

Erinna and Achilles: A New Perspective on Iliadic Intertexts in the *Distaff*

This paper explores possible allusions to the Homeric Achilles in the *Distaff*, a 4th c. BCE fragmentary lament that the poet Erinna wrote for her childhood friend Baucis. Previous scholars have suggested that by writing a lament in hexameters, Erinna purposefully models the *Distaff* on the laments of female characters in the *Iliad* (Skinner 1982; Gutzwiller 1997; Rayor 2005). More recently, however, Faraone has argued that similarities between the *Distaff* and Iliadic laments is due to both drawing on a pre-existing tradition of women's hexameter laments (2021). I wish to suggest another possible Iliadic intertext for the *Distaff*: Achilles' laments for Patroclus. I will begin by examining the particularly Homeric and Achillean characteristics of Erinna fr. 402 (text and numbering from Lloyd-Jones and Parsons 1983), and then suggest possible other elements of the *Distaff* that might bring to mind Achilles' grief for Patroclus.

Fr. 402 describes the insensibility of the dead: "From here an empty echo penetrates to Hades. But there is silence among the dead, and darkness covers their eyes" (τουτόθεν εἰς Ἄϊδαν κενεὰ διανήκεται Ἀχῶ· / σιγὰ δ' ἐν νεκύεσσι· τὸ δὲ σκότος ὅσσε κατέρρει). In the context of the *Distaff*, this has been read as an expression of Erinna's sorrow that Baucis cannot perceive her song (Bowra 1953; West 1977; Gutzwiller 1997). Little attention has been paid, however, to the resonance of τὸ δὲ σκότος ὅσσε κατέρρει with the Iliadic formula "and darkness covered his eyes" (τὸν δὲ σκότος ὅσσε κάλυψεν, *Il.* 4.461 *et passim*), used to describe warriors dying in battle (cf. Neri 2003).

The image of the silent dead in the underworld is also Homeric, calling to mind the *nekkyia* in *Odyssey* 11 (cf. Mirto 2012). However, it is not particularly characteristic of lament (in Homer or elsewhere) to dwell upon the insensible state of the *psuchai* in Hades. But such existential meditations do appear in the speech of Achilles at *Il.* 22.389-90, where he declares that even if the dead in Hades forget, he will remember Patroclus when he himself has died. Achilles' statement is defiant while Erinna's is fatalistic, but their shared engagement with the question of the

cognitive/sensory capacities of the dead in the underworld suggests that they can be read alongside each other.

I suggest that in fr. 402, Erinna cues the reader that there is something Iliadic and Achillean about her grief. This allows us to reread other elements of the *Distaff* in an Achillean context. For example, Erinna's reminiscences about her shared childhood with Baucis (fr. 1.1-26) resonate with mentions of Achilles and Patroclus' shared childhood (*Il.* 11.765-90, 23.84-90), but are not a feature of the women's laments for fallen warriors in the *Iliad*.

But why would such a "quintessentially feminine poem" as the *Distaff* (Levaniouk 2008) invoke the exemplum of Achilles? Perhaps because Erinna lacks feminine exempla for a grief that falls outside of natal and conjugal family ties. The *Distaff* is unique among extant examples of lament because Erinna does not mourn a male kinsman or even a man (Skinner 1982, Gutzwiller 1997). A popular theory for why Erinna is not allowed to lament at Baucis' funeral in the *Distaff* (fr. 1.31-34) is because she is not close kin (Skinner 1982). Achilles too is anomalous as a man lamenting another man who is not a close relative (Halperin 1990, Murnaghan 1999). Indeed, Apollo criticizes Achilles for showing excessive grief for someone who is not a son or a brother (*Il.* 24.46-49). Both Erinna and Achilles experience intense grief for a childhood companion of the same gender, the expression of which is deemed socially inappropriate.

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