

1. Two fearsome triads.

a) Furies, *Met.*, 8.475-485:¹

incipit esse tamen melior germana parente
et, consanguineas ut sanguine leniat umbras,
impietate pia est. nam postquam pestifer ignis
convaluit, 'rogus iste cremet mea viscera' dixit
utque manu dira lignum fatale tenebat,
ante sepulcrales infelix adstitit aras
'poenarum'que 'deae triplices, furialibus' inquit,
'Eumenides, sacris vultus advertite vestros.
ulciscor facioque nefas; mors morte pianda est,
in scelus addendum scelus est, in funera funus;
per coacervatos pereat domus impia luctus.
...'

She begins to be a better sister than parent, and, in order to appease her sibling shades, is faithful in her faithlessness. For, after the destructive fire had grown strong, she said, "Let this funeral pyre consume my womb!" and held out the fatal log with her dire hand. She stood, unfortunate one, before the funereal altar and said: "**Three-fold goddesses of punishment, Eumenides, turn your face to these dreadful rites. I avenge and create an unspeakable act; death must be paid for with death, crime must be added to crime, killing to killings.** Let this faithless house perish utterly through these heaped up griefs. ..."

b) Fates, *Met.*, 8.451-457:

stipes erat quem, cum partus enixa iaceret
Thestias, in flammam **triplices** posuere **sorores**
staminaque impresso fatalia pollice nentes
'tempora' dixerunt 'eadem lignoque tibi que,
o modo nate, damus.' quo postquam carmine dicto
excessere deae, flagrantem mater ab igne
eripuit ramum sparsitque liquentibus undis.

There was a log that the **three sisters** placed into the fire as the daughter of Thestius lay in bed after giving birth, and, as they spun their fatal thread and marked it with a thumb, they said: "We shall grant the same amount of time to you and this log, o newly born child." After this song was recited, the goddesses departed, and the mother snatched the burning branch from the fire and wet it with flowing water.

2. Homer's enforcing Furies:

a) called on by Meleager's mother (*Il.*, 9.571-2)

... ἢ ῥα θεοῖσι
πόλλα ἀχέουσ' ἠρᾶτο κασιγνήτοιο φόνοιο,
πολλὰ δὲ καὶ γαίαν πολυφόρβην χερσὶν ἀλοία
κυκλήσκουσ' Αἴθην καὶ ἐπαινὴν Περσεφόνειαν,
πρόχλυ καθεζομένη, δεύοντο δὲ δάκρυσι κόλποι,
παιδὶ δόμεν θάνατον· τῆς δ' ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινὺς
ἔκλυεν ἐξ Ἐρέβεσφιν, ἀμείλιχον ἦτορ ἔχουσα.

... who, grieving much, asked the gods for the death of her son, and again and again she struck the earth that feeds many with her hands, 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.**

b) and the father of Phoenix (*Il.*, 9.453-6)

... πατήρ δ' ἐμὸς αὐτίκ' οἴσθεις
πολλὰ κατηρᾶτο, **στρυγερᾶς δ' ἐπεκέκλετ' Ἐρινῦς,**
μή ποτε γούνασιν οἴσιν ἐφέσσεσθαι φίλον υἱόν
ἐξ ἐμέθεν γεγαῶτα· ...

But my father suspected straightaway and called down many curses upon me, and he called upon the hateful Erinys, that he would never set a dear child born from me upon his knees.

c) with Μοῖρα (*Il.*, 19.85-89)

πολλάκι δὴ μοι τοῦτον Ἀχαιοὶ μῦθον ἔειπον,
καὶ τέ με νεικείεσκον· ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἰτιός εἰμι,
ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινὺς,
οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἐμβαλον ἄγχιον ἄτην,
ἦματι τῷ ὅτ' Ἀχιλλῆος γέρας αὐτὸς ἀπήρων.

The Achaeans often say this of me and reproach me, but it is not I who am to blame, but **Zeus and Moira and the mist-walking Erinys**, who sent fierce Ate into my wits in the assembly, on that day when I myself took away Achilles' war prize.

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

d) With a prophetic horse (Il. 19.418):

Ὡς ἄρα φωνήσαντος Ἐρινύες ἔσχεθον ἀυδήν.

Then **the Erinyes stopped the voice** of the one who spoke.

3. Theban Furies, a preview (Met., 9.403-414):

...
non est passa Themis. 'nam iam discordia Thebae
bella movent' dixit, 'Capaneusque nisi ab Iove vinci
haud poterit, fientque pares in vulnere fratres,
subductaque suos manes tellure videbit
vivos adhuc vates, ultusque parente parentem
natus erit factus pius et sceleratus eodem,
attonitusque malis, exul mentisque domusque,
vultibus Eumenidum matrisque agitabitur umbris,
donec eum coniunx fatale poposcerit aurum
cognatumque latus Phegeius hauserit ensis.
tum demum magno petet hos Acheloia supplex
ab Iove Calliroe natis infantibus annos;
... "

Themis did not allow it. "For Theban strife will soon enough stir up wars, and only Jupiter will be able to overcome Capaneus; brothers will become equal in wounds; he will see, while still alive, his own spirits when the earth has been drawn aside; his son, after he has avenged a parent upon a parent (both *pius* and wicked in the same deed), will be driven, struck with evils, by the appearances of the Eumenides and by ghosts of his mother, an exile from both mind and home, until his wife demands the fatal gold and the sword of Phegeius drains the flank of his kinsman. That is when Calliroe, daughter of Achelous, will beg these years for her infant sons as a suppliant to great Jupiter. ... "

4. 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 that one [Amphiarus] 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.

5. Hard Fates

a) Spreading discord within Thebes (Theb., 1.171-75):

atque aliquis, cui mens humili laesisse ueneno
summa nec impositos umquam ceruice uolenti
ferre duces, 'hancne Ogygiis,' ait, 'aspera rebus
fata tulere vicem, totiens mutare timendos
alternoque iugo dubitantia subdere colla?
... "

And someone, whose intent was to harm the highest with humble poison and who never bears assigned leaders with a willing neck, said "Have the harsh Fates brought this change to Theban affairs, to change so often those who must be feared and to put hesitant necks under an alternating yoke? ... "

b) As Zeus is asked for a sign (Theb., 3.491-3):

si datur et duris sedet haec sententia Parcibus
soluere Echionias Lernaeanae cuspidem portas,
signa feras laeusque tones; ...

If it is given and the harsh Fates are settled on this purpose, to open the Theban gates with Lernaean spear, give a signal and thunder on the left; ...

c) In the sad story of Phaethon (Theb., 6.320-25):

... sic ignea lora
cum daret et rapido Sol natum imponeret axi,
gaudentem lacrimans astra insidiosa docebat
nolentesque teri zonas mediamque polorum
temperiem: pius ille quidem et formidine cauta,
sed iuuenem durae prohibebant discere Parcae.

... in this way the Sun, when he gave over the fiery reins and placed his son upon the swift axle, tearfully taught the rejoicing boy the treacherous stars, the zones unwilling to be worn down and the mild zone between the poles. He was indeed dutiful, with a wary fear besides, but the harsh Fates kept the boy from learning.

d) In response to an omen (*Theb.*, 6.921-3):

tum generum, ne laudis egens, iubet ardua necti
tempora Thebarumque ingenti uoce citari
uictorem: dirae recinebant omina Parcae.

Then he ordered that his son-in-law, so that he might not lack praise, be wreathed upon his lofty temples and be called out with a great voice as victor of Thebes: the dread Fates made the omen resound.²

6. ... and harmful

a) Invoked by Polynices (*Theb.*, 11.188-92):

'...
at tu, care socer, (nec enim omnis culpa malorum
me penes, et superi mecum **Parcaeque nocentes**)
sis lenis cineri, meque haec post proelia raptum
alitis fratrique tegas urnamque reportes,
hoc tantum, et natae melius conubia iungas.'

But may you, dear father-in-law, (for not all the blame for these evils is mine, both the gods above and the **harmful Fates** are with me) be gentle to my ashes, and after this battle, take me up and shield me from the birds and my brother and carry back my urn, only this, and make a better marriage for your daughter.'

b) ... and by Pietas (*Theb.*, 11.457-64):

iamdudum terris coetuque offensa deorum
auersa caeli Pietas in parte sedebat,
non habitu quo nota prius, non ore sereno,
sed uittis exuta comam, fraternaue bella,
ceu soror infelix pignantum aut anxia mater,
deflebat, **saeuumque Iouem Parcasque nocentes**
uociferans, seseque polis et luce relicta
descensuram Erebo et Stygios iam malle penates.

For a long time now Pietas had been sitting turned away in a part of heaven, displeased by the earth and the company of the gods, not in the appearance by which she was earlier known, not with a calm face, but having released her hair from its bands; she wept at the fraternal war, like an unfortunate sister or anxious mother of those fighting, **calling out to both fierce Jupiter and the harmful Fates** that she now preferred to descend to Erebus and Stygian household gods.

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2 I follow Klotz 1973 and Shackleton-Bailey 2003 in taking the *recinebant* reading from P, rather than Hill's *retinebant*.