

Fated Fury: How the Furies Establish Supremacy over the Fates in Statius' *Thebaid*

Two groups of figures, the Fates and the Furies, permeate Statius' *Thebaid*. Though previous scholarship has often noted the role of each of these groups and their individual members within the context of the work (Feeney 1991, Ganiban 2007, Gilder, III 1997, Hoffmann 1999, McNelis 2007, Pollmann 2004, Vessey 1973), little attention has been paid to the relationship between the two similar chthonic groups of three. To that end, this paper investigates the Fates and Furies in the *Thebaid*, with special interest towards instances of their interaction. While the Furies successfully dominate other characters such as Oedipus, Jupiter, and Dis himself, a last obstacle to the Furies' supremacy in the work is the Fates, who have also proven themselves superior to Jupiter. This doublet group to the Furies experiences a blurring of its distinction from them until ultimately being totally supplanted by the Furies, who come out as the supreme forces in control of characters' fates in the *Thebaid*.

Firstly, the relative closeness in the incidence of the appearances of the Fates (83 references) and the Furies (68 references) within the text points not to a stark dominance of one group over the other, but instead to almost an equality of the two on the atomic level of word frequency. This breakdown in the groups' division is further seen in the confusion between Olympian and chthonic realms, powers, and divinities which permeates the work, particularly on occasions during which there is a lack of clarity over who the particular actor—Fate or Fury—is in a certain situation due to the shared vocabulary used to identify each. As the work progresses, however, especially in Books 11 and 12, the Furies become the sole entities signified by these overlapping descriptors of the Fates and Furies, establishing their dominance through their usurpation of these identifiers.

The Furies furthermore seek to undermine the agency and function of the Fates in their rise to supremacy. Tisiphone employs Atropos as a handmaiden (*Theb.* 1.111). Laius prophesizes at the pleasure not only of Lachesis, a Fate who rightly governs the foretelling of the future, but also of the Fury Megaera (*Theb.* 4.636). Finally, as Statius works himself up to writing the actual beginning of the war, the Furies become the ones who break the life-threads and indeed even snatch these threads away from the Fates entirely (*Theb.* 8.381-382). The Furies are not only relieving the Fates of their role in prophecy and ending mortals' lives, but robbing the Fates of their very function, agency, and, therefore, identity.

Just as Statius asserts in the beginning of his work—*nec furiis post fata*—the Furies of the *Thebaid* will not be subordinate to the Fates (*Theb.* 1.35). The prominence of the Furies is established through their frequency in the work, through the actions they exhibit and their role in bringing about the epic's conclusion, and through their relationship to an ongoing struggle between Jupiter and Dis, both of whom they dominate. While the Furies control other individuals, it is ultimately by displaying themselves as superior to the group of the Fates that the Furies achieve total supremacy and dictate the outcome of the *Thebaid*.

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