

Monstrous Crowns and the New Furies of Roman Epic
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1. Emblems of the Underworld

a) in the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice (*Met.* 10.45-46):¹

tum primum lacrimis uictarum carmine fama est Eumenidum
maduisse genas; ...

The story is that the cheeks of the Eumenides, conquered by his
song, were then wet with tears for the first time; ...

b) in the tale of Althaea and Meleager (*Il.* 9.569-72):

κυκλήσκουσ' Αἴδην καὶ ἐπαινήν Περσεφόνειαν,
πρόχλυ καθεζομένη, δεύοντο δὲ δάκρυσι κόλποι,
παιδὶ δόμεν θάνατον· τῆς δ' ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινὺς
ἔκλυεν ἐξ Ἐρέβεσφιν, ἀμείλιχον ἦτορ ἔχουσα.

...

kneeling with her robe wet with tears, calling upon Hades and
dread Persephone to grant death to her son; an Erinys who walks
in mist with an implacable heart heard her from Erebus.

2. Underworld administration

a) Ministers of Hades (*Theb.* 4. 525-7):

ipsum pallentem solio circumque ministras
funestorum operum Eumenidas Stygiaeque seueros
Iunonis thalamos et torua cubilia cerno.

I see pale Hades himself on his throne, and around him the
Eumenides, assistants in his deadly tasks, and the grim chamber
and fierce bed of Stygian Juno.

¹ The texts used are Tarrant 2004 for the *Metamorphoses*, Munro &
Allen 1920 for the *Iliad*, and Hill 1983 for the *Thebaid*; all translations
are my own.

b) Furies and Fates, working together (Theb. 8.9-13, 24-26):

necdum illum aut trunca lustrauerat obuia taxo
Eumenis, aut furuo Proserpina poste notarat
coetibus adsumptum functis; quin comminus ipsa
Fatorum deprensa colus, uisoque pauentes
augure tunc demum rumpebant stamina Parcae.

...

[as Hades sits in judgment]

stant Furiae circum uariaeque ex ordine Mortes,
saeuaque multisonas exertat Poena catenas;
Fata serunt animas et eodem pollice damnant:

A Fury had not yet met and cleansed him [Amphiaraus] with
broken off yew, nor had Proserpina marked him on the black
doorpost when he was taken up by the assemblies of the dead.
Indeed, close at hand the very distaff of the Fates was surprised,
and then at last the Parcae, fearful at the sight of the augur, broke
their threads. ... The Furies stand nearby, and the varied Deaths in
order, and fierce Punishment stretches out chains with much
noise; the Fates bring forth and condemn souls with the same
thumb.

3. Juno calls on the Furies

a) *Met.* 4.454-5:

...

carceris ante fores clausas adamante sedebant
deque suis atros pectebant crinibus angues.

... they were sitting before the doors of the prison, closed with
adamant, and combing the black snakes in their hair.

b) *Met.* 4.473-5:

... sic haec Iunone locuta,
Tisiphone canos, ut erat, turbata capillos
mouit et obstantes reiecit ab ore colubras

When Juno had thus spoken, Tisiphone, disordered as she was,
moved her white hair, threw back the obstructing snakes from her
face, [and said ...]

4. Fury armed

a) *Met.* 4.481-485; 490-494:

Nec mora, Tisiphone madefactam sanguine sumit
importuna facem fluidoque cruore rubentem
induitur pallam tortoque incingitur angue
egrediturque domo; Luctus comitatur euntem
et Pavor et Terror trepidoque Insania vultu.

...

obstitit infelix aditumque obsedit Erinys,
nexaque vipereis distendens bracchia nodis
caesariem excussit; motae sonuere colubrae,
parsque iacent umeris, pars circum pectora lapsae
sibila dant saniemque uomunt linguisque coruscant.

Without delay, grim Tisiphone snatches up a blood-soaked torch,
dons her cloak, red with gore and blood, girds herself with a
twined snake, and leaves the house. Grief accompanies her as she
goes, and Fear and Panic and Madness, with her disturbed face.
[She arrives at the halls of Athamas, who immediately decides to
flee] ... the calamitous Erinys stood in the way and blocked their
exit. She spread her arms, entwined with knotted snakes, and
shook her hair; the roused snakes resounded: some lie still on her
arms; some slip around her breast and hiss and vomit gore and
brandish their tongues.

b) *Athena arming (Il. 5.733-42):*

αὐτὰρ Ἀθηναίη κόρη Διὸς αἰγίοχοιο
πέπλον μὲν κατέχευεν ἔανόν πατρὸς ἐπ' οὐδὲι
ποικίλον, ὃν ῥ' αὐτὴ ποιήσατο καὶ κάμε χερσίν,
ἧ δὲ χιτῶν' ἐνδῦσα Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο
τεύχεσιν ἐς πόλεμον θωρήσσετο δακρῶντα.
ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' ὤμοισιν βάλετ' αἰγίδα θυσανίεσσαν
δεινήν, ἣν πέρι μὲν πάντη Φόβος ἐστεφάνωται,
ἐν δ' Ἔρις, ἐν δ' Ἀλική, ἐν δὲ κρούεσσα Ἰωκή,
ἐν δὲ τε Γοργεῖη κεφαλὴ δεινοῖο πελώρου,
δεινὴ τε σμερδνὴ τε, Διὸς τέρας αἰγίοχοιο·

But Athena, daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, shed upon her father's floor the fine, intricate robe that she herself had made and worked with her hands, donned a tunic, and began to arm herself for tear-causing battle with the armor of Zeus the cloud-gatherer. Around her shoulders she tossed the dread, tasseled aegis — Panic surrounds it all, and Strife is on it, and Courage, and chilling Rout, and a head of a Gorgon, fearful prodigy, wonderful and terrible, a sign of Zeus the aegis-bearer.

c) *Met.* 4.495-6:

inde duos mediis abrumpit crinibus angues
pestiferaque manu raptos immisit; ...

Then she tore two serpents from the middle of her hair, snatched them up in her destructive hand, and hurled them.

d) *Met.* 4.510-11:

sic uictrix iussique potens ad inania magni
regna redit Ditis sumptumque recingitur anguem.

Thus victorious, and having accomplished her command, she returns to the lifeless kingdom of great Dis and unbinds the snake that she had donned.

5. Fury as queen

a) Tisiphone's monstrous toilette (*Theb.* 1.88-91):

talia dicenti crudelis diua seueros
aduertit uultus. inamoenum forte sedebat
Cocytus iuxta, resolutaque uertice crines
lambere sulphureas permiserat anguibus undas.

The cruel goddess turned her grave face toward him as he said such things. She was sitting by chance beside the unpleasant Cocytus, and she had allowed her locks, let loose from the crown of her head, to lick the sulphurous waters with snakes.

b) Tisiphone armed (*Theb.* 1.103-113):

centum illi stantes umbrabant ora cerastae,
turba minor diri capitis; sedet intus abactis
ferrea lux oculis, qualis per nubila Phoebes
Atracia rubet arte labor; suffusa ueneno
tenditur ac sanie gliscit cutis; igneus atro
ore uapor, quo longa sitis morbique famesque
et populis mors una uenit; riget horrida tergo
palla, et caerulei redeunt in pectora nodi:
Atropos hos atque ipsa nouat Proserpina cultus.
tum geminas quatit ira manus: haec igne rogali
fulgurat, haec uiuo manus aera uerberat hydro.

Those hundred horned vipers standing erect shadow her face, the smaller band of the dreadful head. An iron light dwells within her sunken eyes, as the work of Phoebe reddens with Atracian art through the clouds. Her skin is stretched, filled with venom, and swells with [bloody] matter; there is a fiery breath from her black mouth, from which long thirst and diseases and famine and death come as one to people. Her back bristles with a frightful cloak, and the dark knots return to her breast: Atropos and Persephone herself refresh these ornaments. Then wrath shakes both hands: this one gleams with funereal fire, this one strikes bronze with a living snake.

c) A worldly crown offered to the queen of the Underworld (*Theb.* 1.82-83):

“...
indue quod madidum tabo diadema cruentis
unguibus abripui, uotisque intincta paternis
i media in fratres, generis consortia ferro
dissiliant. da, Tartarei regina barathri,
quod cupiam uidisse nefas, nec tarda sequetur
mens iuuenum: modo digna ueni, mea pignora nosces.”

Don the diadem soaked with corruption that I snatched off with bloody nails, and, impelled by the vows of a father, go between the brothers so that the fellowship of birth might spring apart with the blade. Queen of the Tartarean abyss, grant the sin that I would wish to have seen, and that the mind of the youths not be slow to follow. Just come as is proper; you know my pledge.

6. Reigning Furies in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

a) as Jupiter concludes the tale of Lycaon (*Met.* 1.240-243):

occidit una domus, sed non domus una perire
digna fuit; qua terra patet, fera regnat Erinys.
in facinus iurasse putes; dent ocus omnes
quas meruere pati (sic stat sententia) poenas.'

One house perished, but not only one house deserved to die;
wherever the earth extends, a fierce Fury reigns. You would think
they had conspired in villainy; let them all swiftly pay the
penalties they deserve to endure – thus stands my judgment.

b) at the death of Orpheus (*Met.* 11.13-14)

...sed enim temeraria crescunt bella modusque abiit insanaque
regnat Erinys.

But, indeed, reckless war grows, and moderation departs, and an
insane Erinys reigns.

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