

11. The Other Heraclitus

Diogenes Laertius identified five individuals named Heraclitus¹ and quoted an elegy written by Callimachus in memory of one of them, the poet Heraclitus of Halicarnassus in Caria:

*Eipe tis, Hêrakteite, teon moron es de me dakru
êgagen emnêsthên d' hossakis amphotoi
êlion en leschêi katedusamen. alla su men pou,
xein' Halikarnêseu, tetrapalai spodiê,
hai de teai zôousin aêdones, hêisin ho pantôn
harpaktês Aidês ouk epi cheira balei.*²

In the well-known translation by the Eton tutor William Johnson Cory (1823-92):

They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.
I wept, as I remembered, how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.
And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
A handful of grey ashes, long long ago at rest,
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.³

Unfortunately, Callimachus' prediction turned out to be largely false. Only one of Heraclitus' "poetic nightingales" survived, a funereal epigram for a Cnidean woman named Aretêmiâs. But confusion between the Ephesian philosopher and the honoree of Callimachus' poem, already present in antiquity, continues to the present day.

Callimachus' epigram displays the restraint and precision that helped to make its author the leading elegist of his age. Recent studies of the poem have called attention to

¹ *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, IX, 1.

² *Palatine Anthology* 7, 80; Epigram II in Pfeiffer 1953, 81; and Epigram XXXIV in Gow and Page 1965, I, 65-66; with *êlion [en]* for Pfeiffer's *êlion en* (see Vol. II, 191-92).

³ Cory 1858, 7; reprinted in the 1877 and 1891 editions and widely anthologized.

the plain and straightforward character of its wording and sentence structure⁴, the effective manner in which the poem draws the reader into the personal world of the speaker⁵, and the skill with which the poet develops contrasts of light with dark and the death of the body with the staying power of poetry.⁶

Not surprisingly, many later poets remembered Callimachus' epigram and imitated its features. Virgil echoed *êlion en leschêi katedusamen* in *Eclogue IX* (51) when the shepherd Moeris remembers that *saepe ego longos/ cantando puerum memini me condere soles* ("often as a boy I recall that with song I would lay the long summer days to rest").⁷ R. Edgecombe 2008, 408-09 compares the lines "How often we talk'd down the Summer's Sun, / And cool'd our Passions by the breezy stream" in the *Night Thoughts* of the 18th-century English poet Edward Young. Others have heard echoes in the phrase "the hands of death" in Ovid's elegy on the death of Tibullus (*Amores* 3.9), in Tibullus' own "Illness of Phaecia" (III.4), in Horace's *Odes* (2.7. 6-7)⁸, and in the "living nightingales" and "envious hand of Aidoneus" in a funereal epigram by Quintus Sulpicius Maximus.⁹

Cory's "Heraclitus", on the other hand, has received mix reviews. Some fault his translation as wordy, overly emotional, and far removed from the Callimachean original.¹⁰ Others consider it an excellent poem in its own right—less concise than Callimachus' classic epigram, but still a worthy effort.¹¹

⁴ See Snell 1958, 1-4.

⁵ See Walsh 1990, 1-2.

⁶ See MacQueen 1982, 48-56 and Hunter 2006, 119.

⁷ G. Williams 1991, 169-77.

⁸ F. Williams 2003, 225-34.

⁹ De Stefani and Magnelli 2011, 548-9.

¹⁰ See Gildersleeve 1912, 486-7 and Ferguson 1970, 64-80.

¹¹ See Hirst 1932, 127 and Stallings (online) 2010.