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Translations of Three Callimachus Epigrams (Epigrams 44, 59 and 42)

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***Abstract**: Having first come across the name Callimachus in the opening line of Ezra Pound's 'Homage to Sextus Propertius', I became enticed by the so called 'shades of Callimachus' described therein. His work carries such variety within it, from odes and hymns to critical discussions and the epigrams which are of particular interest to me, that I was surprised that nothing of his had ever invaded the prescribed texts in the course of my study of Classical literature. Here, I submit translations of Epigrams 41, 43 and 58 (as numbered by Pfeiffer). This small selection, to my mind at least, captures some of the tone and beauty of language evident in the sixty-four epigrams that are extant (the Byzantine encyclopaedia, Suda, numbers his epigrammatical works in the region of 800). What attracts me to these short writings, and to these particular three, is the atmospheric tone and substance of feeling created in such a brief number of lines, the essence of which one can only hope to communicate in some measure through an English translation.*

All Greek sourced from

R. Pfeiffer (ed.), *Callimachus: Volumen II (Hymni et Epigrammata).* Oxford University Press, London. 1949.

Lexical Assistance

H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon.* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996.

Epigram 44

ἕλκος ἔχων ὁ ξεῖνος ἐλάνθανεν: ὡς ἀνιηρόν
πνεῦμα διὰ στηθέων (εἶδες;) ἀνηγάγετο,
τὸ τρίτον ἡνίκ᾽ ἔπινε, τὰ δὲ ῥόδα φυλλοβολεῦντα
τὠνδρὸς ἀπὸ στεφάνων πάντ᾽ ἐγένοντο χαμαί:
ὤπτηται μέγα δή τι: μὰ δαίμονας οὐκ ἀπὸ ῥυσμοῦ
εἰκάζω, φωρὸς δ᾽ ἴχνια φὼρ ἔμαθον.

Our guest has a secret wound. See how he draws up
troubled sighs among his breaths
and drinks down a third cup. The roses of his garlands
shed their petals and fall to the ground
as some great thing consumes him. Not from the powers behind it,
nor from its form
do I know it, but a thief knows the tracks of a thief.

Epigram 59

τίς, ξένος ὦ ναυηγέ; Λεόντιχος ἐνθάδε νεκρόν
εὖρέ σ᾽ ἐπ᾽ αἰγιαλοῦ χῶσέ τε τῶιδε τάφωι
δακρύσας ἐπίκηρον ἑὸν βίον: οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτός
ἤσυχον, αἰθυίηι δ᾽ ἶσα θαλασσοπορεῖ.

Who are you, stranded stranger? Leontichos found your corpse
there on the beach, and placed you here in this tomb,
shedding tears at the fragility of his own life. There was for him
no rest, crossing the oceans like the shearwater[1].

[1] αἰθυία – ‘diving-bird, sea-bird’ (*Liddell and Scott)*

Epigram 42

ἥμισύ μευ ψυχῆς ἔτι τὸ πνέον, ἥμισυ δ᾽ οὐκ οἶδ᾽
εἴτ᾽ Ἔρος εἴτ᾽ Ἀίδης ἥρπασε, πλὴν ἀφανές.
ἦ ῥά τιν᾽ ἐς παίδων πάλιν ὤιχετο; καὶ μὲν ἀπεῖπον
πολλάκι 'τὴν δρῆστιν μὴ ὑποδέχεσθε νέοι᾽.
† ουκισυνιφησον[1]: ἐκεῖσε γὰρ ἡ λιθόλευστος
κείνη καὶ δύσερως οἶδ᾽ ὅτι που στρέφεται.

Half my soul still breathes, but I know not whether
it was Love or Death that stole the other, only that it is gone.
Perhaps it flew to the boys once again? And yet I told them
often, “don’t let the fugitive in”!
For there, I know, she floats about,
stoned[2] and sick with love devout.

[1] untranslated as an unoriginal interpolation (*Pfeiffer*). Were it to be included, it could be taken as ‘search with me there’ or similar.
[2] more literally associated with ‘dead by stoning’ (*Liddell and Scott*) but a more modern sense implying the debilitating effects of love seems more appropriate here.