THE IMAGERY OF SOLON,
FR. 4 WEST (3 GENTILI-PRATO)*

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to provide a close examination of the nature and impact of the images in Solon’s Fr. 4 W. The images discussed are the ‘foundations of Justice’ (14-15), ‘the unavoidable wound’, the ‘enslaved’ city and ‘slumbering war’ (17-20), the prowling evil that threatens the city (27-30), the ‘bonds’ of Eunomia (33), the ‘flowers of delusion’ (35), and the ‘taming’ of arrogance (36-37). It is noticeable that in the majority of cases Solon’s use of a particular image is the earliest in extant Greek literature, and that the images are organically integrated into the text and advance the argument and meaning.

Solon’s second-longest surviving fragment has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, for its content and structure, its thought and style vis-à-vis Homer and Hesiod, and its social context. Many scholars have also commented en passant or in greater detail on particular images. At the Solon conference at the Radboud University Nijmegen in 2003 the poem and its imagery also received due comment. However, I think yet closer and more detailed analysis of the nature, behaviour and impact of the similes and metaphors in the fragment is possible.

In Fr. 4, Solon takes the real practices and conditions in the Athens of his day, brings the ills and dangers to the attention of his audience, and suggests remedies. He makes his ideas concrete and vivid by dramatising the protagonists in the struggle: Dikê, Kakôn, Doulosynê, Dusnomia and Eunomia.

* I wish to thank the anonymous referees for valuable comments and information.
2 For the conference papers see Blok & Lardinois 2006.
3 Given the uncertainty surrounding ‘author’ and ‘text’ in an oral tradition, it is even more imperative than usual to distinguish between poetic persona and historical figure. This article is naturally concerned with the former. See now Lardinois 2006; Stehle 2006; Blaise 2006:128-31; Martin 2006:169 n. 49.
In addition, a series of images conveys his thoughts and feelings: his belief and hope in Justice, his concern about the plight of his city, his warning of war, and his trust in the power of Eunomia.

1. The edifice of Justice (14-15)

Scholars have readily understood the reference and aura of σεμνὰ Δίκης θέμεθα: ‘... Dikê, that august being upon whom, as upon a rock, human society rests’;4 ‘Colla citazione di Dike, il linguaggio del poeta acquisìa un tono solenne e ieratico. ... Θέμεθα εί τον Ἑομενίαν που μενιά τι σημασία’;4 They have also compared Hesiod’s personification of Dikê as the daughter of Zeus and Themis, and sister of Eunomia (Theog. 902; Op. 256ff.) and seen that Dikê is here visualised as a divine (but not mythical) power that has laid down laws like an edifice built on sound and enduring foundations and, like a temple, inspiring awe.7 It has also been pointed out that this is the earliest surviving application of the image to Justice,8 anticipating Aeschylus’ θέμεθα Δίκης (Suppl. 707-08) and Δίκης ... πιθήκη (Ch. 646), and Pindar’s βάθρον πολλών ἄστικα of Eunomia and Dikê (Olym. 13.6-8). The use of συγόσοσ used of Eunomia and Dikê (Olym. 13.6-8). The use of συγόσοσ is also original.9 The personification (συγόσοσ σύνωσε, ἥλθ’ ἀποτελεσμάτη) is sustained in the rest of the poem.

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5 Masaracchia 1958:258-59.
2. The inevitable wound, slavery and slumbering war (17-20)

This already comes upon the whole city, an unavoidable sore
and the city has quickly reached vile slavery,
which arouses civil discord and slumbering war,
which destroys the lovely prime of many.

The personification continues as 'this', the consequences of Dysnomia
provoked by the misconduct of the aristocracy,\(^{10}\) invades the entire population of Athens (πόλει ἐρχεται),
the city being itself personified as enslaved (ταχέως ἔλυθε δουλωσίμη),
deprived of civil rights as a result of tyranny.\(^{11}\) The inevitable consequence is implied in the metaphor of the un-
avoidable wound or sore (ἐλκός ἀφυκτον). The word ἐλκός
signifies a wound from a weapon or animal, or a festering sore or ulcer,
such as that caused by snake-bite (Hom. Il. 2.723), or by plague (Thuc. 2.49.5; Xen. Eeg. 5.1). The former meaning fits better here,
especially in view of lines 19-20.\(^{12}\)
Archilochus (Fr. 13.8) uses it as a metaphor for the pain resulting from
bereavement, and Sophocles (Ant. 651-52) for the pain caused by lost love,
but Solon is the first in surviving Greek literature to use it metaphorically of
the ills threatening a city. After him, Aeschylus uses words similar to Solon's
when speaking of the effect of loss of life on a city (πόλει, μὲν ἐλκός ἐν τῷ
dήμῳ ταχεύμ, Ag. 640).

Degani & Buzaracchini 1977:109 understand lines 17-29 as 'le conseguenze dell'azione di Dike', but, as Manuwald 1989:6-7, has pointed out, Solon would not have conceived of Dikê as a sore (ἐλκός) and an evil (κακόν),
and envisages her action in the future (15), whereas the 'thing' is attacking the city immediately and in the present; cf. also Stahl 1992:391-92. Noussia 2001:250-51 correctly assesses the situation:
the stasis was not class-related, but caused by party-strife between various aristocratic factions.

\(^{11}\) Cf. Gerber 1999:117 n. 2; Noussia 2001:250; Mülke 2002 ad loc; Irwin 2005:98-104. Siegmann 1975:277, may be correct in stating that the city is being portrayed as an organism, with the citizens as the various organs, and having an inner and outer
equilibrium, now disrupted. There are, however, no signals of this in the text itself.

Next in the chain of events, enslavement, also personified and still metaphorical, awakens civil strife and slumbering war (στάσις ἔμφυλον πόλεμόν θ’ ἐδούτ′ ἔπευξεν), as the poet equates internal strife with a war against an external foe. The metaphor of dormant war occurs nowhere else. Although ἐγέρθη, 'to awaken' (and thus implying sleep), is used metaphorically of war (e.g. Hom. Il. 2.440; 4.352; 20.31), ἐγέρθη itself occurs thus elsewhere only of the force (μέτοχος) of the Northwind (Hom. Il. 5.524), of the sea (πότις: Simon. Fr. 543.22 PMG), of evil (καιῶν: Simon. Fr. 543.22 PMG and Eur. Supp. 1147), of mountain peaks (ὁρῶν κορυφαί: Alcm. Fr. 89.1 PMG), of splendour (χάρμα: Pind. Isæ. 7.17) and of proclamations (κηργύματα: Eur. Hec. 662).

3. Prowling evil (27-30)

σοτω δημόσιον καιῶν ἔρχεται ἀκαθήτωσιν,
αἰτιαμένη δ' ἐπέρ ἐξευθέν οὐκ ἐθάλασαν θάρσην,
ὑψηλὸν δ' ὑπὲρ ἐρείς ὑπερήφανον, ἐφ' ὑπὲρ πάντως,
εἰ καὶ τις θέρει χρήσθων ἐν μικρόν ἡ θάλαμον.

So the public evil comes into the home of everyone,
and courtyard-gates no longer wish to keep it out;
it leaps right over the high wall, and surely finds anyone
even if he flees and runs to a corner of his room.

The evil among the people, δημόσιον καιῶν, now invades each home in the city. Its progress to its target is unstoppable: it enters each one's house despite courtyard-gates and high barriers, and penetrates right into a corner of the bedroom. Thus public ills penetrate into the private sphere. Römisch regards this passage (with Fr. 31 G-P, 8-9; 37 W, 9-10) as another proof of Solon's 'plastische Ausdruck' and originality vis-à-vis Homer and Hesiod. For him, Solon's personification of the καιῶν into a 'Strafender Rächer', rather than into a divine being as in Homer and Hesiod, was something new. Accordingly, the δημόσιον καιῶν is a 'Begriff des Unheils' and not a person. Will has stated: 'The picture of the city haunted to its last nook by evil is one of the great visions of Greek poetry.' One can be more precise. The diction is quite ordinary and even prosaic, and yet the sequence of verbs, 'comes', 'leaps over', 'finds' (ἔρχεται, ὑπερήφανον and ἐφ'), individually used

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13 Anhalt 1993:72-79; Irwin 2005:97-100, who also notes the inversion from slavery as a result to slavery as a cause of war.
15 Römisch 1933:79-80.
in Greek with any number of agents, together creates the impression of some creature or monster. The audience/reader has been prepared for this association in line 23 (παίστα μὲν ἐν δήμῳ στρέφεται κακά, 'these evils prowl among the people'), where ἐν δήμῳ ... κακά anticipates δημόσιον κακόν, and στρέφεται appears in Homer and Solon in the context of an animal turning at bay to face hounds. The beast is not specified, but – far more effectively – conjured up by powerful suggestion. The κακόν is ominous, insidious and dangerous, its ability to overpower emphasised by the loss of the will on the part of the gates to resist, and the repetitious ἔφημλαν ... ὑπὲρ ... ὑπέρθορεν.

4. The bonds of Eunomia (33)

καὶ θηρίντα τῶν ἀδύνατος ἀμφιτέθησε πέδας

and she often puts bonds on the unjust

The subject, Eunomia (Εὐνομία, 32), is represented as putting fetters on the unjust and thus curtailing their evil practices. The metaphor is anticipated by literal casting into bonds in lines 23-25 where the poor, having lost their freedom as a result of debt, are bound and sent abroad:

τῶν δὲ πεινερῶν

ἠενέσπεν τοιοῦ ἐξετίκα ἐς ἄλλας ἀρετήν

προβείνετε δεμπότα τ' ἀνικελότα δεθείες

and of the poor

many are going to a foreign land,

sold and bound in shameful bonds

17 One must disagree with Anhalt 1993:108 that no particular being is intended, but just communal evil. Mülke 2002:143 relates the portrayal of the wilful and intentional action of evil to a demon. Nossia 2001:254 and Irwin 2005:102 compare the lion’s behaviour at Hom. II. 5.136-42 and Aesch. Ag. 827-28, which, however, shares only the detail about leaping over a wall and focuses on the lion’s ferocity and strength.


19 For Anhalt 1993:108-10, the unwilling doors signify a ‘multiplicity of ways in which public evil penetrates into the house of different individuals’ (110); the doors or fence are insignificant or irrelevant as traditional barriers between public and private. Mülke 2002:143 understands the terminology (ἄληθεία, ἐρρος, θύρα, θάλαμος, ὑψηλων) as referring to the homes of aristocrats, especially in the country; cf. Adkins 1985:121.
What has actually happened to the impoverished Athenian citizens often befalls the corrupt leaders metaphorically at the hands of Eunomia. The metaphorical use of πενηθή is surprisingly rare in extant Greek literature. It is used of a cloak ‘fettering’ someone (Aesch. Ch. 493, 982; Soph. Tr. 1057), or of a row of fortresses (Polyb. 18.11.5). Solon’s use again seems unique: before him Semonides (7.116) represents women as men’s metaphorical fetters.

5. The flowers of delusion (35)

αὐθαίνει δ’ ἀτης ἄθεα φύλλα

she withers delusion’s flowers as they bud

The subject is still personified Eunomia, who brings about a whole series of beneficial processes (34-38). In this line she destroys the particular evil (the blindness of the leaders and the resultant damage) just as it has begun to develop. There are two metaphors, ‘delusion’s flowers’ and ‘withering’.

Neither Sophocles’ use of μανίας ἀθέας (‘the flower of madness’, Tr. 1000) of the acme of pain caused by Atê, nor Hesiod’s ἡμια ... ἀγήσσερα κάρφω (‘[Zeus] easily withers manly deeds’, Erg. 5.7), approaches Solon’s creation.20 In addition, the verb αὐθαίνει is quite rare in Attic in its literal sense of drying something out.21

6. The taming of arrogance (36-37)

ιμηρίζει τ’ ἐργα πραύνει

and arrogant deeds / she tames

The primary application of the verb πραύνει (‘she calms’, ‘she soothes’) involves physical and psychological states.22 There may, however, be a metaphor intended in the sense of taming wild animals (for example, mules, dogs, elephants, horses). The earlier suggestion of the evil attacking Athens like a beast (27-30) may still be operative in the poet’s mind. But there is no way of deciding in favour of either metaphorical use or simple personification.

21 It occurs metaphorically of ‘wasting or pining away’: Aesch. Ch. 260; Soph. El. 819, Ph. 954.
7. Conclusions

The above discussion has shown that nearly all the images in this poem are unre corded in extant Greek literature before Solon and echoed by poets after him. This does not, of course, mean that they are 'original' to him. It does, however, indicate a sufficiently individual and creatively expressive mind to have served as a model for others. Where a precedent can be found in Homer or Hesiod, Solon retains his individuality and independence as he reshapes an image to embody a new meaning and fit a new context. It is also evident that the images are not simply illustrative ornaments, with only a single or simple idea, but rather present a whole nexus of suggestions, and have a complexity that makes interpretative demands on the audience. Solon thought through or by means of his imagery: a series of diverse images carries, advances, enriches and deepens the thought. That this poetic technique, known in oral composition and delivery, appears in a long text (as also in Fr. 13) suggests that this may have been a characteristic of more poems in his lost œuvre.23

Bibliography


23 Cf. also Martín 2006, who aptly calls Solon’s imagery ‘condensed arguments’ (163).
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