

Tisiphone as an Internal Poet in Statius' *Thebaid*

In this paper, I will analyze Statius' portrayal of Tisiphone, one of the three Furies, in the *Thebaid*, with particular emphasis given to her role as an internal poet in Books 1 and 11. Even at the beginning of the poem, Statius struggles to assert his authorial control over the narrative of his epic. After invoking Pierian fire and Clio for a heroic or worthy beginning to the *Thebaid*, Statius abruptly begins with Oedipus, wrathful in his hatred of his two traitorous sons. Oedipus, who exists in a liminal and corrupted state, operates outside of the heroism of the proem, assumes control of the narrative, and calls upon a divine enactor of his vengeance. After hearing the prayer of Oedipus, Tisiphone summons herself to Earth and brings about the deaths of many Theban and Argive heroes. Her influence in the epic is unparalleled by any other character in the *Thebaid*, as she manipulates Polynices and Eteocles to bring about their fatal fratricidal duel.

Statius' representation of Tisiphone has been widely debated in the field of Statian scholarship, with scholars such as Philip Hardie (1993) and Alison Keith (2016) analyzing the intertextual connections between Statius' Tisiphone and the Tisiphone of Vergil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Dennis Feeney, in his seminal work *The Gods in Epic: The Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition*, likewise finds many connections between Statius' Tisiphone and Ovid's Tisiphone. While I generally agree with the sentiments of Feeney, Hardie, and Keith, I believe that their works have not entirely addressed Tisiphone's role in Statius' *Thebaid*. I suggest that Tisiphone, in her desire to bring about a resolution to the central issues of the poem and subsequent success

in doing so, establishes her control over the narrative and thereby solidifies her role as an internal poet of the epic.

My paper addresses the issue of Tisiphone's actions in the *Thebaid* with particular attention given to her introduction in Book 1 and her role in the death of Eteocles and Polynices in Book 11. Specifically, in my project, I will be looking at Tisiphone's transformative role from the poetic muse of Oedipus' invocation in Book 1 to an autonomous creator of destruction in Book 11, in order to show that Tisiphone most closely resembles a poet in her authorial control of the narrative. Specifically, I will discuss Tisiphone's monologue during which she and her sister Megaera, unopposed by the will of the Olympians, watch the climactic duel between Eteocles and Polynices.

As she and her sister watch the inevitable downfall of the brothers, Tisiphone comments on her agency in the downfall of heroes such as Tydeus, Eteocles, and Polynices. Like Oedipus, who, in his invocation to Tisiphone, assigns an important role to her in the development of his fate, Tisiphone also asserts that her cataclysmic influence over Tydeus kept him from his fated immortality. Tisiphone's role in the development of the critical events of the *Thebaid* illustrates that her role in the epic has transcended that of a muse and has cast her instead as an internal creator, comparable to the influence of a poet. Having asserted her unopposed authorial control over the events and outcome of the epic, Tisiphone expresses her exhaustion at the events happily relinquishes her control over the narrative. Like Statius, who frequently experiences fatigue and calls upon a muse for new inspiration, Tisiphone also suffers similar enervation from the subject matter culminating in her eventual exit from the epic. Using the research of Feeney,

Hardie, and Keith, I hope to shed new light on the previously unexplored role and importance of Tisiphone as an internal poet in the *Thebaid*.

Bibliography

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