

Classic Poetry Series

# **Pablius Papinius Statius**

## **- poems -**

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## Pablius Papinius Statius(45 - 96)

Statius was a Latin poet, born in Naples in 45 AD. His father, a Greek and a teacher of rhetoric, immigrated to Naples in the first half of the first century. Statius was something of a child prodigy, quickening rising to fame as a poet. Since his father taught members of the senatorial class, his skills became known to the upper classes.

From his boyhood he had won many poetic contests in Naples, three times in Alba, where he received the golden crown from the hand of the emperor Domitian. But, in 94 AD at the great Capitoline competition Statius failed to win the coveted chaplet of oak leaves. No doubt the extraordinary popularity of his *Thebais* had led him to regard himself as the supreme poet of the age, and when he could not sustain this reputation in the face of rivals from all parts of the empire he accepted the judges verdict as a sign that his day was past, and retired to Naples. In a poem he addressed to his wife on this occasion there are hints that Statius was suffering from a loss of the emperors favor. He may have felt that a word from Domitian would have won for him the envied garland, and that the word ought to have been given. In the preface to the *Silvae* there is mention of detractors who hated Statius' style, and these may have succeeded in inducing a new fashion in poetry at court. He appears to have relished thoroughly the role of court-poet.

Statius' poetic expression is, with all its faults, richer on the whole and less forced and more buoyant than is to be found generally in the Silver Age of Latin poetry. Statius is at his best in his occasional verses, the *Silvae*, which have a character of their own, and in their best parts a charm of their own. There are thirty-two poems, divided into five books, each with a dedicatory epistle. Of nearly four thousand lines which the books contain, more than five-sixths are hexameters. The subjects of the *Silvae* are varied. Five poems are devoted to flattery of the emperor and his favorites. Six are lamentations for deaths, or consolations to survivors. Another group of the *Silvae* give picturesque descriptions of the villas and gardens of the poet's friends. In these we have a more vivid representation than elsewhere of the surroundings amid which the grandees of the early empire lived when they took up their abode in the country.

The epic poems of Statius are considered less interesting. They are the product of long elaboration. The *Thebais*, which the poet says took twelve years to compose, is in twelve books, and has for its theme the deadly strife of the Theban brothers. There is also preserved a fragment of an *Achilleis*, consisting of one book and part of another.

Statius died in Naples in AD 96 (estimated date)

# Ode To Sleep

Gentle divinity, how have I merited?  
Whither, unfortunate wretch, have I strayed,  
Thus of thy bounty to lie disenherited -  
I alone whilst every other is paid?  
Sleeping are cattle and birds without number,  
Beasts of the wilderness rest in their lair;  
Even the hills, as if weary, feign slumber,  
Even the torment sighs soft in the air.

Lulled are the shuttering waves of the ocean,  
Seas in the lap of the land lie at peace.  
Only for me in monotonous motion  
Day follows day, and there comes no release.

Moonlight & starlight & light of the morning  
Seven times flit o'er my feverish cheek.  
Once again Dawn's chilly hand offers warning.  
Whither, oh whither for rest shall I seek?

Had I the eyes of an Argus, nor heeded  
Ever to keep my whole body awake -  
Half of the sentries alone being needed -  
Still I could never my slumber-thirst slake.

Yet - if there's one in the arms of a lover  
Scornful of sleep and the joy that sleep brings,  
Come thou to me! I'll not ask thee to cover  
My eyes with the fullest extant of thy wings

Happier suitors may sue for such blessing,  
I'll beg a touch, be it ever so slight,  
Of thy wand, or a whisk of thy garment caressing  
My eyelids to droop as it crosses the night.

Pablius Papinius Statius

# Thebais - Book One - Part I

Fraternal rage, the guilty Thebes' alarms,  
Th' alternate reign destroyed by impious arms,  
Demand our song; a sacred fury fires  
My ravished breast, and all the muse inspires.  
O goddess, say, shall I deduce my rhymes  
From the dire nation in its early times,  
Europa's rape, Agenor's stern decree,  
And Cadmus searching round the spacious sea?  
How with the serpent's teeth he sowed the soil,  
And reaped an iron harvest of his toil?  
Or how from joining stones the city sprung,  
While to his harp divine Amphion sung?  
Or shall I Juno's hate to Thebes resound,  
Whose fatal rage th' unhappy monarch found?  
The sire against the son his arrows drew,  
O'er the wide fields the furious mother flew,  
And while her arms a second hope contain,  
Sprung from the rocks and plunged into the main.  
But waive whate'er to Cadmus may belong,  
And fix, O muse ! the barrier of thy song  
At Œdipus: from his disasters trace  
The long confusions of his guilty race:  
Nor yet attempt to stretch thy bolder wing,  
And mighty Cæsar's conqu'ring eagles sing;  
How twice he tamed proud Ister's rapid flood,  
While Dacian mountains streamed with barb'rous blood;  
Twice taught the Rhine beneath his laws to roll,  
And stretched his empire to the frozen pole;  
Or long before, with early valour, strove,  
In youthful arms, t' assert the cause of Jove.'  
And thou, great heir of all thy father's fame,  
Increase of glory to the Latian name,  
Oh ! bless thy Rome with an eternal reign,  
Nor let desiring worlds entreat in vain.  
What though the stars contract their heav'nly space,  
And crowd their shining ranks to yield thee place;  
Though all the skies, ambitious of thy sway,  
Conspire to court thee from our world away;  
Though Phœbus longs to mix his rays with thine,

And in thy glories more serenely shine;  
Though Jove himself no less content would be  
To part his throne and share his heaven with thee  
Yet stay, great Cæsar ! and vouchsafe to reign  
O'er the wide earth, and o'er the wat'ry main,  
Resign to Jove his empire of the skies,  
And people heav'n with Roman deities.  
The time will come, when a diviner flame  
Shall warm my breast to sing of Cæsar's fame:  
Meanwhile permit, that my preluding muse  
In Theban wars an humbler theme may chuse:  
Of furious hate surviving death, she sings,  
A fatal throne to two contending kings,  
And fun'ral flames that, parting wide in air,  
Express the discord of the souls they bear :  
Of towns dispeopled, and the wand'ring ghosts  
Of kings unburied in the wasted coasts;  
When Dirce's fountain blushed with Grecian blood,  
And Thetis, near Ismenos' swelling flood,  
With dread beheld the rolling surges sweep,  
In heaps, his slaughtered sons into the deep.  
What hero, Clie ! wilt thou first relate?  
The rage of Tydeus, or the prophet's fate?  
Or how, with hills of slain on ev'ry side,  
Hippomedon repelled the hostile tide  
Or how the youth with ev'ry grace adorned  
Untimely fell, to be for ever mourned?  
Then to fierce Capaneus thy verse extend,  
And sing with horror his prodigious end.  
Now wretched Œdipus, deprived of sight,  
Led a long death in everlasting night;  
But while he dwells where not a cheerful ray  
Can pierce the darkness, and abhors the day,  
The clear reflecting mind presents his sin  
In frightful views, and makes it day within;  
Returning thoughts in endless circles roll,  
And thousand furies haunt his guilty soul:  
The wretch then lifted to th' unpitying skies  
Those empty orbs from whence he tore his eyes,  
Whose wounds, yet fresh, with bloody hands he strook,  
'While from his breast these dreadful accents broke.  
"Ye gods ! that o'er the gloomy regions reign,

Where guilty spirits feel eternal pain;  
Thou, sable Styx ! whose livid streams are rolled  
Through dreary coasts, which I though blind behold:  
Tisiphone, that oft hast heard my pray'r,  
Assist, if Ædipus deserve thy care !  
If you received me from Jocasta's womb,  
And nursed the hope of mischiefs yet to come:  
If leaving Polybus, I took my way,  
To Cirrha's temple on that fatal day,  
When by the son the trembling father died,  
Where the three roads the Phocian fields divide:  
If I the Sphinx's riddles durst explain,  
Taught by thyself to win the promised reign:  
If wretched I, by baleful furies led,  
With monstrous mixture stained my mother's bed,  
For hell and thee begot an impious brood,  
And with full lust those horrid joys renewed;  
Then self-condemned to shades of endless night,  
Forced from these orbs the bleeding balls of sight:  
If worthy thee, and what thou mightst inspire.  
Oh hear ! and aid the vengeance I require,  
My sons their old, unhappy sire despise,  
Spoiled of his kingdom, and deprived of eyes;  
Guideless I wander, unregarded mourn,  
Whilst these exalt their sceptres o'er my urn;  
These sons, ye gods ! who with flagitious pride  
Insult my darkness, and my groans deride.  
Art thou a father, unregarding Jove !  
And sleeps thy thunder in the realms above?  
Thou fury, then some lasting curse entail,  
Which o'er their children's children shall prevail :  
Place on their heads that crown distained with gore,  
Which these dire hands from my slain father tore;  
Go ! and a parent's heavy curses bear;  
Break all the bonds of nature, and. prepare  
Their kindred souls to mutual hate and war.  
Give them to dare, what I might wish to see  
Blind as I am, some glorious villainy !  
Soon shalt thou find, if thou but arm their hands,  
Their ready guilt preventing thy commands:  
Couldst thou some great, proportioned mischief frame,  
They'd prove the father from whose loins they came."

The fury heard, while on Cocytus' brink  
Her snakes untied, sulphureous waters drink;  
But at the summons rolled her eyes around,  
And snatched the starting serpents from the ground.  
Not half so swiftly shoots along in air  
The gliding lightning, or descending star.  
Through crowds of airy shades she winged her flight,  
And dark dominions of the silent night;  
Swift as she passed the flitting ghosts withdrew,  
And the pale spectres trembled at her view:  
To th' iron gates of Tænarus she flies,  
There spreads her dusky pinions to the skies.  
The day beheld, and sick'ning at the sight,  
Yelled her fair glories in the shades of night.  
Affrighted Atlas, on the distant shore,  
Trembled, and shook the heav'ns and gods he bore.  
Now from beneath Malea's airy height  
Aloft she sprung, and steered to Thebes her flight;  
With eager speed the well-known journey took,  
Nor here regrets the hell she late forsook.  
A hundred snakes her gloomy visage shade,  
A hundred serpents guard her horrid head,  
In her sunk eye-balls dreadful meteors glow:  
Such rays from Phœbe's bloody circle flow,  
When lab'ring with strong charms, she shoots from high  
A fiery gleam, and reddens all the sky.  
Blood stained her cheeks, and from her mouth there came  
Blue steaming poisons, and a length of flame:  
From ev'ry blast of her contagious breath  
Famine and drought proceed, and plagues, and death.

Pablius Papinius Statius



## Thebais - Book One - Part II

A robe obscene was o'er her shoulders thrown,  
A dress by fates and furies worn alone. us  
She tossed her meagre arms; her better hand'  
In waving circles whirled a fun'ral brand:  
A serpent from her left was seen to rear  
His flaming crest, and lash the yielding air.  
But when the fury took her stand on high, too  
Where vast Oitheron's top salutes the sky,  
A hiss from all the snaky tire went round:  
The dreadful signal all the rocks rebound,  
And through th' Aobaian cities send the sound.  
Æte, with high Parnassus, heard the voice;  
Eurotas' banks remurmured to the noise;.   
Again Leucothea shook at these alarms,  
And pressed Palæmon closer in her arms.  
Headlong from thence the glowing fury springs,  
And o'er the Theban palace spreads her wings,  
Once more invades the guilty dome, and shrouds  
Its bright pavilions in a veil of clouds.  
Straight with the rage of all their race possessed  
Stung to the soul, the brothers start from rest,  
And all their furies wake within their breast.  
Their tortured minds repining envy tears,  
And hate, engendered by suspicious fears;  
And sacred thirst of sway; and all the ties  
Of nature broke; and royal perjuries;  
And impotent desire to reign alone,  
That scorns the dull reversion of a throne;  
Each would the sweets of sov'reign rule devour,  
While discord waits upon divided power.  
As stubborn steers by brawny plowmen broke,  
And joined reluctant to the galling yoke,  
Alike disdain with servile necks to bear  
Th' unwonted weight, or drag the crooked share,  
But rend the reins, and bound a diff'rent way,  
And all the furrows in confusion lay:  
Such was the discord of the royal pair,  
Whom fury drove precipitate to war.  
In vain the chiefs contrived a specious way,

To govern Thebes by their alternate sway:  
Unjust decree ! while this enjoys the state,  
That mourns in exile his unequal fate,  
And the short monarch of a hasty year  
Foresees with anguish his returning heir.  
Thus did the league their impious arms restrain,  
But scarce subsisted to the second reign.  
Yet then, no proud aspiring piles were raised,  
No fretted roofs with polished metals blazed;  
No laboured columns in long order placed,  
No Grecian stone the pompous arches graced;  
No nightly bands in glitt'ring armour wait  
Before the sleepless tyrant's guarded gate;  
No chargers then were wrought in burnished gold,  
Nor silver vases took the forming mold;  
Nor gems on bowls embossed were seen to shine,  
Blaze on the brims, and sparkle in the wine.  
Say, wretched rivals ! what provokes your rage?  
Say, to what end your impious arms engage?  
Not all bright Phœbus views in early morn,  
Or when his ev'ning beams the west adorn,  
When the south glows with his meridian ray,  
And the cold north receives a fainter day;  
For crimes like these, not all those realms suffice,  
Were all those realms the guilty victor's prize !  
But fortune now (the lots of empire thrown)  
Decrees to proud Eteocles the crown:  
What joys, oh tyrant ! swelled thy soul that day,  
When all were slaves thou couldst around survey,  
Pleased to behold unbounded power thy own,  
And singly fill a feared and envied throne !  
But the vile vulgar, ever discontent,  
Their growing fears in secret murmurs vent;  
Still prone to change, though still the slaves of state,  
And sure the monarch whom they have, to hate;  
New lords they madly make, then tamely bear,  
And softly curse tile tyrants whom they fear.  
And one of those who groan beneath the sway  
Of kings imposed, and grudgingly obey,  
(Whom envy to the great, and vulgar spite  
With scandal armed, th' ignoble mind's delight,)  
Exclaimed-" O Thebes ! for thee what fates remain,

What woes attend this inauspicious reign?  
Must we, alas ! our doubtful necks prepare,  
Each haughty master's yoke by turns to bear,  
And still to change whom changed we still must fear?  
These now control a wretched people's fate,  
These can divide, and these reverse the state:  
Ev'n fortune rules no more !-O servile land,  
Where exiled tyrants still by turns command.  
Thou sire of gods and men, imperial Jove !  
Is this th' eternal doom decreed above?  
On thy own offspring hast thou fixed this fate,  
From the first birth of our unhappy state;  
When banished Cadmus, wand'ring o'er the main,  
For lost Europa searched the world in vain,  
And fated in Bœotian fields to found  
A rising empire on a foreign ground,  
First raised our walls on that ill-omened plain,  
Where earth-born brothers were by brothers slain?  
What lofty looks th' unrivalled monarch bears !  
How all the tyrant in his face appears !  
What sullen fury clouds his scornful brow !  
Gods ! how his eyes with threat'ning ardour glow !  
Can this imperious lord forget to reign,  
Quit all his state, descend, and serve again?  
Yet, who, before, mere popularly bowed?  
Who more propitious to the suppliant crowd?  
Patient of right, familiar in the throne?  
What wonder then? he was not then alone.  
O wretched we, a vile, submissive train,  
Fortune's tame fools, and slaves in ev'ry reign !  
As when two winds with rival force contend,  
This way and that, the wav'ring sails they bend,  
While freezing Boreas, and black Eurus blow,  
Now here, now there, tho reeling vessel throw:  
Thus on each side, alas ! our tott'ring state  
Feels all the fury of resistless fate,  
And doubtful still, and still distracted stands,  
While that prince threatens, and while this commands."  
And now th' almighty father of the gods  
Convenes a council in the blest abodes:  
Far in the bright recesses of the skies,  
high o'er the rolling heav'ns, a mansion lies,

Whence, far below, the gods at once survey  
The realms of rising and declining day,  
And all lii' extended space of earth, and air, and sea.  
Full in the midst, and on a starry throne,  
The majesty of heav'n superior shone;  
Serene he looked, and gave an awful nod,  
And all the trembling spheres confessed the god.  
At Jove's assent the deities around  
In solemn state the consistory crowned.  
Next a long order of inferior pow'rs  
Ascend from hills, and plains, and shady bow'rs;  
Those from whose urns the rolling rivers flow;  
And those that give the wand'ring winds to blow:  
Here all their rage, and ev'n their murmurs cease,  
And sacred silence reigns, and universal peace.  
A shining synod of majestic gods  
Gilds with new lustre the divine abodes;  
Heav'n seems improved with a superior ray,  
And the bright arch reflects a double day.  
The monarch then his solemn silence broke,  
The still creation listened while he spoke,  
Each sacred accent bears eternal weight,  
And each irrevocable word is fate.  
"How long shall man the wrath of heav'n defy,  
And force unwilling vengeance from the sky!

Pablius Papinius Statius

## Thebais - Book One - Part Iii

Oh race confed'rate into crimes, that prove  
Triumphant o'er th' eluded rage of Jove!  
This wearied arm can scarce the bolt sustain,  
And unregarded thunder rolls in vain:  
Th' o'erlaboured Cyclops from his task retires,  
Th' Æolian forge exhausted of its fires.  
For this, I suffered Phœbus' steeds to stray,  
And the mad ruler to misguide the day;  
When the wide earth to heaps of ashes turned,  
And heaven itself the wand'ring chariot burned.  
For this, my brother of the wat'ry reign  
Released th' impetuous sluices of the main:  
But flames consumed, and billows raged in vain.  
Two races now, allied to Jove, offend;  
To punish these, see Jove himself descend.  
The Theban kings their line from Cadmus trace,  
From godlike Perseus those of Argive race.  
Unhappy Cadmus' fate who does not know,  
And the long series of succeeding woe?  
How oft the furies, from the deeps of night,  
Arose, and mixed with men in mortal fight:  
Th' exulting mother, stained with filial blood;  
The savage hunter and the haunted wood;  
The direful banquet why should I proclaim,  
And crimes that grieve the trembling gods to name?  
Ere I recount the sins of these profane,  
The sun would sink into the western main,  
And rising, gild the radiant east again.  
Have we not seen (the blood of Laius shed)  
The murd'ring son ascend his parent's bed,  
Through violated nature force his way,  
And stain the sacred womb where once lie lay?  
Yet now in darkness and despair he groans,  
And for the crimes of guilty fate atones.  
His sons with scorn their eyeless father view,  
Insult his wounds, and make them bleed anew.  
Thy curse, oh Ædipus, just heav'n alarms,  
And sets th' avenging thunderer in arms.  
I from the root thy guilty race will tear,

And give the nations to the waste of war.  
Adrastus soon, with gods averse, shall join  
In dire alliance with the Theban line  
Hence strife shall rise, and mortal war succeed;  
The guilty realms of Tantalus shall bleed;  
Fixed is their doom; this all-rememb'ring breast  
Yet harbours vengeance for the tyrant's feast."  
He said; and thus the queen of heav'n returned;  
(With sudden grief her lab'ring bosom burned)  
"Must I, whose cares Phoroneus' tow'rs defend,  
Must I, oh Jove, in bloody wars contend?  
Thou know'st those regions my protection claim,  
Glorious in arms, in riches, and in fame:  
Though there the fair Egyptian heifer fed,  
And there deluded Argus slept, and bled;  
Though there the brazen tower was stormed of old,  
When Jove descended in almighty gold:  
Yet I can pardon those obscurer rapes,  
Those bashful crimes disguised in borrowed shapes;  
But Thebes, witero shining in colostial charms  
Thou cam'st triumphant to a mortal's arms,  
When all my glories o'er her limbs were spread,  
And blazing light'nings danced around her bed;  
Cursed Thebes the vengeance it deserves, may prove:  
Ah why should Argos feel the rage of Jove?  
Yet since thou wilt thy sister-queen control,  
Since still the lust of discord fires thy soul,  
Go, raze my Samos, let Mycene fall,  
And level with the dust the Spartan wall;  
No more let mortals Juno's pow'r invoke,  
Her fanes no more with eastern incense smoke,  
Nor victims sink beneath the sacred stroke;  
But to your Isis all my rites transfer,  
Let altars blaze and temples smoke for her;  
For her, through Egypt's fruitful clime renowned  
Let weeping Nilus hear the timbrel sound.  
But if thou must reform the stubborn times,  
Avenging on the sons the father's crimes,  
And from the long records of distant age  
Derive incitements to renew thy rage;  
Say, from what period then has Jove designed  
To date his vengeance; to what bounds confined?

Begin from thence, where first Alpheus hides  
His wand'ring stream, and through the briny tides  
Unmixed to his Sicilian river glides.  
Thy own Arcadians there the thunder claim,  
Whose impious rites disgrace thy mighty name;  
Who raise thy temples where the chariot stood  
Of fierce Ænomaus, defiled with blood:  
Where once his steeds their savage banquet found,  
And human bones yet whiten all the ground.  
Say, can those honours please; and canst thou love  
Presumptuous Crete that boasts the tomb of Jove?  
And shall not Tantalus's kingdoms share  
Thy wife and sister's tutelary care?  
Reverse, O Jove, thy too severe decree,  
Nor doom to war a race derived from thee;  
On impious realms and barb'rous kings impose  
Thy plagues, and curse 'em with such sons as those."  
Thus, in reproach and pray'r, the queen expressed  
The rage and grief contending in her breast;  
Unmoved remained the ruler of the sky,  
And from his throne returned this stern reply:  
"Twas thus I deemed thy haughty soul would bear  
The dire, though just, revenge which I prepare  
Against a nation thy peculiar care:  
No less Dione might for Thebes contend,  
Nor Ilacehus less his native town defend;  
Yet these in silence see the fates fulfil  
Their work, and rev'rence our superior will.

Pablius Papinius Statius

## Thebais - Book One - Part Iv

For by the black infernal Styx I swear,  
(That dreadful oath which binds the thunderer)  
'Tis fixed; th' irrevocable doom of Jove;  
No force can bend me, no persuasion move.  
haste then, Cyllenius, through the liquid air;  
Go, mount the winds, and to the shades repair;  
Bid hell's black monarch my commands obey,  
And give up Laius to the realms of day,  
Whose ghost yet shiv'ring on Cocytus' sand,  
Expects its passage to the further strand:  
Let the pale sire revisit Thebes, and bear  
These pleasing orders to the tyrant's ear;  
That from his exiled brother, swelled with pride  
Of foreign forces, and his Argive bride,  
Almighty Jove commands him to detain  
The promised empire, and alternate reign:  
Be this the cause of more than mortal hate:  
The rest, succeeding times shall ripen into fate."  
The god obeys, and to his feet applies  
Those golden wings that cut the yielding skies.  
His ample hat his beamy locks o'erspread,  
And veiled the starry glories of his head.  
He seized the wand that causes sleep to fly,  
Or in soft slumbers seals the wakeful eye;  
That drives the dead to dark Tartarcan coasts,  
Or back to life compels the wand'ring ghosts.  
Thus, through the parting clouds, the son of May  
Wings on the whistling winds his rapid way;  
Now smoothly steers through air his equal flight,  
Now springs aloft, and tow'rs th' ethereal height;  
Then wheeling down the steep of heav'n he flies,  
And draws a radiant circle o'er the skies.  
Meantime the banished Polynices roves  
(his Thebes abandoned through th' Aonian groves,  
While future realms his wand'ring thoughts delight,  
His daily vision and his dream by night;  
Forbidden Thebes appears before his eye,  
From whence he sees his absent brother fly,  
With transport views the airy rule his own,



And swells on an imaginary throne.  
Fain would he cast a tedious age away,  
And live out all in one triumphant day.  
He chides the lazy progress of the sun,  
And bids the year with swifter motion run.  
With anxious hopes his craving mind is tost,  
And all his joys in length of wishes lost.  
The hero then resolves his course to bend  
Where ancient Danaus' fruitful fields extend,  
And famed Mycene's lofty towers ascend,  
(Where late the sun did Atreus' crimes detest,  
And disappeared in horror of the feast.)  
And now by chance, by fate, or furies led,  
From Bacehus' consecrated caves he fled,  
Where the shrill cries of frantic matrons sound,  
And Pentheus' blood enriched the rising ground.  
Then sees Cithaeron tow'ring o'er the plain,  
And thence declining gently to the main.  
Next to the bounds of Nisus' realm repairs,  
Where treach'rous Scylla cut the purple hairs :  
The hanging cliffs of Sciron's rock explores,  
And hears the murmurs of the diff'rent shores:  
Passes the strait that parts the foaming seas,  
And stately Corinth's pleasing site surveys.  
'Twas now the time when Phœbus yields to night,  
And rising Cynthia sheds her silver light,  
Wide o'er the world in solemn pomp she drew  
Her airy chariot hung with pearly dew;  
All birds and beasts lie hushed; sleep steals away  
The wild desires of men, and toils of day,  
And brings, descending through the silent air,  
A sweet forgetfulness of human care.  
Yet no red clouds, with golden borders gay,  
Promise the skies the bright return of day;  
No faint reflections of the distant light  
Streak with long gleams the scatt'ring shades of night:  
From the damp earth impervious vapours rise,  
Encrease the darkness, and involve the skies.  
At once the rushing winds with roaring sound  
Burst from th' Æolian caves, and rend the ground,  
With equal rage their airy quarrel try,  
And win by turns the kingdom of the sky:

But with a thicker night black Auster shrouds  
The heav'ns, and drives on heaps the rolling clouds,  
From whose dark womb a rattling tempest pours,  
Which the cold north congeals to haily show'rs.  
From pole to pole the thunder roars aloud,  
And broken lightnings flash from ev'ry cloud.  
Now smoaks with show'rs the misty mountain-ground,  
And floated fields lie undistinguished round.  
Th' Inachian streams with headlong fury run,  
And Erasmus rolls a deluge on:  
The foaming Lerna swells above its bounds,  
And spreads its ancient poisons o'er the grounds:  
Where late was dust, now rapid torrents play,  
Rush through the mounds, and bear the dams away:  
Old limbs of trees from crackling forests torn,  
Are whirled in air, and on the winds are borne:  
The storm the dark Lycæan groves displayed,  
And first to light exposed the sacred shade.  
Th' intrepid Theban hears the bursting sky,  
Sees yawning rocks in massy fragments fly,  
And views astonished, from the hills afar,  
The floods descending, and the wat'ry war,  
That, driv'n by storms, and pouring o'er the plain,  
Swept herds, and hinds, and houses to the main.  
Through the brown horrors of the night he fled,  
Nor knows, amazed, what doubtful path to tread;  
His brother's image to his mind appears,  
Inflames his heart with rage, and wings his feet with fears.  
So fares a sailor on the stormy main,  
When clouds conceal Boötes' golden warn,  
When not a star its friendly lustre keeps,  
Nor trembling Cynthia glimmers on the deeps;  
He dreads the rocks, and shoals, and seas, and skies,  
While thunder roars, and lightning round him flies.  
Thus strove the chief, on every side distressed,  
Thus still his courage, with his toils increased;  
With his broad shield opposed, he forced his way  
Through thickest woods, and roused the beasts of prey,  
Till he beheld, where from Larissa's height  
The shelving walls reflect a glancing light:  
Thither with haste the Theban hero flies;  
On this side Lerna's pois'nous water lies,

On that Prosymna's grove and temple rise :  
lie passed the gates, which then unguarded lay,  
And to the regal palace bent his way;  
On the cold marble, spent with toil, he lies,  
And waits till pleasing slumbers seal his eyes.  
Adrastus here his happy people sways,  
Blest with calm peace in his declining days;  
By both his parents of descent divine,  
Great Jove and Phœbus graced his noble line:  
Heaven had not crowned his wishes with a son,  
But two fair daughters heired his state and throne.  
To him Apollo (wondrous to relate !  
But who can pierce into the depths of fate?)  
Had sung-"Expect thy sons on Argos' shore,  
"A yellow lion and a bristly boar."  
This long revolved in his paternal breast,  
Sate heavy on his heart, and broke his rest;  
This, great Amphiaraus, lay hid from thee,  
Though skilled in fate, and dark futurity.  
The father's care and prophet's art were vain,  
For thus did the predicting god ordain.  
Lo hapless Tydeus, whose ill-fated hand  
Had slain his brother, leaves his native land,  
And seized with horror in the shades of night,  
Through the thick deserts headlong urged his flight:  
Now by the fury of the tempest driv'n,  
He seeks a shelter from th' inclement heav'n,  
Till, led by fate, the Theban's steps he treads,  
And to fair Argos' open court succeeds.  
When thus the chiefs from diff'rent lands resort  
T' Adrastus' realms, and hospitable court;  
The king surveys his guests with curious eyes,  
And views their arms and habit with surprise.  
A lion's yellow skin the Theban wears,  
horrid his mane, and rough with curling hairs;  
Such once employed Alcides' youthful toils,  
Ere yet adorned with Nemea's dreadful spoils.  
A boar's stiff hide, of Calydonian breed,  
Cœnides' manly shoulders overspread.  
Oblique his tusks, erect his bristles stood,  
Alive, the pride and terror of the wood.  
Struck with the sight, and fixed in deep amaze,

The King th' accomplished oracle surveys,  
Reveres Apollo's vocal caves, and owns  
The guiding godhead, and his future sons.  
O'er all his bosom secret transports reign,  
And a glad horror shoots through ev'ry vein.  
To heav'n he lifts his hands, erects his sight,  
And thus invokes the silent queen of night.  
"Goddess of shades, beneath whose gloomy reign  
You spangled arch glows with the starry train:  
You who the cares of heav'n and earth allay,  
Till nature quickened by th' inspiring ray  
Wakes to new vigour with the rising day:  
Oh thou who freest me from my doubtful state,  
Long lost aid wildered in the maze of fate !  
Be present still, oh goddess ! in our aid;  
Proceed, and firms those omens thou hast made.  
We to thy name our annual rites will pay,  
And on thy altars sacrifices lay;  
The sable flock shall fall beneath the stroke,  
And fill thy temples with a grateful smoke.  
Hail, faithful Tripos ! hail, ye dark abodes  
Of awful Phœbus: I confess the gods!"  
Thus, seized with sacred fear, the monarch prayed;  
Then to his inner court the guests conveyed;  
Where yet thin fumes from dying sparks arise,  
And dust yet white upon each altar lies,  
The relics of a former sacrifice.

Pablius Papinius Statius

## Thebais - Book One - Part V

The king once more the solemn rites requires,  
And bids renew the feasts, and wake the fires.  
his train obey, while all the courts around  
With noisy care and various tumult sound.  
Embroidered purple clothes the golden beds;  
This slave the floor, and that the table spreads;  
A third dispels the darkness of the night,  
And fills depending lamps with beams of light.  
Here loaves in canisters are piled on high,  
And there in flames the slaughtered victims fry.  
Sublime in regal state Adrastus shone,  
Stretched on rich carpets on his iv'ry throne;  
A lofty couch receives each princely guest;  
Around, at awful distance, wait the rest.  
And now the king, his royal feast to grace,  
Acestis calls, the guardian of his race,  
Who first their youth in arts of virtue trained,  
And their ripe years in modest grace maintained;  
Then softly whispered in her faithful ear,  
And bade his daughters at the rites appear.  
When from the close apartments of the night,  
The royal nymphs approach divinely bright;  
Such was Diana's, such Minerva's face;  
Nor shine their beauties with superior grace,  
But that in these a milder charm endears,  
And less of terror in their looks appears.  
As on the heroes first they cast their eyes,  
O'er their fair cheeks the glowing blushes rise,  
Their downcast looks a decent shame confessed,  
Then on their father's rev'rend features rest.  
The banquet done, the monarch gives the sign  
To fill the goblet high with sparkling wine,  
Which Danaus used in sacred rites of old,  
With sculpture graced, and rough with rising gold.  
Here to the clouds victorious Persons flies,  
Medusa seems to move her languid eyes,  
And, ev'n in gold, turns paler as she dies.  
There from the chace Jove's tow'ring eagle bears,  
On golden wings, the Phrygian to the stars:

Still as he rises in th' ethereal height,  
His native mountains lessen to his sight;  
While all his sad companionous upward gaze,  
Fixed on the glorious scene in wild amaze;  
And the swift hounds, affrighted as he flies,  
Run to the shade, and bark against the skies.  
This golden bowl with gen'rous juice was crowned,  
The first libations sprinkled on the ground,  
By turns on each celestial pow'r they call;  
With Phœbus' name resounds the vaulted hail.  
The courtly train, the strangers, and the rest,  
Crowned with chaste laurel, and with garlands dressed,  
While with rich gums the fuming altars blaze,  
Salute the god in num'rous hymns of praise.  
Then thus the king: "Perhaps, my noble guests,  
These honoured altars, end these annual feasts  
To bright Apollo's awful name designed,  
Unknown, with wonder may perplex your mind.  
Great was the cause; our old solemnities  
From no blind zeal, or fond tradition rise;  
But saved from death, our Argives yearly pay  
These grateful honours to the god of day.  
"When by a thousand darts the Python slain  
With orbs unrolled lay cov'ring all the plain,  
(Transfixed as o'er Castalia's streams he hung,  
And sucked new poisons with his triple tongue)  
To Argos' realms the victor god resorts,  
And enters old Crotopus' humble courts.  
This rural prince one only daughter blest,  
That all the charms of blooming youth possessed;  
Fair was her face, and spotless was her mind,  
Where filial love with virgin sweetness joined.  
Happy ! and happy still she might have proved,  
Were she less beautiful, or less beloved !  
But Phœbus loved, and on the flow'ry side  
Of Nemea's stream, the yielding fair enjoyed:  
Now, ere ten moons their orb with light adorn,  
Th' illustrious offspring of the god was born;  
The nymph, her father's anger to evade,  
Retires from Argos to the sylvan shade;  
To woods and wilds the pleasing burden bears,  
And trusts her infant to a shepherd's cares.

"How mean a fate, unhappy child ! is thine?  
Ah how unworthy those of race divine?  
On flow'ry herbs in some green covert laid,  
His bed the ground, his canopy the shade,'  
He mixes with the bleating lambs his cries,  
While the rude swain his rural music tries  
To call soft slumbers on his infant eyes.  
Yet ev'n in those obscure abodes to live,  
Was more, alas ! than cruel fate would give,  
For on the grassy verdure as he lay,  
And breathed the freshness of the early day,  
Devouring dogs the helpless infant tore,  
Fed on his trembling limbs, and lapped the gore.  
Th' astonished mother, when the rumour came,  
Forgets her father, and neglects her fame;  
With loud complaints she fills the yielding air,  
And beats her breast, and rends her flowing hair;  
Then wild with anguish to her sire she flies:  
Demands the sentence, and contented dies.  
"But touched with sorrow for the dead too late,  
The raging god prepares t' avenge her fate.  
He sends a monster, horrible and fell,  
Begot by furies in the depths of hell.  
On me, on me, let all thy fury fall,  
Nor err from me, since I deserve it all:  
Unless our desert cities please thy sight,  
Or fun'ral flames reflect a grateful light.  
Discharge thy shafts, this ready bosom rend,  
And to the shades a ghost triumphant send;  
But for my country let my fate atone,  
Be mine the vengeance, as the crime my own.  
"Merit distressed, impartial heav'n relieves:  
Unwelcome life relenting Phœbus gives;  
For not the vengeful pow'r, that glowed with rage,  
With such amazing virtue durst engage.  
The clouds dispersed, Apollo's wrath expired,  
And from the wond'ring god th' unwilling youth retired.  
Thence we these altars in his temple raise,  
And offer annual honours, feasts, and praise;  
These solemn feasts propitious Phœbus please;  
These honours, still renewed, his ancient wrath appease."  
"But say, illustrious guest," adjoined the king,

"What name you bear, from what high race you spring?

The noble Tydeus stands confessed, and known

Our neighbour prince, and heir of Calydon.

Relate your fortunes, while the friendly night

And silent hours to various talk invite."

The Theban bends on earth his gloomy eyes,

Confused, and sadly thus at length replies:

"Before these altars how shall I proclaim,

O gen'rous prince! my nation, or my name,

Or through what ancient veins our blood has rolled?

Let the sad tale for ever rest untold!

Yet if propitious to a wretch unknown,

You seek to share in sorrows not your own;

Know, then, from Cadmus I derive my race,

Jocasta's son, and Thebes my native place."

To whom the king (who felt his gen'rous breast

Touched with concern for his unhappy guest)

Replies: "Ah! why forbears the son to name

His wretched father, known too well by fame?

Fame, that delights around the world to stray,

Scorns not to take our Argos in her way.

Ev'n those who dwell where sans at distance roll,

In northern wilds, and freeze beneath the pole;

And those who tread the burning Lybian lands,

The faithless Syrtes and the moving sands;

'Who view the western sea's extremest bounds,

Or drink of Ganges in their eastern grounds;

All these the woes of Ædipus have known,

Your fates, your furies, and your haunted town.

If on the sons the parents' crimes descend,

What prince from those his lineage can defend?

Be this thy comfort, that 'tis thine t' efface,

With virtuous acts, thy ancestor's disgrace,

And be thyself the honour of thy race.

But see! the stars begin to steal away,

And shine more faintly at approaching day;

Now pour the wine; and in your tuneful lays

Once more resound the great Apollo's praise."

"O father Phœbus ! whether Lycia's coast

And snowy mountain, thy bright presence boast;

Whether to Sweet Castalia thou repair,

And bathe in silver dew thy yellow hair;



Or pleased to find fair Delos float no more,  
Delight in Cynthus, and the shady shore;  
Or choose thy seat in Ilion's proud abodes,  
The shining structures raised by lab'ring gods;  
By thee the bow and mortal shafts are borne;  
Eternal charms thy blooming youth adorn:  
Skilled in the laws of secret fate above,  
And the dark counsels of almighty Jove,  
'Tis thine the seeds of future war to know,  
The change of sceptres, and impending woe,  
When direful meteors spread, through glowing air,  
Long trails of light, and shake their blazing hair.  
Thy rage the Phrygian felt, who durst aspire  
T' excel the music of thy heav'nly lyre;  
Thy shafts avenged lewd Tityus' guilty flame,  
Th' immortal victim of thy mother's fame;  
Thy hand slew Python, and the dame who lost  
Her num'rous offspring for a fatal boast.  
In Phlegyas' doom thy just revenge appears,  
Condemned to furies and eternal fears;  
He views his food, but dreads, with lifted eye,  
The mould'ring rock that trembles from on high.  
"Propitious hear our prayer, O pow'r divine !  
And on thy hospitable Argos shine;  
Whether the style of Titan please thee more,  
Whose purple rays th' Achæmenes adore;  
Or great Osiris, who first taught the swain  
In Pharian fields to sow the golden grain;  
Or Mitra, to whose beams the Persian bows,  
And pays, in hollow rocks, his awful vows;  
Mitra, whose head the blaze of light adorns,  
Who grasps the struggling heifer's lunar horns."

Pablius Papinius Statius

## Thebais - Book Two

Now Jove's Command fulfill'd, the Son of May  
Quits the black Shades and slowly mounts to Day.  
For lazy Clouds in gloomy Barriers rise,  
Obstruct the God, and intercept the Skies;  
No Zephyrs here their airy pinions move,  
To spread his progress to the Realms above.  
Scarce can he steer his dark laborious Flight,  
Lost and encumber'd in the Damps of Night:  
There roaring Tides of Fire his Course withstood,  
Here Styx in nine wide Circles roll'd his Flood.  
Behind old Laius trod th' infernal Ground,  
Trembling with Age, and tardy from his Wound;  
(For all his Force his furious Son apply'd,  
And plung'd the guilty Faulchion in his Side.)  
Propt and supported by the healing Rod,  
The Shade pursued the Footsteps of the God.  
The Groves that never bloom; the Stygian Coasts,  
The House of Woe; the Mansions of Ghosts,  
Earth too admires to see the Ground give way,  
And gild Hell's Horrors with the Gleams of Day.  
But not with Life repining Envy fled,  
She still reigns there, and lives among the Dead.  
One from this Crowd exclaim'd, (whose lawless Will  
Inur'd to Crimes, and exercis'd in Ill,  
Taught his prepost'rous Joys from Pains to flow,  
And never triumph'd, but in Scenes of Woe)  
Go to thy Province in the Realms above,  
Call'd by the Furies or the Will of Jove:  
Or drawn by Magick Force or Mystick Spell,  
Rise, and purge off the sooty Gloom of Hell.  
Go, see the Sun, and whiten in his Beams,  
Or haunt the flow'ry Fields and limpid Streams,  
With Woes redoubled to return again,  
When thy past pleasures shall enhance thy Pain.  
Now by the Stygian Dog they bent their Way;  
Stretch'd in his Den the dreadful Monster lay;  
But lay not long, for startling at the Sound,  
Head above Head he rises from the Ground.  
from their close Folds his startling Serpents break,

And curlin horrid Circles round his Neck.  
This saw the God, and stretching forth his Hand,  
Lull'd the grim Monster with his potent Want  
Thro' his vast Bulk the gliding Slumbers creep,  
And sent down all his glaring Eyes in Sleep.  
There lies a Place in Greece well known to Fame,  
Thro' all her Realms, and Tænarus the Name,  
Where from the Sea the Tops of Malea rise,  
Beyond the Ken of Mortals, to the Skies:  
Proud in his Height he calmly hears below  
The distant Winds in hollow Murmurs blow.  
Here sleep the Storms when weary'd and opprest,  
And on his Head the drowsy Planets rest:  
There in blue Mists his rocky Sides he shrouds,  
Ane here the tow'ring Mountain props the Clouds.  
Above his awfu Brow no Bird can fly,  
And far beneath the mutt'rung Thunders die.  
When down the Steep of Heav'n the Day descends,  
The Sun so wide his floating Bound extends,  
That o'er the Deeps the Mountain hangs display'd  
And covers half the Ocean with his Shade:  
Where the Tænarian Shores oppose the Sea,  
The Land retreats, and winds into a Bay.  
Here for Repose Inperian Neptune leads,  
Tir'd from th' Ægean Floods, his smoaking Steeds;  
With their broad Hoofs they scoop the Beach away,  
Their finny Train rolls back, and floats along the Sea.  
Here Fame reports th' unbody'd Shades to go  
Thro' this wide Passage to the Realms below.  
From hence the peasants, (As th' Arcadians tell,)  
Hear all the Cries, and Groans, and Din of Hell.  
Oft, as her Scourge of Snakes and Fury plies,  
The piercing Echoes mount the distant Skies;  
Scar'd at the Porter's triple Roar, the Swains  
Have fled astonish'd, and forsook the Plains.  
From hence emergent in a mantling Cloud  
Sprung to his native Skies the winged God.  
Swift from his Face before th' Ethereal Ray,  
Flew all the black Tartarean Strains away,  
And the dark Stygian Gloom refin'd to Day.  
O'er the Towns and Realms he held his Progress on,  
Now wing'd the Skies where bright Arcturus shone,

And now the silent Empire of the Moon.  
The Pow'r of Sleep, who met his radiant Flight,  
And drove the solemn Chariot of the Night,  
Rode with respect and from th' empyreal Road  
Turned his pale Steeds, in reverence to the God.  
The Shade beneath pursues his Course, and spies  
The well-known Planets, and congenial Skies.  
His Eyes from far, tall Cyrrha's Heights explore,  
And Phocian Fields polluted with his Gore.  
At length to Thebes he came, and with a Groan  
Survey'd the guilty Palace on his own;  
With awful Silence stalk'd before the Gate,  
But when he saw the Trophies of his fate,  
High on a Column rais'd against the Door,  
And his rich Chariot still deform'd with Gore,  
He starts with horror back; ev'n Jove's Command  
could scarce controul him, nor the vital Wand.

Pablius Papinius Statius