

It is no secret that Vergil, in his *Aeneid*, alluded occasionally to Hellenistic epigram. In my fifteen minute paper, I demonstrate that, when he did so, he sometimes referred to two important themes of pre-Hellenistic and early Hellenistic epigram: questioning the ability of writing to give voice to the voiceless (e.g. stones, or the dead, who often appear as speakers in early epigram), and questioning the efficacy of writing in communicating across time and space—the very features that distinguish it from speech.

In the episode of Palinurus's death, Vergil puts to the test the idea that an epigram can accurately reproduce the speech of the deceased. He does this by presenting two contrasting allusions to Hellenistic epigram. First, Aeneas discovers and discusses Palinurus's disappearance at the end of book 5, and then Palinurus himself, as a ghost, gives the facts in book 6.

Aeneas's thoughts are along the line of an epigram he might have to carve:

*nudus in ignota, Palinure, iacebis harena* (*Aen.* 5.871) ≈

γυμνὸς ἐπ' ἀξείνου κείμενος αἰγιαλοῦ (Damagetus 9.6 Gow-Page)

Palinurus later reveals that his story is much more complicated. In fact, he survived, swam to shore, and then was killed for his meager possessions—an improbable tale incorporating elements from [Plato] *epig.* 18 and Leonidas of Tarentum 14 and 62 (see Austin's *Aeneid* 6 commentary ad loc.), along with other Hellenistic epigrams. Vergil thus shows that epigrammatic speech is not accurate: *this* deceased, at least, would say very different things.

But on the other hand, Aeneas's *words* in 5.871 did turn out to be true, even though they implicitly communicated the idea that Palinurus had drowned and would never be found by Aeneas's men. This is the problem pointed out by Plato's *Phaedrus* (275d): that unchanging words, read in changed circumstances, may fail to communicate their intended message. Plato's criticism was poetically explored by the poetess Anyte, one of the first generation of Hellenistic epigrammatists. Her epigram 1 borrows its first two words from the traditional address of sepulchral epigram to the passerby:

ἔσταθι τᾷδε, κράνεια βροτοκτόνε, μηδ' ἔτι λυγρόν

χάλκεον ἀμφ' ὄνυχα στάζε φόνον δαΐων,

ἀλλ' ἀνὰ μαρμάρειον δόμον ἡμένα αἰπὺν Ἀθάνας

ἄγγελλ' ἀνορέαν Κρητὸς Ἐχεκρατίδα.

This epigram—rendered effective only because it appears on papyrus, not on an object, which would eliminate the mystery—confuses the reader between sepulchral and dedicatory intentions, as well as implicating him briefly in murder and a command to stop dripping gore. Only by the end, and with difficulty, does it succeed in transmitting its message.

The circumstances here are closely similar to those in the Polydorus episode in *Aeneid* 3. There we have an attempted sacrificial circumstance interrupted by a sepulchral one (precisely the reverse of Anyte 1), the cornels that are ambiguously spears, the dripping gore, and the success, only with difficulty, of communication in the end. In a refutation of Anyte 1, the standing cornel fails to announce effectively (ἄγγελ', line 4), and the real voice of the dead must intervene, as in *Aeneid* 6.

But can this voice communicate across space, a hope embodied in the Hellenistic motif of “passing on the message”? It nearly fails: Aeneas asks the question that even archaic epigrams (e.g. [Sappho] *epig.* 1 Gow-Page) had claimed to solve: *eloquar an sileam?* (*Aen.* 3.39)