Introduction

The Alexandrian poet Callimachus is, I have learned over several decades, an author who benefits from constant re-reading. So often the hidden gem of an image, a line, a poem even, just does not meet the reader's eye the first time she or he encounters the text. By way of a preface to this collection, mostly work inspired by Callimachus, his fellow Alexandrian authors, his era at the court of the Ptolemies, or later authors he himself inspired, I would like to reconsider a couple of signal texts.

I begin with one of Callimachus' most popular epigrams; *Ep*. 2 (G-P 34) is one of two epigrams that are preserved by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of the Philosophers*.

Εἶπέ τις Ἡράκλειτε τεὸν μόρον, ἐς δέ με δάκρυ
ἤγαγεν, ἐμνήσθην δ' ὁσσάκις ἀμφότεροι
ἥλιον ἐν λέσχῃ κατεδύσαμεν· ἀλλὰ σὺ μέν που
ξεῖν' Ἁλικαρνησεῦ, τετράπαλαι σποδιή·
αἱ δὲ τεαὶ ζώουσιν ἀηδόνες, ἧισιν ὁ πάντων
ἁρπακτὴς Ἅΐδης οὐκ ἐπὶ χεῖρα βαλεῖ.

Sources: Diogenes Laertius 9.17 τρίτος [Heraclitus] ἐλεγείας ποιητὴς Ἁλικαρνασσεύς, εἰς ὃν Καλλίμαχος πεποίηκεν οὕτως; AP 7.80 εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν Καλλιμάχου. [J] οὐχ ἁρμόσει τοῦτο εἰς Ἐφέσιον φιλόσοφον; Planudes Καλλιμάχου; Suda λ 309 s.v. λέσχη quotes lines 2-6 without attribution.

1 δέ με C δέ δε P δ' ἐμὲ Diog. 3 ἥλιον ἐν λέσχῃ P Suda ἠέλιον ἐν Pl Diog. ἠέλιον λέσχῃ coni. Bentley κατελύσαμεν Diog. v.l. 4 Ἁλικαρνασ(σ)εῦ Diog. v.l. Suda

> Someone mentioned your death, Heraclitus, and this brought | me to tears; I remembered how often we both | put the sun to sleep in conversation. But you, I suppose, | Halicarnassian friend, were ashes very long ago. | But your nightingales live on, upon which | Hades, the robber of all, will not cast his hand.

There are several features here that illustrate the layered Homeric tessitura of Callimachus' poetry. 1. One is the form κατεδύσαμεν; while the verb καταδύνω is a common Homeric one, this usage, of putting the sun to sleep, a variation on the metaphor of the common Homeric image of the sun setting, i.e., entering Ocean, occurs only here.[1] 2. The term ἐν λέσχῃ reflects both a Homeric text and a conundrum in Homeric scholarship: at *Od*. 18.329 Melantho tells Odysseus, disguised

1 2 E.g. *Il*. 1.475 ἠέλιος κατέδυ; 1.592 ἅμα δ'ἠελίῳ καταδύντι. Aristaenetus 1.24 imitates this Callimachean passage.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110787672-204

as an aged beggar, to go sleep in the λέσχη; the *Odyssey* scholia are much concerned about the exact nature of λέσχη here, apparently a public place for vagrants to sleep. 3. The term evolved into the sense 'conversation'; the Callimachean trick here is that the term evokes both a Homeric term and a Homeric problem.[2] Hades 'that sets his hand on all' evokes Achilles' own statement on the inevitability of death at *Il.* 22.365–66. 4. The term ἁρπακτής is Callimachus' variation on the Homeric hapax legomenon ἁρπακτήρ, which occurs at *Iliad* 24.262 in Priam's reproach of his remaining sons, whom the aged king compares to wolves at the end of a remarkable tetracolon crescendo of insults: ψεῦσται τ' ὀρχησταί τε, χοροιτυπίῃσιν ἄριστοι | ἀρνῶν ἠδ' ἐρίφων ἐπιδήμιοι ἁρπακτῆρες, 'liars and dancers, best at beating the ground in the dance, local pilferers of lambs and kids.' It is worth noting here that Callimachus does not use the suffix -ηρ, which is the most common in Homer with *nomina agentis* derived from uncompounded verbal roots, but the suffix -ης, which is the most common form in Ionic-Attic (and already in Homer with compound *nomina agentis*). 5. Even the εἰπέ τις and τεὸν μόρον of the first line assume poignant Homeric associations, especially for a poet, and audience, imbued with Homer's *Iliad*; for Achilles is told of Patroclus' death by Nestor's son Antilochus at *Iliad* 18.18–21, and it is Achilles own fated death, his μόρος, that Hephaestus laments to Thetis on promising to create the magnificent armor for Achilles at *Iliad* 18.465. For on Hector's death, as Thetis tells Achilles, he will himself be soon to die, ὠκύμορος (*Iliad* 18.95). Perhaps most poignantly, as he sets out for battle at the end of *Iliad* 19 Achilles avows to his immortal horse Xanthus that it is his, Achilles', fate to die at Troy: εὖ νυ τὸ οἶδα καὶ αὐτὸς ὅ μοι μόρος ἐνθάδ' ὀλέσυαι, | νόσφι φίλου πατρὸς καὶ μητέρος·, 'well lo do I know it, that it is my fate to die here, apart from my beloved father and mother'.

It is not going too far to say that Callimachus' epigram on the loss of his friend Heraclitus encapsulates, in a small poem, the greatest narrative of one friend's loss of another in Greek culture, Achilles' loss of Patroclus; it does this through the juxtaposition of recollections of especially memorable moments in Homer's poetry in six lines, almost in the same way that, for example, a cameo can, in miniature, encompass a much larger reality. A final observation: line 5 ἀηδόνες is conventionally understood to refer to the poetry of Heraclitus, and may even

2 The Callimachean innovation is much imitated in Roman poetry, e.g. Virgil, *Ec.* 9.51–2: *saepe ego longos | cantando puerum memini me condere soles* ("Often as a boy I remember putting long summer suns to rest in singing"); Horace, *Odes* 2.7.6–7; Ovid, *Tristia* 5.13.27–30 (see Williams 1991, 169), and Persius at 5.42*: tecum etenim longos memini consumere soles* ("with you I recall even passing long days").

be the title by which a collection of his poetry was known; 6. but I would note that ἀηδών is also a Homeric hapax legomenon; in one of the most famous passages of *Odyssey* 19 (line 518), where Penelope compares her own weeping for her lost husband to that of Icarius' daughter Procne, changed into a nightingale, forever lamenting the death of her son. The poet thus evokes the weeping Penelope as analogy of his own sorrow, and this is yet another instance of fluidity of gender in Callimachus, a feature that figures in our next example of the poet's use of Homer.

And while there are many ἀηδόνες in Greek lyric and tragic poetry, this is a markedly Homeric epigram, one that plays throughout with Homeric language and Homeric imagery; I would suggest that Callimachus, in a short poem where he effects a novel 'Homerism' in the rendition of κατεδύσαμεν, is very aware that ἀηδών is a Homeric *hapax legomenon*, and that recalling that one poignant passage, and that specific grief, is very much the point here. Callimachus' figures his longing for the Homeric μόρος of a beloved friend in terms of the great longing for a beloved husband, Penelope's for Odysseus. And indeed, we might recall here that the term σποδιή occurs but once in Homer, at Odyssey 5.488, of Odysseus' nadir in the poem, where the smoldering ember is a final spark of life. 7 The two one-time Homeric images of Odysseus and Penelope live again in Callimachus' epigram. So, Callimachus continues his love, memory and grief for his friend in terms of the two great loves of Homeric epic, and such a small poem in truth encapsulates so much.

I would like to close with a final epigram, one that I have written on at some length in the past, but the strength of whose relationship to a very famous Roman poem I have only completely come to understand quite recently. The epigram is 51 Pf. (15 G-P):

> Τέσσαρες αἱ Χάριτες· ποτὶ γὰρ μία ταῖς τρισὶ τήναις
> ἄρτι ποτεπλάσθη κἦτι μύροισι νοτεῖ.
> εὐαίων ἐν πᾶσιν ἀρίζηλος Βερενίκα,
> ἇς ἄτερ οὐδ' αὐταὶ ταὶ Χάριτες Χάριτες.
>
> Four are the Graces. For amidst the other three just now a new one has been fashioned, still moist with perfume, Berenice, splendid, blessed among all, without whom the very Graces are not the Graces.

Many years ago, in the context of a Groningen Hellenistic Poetry Workshop luncheon, I suggested that this poem might be meant as a quasi-humorous comment on the completion of the *Aetia*, the *Four Graces* being the four books of the poem (the *Charites* as poetry is a term familiar already from Simonides). The newly added fourth Grace is thus *Aetia* 4, where the lock, moistened with a young

girl's perfume, ascends through the air to the lap of Arsinoe-Aphrodite. More recently, in writing *Callimachus in Context*, my co-author and I put forth the suggestion that this epigram was a model for the first poem of Catullus' *libellus*):

> Cui dono lepidum novum libellum
> arida modo pumice expolitum?
> Corneli, tibi: namque tu solebas
> meas esse aliquid putare nugas
> iam tum, cum ausus es unus Italorum
> omne aevum tribus explicare cartis
> doctis, Iuppieter, et larboriosis.
> quare have tibi quidquid hoc libelli
> qualecumque: quod <o> patrona virgo
> plus uno maneat perenne saeclo.
>
> To whom am I to give this charming new book, just now polished with dry pumice stone? To you, Cornelius. Since you used to think my trifles worth something, even when you, alone of Italians, dared to lay out human history in three learned, and, God, laborious volumes. So take whatever sort of little book this is, of whatever worth — may it last, my virgin patron, more than a century, year in, year out.

At the time the line that most struck me was the second one, where there is a kind of reverse parallelism with the second line of Callimachus' epigram: the newly fashioned yet still wet Grace transmuted to the newly polished little book. The final line of the Catullus bears, of course, a remarkable similarity to the formal end of the opening of the *Aetia*, fr. 7.14 Pf. addressed, we should note, by the poet to the Graces (*Charites*)

> ἔλλατε νῦν,⌋ ἐ⌊λέ⌋χ̣ο̣ι̣ῳ̣ι |δ⌋' ἐνιψήσασθ⌊ε⌋ λιπώς⌊ας
> χεῖρ⌋ας ἐμ⌊οῖς, ἵνα μο⌋ι πουλὺ μένως⌊ι⌋ν ἔτος
>
> Come now, smear your unguented hands upon my elegies, that they last for many a year.

What I did not see at the time, which seems astonishing to me now, but then one *does* often overlook the obvious, is the simple mathematics involved: Cornelius Nepos, the recipient of Catullus' *libellus*, will now have four volumes — Catullus is playing upon the Callimachean addition of one to three (we might note that *omne aevum* is not a bad summary of the *Aetia* as well, which begins at the starting point of Greek mytho-history, only to end at the poet's own day). This in turn makes it very likely that the Callimachus epigram may well be dedicatory itself, to accompany the gift of the *Aetia*: the Crinagoras epigram on a gift of the *Hecale* to the young Marcellus makes a very revealing parallel here. The intertextual

reading sheds light on both poems: here with the distinction that the one is so well known, the other deserves to be. Perhaps here we have made a beginning.

No single work of Callimachus had such an enduring legacy as his narrative of the young lovers Acontius and Cydippe. Due to the loss of much of *Aetia* 3, this story is best known to us through the somewhat pallid prose version of the much later epistolographer Aristaenetus (I.10), and several Roman poetic imitations, among them Virgil *Eclogue* 10, Propertius I.18 and of course two of Ovid's *Heroides* XX and XXI. Of Callimachus' original poetic narrative there remain a handful of shorter fragments (67–74 Pf.) and then the longer concluding fragment 75, much of which is devoted to the subsequent history of the Acontidae. When I first began reading Callimachus as a University of Michigan undergraduate in the early 1980's I was much taken with an older learned poet's interchange with his young poetic subject, and with his giving his young artistic creation a poetic voice (an ancient, and very different, version of R.M. Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*. By way of conclusion to this short preface to *The Laurel and the Olive* I would like to return to these fragments and to essay an answer to the obvious question, what made Acontius appeal so much to later poets?

There is, first of all, one obvious answer: Eros is the boy's teacher, and elegiac poetry his medium. Acontius is the model of the poet-lover drawn into the wilderness to sing his erotic lament and to carve his beloved's name (in elegiac couple no less) on tree bark — a permanent inscription of a young, volatile passion. As a subject, Acontius is not particularly clever, but Eros inspires him to an act of great boldness, pressing his suit to the much sought-after Cydippe, she of the Sappho inspired facial beauty (line 13 ἠοῖ εἰδομένη μάλιον ῥέθος, 'with a face that looked more like the Dawn', a rare later occurrence of the Sappho term ῥέθος). Acontius, himself subject of much male erotic attention (frr. 68 and 69) now turns from object to subject of erotic passions, and from homosexual to heterosexual love (fr. 70 ἀλλ᾽ ἀπὸ τόξου | αὐτὸς ὁ τοξευτὴς ἄρδιν ἔχων ἑτέρου, "but the archer himself with the arrow-point from another's bow", with the lovely, very Callimachean recurrence αὐτὸς ὁ τοξευτὴς from line 1 Αὐτὸς Ἔρως ἐδίδαξεν Ἀκόντιον, "Eros himself taught Acontius", an ἀκόντιον is an arrow, Callimachus is very partial to word-play). In the countryside on every pretext (fr. 72 Pf.) the lovesick boy writes erotic elegiac couplet on trees (fr. 73), and so becomes the original model of the later Roman erotic elegist. Throughout the poet's treatment of his poetry-writing subject is playful, loving, even occasionally jocular, until final at the poem's end Acontius has now become the poet, and his love-story is now a Callimachean one (fr. 75 lines 76–70, ἔνθεν ὁ παιδὸς | μῦθος ἐς ἠμετέρην ἔδραμε Καλλιόπην, "whence the boy's story ran to my Calliope"). Subject and object are now one.

Perhaps I should close with an explanation for this collections' title. Callimachus' fourth *Iambus* (fr. 204 Pf.) centers on a debate between a laurel and an olive, the grand and powerful versus the simpler and more accommodating (and, if we think of it in those terms, the hexameter and pentameter in dialogue). Much of my scholarly career has been devoted to the dynamic interchange of texts and authors of different levels, and to the tensions and resolutions brought about in this exchange. A few days ago, I was given, enclosed in glass, paired leaves of laurel and olive from the Mideast — what makes the image so strong is the interplay and the contrast.