

The second poem in Callimachus' book of *Iambi* (fr. Pf. 192; *POxy* 1011) consists of a short animal fable that tells of the passage of speech from animals to humans (in the Golden Age), who, as a result of this dubious inheritance, now (in Callimachus' day) speak excessively (lines 13-14). Although the mocking fable is ascribed to "Aesop of Sardis" in the closing lines (15-16), there is no evidence that such a fable was associated with Aesop in any of the collections that survive under his name (cf. Perry 1962; Adrados 1997; Dijk 1999). This problem lies at the center of literary-critical discussions of *Iamb 2*: What is to be done when a literary, ascribed fable has no clear links to extant collections of Aesopica? This paper argues that Callimachus' engagement with Aesop in *Iamb 2* should not necessarily be approached as an adaptation of an "original version" of a fable with which the poet and his readers would have been familiar. Rather, I argue, it is likely that Callimachus invented this fable; in doing so, Callimachus (1) develops a central conceit of the genre (talking animals) into an *aition* that explains the garrulousness of his contemporaries; (2) expands a literary trope—developed in a series of comparable adaptations of fables in prior Greek literature—in which fable-tellers signal that they are freely improvising a fable even while ascribing the tale to Aesop; and (3) makes the Aesopic fable into a model for the improvisational storytelling found throughout the *Iambi*.

The conventional fable opening (ἦν κείνος οὐνιαυτός, 1) places the story in a Golden Age, when animals spoke in the same way as humans (αὐτως/ἐφθέγγεθ' ὡς πηλὸς ὁ Προμήθειος, 2-3). In what follows, Callimachus composes a kind of "meta-fable," in which the subject becomes the various relationships between animals (τό τε πτηνόν/καὶ τοῦν θαλάσση καὶ τὸ τετραπουν, 2-3), humans (οἱ δὲ πάντες ἄνθρωποι, 13), and the power of speech (καὶ πουλύμυθοι καὶ λάλοι πεφύκασιν /ἐκεῖθεν, 14-15). The broad application of this central conceit of animal fable to his contemporaries (including named and unnamed individuals at 10-13) draws attention to the fiction of Callimachus' ascription at 15-17. Moreover, in his improvisation of a self-serving fable that is nonetheless ascribed to Aesop, Callimachus had precedents in Aristophanes (*Wasps* 1401-05; *Birds* 467-471) and Plato (*Phaedo* 60c1-7).

Scholars have proposed a wide range of solutions to the problems posed by *Iamb 2*: there have been full reconstructions of a putative original (Hausrath 1949), as well as suggestions that Aesop never could have composed such a sophisticated fable (Puelma-Piwonka 1947); comparable motifs and themes found in collected fables have been used both to argue that Callimachus probably stuck closely to a now lost "original version" (e.g., Perry 1962) as well as to argue that Callimachus departed radically from his source (Acosta-Hughes 2002). But many of the features scholars have identified as "Callimachean" or "innovative" in *Iamb 2* can be shown to have antecedents in the fable-adapting tradition. This paper not only points to an alternative interpretation of Callimachus' art and motivations in *Iamb 2* and of his use of Aesop as a literary model, but, more generally, to the need for non-originary approaches to Aesopica that address the methodological challenges posed by literary adaptation without depending exclusively on problematic conceptions of Aesop's "original versions" or on anachronistic notions of the universality, popularity, or simplicity of Aesopic fables.