

*Theognis (Theognidea) -- (6th Century)*

Theognis 15–18

Muses and Graces, daughters of Zeus, who came once to the wedding of Cadmus and sang the lovely verse, "What is beautiful is loved, what is not beautiful is not loved." This is the verse that went through your immortal lips.

Theognis 87–90

Don't show affection for me in your words  
but keep your mind and heart elsewhere,  
if you love me and the mind within you is loyal.  
Either love me sincerely or renounce me, hate me, and quarrel openly.

Theognis 91–92

He who says one thing but thinks another is a dangerous comrade,  
Cyrnus, better an enemy than a friend.

Theognis 93–1001

If a man praises you as long as you can see him,  
but speaks maliciously when apart,  
such a comrade is in truth no very good friend,  
whoever speaks with a smooth tongue  
but has different thoughts.  
May I have the sort of friend who knows his comrade  
and, like a brother, puts up with his disposition  
even when he is hard to bear. Please take these things to heart,  
my friend, and one day hereafter you will remember me.

Theognis 115–161

Many in truth are your comrades when there's food and drink,  
but not so many when the enterprise is serious.

Theognis 129–30

Don't pray for outstanding excellence or wealth,  
Polypaïdes; the only thing a man can have is luck.

Theognis 143–44

No mortal, Polypaïdes, has yet escaped the notice of the immortals,  
if he deceives a stranger or a suppliant.

Theognis 149–50

Fortune gives even an utterly wicked man riches, Cyrnus,  
but excellence is allotted to few as their companion.

Theognis 151–52

It is insolence (hybris), Cyrnus, that the god gives first to a wicked man  
whose position he intends to make of no account.

Theognis 153–54

In truth excess breeds insolence (hybris), whenever prosperity comes to a wicked man who is not sound of mind.

Theognis 167–68

One man is wretched this way, another that, and no one of all whom the sun looks down upon is truly fortunate.

Theognis 181–82

It is better, dear Cynus, for a poor man to be dead than to live oppressed by grievous poverty.

Theognis 211–121

Drinking wine in large quantities is indeed a bane, but if one drinks it wisely, wine is not a bane but a blessing.

Theognis 213–18

My heart, keep turning a versatile disposition in accordance with all your friends, mingling with it the mood which each one has. Adopt the mood of the cunning octopus which seems to resemble the rock to which it clings. Now follow along in this direction, now take on a different complexion. Cleverness is in truth superior to inflexibility.

Theognis 257–60

I am a fine, prize-winning horse, but I carry a man who is utterly base, and this causes me the greatest pain. Often I was on the point of breaking the bit, throwing my bad rider, and running off.

Theognis 279–82

It is natural that the base man have a base view of justice and have no regard for resentment to follow, since it is possible for a base man to have ready access to many criminal acts and to consider that everything he does is fine.

Theognis 333–34

Never be the friend of an exile with a view to the future, Cynus; for not even when he comes home is he any longer the man he was.

Theognis 335–36

Don't show too much zeal; the middle course is the best of all. This way, Cynus, you will have merit and that's hard to come by.

Theognis 361–62

When a man has suffered a great disaster, Cynus, his heart diminishes, but afterwards, when he gets revenge, it increases.

Theognis 413–14

I'll not so arm myself with wine,  
nor does wine lead me on, that I speak ill of you.

Theognis 421–24

Many men do not have on their tongue a door that closes with a well-adjusted fit,  
and they care about much that does not concern them.  
Often it is better for the bad to be stored away within  
and better for the good to come out than the bad.

Theognis 425–28

It is best of all for mortals not to be born  
and not to look upon the rays of the piercing sun,  
but once born it is best to pass the gates of Hades  
as quickly as possible and to lie under a large heap of earth.

Theognis 457–60

A young wife is not suitable for a husband who is old.  
For she is like a boat that does not obey the rudder,  
nor do the anchors hold. She breaks her moorings  
and often finds another harbour at night.

Theognis 499–502

Experts recognize gold and silver by fire,  
but wine reveals the mind of a man,  
even though he is very prudent, if he takes and drinks it beyond his limit,  
so that it puts to shame even one who was formerly wise.

Theognis 503–508

My head is heavy with wine, Onomacritus, it overpowers me,  
I am no longer the manager of my judgement, and the room is going round and round.  
But, come, let me stand and find out whether  
the wine has hold of my feet as well as the mind within me.  
I'm afraid that in my fortified state I may do something foolish  
and bring great disgrace upon me.

Theognis 509–10

Wine drunk in large quantities is a bane, but if one drinks it  
wisely, it is not a bane but a blessing.

Theognis 523–26

Not to no purpose, Wealth, do mortals honour you most  
of all, for you easily put up with baseness.  
In fact, it is fitting for the noble to have wealth,  
whereas poverty is appropriate for the base man to endure.

Theognis 527–28

Alas for youth and alas for cursed old age,  
the latter because it comes on, the former because it leaves.

Theognis 531–34

My heart is always warmed whenever I hear the pipes  
sounding a lovely voice. I delight in drinking well  
and singing to the piper's accompaniment,  
and I delight in holding in my hands the tuneful lyre.

Theognis 561–62

May I have some of my enemies' property for myself  
and hand over most of theirs to my friends to keep.

Theognis 563–66

You should get invited to dinner and sit beside a man of worth  
who knows every kind of skill.  
Whenever he says something clever, take note of it  
so that you may learn and go home with this as profit.

Theognis 567–70

I have fun, delighting in my youth;  
for I will lie a long time beneath the earth, mute as a stone,  
when my life is over and I leave the sun's lovely light.  
For all my merit I'll have sight no more.

Theognis 579–82

I hate a scoundrel and I veil myself as I pass by,  
with as little thought for him as a small bird would have.  
And I hate a woman who runs around,  
and a lecher who wants to plough a field belonging to another.

Theognis 605–606

Excess to be sure has already destroyed many more men than famine,  
men who wanted to have more than their allotment.

Theognis 627–28

It's disgraceful for a drunk to be in sober company  
and disgraceful if a sober man keeps company with drunks.

Theognis 631–32

He whose mind does not control his heart always finds himself  
in trouble, Cynus, and in great perplexity.

Theognis 641–44

You can't know either your friend or your enemy,  
unless you find yourself engaged in a serious enterprise.  
Many are your friends and comrades at the mixing bowl,  
but not so many when the enterprise is serious.

Theognis 649–52

Ah wretched Poverty, why do you lie upon my shoulders  
and deform my body and mind? Forcibly and against my will  
you teach me much that is shameful,  
although I know what is noble and honourable among men.

Theognis 687–88

It is not possible for mortals to fight against the gods  
or to pronounce judgement (on them); no one has this right.

Theognis 689–90

One ought not to cause harm, except when harm is called for,  
nor do what is better left undone.

Theognis 757–64

May Zeus who dwells in the sky ever hold  
his right hand over this city to keep off harm,  
and may the other blessed immortal gods (do likewise);  
and may Apollo make straight our tongue and mind.  
Let the lyre sound forth holy song and the pipe also,  
and after offering libations satisfying to the gods  
let us drink, making pleasant conversation  
with one another and fearing not the Median war.

Theognis 765–68

May it be thus or better, to pass the time  
with cheerful hearts in festive pleasure free of cares;  
and may malevolent spirits, accursed old age,  
and death's finality be kept far away.

Theognis 837–40

Two demons of drink beset wretched mortals,  
enfeebling thirst and harsh drunkenness.  
I'll steer a middle course between them and you won't persuade me  
either not to drink or to drink too much.