

'But Moira overcame me...': Fate and Death in Early Greek Religion

1. Moira in Homer

follows men and is threateningly near	<i>Il.</i> 16.853, 21.110, 24.132; <i>Od.</i> 24.28-29
is inescapable	<i>Il.</i> 6.488
restrains and surrounds men, even when they are face-to-face with death	<i>Il.</i> 4.517
impels men and brings them to destruction	<i>Il.</i> 5.629, 5.613, 13.602, 21.83
represented as murderous and death-bringing	<i>Od.</i> 22.413

2a. Birth of (Titanic) Moirai in Hesiod; *Th.* 217-22. *Trans. Most, with amendments.*

καὶ Μοίρας καὶ Κήρας ἐγείνατο νηλεπίουνας, Κλωθῶ τε Λάχεσιν τε καὶ Ἄτροπον, αἶ τε βροτιῶσι γεινομένοισι διδοῦσιν ἔχειν ἐγαθὸν τε κακὸν τε, αἶ τ' ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε παραιβασίας ἐφέπουσιν, οὐδε. Ποτε λήγουσι θεαὶ δεινοῖο χόλοιο, πρὶν γ' ἀπὸ τῶ δῶσι κακὴν ὄπιν, ὅσις ἀμάρτη	And she bore Fates and pitilessly punishing Dooms, Klotho and Lachesis and Atropos, who give to mortals when they are born both good and evil to have, and who hold fast to the transgressions of both men and gods; and the goddesses never cease from their terrible wrath until they give evil punishment to whoever commits a crime.
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2b. Birth of (Ouranic) Moirai in Hesiod; *Th.* 904-906. *Trans. Most.*

Μοίρας θ', ἧς πλείστην τιμὴν πο.ρε μῆτιετα Ζεὺς, Κλωθῶ τε Λάχεσιν τε καὶ Ἄτροπον, αἶ τε διδοῦσι θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισιν ἔχειν ἀγαθόν τε κακόν τε.	And the Fates, upon whom the counsellor Zeus bestowed the greatest honour, Klotho and Lachesis and Atropos, who give to mortal human beings both good and evil.
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3. The Descent of Peirithous to Hades. *Hes. fr.* 216.1-4 (Most).

..... ὄλ]έσαι με βίηφι τε δουρί μακρῶι, ἀλλὰ με Μοῖρ' ὄλο]ῃ καὶ Λητοῦς ὤλεσε[ς υἱός. ἀλλ' ἄγε δὴ μοι ταῦα δι]αμπερέως ἀγό[ρεασον·]νδε κατήλυθες [εἰς Ἄϊδαο]to destroy me by force and a long spear But <u>deadly Fate</u>] and Leto's son destroyed [me. But now come and] tell [me this] through and through] you have descended [into Hades
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4. Pindar. *Paeon* 6.93-95

νέφεσσι δ' ἐν χρυσεῖσι Ὀλύμποι – ο καὶ κορυφα[ισι]ν ἴζων μόρσιμ' ἀνα[λ]ύεν Ζεὺς ὁ θεῶν σκοπὸς οὐ τόλ– μα·	But Zeus, the watcher of the gods, sitting on the peaks among the golden clouds of Olympos, Did not dare to undo the things that were fated.
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6. Solon. *fr.* 27 (Gerber)

τὴν δεκάτην δ' εἴ τις τελέσας κατὰ μέτρον ἴκοιτο, Οὐκ ἂν ἄωρος ἑὼν μοῖραν ἔχοι θανάτου.	If one man were to complete stage after stage and reach the tenth, he would not have death's allotment prematurely.
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7. Theognis. *Elegiac Poems* 271-278.

ἴσως τοι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποις γῆρας τ' οὐλόμενον καὶ ζεότητ' ἔδοσαν, τῶν πάντων δὲ κάκιστον ἐν ἀνθρώποις θανάτου τε καὶ πασέων νοσῶν ἐστὶ πονηρότατον, παῖδας ἐπεὶ θρέψαιο καὶ ἄρμενα πάντα παράσχοις, χρήματα δ' ἐγκαταθῆς πόλλ' ἀνιπρὰ παθῶν, τὸν πατέρ' ἐχθαίρουσι, καταρθνται δ' ἀπολέσθαι, καὶ στυγέουσ' ὥσπερ πτωχῶν ἐσερχόμενον.	The gods have given mortal men an equal share of other things, accursed old age and youth, but there is something that is the worse and most grievous of all things in human life, including death and every kind of sickness, (namely, that) whenever you have raised sons, provided everything that is fitting, and stored up wealth (for them) after much bitter suffering, they hate their father, pray for his death, and loath him as if he were a better at the door.
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8. Theognis. *Elegiac Poems* 1187-1190.

οὔτις ἀποῖνα διδούς θάνατον φύγοι οὐδὲ βεβαρέταν δυστυχίην, εἰ μὴ μοῖρ' ἐπὶ τέρμα βάλοι, οὐδ' ἂν δυσφροσύνας, ὅτε δὴ θεὸς ἄλγεα πέμπη θνητὸς ἀνὴρ δῶροις βουλόμενος προφυγεῖν	No one can pay a ransom and avoid death or heavy misfortune, if fate does not set a limit, nor, although he wish to, can a mortal avoid mental distress through bribery, when the god sends pain.
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9. Gold tablet from Thurii, 4th century BCE. OF 488. Edmonds A1; Graf/Johnston 5; Bernabé/Jiménez L9.

<p>Ἔρχομαι ἐκ καθαρῶν<ν> καθάρᾳ, χθονί<ων> βασιλείᾳ, Εὐκλῆς Εὐβό<ου>λεύς τε καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι· καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὑμῶν γένος ὄλβιον εὐχομαι εἶμεν. <u>ἀλ<λ>ά με Μο<ι>ρ᾿{α} ἐδάμασ<σ>ε {καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι} καὶ</u> <u>ἀσ{σ}τεροβλήτᾳ κ<ε>ραυνῶι.</u> κύλο<ου> δ᾿ ἐξέπτᾳν βαρυπενθέος ἀργλέοιο, ἴμεπτο<ῦ> δ᾿ ἐπέβαν στεφάνο<ου> ποσὶ καρπαλίμοισι, δεσ{σ}ποινας δ᾿{ε} ὑπὸ κόλπον ἔδυν χθονίας βασιλείας· {ιμερτοδαπεβανστεμανοποσικαρπασιμοισι} ὄλβιε καὶ μακαριστέ, θεὸς δ᾿ ἔση ἀντὶ βροτοῖο. ἔριφος ἐς γὰς ἔπετον.</p>	<p>Pure I come from the pure, Queen of those below the earth, And Eukles and Eubouleus and the other immortal gods; For I also claim that I am of your blessed race. <u>But Fate mastered me and the thunderer, striking with his</u> <u>lightening.</u> I flew out of the circle of wearying heavy grief; I came on with swift feet to the desired crown; I passed beneath the bosom of the Mistress, Queen of the Underworld, ‘Happy and most blessed one, a god you shall be instead of a mortal.’ A kid I fell into milk.</p>
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10. Gold tablet from Thurii, 4th century BCE. OF 489. Edmonds A2; Graf/Johnston 7; Bernabé/Jiménez L10a.

<p>Ἔρχομαι<ι> ἐ<κ> καθα<ρῶν> {σχονων} καθάρᾳ, χ<θ>ονί<ων> βασίλ{ν}<ει>α<ν>, Εὐκλε καὶ Εὐβουλεῦ {ι} καὶ θεοὶ <καὶ> δαίμο<ν>ε<ς> ἄλλοι· καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὑμῶν γένο<ς> εὐχομαι ὄλβιον εἶναι πο<ι>νὰν δ᾿ ἀνταπέ{ι}τε{σε}ι<σ> ἔργων ἕνεκα οὐ<τ>ι δικα<ί>ων. <u>εἴτε με Μο<ι>ρα ἐδάμασ<σ> ᾿{ατο} εἴτε ἀστεροπῆτᾳ κ<ε>ραυνῶν.</u> νῦν δ᾿ ἰκέτι<ς> ἦκω πα<ρα>ὶ ἀγνή<ν> Φε<ρ>σεφόνε<ι>αν, ὥς με{ι} πρόφ<ρ>ω<ν> πέμψη<ι> ἔδρας ἐς εὐαγέ{ι}ων.</p>	<p>Pure I from the pure, Queen of those below the earth, And Eukles and Eubouleus and the other gods and daimons; For I also claim that I am of your blessed race. Recompense I have paid on account of deeds not just; <u>Either Fate mastered me or the thunderer flinging the lightning bolt.</u> Now I come, a suppliant, to holy Persephone, That she, gracious, may send me to the seats of the blessed.</p>
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11. Gold tablet from Thurii, 4th century BCE. OF 490. Edmonds A3; Graf/Johnston 6; Bernabé/Jiménez L10b.

<p>Ἔρχομαι ἐ<κ> καθαρῶ<ν> κα<ρ>αρά, χθ<ο>ονί<ων> βασίλ<ει>α<ν>, Εὐκλε{α} κα<ί> Εὐβό<ου>λεῦ καὶ θεοὶ <καὶ> {ῥοοι} δ<αί>μονες ἄλλοι· καὶ γὰρ ἐ<γ>ώ<ν> ὑ<μῶν> γένος εὐχομαι ὄλβιον ε<ί>να<ι> {ὄλβιο} ποινὰν <δ᾿> ἀνταπέτε<ισ> ἔργω<ν> ἕνεκ᾿ ο<ῦ>τι δικα<ί>ων. <u>ε<ί>τ<ε> με Μοῖρα <ἐδάμασ> ε<ί>τε ἀ<σ>τεροπῆτᾳ {κη}</u> <u>κεραυνῶ<ν>.</u> νῦν δ᾿ <ί>κ<έ>τις ἦκω {ικω} πα<ρα>ὶ ἀ<γ>νή<ν> Φ<ε>ρ<σ>ε<φ>όνειαν<ν>, ὥς {λ} με <π>ρόφ<ρ>ων πέ[μ]ψ<η> {μ} ἔδρας ἐς εὐ<α>γ<έ>ων<ν>.</p>	<p>Pure I from the pure, Queen of those below the earth, And Eukles and Eubouleus and the other gods and daimons; For I also claim that I am of your blessed race. Recompense I have paid on account of deeds not just; <u>Either Fate mastered me or lightning bolt thrown by the thunderer.</u> Now I come, a suppliant, to holy Persephone, That she, gracious, may send me to the seats of the blessed.</p>
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12. Gold tablet from Thurii, 4th century BCE. OF 492. Edmonds C1; Graf/Johnston 4; Bernabé/Jiménez L12. Translation Graf/Johnston

To Protogonos [untranslatable letters (UL)] Earth Mother [UL] Cybele [UL] Girl [UL] of Demeter [UL]
[UL] Zeus [UL] Air [UL] Sun, Fire that overcomes [UL] all.
[UL] Fortune [UL] Phanes, All-remembering Moirai [UL] you famous daimon [UL]
Father [UL] Master of All [UL] correspondence [UL]
[UL] Air, Fire [UL] Mother [UL] Fasting, Night [UL] Day [UL]
Seventh day [UL] of a fast, Zeus Who-Digs-In (?) and Watcher-Over-All, always [UL] Mother, hear
My [UL] prayers [UL] beautiful [UL] Demeter, Fire Zeus Chthonic Kore [UL]
Hero [UL] Light to the mind [UL] the mindful one seizes Kore
land [UL] Air [UL] to the mind.