

## TWO

# HERACLITUS



Heraclitus has been a favorite subject for both ancient biographers and modern scholars, so there is a special need to separate the mysterious, dark philosopher from his mysterious, dark biography. The key point to keep in mind when considering the life, and especially the death, of this profound philosopher is the extraordinary antipathy, even hatred, that he roused in his readers and biographers. Their hostility, evident to a certain degree in the lives of all the philosophers, reaches unprecedented heights when Heraclitus dies buried in dung. To understand this death, the traditional biographical reaction to Heraclitus must be reviewed in detail, for it is the biographers' reaction to and interpretation of Heraclitus' work that account for this singular, and singularly hostile, death.

### DATE AND BACKGROUND

For Heraclitus, most scholars accept the traditional floruit as given by Diogenes Laertius, from Apollodorus, as in the Sixty-Ninth Olympiad, 504/3–501/0 BCE.<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus was a native of Ephesus in Asia Minor, and

Diogenes Laertius gives his father's name as Blosson or Heracon.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, Heraclitus was considered a member of the local ruling family through his father (DL 9.1; Strabo 14.25) but was said to have renounced his inherited kingship (DL 9.6). For this information, Diogenes Laertius draws upon Antisthenes of Rhodes, who cites the renunciation as proof of Heraclitus' "μεγαλοφροσύνη." Hicks translates this as "magnanimity;"<sup>3</sup> however, I doubt very much that magnanimity is what either Antisthenes or Diogenes Laertius had in mind.<sup>4</sup> In the earlier section of the biography, Diogenes Laertius paired *μεγαλόφρων* with *ὑπερόπτης*, which suggests a more pejorative meaning to the use of *μεγαλοφροσύνη* in 9.6 that Hicks supplies. "Arrogance" or "superciliousness" comes closer to the mark.<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius is at pains throughout to illustrate that trait—call it pride, arrogance, superciliousness, haughtiness, or simple contempt—that was, to him and to others, most characteristic of Heraclitus and that was to culminate ultimately in complete misanthropy. Indeed, as Mouraviev shows, the whole passage can be taken as a character study in arrogance.<sup>6</sup> To explore the motives of this characterizations, then, will be our first step in understanding traditional reactions to Heraclitus and to the biography these reactions produced.

#### THE DARK ONE OF EPHEBUS

In his lives in general, Diogenes Laertius supports his biographical statements with illustrative quotations taken from his subject's work.<sup>7</sup> To determine the validity of his characterization, we must first determine whether the quotations he selects are accurately used and germane. He begins his life of Heraclitus as follows:

1. Heraclitus, son of Blosson or, as some say, of Heracon, was an Ephesian. He was at this height in the Sixty-Ninth Olympiad. He was arrogant beyond all men, and contemptuous, as is clear from his writings, in which he says: (DL 9.1)

Ἡράκλειτος Βλόσσωνος ἢ, ὡς τινες, Ἡράκωντος Ἐφέσιος. οὗτος ἤκμαζε μὲν κατὰ τὴν ἐνάτην καὶ ἐξηκοστὴν ὀλυμπιάδα μεγαλόφρων δὲ γέγονε παρ' ὄντιναοῦν καὶ ὑπερόπτης, ὡς καὶ ἐκ τοῦ συγγράμματος αὐτοῦ δῆλον, ἐν ᾧ φησι . . .

2. Much learning does not teach wisdom, or else it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras and then again Xenophanes and Hecateus. (fr. 40) [Diogenes Laertius continues: For he has it that,]

πολυμαθὴ νόον ἔχειν οὐ διδάσκει· Ἡσίοδον γὰρ ἂν ἐδίδαξε καὶ Πυθαγόρην αὐτίς τε Ξενοφάνεά τε καὶ Ἑκαταίον.

3. A single thing is wisdom, to understand knowledge, that which guides everything everywhere (fr. 41), [and that,]

εἶναι γὰρ ἓν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτι ἐκυβέρνησε πάντα διὰ πάντων.

4. Homer deserves to be chased from the [poetic] contests and beaten with a stick, and Archilochus too. (fr. 42)

τόν τε Ὅμηρον ἔφασκεν ἄξιον ἐκ τῶν ἀγώνων ἐκβάλλεσθαι καὶ ῥαπίζεσθαι καὶ Ἀρχίλοχον ὁμοίως.

Diogenes Laertius thus opens his biography of Heraclitus with a very general statement about Heraclitus' father and dates and moves immediately to a character study of his subject. To illustrate Heraclitus' personality and its dominant trait, arrogance, he selects three seemingly unrelated Heraclitean statements to support his opening remarks.<sup>8</sup> By these citations, he means to establish Heraclitus' character (his arrogance) firmly in his reader's mind. Citations 2 and 4 both censure well-known poets and philosophers; to the biographical mind, Heraclitus reveals his arrogance in these statements by showing his contempt for Hesiod, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Hecataeus, Homer, and Archilochus. The reason for his contempt is given in citation 3: all these men have fallen short of the Heraclitean standard of true wisdom.<sup>9</sup> To Heraclitus, true wisdom, which guides the universe, lies in understanding knowledge and not merely possessing it. Hesiod, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, and Hecataeus fall short in that they had much learning rather than true knowledge. Homer and Archilochus also fall short of this standard. Heraclitus further suggests that they should be expelled from the ranks of honor that they falsely hold.

Thus it is a biographical interpretation of these fragments and their implications for Heraclitean personality, and not their philosophical intent, that interests Diogenes Laertius. He begins his biography by announcing that Heraclitus was an arrogant man (citation 1). Proof is given through illustrative quotations. Heraclitus insultingly dismisses several well-known and highly regarded men of letters (citations 2–4) and sets himself up as arbiter of true wisdom (as opposed to mere erudition) and sole possessor of it (citation 3). But what of the Heraclitean and philosophical intent of these statements? If we do not, automatically, accept

this traditional characterization based on traditional, biographical interpretation of these fragments, we must instead reconstruct the thought and philosophy that underlies them. Other fragments may provide the clues for Heraclitus' thought. Since citations 2 through 4 deal with poets and philosophers, let us see what Heraclitus says elsewhere about such men.<sup>10</sup>

5. Of those whose discourse I have heard, none arrives at the realization that wisdom is set apart from all else. (fr. 108)

ὁκόσων λόγους ἤκουσα, οὐδείς ἀφικνεῖται ἐς τοῦτο, ὥστε γινώσκειν ὅτι σοφόν ἐστι πάντων κεχωρισμένον.

6. For what intelligence or understanding have they? They believe in the bards of the people and use the mass as teacher, not knowing that, "Many are bad, few are good." (fr. 104)

τίς γὰρ αὐτῶν νόος ἢ φρήν; δήμων ἀοιδοῖσι πείθονται καὶ διδασκάλῳ χρείωνται ὁμίλῳ οὐκ εἰδότες ὅτι οἱ πολλοὶ κακοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἀγαθοί.

Citation 6 records Heraclitus' dissatisfaction with the people, who rely upon and believe in poets and popular wisdom, without distinguishing the few good teachers from the many that are bad. Citation 5 speaks of his disenchantment with other philosophers, none of whom have arrived at the separate nature of wisdom (a statement that recalls the definition of wisdom in citation 3). Citations 5 and 6, then, explain the censure of poets and philosophers in citations 2 and 4. Such men not only fail to grasp the nature of wisdom, but compound their failure by leading the people away from true wisdom (since the people cannot distinguish by themselves between good and bad poets and philosophers.)<sup>11</sup> The sentiments recorded in citations 2 and 4 have their basis not in arrogance, as Diogenes Laertius would have us believe, but in philosophy. Heraclitus reproaches these men for their philosophical failings and for teaching false wisdom to the people. The separate nature of wisdom (i.e., wisdom that is personal and unique, separate from popular or cultural belief),<sup>12</sup> defined in citation 3 and elucidated in citation 5, is his example of one way in which they fail. Heraclitus speaks not from contempt or arrogance, as Diogenes Laertius would have us believe, but from a philosophical and perhaps even didactic point of view. An objective reader, one who has no traditional or popular view to uphold, could as easily find in these fragments concern for the people, as contempt for others.

Diogenes Laertius continues his characterization of the arrogant philosopher by more illustrative quotation in the next section, 9.2, which begins:

7. Insolence, more than a fire, must be extinguished (fr. 43) [and]

ὑβριν χρὴ σβεννύναι μᾶλλον ἢ πυροκαϊήν.

8. The people should fight for their laws, as for their walls (fr. 44)

μάχεσθαι χρὴ τὸν δῆμον ὑπὲρ τοῦ νόμου ὄκωσπερ τείχεος.

Heraclitus, as an arrogant man, here censures other people's insolence, further proving Diogenes Laertius' characterization. Citation 7 thus fits nearly into the scheme so far; people in their insolence think to possess the truth and even lead others astray with their version of it and for this they should be censured. It does, however, require some leap in thought from the personal and specific of the preceding citation 4 (Homer and Archilochus should be beaten and banished) to the impersonal and general of citation 7 (insolence really should be done away with.) But what of citation 8? The relationship that Diogenes Laertius makes between arrogance, insolence, and the defense of one's walls is not immediately apparent; it seems neither particularly applicable to the people of citations 2 and 4, nor logically or philosophically to fit with the thought of citation 7. It is, nonetheless, important for Diogenes Laertius' characterization, for citation 8 brings in the first suggestion of the misanthropy for which Heraclitus was notorious. The citation thus broadens the characterization and paves the way to demonstrate Heraclitus' arrogance and contempt for the common people as well as for men of letters.<sup>13</sup> The fragment, with its explicit concern for the law, is read as an implicit criticism of "the people" (in that the people were thought to dismiss or ignore the law<sup>14</sup>), and so is included by association with Heraclitus' arrogance rather than by any logical or philosophical context.<sup>15</sup> There is no real relationship between citations 7 and 8, despite the way Diogenes Laertius connects them, save the association, based upon Heraclitus' arrogance, that exists in his own mind and that he obliquely presents to the reader.<sup>16</sup>

Heraclitus, as it happens, was said to have enjoyed bad relationships with a specific group of common people, his fellow citizens the Ephesians. Diogenes Laertius introduces the philosopher's antipathy towards them as 9.2 continues. Immediately after citation 8, he tells us that

9. And he also attacks the Ephesians for banishing his friend Hermodorus, where he says (DL 9.2):

καθάπτεται δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐφεσίων ἐπὶ τῷ τὸν ἑταῖρον ἐκβαλεῖν Ἐρμόδωρον, ἐν οἷς φησιν . . .

10. All the Ephesians, from the young men upward, should hang themselves, and leave the city to the beardless youths, those who banished Hermodorus who was the best man among them, saying, “Let there be none among us who is best, and if there should be such a one, let him go elsewhere and live with others.” (fr. 121)<sup>17</sup>

ἄξιον Ἐφεσίοις ἡβηδὸν ἀπάγξασθαι πᾶσι καὶ τοῖς ἀνήβοις τὴν πόλιν καταλιπεῖν, οἵτινες Ἐρμόδωρον ἄνδρα ἑωυτῶν ὀνήσιον ἐξέβαλον φάντες ἡμέων μηδὲ εἷς ὀνήσιος ἔστω, εἰ δὲ μή, ἄλλη τε καὶ μετ’ ἄλλων.

Now, to assess Diogenes Laertius’ assessment of Heraclitus’ relationship with the Ephesians, we must reconstruct that relationship as far as possible. Traditional sources tell us that Heraclitus was a member of the local ruling family at Ephesus and that he renounced his hereditary kingships in favor of his brother.<sup>18</sup> Renouncing a kingship might indicate disdain for one’s subject and so arrogance or misanthropy, but as a biographical topos that occurs for several other philosophers as well,<sup>19</sup> it cannot be taken as evidence either for an actual renunciation, because of Heraclitus’ dislike of the Ephesians, or for his arrogance generally. Even if one assumes that Heraclitus did play some part in his city’s political life, as, again, so many other philosophers are said to have done,<sup>20</sup> it is still unnecessary to consider citation 10 as factual in regard to the political life of the city or Heraclitus’ personality.<sup>21</sup> While I do not think we need accept either Diogenes Laertius’ remarks or the fragment itself as proof of Heraclitus’ antipathy for the Ephesians, I do think Diogenes Laertius had a particular purpose for including both, as we will see.

After indicating Heraclitus’ contempt for his townspeople in citations 9 and 10, Diogenes Laertius gives an anecdotal example of it.

11. And being asked to make laws for them, he scornfully refused, because the city was already ruled by a bad constitution. Withdrawing to the temple of Artemis, he played knucklebones with the children. Then, to the Ephesians who had gathered around him, he said, “Why, worst of all men,

do you marvel? It is not better to do this than to play politics with you?" (9.3–4)

ἀξιούμενος δὲ καὶ νόμους θεῖναι πρὸς αὐτῶν ὑπερεΐδε διὰ τὸ ἤδη κεκρατῆσθαι τῇ πονηρᾷ πολιτείᾳ τὴν πόλιν. ἀναχωρήσας δὲ εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος μετὰ τῶν παίδων ἡστραγάλιζεν· περιστάντων δ' αὐτὸν τῶν Ἐφεσίων, ἴτι, ὦ κάκιστοι, θαυμάζετε; εἶπεν· ἢ οὐ κρείττον τοῦτο ποιεῖν ἢ μεθ' ὑμῶ πολιτεύεσθαι;

A good story, like so many in Diogenes Laertius: witty, a bit malicious, and wonderfully to the point.<sup>22</sup> But the better the anecdote, the more guarded our response to it should be, for they usually are too good to be true. Given our basic premise, that the biographers systematically create biography from their subject's philosophy, we expect to find the source of this story somewhere in Heraclitus' work. And, in fact, his collected statements contain not one but several fragments suitable for such an incident.

12. Time is a child playing dice; the kingdom is in the hands of a child. (fr. 52)

αἰὼν παῖς ἐστὶ παίζων, πεσσεύων· παιδὸς ἢ βασιλῆι.

13. Children's playthings are men's conjectures. (fr. 70)

παίδων ἀθύρματα νενόμικεν εἶναι τὰ ἀνθρώπινα δοξάσματα.

The citations have in common a single motif, children, with whom men and their actions are unfavorably compared.<sup>23</sup> Heraclitus suggests that the very substance of the people's concerns is childish and impermanent (citations 13), as does his disparaging analysis of political matters and of those who participate in them (citation 12). The Ephesians' concerns about politics specifically seem dismissed as the ephemeral sport of children.

Diogenes Laertius intends this anecdote to be the summary and demonstration of all his earlier statements about Heraclitus' arrogance.<sup>24</sup> He began with general examples of Heraclitus' character, by quoting citations 2 and 4, Heraclitus' censure of poets and philosophers, and then by citation 3, Heraclitus' claims to a unique understanding of the nature of wisdom. In the next sections Diogenes Laertius became less general; he broadened his characterization of Heraclitus as arrogant with citation 7,

and used citation 8 to demonstrate Heraclitus' contempt for 'the people,'<sup>25</sup> and also to introduce the trait of misanthropy, which he then directs, quite specifically, towards the Ephesians in citations 9 and 10. To his mind, Diogenes Laertius has provided evidence not only for his characterizations through illustrative quotations, but also context for his anecdote, by citation 8, which concerns law, and citation 10, with its diatribe against the Ephesians. The associations behind citations 7 and 8 is then clear; they are intended to supply the background for the anecdote which he gives as summary. But before all these came citations 12 and 13; it was the work of Heraclitus which provided the initial impetus for the anecdote.

Using citations 12 and 13 as their starting point, the biographers created this spiteful, if amusing little story of children and the law, which Diogenes Laertius uses to concretize his discussion of Heraclitus' personality by presenting this final example of the philosopher's arrogance and hateful pride.<sup>26</sup> The anecdote gives yet another example of the biographical method and the biographer's knack for turning philosophy into biography. Like the material that precedes it, however, it contains little, if any evidence for the actual character or life of Heraclitus.<sup>27</sup>

Melancholy, like arrogance, was much associated with Heraclitus; by the Roman period he was known as the "weeping philosopher."<sup>28</sup> This gloomy reputation was the result of a slow but steady stream of genuine misinterpretation, genuine and deliberate misunderstanding, and genuine, if hostile frustration. His sobriquet has been deemed "completely trivial"<sup>29</sup> by modern scholars, but it was a favored biographical and satirical characterization, not least because it fit so well with Heraclitus' other generally admitted biographical traits of arrogance, misanthropy, willful obscurity, and obdurate silence.<sup>30</sup> Heraclitus' morose reputation is, of course, his own fault; it stems from various reactions to a single one of his notorious propositions:

14. For, it is impossible to step twice in the same river. (fr. 91)

ποταμῶι γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμβῆναι δις τῶι αὐτῶι.

The fragment is typically Heraclitean in that a profound truth is couched in everyday language. The mundane image of the river makes the thought at once extraordinary and familiar, a (common)sense perception that can be apprehended only by a knowledgeable soul.<sup>31</sup>

Here Heraclitus speaks of the change or flux that both governs and



defines existence. The river is at once changing and the same, embodying both flux and permanence. The water changes (exchanges its water) yet retains its identity as the river. The river's existence or identity persists through its change, as Kirk points out, in this carefully balanced, measured exchange of water.<sup>32</sup>

Other philosophers, both early and late, play an integral part in the misrepresentation of philosophical thought leading to biographical characterizations of Heraclitus. An important early misinterpretation of the statement (citation 14) was Plato, who seems here as elsewhere to have deliberately misrepresented Heraclitus' intention.<sup>33</sup> His error, if we may call it that, was one of emphasis; his paraphrase of the fragment, that "everything flows," stresses movement and change, but loses sight of the permanence and identity inherent in the original statement.<sup>34</sup> In this Platonic interpretation, the Heraclitean statement on change and identity becomes one of change alone, that all things flow like rivers. In the *Cratylus*, where Plato plays upon and with the idea of Heraclitean flux, he uses humor to disparage the idea by comparing flux, and those who believe in it, to people suffering the symptoms of catarrh. Catarrh, an inflammation of the mucous membranes, manifests itself in a runny nose and watering eyes, the same symptoms associated with crying. Presumably both eyes and nose are flowing like rivers.<sup>35</sup> Thus Heraclitus, his theory, and his followers, are all humorously dismissed, likened to men crying.

The next step in Heraclitus' rather dismal reputation was provided by another philosopher, Aristotle's<sup>36</sup> student Theophrastus who, frustrated by either Heraclitus' text or its content,<sup>37</sup> declared the work to be the result of "melancholy." He did not, however, mean the depressed state that some modern and many ancient readers associate melancholy, but rather the nervous excitability or impetuous temperament that Aristotle describes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. "Melancholics" are those who "by their impetuosity cannot wait on reason, because they pursue their imaginative fancies."<sup>38</sup>

Heraclitus' reputation for despondency and weeping, then, depends first upon a Platonic misunderstanding of citation 14, which introduces the idea of the flux, and even more strongly upon the deliberate, albeit humorous, misinterpretation of the same citation, in which believers of the flux are compared to people with catarrh, in which "everything flows." This characterization was augmented and furthered by Theophrastus. Given Plato's comic image of the "flowing" (weeping) philosopher and Aristotle's comments on the effects of melancholy, Theophrastus' statement

was too good for the biographers to pass up. Heraclitus as the “weeping philosopher” worked all too well. Not only did it fit with Diogenes Laertius’ general assessment of his character, it also made an easily identifiable caricature, one that would serve as a perfect foil to the other extreme, the “laughing philosopher” Democritus.<sup>39</sup> This simplification and characterization, the making of “types,” was an integral part of the biographical approach and typically finds humorous expression. The biographers, working for comic effect and from intellectual hostility, seek to reduce philosophers and whole philosophical systems to a series of comic caricatures.<sup>40</sup>

Heraclitus’ biographical character, once firmly established, was further projected onto his working methods and his work itself. The tradition of a morose and misanthropic Heraclitus goes hand in hand with a reputation for obdurate silence. His silence is the subject of two anecdotes from three authors, Plutarch, Themistius, and Diogenes Laertius. Plutarch and Themistius contribute the story of Heraclitus’ advice to the Ephesians who, despite Heraclitus’ adverse feelings towards them, constantly seek him out. Here, they ask Heraclitus’ opinion on unity in wartime. In reply, Heraclitus mixes together barley and water, stirs it thoroughly, and drinks it, without once uttering a word. Plutarch tells us that this was to demonstrate to the other Ephesians both the need to put aside their desire for wealth and the importance of unity of the city. Furthermore, the anecdote was to demonstrate to Plutarch’s readers the viability of nonverbal communication.<sup>41</sup>

This rather odd anecdote shows how cleverly the biographers combined original sources with ready-made motifs and models. First, the biographers drew upon the well-established topos of the philosopher who helps his city during a time of crisis,<sup>42</sup> which they then individualized using Heraclitus’ own work. There is an odd little fragment that states:

15. The mixed drink separates, too, if not stirred. (fr. 125)

καὶ ὁ κυκεὼν δίσταται <μὴ> κινούμενος.

The “mixed drink,” the *kykeon*, is an offering of wine, grated cheese, and barley. It separates into its component parts and loses its unity unless swirled or stirred together. The fragment was obviously taken and made concrete to produce the anecdote about Heraclitus and the Ephesians. As Kirk points out, stirring the drink is irrelevant to the story but specifically mentioned by Plutarch to further make his point.<sup>43</sup> The anecdote further

emphasizes Heraclitus' contempt and hostility to his fellow citizens for their desire for wealth, a point that has no part of the original fragment, but again, stems from the topos by which all philosophers must disdain wealth and earthly goods and that, again, is emphasized by Plutarch. A second rather suspect fragment that speaks pointedly about the dangerous wealth of the Ephesians also comes into play.

16. May wealth not desert you, men of Ephesus, that you be convicted of your wrongdoing. (fr. 125a)

μη ἐπιλίπτοι ὑμᾶς πλοῦτος, ἔφη, Ἐφέσιοι, ἵν' ἐξελέγχοισθε πονηρευόμενοι.

The fragment is all too pointed. Biography, in this case, has provided more than a reaction to the philosopher's work; it has augmented the work by creating a false fragment.<sup>44</sup> We are used, by now, to seeing biography that is generated from the text, but here we see the reverse process: text has been generated from the biography. At some point, this anecdotal, biographical statement ("May wealth not desert you.") crept into the text and became accepted, an addition that authors such as Kirk and Wilamovitz later questioned and rejected.

Once we put the pieces of the mixed-drink anecdote together, two points emerge. First, by combining biographical elements of Heraclitus' work and character (such as reference to an authentic fragment, citation 15; Heraclitus' general contempt for his fellow citizens; and his refusal to speak generally or to those citizens specifically or to take their concerns seriously) with several biographical topoi ready to hand (such as the philosopher's disdain for wealth; the philosopher who aids the state in time of crisis; and a silent version of the philosopher's bon mot),<sup>45</sup> we see how easily an illustrative anecdote is built upon a single fragment. Second, once the anecdote and its foundation fragment of the mixed drink were in place and accepted, an elaborated, second statement against wealth found its way into the text, winning at least limited acceptance.

Heraclitus' silence, his refusal to speak, found great play in the biography. Diogenes Laertius gives us a second anecdotal example of it as follows: When a man asked why Heraclitus was silent, Heraclitus replied, "So that you may chatter" (DL 9.12). For a quiet man, Heraclitus was surprisingly adept at repartee; in fact, philosophers in general had a gift for one-liners that Aristophanes himself would envy. These clever retorts are

so typical of philosophical biography that they make up the topos of the philosophical *bon mot*.<sup>46</sup> Philosophers, inevitably, say the right thing at the right time and Diogenes Laertius makes it a point to include as many as these remarks as possible. Often even he admits that such replies are attributed to more than one philosopher, which brings them close to the type of free-floating or transferred anecdote. The example here would certainly fit many philosophers and many situations.<sup>47</sup> In other instances, such remarks and gestures specifically reflect a particular aspect of the philosopher's work, as does Heraclitus' symbolic gesture, or Anaxagoras' remarks about his "native land."<sup>48</sup> Both the anecdotes about Heraclitus, while falling generally into the *bon mot* topos, also specially emphasize a particular aspect of Heraclitus' character, his refusal to speak, which supports other reports of his churlish, morose behavior and, like arrogance and misanthropy, is inferred from his work. The fragments that make this character trait possible are the following:

17. They know neither how to listen or how to speak. (fr. 19)

ἀκοῦσαι οὐκ ἐπιστάμενοι οὐδ' εἰπεῖν.

18. Let us not, about the greatest things, conjecture at random. (fr. 47)

μὴ εἰκὴ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων συμβαλλόμεθα.

19. The foolish man, at every work, is apt to be a-flutter. (fr. 87)

βλάξ ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ παντὶ λόγῳ ἐπτοῆσθαι φιλεῖ.

20. The eyes are more exact witnesses than the ears. (fr. 101a)

ὄφθαλμοὶ γὰρ τῶν ὄτων ἀκριβέστεροι μάρτυρες.

In each of these fragments, Heraclitus rebukes idle (philosophical) chatter and indicates the inadequacy of speech and hearing.<sup>49</sup> The biographers, however, saw in these fragments stern reproaches from a silent, misanthropic man, and shaped his biographical character, and the anecdotes that illustrate it, accordingly.<sup>50</sup> The anecdotes themselves, however, should not be taken as evidence for either a habitual refusal to speak or for a nonverbal method of communication, teaching, or composition.<sup>51</sup> Like the report of his melancholy, these two anecdotes of willful, critical silence were created from his work and probably for a comic as well as illustrative effect. Both,

under closer scrutiny, fall into pieces and reveal nothing about Heraclitus, but a great deal about the biographical method and its dangers.

This biographical method was extended not only to Heraclitus' personal character, but to the character of his work as well.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, his methods and motives in writing are also seen to proceed from arrogance and misanthropy, and pertinent fragments are twisted to yield their biographical evidence. Diogenes Laertius begins his discussion of Heraclitus' work, theories, and method of investigations, with the passage that begins:

21. He was exceptional from childhood, for when he was young, he declared he knew nothing, but when he was old, that he knew everything. He was no one's pupil, but said that he had searched himself (fr. 101) and learned everything from himself. Sotion, however, says that some people say he was Xenophanes' pupil. . . . (DL 9.5)

γένονε δὲ θαυμάσιος ἐκ παίδων, ὅτε καὶ νέος ὦν ἔφασκε μηδὲν εἰδέναι, τέλειος μέντοι γενόμενος πάντα ἐγνωνέναι. ἤκουσέ τε οὐδενός, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν ἔφη διζήσασθαι καὶ μαθεῖν πάντα παρ' ἑαυτοῦ. Σωτίων δέ φησιν εἰρηκέναι τινὰς Ξενοφάνους αὐτὸν ἀκηροέναι.

Several biographical *topoi* come into play here. First and generally, the phrase that Heraclitus was “exceptional from youth” is a telling one in the biographical world, for signs of adult genius are almost always manifested in the subject's biographical youth. These tokens of future greatness are typical of philosophers as well as poets; bees sat upon the lips of Plato as upon Pindar's.<sup>53</sup> Further, the biographer typically uses childhood or youth to characterize the subject's adult nature. In this case, Heraclitus, having been exceptional in youth, would naturally be exceptional as an adult.<sup>54</sup>

Next, in this passage Diogenes Laertius veers from his usual track to emphasize the unusually misanthropic nature of his subject; his routine standard now calls for a discussion of the subject's teachers.<sup>55</sup> Here, however, the only discussion is Diogenes Laertius' insistence that Heraclitus had no teacher, a statement we will consider in depth. Diogenes Laertius makes only a casual mention of another source that makes Heraclitus the student of Xenophanes. In this reputed relationship, we see a further example of the biographical method, the equation of literary or philosophical influence with an actual student/teacher relationship.<sup>56</sup> The assertion of such a relationship stems from the general biographical tendency to make

the intellectual concrete, in a particularized manner. In some rare cases, the assertion may seek to promote the legitimacy of the student by his association with a famous teacher.<sup>57</sup> In most cases, however, the assertion seeks to demolish the legitimacy<sup>58</sup> of the student, the teacher, or both, by either invalidating the philosophical claims of one or suggesting a rather more intimate relationship between the two. A collaborative intellectual/literary relationship is sometimes suggested, but the more common allegation is that a romantic relationship existed between the two.<sup>59</sup> In Heraclitus' case, the assertion is most certainly not romantic.<sup>60</sup> Yet Heraclitus' philosophical legitimacy could neither be enhanced nor weakened by association with Xenophanes. Heraclitus, as man and philosopher, occupied a unique and solitary place in the ancient world. However, in terms of literary and philosophical influence, Heraclitus and Xenophanes are connected through their criticism of Pythagoras, Homer, and Hesiod,<sup>61</sup> which most likely accounts for the biographical bond between them. The bond, however, is intellectual and not personal. Xenophanes' work may indeed have influenced Heraclitus' work (in criticism of metempsychosis, popular mythology, traditional theology, and religious practice),<sup>62</sup> but it is almost impossible that Heraclitus studied with Xenophanes in person. Their shared criticism, then, is the basis of their rumored association, and the tradition of Heraclitus as Xenophanes' student, weak to begin with, is more than adequately explained by this common philosophical bond.

Diogenes Laertius, on the other hand, is quite insistent that Heraclitus was no one's student, a point well worth noting; his solitary and teacherless state is further proof of his eccentricity, egotism, arrogance, and misanthropy.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the claim of being no one's student arises from the extraordinary statement that as a child Heraclitus said he knew nothing but as an adult claimed to know everything.

Here, in quite specific manner, the biographers are playing upon Heraclitus' frequent comparisons of men and children (see citations **12** and **13**, for example), by comparing his childish wisdom in knowing nothing to his adult folly of claiming to know everything. With this statement, Diogenes Laertius again reverses a standard topos, that the subject's childish nature reveals in embryo his adult character. Heraclitus has, in fact, fallen from his childish state of grace, in which he was aware that he knew nothing, by his arrogant adult claim in knowing everything. Diogenes Laertius thereby emphasizes the unusual, indeed unnatural, character of his subject by this statement. He compounds Heraclitus' arrogant nature by implicit and immediate comparison with the greatest and most humble

of philosophers, whose greatest claim to wisdom, knowledge, and virtue was to know that he did not know.<sup>64</sup> The claim to know everything, on the other hand, reinforces the portrait of Heraclitus as a man completely molded, motivated, and finally blinded by arrogance. The words that Diogenes Laertius quotes and by which he condemns Heraclitus deserve our special attention.

22. I searched into myself. (fr. 101)

ἔδιζήσάμην ἑμεωυτόν.

Although the fragment, as we have seen, is first used to prove that Heraclitus had no teachers and is given as further evidence of his arrogant and misanthropic nature, Heraclitus, of course, had something quite different in mind. He was, in fact, speaking about his method of philosophical speculation and inquiry, which leads directly to his work and its composition.

The source of Heraclitean cosmic wisdom does not lie in “random speculation” or “idle chatter,” as we saw from citations 17, 18, and 19. Nor can it arise from knowledge that comes secondhand from others, as we saw from Heraclitus’ distrust of poets and other philosophers, in citations 2 through 6. Nor, surprisingly (given Diogenes Laertius’ many assertions of his subject’s arrogance), does it arise from Heraclitus himself, for as he tells us:

23. Having listened not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to agree that all are one. (fr. 50)

οὐκ ἔμοῦ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστὶν ἐν πάντα εἶναι.

Although here Heraclitus emphatically disclaims to be the source of wisdom, he does indicate how those who seek it must proceed. For Heraclitus, the path to wisdom is at once obscure, mundane, and mystically, profoundly simple: true wisdom is the result of personal enlightenment, which alone can achieve illumination of mind and soul. Wisdom consists of knowledge not of the common or wide-ranging kind that Heraclitus condemns, but of a specific kind: understanding of the Logos. This knowledge comes only to an enlightened, wakened soul,<sup>65</sup> and in citation 22, “I searched into myself,” Heraclitus indicates how to pursue it.

He cannot, however, explain it. Knowledge can come only from within. Secondhand knowledge, even if it were to come from Heraclitus and not from Pythagoras, Hesiod, Homer, or any other of the accepted teachers, would still be secondhand and therefore worthless. As philosopher and teacher, Heraclitus can only hint at or allude to the Logos and how one finds it; to explain the method is to destroy all chance of attaining its reward. The necessity of personal investigation is put forth in citation 22 and the source of cosmic wisdom is stated in citation 23. Both, furthermore, speak of Heraclitus' opposition to traditional, taught wisdom and traditional methods of philosophical investigation.<sup>66</sup> Citation 22, "I searched into myself," far from reinforcing Diogenes Laertius' portrait of Heraclitus as an arrogant man, brings to light a vastly different man, one of strict intellectual and personal honesty, and his earnest, if necessarily limited, attempt to help others achieve true knowledge and understanding of the Logos.

Diogenes Laertius does return briefly to the arrogance with which he began his characterization, but he does so in order to introduce Heraclitus' work. It is therefore to his introduction, and Heraclitus' work, that we now turn.

#### THE DARKENED PATH

Like so much else in his life, information about Heraclitus' philosophical work is clouded by obscurity and legend. Diogenes Laertius presents his knowledge of "the book"<sup>67</sup> and some general comments on the work.

24. The book which passes as his is, to judge from its content, 'On Nature.' It is divided into three parts: one of the universe, one political, and one theological. (DL 9.5–6)

τὸ δὲ φερόμενον αὐτοῦ βιβλίον ἐστὶ μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ συνέχοντος Περί φύσεως, διήρηται δὲ εἰς τρεῖς λόγους, εἷς τε τὸν περὶ τοῦ παντὸς καὶ πολιτικὸν καὶ θεολογικόν.

25. Among these [commentators on the work], Diodotus the grammarian says that the work is not on nature, but a political work, the natural parts serving only as example and illustration (DL 9.15)

τῶν δὲ γραμματικῶν Διόδοτος, ὃς οὖν φησι περὶ φύσεως εἶναι τὸ σύγγραμμα, ἀλλὰ περὶ πολιτείας, τὰ δὲ περὶ φύσεως ἐν παραδείγματος εἶδει κείσθαι.



26. Diodotus [calls it] “a rudder unerring for the rule of life,” while others, a guide for the conduct for the [whole] world, for one and all alike. (DL 9.12)

Διόδοτος δὲ ἀκριβὲς οἰάκισμα πρὸς στάθμην βίου, ἄλλοι γνώμον ἡθῶν, τρόπου κόσμον ἓνα τῶν ξυμπάντων.

The title of the book given by Diogenes Laertius in citation 24, *On Nature*, was a general, catch-all title for early philosophical treatises of all sorts; as a title for Heraclitus’ work, it means little or nothing.<sup>68</sup> The three divisions of the work given in citation 24 (cosmological, political, and theological) are mere standard subdivisions of Stoic philosophical categories and depend upon literary canons established long after Heraclitus was active.<sup>69</sup> Diodotus’ characterization of the work as a “guide for the conduct . . . for one and all alike,” (citation 26), recalls and probably simply paraphrases Heraclitus’ characterization of wisdom as a “single thing . . . which guides everything everywhere” (citation 3). Clearly the function, and even the category of the work (physics, logic, ethics, or politics?) perplexed readers early on.

The title, divisions, function, and character of the work, as Diogenes Laertius presents them, does little to clarify knowledge of the work. Reactions to Heraclitus’ work, which he also includes, are perhaps more revealing.

27. Seleucos the grammarian says that a person named Croton relates in his book *The Diver* that Crates first brought Heraclitus’ book into Greece. And he says that it needed a Delian diver not to be drowned in it.<sup>70</sup> Some title it, ‘The Muses,’ others, ‘On Nature,’ and Diodotus calls it ‘a rudder precise for the rule of life,’ and others, a guide for behavior, a rule for [all] the world, for one and all alike. (DL 9.12)

Σέλευκος μέντοι φησὶν ὁ γραμματικὸς Κρότωνά τινα ἱστορεῖν ἐν τῷ Κατακολυμβητῇ Κράτητά τινα πρῶτον εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα κομίσει τὸ βιβλίον). καὶ εἰπεῖν Δηλίου τινὸς δεῖσθαι κολυμβητοῦ, ὃς οὐκ ἀποπνιγῆσεται ἐν αὐτῷ. ἐπιγράφουσι δὲ αὐτῷ οἱ μὲν Μούσας, οἱ δὲ Περὶ φύσεως, Διόδοτος δὲ ἀκριβὲς οἰάκισμα πρὸς στάθμην βίου, ἄλλοι γνώμον ἡθῶν, τρόπου κόσμον ἓνα τῶν ξυμπάντων.

28. Theophrastus says that it is because of impulsiveness that some of what he wrote is half-finished, while other parts are mixed this way and that. (DL 9.6)

Θεόφραστος δὲ φησιν ὑπὸ μελαγχολίας τὰ μὲν ἡμιτελῆ, τὰ δὲ ἄλλοτε ἄλλως ἔχοντα γράψαι.

29. This book he deposited in the temple of Artemis and according to some, deliberately made very obscure, so that [only] those able might approach it, and that it might not, by mass reading, be held in contempt. Timon writes of him also, saying, ‘Among them arose cuckoo-ing, mob-hating Heraclitus the riddler.’ (DL 9.6)

ἀνέθηκε δ’ αὐτὸ εἰς τὸ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἱερὸν, ὡς μὲν τινες, ἐπιτηδεύσας ἀσαφέστερον γράψαι, ὅπως οἱ δυνάμενοι [μόνοι] προσίοιεν αὐτῷ καὶ μὴ ἐκ τοῦ δημώδους εὐκαταφρόνητον ἦ. τοῦτον δὲ καὶ ὁ Τίμων [fr. 43 D.] ὑπογράφει λέγων ᾽ τοῖς δ’ ἐνὶ κοκκυστῆς ὀχλολοίδορος Ἑράκλειτος αἰνικτῆς ἀνόρουσε’.

Seleucos’ comment in citation 27, that the book needed a skilled (i.e., Delian) diver not to drown in it, refers quite obviously to the celebrated obscurity of Heraclitus’ work. Attribution of the remark to these two sources, Crates and Socrates, suggests a comic source for the remark; its iambic meter supports a dramatic origin.<sup>71</sup> The ultimate source of the joke, of course, is to be found in Heraclitus’ work, and most likely to the fragment that states:

30. You could not in your going find the ends of the soul, though you traveled the whole way; so deep is its Logos. (fr. 45)

ψυχῆς πείρατα ἰὼν οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο, πᾶσαν ἐπιπορευόμενος ὁδὸν οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει.

The metaphor of the Delian diver, then, would be a periphrasis of the unplumbable depths of souls and the Logos, its imagery, like that of Diodotus’ helm or rudder, an illusion to Heraclitus’ constant association with water.<sup>72</sup> This association, the result of the widespread influence of the flux of citation 14, also underlies the remark about the Delian diver, while its dual attribution and iambic meter speak to a comic source. For while nothing is now known about Croton or his book *The Diver*, their mention here, along with Seleucos and Crates, may provide context and connection to Heraclitus’ theory of the flux. This Seleucos is perhaps not the Seleucos Homericus who wrote about philosophers and whom Diogenes Laertius quotes elsewhere, but rather that Seleucos of Seleucia who,

in opposition to Crates, wrote a reply to a Crates of Mallos, in which he discussed the movement of the tides.<sup>73</sup> Strabo tells us that in this work, Seleucos examines the inequalities in flux and reflux that he had discovered in the Red Sea.<sup>74</sup> It seems quite likely that, in a book about water, tides, and flux, Heraclitus' theories would have come into play and that pertinent quotations of the work may have played a part.<sup>75</sup>

The remark about the Delian diver, here attributed to Croton, however, is also attributed by Diogenes Laertius to Socrates. In 9.22 in his life of Socrates, Diogenes Laertius tells us that it was Euripides who gave the work to Socrates who, besides making the remark about the Delian diver, is also said to have said, "That which I understood is excellent, and, I think, that part too, which I didn't." Euripides' gift, and especially Socrates' playful opinion, are also telling reactions to the work and must be discussed.

Euripides was the poet most often and most typically associated with philosophers,<sup>76</sup> and so his gift of a philosophical text, especially that of Heraclitus, as we will see, is well in keeping with his biographical tradition. Here, the association between a conflated Socrates/Plato figure and Heraclitus, as discussed earlier in connection with citations 21 and 22, leads to a representational anecdote, in which stock characters meet as representatives of literary genres or philosophical schools.<sup>77</sup> Thus the literary/philosophical ties between Plato (via Socrates) and Heraclitus are neatly explained and given concrete form, the poetry meets philosophy through Euripides' gift. Socrates' opinion is characteristic and telling, not only for reactions to Heraclitus' work, but also for his own biography, where the comment is in fact placed. For Socrates, in a neat play on words,<sup>78</sup> confesses both to what he knows and to what he does not, an apt statement for one whose fame rests, in part, on what he does not know. Citation 27, moreover, provides a further link in the association between Heraclitus and Socrates/Plato, with the alternative title of Heraclitus' book as *The Muses*. The title comes from a passage in Plato's *Sophist*, in which he discusses archaic philosophy and refers to the theory of the unity of opposites, first put forth by an "Ionian Muse."<sup>79</sup>

Moving to citation 29, the act of depositing or dedicating a book cannot be taken as proof of either the book's existence or of the act, for such dedications comprise another biographical topos; similar stories are recorded for both Crantor and Hesiod, for example.<sup>80</sup> The imputed motives of this particular dedication, however, arise from Heraclitus' particular biographical character and speak both of his alleged hostility toward

the people and of the studied obscurity of his style. Kirk translates ὅπως οἱ δυνάμενοι [μόνοι] as “so that only those in power” and interprets it to mean “only those upper classes might have access to it.” Furthermore he suggests that the idea of making it inaccessible to the common people is a reaction to those fragments in which Heraclitus treats “the people” with contempt,<sup>81</sup> a charge that we, however, must continue to evaluate. Kirk also points out that there may have been an etiological motive to the story: the 356 BCE fire that destroyed the temple would also have destroyed the book, thus explaining the lack of a complete text.<sup>82</sup>

On the other hand, the charge of deliberate obscurity in citation **29** is found by many to be incontestable.<sup>83</sup> And if by obscure, commentators meant that Heraclitus deliberately employed “riddles, paradoxes, word-play, ambiguity, and analogy,”<sup>84</sup> to produce, “linguistic density . . . and resonance,”<sup>85</sup> to deliberately provoke the reader to greater exertion in a manner often deemed prophetic or oracular, then with this I agree.<sup>86</sup> However, Heraclitus’ style, even if we admit its obscurity as here defined, is not the result of either misanthropy, as citation **29** suggests, or of melancholy, as citation **28** asserts.<sup>87</sup> Although fragments examined earlier may enable Heraclitus’ reader to believe that the stylistic devices arose directly from his dislike of humanity, I think rather that Heraclitus deliberately perfected the mysterious, gnomic style he praises in the following fragment.

**31.** The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor hides, but indicates. (fr. 93)

ὁ ἄναξ, οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει.

Heraclitus not only admires the oracular style of delivery, but recommends it; this studied ambiguity is, I think, celebrated and alluded to in the Delian diver comment. For just as the prophecies of the Delian or Delphic god are at once obscure and darkly clear, so too are the workings of the Logos and Heraclitus’ remarks on it.<sup>88</sup> And therefore citation **31**, like citation **30** that speaks of the unplumbable depths of the soul, played its part in the formation of the Croton-Seleucos-Crates remark of citation **27** and gives us both model and motive for Heraclitus’ style.

It seems, then, that at least one part of Diogenes Laertius’ report on Heraclitus’ book in citation **29** is correct, that he “deliberately made [it]

very obscure.” Correct, that is, in its substance, but mistaken in its imputed motives, for Heraclitus’ aim was not to keep it, intellectually or physically, from “the people.” The work is deliberate and ambiguous, at once simple and profound, lucid and dark, obscurely shining. Heraclitus deliberately speaks with the cryptic half-light of oracular pronouncement, the better to emulate the oracular style he admires.

Finally, Timon’s remarks in citation 29 reflect the hostility, discussed in earlier sections, that Heraclitus’ work awoke in so many of his readers and critics. The description of him as “mob-hating” is drawn from those fragments that refer to humankind in less than flattering terms, quite in line with Diogenes Laertius’ characterization of him as proud and arrogant. The term *riddler* quite clearly refers to Heraclitus’ chosen oracular style, and Timon gives voice to what was clearly the common reaction to Heraclitus and his work.

#### DEATH BY DUNG

We come at last to the death of Heraclitus, succinctly presented by Diogenes Laertius.

32. Finally, he became a misanthrope and going apart by himself in the mountains, lived feeding on grasses and herbs. When, however, this gave him dropsy, he went back down to the city and in riddling manner asked the physicians if they could, after heavy rains, create drought. When they did not understand, he buried himself in a cow-shed, hoping that the heat of the dung would draw out the water. Achieving nothing by this, though, he died, having lived for sixty years . . . and Hermippus says that he asked the doctors if one could, by emptying the intestines, make water pour out. However, when they said this was impossible, he stretched himself out in the sun and ordered boys to plaster him over with dung. He stayed there, stretched out, and the next day died and was buried in the agora. And Neanthes of Cyzicus says that, unable to tear away the dung, he remained there and, unrecognized because of it, was devoured by dogs. (DL 9.3–4)

καὶ τέλος μισανθρωπήσας καὶ ἐκπατήσας ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσι διηιτᾶτο, πῶας σιτούμενος καὶ βοτάνας. καὶ μέντοι καὶ διὰ τοῦτο περιτραπείς εἰς ὕδρον κατήλθεν εἰς ἄστου καὶ τῶν ἰατρῶν αἰνιγματωδῶς ἐπυθάνετο, εἰ δύναντο ἐξ ἐπομβρίας αὐχμὸν ποιῆσαι· τῶν δὲ μὴ συνιέντων, αὐτὸν εἰς βούστασιν κατορύξας τῆι τῶν βολίτων ἀλέαι ἤλπισεν ἐξατμισθήσεσθαι.

οὐδὲν δὲ ἀνύων οὐδ' οὕτως ἐτελεύτα βιοὺς ἔτη ἐξήκοντα. Ἑρμιππος [FHG III 42 fr. 28] δὲ φησι λέγειν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἰατροῖς, εἴ τις δύναται τὰ ἔντερα κεινώσας <τὸ> ὑγρὸν ἐξεράσαι ἀπειπόντων δὲ θεῖναι αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν ἥλιον καὶ κελεύειν τοὺς παῖδας βολίτοις καταπλάττειν· οὕτω δὲ κατατεινόμενον δευτεροαῖον τελευτήσαι καὶ θαφθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ. Νεάνθης δ' ὁ Κυζικηνός [FGrHist. 84 F 25 II 197] φησι μὴ δυνηθέντα αὐτὸν ἀποσπάσαι τὰ βόλτα μεῖναι καὶ διὰ τὴν μεταβολὴν ἀγνοηθέντα κυνόβρωτον γενέσθαι.

Here, Diogenes Laertius gives three versions of a single story: his own, that of Hermippus, and that of Neanthes. Let us first see which elements are unique to each version and which are common to all.

Diogenes Laertius' version includes events prior to the disease, the cause and name of the disease, the attempted cure, and the death.<sup>89</sup> Hermippus adds that Heraclitus was buried in the agora, and Neanthes the grisly detail that Heraclitus was eaten by dogs. The three versions share a single element, that Heraclitus smeared himself with dung. Clearly, it was the most popular element of the story and the one to which we'll first turn our attention.<sup>90</sup> Having seen throughout this chapter the many and varied charges of arrogance, pride, and hatred of humanity, we could be tempted to dismiss the story as so much facile nonsense. However, as Fränkel first pointed out,<sup>91</sup> there is much more to the story than meets the eye and to dismiss it would be to miss both the scholarship and the malice that went into its making. The story and all its details—misanthropy, eating grasses and herbs, riddles, doctors, dung, dogs, and children—are all brilliantly lifted from Heraclitus' work. Systematically, detail by detail, we shall see how Heraclitus unknowingly wrote his own obituary.

*"Finally, he became a misanthrope and going apart by himself in the mountains, lived feeding on grasses and herbs . . ."* Now, there are three main categories of fragments by which Heraclitus was, by his biographers, proved a misanthrope. First are the fragments that speak of Heraclitus' impatience with the people for their failure to see or to understand the Logos that surrounds them. An important fragment tells us that:

33. The existing universal law [the Logos] notwithstanding, people are forever without understanding, both before they hear it and having heard it for the first time. For although everything happens in accordance with this principle, people seem unacquainted with it, although they experience both word and deed of the kind of thing that I myself set out in

detail, distinguishing each thing according to its nature and showing how each thing is. But what other people do escapes them, just as they let escape them what they do while asleep. (fr. 1)

δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόασι, πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγεῦμαι κατὰ φύσιν διαιρέων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅκως ἔχει. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγε- ρθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα χϋδοντες ἐπιλανθάνονται.

Another fragment further discusses the nature of the Logos<sup>92</sup> and people's inability to see it.

34. From the Logos, which they associate most, and which governs all, they are apart and, even as those things they daily meet, seems to them most strange. (fr. 72)

ὦι μάλιστα διηνεκῶς ὁμιλοῦσι λόγῳ τῷ τὰ ὅλα διοικοῦντι, τούτῳ δια- φέρονται, καὶ οἷς καθ' ἡμέραν ἐγκυροῦσι, ταῦτα αὐτοῖς ξένα φαίνεται.

A second category of fragments reveal Heraclitus' impatience with the people's basic foolishness and intellectual inadequacy.

35. For what intelligence or understanding have they? They believe in the bards of the people and use the mass as teacher, not knowing that, 'Many are bad, few good.' (fr. 104)

τίς γὰρ αὐτῶν νόος ἢ φρήν; δήμων ἀοιδοῖσι πείθονται καὶ διδασκάλῳ χρείωνται ὁμίλῳ οὐκ εἰδότες ὅτι ῥοὶ πολλοὶ κακοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἀγαθοί.

36. Human character has not the means of knowing, but the divine one has. (fr. 78).

ἦθος γὰρ ἀνθρώπειον μὲν οὐκ ἔχει γνώμας, θεῖον δὲ ἔχει.

37. One man to me is worth the multitudes, if that one is best. (fr. 49)

εἷς ἐμοὶ μύριοι, ἐὰν ἄριστος ἦμ.

38. And having heard, they are without understanding, like dumb animals. The proverb bears witness to them, 'Present but absent.' (fr. 34)

ἀξύνετοι ἀκούσαντες κωφοῖσιν εἰκόασι· φάτις αὐτοῖσιν μαρτυρεῖ παροῦντας ἀπεῖναι.

A third category openly compares people to either animals or children.

39. Children's playthings are human conjectures. (fr. 70)

παιδῶν ἀθύρματα νενόμικεν εἶναι τὰ ἀνθρώπινα δοξάσματα.

40. A man hearkens to a god as a child to a grown man. (fr. 79)

ἀνὴρ νήπιος ἤκουσε πρὸς δαίμονος ὄκωσπερ παῖς πρὸς ἀνδρός.

41. The wisest of all men, compared to a god, seems an ape in wisdom, in beauty, and in all else. (fr. 83)

ἀνθρώπων ὁ σοφώτατος πρὸς θεὸν πίθηκος φανεῖται καὶ σοφίαι καὶ κάλλει καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν.

42. For the best choose a single thing rather than all that exists, fame everlasting among mortals. Most, however, are satisfied like beasts. (fr. 29)

αἰρεῦνται γὰρ ἓν ἀντὶ ἀπάντων οἱ ἄριστοι, κλέος ἀέναον θνητῶν· οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ κεκόρηγται ὄκωσπερ κτήνεα.

In short, there was material enough and more from which to adduce Heraclitus' contempt for the common run of mortals, if not for the entire human race, a contempt that grew to hatred and culminated, in the biographers' minds, to complete misanthropy and voluntary exile from others.

Heraclitus' exile to the mountains must be considered apart from the rest of his death, since it belongs more to the tradition of biography and the topos of exile than to the biographical tradition of Heraclitus himself. Almost all philosophers undergo some form of exile, voluntary or involuntary, physical or intellectual, fortuitous or importune.<sup>93</sup> Like the related topos of travel<sup>94</sup> that occurs for most philosophers also, or a visit from the Muses that occurs to only a few,<sup>95</sup> exile makes concrete and physical the philosopher's intellectual and social alienation, attributed to him by the biographers as a sign that he is set apart.<sup>96</sup> In the case of Heraclitus, the theme of voluntary exile and misanthropy go hand in hand with the larger scheme of Heraclitus' life and death.



For Heraclitus, in particular, the exile demonstrates not only the biographers' hostility, but their intellectual ingenuity as well. By making Heraclitus turn his back on the people he was so commonly assumed to despise,<sup>97</sup> the biographers reduce him to animal status, just as, in their view, he had so often reduced "most people." Heraclitus, in short, is now one of the common herd, the beasts to whom he compared the people.<sup>98</sup> Previously we saw fragments that expressed the comparison; the next set of fragments have a more particular bearing on his exile and bestiality.

43. If happiness lay in the pleasures of the body, then we would call cattle happy, for they find fodder to eat. (fr. 4)

Si felicitas esset in delectationibus corporis, boves felices diceremus, cum inveniant orobum ad comedendum.

44. Asses prefer garbage to gold. (fr. 9)

ὄνους σύρματ' ἄν ἐλέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ χρυσόν

45. All animals are driven to pasture by blows. (fr. 11)

πάν γὰρ ἔρπετόν πληγῆι νέμεται.

Heraclitus' personal contempt for the pleasures of the body and of society, found by the biographers in these fragments, now rebound upon him; like the animals he speaks of, he too is driven to pasture and to the eating of fodder. Not knowing, himself, how to distinguish good from bad and hating everyone indiscriminately, he acts like a brute beast himself, lives in solitude, and feeds upon grasses and herbs. Finally, his own arrogance and contempt for the people have driven him to these extremes.

Diogenes Laertius continues his account, "when, however, this [diet] gave him dropsy . . ." Dropsy, or edema, an overabundance of water in the body tissues,<sup>99</sup> is the obvious disease for a philosopher so much associated with water. Equally important are those fragments which speak of water and its relationship or effect upon the soul.

46. A dry soul is wisest and best. (fr. 118)

αὐγὴ ξηρὴ ψυχὴ σοφωτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη.

47. For souls, it is delight or death to become water. (fr. 77)

ψυχῆισι τέρψιν ἢ θάνατον ὑγρῆισι γενέσθαι.

48. For souls, it is death to become water; for water, it is death to become earth: from earth comes water, from water, the soul. (fr. 36)

ψυχῆισιν θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι, ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχή.

49. Souls that perish in battle are purer than those that perish in disease. (fr. 136)

ψυχαὶ ἀρηίφατοι καθερότεροι (σο) ἢ ἐνὶ νόσοις.

Heraclitus has now himself fallen prey to his philosophical beliefs; his theories and precepts, which first led to his exile and diet, have now destroyed him. By his own beliefs, as seen in citations 47 and 48, Heraclitus' soul, through an overabundance of water in the body, has met its death and will soon return to earth. Furthermore, since he achieved a wet death in disease, and not a fiery one in battle, he had, according to citations 46 and 49, neither the wisest nor the best soul.

Diogenes Laertius then brings Heraclitus down from the mountains, "he went back down to the city and in riddling manner asked the physicians if they could, after heavy rains, create drought. When they did not understand . . ." Earlier, we saw numerous references to the obscurity of Heraclitus' work, charges that he deliberately made it obscure and inaccessible, and Timon's description of Heraclitus as a "riddler." Here, Heraclitus is made to pay for these sins by posing his question in this enigmatic way. His arrogance is again seen in his attempt to cure himself; his disdain for the medical profession occurs in another fragment.

50. For the physicians, cutting and burning and trying all sorts of remedies, torture their patients, asking in addition a fee which they don't deserve, since they accomplish the same thing as the disease. (fr. 58)

οἱ γοῦν ἰατροί, τέμνοντες, καίοντες, πάντη βασανίζοντες κακῶς τοὺς ἀρρωστοῦντας, ἐπαιτέονται μηδὲν ἄξιοι μισθὸν λαμβάνειν παρὰ τῶν ἀρρωστοῦντων, ταῦτ' ἐργαζόμενοι, τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰς νόσους.

The physicians (and the biographers) now have their revenge; unable to understand Heraclitus' riddle, they are unable to treat him. At the same

time, they are embodying a standard Heraclitean lament, that people are unable to see what is right in front of them.<sup>100</sup>

Diogenes Laertius continues, “*he buried himself in a cow-shed, hoping that the heat of the dung would draw out the water. Achieving nothing by this, though, he died . . .*” Clearly, Heraclitus’ bizarre treatment is drawn from his words in the following fragments.

51. Swine prefer mud to clean water. (fr. 13)

ὑεσ βορβόρωι ἥδονται μᾶλλον ἢ καθαροῖι ὕδατι.

52. Pigs wash themselves in mud, birds in dust or ash. (fr. 37)

sues caeno, cohortales aves pulvere vel cinere lavari.

53. Corpses are more worthy to be thrown out than dung. (fr. 96)

νεκνεσ γὰρ κοπρίων ἐκβλητότεροι.

Nor was the treatment without a redeeming aspect of sound medical practice; dung, in fact, was a general cure-all in the ancient world and, in cases of dropsy, was applied externally.<sup>101</sup> Folk medicine and revenge, then, are combined here in a grotesque parody to cover Heraclitus with dung. The treatment is another of the rebound anecdotes in which the philosopher’s own words rebound upon him. Heraclitus is like the swine who prefer mud in citations 51 and 52.<sup>102</sup> Heraclitus’ words on the worthlessness of the body after death, in citation 53, is reflected in the contemptible treatment of his own body.<sup>103</sup> Further, this degrading death would be thought appropriate for one whose religious beliefs lay outside the realm of traditional belief, as is discussed later in this chapter.

The death story, however, involves even more of Heraclitus’ work, for the biographers were men of some knowledge, if only of the wide-ranging sort. That they were possessed of erudition, if not understanding, is evident from their use of the less obvious, more cosmological parts of Heraclitus’ work, as well as the more obvious fragments mentioned previously.

We saw, in the discussion of citations 14, 27, 28, and 46 through 49, the many fragments that led to an association of Heraclitus and water. Less apparent are those Heraclitean statements about fire and water and the Heraclitean theory of the unity of opposites. Theophrastus, following Aristotle’s lead, was eager to reduce Heraclitus’ philosophy to a strict and

even simplistic material monism.<sup>104</sup> Accordingly, Heraclitus was singled out as the early philosopher who identified fire as the single material from which and through which the cosmos had been derived.<sup>105</sup> Diogenes Laertius, who takes his account of Heraclitus' theories from Theophrastus,<sup>106</sup> explains the influence of fire upon water, in the resultant statement of Heraclitus' theory of exhalations.<sup>107</sup>

54. For fire, by contracting turns into moisture, and this condensation turns into water; water again when congealed, turns into earth . . . then again, earth is liquefied, and thus gives rise to water, and from water the rest of the series is derived. Heraclitus reduces nearly everything to exhalations from the sea. (DL 9.9)

Πυκνούμενον γὰρ τὸ πῦρ ἐξυγραίνεσθαι συνιστάμενόν τε γίνεσθαι ὕδωρ, πηγνύμενον δὲ τὸ ὕδωρ εἰς γῆν τρέπεσθαι· πάλιν τε αὖ τὴν γῆν χεῖσθαι, ἐξ ἧς τὸ ὕδωρ γίνεσθαι, ἐκ δὲ τούτου τὰ λοιπά, σχεδὸν πάντα ἐπὶ τὴν ἀναθυμίασιν ἀνάγων τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάττης·

Heraclitus' own statement, from which this account had first been interpreted by Theophrastus, summarized by Diogenes Laertius above, is expressed in the fragment as follows.

55. Fire's changes: first sea, and of sea the half is earth, the half-lightening flash. (fr. 31)

πυρὸς τροπαὶ πρῶτον θάλασσα, θαλάσσης δὲ τὸ μὲν ἥμισυ γῆ, τὸ δὲ ἥμισυ πρηστήρ.

It is Theophrastus and Diogenes Laertius, in fact, who reduce "nearly everything" to a series of exhalations.<sup>108</sup> In the death story, Heraclitus is made once more to act out his theories as they were understood by others: the heat of the dung, according to their interpretations, will produce exhalations from the water in the body, and thus produce the demanded drought after rain; thus we have yet another of the anecdotes in which the philosopher's theories ironically, and this time fatally, rebound upon him.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, the anecdote also refers to Heraclitus' theory of opposites, a theory which greatly contributed to his death.

Heraclitus' theory of opposites speaks of the essential unity that exists in the interplay or hidden connective tension between seeming opposites

that, in reality, are the opposed extremes of a single entity. Night and day, for example, although they seem like opposites, are in reality the opposed extremes of a single entity of time measured within a twenty-four-hour framework. It is the tension between the two extremes that creates their essential reality and unification into a single unity, the twenty-four-hour day. Therefore, states that seem like polar opposites, such as day and night, young and old, or living and dead, by their tension, form an essential unified entity, a twenty-four-hour day, the living portion of a human life, and the complete cycle of a human life. If we consider the fragment of Heraclitus that states:

56. And the same thing exists in us living and dead, and waking and sleeping, and young and old: for these things changed around are those, and those changed around are these. (fr. 88)

ταὐτό τ' ἔνι ζῶν καὶ τεθνηκὸς καὶ [τὸ] ἐγρηγορὸς καὶ καθεῦδον καὶ νέον καὶ γηραιόν· τάδε γὰρ μεταπεσόντα ἐκεῖνά ἐστι κἀκεῖνα πάλιν μεταπεσόντα ταῦτα.

we find in this statement the expression of unity between opposed states. Their supposed opposition is simply the result of a limited, subjective (unenlightened)<sup>110</sup> viewpoint. Further, states such as living/dead or young/old, taken to be polar opposites by “most men,” instead form a totality of human life whose essence is a single unity.

The theory of opposites, so called, has long caused problems in Heraclitean scholarship.<sup>111</sup> We can, in fact, trace the problem as far back as Aristotle, who took the theory to mean that opposites were identical and the same. For example, Aristotle interpreted Heraclitus to say that opposites such as good and bad are the same and identical.<sup>112</sup> This in turn led Theophrastus and others to believe that Heraclitus denied the law of contradictions,<sup>113</sup> falsely attributing to him the identical nature of opposites, rather than their connective tension and essential unity. With this and the mistaken and common belief that fire was Heraclitus' first or principal material in mind, we see why Heraclitus was the only philosopher to die covered with dung. In the death anecdote, Heraclitus depends upon his principal material, fire, to draw out its opposite, water, by exhalation. The physicians, no more able than most men to see what is right before them, also cannot synthesize or associate Heraclitus' theory of opposites with his condition. Heraclitus, characteristically obscure, cannot resist

living up to his nickname and puts the problem to them in a riddle, which results in his death.<sup>114</sup>

Diogenes Laertius concludes his version of Heraclitus' death with an epigram of his own creation, to be discussed later in this section. He then adds Hermippus' version of Heraclitus' death, which adds only that Heraclitus was buried in the agora or marketplace. This small addition brings up an interesting point, however, for public burial may indicate another biographical topos, that of posthumous honors. Several other philosophers are (at least biographically) so honored after their death, Plato, Pythagoras, and Epicurus among them,<sup>115</sup> and Diogenes Laertius gives us several hints that this may be the case for Heraclitus also.

First, burial in the agora often indicates cult or heroic status, such as Homer achieved after his death and to which Heraclitus' burial has been compared.<sup>116</sup> Second, in his discussion of Heraclitus' work, Diogenes Laertius remarks (9.7) that the fame of his work was such that a sect of Heracliteans was founded after his death. Philosophers, like other authors,<sup>117</sup> often experience this contradiction in their biographies; hated and scorned while alive, they are loved and respected after they die. This reversal, which became a biographical topos, stems from the peculiarly ambivalent attitude of ancient Greeks for their "great men," an envy and hatred expressed in the hostile biographical tradition toward the living subject that allows for a reverential turnabout once the subject is safely dead.<sup>118</sup> Heraclitus, toward whom an almost exclusively hostile tradition exists, nonetheless acquires, to a limited extent, heroic status after his death.<sup>119</sup>

Neanthes, whose account agrees with that of Hermippus as given by Diogenes Laertius, adds one essential point: that Heraclitus, covered with dung and unrecognizable because of it, was torn apart by dogs. Here we have another example of the inability (this time on the part of dogs!) to see something for what it is; once again, Heraclitus' words are turned back upon him. The detail of the dogs comes, in part, from yet another fragment.

57. For dogs bark at those whom they don't know. (fr. 97)

κύνες γὰρ καταβῶζουσιν ὧν ἄν μὴ γινώσκωσι.

This fragment, besides its immediate common sense, has a deeper, more philosophical undertone, human hostility toward new ideas.<sup>120</sup> The fragment may even refer to the hostility that Heraclitus' ideas encountered,

and his regret, expressed elsewhere, that most people prefer to blindly follow popular thought and popular teachers. That hostility, ultimately, was turned against Heraclitus.

In another fragment, Heraclitus remarks that,

58. And yet, they purify themselves by defiling themselves with more blood, as one might, by stepping into mud, wash themselves of that mud. And he would be thought mad, if some other would see him acting this way. (fr. 5)

καθαίρονται δ' ἄλλωι αἵματι μαινόμενοι οἶον εἴ τις εἰς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς πηλῶι ἀπονίξοιτο. μαίνεσθαι δ' ἂν δοκοίη, εἴ τις αὐτὸν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιφράσαιτο οὕτω ποιέοντα.

Heraclitus' new intellectual direction affected his view of religion as well as philosophy; indeed, the universality of the Logos demands integration of the two. In citation 58, we see criticism of traditional religious practice that, according to most scholars, contributes significantly to the final detail of the death story, being eaten by dogs. West, however, sees in Heraclitus' death by dung and dogs allusion to Zoroastrianism; a purification ritual in the *Avesta* calls for the polluted man to rub himself with bull urine and for a dog to watch him as he dies.<sup>121</sup> Fairweather, justly critical of this interpretation, demonstrates that Heraclitus, as a nontraditional religious thinker, died the death reserved for the enemies of traditional religion, atheists, and heretics alike. Other examples of the topos occur in the death of not only the mythical Acteon, but the philosopher Diogenes and the playwright Euripides as well.<sup>122</sup> Statements such as citation 58 with its criticism of cult practices may well have given the biographers the means to cast Heraclitus as an enemy of religion and thus inspiring his death by dogs.

I agree with Fairweather here; Heraclitus' statement in citation 80 ("For dogs bark at those they don't know.") presented the biographers with too neat and ready-made an opportunity to resist, especially if it fit with an already established death for those who stray from the paths of orthodoxy. And the gradual build-up of details in the entire death story—withdrawal, vegetarianism, dropsy, doctors, riddles, children, dung, dogs—strongly suggests a composite tale, carefully selected, elaborated, and perfected into a speaking death, composed by Heraclitus but orchestrated by his biographers.

However logical the explanations, the story of Heraclitus' death remains one of the most grotesque and malicious on record, without a single redeeming factor in it. And yet one is forced to admire the collaborative cleverness with which the biographers combined so many different facets of Heraclitus' work to create the coherent whole. That cleverness is not always so apparent, especially when it comes to Diogenes Laertius' epigrams. But even these may reveal how Diogenes Laertius' interpretation of his subject's philosophy should be analyzed. For Heraclitus, Diogenes Laertius gives three epigrams: his own, which follows his account of the death, and two others given later in his chapter. We will deal with these latter ones first.

59. Heraclitus am I. Why do you drag me up and down, uncultured boors?

It was not for you that I labored, but for those who understand me.

One man is worth thirty thousand, but the countless mass is as Nothing. This will I proclaim, even in Persephone's domain.

(DL 9.16 = AP 7.128)

Ἡράκλειτος ἐγὼ τί μ' ἄνω κάτω ἔλκετ' ἄμουσοι;  
οὐχ ὑμῖν ἐπόνουν, τοῖς δ' ἔμ' ἐπισταμένοις.  
εἷς ἐμοὶ ἄνθρωπος τρισμύριοι, οἱ δ' ἀνάριθμοι  
οὐδεῖς. ταῦτ' αὐδῶ καὶ παρὰ Φερσεφόνη.

The poem by now holds no real surprises, lifted as it is from Heraclitus' work. The germane fragments are the following.

60. The way up and the way down are one and the same.<sup>123</sup> (fr. 60)

ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή.

61. For what intelligence or understanding have they? They believe in the bards of the people and use the mass as teachers, not knowing that, 'Many are bad, few good.' (fr. 104)

τίς γὰρ αὐτῶν νόος ἢ φρήν; δῆμων ἀοιδοῖσι πείθονται καὶ διδασκάλωι  
χρεῖωνται ὁμίλωι οὐκ εἰδότες ὅτι ὅϊ πολλοὶ κακοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἀγαθοί.



62. To me, one man is worth multitudes, if he is best. (fr. 49)

εἷς ἐμοὶ μύριοι, εἴαν ἄριστος ᾦ.

63. When he is there, they arise and become watchful guardians of the living and the dead. (fr. 63)

ἔνθα δ' ἐόντι ἐπανίστασθαι καὶ φύλακας γίνεσθαι ἐγεῖρτι ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν.

The appropriateness of citations 60, 61, and 62 to the epigram are immediately clear. The implication of the last citation, 63, that there is an afterlife, of some sort and at least for certain souls, may have suggested to the epigrammist Heraclitus' proclamation from the underworld. Originality, we should remember, was not an essential or even highly regarded quality in the ancient world; the epigrammist is playing upon well-established rules in drawing so obviously upon his subject's work. Of interest to us, rather, is the demonstration of biographical methodology, how the author drew upon his own knowledge (and interpretation) of Heraclitus' work to create a speech characteristic of his subject. Note, too, that in citation 59, Heraclitus' work takes on his characteristic snobbish and insulting tone, when it speaks to the "uncultured boors" and the "countless mass" who wrongfully handle it.

The next epigram is more subtle in sense and more laudatory in tone.

64. Don't unroll too hastily to the winding stick the book

Of Heraclitus the Ephesian. It is indeed an almost inaccessible road.

Darkness and gloom without light are there. But should an initiate Guide you, it shines more openly than sunlight.<sup>124</sup> (DL 9.16 = AP 9.540)

μὴ ταχὺς Ἡρακλείτου ἐπ' ὀμφαλὸν εἴλεε βύβλον  
τοῦφειοῦ· μάλα τοι δύσβατος ἀτραπιτός.  
ὄρφνὴ καὶ σκότος ἐστὶν ἀλάμπετον· ἦν δέ σε μύστης  
εἰσαγάγη, φανεροῦ λαμπρότερον ἡελίου.

In this epigram we also see allusion to the difficulty and obscurity of Heraclitus' work and, in the second sentence, a second allusion to citation 60, the road or way of Heraclitean thought and metaphor. Kirk considers

the epigram of “higher poetic quality, and the imagery from the Mysteries (in which the novice was led from darkness into the brilliantly lit scene of revelation) is effective: the suggestions, too, that beneath the obscurity of Heraclitus’ style a clear and penetrating thought is concealed, is not a common one.”<sup>125</sup>

With this second epigram, then, we get the sense that Heraclitus’ philosophy and its rendering was indeed difficult, but not impossible. It hints that the mystery of his thought, once revealed, would reward the reader’s hard work with its revealed wisdom.<sup>126</sup> It further suggests that some readers, at least, could appreciate the thought inherent to the style and recognize the brilliance behind it. The epigram reminds us, then, that not all chose to dismiss Heraclitean philosophy as merely a source for derisive anecdotes and that epigrams too, if we let them, tell us a great deal about their subject and the attitude of the epigrammatist toward their subject.

Diogenes Laertius’ own epigram, which follows his account of Heraclitus’ death, presents different problems. However, in addition to the usual reference to the obscurity of Heraclitus’ work, we find an idea worth pursuing.

65. Many times did I marvel at Heraclitus, how having drained his life  
 To the dregs, he died in this ill-fated way:  
 For a foul disease flooded his body and water, quenching the  
 Light in his eyes, brought on darkness and gloom. (DL 9.4 = AP  
 7.127)

Πολλάκις Ἡράκλειτον ἐθαύμασα, πῶς ποτε τὸ ζῆν  
 ὧδε διαντλήσας δύσμορος εἶτ’ ἔθανεν  
 σῶμα γὰρ ἀρδεύουσα κακὴ νόσος ὕδατι φέλλος  
 ἔσβεσεν ἐκ βλεφάρων καὶ σκότον ἠγάγετο.

The first two lines are obviously another reference to the barley-drink that Heraclitus “drains” in citation 15 above and to the water imagery so strongly associated with Heraclitus. The second two lines refer to Heraclitus’ assertion in citations 47 and 48 that it is death for souls to become water and indeed demonstrate how strongly the idea of light and sight were associated with thought and knowledge in the philosophy of Heraclitus. Without them, there is only darkness, gloom, and death.<sup>127</sup>

And there we have it: a difficult philosopher and a difficult philosophy,

but not an impossible one, nor one grounded in arrogance or misanthropy. Heraclitus hints rather than reveals, makes unremitting demands on our intellect, patience, and efforts, and refuses to easily yield the extraordinary brilliance and individuality of his thoughts, rapt in their oracular expression. On the other hand, to label Heraclitus as moody, melancholic, and misanthropic because of the difficulty of his style is to give the biographers the last word. And in spite of their best efforts, Heraclitus won from them the prize that he himself declared best in citation **42**, fame everlasting among mortal men.