

HERACLITUS: FRAGMENT 98 (DK)

Αἱ ψυχαὶ ὁσμῶνται καθ' Αἰδην. 'This saying is obscure', as Marcovich observes, and much *πολυμαθία* has been expended on it, which would have amazed and dismayed Heraclitus. Perhaps, as so often, we are being too clever, and overlooking the obvious, to which Heraclitus keeps trying to bring us back ('the sun is a foot wide'—fr. 3 DK). Why do souls smell in Hades? Well, 'it is death to souls to become water' (fr. 36 DK), 'it is death for souls to get wet' (fr. 77 DK). It seems to be generally agreed that Heraclitus thought the soul to be, in principle, fire. And what happens when fire gets wet? A lot of smoke. 'And if all things became smoke, the nostrils would discern them' (fr. 7 DK). That is to say, in a place of quenched souls (Hades), it is the sense of smell that has to come into play. And perhaps that is what we were looking for.

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