

Empedoclean Echoes in Statius' *Thebaid*:

Tisiphone and Pietas as Allegorical Representations of Strife and Love

The reception of Empedocles in Latin epic has long drawn scholarly attention. Studies have examined Ennius' (Bignone 1929; Garani 2007), Vergil's (Farrell 1991; Nelis 2001), and Ovid's (Pascal 1905; Hardie 1995; Ham 2013) engagement with Empedoclean philosophy. More recently Nelis (2014) has suggested that Empedocles' influence extends beyond the Augustan age well into the Neronian age, and perhaps even farther, whereas Farrell (2014) has argued that this philosophy loses its appeal after the fall of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. In this paper I follow up on Nelis' intuition by looking for Empedoclean motifs in Statius' *Thebaid*. In particular, I suggest that the clash between Tisiphone and Pietas in Books 1 and 11 can be interpreted allegorically as a reference to Empedocles' dialectic of Strife and Love.

Tisiphone's intervention in Book 1 gives start to the civil war. The Fury is reminiscent of Ennius' *Discordia* and Vergil's *Allecto*, two characters associated with Empedocles' *Neikos*. By specifying that all the components of nature are terrified at her arrival, Statius seems to evoke Empedocles' theory of the four elements. In addition, the result of Tisiphone's action, namely the breach of Eteocles' and Polynices' power-sharing agreement, is described as the dissolution of the cosmic bonds. Pietas, on the other hand, tries to prevent the outbreak of the war by fostering concord between the two brothers. Moreover, her brief visit to the battlefield inspires in the soldiers of both sides a sudden sense of peace, a peculiar feature of Empedocles' reign of *Philotes*.

In Book 11 Tisiphone and Pietas face each other. The Fury succeeds in driving her rival away for good by threatening her with the same cosmic powers displayed in Book 1. At this point, nothing can stop the war, as is shown by the fratricidal clash that follows this scene. This characterization of the interaction between Tisiphone and Pietas suggests that Statius compares the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices with the second phase of Empedocles' cosmic cycle, in which Strife prevails and Love fades away, and its outcome with the third phase, in which chaos dominates. In this light,

Theseus' intervention in Book 12, which aims at recomposing the unity of the State, may be viewed, at least on the surface, as the reappearance of Love, and the beginning of a new age for Thebes.

Bibliography

Bignone, E. 1929. "Ennio ed Empedocle." *RFIC* 57: 10-30.

Farrell, J. 1991. *Vergil's Georgics and the Traditions of Ancient Epic*. Oxford.

——— 2014. "Looking for Empedocles in Latin Poetry: A Skeptical Approach." *Dictynna* 11 (on-line).

Garani, M. 2007. *Empedocles Redivivus: Poetry and Analogy in Lucretius*. London-New York.

Ham, C.T. 2013. *Empedoclean Elegy: Love, Strife, and the Four Elements in Ovid's Amores, Ars Amatoria and Fasti*. Diss. Philadelphia.

Hardie, P. 1995. "The Speech of Pythagoras in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15: Empedoclean *Epos*." *CP* 45: 204-214.

Nelis, D. 2001. *Vergil's Aeneid and the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius*. Leeds.

——— 2014. "Empedoclean Epic: How Far Can You Go?" *Dictynna* 11 (on-line).

Pascal, C. 1905. *L'imitazione di Empedocle nelle Metamorfosi di Ovidio*. Florence.