

Elemental Juno: Reading Vergil with the Presocratics

In the *Aeneid*, Juno appears as an elemental force, carrying out her will through minor deities connected to the four elements: Aeolus (wind), Iris (fire), Allecto (earth), and Juturna (water). By making these elemental deities serve her purposes, Juno takes on immense powers which infringe on the *numen* of other deities. The Presocratics provide a helpful lens to illuminate the interaction of the elements and the transgressive power Juno gains through them.

The storm in book 1 is an excellent example of the connected powers of the elements and how Juno's use of these powers interferes with other gods. Aeolus' winds do not directly attack Aeneas, instead they create a storm through which the winds manipulate the other three elements. The winds are described as a multi-elemental force, able to overpower water and earth: *maria ac terras caelumque profundum/ quippe ferant* (1.68-69). This description which privileges one element over the others is reminiscent of the Presocratic concept of the ἀρχή, especially that of Anaximenes of Miletus which holds "the principle (ἀρχή) is. . .air, out of which come to be things that are coming to be, things that have come to be, and things that will be." (13A7, Curd 15) Thus the winds in the storm are able to control the other elements, disturbing the sea and trespassing on Neptune's *numen*.

Besides earth and water, the winds as ἀρχή control fire : *intonuere poli et crebris micat ignibus aether* (1.90). Lightning is not out of place in a storm, but its prominent position and its affect on the men, particularly Aeneas makes it notable. The thunder and lightning are a sign of death: *praesentemque viris intentant omnia mortem* (1.91). At this point, Jupiter's involvement in Aeneas' mission has not been explained; rather we see Juno and her wrath as the primary divine force. This is especially true when we consider Heraclitus: "Thunderbolt steers all things." (22B64, Curd 37) Here Heraclitus has separated the thunderbolt from its divine wielder, though

he acknowledges a force known as Zeus. (22B32, Curd 33) This separation is indicative of Juno's entire elemental manipulation throughout the *Aeneid*; Juno is able to use the elements usually controlled by one god. The thunderbolt is still a symbol of power, but now it is uncertain who wields it. In the storm, Juno's interference through Aeolus disturbs the natural order of both the elements and the *numen* of the gods. When Juno complains "*quod si mea numina non sunt/ magna satis, dubitem haud equidem implorare quod usquam est:/ flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo.*" (7.310-312) we understand that any *numen* that can control all the things of both heaven and hell is certainly great enough.

Bibliography

Curd, Patricia ed. *A Presocratics Reader*. Translated by Richard D. McKirahan, Jr.

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