

CLAUDIAN

VIII. (LXIX.)

De Polycaste et Perdicca.

Quid non saevus Amor flammarum numine cogat ?
sanguinis en fetum mater amare timet.
pectore dum niveo miserum tenet anxia nutrix,
inlicitos ignes iam fovet ipsa parens.
ultrices pharetras tandem depone, Cupido. 5
consule iam Venerem : forsan et ipsa dolet.

IX. (XLV.)

De hystrice.

Audieram memorande tuas Stympthale volucres
spicula vulnifico quondam sparsisse volatu,
nec mihi credibilis ferratae fabula pinnae
visa diu. datur ecce fides et cognitus hystrix
Herculeas adfirmat aves.

Os longius illi 5
adsimulat porcum. mentitae cornua saetae
summa fronte rigent. oculis rubet igneus ardor.
parva sub hirsuto catuli vestigia dorso.
hanc tamen exiguum miro natura tueri
praesidio dignata feram : stat corpore toto 10
silva minax, iaculisque rigens in proelia crescit
picturata seges ; quorum cute fixa tenaci

¹ Perdiccas, the young hunter, is said to have fallen in love with his mother Polycaste (or Polycarpe) = the Earth (see *Mythogr. Lat.* ii. 130). Claudian inverts the story. For details see Höfer in Roscher's lexicon, art. "Perdix," col. 1953.

SHORTER POEMS VIII, IX

VIII (LXIX)

*Of Polycaste and Perdiccas.*¹

To what deeds of cruelty will the flames of love not inspire mankind? Here is a mother who dares not love her child, the fruit of her body. Holding the unhappy boy to her snowy breast and wishing to give him suck, she conceives for him, though she is his mother, a shameful passion. Cupid, thou goest too far; put down thy cruel quiver. Consult Venus; mayhap she feels like pangs.

IX (XLV)

The Porcupine.

I had heard the strange tale, Stymphalus, that the birds that haunted thy marshes let fall from them arrows of death in their flight, and for long I could not bring myself to believe this story of iron feathers. But here is proof: the porcupine who is surely related to those birds of Hercules is their warrant.

His long snout is like that of a swine. Stiff bristles like horns stand up from his forehead. Red and fierce are his fiery eyes. Under his bristly back are short legs like those of a small dog. Small as this animal is, nevertheless Nature has seen fit to dower him with a wonderful means of defence. All over the body grows a threatening thicket: a harvest of brightly coloured spears bristles up ready

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alba subit radix, alternantesque colorum
tincta vices, spatiis internigrantibus, exit
in solidae speciem pinnae, tenuataque furtim 15
levis in extremum sese producit acumen.

Sed non haec acies ritu silvestris echini
fixa manet. crebris propugnat iactibus ultro
et longe sua membra tegit, tortumque per auras
evolat excusso nativum missile tergo. 20

interdum fugiens Parthorum more sequentem
vulnerat ; interdum positis velut ordine castris
terrificum densa mucronum verberat unda
et consanguineis hastilibus asperat armos :

militat omne ferae corpus vibrataque rauco 25
terga fragore sonant. stimulis accensa tubarum
agmina conlatis credas configere signis :

tantus in angusto strepitus furit. additur armis
calliditas parcusque sui tumor iraque numquam
prodiga telorum, caute contenta minari 30
nec nisi servandae iactus impendere vitae.

error abest : certum sollertia destinat ictum
nil spatio fallente modum, servatque tenorem
mota cutis doctique regit conamina nisus.

Quid labor humanus tantum ratione sagaci 35
proficit ? eripiunt trucibus Gortynia capris
cornua ; subiectis eadem lentescere cogunt
ignibus ; intendunt taurino viscere nervos ;
instruitur pinnis ferroque armatur harundo.
ecce brevis propriis munitur bestia telis 40

¹ In the making of bows.

SHORTER POEMS IX

for battle. The roots of these weapons are white and are firmly fixed in the animal's skin. The quills are themselves parti-coloured with black bands and come to a stiff quill-like point, diminishing in diameter towards the tip which is smooth and sharp.

But his armoury is not fixed like that of the woodland hedgehog. He can take the offensive and also protect himself at a distance by the frequent discharge of these darts of his, hurling through the air the flying missiles which his own back supplies. At times like the flying Parthian he wounds his pursuers ; at times he entrenches himself and strikes his foe by the discharge of a storm of these terrible weapons which bristle on his shoulders out of which they grow. He fights with his whole body, and his back, as it moves, emits a raucous sound. You would think it was the trumpet's note stirring an army to close with the foe and fight. Small is the animal but great the din. Besides his arms he displays cunning and a cold, calculated fury that never wastes its weapons but cautiously contents itself with threats, for he never expends a dart but in defence of his life. His aim is sure ; the blow, such is his skill, unerring, nor can distance delude his range. The motion of his skin in the act of discharging ensures the speed, and accurately directs the flight, of the weapon.

Has human endeavour, with reason to guide it, ever done the like ? Men rob of their horns the wild goats of Crete, then they force them to become pliant over the fire¹ ; they use the guts of cattle to string their bows ; they tip their arrows with iron and wing them with feathers. But here is a small animal whose arms are contained in his own body

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externam nec quaerit opem ; fert omnia secum :
se pharetra, sese iaculo, sese utitur arcu.
unum animal cunctas bellorum possidet artes.

Quodsi omnis nostrae paulatim industria vitae
fluxit ab exemplis, quidquid procul appetit hostem,
hinc reor inventum, morem hinc traxisse Cydonas 46
bellandi Parthosque retro didicisse ferire
prima sagittiferae pecudis documenta secutos.

X. (XCII.)

De birro castoreo.

Nominis umbra manet veteris ; nam dicere birrum,
si Castor iuret, castoreum nequeo.
sex emptus solidis ! quid sit, iam scire potestis :
si mihi nulla fides, credite vel pretio.

XI. (XCI.)

In sepulchrum speciosae.

Pulchris stare diu Parcarum lege negatur.
magna repente ruunt ; summa cadunt subito.
hic formosa iacet : Veneris sortita figuram
egregiumque decus invidiam meruit.

XII. (LXXXIV.)

De balneis Quintianis quae in via posita erant.

Fontibus in liquidis paulum requiesce, viator,
atque tuum rursus carpe refectus iter.

¹ Claudian is, I think, punning on *castor*=a beaver, and Castor, the name of the owner of the coat. But *castor* in l. 2 might be taken to refer either to the god or to the animal.

SHORTER POEMS IX-XII

and who needs no external defence. He carries all his own arms ; himself his own quiver, arrow, and bow. Alone he possesses all the resources of war.

But if all human activities as they grow have had their source in imitation we may see here the exemplar of combat by means of missiles. It is from him that the Cretans learned to shoot and the Parthians to strike while in flight. These did but follow the example of the animal that is armed with arrows.

X (XCII)

Of Beaver's Overcoat.¹

'Tis but the shadow of a name that is left. I cannot call it a coat of beaver, not though Beaver swear it is one. It cost six shillings. Now you know what it is like. If you don't believe me, believe the price.

XI (XCI)

On the Tomb of a Beauty.

Fate allows not beauty a long life : sudden is the end of all that is noble and pre-eminent. Here lies a lovely woman : hers was the beauty of Venus and hers the illwill of Heaven for a gift so rare.

XII (LXXXIV)

Quintius' Baths.

Stay awhile and bathe in these waters, traveller ; then set forth again upon thy journey refreshed.