

What Happened to the *Dirae*? Diels' Reconstruction of Parmenides' Latin Fragment.

Caelius Aurelianus was a 5th century C.E. Latin translator of the Greek medical writer, Soranus of Ephesus (active c. 100 C.E.). In his work *On Chronic Diseases*, Caelius opens his discussion of homosexuality with some verses of Parmenides (*Tard. Pass.* 4.9.134-35). Caelius tells his readers that he composed the Latin verses in as similar a style as he was able so that the *ratio* of the languages would not be mixed (*latinos [versus] enim ut potui simili modo composui ne linguarum ratio misceretur, ibid.* 4.9.134). Six hexameters follow stating that “when a woman and a man mix their seeds of love together from their veins, a formative power maintaining proper mixture fashions well-made bodies out of conflicting blood. For if the powers should fight when the seed is mixed, and if they do not form a unity in mixed body, then Furies shall torment the sex as its born with a double seed” (*femina virque simul veneris cum germina miscent | venis informans diverso ex sanguine virtus | temperiem servans bene condita corpora fingit. | nam si virtutes permixto semine pungent, | nec faciant unam permixto in corpore, dirae | nascentem gemino vexabunt*, Parmenides fr. B18 D-K = D49 Laks-Most, my trans.).

Scholarship on this fragment has been mainly preoccupied either with recovering the immediate context in which it appeared in Parmenides' poem (e.g. Diels 1897, 115, argues that it belongs in a Parmenidean discussion of Hermaphroditism) or with accurately understanding the physical details of what is being described (e.g. Tarán 1965, 263-65). Very little comment has been made on Caelius' use of the term *dirae* in his translation and to what extent it accurately reflects the Parmenidean original. Diels' Greek reconstruction of Parmenides fragment intentionally avoids any corresponding word for *dirae*. Defending his choice, Diels writes: “Roman fear reverberates in Caelius' choice of the term *dirae*, which I, therefore, allowed no

place in my retranslation since it is un-Greek” (1897, 116, my trans.). Diels reasoning is inconclusive.

Coxon makes progress when he provides a Homeric parallel that would explain the presence of the *Dirae*. He claims that “the conjunction of [*dirae nascentem*] is an unmistakable allusion to Homer’s ἀλλ’ ἐμὲ μὲν κῆρ ἀμφέχανε στυγερή, ἥ περ λάχε γινόμενόν περ (Ψ 78-9),” where the recently deceased Patroclus appears to a dreaming Achilles (1986, 255). In Coxon’s view, the Homeric context complements the fragment because of the later tradition which makes Achilles and Patroclus lovers.

I agree with Coxon’s motive to find a parallel in epic for Caelius’ *Dirae*, but I do not think his parallel is the right one. I follow the suggestion of one of Drabkin’s notes, which suggests that *Dirae* should be translated as “Furies” (1950, 903 n.11). I propose that the best parallel is to be found in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. At lines *WD* 802-4, Hesiod describes how the Erinyes presided over the birth of Strife:

Πέμπτας δ’ ἐξάλασθαι, ἐπεὶ χαλεπαί τε καὶ αἰναί·
ἐν πέμπτῃ γάρ φασιν Ἐρινύας ἀμφιπολεύειν
Ἵρκον γεινόμενον, τὸν Ἔρις τέκε πῆμ’ ἐπιόρκους.

Avoid the fifth days, since they are harsh and terrible.

For on the fifth day they say that the Erinyes were attendants

As Oath was being born, whom Strife bore as a bane to oath-breakers.

Parallels in the *Aeneid* suggest that *Dirae* would be a fair translation for the Greek Ἐρινύες (cf. 7.324, 445-55). Furthermore, the Hesiodic context of witnessing the birth of a child of strife, not to mention the paradoxical birth of Oath from Strife, is well-reflected in Parmenides’ fragment.

Both the harmonious birth paradoxically formed “from conflicting seed” (*diverso ex sanguine*) and the birth continually tormented by Furies because its parents’ seeds fight in the womb (pugnant) are echoed by Parmenides. This potential Hesiodic allusion helps fill in some details about Parmenides’ use of genealogical motifs which included not only personifications like Dikê, but also mythical characters like the Erinyes. Such an allusion would join the many other allusions Parmenides makes to Hesiod, as in the proem and *Doxa*, but the suggestion of the *WD* as a parallel has, to my knowledge, not yet been made by any other scholar.

Bibliography

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