POETRY AS INITIATION

The Center for Hellenic Studies Symposium on the Derveni Papyrus

edited by
Ioanna Papadopoulou and Leonard Muellner

10

"Riddles over Riddles"

"Mysterious" and "Symbolic" (Inter)textual Strategies

The Problem of Language in the Derveni Papyrus

Anton Bierl
University of Basel

1. Introduction

THE OFFICIAL AND AUTHORITATIVE *EDITIO PRINCEPS* of the Derveni Papyrus by Kyriakos Tsantsanoglou and George M. Parássoglou, with translation, papyrological apparatus, and photographs, and the first full commentary in English by Theokritos Kouremenos, has given our knowledge a secure textual foundation.[1] Finally, with this new footing, we can go into the deeper hermeneutical problems of a text that is still so full of riddles for us. Important progress has also been made by Alberto Bernabé's edition, with its *apparatus criticus* that is a thesaurus of supplementary knowledge and alternative readings.[2] And Gábor Betegh's first monograph on the papyrus, an admirably full-fledged interpretation finished shortly before KPT,[3] is a great achievement to which my modest thoughts owe a great deal. However, even now there are still numerous open points.

My contribution will focus on several important questions that are essential for understanding the Derveni Papyrus as a whole: (1) What are the exegetical methods of the Derveni author? (2) What is the importance of the riddling and how is it linked to the allegorical method? (3) What is the point of view of the Derveni author—is he an anti-Orphic who applies a radical, natural scientific allegoresis to a canonical Orphic text, or is he himself part of the Orphic

---

[1] Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006 (= KPT). See also the useful commentary by Jourdan (2003). In this article I quote the KPT *editio princeps*.
[2] Bernabé 2007a:169–269. See also the interim text with a good apparatus by Janko (2002).
[3] Betegh 2004.

movement? If the latter, in what way? (4) Further, does Presocratic thinking about nature have anything to do with Orphic thinking? (5) Does the text provide proof for the view of Wilhelm Nestle and many others who plead for a clear-cut progression from μῦθος to λόγος,[4] or does it give any evidence that such an evolutionary process has to be modified to accommodate interpenetration between these discourses?[5] Glenn Most's work is essential for me in this regard.[6] I am also indebted to a recent article by Spyridon Rangos and the work of others who have explored the hermeneutical strategies of the Derveni author.[7] Until recently, following the revision of the evolutionist view of the progression from μῦθος to λόγος, it had become almost the *opinio communis* that the Derveni author was somehow linked to Orphism and at least influenced by religious thoughts and practices.[8] The volume edited by André Laks and Glenn Most had a big impact on this view,[9] and Betegh encapsulates it in his first book-length study on the Derveni Papyrus. However, there have always been voices against such an opinion: some scholars have argued that the Derveni author was an anti-Orphic and natural scientist radically opposed to such obscure mystic thinking.[10] With his line-by-line commentary in the authoritative edition of KPT Kouremenos now strongly sides with the latter group and seems to tip the scales. My contribution is meant to counterbalance such an argument and to give a nuanced pro-Orphic interpretation.

The entire debate is also connected to the problem of how to link columns 1–6 to the allegorical reading of a theogony of Orpheus in the rest of the text.[11] Formerly the text was called a Presocratic allegorical commentary on an Orphic poem, written from a strong perspective of natural science.[12] However, it seems that this cannot be the whole story. Michael Frede has recently pointed out that the author is not really interested in an overall scientific interpretation.[13] The entire apparatus of Presocratic science elaborated in an eclectic way is rather underdeveloped. What might then be the intention of the author and the context of the primary recipient? Like many critics I am convinced that it must

---

[4]   Nestle 1940. For the *P.Derv.*, see e.g. Burkert 1968.

[5]   Most 1997 and in general Most 1999.

[6]   Most 1997 and Most 1999. See also Laks and Most 1997.

[7]   Rangos (2007) has worked along similar lines, though I began to think about this independently before. See also Henry 1986 and Sistakou and Calame in this volume.

[8]   E.g. West 1983:68–115; West 1997; and the work of Burkert, in particular Burkert 1999:59–86, esp. 78–86; Burkert 2006; Bernabé 2007b.

[9]   Laks and Most 1997.

[10] E.g. Henrichs 1984, esp. 255; Rusten 1985:140; Casadio 1987:386; Janko 1997; Janko 2001:6: "sophist" (but also "at once a sophistical Orphic and an Orphic sophist" [5]); KPT 52.

[11] See Johnston, Graf, Bernabé in this volume.

[12] E.g. Burkert 1968; Janko 2001:1–6.

[13] Frede 2007, esp. 9–12.

somehow have to do with the ritual columns. I strongly believe that the Derveni author is a reform Orphic, as Most has put it.[14] The *we*-form of the first-person plural πάριμεν in col. 5.4 speaks in favor of this opinion.[15] But does the appropriation of the Orphic text only function as a statement against the fear of the "Fire next time," in a ritual soteriological and burial context, the primary *Sitz im Leben*?[16] Betegh seems to be on the right path in associating the ritual passages with the δρώμενα, and the exegetical passage then with the λεγόμενα in the sense of a ἱερὸς λόγος.[17] And Rangos makes a very good point in underlining the obfuscating quality of the text in order to make evident the latent nuances.[18]

2. The Derveni Author, a Riddling *Orpheotelestes?*

It goes without saying that riddling is a major feature of our text (e.g. cols. 7, 9, and 13).[19] The hermeneutical tools of allegory and allegoresis imply that readers presume the author of the canonical text to intend something other than what the literal sense indicates. What is striking in the allegoresis of the Derveni Papyrus is the fact that the target discourse, natural science, remains rather vague, a strange, eclectic blend of Presocratic natural theory. Does this render our author an incompetent who fails to reach his intellectual goal?[20] I do not think so; he most likely aims at something other than pure allegoresis. Like his source, the supposedly riddling Orpheus, the Derveni author himself riddles. Thus we have two-tier riddling, or "riddles over riddles," which makes it so difficult to grasp the authorial register. The author does not intend to give a nuanced logocentric view in the vein of science. Rather, nature is part of the mystical and eschatological discourse upon which Presocratics like Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles are based. That these early philosophers are not completely embedded in λόγος, but deeply rely on myth and ritual discourse, has recently been made more and more evident.[21]

Initiation and soteriology do not necessarily possess only metaphoric value for abstract philosophy. Insight into nature and the cosmos is still intrinsically

---

14   Most 1997:122–124.

15   πάριμεν [εἰς τὸ μα]ντεῖον ἐπερ[ω]τήσ[οντες] ("we enter the oracle in order to ask," 5.4).

16   Most 1997, with "we" at 120. However, see Burkert in this volume, suggesting that πάριμεν is an infinitive.

17   Betegh 2004, esp. 349–359; the Derveni author designates the poem as *hymnos* (7.2). For hymn as unmarked term for an epic poem in its performance, see Nagy 1990:353n77. Often there is a cyclical logic. For *hieroi logoi*, see Henrichs 2003; he is skeptical about applying this term to the *P.Derv.*: see pp. 213–214, 232–233.

18   Rangos 2007. See also Betegh 2004:364–370.

19   See 7.5–6, 9.10, 10.11, 13.6, 17.13.

20   Rusten 1985:122; West 1983:79.

21   See the literature cited in Bierl 2007:45n254; Gemelli Marciano 2008.

associated with wisdom in general and with eschatology, a realm of knowledge concerned with the afterlife of the soul.[22] Heraclitus himself, whom our author cites (DK 22 B 3 and 94, in col. 4), uses a dark, aphoristic prose that reflects the grounding of his thought in death.[23] Language and play with linguistic elements are part of his philosophical thinking, which aims at triggering a lightning-like intuition.[24] Other authors and forms display language play as well: the αἶνος, a story with a deeper meaning behind the surface,[25] achieves its effect through the use of defamiliarized, strange, and riddling language (αἰνίγματα); Anaximander produces a rather poetic prose full of metaphors;[26] Parmenides seems to be based on mystical insights.[27] Peter Kingsley has aptly demonstrated the ways in which both Parmenides and Empedocles are deeply involved in the religious discourse of mystery cults in Magna Graecia.[28] Empedocles poses as a god, μάντις, prophet, and healer who teaches with an oracular language that involves nature and the future of the soul.[29] Thus his style is strange, poetic, and dark. Like Heraclitus, he uses paretymologies; furthermore, he applies polyptota, metaphors, metonymies, and kennings—he breaks loose the bond between signifier and signified and employs new, defamiliarized forms and vocabulary. Empedocles' poetical and "studied ambiguity" produces an alienating style that makes the recipient "stop thinking at the right moment" in order to reach the sudden, mystical insight.[30] Parmenides embeds his view on φύσις and cosmogony in poetry and in a mystical journey through the elements. Empedocles seems, as Andreas Willi, among others, points out, to resort to a divine language, which is typical of Indo-European culture.[31] For him, the problem of communication and knowledge seems to lie in naming as a means of human designation. Human beings notoriously err in their use of language, but by reverting to another, higher language, closer to the putative origin, the recipient can reach higher knowledge. This is part of the initiation into mystery cults like Orphism, where the initiands are directed by ἱεροὶ and riddling λόγοι, by συνθήματα and σύμβολα to higher cognition. Whereas the thoughts of men are led astray by faulty naming, gods and divine authorities like Orpheus possess

---

[22] See Seaford 1986.

[23] Thurner 2001.

[24] See e.g. Schefer 2000; Bremer 1990. On Heraclitus and *P.Derv.*, see Seaford 1986 and Sider 1997.

[25] Nagy 1979:235–241, esp. 240; Nagy 1990:31.

[26] Simplicius *De physica* 24.20–21: ποιητικωτέροις οὕτως ὀνόμασιν αὐτὰ λέγων (DK 12 A 9; after the famous fragment of Anaximander, DK 12 B 1).

[27] Gemelli Marciano 2008.

[28] Kingsley 1995; Kingsley 1999.

[29] Bierl (forthcoming). For these designations regarding the Derveni author, see Tzifopoulos in this volume.

[30] Willi 2008:193–229. For the citation, see Millerd 1908:21, referred to at Willi 2008:221.

[31] Willi 2008:230–263, esp. 243–254.

the true language, which is located in the realm of θέμις, divine order. In other words, the denotations of men are only θέσις or νόμος, while the true content is pure φύσις.[32]

3. The Method of the Derveni Author: Inclusion and Exclusion as Principles of Understanding in Initiatory Contexts

First I would like to look at column 7:

```
   ...(.)]οϲε̣[
   ..ὕ]μνο̣ν [ὑγ]ι̣ῆ καὶ θεμ[ι]τ̣ὰ λέγο[ντα· ἱερουργεῖ]το γὰρ
   [τῆ]ι ποήσει. [κ]αὶ εἰπεῖν οὐχ οἷόν τ[ε τὴν τῶν ὀ]νομάτων
   [λύ]σιν καίτ[οι] ῥηθέντα. ἔστι δὲ ξ[ένη τις ἡ] πόησις
5  [κ]α̣ὶ ἀνθρώ[ποις αἰνι[γμ]ατώδης, [κε]ὶ ['Ορφεὺ]ς αὐτ[ὸ]ς
   [ἐ]ρ̣ίστ' αἰν[ίγμα]τα οὐκ ἤθελε λέγειν, [ἐν αἰν]ίγμαϲ[ι]ν δὲ
   [μεγ]άλα̣. ἱερ[ολογ]ε̣ῖται μὲν οὖν καὶ ἀ̣[πὸ το]ῦ πρώτου
   [ἀεὶ] μέχρι οὗ [τελε]υταίου ῥήματος. ὡ̣[ς δηλοῖ] καὶ ἐν τῶι
   [εὐκ]ρινήτω̣[ι ἔπει· "θ]ύρας" γὰρ "ἐπιθέ[σθαι" κελ]εύσας τοῖ[ς]
10 ["ὠϲὶ]ν" αὐτ[οὺς οὔτι νομο]θ̣ε̣τεῖν φη[ϲιν τοῖς] πολλοῖς
            τὴ]ν ἀκοὴν [ἁγνεύο]ντας κατ̣[ὰ]
                        ]ϲειτ̣[..].
            ]ωι τ[..]εγ.[...]..[
   ἐν δ]ὲ τῶι ἐχομ[έ]νωι πα[
15          ].τ..ειγ.[.]κ̣ατ̣[
```

... a hymn saying sound and lawful words. For [a sacred rite was being performed] through the poem. And one cannot state the solution of the [enigmatic] words though they are spoken [*i.e. not secret*]. This poem is strange and riddling to people, though [Orpheus] intended to tell not contentious riddles but rather great things in riddles. In fact he is speaking mystically, and from the very first word all the way to the last. As he also makes clear in the well-recognized verse: for, having ordered them to "put doors to their ears," he says that he is not legislating for the many [but addressing himself to those] who are pure in hearing ... and in the following verse ...[33]

---

32 For Empedocles and the *P.Derv.* author, see Betegh 2004:370–372.
33 All translations of the *P.Derv.* are from KTP, from Betegh 2004, or from a combination of them with slight modifications.

Orpheus probably sings a hymn in the form of a ἱερὸς λόγος, uttering things that are sound or even healthy and that are in accord with divine θέμις. He is the healer and divine authority who composes according to divine language—at least he thinks so. Words can have a salubrious effect. They have to do with health because, through the recitation of poetry, a sacred rite is being performed. The words of poetry have a special and sacred aural effect as λεγόμενα in accompaniment with δρώμενα. Since the poem is a holy text, and in accordance with mystery rites, it is forbidden to overtly solve its riddles. This means that there is a choice: one must either allegorize—rendering the discourse no longer holy—or simply utter the obscure words. It cannot be approached in both ways at the same time. However, our author tries to establish a *modus* that cuts between both options, a typically Orphic paradoxical mode that concentrates on the mystic workings of nature.[34]

The poem of Orpheus is strange because it defamiliarizes, deestablishes, fixed meanings; it loosens the link between signified and the signifier and occupies a zonal territory in between. To an average audience, therefore, it seems to be a riddling, enigmatic work. Yet Orpheus does not intend to use this technique for contentious purposes, or to show off in a rhetoric ἀγών. No, according to the Derveni author Orpheus wants to say great things in riddles, that is, he wants to help the initiated, the μύσται, to grasp the circumstances of nature and the cosmos, the quintessential message of Orphic and/or mystery cult in general. The Derveni author can prove this with Orpheus' standard entrance verse, which is characteristic of mysteries:

ἀείσω ξυνετοῖσι· θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε, βέβηλοι
φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί· θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε, βέβηλοι

OF 1 and 3

Orpheus, as well as the Derveni author, has the key. The entrance formula reflects the standard notion of mystic exclusion and inclusion. The initiated and "pure in hearing" are included—they, as μύσται, are able to hear and learn what is divine law, θέμις. To "put doors to the ears" means to exclude the others, the profane or βέβηλοι. The door stands for the barrier between inside and outside, and the image associates hearing with special access. Thus the sacred space of the sanctuary is metonymically shifted to the private space of the auditory canal of the τελεστής or μύστης. The formula mirrors the central verb μύω, which designates the act of listening to an authoritative voice of θέμις as well as the signal to keep the mouth and ears shut.[35] The initiated should open their

---

[34] Cf. Rangos 2007, esp. 70: "He wants it both ways." Cf. also Most 1997.
[35] Nagy 1990:31–32 (with the link to *mythos*).

ears and eyes so that they can experience the sacred message; the masses must be kept outside. The imperative suggests the drawing of a boundary around a zonal space where the truth of φύσις becomes evident, but in latent and enigmatic terms. The word βέβηλοι comes from βαίνω; the uninitiated masses have to *go*, to keep away from the closed doors that shut up the inner space of their ears. By employing the formula the author says that Orpheus is not "legislating" (νομο]θετεῖν, 7.10) for the many—i.e. using the style of νόμοι and θέσις to express what is merely conventional signification—but addressing his poem to the "pure in hearing," who have access to the special and marked space and who are allowed to hear what is divine and, thus, the essence of φύσις.

With new riddles the Derveni author then tries to tease out deeper meaning: the authoritative meaning of αἶνος is hidden and has to be made manifest. However, the author does not convey this meaning in an evident sense, but adds a second enigmatic layer. The reason Orpheus riddles, according to the Derveni author, is to comply with the taste of the recipients, ordinary men who like to give names. Compare the following expressions: Ὀρφεὺς γὰ`ρ´ / τὴν φρόνησ[ι]ν Μοῖραν ἐκάλεσεν· ἐφαίνετο γὰρ αὐτῶι / τοῦτο προσφερέστατον ε[ἶ]ναι ἐξ ὧν ἅπαντες ἄνθρωποι / ὠνόμασαν· ("For Orpheus called thought Moira. This seemed to him to be the most suitable of the names that all people had given," 18.6–9); πάγ[τ᾽ οὖ]ν ὁμοίω[ς ὠ]νόμασεν ὡς κάλλιστα ἠ[δύ]γατο / γινώσκων τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὴν φύσιν ("So he named all things in the same way as finely as he could, knowing the nature of men ...," 22.1–2); and ὁ δὲ σημαίνει τὴν αὐτοῦ γνώμην / ἐν τοῖς λεγομέν[ο]ις καὶ νομιζομένοις ῥήμασι ("But he indicates his own opinion in current and customary expressions," 23.7–8). Even an initiated audience, according to Orpheus, thinks in customary ways. People are used to mythical figures in theogonic poems. Thus, the Derveni author argues, Orpheus clothes his ideas in such traditional figures with a putatively different intention.

If, as Parmenides and Empedocles say, naming is the great problem of mankind—with ὀνόματα people might reach false conclusions—a poet needs poetic metaphors to meet the taste of his audience. In *Rhetoric* 1407a32–1407b6 Aristotle criticizes Empedocles (Emp. test. 31 A 25) for his ambiguities—ἀμφί-βολα is a feature of oracular language—and in *Meteorologica* 357a24–28 he assails him for his metaphorical style, which is apt for poets, but not suitable πρὸς δὲ τὸ γνῶναι τὴν φύσιν. Therefore, according to Aristotle, Empedocles lacks the principle of clarity that should accompany a philosopher, something which might also be said of Orpheus. But a goetic and mystical wonder-worker and μάντις-poet resorts to metaphors in order to provoke thinking. Intentional ambiguity is used to reach intuitive insights. The Derveni author is part of the Orphic system, too—he wants to radicalize and enforce such riddling strategies.

4. The Cognitive and Didactic Purpose and the Derveni Author as a Figure between Philosopher and Orphic Wisdom Practitioner

It is my contention that the Derveni text is hardly concerned with burial ritual;[36] rather, it has its *Sitz im Leben* in a didactic context.[37] The Derveni author—as oracular priest, healer, and prophet—appropriates the canonical text of the great guru Orpheus to convey initiatory and cognitive messages. But for him Orpheus' theogony as αἴνιγμα is not radical enough, even though Orpheus is known as the founder of bizarre myths and wisdom. Still, the paradoxical blurring of opposites that is typical for myth and ritual triggers unifying cognition for the μύσται.

Orphic ideology is a bricolage comprising the canonical Hesiodic theogony and many other variants that blend traditional Greek views with new Oriental and other external influences.[38] As διφυής *par excellence* Orpheus is the marked and fictionalized sign for such knowledge based on moralistic and biotic rules. Compared to the ordinary Olympian theology, the main principle of his lore seems to be a grounding of life in death and a spiritual foregrounding of Night and other chthonic elements.[39] The Derveni author himself behaves like a priest and Orphic μάγος and γόης.[40] Through magic and special rituals, he attempts to secure the passage of souls to death and Night (cf. cols. 1–6). And symbolic analogy is his primary method.

The Orphic group and rival "extra-ordinary" practitioners honor the Erinyes with χοαί and something birdlike, since souls are compared to birds (col. 6)—like goes to like—and all is fitted to music and musical performance, poetry (col. 2). The chthonic Erinyes, as avengers, are assistants of the Olympic gods and guarantors of the current cosmos and Zeus' system of δίκη (col. 3). Binary oppositions can be subverted; what harms can also help to maintain order. The author cites Heraclitus fragments 3 and 94, on the sun and its tendency to overstep boundaries and on the role of the Erinyes, Δίκης ἐπίκουροι, who hunt down transgressors (col. 4). The word ὑπερβατόν (4.10) is the verbal adjective for violating the limits of the cosmic order as well as the *terminus technicus* for suspending the syntactical standard order and sense (cf. 8.6).[41]

---

[36] See Most 1997:131–135.

[37] See Calame 1997:77–80; Betegh 2004:360–370; and also Calame and Graf in this volume.

[38] For bricolage, see Edmonds 2004:4.

[39] See e.g. Bremmer 1991; Burkert 1999:59–86.

[40] Edmonds (2008:34–35) rightly stresses that our author has to deal with rivals and so believes him to be a *mystes*, not a *magos*. However, I believe that it is in principle possible for him to be a *magos*, too (see also Edmonds 2008:35n83; Betegh 2004:81–82); much depends on how one interprets the *magoi* in column 6. The first-person plural in 5.3 might be an indication that he includes himself. On *magos*, see also Bernabé, Graf, and Johnston in this volume.

[41] See Rusten 1985:125n10 (with reference to *scholia* (A) *Iliad* 14.1); Jourdan 2003:47n7.

Column 5 deals with the terrors of Hades, and with the disbelievers: "For them we go into oracular shrines to inquire for oracular answers" (αὐτοῖς πάριμεν [εἰς τὸ μα]ντεῖον ἐπερ[ω]τήσ[οντες], / τῶν μαντευομένων [ἕν]εκεν, 5.4–5). The uninitiated are afraid of the horrors of the underworld because they do not have access to the truth. Dream interpretation, however, yields a deeper knowledge in the same way that oracular language does. Both are ambiguous and seem to be lacking in logic, both move on metonymies and metaphors, and both provide signs, σήματα or παραδείγματα (5.8), in a loose and ambivalent structure. In this respect one can compare Heraclitus, who says of the Delphic oracle: Ὁ ἄναξ, οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει (fr. 93 DK).

The use of cryptic and enigmatic language in the way of an exegesis of dreams and oracles is precisely the strategy adopted by our anonymous "extraordinary" practitioner to produce deeper insight. But our author is aware of the fact that, because of "fault" (ἁμαρτίη) or "pleasure" (ἡδονή) (5.8–10), some do not apprehend dreams or care about latent signs. These undesirable behaviors result in "disbelief" (ἀπιστίη) and "lack of understanding" (ἀμαθίη) (5.10). Moreover, moral aberration is analogous to the deviation from initiatory wisdom. Ritual acts and enchanting songs allow μάγοι like him to remove the impeding δαίμονες: "As if they pay a penalty" (ὡσπερεὶ ποινὴν ἀποδιδόντες, 6.5), they offer a sacrifice (see column 6). Μάγοι, in the same way as μύσται, communicate with the Erinyes through fluids and knobbed cakes. The performance of ritual and speech acts can accomplish diametrical change: in such a way, Erinyes, who harm, become Eumenides, who are emblematically benevolent (see col. 6), and disbelievers can be turned into believers. Analogy and symbolic similarity are the principal ideas behind such thinking and doing, and they are the features of exegetical speech as well.

The Derveni author clarifies his standpoint in a sort of parenthesis in column 20: for him the performance of rites is important, but it has to be complemented by knowledge. People performing the mystery rites in the cities have only seen the holy things. But he wonders whether they have knowledge (γινώσκειν): "For it is not possible to hear and at the same time to understand what is being said" (οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε / ἀκοῦσαι ὁμοῦ καὶ μαθεῖν τὰ λεγόμενα·, 20.2–3). Mere listening does not automatically lead to understanding, which is why he tries to deepen the discourse with new riddling that leads to learning and sudden insight. Seeing the holy things is one thing, and true knowledge of such signs another. Therefore, the Derveni author is against other rival priests and ritual wonder-workers as well, and he pities those who follow them. Only he has access to the necessary wisdom, and only he can teach it.

5. Learning about *Physis* through Fragmentation and Playing with the Orphic Text

In answer to the question "How does the Derveni author approach his goal?," I contend that he applies linguistic and exegetical strategies based on his religious intentions and desire to enlighten. Thus he invents new σύμβολα and συνθήματα that are similar to the many strange συνθήματα dispersed in the gold tablet Thurii 2 (Graf 4, *OF* 492), which has already been connected with our text by Betegh.[42] He achieves this by unfastening (λύσις) and splitting the great canonical theogony of Orpheus into many symbolic, mysterious, and oracular parts. In other words, he fragments the continuous epic hexameters of Orphic narration. Furthermore, he loosens its syntagmatic and syntactic structure, and, not least, its sense.

By defamiliarizing habitual meaning, by splitting and rendering the signifier ambiguous, the Derveni author tries to activate thought in order to establish a new harmonized sense. This activation is accomplished through a performative speech act, such as teaching or the reading aloud of a new text by a priest or recipient. In other words, a textual σπαραγμός is applied to Orpheus, the emblematically διφυής poet. And when Orpheus, symbol of free invention by bricolage, meets new bricolage, the enchantment and strange diction that produce a dissolution of sense can yield new intuitive understanding. Therefore, our text is not a commentary, a logocentric exegesis of a poem whose meaning, having become questionable, must be legitimized. Instead, the author's method creates unity in plurality, reinforcing an Orphic principle. All in all, the Derveni text is not just an accommodationist's transformation to a new sense.[43] Nor is it poetry explained by science, since the Presocratic system of targeting is imprecise and unclear. Rather, source and target meet and overlap in a syncretistic association, and both maintain a bricolage of common physical ideas based on nature and the cosmos. Cosmogony, cosmology, and the knowledge of φύσις and its evolution form this common ground, which means that both texts are intrinsically Orphic.

According to the Derveni author, Orpheus' poem reflects the taste of the masses: they demand the existence of mythological figures who stand for traditionally associated knowledge. By splitting, defamiliarizing, and reassembling the text in unusual lemma-like catchwords the author can produce new meaning from these associations. The source is a holy text to which he applies the poetical and hermeneutical tools of paretymology and allegoresis. His

---

[42] Betegh 2004:333–337. See also Rangos 2007:65 on "new syntheses of telestic Orphic myths with cosmogonical and cosmological processes" and 65–67 for σύμβολα.

[43] Most 1997:124.

intention is to break up, disrupt, and shift the meaning. Therefore, the Derveni author must be seen as an Orphic making use of new linguistic techniques. He draws on philosophers who base their writings in myth and religious concepts, in order to convey the same message as theirs by using Orpheus: everything is nature, and understanding nature—the cosmos, sun, moon, and stars—provides the μύστης with eschatological knowledge. The putative ὑπερβατά (4.10, 8.6) and false syntactical connections are wrong and unjust, i.e. unsound readings: since Sun tends to transgress, the Erinyes come to set it back on the right path; moral behavior and cosmic behavior are assimilated and interrelated. In the same way, as one tries to appease the Erinyes and make them benevolent (see cols. 1–6), he helps to create cosmos—order—in language.[44] The fragments the Derveni author singles out are put together to form new, concise, and symbolic συνθήματα, material that fosters thought.[45]

6. The Presocratic and Orphic System of *Physis*

The author's physical and eclectic system of Presocratic science is fairly easy to comprehend:[46] instead of a single force, we have two: Sun, the fomenting and striking energy of fire responsible for mixing and making the particles of Being float, and Night, which joins things in certain configurations: "Sun dissolves by heating, night unites by cooling those things which the sun heated" (ὁ ἥλι[ος θερμαίνων δι]αλύει ταῦτα ἡ νὺξ ψύ[χουσα] / συ[νίστησι.........] ἄσσα ὁ ἥλιος ἐθέρ[μ, 10.12–13). Furthermore, in Sun and Night we have the four qualities of early ancient medicine: warm and dry versus cold and humid. Fire, the pure energy, has to be removed to a certain distance so that everything does not melt and commingle. Thus things stand apart and coagulate into a certain formation: our world (ἡ νῦν μετάστασις, 15.9). Separating, dissolving in order to make stand in distance (διαλύειν, διιστάναι), and assembling, putting together (συνιστάναι), are the two actions responsible for the configurations of the eternal beings. These actions mirror the Empedoclean forces of Philia/Philotes and Neikos.

On the level of textual montage, as we have seen, the Derveni author acts on separation and reassembly, fragmenting and connecting as well. Column 10, where the author assimilates saying, uttering, and teaching, is important for

---

44 And maybe even music; see 2.8: καὶ] ἐπέθηκε[ν ὕμνους ἁρμ]οστο[ὺ]ς τῆι μουσικῆι; the subject could be Orpheus himself or a rival Orphic priest.

45 I need only recall sentences like αἰδοῖον κατέπινεν, ὃς αἰθέρα ἔκθορε πρῶτος (13.4) or Οὐρανὸς Εὐφρονίδης, ὃς πρώτιστος βασίλευσεν (14.6). Compare also the riddling: Ζεὺς κεφα[λή, Ζεὺς μέσ]σα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ [π]άντα τέτ[υκται (17.12) or Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς δ' ἀρχὸς ἁπάντων ἀργικέραυνος (19.10).

46 See Burkert 1968; Betegh 2004:278–348; KTP 28–45. Jourdan (2003:xvii–xviii) provides a useful summary of the system.

assembly in a didactic context. In the same way that Orpheus' Night utters, says, and teaches her understanding of the world, so too does our anonymous Orphic. By disjoining the sense and defamiliarizing the syntax and context, the Derveni author provides συνθήματα as sayings; in uttering them with his voice (φωνή) he produces poetic enchantment. The dual-natured Orphic system, the paradoxical harmony of binary opposites, is reinforced by teaching through fragmented citations. The symbolic catchwords then trigger the desired sudden, enlightening insight.

The arcane, chthonic, and mysterious are here as important as the evident. Life is grounded in death and Night, who serves as "nurse" (τροφός, 10.11). Night has knowledge and proclaims her oracle from the innermost shrine (ἐξ ἀδύτοιο), where she is "never setting" (ἄδυτον, col. 11). Night does not set as φῶς, but rather remains in the same place after being struck by a beaming light. Parmenides discusses the same dual system of light and night:

> μορφὰς γὰρ κατέθεντο δύο γνώμας ὀνομάζειν·
> τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεών ἐστιν—ἐν ὧι πεπλανημένοι εἰσίν—
> 55 τἀντία δ᾽ ἐκρίναντο δέμας καὶ σήματ᾽ ἔθεντο
> χωρὶς ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων, τῆι μὲν φλογὸς αἰθέριον πῦρ,
> ἤπιον ὄν, μέγ᾽ [ἀραιὸν] ἐλαφρόν, ἑωυτῶι πάντοσε τωὐτόν,
> τῶι δ᾽ ἑτέρωι μὴ τωὐτόν· ἀτὰρ κἀκεῖνο κατ᾽ αὐτό
> τἀντία νύκτ᾽ ἀδαῆ, πυκινὸν δέμας ἐμβριθές τε.
> 60 τόν σοι ἐγὼ διάκοσμον ἐοικότα πάντα φατίζω,
> ὡς οὐ μή ποτέ τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμη παρελάσσηι.

Mortals have settled in their minds to speak of two forms, one of which to name alone is not right,[47] and that is where they go astray from the truth. They have assigned an opposite substance to each, and marks distinct from one another. To the one they allot the fire of heaven, light, thin, in every direction the same as itself, but not the same as the other. The other is opposite to it, dark night, a compact and heavy body. Of these I tell you the whole arrangement as it seems to men, in order that no mortal may surpass you in knowledge.

fr. 8, 52–61

And Parmenides continues:

> αὐτὰρ ἐπειδὴ πάντα φάος καὶ νὺξ ὀνόμασται
> 5 καὶ τὰ κατὰ σφετέρας δυνάμεις ἐπὶ τοῖσί τε καὶ τοῖς

---

[47] Here I follow Hölscher 1969:27, 104. The translation is after John Burnet, with small changes.

πᾶν πλέον ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ φάεος καὶ νυκτὸς ἀφάντου
ἴσων ἀμφοτέρων, ἐπεὶ οὐδετέρωι μέτα μηδέν.

Now that all things have been named light and night; and the things
which belong to the power of each have been assigned to these things
and to those, everything is full at once of light and dark night, both
equal, since neither has aught to do with the other.

<div align="right">fr. 9</div>

Night has the identical σήματα of Being as light, since neither can be said to
be Nothing. To name one alone, as if it were only the negative opposite, is
fallacious.[48] Night is unconscious—as the lightweight and mild light she is self-
identical—and possesses material substance. The decisive knowledge stems
from the subconscious, oracular and dreamlike (see col. 5). Night resides in a
sacred shrine because she has an oracular status and because, as paretymologi-
cally explained, she does not set. For this etymological play one might compare
Heraclitus fr. 16 DK: τὸ μὴ δῦνόν ποτε πῶς ἄν τις λάθοι; ("How could anyone
not realize that which never sets?"). Thus human beings, at least the initiated
ones, have to deal with and refer to Night, Hades, and Death. In this formulation,
Night becomes the basis of life. The Orphic bone tablets of Olbia testify: ΒΙΟΣ
ΘΑΝΑΤΟΣ ΒΙΟΣ ("Life–Death–Life," *OF* 463). People, or at least mantic priests,
γόητες and μάγοι, must initiate ritual contact with Night to appease her horror
and bring forth benevolence, wealth, blessings, and knowledge.

Our author also follows another Parmenidean principle: there is no
becoming/coming into being or destruction/perishing; things—τὰ ἐόντα—are
and have always been.[49] In the course of time we come into contact with different
κόσμοι and configurations of particles through separation and mixture. There
is development toward the order of Zeus, but Zeus is already there from the
beginning and he operates as a mastermind (*Nous*) in the world. The temporal
process from Night, through Ouranos and Kronos, to Zeus is subsumed under a
universal divine plan, and the paradox of temporal succession and self-identity
is made clear by συνθήματα.[50]

In such a riddling exegesis the bond between cause and effect is often
dissolved; in our text it happens quite often that cause and effect are established
and produced in retrospect. Human beings have difficulty understanding the

---

[48] Hölscher 1969:103–105. The mistake lies in the duality—in reality both sides belong together in
a complementary way.
[49] For Parmenides and the Derveni Papyrus, see KPT 32.
[50] For the central role of Zeus, see Bernabé 2007b:125–126 ("Thus, he is a kind of harmonization of
contradictions [a characterization reminiscent of Heraclitus' formulation of the divine]" [125]).

mystery of life—a difficulty stemming from denomination (ὀνομάζειν). When they conceptualize generation, development, and process, they think in terms of sexual intercourse (see cols. 13 and 21). Common theogonies and cosmogonies account for these notions: *phallos*, sexual encounters, and other scandalous stories are signs, screens, or symbols; by reading them one can reach their implicit truth. Moreover, many mystery cults work with such sexual rites and tokens as well—Orpheus and Orphic initiations are notorious for doing so.[51]

7. Going through the Theogony

The textual and hermeneutical strategies regarding columns 8ff. that explain how Zeus was installed are most riddling, but they lead to insight in φύσις: Orpheus' theogony is pure poetry and ὀνόματα. By means of an *in medias res* order and the use of ring composition, the importance of Zeus, the guarantor of this κόσμος, is mirrored on the level of compositional and poetic structure.[52] The decisive paradox of Orphic cyclicity is conveyed by systematically playing down the violence in the succession of mighty divine rulers. Regime change happens only insofar as the configuration of succession develops toward the now-existing natural order of Zeus. However, Zeus is the real ἀρχή from the very beginning, as he dominates the world. Therefore, he is paradoxically identical to all former personifications of this evolution.

Let us have a look at how the Derveni author delineates this development, picking out fragmented verses—the fragmentary use does not imply, as West and other critics have argued, that according to the logic of a stemma we can reconstruct an abridged Derveni theogony as a lineage of an Orphic Protogonos theogony:[53]

> "Ζεὺς μὲν ἐπεὶ δὴ πα[τρὸς ἑο]ῦ πάρα θέ[σ]φατον ἀρχὴν
> [ἀ]λκήν τ' ἐν χείρεσσι ἔ[λ]αβ[εν κ]α̣[ὶ] δαίμον[α] κυδρόν."

> "And when Zeus took from his father the prophesied rule
> And the strength in his hands and the glorious *daimon*."

8.4–5

Truth is again brought about by linguistic means, by loosening the syntax, the grammatical order. The Derveni author claims: "It has escaped notice that

---

51 Burkert 1987:67, 74, 80, 95–96, 104–108, 134n12, 156n44. For the allegoresis on the isotopy of sexuality, see Calame 1997:66–75.

52 For the "flashback device," see Bernabé 2007b:113–114.

53 West 1983:82–115, esp. 87, 95n44. Bernabé (2007b:126) thinks as well that it was "a brief poem that took for granted the knowledge of other poems."

these words are transposed" ([τ]αῦτα τὰ ἔπη ὑπερβατὰ ἐό[ν]τα λανθάν[ει·], 8.6). ὑπερβατά—the putative transgression—lies in the use of language. This syntactical transposition has to be restored to the correct order, just as the sun must be returned to normal δίκη by the Erinyes when it oversteps its boundaries (see col. 4). The decisive words are πατρὸς ἑοῦ and πάρα; if πάρα is not in anastrophe, it does not go with the genitive "from his father" but with the accusative "contrary to divine decrees"—παρὰ θέσφατα (8.11). Our author points at a morally dangerous poetic and syntactical ambivalence. Thus he purifies it by reinstalling a clear reference, and he reads: "Zeus, when he took the strength from his father and the glorious *daimon*" (Ζεὺς μὲν ἐπεὶ τὴ[ν ἀλ]κὴν / [πα]ρὰ πατρὸς ἑοῦ ἔλαβεν καὶ δαίμονα [κυδρ]όν, 8.7–8).

The Orphic exegete does not want to draw on variants of the saga in which Zeus listens to his father. For him the fact that Zeus took the *strength* is decisive. He understands "strength" in the sense of "a natural force": strength automatically joins with the strongest, as in the phrase "equal with equal" (ὅμοιον ὁμοίῳ). The author tries to play down the revolutionary, violent act of succession as much as possible; in his own reading he leaves out ἀρχήν in its sense of "reign, regime." Those who do not understand the meaning of the word associate it with a real deposition of sovereigns. In reality it means removing the fire, the partitioning of the sun at a safe distance so that it does not hinder things from coagulating and coming together (see col. 9). Zeus is installed "so that he may rule on the lovely abode of snow-capped Olympus" (ὡς ἂν ἔχοι κά]τα καλὸν ἕδος νιφόεντος Ὀλύμπου, 12.2). Surprisingly, he associates Olympus with time, not with heaven, because time is long. Zeus rules for eternity, over the long span of temporal extension. Time is snow-capped because it has the quality of Night, who is white, cool, gray, and bright (12.11–13).

The author returns to the succession of Zeus in column 13: the variant πατρὸς ἑοῦ πάρα [θ]έσφατ' ἀκούσα[ς] (13.1) gives the Orphic rhetorician and equivocator evidence that succession is not necessarily due to listening to Zeus' father or to Night, who might have given orders to seize power. The sense of the verb lies in listening to the oracular voice of Night, which possesses the deepness of *Nous*. Zeus deposes Ouranos by swallowing his αἰδοῖον, the male member, which first ejaculated αἰθήρ (or which first sprang into αἰθήρ).[54] Much ink has been spilled in attempts to explain 13.4 (αἰδοῖον κατέπινεν, ὃς αἰθέρα ἔκθορε πρῶτος):[55] I side with Burkert's interpretation, based on a Hittite mythic parallel, the *Song of Kumarbi*, recently confirmed by Berna-

---

[54] Burkert 1999:82; Burkert 2006:102–103. For "ejaculate," see also Jourdan 2003:63.

[55] For θόρε resp. θρώσκω and θόρνυμι in the Orphic-Bacchic gold-leaves, see Tzifopoulos in this volume.

bé,[56] and against West, whose domesticated reading has also gained its adherents. West, followed by many other critics,[57] combines 8.5 ([ἀ]λκήν τ' ἐν χείρεσσι ἔ[λ]αβ[εν κ]α[ὶ] δαίμον[α] κυδρόν) with 13.4 and reconstructs for the Orphic poem ...καὶ δαίμονα κυδρὸν / αἰδοῖον κατέπινεν, in which case αἰδοῖον acts as an adjective modifying *daimon*, i.e. "reverend" Protogonos-Phanes, and not as the word for the scandalous phallus.

But the Derveni author goes on: "Since he is speaking through the entire poem allegorically [αἰνίζεται κ[α]θ' ἔπος ἔκαστον] about real things, it is necessary to speak about each word in turn. Seeing that people consider all birth to depend on the genitals [ἐν τοῖς α[ἰδοίο]ις ὁρῶν τὴν γένεσιν τοὺς ἀνθρώπου[ς]] and that without the genitals there can be no birth, he used this [word] and likened the sun to a genital organ [αἰδοίωι εἰκάσας τὸν ἥλιο[ν]]" (13.6–9). The scandalous action of an ejaculation of *aither* is expressed as a metaphor, an image of the sun and its effect on the formation of natural life. Thus *phallos* must have stood here; otherwise, the author would be making a double replacement, from the august *daimon* Protogonos, to *phallos*, to Sun. West, on the contrary, believes that he must restore a "faulty" text that has come into the hands of our author.[58] But there is a higher probability that the Orphic wisdom practitioner breaks the canonical text of the master into enigmatic pieces, which seem to be incorrect, for his own didactic purposes. While these συνθήματα might include different readings in close narrative context, it is a mistake to reconstruct the right text in terms of textual criticism, as if we had variants in a textual transmission.

The sentence "[He made] to leap, the brightest and hottest having been separated from himself" ([ἐ]κθόρηι τὸν λαμπρότατόν τε [καὶ θε]ρμό[τ]ατον / χωρισθὲν ἀφ' ἑωυτοῦ, 14.1–2) might again depict the mythical ejaculation, focusing on the energy of semen. Moreover, the dissociation of the hottest, i.e. *phallos*/sun, from himself is an allusion to the famous castration in prospect, since Ouranos is deprived of his *phallos*: "So he says that this Kronos was born from the sun to the earth because he became the cause through the sun that they were struck against each other" (τοῦτον οὖν τὸν Κρόνον / γενέσθαι φησὶν ἐκ τοῦ ἡλίου τῆι Γῆι, ὅτι αἰτίαν ἔσχε / διὰ τὸν ἥλιον κρούεσθαι πρὸς ἄλληλα, 14.2–4). "The great deed" (ὃς μέγ' ἔρεξεν, 14.5) is the castration. Kronos is born from the union of Sun/Ouranos' *phallos* with Ge—through the sun he becomes the cause (αἰτίαν ἔσχε, 14.3) setting all things in motion. Kronos is etymologized to κρούειν/κρούεσθαι

---

[56] Burkert 1999:82; Burkert 2006:101–111; Bernabé 2002:105–112; Bernabé 2007b:107–110; and cf. Betegh 2004:109–122, esp. 113–122.

[57] West 1983:85 (cf. 114); KTP 21–28. Brisson 2003 and Jourdan 2003:60–63 are against Burkert's suggestion and argue for an ambiguous polysemy between the adjective and noun. See Sider in this volume.

[58] West 1983:85.

'strike'. After Ouranos is dethroned by castration, Kronos is established as the natural force, albeit retrospectively, by his great deed. He is the "Striker," but the energy stems from the cutting off of his father's *phallos*—the removal, as a means of distancing, is the act of concentrating fire's loose energy in the ball of Helios: this is how the sun comes to give the energy that all things draw from in order to grow and move. Encircling the striking energy allows things to condense and prevents them from standing apart from one another (cf. κρούε<ι>ν αὐτὰ πρὸ̣ς ἄλ]λη̣λα κα̣[ὶ] ποήσηι τὸ [πρῶτ]ον / χωρισθέντα διαστῆναι δίχ' ἀλλήλων τὰ ἐόντα·, 15.1–2). "For when the sun is separated and encircled/distanced, he coagulated in the middle and held fast both the things that are above and those which are below the sun" (χωρ[ι]ζομένου γὰρ τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ ἀπολαμβανομένου / ἐν μέσωι πήξας ἴσχει καὶ τἄνωθε τοῦ ἡλίου / καὶ τὰ κάτωθεν, 15.3–5). *Nous*—that is, Zeus, the highest principle—fixed the sun in the middle, removing its dangerous potential to a safe distance so that fire would not prevent things from joining (cf. col. 9).

By uttering Orpheus' riddling poetry the Derveni author metaphorically produces and performatively reenacts the natural process of distancing energy, concentrating and encircling it in one huge ball of fire, the sun. Ouranos ejaculates the sky; by castrating his father, Kronos separates the *phallos*: the fire is distanced and fixed in the sky. The absorption (καταπίνειν) of the *phallos* iconically reenacts the encirclement of the sun in rings (as shown in Anaximander and Parmenides).[59] The stomach of Zeus is then, poetically speaking, the cosmos enclosing the *phallos* of Ouranos, from which the sun qua *aither* and the first state of mixed energy comes. In *aither* fire is merged with air in an undifferentiated blend. In the next step fire has to be separated, concentrated, and spaced. Zeus swallows the *phallos*, thus notionally and poetically enacting the image of the sun encapsulated. Zeus/*Nous* then fixes the sun in the middle (15.4), and we meet again the interplay of a διιστάναι and συνιστάναι, a breaking apart and putting together.[60] Only with the separation of the sun through Kronos, as "striking" energy, can he be performatively produced and become Κρούων. The effect is the cause, so to speak. And as Zeus swallows the *phallos* of Ouranos, he encircles and encapsulates the sun: only by doing so does he become the principle of our *kosmos* (ζῆν; cf. τὸν Ζῆνα, 18.15, and τὸν Ζᾶνα, 23.4).

Even in the first generation Ouranos/Sky is only retrospectively produced by the action of ejaculating *aither* into the sky. In column 16 the citation says:

---

59 Parmenides DK 28 A 37 and B 12.1. In the middle is the *daimon* who rules everything (B 12.2), comparable to *Nous*/Zeus.

60 διιστάναι (15.2, 15.9) vs. συνιστάναι (9.6, 10.13, 17.2, 17.8, 17.15, 21.3, 25.9). See also Calame 1997: 72–73.

Πρωτογόνου βασιλέως αἰδοίου· τῶι δ' ἄρα πάντες
ἀθάνατοι προσέφυν μάκαρες θεοὶ ἠδὲ θέαιναι
5   καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ κρῆναι ἐπήρατοι ἄλλα τε πάντα,
ἅσσα τότ' ἦν γεγαῶτ', αὐτὸς δ' ἄρα μοῦνος ἔγεντο.

with the phallus of the first-born king [i.e. Ouranos, not Phanes-
     Protogonos], upon which all
the immortals grew, blessed gods and goddesses
and rivers and lovely springs and everything else
that had been born then; and he himself became solitary.

16.3–6

When Mind (*Nous*/Zeus) swallows the *phallos*, which is solitary and separated,
Sun and Mind become separated and are then alone. But from this cosmos every-
thing grows; by means of this solitary Mind, Zeus plans/contrives (ἐμήσατο, 23.4)
the entirety of life (τὸν Ζᾶνα, 23.4). In the naming lies the problem,[61] because all
is in existence before it is named.[62] Men believe in birth and temporal succession
by attaching different names (see col. 17), but in reality all that has ever been
and all gods are constituted in Zeus. Air is Zeus; Ouranos and Kronos are Zeus,
who is therefore head (i.e. beginning), middle, and end. From Zeus all things
have their being (col. 17); therefore, the text culminates in the brief "hymn to
Zeus": "Zeus the head, Zeus the middle, and from Zeus all things are fashioned"
(Ζεὺς κεφα[λή, Ζεὺς μέσ]σα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ [π]άντα τέτ[υκται], 17.12).[63]

All things are present in the air/breath (πνεῦμα) (18.2); Orpheus calls it
Moira, which is the φρόνησις or *Nous* (col. 18), hence Zeus, who is equated with a
king dominating everything, as the ἀρχή (col. 19). "Zeus, the ruler of all with the
bright bolt" (Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς δ' ἀρχὸς ἁπάντων ἀργικέραυνος, 19.10), rules
like the Heraclitean fire, principle of thought and energy.[64]

By "mating" Orpheus putatively means the congress of the particles of be-
ing: similar goes to similar—ὅμοιον ὁμοίῳ. Aphrodite, Peitho, and Harmonia are
the κατὰ φάτιν (21.8–9) designations of mixing, gathering, and joining (col. 21).
The many names for *Ge* are names of convention as well, which make sense etymo-
logically (col. 22). Through greed, moral deviations, and lack of understanding
(22.6), people use this plethora of different names—but in reality they all mean
the same thing.

[61] For ὄνομα, see 7.3, 17.7, 19.9, 21.7, 22.10, 23.12. For ὀνομάζω, see 12.7, 14.7, 14.9, 17.1, 17.5, 17.7, 18.3, 18.9, 18.12, 21.10, 21.13, 22.1, 22.10. On the naming, see Burkert 1970.
[62] π[ρ]ότερον ἦν πρ[ὶν ὀν]ομασθῆναι, ἔπ[ει]τα ὠνομάσθη· (17.1).
[63] For the "hymn to Zeus" (*OF* 14), see Bernabé 2007b:116–118; for Zeus as center of the poem and highest being, ibid., 125–126.
[64] Cf. Heraclitus DK 22 B 64: τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει Κεραυνός.

In column 23 the Derveni author presents a riddling equation featuring Okeanos, air, and Zeus. Okeanos and Achelous are not water: the expression "he placed in the sinews" implies a human or divine figure. Choerilus metaphorically calls the network of all rivers γῆς φλέβες (*TrGF* I 2 F 3). How can water be air? Here, I again suggest paretymological play.[65] The Orphic verse ἶνας δ' ἐγκατ[έλε]ξ' Ἀχελωΐου ἀργυ[ρ]οδίνε[ω (23.11) he explains with τὰ[ς] δ' ἶνα[ς ἐγκαταλ]έξαι ἐστ[ὶ ...] δε ἐγκατῶ[σ]αι[66] (23.13). The utterance τὰ[ς] δ' ἶνα[ς can be understood as τὰ[ς] δίνα[ς—the vortices of air, already present in the epithet ἀργυ[ρ]ο-δίνε[ω] 'silver-eddying'. Water is both Air and Zeus, who is the energy of the vortex, because it is the whirl of the air that strikes and moves, contriving everything.[67]

Then the author speaks about the moon (cols. 24–25). It is circular, equally measured, and of equal limbs. Orpheus calls the moon the one "who shines for many articulate-speaking humans on the boundless earth" (ἣ πολλοῖς φαίνει μερόπεσσι ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν, 24.3). One could disagree with this, since the moon might shine more at her zenith (ὑπερβάλλειν, 24.4–6). However, this is not Orpheus' meaning. According to the author, the phrase alludes to the moon's role in time-keeping. He comes back to the two important principles of the sun and night (col. 25): the moon is bright, but cold; the stars are invisible and latent, but during the night they are visible and manifest themselves. They float at a certain distance, but this is out of a cosmic necessity, i.e. *Nous* or Zeus. Without the distance, another sun would coagulate. But there is only *one* sun.

At this point the author inserts an additional methodological statement: "And the words that follow he puts before [as a screen], not wishing all men to understand" (τὰ δ' ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐπίπροσθε π[ο]ιεῖται / [οὐ β]ου[λό]μενο[ς] πάντας γιν[ώ]σκε[ι]ν, 25.12–13). Orpheus uses poetic expressions to conceal the meaning, and the author tries to reveal it. At the same time, by using new terms, he covers the truth with new screens.

In the last column (26) the author deconstructs the story of the incest between Zeus and Rhea/Demeter, from which Dionysus, the last ruler, is born.[68] If Zeus encompasses all gods, we must assume that he also has his mother inside of him. Therefore, a sexual generation is impossible. Mother is just another metaphor for Mind. Again he makes his argument at the micro-linguistic level,

---

[65] Discussed by Obbink at the CHS conference. For another explanation—a borrowing from Akkadian *înân*—see D'Alessio 2004, esp. 23–29.

[66] Or Betegh: ἐστ[ὶν τ]ὸ ἐγγε[νέσθ]αι.

[67] For δῖνος, see Anaxagoras DK 59 A 57; for δίνη, see Empedokles DK 31 B 35.4; B 115.11. At the same time τὰ[ς] δ' ἶνα[ς could be read as accusative plural of ἴς 'strength'. See KPT 259–260.

[68] See Bernabé 2007b:121–122.

playing with sound-ambiguities.[69] By overlapping the genitive of the feminine adjective ἐύς with the feminine possessive pronoun ἐός the inventive author claims that Zeus' new creation does not come from "his own" (ἑᾶς) mother, but from his "good" (ἑᾶς instead of ἐῆος) mother. The adjective ἐύς is, of course, not identical with the possessive pronoun ἐός. However, the erroneous confusion was quite frequent among grammarians.[70] The Mother is good, since Zeus mingles in love not with his mother, but with Mind—it is identical with the good Mind, the mother of all.

As a textual example he cites Hermes, the giver of goods, δῶτορ ἐάων in *Odyssey* 8.335[71] and the two urns in the famous passage from *Iliad* 24: "for two urns are placed down on Zeus' floor—of gifts such as they give: of evils, and the other one of goods [ἐάων]" (δοιοὶ γάρ τε πίθοι κατακήαται ἐν Διὸς οὔδει / δώρων, οἷα διδοῦσι, κακῶν, ἕτερος δέ τ' ἐάων, 527–528).[72] Besides the linguistic sophistry the reference to Hermes might not be by chance. As ψυχοπομπός, he is linked to Hades and the passage into the underworld, where all goods are waiting for those who behave properly in both a ritual and intellectual sense. What is harmful has to be changed into good. The idea of jars (πίθοι) filled with different qualities on Zeus' floor shows that Zeus epitomizes and encompasses everything—that is, all the binary opposites, even good and evil. Further, this fits in with chthonic Hades, since moral behavior decides if the δεινά of Hades can turn out good.

8. Conclusion

By bizarrely riddling over an Orphic text, which is itself putatively riddling but quite traditional, the Derveni author introduces a radical *Umwertung* of values and meanings. The μεθιστάναι (6.3) happens both through ritual and through speech-acts; that which is latent is highlighted by obscurely spoken words. Through both fragmented and decontextualized sentences the sense is distorted, twisted, and changed.

What our author intends to convey with such enigmatic utterances often remains uncertain: it is not a clear-cut and lucid commentary in terms of

---

[69] For parallels to the practice of early Alexandrian philology and its *hypomnema* exegesis, see Rusten in this volume.

[70] LSJ s.v. ἐύς; ἐός = ἀγαθός; see Apollonios Dyskolos *Syntax* 213.7–8 Uhlig on *Iliad* 24.292 and KPT 271 *ad loc.* and Jourdan 2003:104–105. The play on semantic ambiguity is easier to grasp if we print in 26.2 ἑᾶς (as Jourdan 2003:26 and Betegh 2004:54–55) instead of ἑᾶς (as KPT 113; Janko 2002:52).

[71] Only here, in *Odyssey* 8.325, and in the passage of the *Iliad* 24.528 do we have the variant with *spiritus asper* δῶτορ ἐάων. See Hainsworth 1988:369 *ad Odyssey* 8.325.

[72] See also Brügger 2009:189 *ad loc.*

Presocratic natural science. But by means of abstruse remarks, some light can be shed on the basic mechanisms of φύσις 'nature'. *Physis* as eternal cosmic being is a miracle. People tend to err because of incorrect names (ὀνόματα), since the language of φύσις or the gods is basically lost. However, φύσις and κόσμος speak for themselves. Human language, on the contrary, is not φύσει, but νόμῳ, by convention, or θέσει. Yet some great poets and guru-prophets might still have access to pure φύσις and physical language, though they may make concessions to the audience and their tastes. Furthermore, the cosmos, sun, moon, and stars are also part of the soteriological reflections. By understanding φύσις people can reach deep insights about life, including its basis in night and death.

Our Derveni author seems to be an Orphic with philosophical knowledge. He is neither inept and clumsy nor unintelligent. He is certainly not a modern scientist, but he wants to trigger reflection and deep thoughts on the paradoxical workings of nature. Insight is activated by short and bizarre distortions of sense. Therefore, the Orphic poem is treated as an oracular message from the dark. Deeper meaning is teased out by further riddling, by fragmentation, by a loosening of syntactic and semantic order, by highlighting poetic ambiguity, by opening up the nuances. The canonical text is decontextualized, cut to pieces, and fragmented into defamiliarized morsels of words. Just as συνθήματα unite opposites to a paradoxical utterance, nature encompasses two principles: separation and reassembly. The aphoristic, obscure oracular mode à la Heraclitus paves the path to sudden insight. The συμβάλλειν of fragmented words, the dark re-transpositions of παραγωγά, ὑπερβατά, the distortions of sense and structure, and the poetic and magic logic of analogy initiate understanding. Through these games of language the mystic sense of φύσις can flare up like a sudden bolt.

All in all, the context of the Derveni papyrus is clearly didactic, and the text does seem to be situated in Orphic circles and its teachings. However, according to the enlightening ideas of its author, it is not enough to perform Orphic rites, to listen to ἱεροὶ λόγοι, or to see σύμβολα 'sacred things'. While the λεγόμενα and ὁρώμενα should provoke thought, insight, and understanding, the message that the text offers to μύσται can be grasped not by means of logocentric discourse, but only through its hints at the mysteries of φύσις. These are the mysteries I refer to as "riddles over riddles."

Bibliography

Bernabé, A. 2002. "La théogonie orphique du papyrus de Derveni." *Kernos* 15:91–129.

———. 2004–2005. *Orphicorum et Orphicis similium testimonia et fragmenta. Poetae epici Graeci: Testimonia et fragmenta*, part II, fasc. 1–2. Munich. [Cited as *OF*, with fragment number.]

———, ed. 2007a. *Musaeus · Linus · Epimenides · Papyrus Derveni · Indices. Poetae epici Graeci: Testimonia et fragmenta*, part II, fasc. 3. Berlin.

———. 2007b. "The Derveni Theogony: Many Questions and Some Answers." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 103:99–133.

Betegh, G. 2004. *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology, and Interpretation.* Cambridge.

Bierl, A. 2007. "Literatur und Religion als Rito- und Mythopoetik: Überblicksartikel zu einem neuen Ansatz in der Klassischen Philologie." *Literatur und Religion, 1: Wege zu einer mythisch-rituellen Poetik bei den Griechen* (ed. A. Bierl, R. Lämmle, and K. Wesselmann) 1–76. Berlin.

———. Forthcoming. "Empedokles: Philosoph, Arzt, Dichter und religiöser Prophet. Vom Mythos zum Logos?" Inauguration Lecture, Basel, 13 May 2003.

Bremer, D. 1990. "Logos, Sprache und Spiel bei Heraklit." *Synthesis Philosophica* 10:379–391.

Bremmer, J. 1991. "Orpheus: From Guru to Gay." *Orphism et Orphée en l'honneur de Jean Rudhardt* (ed. P. Borgeaud) 13–30. Geneva.

Brisson, L. 2003. "Sky, Sex, and Sun: The Meanings of αἰδοῖος/αἰδοῖον in the Derveni Papyrus." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 144:19–29.

Brügger, C. 2009. *Homers Ilias. Gesamtkommentar VIII: Vierundzwanzigster Gesang* (ed. A. Bierl and J. Latacz). Berlin.

Burkert, W. 1968. "Orpheus und die Vorsokratiker: Bemerkungen zum Derveni-Papyrus und zur pythagoreischen Zahlenlehre." *Antike und Abendland* 14:93–114 (= *Walter Burkert, Kleine Schriften, III: Mystica, Orphica, Pythagorica* [ed. F. Graf] 62–88. Göttingen).

———. 1970. "La genèse des choses et des mots: Le papyrus de Derveni entre Anaxagore et Cratyle." *Les Études Philosophiques* 25:443–455.

———. 1987. *Ancient Mystery Cults.* Cambridge, MA .

———. 1999. *Da Omero ai Magi: La tradizione orientale nella cultura greca.* Venice.

———. 2006. "Die altorphische Theogonie nach dem Papyrus von Derveni." *Walter Burkert, Kleine Schriften III: Mystica, Orphica, Pythagorica* (ed. F. Graf) 95–111. Göttingen.

Calame, C. 1997. "Figures of Sexuality and Initiatory Transition in the Derveni Theogony and Its Commentary." In Laks and Most 1997:65–80.

Casadio, G. 1987. "Adversaria Orphica: A proposito di un libro recente sull'Orfismo." *Orpheus* 8:381–395.

D'Alessio, G. B. 2004. "Textual Fluctuations and Cosmic Streams: Ocean and Acheloios." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 124:16–37.

Edmonds, R. G., III. 2004. *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the "Orphic" Gold Tablets.* Cambridge.

———. 2008. "Extra-ordinary People: *Mystai* and *Magoi*, Magicians and Orphics in the Derveni Papyrus." *Classical Philology* 103:16–39.

Frede, M. 2007. "On the Unity and the Aim of the Derveni Text." *Rhizai* 4.1:9–33.

Gemelli Marciano, M. L. 2008. "Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenides' *Aletheia*." *Ancient Philosophy* 28:21–48.

Hainsworth, J. B. 1988. "Book VIII." *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey, vol. 1: Introduction and Books i-viii* (ed. A. Heubeck, S. West, and J. B. Hainsworth) 341–385. Oxford.

Henrichs, A. 1984. "The Eumenides and Wineless Libations in the Derveni Papyrus." In *Atti del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia*, II, 255–268. Naples.

———. 2003. "*Hieroi Logoi* and *Hierai Bibloi*: The (Un)written Margins of the Sacred in Ancient Greece." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 101:207–266.

Henry, M. 1986. "The Derveni Commentator as Literary Critic." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 116:149–164.

Hölscher, U. 1969. *Parmenides, Vom Wesen des Seienden: Die Fragmente, griechisch und deutsch.* Frankfurt.

Janko, R. 1997. "The Physicist as Hierophant: Aristophanes, Socrates, and the Authorship of the Derveni Papyrus." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 118:61–94.

———. 2001. "The Derveni Papyrus (Diagoras of Melos, *Apopyrgizontes Logoi*?): A New Translation." *Classical Philology* 96:1–32.

———. 2002. "The Derveni Papyrus: An Interim Text." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 141:1–62.

Jourdan, F. 2003. *Le Papyrus de Derveni: Texte présenté, traduit et annoté.* Paris.

Kingsley, P. 1995. *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition.* Oxford.

———. 1999. *In the Dark Places of Wisdom.* Inverness, CA.

Kouremenos, T., G. M. Parássoglou, and K. Tsantsanoglou, eds. 2006. *The Derveni Papyrus, Edited with Introduction and Commentary.* Florence. [Cited as KPT.]

Laks, A., and G. W. Most, eds. 1997. *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus.* Oxford.

Millerd, C. 1908. *On the Interpretation of Empedocles.* Chicago.

Most, G. W. 1997. "The Fire Next Time: Cosmology, Allegoresis, and Salvation in the Derveni Papyrus." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 117:117–135.

———. 1999. "From Logos to Mythos." *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought* (ed. R. Buxton) 25–47. Oxford.

Nagy, G. 1979. *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry.* Baltimore. Rev. ed. 1999.

———. 1990. *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past.* Baltimore.

Nestle, W. 1940. *Vom Mythos zum Logos: Die Selbstentfaltung des griechischen Denkens von Homer bis auf die Sophistik und Sokrates.* 2nd ed. 1975. Stuttgart.

Rangos, S. 2007. "Latent Meaning and Manifest Content in the Derveni Papyrus." *Rhizai* 4.1:35–75.

Rusten, J. S. 1985. "Interim Notes on the Papyrus from Derveni." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89:121–140.

Schefer, C. 2000. "'Nur für Eingeweihte!' Heraklit und die Mysterien." *Antike und Abendland* 46:46–75.

Seaford, R. 1986. "Immortality, Salvation, and the Elements." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 90:1–26.

Sider, D. 1997. "Heraclitus in the Derveni Papyrus." In Laks and Most 1997:129–148.

Thurner, M. 2001. *Der Ursprung des Denkens bei Heraklit.* Stuttgart.

West, M. L. 1983. *The Orphic Poems.* Oxford.

———. 1997. "Hocus-pocus in East and West: Theogony, Ritual, and the Tradition of Esoteric Commentary." In Laks and Most 1997:81–90.

Willi, A. 2008. *Sikelismos: Sprache, Literatur und Gesellschaft im griechischen Sizilien (8.–5. Jh. v. Chr.).* Basel.