

## Empedoclean Mixtures in the *Moretum*

The anonymous first-century C.E. Latin poem *Moretum* describes the plowman Simulus preparing a round loaf (*orbis*, 48) of bread and a ball (*globum...moreti*, 117) of herbal spread. In this creation, scholars have briefly noted allusions to the cosmologies of Lucretius and Vergil (Gowers, 47), Empedocles (Bernsdorff), and to the cosmological overtones in the pervasive roundness of the foodstuffs produced (Salanitro). Going beyond these relatively superficial remarks on the cosmological makeup of the poem, my paper systematically explores how this description of a workman fashioning spheres and combining ingredients to make *e pluribus unu[m]* (104) adapts Empedoclean cosmogony with its cycle of one and many (*monon einai / ek pleonōn* F.20.1-2 Graham). Firstly, I discuss several unnoticed Empedoclean features in the complex narrative structure of the poem. Moreover, I examine how allusions to the cosmogony in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* clash with Empedocles so as, I argue, to double the cosmological forces by means of metapoetic strife. In addition to shedding new light on the poem's intricate narrative structure, my argument interprets the *Moretum* as a nuanced reception, and not merely a parody of Empedocleanism, as Farrell (n.47), responding to Bernsdorff's conference paper, has argued.

A comparison of Simulus' preparation of bread with that of the *moretum* uncovers the poem's Empedoclean structure. Not only do the canonical elements appear throughout, (fire, 8; air, 12; earth, 16; water, 37; cf. Empedocles F9). Both follow a formula of combination, separation, mixture, and re-separation, recalling Empedocles' cosmic cycle in which creation and destruction are double (*doiē de thnētōn genesis, doiē d' apoleipsis*, F20.3) and caught in a cycle of mixture and separation (*mixis te diallaxis*, F11.3). Grain (13-18) and herbs (87-91) are

gathered; one is milled (26-29; 39-43), the other peeled (94-7); the flour is combined with water into a ball of dough (43-49) and the herbs are mixed with cheese and other ingredients and molded into a sphere (98-106; 114-118); and the dough is divided into sections (49-51) while the *moretum* is described in the language of *concordia discors* (often a feature of Empedoclean reception; e.g. *Met.* 1.18-20; Manilius 1.142; Lucan 1.98) which promises to separate like the oil and vinegar mixed into it (113-114). All but one stage in this cycle exhibits the imagery of love and strife, which are present as a juxtaposition of sexual and violent vocabulary. Moreover, Empedocles' vortex (cf. F28.1-11; cf. also F30-33 on Empedocles' sphere) figures as the grain is separated in the rotating motion (*gyris*, 26) of the mill while the *moretum* is mixed in the circular stirring (*gyris*, 102) of the mortar and pestle. These gyrating passages, alternating operations of love and strife, are each divided by short interruptions: respectively, the description of the African slave Scybale's body (31-35) and Similus' angry reaction to the garlic's pungent smell (106-109). The outer passages, I argue, appear to "revolve" around the digressions. A further love/strife contrast is apparent here, since the strife and love in the cooking are contrasted with the surrounded passages, revealing the opposite force in the mind of Similus: the mill encircles a description of a female body that is sexualized, while the blending pestle orbits a flash of violent, if pathetic, anger. These *gyris*-passages, at roughly the first and third quarters of the poem, elegantly structure the entire narrative in a ring composition that surrounds the description of Similus' garden at the center of the poem (61-85).

Among these Empedoclean elements, pointed allusions to the cosmogony of Ovid neither support the Empedoclean structure nor suggest that Ovid is a source for accessing Empedocleanism. Rather, they contradict the rest of the structure of the *Moretum*, occurring, for example, at the only stage in which the expected love/strife language is absent; namely, the

dough-fashioning (43-51), which juxtaposes allusions to the beginning and end of Ovid's cosmogony, as if folding Ovid's creation on itself and suppressing the erotic language that the *Metamorphoses* creation account also excludes (cf. Wheeler, 115). This Ovidian addition to the Empedoclean formula, I argue, functions as yet another juxtaposition of love and strife, and a playful homage to Ovid's own manipulation of cosmogonic traditions.

### Bibliography

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