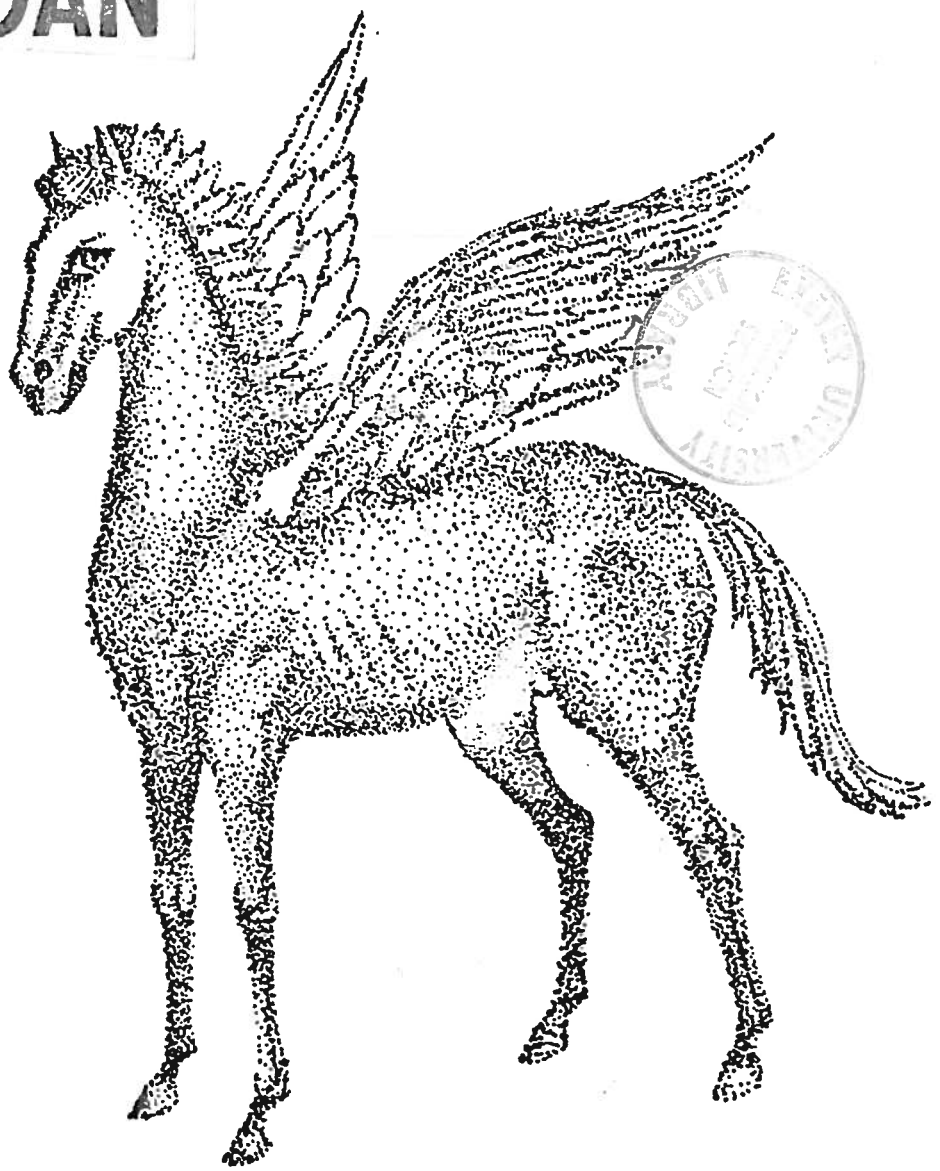
PEGASUS



1987

35p

No. 30 June, 1987

PEGASUS

University of Exeter Classical Society Magazine

Editor : Sarah Barker

I'd like to start by thanking everyone who made this edition possible, in particular Valerie Harris, our Departmental Secretary, who endured my continual queries, and David Harvey for his support.

I hope that the smaller number of articles than usual in this year's edition is balanced by the quality: I'm especially pleased to have been able to include an edited version of the paper given by Prof. E.J.Kenney to the Classical Society last term.

In conclusion, I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage students in the future to submit more articles - it is, after all, a student magazine!

Sarah Barker

CONTENTS

Klytemnestra in Aeschylus' Agamemnon

What Agamemnon expects Klytemnestra to do is shown in her speech to the Herald, where she is pretending to be the faithful wife (587-614), a faithful wife, hostile to his enemies, a watchdog, who changes none of his laws. In fact, though, she is none of these things; she is unfaithful with Aegisthus, an enemy of Agamemnon and rules as she wishes. The chorus obviously expect her to hand back power to Agamemnon, as they see her as a regent only; this she does not do. They also expect her to behave in a womanly way, paying attention to dreams, being over optimistic and unable to think straight. In fact, Klytemnestra is very clear, her knowlege is based in the fact of the beacon. She also describes herself as "ΟΥΚ ΑΦΡΟΝΤΙΣΤΟΣ" (1377) which rebuts the chorus' views on womens' minds. She does not entirely assume the role of a man though (1231). Firstly, she cannot: she has to rely on Aegisthus to provide military support for her. It is her heart that is described as 'man-minded'. She cannot achieve what she wants in the sure way that a man could; i.e. she has to kill with guile, rather than just violence. To do this she assumes a feminine role, pretending to be a faithful, loving wife to her Agamemnon inside. In the conflict with the chorus at the end of the play she does not provoke them to violence against her, as Aegisthus does against himself, so there is a comparison between Klytemnestra and Aegisthus here, and he has the more masculine role. At the end of the play she says that she and Aegisthus will be joint rulers. If she had completely assumed the male role, and pushed him into the female one, this would not be so. It is significant that we do not know what the situation was before: Aeschylus does not allow us to focus our attention on this question.

Her behaviour differs from the 5th century norm in tht she holds power in her husband's absence, probably the norm would have been for a male relative to be in charge. At this point, however, all the Greeks are off to Troy, so Menelaus who would be the obvious answer is away too. She is very much out of the house; often in tragedy women explain why they have come out but Klytemnestra does not. There is no mention of any menial work. Klytemnestra did not make the purple "carpet" and this can be contrasted with Penelope's shroud, etc. She deals with the chorus extensively, who represent the elders of Argos, and she has planned the whole chain of beacons, or at least knows in detail how it works. These opportunities are provided by her regentship. She is also violent, a murderess, and conquers by her wits as well when she overcomes Agamemnon's resolve not to walk on the carpets.

She is very brave and a determined woman ('bold' 1399 and 1426), and she does not need to psyche herself up to the murder, as Orestes and Electra do in the Choepheroi. She is very organised - for example, the beacons - and very clever, overcoming Agamemnon by playing on his weaknesses, and by aiming arguments. She is also very aware of the way in which women are treated in terms of their intellect and says mock-modestly, after her two long speeches, 'Here then are a woman's words' (348), picking up on the chorus' scepticism of her.

Her predominant emotion seems to be hatred of Agamemnon. She is jealous of his power and his authority as a male. She is sexually jealous of Chryseis and Cassandra and articulates her feelings of outrage at his affairs with them in a violent and scornful speech after his murder (1438-47). Agamemnon's dishonouring of their marriage bond is

also exemplified by his sacrifice of Iphigenia. Although this is not mentioned until late in the play, she describes Orestes as the 'ratification of our love', so her view of Iphigenia would probably have been much the same. Certainly she uses the slaughter of her child as justification for the murder (1432). After she has killed Agamemnon and Cassandra she gloats excessively over their corpses.

Passion for Aegisthus does not seem to be present; he is just around. Desire for him does not stand out strongly as a motive for killing Agamemnon. In the Choepheroi (893), she does lament 'the dearest strength of Aegisthus' using a Homeric phrase and Orestes seems surprised at the affectionate form of address (894). But whether he was dear to her or whether she mourns his strength which upheld her position is not an important issue in the trilogy. There is no interchange between Klytemnestra and Aegisthus from which to draw conclusions about the quality of their relationship. Aegisthus is necessary to control troops, but is accorded little respect and is referred to as a woman and a housekeeper, someone who stays indoors, a characteristic of women. Her relationship with Orestes is hardly referred to in the 'Agamemnon'. She mentions that he is in exile for his own safety but as she says this to Agamemnon himself, it is not possible to tell whether this was the case.

Her relationship with the chorus is uneasy. They obviously respect her and are obedient to her 'κρατος' (255ff). They ply her honour but at the same time make it clear that they do so as it is right in the absence of her husband (259-60). They do not address her as 'queen' but as the wife of Agamemnon (e.g. watchman, at line 26). They are 'ευφρων' towards her but do not accept all that she says; they demand proof, accusing her of dreaming. When at last proof is given they only trust it because they feel she has spoken like a man(351). At lines 475ff they change their minds again, calling the news rumour and fantasy. It is debatable whether Klytemnestra is still present on stage at this point, but it is unlikely that the chorus would have changed their opinion so dramatically unless there were some reason, such as Klytemnestra no longer being present. Their loyalty lies with Agamemnon rather than Klytemnestra as they try to warn him of the dangerous situation in his house. Earlier they seemed loyal to Klytemnestra, but only in Agamemnon's absence, as his queen. After the murder when the chorus upbraid her, she is very calm and they are rather panicky, shown by the metres in which they speak, iambics and dochmiachs respectively. However, as the scene continues, Klytemnestra gets angry and loses control and the metre changes to anapaests. This shows that the chorus can upset her although they never get the better of her.

Various animal similes are used of her, a cow attacking a bull (1125), a bitch (1228), an 'amphisbaena' which is a mythical monster (1233), and Scylla (1235), a two-footed lioness sleeping with a wolf (1258) and a hen (1672). Two fo these images are in terms of the male/female relationship; the cow and the bull and Clytemnestra as the hen beside Aegisthus as the strutting cock. The use of 'bitch' reminds

us of the same word's ironical use at line 607 and of Helen's use of the word to describe herself in Odyssey 4. None of the rest have any particular significance apart from emphasising her savagery and destructive effect on men. Two phrases are used of her which depict her unfemininity: 'γυναικος ανδροβουλον κεαρ' (11) and 'κατ ανδρολεγεις' (351). Other images of her as healer (97) and guardian (914) turn out to be ironic as she is neither of these.

Klytemnestra corrupts the social order in the Agamemnon. She takes a lover, rules the state and does pretty much what she likes, but loses control of and contact with her children. The distortions of the familiar roles constitute the issues of the play. The importance of the sexual conflict is signified by the way in which Aeschylus makes Klytemnestra herself kill Agamemnon rather than Aegisthus doing it, as he does in Homer. Her burial of and lamentation for her husband, traditionally a woman's duties, emphasises the singularity of Klytemnestra's position.

Katy Judd
(edited by Vanda Zajko)

EXETER'S GRECIAN SUBURB

Exeter City Football Club plays at St James' Park near the top end of Sidwell Street. One entrance to the field was erected by the supporters' club after the Second World War and is called the Grecian Gate. In 1908 the public had been invited to suggest a nickname for the team: "the Grecians" was finally chosen because St. Sidwellians had long been known as Greeks. However, nobody really knew why. The Express and Echo carried a flurry of letters on the subject in the 1930s, including one in verse by "T.L.":

> "Grecians forsooth! but whence so great a name,
> For ever foremost in the ranks of fame,
> St. Sidwell's sons obtained: ah! who can know,
> Or who attempt its origin to show..."

T.L. then tries to trace a link between the Devon Courtenays and the 12th-century Byzantine emperors, but fails to implicate St. Sidwells.

The local papers habitually referred to St.Sidwellians as Greeks". The usage was firmly established by 1828, when there was a hearing at the Guildhall of a complaint Davey v. Sclater and Sclater v. Davey: "This was a cross complaint, and the large muster of GREEKS showed that 'the tug of war' had been in the east country." "T.T.", reminiscing in 1874, called St. Sidwells "The Grecian suburb... It used to be said in my day 'let us go up with the wise men of the East, those living without the East Gate of the city!"

Robert Newton's book on Exeter in the eighteenth century explains that "Grecians was the name given to the mob stimulated by free food and drink to intimidate respectable voters at parliamentary and mayoral elections; St. Sidwell's was their stronghold." The source for this is the Mobiad, the mock epic written by an Exeter printer, Andrew Brice, describing the mob's behaviour at an election in the 173Gs:

> "The Yellow GREEKS with vast Huzza rush in;
> And Blues look bluer at the dauntful Din."

He explains in a footnote: "GREEKS. So we surname, I know not why, the rugged inhabitants of St. Sidwell's. The title seems to have arisen from their contending with the City at Foot-ball etc., they being call'd Greeks as making the Invasion, and the Townsmen perhaps Trojans in defending their Ground..." Blue was the colour of the Tory favours and also of the uniform of the City boys, the Blueboys.

It is clear that the story of the Trojan War was familiar to the inhabitants of Exeter. A Latin epic De Bello Troiano had been written by a 12th-century Exonian, Josephus Iscanus. In 1346 the mayor of Exeter, Robert Noble, had a beautiful daughter called Helen. One of her admirers sang:

> "As noble Helen was the cause
> of ten years' war in Troy
> So Helen Noble is the cause
> Of this my great annoy."

In July 1726 Brice's Weekly Journal carried the following advertisement:

"This is to give Notice to all gentlemen, Ladies and others, that during the Time of the Fair in Southernhay, will be perform'd by Artificial Actors, an Excellent Play, call'd

The Siege of Troy:

Not like the common Puppet Shews, but after the Play house Manner; Wherein will be finely represented the Figure of the Wooden-Horse, which was made hollow, and of such vast Capacity as to contian at least 500 Men; together with a lively Prospect of the Grecian Camp and Army, with the Princes in their proper Habits: Shewing the Manner of their taking the City of Troy, which will appear in Flames, agreeable to the History. Also a charming Representation of the Sea, the nearest Imitation of Nature possible, where will be seen the Grecian Fleet returning with their rich Spoil and Plunder from the Siege."

Those were days when every schoolboy knew that a hostile gang outside the city walls resembled Homer's Greeks. Perhaps this consciousness died when the city gates were dismantled and the grammar school itself moved outside the shelter of the walls. We no longer perceive the city as beleaguered by the inhabitants of St. Sidwell's.

HAZEL HARVEY

A Legend and a Picture: Marcus Curtius and B.R.Haydon

One of the most spectacular pictures in the Impressionist Museum at the Tuileries represents a dishevelled woman astride a galloping horse, waving a sword in the air, charging, the horse's legs horizontally outstretched, across a field bestrewn with corpses. The picture, painted in 1894 by Douanier Rousseau, is simply called "War"; and Medici postcards are available. Some forty years ago I showed one to a friend in London; and he observed, "It reminds me of the picture of Marcus Curtius leaping into the Curtian Gulf, in the Comic History of Rome."

When the next term began, I showed the print, and mentioned the observation, to a colleague. The colleague commented,
"There is a very similar picture in the City Museum".

There was; and there is. It was the main piece in an exhibition held at the Museum in June 1986. The similarity between the two pictures was easily explained. The comic picture was a deliberate parody of the other.

Nor was it the only parody: there were cartoons, in Punch and elsewhere, which showed the self-immolating hero in many contemporary avatars: as the Emperor Napoleon III, as directors of rival companies, as a Cabinet Minister adopting a suicidal policy, as one or other, or both, of the contending factions in the American Civil War. With the exception of When did you last see your father?, I doubt whether any popular picture has been so widely, and so hilariously, parodied.

Why should this be? The picture is not outstandingly bad (a far worse picture on an adjacent wall represents Richard II and Bolingbroke entering London, respectively hooted and acclaimed by the citizenry: one is reminded of G.K.Chesterton's illustration of the clerihew "Adam Smith/Was disowned by all his kith: But backed through thick and thin/ By all his kin") nor, surely, by the standards of a generation which went wild over heroic or chivalrous gestures, was it outstandingly sentimental or sententious.

Let us see how Livy describes the episode.

> "The middle of the Forum fell in, to an immense depth, by earthquake, or some other force; nor could that abyss be filled by throwing in earth, which everyone carried for himself, until on the advice of the gods an inquiry began, as what that was in which the strength of Rome lay; for that was what the prophets said had to be sacrificed there, if they wanted the Roman Republic to be everlasting. Then, they say, Marcus Curtius, a young man with a distinguished war record, indignantly asked those who were uncertain what to do, whether anything that Rome possessed was more precious than arms and courage. There was a silence: looking at the temples of the immortal gods which tower above the Forum, and at the Capitol. holding his hands out first to the sky then to the gaping chasm beneath, and to the spirits below, he dedicated himself; then, riding a horse caparisoned as richly as he could afford, he threw himself in full armour into the gulf".

A little theatrical, perhaps, and more than a little egotistic; some may be reminded of Rupert Brooke; but a generous and honourable idea, even if, as Livy suggests, it is really a pious fiction.

Let us now see what the Victorian humourist makes of it. (The author's name was A'Beckett; the illustrator was John Leech, one of the earliest contributors to Punch).

> "At length the augurs were consulted; who, taking a view of the hole, announced their conviction tht the perforation of the earth would continue, and that in fact it would become in time a frightful bore, if the most precious thing in Rome were not speedily thrown into it. Upon this, a young guardsman named Marcus Curtius, fancying that there could be nothing more precius than his precious self, arrayed himself in a full suit of armour and went forth, fully determined to show his metal. Notice was given that at an appointed time a rapid act of horsemanship would be performed by Marcus Curtius, and as there is always a great attraction in a feat which puts life in jeopardy, the attendance at a performance where death for the man and the courser was a matter of course, was what we should call numerous and respectable...The equestrian performance was no sooner over than the theatre of the exploit was immediately closed, and a lake arose on the spot, as if the scene was one that might announce a continual overflow. The place got the name of the Lacus Curtius in honour of the hero, if such he may be called; and his fate certainly involved the sacrifice of one of the most precious articles in Rome, for it would have been impossible to find in the whole city such a precious simpleton".

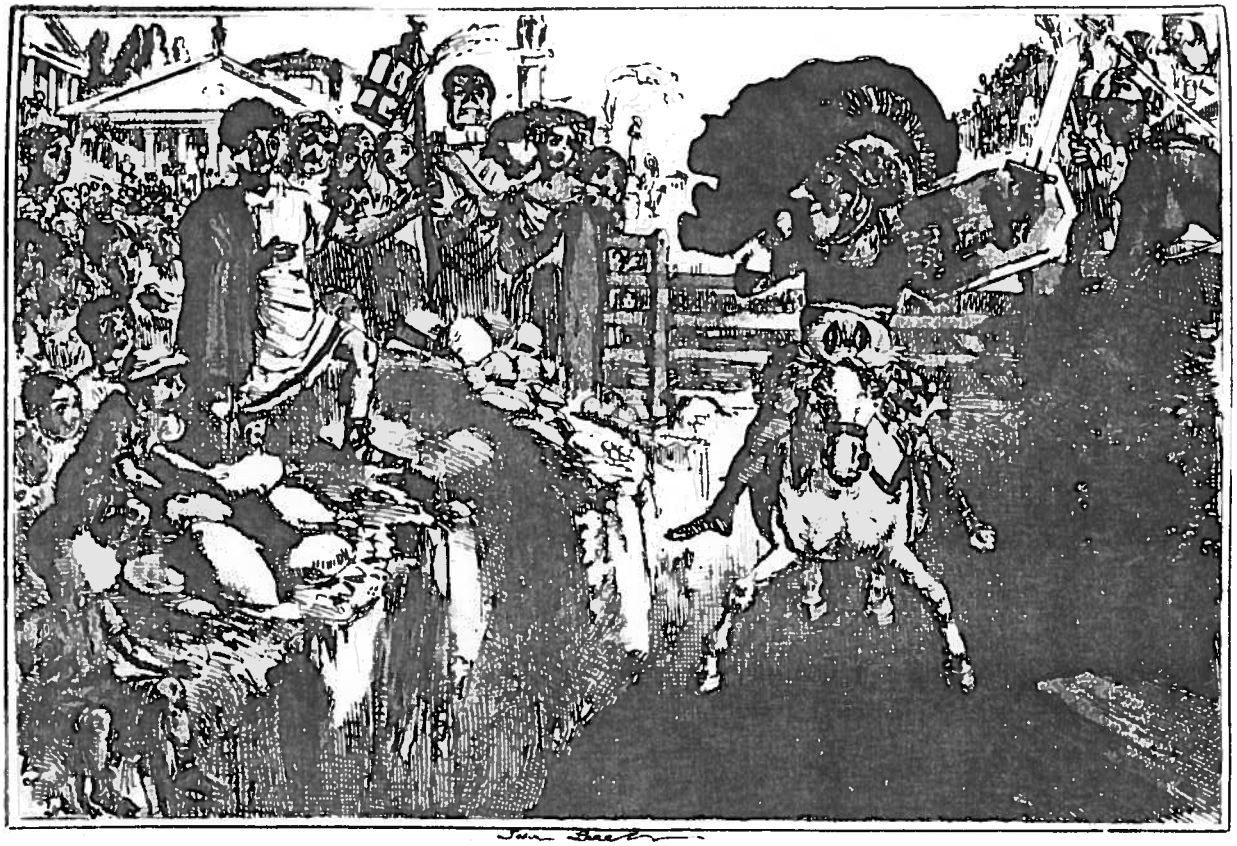
Now the puns certainly make painful reading; but the author is not by any means a mere Lytton-Strachey debunker avant la lettre. In this work, and the companion Comic History of England, we can usually see, beneath the superficial flippancy, a moderately sensible and humane Victorian Liberal. He refuses to romanticize either Coriolanus or Charles I, though he regrets the execution of the latter; he abominates the Victorian Poor Law, and sympathizes with the Roman Plebs, though he mildly suggests that burning at the stake seems a disproportionate punishment for being rude to a tribune; and, like Sir Charles Oman, he trounces Gaius Gracchus for trying to interfere with the iron laws of economics. (The economics of Hayek, of course, and of Scrooge before him: but this does not in his case exclude a sympathy for the Roman, or the Victorian poor). Why, then, does he, and why did so many of his contemporaries, think that self-immolation was a theme for a sick joke? (The author skates very lightly over the repeated devotiones of the Decius Mus family, but that is probably because he does not want to make the same comments twice.) Not, I think, because it was fictitious; the stories of Lucretia and Verginia are fictitious, and so, according to some, is the Massacre of the Innocents, but one would not treat them with levity, nor would one parody the numerous child deaths in Victorian novels. The Charge of the Light Brigade has often been parodied, but seldom ridiculed; the Victorians, and their immediate successors, went wild over the deaths of General Gordon and of Captain Oates; Newbolt has been criticized, but the death-scenes in his poems, whether authentic or fictitious, are commonly treated with more respect than they, perhaps, deserve.

We should, of course, distinguish between the 1840s and the 1890s. The 1890s were an age of what the Germans, who should know about it, describe as hurra-patriotismus; the years which led to them had turned the word "Empire" from a boo-word, originally suggesting the Bonapartes or the Tsars, to a hurray-word associated with the Forces and the Monarchy. The 1840s remembered the Napoleonic Wars, and respected individual courage - The Private of the Buffs is still moving, and was quoted, rather more than half seriously, in 1941 as a criticism of a celebrated author who was thought, incorrectly, to have behaved dishonourably when in enemy hands - but the military were not idolized; the Duke of Wellington was admired as a soldier and statesman, but the Earl of Cardigan was commonly regarded as a pain in the neck; Thackeray, also a Punch contributor, wrote a savagely anti-militarist poem simply because a Guardsman's busby got in his way when he was trying to watch a Royal procession.

But Leech and the author he illustrated are not, here, attacking military attitudes. Firmness under fire, or in captivity, were expected in the Army, and admired outside it, but no Napoleonic or Crimean traditions suggest the existence of a kamikaze ethos; nor did the conventional teaching of history, whether ancient or contemporary. Chinless wonders, of course, have been objects of ridicule from time immemorial, but Marcus Curtius was not a Lord Verisopht or a Bertie Wooster. We can, I think, discount the possibility that the author is suggesting, as some might have done, that the Romans, or those who study them, are inherently ridiculous; here, as elsewhere in the work, part at least of the target is contemporary. It is also aristocratic, though the author is not knocking conventional aristocratic attributes or attitudes. What then is he knocking?

There is no publication date on the book, but the British Museum Catalogue, gives the date 1851, following an 1847 date, for the companion work. The humour, in style and subject-matter, is clearly 1840ish: Haydon's picture appeared in 1843, and the Lays of Ancient Rome, quite often quoted, were published in 1842. Less immediately obvious as sources, Disraeli's Coningsby (parodied by Thackeray as Codlingsby) appeared in 1844, and Sybil or the Two Nations in 1845. Earlier, in 1839, Victorian Gothic had appeared at its most grotesque in the Eglinton Tournament, where a romanticizing Tory Peer had organized what he believed to be a replica of a medieval tournament: not, like its prototypes, an orgy of homicide and wife-swapping in which estates, as well as wives and mistresses, might exchange hands, but, it was hoped, a demonstration of hardiness and expertise which might impress the common people and scare off any possible invader. (Possible, rather than actual: neither Bismarch nor Napoleon III had yet made their names, and neither the Hapsburgs nor the Romanoffs were any threat to anyone but their own subjects).

What, then, have Eglinton, Disraeli, and Marcus Curtius in common? Romanticism, pretentiousness, and a cult of the phoney antique: combined, I think we should add, with a certain generosity of spirit. These were embodied, through the 1840s, in the Young England movement: a comparatively short-lived political equivalent of the



The gallant Curtius leaping into the gulf.

from Roma: die Denkmale der ewigen Stadt von Dr.P.Albert Kuyn, 1877.

Henri Rousseau. La Guerre ou La Chevauchée de la discorde.

Tractarian movement in the Church and the, rather longer-standing, cult of the Middle Ages, sometimes oddly combined with Cavaliers and Jacobites, in literature. Its leaders, mainly public-spirited but not outstandingly intelligent young noblemen, wished, in the words of a later romantic, to tie in a living tether the prince and priest and thrall, and they appealed to what they thought was a genuine historical tradition to help them to do so. That they also wished to preserve the existing social order, purged of its abuses, and their own status, fortified by a recognition of its clear social duties, is certainly true, but hardly reprehensible; although A'Beckett did not realize this, there were noblemen in the later Roman Republic whose aims were precisely the same (the most notable being Livius Drusus, the tribune of 91 B.C.). Some contemporaries, including Dr. Arnold, looking perhaps far into the future, saw this medieval revivalism as a danger to Christian and civilized values, and the Japanese equivalent, the idea of Bushido, was certainly invented by evil and ambitious men with plans of conquest and spoilation, but the activities of Young England were usually laudable, though their language was often absurd. To go into detail, let us quote a near-contemporary Liberal historian (Justin Maccarthy, A History of Our Own Times, vol. I).

> "The Young England party, as they were named, were ardent to restore the good old days when the noble was the father of the poor and the chief of his neighbourhood. The young landlord exhibited himself in the attitude of a protector, patron, and friend to all his tenants. Doles were formally given at stated times to all who came for them to the castle gate. Young noblemen played cricket with the peasants on their estate, and the Saturnian age was believed by a good many persons to be returning for the express benefit of Old, or rather of Young, England... There was something of a party being formed in Parliament for the realization of Young England's idyllic purposes. Ity comprised among its members several more or less gifted youths of rank, who were full of enthusiasm and poetic aspirations and nonsense, encouraged and supported by..."

(a politician not named, but characterized in several lengthy clauses which perhaps compose the longest recorded periphrasis for the word Disraeli.)

A rather less flattering account was given by a more nearly contemporary writer.

> "The aristocracy, in order to rally the people to them, waved the proletarian almsbag in front for a banner. But the people, so often as it joined them, saw on their hindquarters the old feudal coats of arms, and deserted, with loud and ireverent laughter."

So Karl Marx, in 1848. It is unlikely that the "people", at least the farm labourers who in prosperity and depression alike were the worst paid and the worst housed labourers in England, if not in Europe, had much to laugh about, though they probably made as much use as they could of what they regarded, as they regarded contemporary High-Anglican churchmanship, as a quaint hobby of the gentry. But the middle classes certainly laughed: and the loudest and most irreverent laughter came from John Leech and Gilber A'Beckett.

H.W.Stubbs

WHOOPS!

Whenever I say to students that I don't particularly enjoy marking exams, they always remind me, very properly, that it is much worse to have to take them. And markers do have one compensation: the strange and entertaining pieces of information that crop up in some candidates' papers. For nearly a quarter of a century I have been scribbling these down, and it is, I think, about time that they should appear in the pages of Pegasus. I have selected passages on the Mycenaeans (but have headed these with a version of the word that throws new light on Bronze Age patronage), Roman history, and women in the ancient world. In a future issue I hope to present material on other topics, in particular Greek history, an area in which my collection is particularly rich. In only one case have I succumbed to the temptation to "improve" on the original (and I hope Paul Cartledge will forgive me), much though I have longed to make the Marmiti come from Bovrillae, and to add a letter to what lictors carried. Otherwise I have merely added a very few linking words.

The Maeceneans

Schliemann found Mycenae, although he thought it was Troy. Schliemann did make mistakes, especially in finding the gold mask of Agamemnon at Troy. Greece was much more wooden in Mycenean times than it is today. The so-called "treasury of Atreus" is believed to be, as the name suggests, Atreus' treasury. Linear B shows that Mycenae must have been a literary society. One of the problems of associating the destruction of Mycenaean centres with a Dorian arrival is the evidence of reoccupation of some sites, or perhaps even continued occupation, especially that of R.A.Tomlinson in Argos and the Argolid.

Roman History

The reign of Servus Hostilus is smattered with fiery language and brave ordeals. It may be that Livy never took any part in military affairs in his own lifetime, and that his apparent ignorance is in fact wholly genuine. The senate developed an esprit de coeur; lictors carried their faces. The consequences of a plebian that spoke in a government that was ruled by "the Best" was grime. The Romans invaded Italy, and found themselves face to face with classical Latin. Then came the Hannibballistic Wars,

in which the Marmiti were involved. C.Gracchus passed a Lex Fragmentaria; Cicero had a daughter named Tuna; Brutus had a position in a mint factory. After the Triumphirate, Augustus changed the constitution of the Romans completely from a Republican one to an Empirical one. Even the Senate could do nothing to pull the ground away from under the feet of the Princeps. Under the Republic the leading figures were of high moral worth, but under the Principate the lowering of behaviour created ripples throughout society. Virgil's poetry is full of double meanings, mostly relating to Augustus' person. In 1 B.C. his daughter Julia was exiled when one of her parties got out of hand. This came when Augustus had just been made Papa Patria. The plebs were only interested in bread and circuses, or, in the words of Juvenal, "panem et circuses". This was a grave miserror.

Women in the Ancient World

It is extremely difficult to tell to what extent males are chauvinist, if at all, granted that they are. Men may find themselves married to different types of women, particularly wives. Helen gave the men at Menelaus' palace a drug to keep them happy while the bard was singing. The traditional attitudes found in Semonides could not help but convince women and their husbands that it was better to be inside, particularly if they were attractive, and especially if they looked like a monkey. At Sparta, some women even grew beards at the time of their marriage. Aristotle disapproved of their short tunics which probably had a slit in each side in view of Paul Cartledge. Betrothal was known as en gyne. Sophocles may just have been a victim of retrospective analysis where his attitudes in childhood towards women were concerned. In the Bacchae, women kill not only animals but even the king; in this way Euripides very subtly indicates the increasing importance of women. Critias spoke in favour of pre-natal care for fathers. It was important for a man to have a good mother, as otherwise it gave the chance for ridicule.

Roman society was male-orientated, with the woman firmly underneath. At a Roman wedding a torch was lit from the hearth of the bride's house and taken to the groom's house, where it was thrown away. The torch was intended to represent the bride's shift of loyalty to her husband's family. Ancient contraceptive methods worked because they prevented the sperm from going beyond the uterus. Martial, however, was unwilling to become the passive partner in cunnilingus. DAVID HARVEY

The torch was intended to represent the bride's shift of loyalty to her husband's family. Ancient contraceptive methods worked because they prevented the sperm from going beyond the uterus. Martial, however, was unwilling to become the passive partner in cunnilingus.

DAVID HARVEY

OVIDIVS PRAESTIGIATOR: ART AND ARTIFICE IN THE METAMORPHOSES

It is always interesting to watch authors, ancient and modern, go up and down on the critical Stock Exchange. Even after two thousand years and more fluctuations of taste still have power to exalt or depress the current reputation of established classics. In the field of Latin poetry one particularly striking example is Ovid.

A. W. Verrall, we are told, took against Ovid when he was at school. "This dislike (he) never lost, and I can recall the tone of real sadness with which he once referred to the essential triviality of Ovid's art: it actually distressed him that a man who could have done better things 'should have left only piffle'. One can well believe that the boy dimly felt the same disappointment, that he was even at that early age seeking in his author something more than the 'topmost froth of thought'". (Bayfield in A.W. Verrall Collected Literary Essays Classical and Modern, ed. M.A. Bayfield and J. D. Duff, Cambridge 1913). Well, that was a long while ago, and Ovid has come up in the world since then. But commentators and interpreters still, it seems to me, display a certain insecurity, a defensiveness, in what they say of him, more especially when dealing with the Metamorphoses. With Lucretius, with Catullus, with Virgil, with Horace, for all their several nuances and ambiguities, the critic at bottom feels solid ground in the sense that there is some commitment underpinning the message, however tricky it may be to pin down and analyse. What, if anything, was Ovid committed to? Is his brilliant and incessant play of literary virtuosity anything but that - play? What, if anything, is the Metamorphoses in particular about? Is its creator simply praestigiator, a brilliant illusionist?

It is of the Metamorphoses rather than of the Fasti or the Heroides or the Tristia that the question must be asked: for this is his chef d'oeuvre. However, great artists are by definition exceptional people; and it is a familiar fact that they tend to be greatly preoccupied with technique. It might therefore be objected that it has been Ovid's surface brilliance, his mastery of the tricks of the trade, that has chiefly excited the admiration of his fellow professionals - craftsman calling to craftsman. There is something in that - witness the admiration of men of letters for P.G. Wodehouse, to which I shall presently recur - but it cannot be the whole story. That explanation will not account for the sheer size and quality of the impression that he has left on the European cultural tradition. It is surely improbable that the poets and painters who have resorted to him over the centuries for inspiration had no other incentive than, in the words of John Courtenay, to 'cull the tinsel phrase' or its visual equivalent. Ovid is sometimes labelled a 'mere entertainer'. Besides exemplifying a tendency to overwork the word 'mere' - it begs a fundamental question: what is 'mere' about entertainment? What is also overlooked in judgements of this kind is the improbability that the stories in the Metamorphoses, which include many of the great central Greek myths, as retold by Ovid, could somehow emerge from the retelling process divested of their moral content. By retelling them in his own way he was inevitably bound to place them in a fresh light and to invite re-examination of their message. Even had he wanted to I cannot imagine how he could have told them 'straight', in a manner which strained their values out of them; and of course he wanted nothing of the kind. The myths were there to be re-interpreted by every poet and artist who took them up; and what Ovid does with them shows him at every

turn acutely aware of himself and conscious of what his predecessors had done with this corpus of original material. Myth and legend - from which history proper in the current educational tradition was only tenuously distinguished - was the accepted and indispensable reservoir of ideas and values, offering standards for comparison and analysis: a vast encyclopaedia continuously revised of human experience and aspiration. Here I may seem to be labouring the obvious; and with regard to tragedy and 'serious' epic it would not occur to anybody to dispute any of this or what follows from it. Why should things be different - as they are- when it is the Metamorphoses that is in question?

It must be at least in part - and here I finally come within hail of my announced theme - because Ovid has for many readers seemed too clever by half, too clever for his own good. He said as much himself, and "he was told so in his own time, and his ghost has been hearing it ever since": so J.F. Nims in his excellent brief introduction to the 1965 reissue of the Golding version of the Metamorphoses. The sort of cleverness he indulged in was not in fact by any means peculiar to him. Virgil was as Alexandrian as could be; recent work has shown that he could be every bit as trickily allusive as Ovid when he chose. (See now Wendell Clauson, Virgil's Aeneid and the tradition of Hellenistic poetry, Sather Classical Lectures Vol. 51, 1987). But he is not, as Ovid appears to be, dominated by the preoccupation with manner, with form, and above all, with words. One must concede that Ovid was evidently in love with language and continuously alert to the endless possibilities for the ingenious manipulation of words. That in itself is enough to discredit him in the eyes of a certain type of reader.

The difference between the Metamorphoses and other epics is immediately evident in the first four lines:

> In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas
> corpora: di, coeptis (nam uos mutastis et
> illa) adspirate meis primaque ab origine
> mundi ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora
> carmen.

This is all the poem or prelude there is to this long epic ((approximately equivalent to the Odyssey), and it is packed with allusive meaning. I do not propose to go over again ground already covered in print; the point I want to emphasize now is the way in which here, at the very beginning of this vast literary enterprise, the poet asserts himself. Epic is traditionally impersonal, with the muse speaking through the poet. Virgil enshrines his views on the sort of epic he proposes to write, not in the Aeneid but in the Georgics. Ovid centres the spotlight not on a hero or even a theme for all the identification of change as the subject of the poem - but on himself and his role. To the switched-on reader, such as we must hypothesize for this elaborate philological poetry, those five words which end line 2 say a great deal:

> . . . nam uos mutastis et illa.

Assuming that I am right to believe that Ovid did indeed write illa and not illas this identifies a standard programmatic-polemical motif. This is the scenario initiated by Callimachus in which the poet starts writing the wrong sort of poetry, and the god appears and calls him to order. What our ideal switched-on reader would remember was that Ovid had already had fun with this idea in the first poem of the Amores. This exercise in the manipulation of the genre and of its denizens, human and divine alike, is a demonstration of the power of the poet, the maker, to create and order a world on

his own terms. There it was the world of elegy; in the Metamorphoses it is the Universe. The throwaway reference to a theophany is pregnant in its brevity. The reader may take it as looking back to the (alleged) genesis of the Amores, to anything and everything written by the poet to date; and of course to the work now launched. Peter Knox has acutely pointed out that "the parenthesis fills the second half of the second hexameter, precisely the point where the reader of a new work by Rome's most celebrated elegist will first notice that this is not an elegiac couplet". (P.E. Knox, Ovid's Metamorphoses and the traditions of Augustan poetry, CPS Suppl. 11, 1986, 9). Again the implication is that whatever may be said or implied about di intervening, it is the poet who is manipulating the operation, gods included.

More than once in the Metamorphoses Ovid allows himself allusive reminders of his presence and his role: he, the poet, is shaping these events, he has created a travesty of the real world in which they are taking place. At 2. 219, in a catalogue of the mountains scorched when Phaethon loses control of the chariot of the Sun, he refers to Haemus as nondum Oeagrius, 'not yet Oeagrian'. This immediately recalls, and is clearly intended to, Virgil's Oeagrius Hebrus at Georgics 4. 524. This expression was in its original setting recherche: Virgil probably coined the adjective Oeagrius, 'son of Oeagrus', and by applying it allusively to a river drew attention to it. Ovid reapplies it to the scene of Orpheus' death, and while thus acknowledging Virgil's contribution to the language of Latin poetry contrives also to make the point that Haemus (and a fortiori Hebrus) cannot as yet be famous in this connection, since Orpheus does not exist - because Ovid has not got to him. This little trick recurs several times; the implication is that these events are not so much waiting to be recorded as waiting to happen. This goes one better than Horace's 'Vixere fortes'; in the Universe of the Metamorphoses it is only what a poet has been pleased to bring into being that exists. Another such reminder of who is pulling the strings can be found in what on the face of it is a casual comment at 8. 726. The story of Baucis and Philemon is there said to have affected all those present, 'especially Theseus', Thesea praecipue. Theseus figures in the Metamorphoses for the most part as a peg on which to hang the series of episodes which begin at 7. 404; to refer to him from time to time helps to keep the reader in mind of the narrative framework, and here he has a specific if humble role of providing the transition to the next story. That is done by yet another variant on one of Ovid's transitional formulae in the poem 'all, except only X' - here 'all, especially X'. But why 'especially'? "Theseus would obviously be more moved than his doubting friend Pirithous", suggests Anderson, who at any rate has a go; but Hollis rather undercuts this explanation by noting that cunctos implies that, "even Pirithous is impressed". The true answer is literary. The tale that they have just been listening to exemplifies a typically Ovidian technique of combination. On to a folk-tale (so it would seem) of Near Eastern origin he has grafted a literary motif that goes back to Homer, the reception of a great personage in a humble dwelling. The theme was handled by more than one Hellenistic poet, but the canonical treatment was that by Callimachus in his lost Hecale. In this he told how Theseus, on his way to tackle the bull of Marathon, was harboured in her cottage by a poor old woman, Hecale. For much of the detail in the scenes in which the gods are hospitably received by the old couple Ovid was clearly indebted to Callimachus, as his readers would be expected to recognise. Theseus' interest is due to the fact that he has been here before: it is that, not of a mythical hero, but of a character in a poem - two poems in fact, Callimachus' as well as Ovid's.

So much for art and artifice. We are still entitled to ask what the poet is saying. Is he saying anything? Is he simply indulging himself? Seneca seems to have thought so. Apropos of 1.394 on the bizarre consequences of the great flood:

nat luper inter oues, fuluous uehit unda leones -

he sourly remarked that this was no theme for fun and games: 'non est res satis sobria lasciuire deuorato orbe tarrarum' (NQ 3. 27. 13). But this whole string of paradoxes has a point, it is not wit for its own sake. This is a picture of a world that no longer makes sense, in which order has dissolved into chaos. Behind these isolated incongruities there is a single central cosmic incongruity: the huge injustice of an entire world doomed to extinction, good along with bas - for we have been expressly told (220-1) that the common people were pious; or are we to suppose that Ovid had forgotten that already? - and the innocent brute creation along with guilty mankind. The next universal catastrophe, the Conflagration, will also be set off by a god, this time inadvertently - but if the universe is a moral shambles, does it matter much to those on the receiving end whether it is malignity or incompetence that is shaping their destinies? In that connection there is some delicate Ovidian byplay. Jupiter has evidently been reading up on the future history of the world for which he is responsible in the Olympian Public Record Office (the tabularia of 15. 810), and has found that at some time or other a general conflagration is fated to occur (1. 256 ff.). This looks like a sly reference to the Stoic doctrine of ecpyrosis, the periodical destruction of the universe by fire; but on the mythical level it is used to motivate Jupiter's opting for water as the means of destruction:

> . . . . timuit ne forte sacer ot ab ignibus
> aether conciperet flammas langusque ardesceret
> axis (245-5) -

not knowing, though the poet knows and reminds us, that a rash promise by Phoebus in the not too distant future will set off a catastrophe starting in heaven that will very nearly anticipate the ecpyrosis and will necessitate his using the thunderbolt after all - which on second thoughts he now replaces in its holster (259). So uncertainty is felt; is Jupiter really in charge? He can change things but things also change in spite of him. In this universe of ceaseless and unpredictable vicissitudes only the poet knows what will happen next. Jupiter proposes, Ovid disposes.

Critics seem to be ill at ease when faced with a work of literature that does not appear to be making some kind of moral statement. In such a case they will sometimes force a moral statement out of a book by rack and thumbscrew: witness recent attempts to read a profound criticism of Roman society into Petronius' comic novel. When all else fails they pretend it isn't literature and so doesn't count. Of this ploy the outstanding victim among English writers has been P.G. Wodehouse. But where is the law which says that a work of literature is valuable only if it is 'serious', i.e. solemn? Why impose on literature a kind of limitation which is not imposed on painting or music? The question to ask is surely: given that many people, some of them with (on the face of it) pretensions to judge, do value Wodehouse and Ovid, what it is they value in them and why? Part of the answer lies in the sheer rarity, at its best, of what they do best, high comedy. Comedy sets out to entertain, to divert, to provide pleasure: dulce without utile - but who says that pleasure is not useful? And in fact any comedy that rises above the level of slapstick must say something. The point at issue is how it says it. Comedy implies detachment, irony, intellectualisation. "The world

is a tragedy to those that feel, a comedy to those that think" - so Horace Walpole, though I don't suppose he invented this favourite dictum of his. The universe of the Metamorphoses is by and large a heartless place, in which men and women, and frequently the gods also, are caught up by arbitrary and inflexible forces in a non-stop kaleidoscopic sequence of romance, violence, delight, despair, farce, tragedy, apotheosis, agony . . . a world in which nothing is certain and nobody's identity is wholly secure. The overall effect remains elusive, as is seen from the attempts of scholars to pin down and read significance into the structure of the poem. One cannot be unaware that Ovid's selection and organisation of his material is artful in every sense of the word, but nobody has yet (I would say) succeeded in showing that it is functional in the sort of way that can be postulated for other Latin epics - the De Rerum Natura, the Aeneid, the Pharsalia. If it reflects anything, it is the endless changefulness of events and of the world in which they take place. Ovid's much-criticised transitions can themselves be understood as reinforcing the message, a form of comment on the fluid and unpredictable character of causation. This means that it is often difficult to know what to make of any one episode when it is read in the fluctuating and unstable context of what precedes and follows it.

I will try to illustrate this point by looking briefly at the central episode of Book VIII, the Calydonian Boar-hunt and the story of Meleager. Ovid ends his epic-style catalogue of the participating heroes with Atalanta as Virgil had ended his muster-roll of the Italian forces with Camilla. The description of her includes one ominous detail: the arrows rattle in her quiver:-

> ex umero pendens resonabat eburnea laeuo
> telorum custos (320-1)

as Apollo's had rattled when he came down to destroy the Greeks in the first book of the Iliad (46) - or rather are to rattle - for the Trojan War has yet to happen. This dainty vision:

> talis erat cultu, facies quam dicere uere
> uirgineam in puero, puerilem in uirgine possis (322-3)-

completely bowls over Meleager -

> hanc pariter uidit, pariter Calydonius
> heros optauit (324-5) -

on which Anderson acutely notes, "Ovid characteristically uses heroes in unheroic contexts". In the circumstances Meleager has to content himself with a brief expression of his hopes, rather obliquely phrased - 'nec plura sinit tempusque pudorque' (327); the upshot is that he enters the hunt with his mind not by any means concentrated on the object of the exercise.

The scene having thus been set, it ought not to come as a surprise that the ensuing hunt is a far from heroic performance. The 'almost comic' incidents involving Nestor and Telamon are not, as Hollis's comment would suggest, exceptional. The whole thing is a knockabout from start to finish, and highly diverting knockabout. In the presence of the fascinating Atalanta everybody but Meleager goes to pieces. Echion hits a tree. Jason misses altogether. Mopsus has the tip of his spear whipped off in mid-air by Diana. Nestor - specially imported by Ovid; it doesn't appear that he was among the traditional participants - has to save himself by pole-vaulting into a tree. Castor and Pollux perform the traditional role of cavalry on the battlefield by cantering about gallantly and ineffectually. Telamon falls flat on his face; and the luckless Jason, trying his luck again, transfixes a hound. Finally Meleager kills the beast and

then infuriates the entire field by presenting the brush, so to speak, to Atalanta, who had scored the one hit - a ladylike outer on its ear - in the whole proceedings. Meleager's comment on that feat had resulted in much ill-feeling and the death of Ancaeus while showing off with his axe; now there is a riot, led by Meleager's two uncles, whom he incontinently kills. End of hunt.

On any conventional view of the unities this leaves something to be desired as the first act of a tragedy. It must be presumed that in Euripides' Meleager, which must have been Ovid's principal model, a decent tragic decorum would have been observed in the narration of the hunt by Messenger. Moreover, the management of the love-interest must have been rather different. Ovid deliberately trivialises this - and hence the motivation of the tragic sequel - by placing it in an elegiac rather than a tragic light. Meleager's instant infatuation with Atalanta is conveyed in words which both recall well-known Theocritean and Virgilian models and encapsulate the arbitrary and more often than not retributive nature of love in the world of the Metamorphoses:

> hanc pariter uidit, pariter Calydonius heros -

we have already noted the irony of that phrase -

> optauit renuente deo flammasque latentes hausit . . .
> (324-6)

Meleager's subsequent irresponsible and ultimately fatal actions take place, as we have seen, against a background of disorderly but also occasionally gruesome farce. In Ovid's treatment Meleager's love, his initial tactlessness and subsequent total lack of self-control come across as abruptly - and arbitrarily-motivated happenings in a scenario as morally chaotic as most other things that occur in this pantomime universe, in which buffoonery and tragedy alternate without warning or apparent cause.

There follows almost casually the transition to Althaea:

> dona deum templis nato uictore ferebat cum
> uidet exstinctos fratres Althaea referri. (445-6)

Ovid leaves it to be inferred that the good news outstripped the bad, or that the bad was not suppressed until it could not be concealed; that doesn't matter. What is brought out is the brutal sang-froid of a dispensation which can thus juxtapose triumph and bereavement, gain and loss, joy and grief, and place a human being in a dilemma, not of her seeking or contriving, that calls in question her most profoundly felt ties and affections. One can only speculate as to what if anything Althaea's great scene as Ovid handles it owes to Euripides. The general tone and treatment are obviously declamatory and reflect Ovid's rhetorical grounding and predilections; the theme itself is tragic, resembling in its presentation of the conflicting claims of motherhood and sisterhood the situation of Orestes, poised between the claims of father and mother. But, tragic as Althaea's plight is in principle, how seriously does Ovid's management of the whole episode allow us to take it? Neither Meleager nor his uncles, as they are depicted by him, arouse admiration or sympathy. It is only after Althaea has taken her decision and put the brand in the fire that we are reminded (though pudor at line 327 is a possible hint) that the man who murdered his uncles for love of this maiden votary of Diana is already married; and even this reminder is offered in passing and without emphasis in a list of sorrowing relatives:

> granda euumque patrem fratresque piasque sorores
> cum gemitu sociamque tori vocat ore supremo
> forsitan et matrem. (520-2)

The fact was part of the tradition; it is typical of Ovid to slip in in this way, and by doing so he surely casts a shadow of doubt over the ostensibly dignified deathbed of the hero and what Hollis calls his final rehabilitation?

Meleager's death closes the drama proper; what follows is a brief epilogue in which the rest of the cast are disposed of. Amid the general grief Althaea kills herself, and Meleager's sisters, unable to stop mourning for him, are changed by Diana into guinea-fowl. Hollis calls the passage comic. Certainly it is not tragic, but it isn't exactly funny either, at least to me. There is indeed a note of humorous exaggeration in the poet's resort to the 'had I a hundred tongues' formula in the face of the sisters' grief:

> non mihi si centum deus ora sonantia linguis
> ingeniumque capax totumque Helicona dedisset,
> tristia persequerer miserarum dicta sororum (533-5)

but the prevalent note might seem to be rather one of satire. We are asked to contemplate the spectacle of a whole city prostrate in grief - alta iacet Calydon - for a man who had brought the whole thing on himself because he could not behave like a responsible adult - or did he have it brought on him? For it was after all Diana who sparked off the whole affair by her indiscriminate visitation of the careless omission of Oeneus on a whole countryside, and it is again Diana, not in pity (like Juno with Dido) but being now satisfied with blood - caede exsatiata - who writes the whole family out of the series - except for Gorge and Deianira, the latter of whom will be needed later.

Ovid does not allow the reader to linger to savour whatever impression the episode has made on him. As is the way of the Metamorphoses, we are off again, with the next words, interea Theseus, on another sequence, the Baucis and Philemon-Erysichthon diptych. If one's experience of the poem as a whole has a quality of inconclusiveness, that is because Ovid, more often than not, does not permit time for conclusions to form - and that may well be part of the message. The universe as Ovid shows it to us in this poem is inconclusive. In the inherent unpredictability of Ovid's ever-changing universe, only one thing endures imperishably, as we finally learn in Pythagoras' great speech: the soul. Into whatever bodies it may pass, it is unchanged itself:

> animam . . . . semper eandem
> . . . . esse docoo . . . (15. 171-2)

The power of the human spirit to survive whatever, not only rulers or gods, but the very nature of the universe, can devise for its undoing is evidenced by the poem itself: the Metamorphoses is the document of the poet's power to create and impose his own vision of things. That vision is elusive because Ovid so willed it, and it puts the onus on the individual reader to come to terms with what on the face of it does not begin to make sense. As Anderson puts it: "might not Ovid be indicating . . . that human existence is a tangle of experiences which ideally requires a complicated, clear-eyed response from us? That humor and pathos are intertwined with nearly every human event?" ('Playfulness and seriousness in Ovid's Metamorphoses', in Mosaic Vol. 12 No.2, 1981). I think Ovid would have liked the bracketing of 'complicated' and 'clear-eyed'.