessel right out of the sea, carrying her up between two clouds.

Away and aloft!

Chorus — And ever higher!
Upward and upward we flew!

Lucian — Till the earth looked like a distant disc
Of shimmering green and blue!

A Lunar Patrol

Euscopus — Land ahoy!

Lysimachus — Land? Up here? Impossible!

Euscopus — Land ahoy! And vultures!

Chorus — Vultures?

Lucian — A posse of men riding enormous vultures came alongside, and their leader said:

Gypophortus — You and your platoon
Are nearing the shores of the moon!

Lucian — Now that we did not know!

Gypophortus — I'm telling you!
Our law is very clear:
Your vessel is trespassing here!

Lucian — That law we did not know!

Gypophortus — I'm telling you!
And at the King's request,
You're all of you under arrest!

Lucian — And what shall we do now?

Gypophortus — I'm telling you!
To the King you shall expound
Whither your vessel is bound.

Lucian — But that we do not know,
As I'm telling you!
They guided us to an airy port, and brought us straight before the King, who said to me:

King Endymion

Endymion — Hail, handsome stranger!
Now are you a smuggler or a spy?

Lucian — Hail, King, I'm neither!
But just a sailor passing by!

Endymion — Since you speak such perfect Greek
I know you cannot tell a lie.
But,
With a well-armed ship and war-like gear,
You creep into our hemisphere,

And say you're really going elsewhere!
Kindly tell me where and why!

Lucian So I narrated
Our story, leaving nothing out.
That done, he stated
Our faith no longer was in doubt.

Endymion Welcome then, with all your men;
And let me say it is a boon:
For,
Of dear old Greece I've had no word
Since as a lad I watched my herd,
And was by Artemis transferred
To rule the people on the Moon.

Lucian Then you Sir, you must be Endymion of Caria!

Endymion Endymion's my name. What's yours?

Lucian My name is Lucian, of Samosata.

Endymion Never heard of it!

Lucian After your time doubtless.

I told him all the outstanding news since he had gone away.
And in return he told me the cause of our arrest that day.
It seemed, the Moon was at war with the Sun,
and hence the defence-regulations.
And the reason why this was had begun,
was the Sun's aggressive depredations!

The Morning Star

Endymion There is a planet,
The Morning Star is its name.
We thought we'd man it,
Since no-one else had made a claim.
So we shipped a well-equipped
Initial landing-party there.
Ah!
But when our colonists arrived,
A troop sent from the Sun contrived
To ambush them, and none survived,
Save two who hid behind some air.

These two men returned with the news of the outrage. But the ruler of the Sun, King Phaethon, an erratic fellow at the best of times, ignored our protests, and refused to negotiate!

We had no option,
So war was presently declared.
Now an offensive
Has been most carefully prepared.
We go forth to wreak our wrath
When dawn's first light is in the sky.
And..!
If you would like some fighting too,
I'll find you mounts for all your crew,
To help us show the Sun who's who!
That is what we'll do, or die!

Chorus — Great King Endymion,
Your summons cannot be denied!

Lucian — I and my colleagues
Will gladly fight upon your side.

(Chorus — We will fight!)

Chorus — Phaethon will find anon
He's bitten off more than he can chew!
Yes!
We'll drive the tyrant from the sky,
And his defeat will testify
That justice wins when aided by
Lucian and all his crew!

Lucian — So on the morrow, when the lunar host assembled, we joined the King's own aerial cavalry, mounted on honey-bees as large as elephants!

A Battle

Chorus (of bees) — Buzz, buzz.

Endymion — Forces of the Moon, advance!

Lucian — Mounted Troop of Greeks, advance!

Endymion — Keep your weapons ready to hand!

Lucian — Keep your weapons ready to hand!

Endymion Forces of the Moon, right incline!

Lucian Greeks, right incline!

Endymion Keep to the right of the cloud-banks!

Lucian Greeks, follow me!

Endymion Enemy in sight! Battle formation!

Lucian Greeks, follow me!

Endymion Give the symbol to charge!
Charge!

Lucian Charge!

Chorus The battle was a short one,
And soon was ended in a truce.
Phaethon besought one,
When he saw that fighting was no use.
Terms were made for mutual trade,
And all the people cried Hurrah!
As
The two kings, acting most polite,
Agreed that compromise was right,
And both together should unite
To colonise the Morning Star!

Endymion's gratitude

Lucian We put up trophies on the clouds, and tablets with the treaty-terms, and so returned.
And when we got back, King Endymion expressed his gratitude to us Greeks.

Endymion Many thanks, my dear Lucian, for everything you and your men have done on my behalf today. And as some slight mark of esteem, let me make you the governor of our new realm on the Morning Star. Had I a daughter, you could have her in marriage; but the fact is, I've not! For the great Goddess Artemis has ordained that there shall be no women on the Moon.

Chorus No women?

Lucian My crew were naturally surprised.

Lunar Society

Chorus

What do they do on the Moon without women?
How do they cope without wives?
Who is the cook for the dinner and supper?
Who is the cleaner and washer-upper?
What
do they do, and how, when a tiny wee stranger arrives?
And when at last they are grey old men,
Who is there to look after them then?
What do they do on the Moon without women?
To bring a bit of joy to their lives?

Endymion

We are well off on the Moon without women.
We have no fuss or to-do.
All the domestical chores you mention
Don't need female intervention.
We
do them all ourselves, and a very good job it is too.
For women are prone to nag and scold,
Specially when they're haggard and old;
And if we could not keep the Moon without women,
We'd rather go and live in a Zoo.

Every man is allotted from birth
As a batman here or there.
He serves his masters and shows his worth
Until his twenty-fifth year.
Then he stops and is served in turn
By the younger generation.
There's nothing to pay and nothing to earn!
It's a wonderful organisation!

Lysimachus

What about children?

Lucian

Hush, Lysimachus!

Endymion

Children, d'you say? A very good question!

A Lunar Birth

Lucian

Then King Endymion smilingly led us to the Royal Garden,
and pointed out a beautiful blue tree bearing a gigantic acorn!

Endymion

A man cuts his toe-nails,
And plants the cuttings in the ground,

And soon there grows up a little tree,
As you can see.
And on it in time a large acorn is found,
Which contains the young offspring to be.

Lysimachus — From this acorn enormous,
D'you mean to inform us,
There's going to be born a young Prince?

Endymion — Yes! If you just wait a minute,
You'll see that he's in it.
And I hope that his birth will convince.

Philosopher!

Lucian — Why a philosopher?

Endymion — Why? For prenatal tuition! The boy must not be born illiterate.
Philosopher, have you completed the instruction of my family tree?

Balanotrophus — Yes, your Majesty.

I've read and I've lectured
Until the syllabus was done.
Though his knowledge of History is somewhat rough,
It's good enough!
But in other respects you will find that your son
Is a Prince made of just the right stuff!

Lucian — D'you mean He's been taught
All the things a Prince ought,
And will know what this World is about?

Endymion — Yes! And now it is stated
My son's educated,
Perhaps he had best be shelled out!

Lucian — They opened the acorn, and there! The Prince stepped out; a strapping youth, eighteen years old and fully clothed!

Endymion — Welcome, my son! Your name shall be Cleanthus. By the way, I am your father!

Chorus — Speech!

Cleanthus — O my progenitor paternal, for your kind salutation I your scion am much beholden, and do gladly take the appellation of Cleanthus.

(Endymion Most eloquent! What a nice way of putting it!)

Cleanthus And, Sirs, to you, whose courteous presence augments the felicity of this my natal day,

(Endymion My son is quite an orator! Perhaps a bit too flowery!)

Cleanthus I do extend my gratitude of heart together with the hand of cordiality.

Chorus Hail! Hail, Cleanthus! Happy birthday!

That's how it is on the Moon without women:
Children grow on a tree!
First there's a flower like a big petunia,
Then an acorn, and out comes Junior!
Think
what advantages this method's bound to ensure:
The cost of education is less;
The child is born in his evening dress:
And best of all on the Moon without women,
They never have a Mother-in-

Lysimachus What about love?

Chorus -law! They never have a Mother-in-law!

Lysimachus What about love?

Lucian Hush, Lysimachus!

Endymion Love, did you say?

Chorus Yes, love!

Lunar Love

Endymion Another intelligent question! Cleanthus, you new-born youngster, tell your friends what you know about love.

Cleanthus The object of my amorous attachment, my rapturous erotic infatuation, is great Artemis!

Lucian
Lysimachus Great Artemis!

Endymion It's true! We all love the Goddess!

Cleanthus Great Artemis!

Endymion — It's our heredity! We're born that way! All of us love great Artemis!

Chorus — Great Artemis!

Endymion — Come friends, away to the birthday party! You are all invited!

Lucian — And Lysimachus, no more questions, thank you!

Lysimachus — Aye, aye, Lucian!

Chorus — That's what they do on the Moon without women!
A most successful affair. (Oh yes)
Loving the Goddess and serving each-other,
There's no need for a wife or mother!
See
how they live like Lords, and no-one lacks for good cheer!
They don't have to buy their wife new hats!
Nor are they plagued by the howling of brats!
That's why it's bliss on the Moon without women,
And everyone's a bachelor here.

Endymion — Ah, love!

Cleanthus — Great Artemis! Ah, love!

Lucian
Lysimachus — Great Artemis!

Chorus — Every single man's a bachelor, — here!

Part III

Departure

Lucian — We said goodbye, and cast off with a fair wind, which gently set us down, until on the seventh day the ship touched the sea once more.

Chorus — Oh for the open main!

Lucian — Oh for the fresh sea air!

Chorus — Oh to explore!
Some murmuring shore,
We know not where!

The Whale

Euscopus — Whale ahoy! A school of wales!

Chorus — Monster whales they were!
Several hundred of them, each about fifty miles long!
And the biggest came racing towards us with his great jaws gaping wide!
There was no panic! All the crew stood firm!
On came the monster!
Ah!

Lucian — He had swallowed us in a trice, ship and all, narrowly missing us with his huge jagged teeth!
Inside the whale it was very dark and oppressive, like a dripping underground cavern.
But the ship seemed still afloat on slimy waters.
There was nothing to do but drop the anchor, light the lamps, and make a cold supper, during which we all wept copiously!

A Melancholy Supper

Deipneticus — Kindly pass the ham,

Chorus — Boo hoo hoo!

Deipneticus — And the

Chorus — Boo hoo hoo!

Deipneticus — pickled cabbage too!

Polycreos — Oh, the ham is very salt!

Chorus — But that is our own fault,
For crying into it. Boo hoo hoo!

Tyrophilus — Kindly pass the cheese,

Chorus — Boo hoo hoo!

Tyrophilus — And the

Chorus — Boo hoo hoo!

Tyrophilus — bread and butter too!

Eurystomus — Oh, the butter is awash!

Chorus — And we need a mackintosh,
With all of us in tears, Boo hoo hoo!

Lysimachus — Our voyage, so hopeful, now is all in vain!
And we'll never see our native land again!

Chorus — Will you
Kindly pass the wine!
Boo hoo hoo!
It will …
Boo hoo hoo!
Stop us feeling blue!
Pour out only half a cup,
For our tears will top it up,
When all of us are crying. Boo hoo hoo!

Lucian — About once an hour the whale opened his jaws for a deep breath of air.

Chorus — Very refreshing!

Lucian — But his mouth was only open a few seconds, and then snapped shut with great violence!

Chorus — Very alarming!

Lucian — We saw we could not hope to get our vessel out!
There was no escape! So we kept up our spirits by telling conundrums!

Chorus — Did you ever hear about the
Man who had a cat,
Boo hoo hoo!
And he …
Boo hoo hoo!
taught it all he knew!
After spending one whole week
On the alphabet in Greek,
That cat still knew only “mu”! Boo hoo hoo!

Exploration

Lucian — When our eyes became accustomed to the gloom inside the whale,
We saw we were near a massive stretch of land.
So we asked ourselves, how was it
There’d been this alluvial deposit,
Unless the whale had swallowed simply tons of stone and sand.
And on the beech we saw
Animal bones there by the score;
And the rotting wreckage of ships was strewn about on every hand.

Muster the landing-party, Lysimachus!

Lysimachus — Aye, aye, Lucian!

Chorus — Oh, the land was very fruitful, there were plenteous plants and trees,
Even radishes, kale, and carrots all around!
In the shallows oysters grew,
And much other shell-fish too,
And in a little glade a fresh-water spring was found!
We saw with some vexation
We could not perish by starvation,
But must wait till old age should bring us down beneath the ground!

Previous Arrivals

Lucian — But to our surprise, we came upon a little temple, evidently dedicated to Poseidon. Just then, an old man and a boy rushed out of it, and drew their swords in terrified astonishment at seeing us! They challenged us!

Geron — Who goes there?

Monodemus — Yes, who goes there?

Geron — Silence! I said that!

Monodemus — Yes, Father, so did I!

Lucian — Peace! I called. The old man cautiously approached.

Geron — Who are you, and what seek you in our whale?

Lucian — Your whale! How claim you this whale as yours?

Geron — We got here first!

The Old Man's Story

Geron — Ten years ago, we were ship-wrecked here,
And all our companions drowned.
Only I and my boy being saved,
We built this temple, and worked and slaved
To farm all the country around,
And make the best of what we found.
We penetrated,
And irrigated,

And cultivated,

(Monodemus joins in) Inseminated,
And regulated,
And fecundated, —

Lucian Cross-pollenated?

Geron Of course! That also, to ensure we'd have crops without fail.
Then at discretion,
We made a procession,

Monodemus Both of us!

Ge. & Mon. Taking formal possession
Of this whale!

Geron But a few months later, some wicked tribes invaded our whale.
They denied our rights, they stole our stores;
Resistance was of no avail.
Now they live further in; and we're obliged to pay
A tribute of seventy oysters a day.
And we forfeit our existence if we fail;
For there's no-where else to go, in this whale.

Lucian How many other people live here?

Geron Only these invaders! But the whole realm is rightfully ours!

Lucian No doubt! But who are these unpleasant intruders?

Oppression

Geron They're a
Noxious clan of lobster-men, half lobster and half human!
Rapacious and wild and ruthless to a degree!
Who enjoy the terrorisation
That they cause our whole population!

Monodemus They don't terrorise me, Father!

Geron Well, half the population then!
But we'll see, my son, for there'll be trouble soon for you and me!
When the bailiffs come today,
Where are the oysters we must pay?
For these strangers doubtless have eaten all the oysters there might be!

Lucian — We have, I fear! And a very good breakfast too!
We apologise!
But when these Bailiffs come, refuse them, send them off with a flea in the ear!

Monodemus — Or to be more exact, a wallop on the antennae!

Geron — Ah, but then they'll all make war on us,
And their vengeance will be sore on us,
And we shall be destroyed, for we are few and they are many!

Lucian — Well, what else is to be done,
Whether they're two or ten to one,
If it's oysters they will demand, and you cannot provide them any?

A Stratagem

Lucian — When they arrive, we will ambush them! Get your arms, and take cover!

Chorus — So the tribute was refused, and soon the lobster-men arrived,
All armed to the teeth, and breathing vengeance hot!

Lucian — When the moment came, I sang out!

Chorus — And from hiding, all of us sprang out!
We took them by surprise, and had a victory on the spot!
To their citadel then we sped,
Catching and killing all who fled,
And we burnt the edifice to the ground, and massacred the lot!

Victorious Obsequies

Chorus — We solemnly buried the enemy dead;
And prayers for their human halves were said;
Battle trophies were displayed;
And we gave thanks to Poseidon for his aid.

Escape

Lysimachus — I have an idea! To escape from this prison, we must kill the whale!

Geron — My empire!

Lysimachus — By setting fire to these forests!

Geron — My handiwork!

Lysimachus — Lest the whale close his mouth when he dies and trap us all inside,
we must send a working party to prop it open with balks of timber.

Lucian — Brilliant! Muster the timber-party!
It's as good as done! Roast whale!

We fired the forests, starting at the stern! Soon we had a merry
blaze! The old man wrung his hands!

Chorus — On the first day the whale began to shiver!

Lucian — The old man wrung his hands!

Chorus — On the next day the whale began to quiver!

Lucian — And the old man wrung his hands!

Chorus — On the third day the whale began to wriggle and jiggle!
Everything began to shake!
And in the smoke that made us choke,
It was like one long earthquake!

On the fourth day the whale was in a tizzy!

Lucian — The old man did his nut!

Chorus — The water in the whale became fizzy!

Lucian — And the old man swore!

Chorus — Tut! Tut!

On the fifth day the whale began to juggle and struggle!
Down fell Poseidon's shrine!
Though the old man screamed, to us it seemed
As a ruin it still looked fine!

On the sixth day life was utter madness!

Lucian — The old man stayed in bed!

Chorus — But the seventh day was one of gladness!
For at last the whale was dead!

The ship was got up to the monster's mouth!
With ropes and pulleys we hauled her 'tween the teeth!
Neatly launched her in the sea!
And we scrambled aboard as quick could be!
Hi! Monodemus! Geron! Where are you?
Cast her off! We're clear!

It was just in time! For a moment later we saw the monster begin to disappear!

Lucian — It sank! Leaving an enormous steaming whirlpool!
We were overjoyed to be free!

Chorus — Oh for the open main! (Hurrah! Hurrah!)
Oh for the sparkling blue!
Oh for the blaze
Of calm sunny days,
With nothing but sea in view!

Lucian — But the old man stood and wept.

The Old Man's Farewell

Geron — Farewell! Farewell my home! Farewell my little acre!
Farewell my house, my fields, my own dear temple of Poseidon!
I shall never see them more! No more!
I know it was but a whale, a roving monster, I know it swallowed me to devour me!
But ten long years it sheltered me! It was my home, I lived there,
And I loved it!

Chorus — We vowed we would build a new temple to Poseidon, if we ever got home alive!

Part IV

Paradise Scented

Osphreticus & Euscopus — What a wonderful smell, but what is it?
Is it lilies or violets or roses?
It's a mixture of perfumes exquisite,
A pot-pourri for sensitive noses!
Is it laurel in bloom? Is it vines, or myrrh?
Or the delicate hyacinth flowering?
But whatever the scent, we declare
That the source of the scent must be near.
For beside being wonderfully rare,
It is wonderfully overpowering!

Paradise Sighted

Euscopus — Land ahoy! Or rather, Paradise!

Chorus — Paradise!

Well, presently land was before us,
With its harbours and meadows and trees.
Bright birds sang in rapturous chorus,
And a fragrance lay sweet on the breeze!
From a distance the sounds of the lyre and pipe
Were blended with voices a-murmur.
So we anchored in sight of the sand,
And we donned the best clothing to hand,
For we thought it the moment to land
On this beautiful terra-firma.

Arrest

Lucian — But before we could go any distance, some young men stopped us, and their leader said:

Macaristus — Pardon my misgiving,
But all of you seem to be living.

Lysimachus — Well, what is strange in that?

Macaristus — I'll tell you , sir.
It's usually required
That newcomers here have expired.

Lysimachus — D'you mean we should be dead?

Macaristus — I'll tell you , sir.
In case you have not guessed,
This land is the Isle of the Blest.

Lysimachus — Oh dear, what shall we do?

Macaristus — I'll tell you , sir.
You all must now be brought
To Judge Rhadamanthus's court.

Lucian — And what will he decide?

Macaristus — He will tell you , sir.

Lucian — So we were now in the land of the glorious Dead, the paradise of Heroes! They bound us all with daisy-chains, and led us to the House of Justice. Ours was not the first case.

The Court of the Dead

Rhadamanthus — Great Alexander
What is the nature of your plea?

Alexander — Great Rhadamanthus,
Our placing at table you decree:
If you scan
The seating plan,
You'll see where you've given me a seat,
With Hannibal on my right,
And on my left a Roman Knight.
The Punic Wars they both recite,
Which neither side knew how to fight.
I find it hard to be polite!
Yes, I who never in life knew one defeat!

Rhadamanthus — Ah well, Alexander,
Errors such as this occur!
I will transfer you.
Just say the position you prefer.

(duet)

Alexander — May I voice
An ample choice
And leave the decision with you?

Rhadamanthus — You may!

Alexander — I've lots of friends to say the least,
With whom I'd rather sit to feast,
Than men I've too long predeceased,
And all my friends their vote have cast
To be with me at our repast!

Rhadamanthus — I much regret that I, I too, beside you cannot take my place,
But must remain upon the dais,

Alexander — Their number if a large one;
May I proceed to name a few?

Rhadamanthus — Great Alexander, let them all be specified!
Say whom you wish to sit beside!

Lucian

Alexander gave a list of friends and comrades which was as long as your arm! So Rhadamanthus decreed a special table for the lot of them! The matter would be reviewed the next quarter-day.

The next case concerned Helen of Troy, who was present in court, but paying no attention! She was far too busy making eyes at my crew. And they, for their part, were obviously not impervious to her charms! In fact, they were all now in love with her!

Rhadamanthus

Great Menelaus,
What is the nature of your plea?

Menelaus

It's my dear wife, sir!
To my mind she ought to live with me.
Theseus here,
And Paris swear
That they both have got an equal right!
But Theseus has three wives at call,
And Paris knows his hopes are small.
A second chance will not befall,
For Helen loves me best of all!
She loves me best!
She told me so herself, at home last night!

Rhadamanthus

Menelaus, you are Helen's legal husband, and you've had a lot of fuss and bother. You've certainly earned her, so keep her!

Now for the newcomers!
Lucian, Lysimachus, and the rest of you. You have broken our strictest law by being alive. But it may not be your fault. So I decree that unless your case is altered by your decease, you may stay here a-while, provided you keep our Blessed Peace!

A Fruitless Visit

Lucian

So we were set free!
The sun was sinking beyond the western horizon,
But as the Dead dine late, we had time upon our hands till dinner.
So in hopes of seeing Helen,
We went down in a party,
To the house of Menelaus,
And waited.
Nothing happened!
We thought of singing a serenade.
Just then Menelaus came up looking not exactly good-tempered!

An Elopement

Menelaus — I suppose you are waiting to see Helen? Well, it's no use!
She's gone!

Lucian — Gone?

Menelaus — Yes! She was last seen rowing from the island with a young man in a boat. I presume she's eloping again!

Lysimachus — Or launching her thousandth and first ship!

Lucian — Do you know who she's eloped with?

Menelaus — Some young fool called Monodemus!

Chorus — Monodemus!

Geron — My son! Ten years in the whale haven't altered him!

Chorus — Shame on Monodemus!

Lysimachus — It's disgusting!

Chorus — It's most irregular, most!
When a man elopes with a ghost!
For everyone knows that,
In our mortal condition,
There's no larking about with
An apparition!
It's worse than eloping, it's worse!
It's downright perverse!

If he's a bit of a lad,
He must also be a bit mad!
Well! Could he have hoped for
Some Ars Amatoria,
When he'd nothing to flirt with
But a Phantasmagoria?
It's worse than madness, it's worse!
It's downright perverse!

A Rebellion

Rhadamanthus — To arms! To arms! To arms!

Lucian — To arms?

Rhadamanthus — That's what I said!

Lucian — But why?

Rhadamanthus — The island of the Damned is in rebellion!
These wicked souls have overpowered their prison staff!

Chorus — Insufferable!

Rhadamanthus — And drugged the great dog Cerberus!

Chorus — Incredible!

Rhadamanthus — And they have managed to extinguish most of the everlasting fire!

Chorus — Impossible!

Rhadamanthus — They are launching their ships to attack us!
And Helen may be taken as a hostage!
A deplorable situation! Thanks to your Monodemus!

Chorus — Shame on Monodemus!

It's most irregular, most!
When a man elopes with a ghost!
These amorous leanings,
Why! everyone has 'em!
But not for a lover
Made of ectoplasm!
It's worse than eloping, it's worse!
It's downright perverse!

The Heroes' Alarm

Lucian — The alarm was a most unwelcome surprise!
For the Heroes were all busy doing other things!

Lysimachus — Ulysses was writing to Calypso
Of his love for her now as then.
He was saying so
With a hot bon mot,
When he had to get his sword and drop his pen!

Socrates was chopping some logic,
When he had to answer the call.
But it shocked his scruples
To leave his pupils
Without refuting them all!

Aenias was being pious,
And Virgil was at his side.
The were checking the details
Virgil retails.
But they left them unverified!

Euclid was evolving a theorem
For parallel lines which meet.
At the summons, he
Said Q.E.D.
And a lot of other things we can't repeat!

Agamemnon, covered in soapsuds,
Turned up a bit out of breath.
He'd been on the hearth
In a nice hot bath
Where he couldn't be hacked to death!

Achilles couldn't find his armour,
For Patroclus, without saying please,
Had borrowed it to take
Cassandra to a wake
In the Golden Tub of Diogenes!

A Sea Battle

Chorus (some simulating distant drums and trumpets)

The Heroes launched their ships, and a great sea battle ensued. But the Damned were rather disorganised. Ixion's wheel got a puncture! And the sieve bearing the Danaids sank at the outset! The Heroes were soon victorious. And the Damned were put away once more on their island, to endure their traditional punishments. So the Heroes returned.

A Revival of the Arts

Chorus All the poets started new epics!

Lucian But Homer's was strange to see!
For he wrote on clay
In "Linear A"
With a musical notation —

Chorus "Linear B"!
Livy only made an appearance

When the Heroes got back to land.
For he said his annals
Did best from channels
Of news that wasn't first-hand!

Lysimachus — Pheidias began a statue,
And modelled each separate part
So a likeness was caught
Of each hero that fought,
Till head to waist of it,
All were traced a bit!

Chorus — But the best of it
Was the rest of it!

An Apology

Lucian — Helen and Monodemus were brought home in disgrace.
Rhadamanthus admonished the young man.

Rhadamanthus — Monodemus, you are entirely to blame, for being so young, so handsome, so foolish, and above all alive!
What have you to say?

Monodemus — I'm sorry, sir, if I've offended. But you see,
The law, in my country, rules that at the death of a husband,
His wife is widow, and free (if she should choose) to remarry.
Menelaus is dead, so the inference I drew
Was that Helen is a widow, though she's dead too;
And I consequently courted her,
Which she did not say was wrong to do.
But my intentions, I assure you, sir,
Were all the time strictly honourable.

Orders to Depart

Rhadamanthus — My foot! That doesn't mitigate your blame!
You took Helen out to sea, where the sight of her induced the Damned to break their confinement.
I regret to say that in effect you Greeks must be deemed to have broken our Blessed Peace!
You will therefore leave immediately!

Lucian — We collected our things and made ready. And Alexander, that seasoned traveller, showed us our course, and gave us advice.
Indeed, we gave him some too!

Good Advice

Alexander — Never eat antirrhinums
When the sun is in the north!
Never employ scissors to stir the fire!
Never cross a bridge until you've got there!
Never sit on ice unless you're hot there!
Never make love that you don't mean
To maidens over sweet eighteen!
Never mix up a dog with a cat!
Never never never do that!

Geron — Never tell the date from a sun-dial!

Lysimachus — Especially when it's dark!

Lucian — Never annoy hornets when you are nude!

Alexander — Never kiss a face which you've forgotten!
Never climb a ladder which you're not on!

Chorus — Never tell a lie that's new to you,
For someone's bound to prove it true!

Monodemus
Lysimachus — Never mix up a writ with a rat!

Osphreticus — Never never never do that!

Chorus — Never let a man insult you
Unless you insult him first!
Never suppose cocks to lay fried eggs! No!
Never peel a peach with a nutmeg-grater!
Never pick the teeth of an alligator!

Rhadamanthus — Never tell a dead man what to do!

Chorus — Unless you are a dead man too!
Never mix up the fit with the fat,
A bit with a bat,
A hit with a hat,
A spit with a spat,
A mit with a mat,
A nit with a gnat,
Never never never do,
Never never never do,
Never never never do, —

Lucian — Stop that! And cast off!

Chorus — Aye, aye, Lucian!

Departure

Lucian — The wind blew, the sun shone, the clouds went past!
And we flew! Away on a homeward course, at last!

Chorus — Ah for the open main!
Oh for the salty foam!
Oh for the wide
Imperious tide
Which bears us home!
Home! We're home! Safe home!

Conclusion

Lucian — We builded the shrine,

Chorus — The shrine for Poseidon!

Lucian — The fairest that Art could provide!

But on going to say thanks,

Chorus — Say thanks to the doctor,

Lucian — We found he'd sorely overworked, and had died!

But we were refreshed!
Refreshed from our sailing,
And in fine form for life's arduous game!
So if you also find your health failing,
I advise you to do the same!

Chorus — For nothing compares with the wonderful feeling
Great seas with their fury and freedom excite!
When the sky and the clouds are your ceiling,
And the sun, moon and stars are your light!
When the sun, moon and stars are your light!
Are your light! Are your light!