

INTRODUCTION

A vaulted room, however small or vast, replicates at a domestic level the experience of being under the sky, in a way which can be measured, controlled, and which shelters. Any intellectual research reduces a world which is exhilarating and fascinating but also obscure and arcane, to a more definable size. Human creation too is a world that is difficult to grasp, and therefore by analyzing it we might need to adapt it to our own level of understanding. Aesthetics as a discipline is a vaulted room, which replicates on a more familiar and manageable level certain aspects of the external reality and of human expression. This small collection of essays deals with various issues related to the history of aesthetics from antiquity to the modern day, with a view to raising some questions and focusing on scholarly research through a specific aesthetic lens.

Callimachus of Cyrene, a poet, and Plotinus, a philosopher, are apt subjects for such an approach, as they both have a peculiar place in the history of aesthetics and had an impact on the art and the reflection of their times but also of later periods. In the case of Plotinus, in particular, his influence extends to many centuries later. Philological and philosophical knowledge are here combined in the reconstruction of the aesthetic interest of different ages not only philosophically, but also with an eye to the results of the artistic production.

The first of the essays presented here investigates Callimachus' position on poetry and his knowledge of Plato's and Aristotle's writings. In particular, it is more than likely that Callimachus knew the Socratic school of Cyrene, his hometown, as foreshadowed in a passage from his *Aitia* about

the validity of the auditory and cognitive experience in opposition to other forms of pleasures.

The second essay focuses on the problem of when precisely a work of art should be considered finished. This question is particularly pressing in relation to the creative process and that is the reason why, during the Renaissance, artists and thinkers reflected on what would be more important for the artistic result. This paper investigates the possibility of finding links between the attitude of artists and writers to the different degrees of refinement and revision of their work, and their engagement with Neoplatonic ideas and culture.

Plotinus' views on the ethical response to human beauty are scrutinized in the third essay, which focuses on a passage from his first treatise on providence. Here Plotinus discusses the different reactions of Paris and Idomeneus with respect to the beauty of Helen, thus leading to a reflection on individual responsibility within the erotic and aesthetic experience.

The fourth essay deals with an altogether different subject, which might be even somewhat controversial in an academic context. Here, in fact, I choose to focus on a very narrow field, that of interior design and decoration, which is very little studied but of great potential for its applications. The focus will be in particular on a category that is more neglected than others, namely that of classic or traditional residential interiors, with a reflection on the activity of Renzo Mongiardino.

Two essays consist of material that I have already published in Italian, but everything has been revised, updated and substan-

tially rewritten.¹ The reason for putting together these seemingly different papers is primarily related to the pleasure that I had in writing them. If this sounds like a superficial motivation, we must reconsider the basis for Callimachus' poetic effort. He does not find pleasure in the transient titillation of the body but in the perennial acquisition of knowledge. In a less elevated way, the next pages engage with a string of subjects that are connected by one aesthetic thread. If some object to the concision of part of these essays, I shall in my defense advocate Callimachus' preference for small and defined compositions. Of the poet of Cyrene, however, I hope to share not the polemic tone, but the playful note.

¹ An Italian version, with variants, of the first essay has been published as 'La filosofia come spunto poetico e polemico in Callimaco', in P.B. Cipolla (ed.), *Metodo e Passione. Atti dell'Incontro di Studi in onore di Giuseppina Basta Donzelli* (Catania, 11-12 aprile 2016), Amsterdam 2018, pp. 75-94. An Italian version, with variants, of the third essay has been published as 'I-domeneo e Paride di fronte ad Elena: un esempio di libertà morale in *Enn.* III 3 (48) 5, 41-43,' in M. Di Pasquale Barbanti and D. Iozzia (edd.), *Anima e libertà in Plotino. Atti del convegno di Catania, 29-30 gennaio 2009*, Catania 2009, pp. 137-157.

CALLIMACHUS ON THE PLEASURE OF KNOWLEDGE

Why should we be concerned with Callimachus in the context of the relationship between philosophy and artistic production? It must be said that Callimachus is one of the poets who more openly manifests and defends a specific way of understanding poetry, and therefore he has a place in the history of ancient aesthetics. In addition to that, as demonstrated by Benjamin Acosta-Hughes and Susan Stephens, the poet shows clear contacts with Plato's and Aristotle's writings, and in general he takes part in a debate that goes back to the positions of the two great philosophers, probably to criticize both. To this I would add that it is more than likely that Callimachus knew the Socratic school of Cyrene, his hometown. This could also be foreshadowed in a specific passage of his poem *Aitia*. My claim is that it is significant that Callimachus in this passage examines the validity of the auditory and cognitive experience in opposition to other forms of pleasures, namely the sensual ones. Moreover, he appears to be connected,¹ both as an author and as a critic, to the literary disputes between Hellenistic philosophers as well as writers, as we can learn from the fragmented writings of Philodemus of Gadara. These aesthetic quarrels have their roots, of course, again in Plato and Aristotle. For these reasons Callimachus deserves to be read in the light of the literary and philosophical controversies, even those of a later date, which reflect the intellectual milieu of the time. Our knowledge in this field, however, remains rather limited due to the very sparse evidence that we have of them.

¹ Cf. A.J. Romano, 'Callimachus and Contemporary Criticism,' in B. Acosta-Hughes, L. Lehnus, S. Stephens (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Callimachus*, Leiden 2011, pp. 309-328.

Callimachus' position on his poetry

Callimachus occupies a special role in the history of literary criticism, as he was the leading man of letters at the court of Ptolemy the Second Philadelphus and his powerful sister-wife Arsinoe II, and of Ptolemy the Third Euergetes and his wife Berenice, and worked at the Library of Alexandria. Unfortunately, for the reconstruction of his oeuvre, apart from the *Hymns* and the *Epigrams*, we have only fragments (although some of considerable extension) of two of his main poetic works, the *Aitia* and the *Hecale*, and of the *Iambi*, while his prose works are completely lost. Among these were the encyclopedic *Pinakes*, a sort of annotated catalogue of all the contents of the Library, in which it was possible to find more explicit information on the vast literary and philosophical knowledge of the poet. An indication of Callimachus' importance in the history of ancient literature and culture is the fact that he was the source of inspiration for the Latin *poetae novi*, particularly Catullus, who famously made a Latin version of Callimachus' *Coma Berenices*, and Horace, who is a key figure in the history of ancient literary criticism and aesthetics.

In the last two decades, research on Callimachus has increased considerably and, for example, we now have two large and comprehensive commentaries of the *Aitia*,² which integrate the historical edition by Rudolph Pfeiffer³ with more recent discoveries of papyri, and translate the fragmented text into modern languages. Alongside these commentaries, many important studies have been published, including some which have fo-

² G. Massimilla (ed.), *Callimaco, 'Aitia': Libri Primo e Secondo*, Pisa 1996; Id. (ed.), *Callimaco, 'Aitia': Libri Terzo e Quarto*, Pisa/Roma 2010; A. Harder (ed.), *Callimachus, 'Aetia'*, Oxford 2012.

³ Pfeiffer (ed.), *Callimachus, vol. I: Fragmenta*, Oxford 1949.

cused on the role of philosophical knowledge in Callimachus,⁴ and in particular have highlighted the many points of contact between him and Plato, whose dialogues were for the poet a sort of reference point, although often in a critical way.

In order to understand Callimachus' idea of poetry, I would like to start from an epigram, where in an erotic context we find a programmatic statement on his art:

Ἐχθαίρω τὸ ποίημα τὸ κυκλικόν, οὐδὲ κελεύθῳ [in a road that carries many people]
χαίρω, τίς πολλοὺς ὧδε καὶ ὧδε φέρει·
μισέω καὶ περίφοιτον ἐρώμενον, οὐδ' ἀπὸ κρήνης
πίνω· σικχαίνω πάντα τὰ δημόσια.
Λυσανίη, σὺ δὲ ναίχι καλὸς καλός—ἀλλὰ πρὶν εἰπεῖν (5)
τοῦτο σαφῶς, Ἥχώ φησί τις· ἄλλος ἔχει.⁵

I hate the poems in the Epic Cycle, I don't like highways
that are heavily traveled, I despise
a promiscuous lover, and I don't drink from public fountains:
Everything public disgusts me. And yes, Lysanias,
you are handsome as handsome, but before I can even say it,
back comes the echo: "Some other man has him." (tr. Lombardo-Rayor)

The text is erotic but also ironic and playful, according to the overall tone of his epigrams: note, for example, that Callimachus expresses his dislike with four different verbs. The poet here declares his desire not to follow, unlike many of his contemporaries, the paths that are already well-trodden in poetry

⁴ B. Acosta-Hughes, L. Lehnus and S. Stephens, *Brill's Companion to Callimachus*, Leiden 2011; Benjamin Acosta-Hughes and Susan Stephens, *Callimachus in Context*, Cambridge 2012.

⁵ Callimachus, *Ep.* 28.

as in love. In his general poetic production this is expressed through eccentric and remote myths, and through use of obscure words and etiologies, in parallel to the erudite character of his studies as a scholar. The manifesto of his poetry is clearly expressed in the conclusion of the *Hymn to Apollo* and in the prologue of the *Aitia*. In both texts Callimachus defends a kind of poetry which is *leptòs*, light and refined, in contrast to the example of the traditional epic poetry and all its supporters. These, we have to imagine, are not simply other poets (as it was thought in the past), but rather literary critics, who established rules of judgment on the work of others.

In the *Hymn to Apollo*, Callimachus proclaims his stance against the epic tradition and claims to aspire to a pure and precious way of making poetry:

ὁ Φθόνος Ἀπόλλωνος ἐπ' οὐατα λάθριος εἶπεν
 “οὐκ ἄγαμαι τὸν ἀοιδὸν ὃς οὐδ' ὄσα πόντος ἀεῖδει.”
 τὸν Φθόνον ὠπόλλων ποδί τ' ἤλασεν ᾧδέ τ' ἔειπεν·
 “Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοῖο μέγας ῥόος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πολλὰ
 λύματα γῆς καὶ πολλὸν ἐφ' ὕδατι συρφετὸν ἔλκει.
 Διοῖ δ' οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι Μέλισσαι,
 ἀλλ' ἤτις καθαρὴ τε καὶ ἀχράαντος ἀνέρπει
 πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβάς ἄκρον ἄωτον.”
 χαῖρε ἄναξ· ὁ δὲ Μῶμος, ἴν' ὁ Φθόνος, ἔνθα νέοιτο.⁶

Spake Envy privily in the ear of Apollo: “I
 admire not the poet who singeth not things for number as the
 sea.”

Apollo spurned Envy with his foot and spake thus:
 “Great is the stream of the Assyrian river, but much
 filth of earth and much refuse it carries on its waters.
 And not of every water do the Melissae carry to Deo,

⁶ Callimachus, *Hymn to Apollo* 105-113.