

natura uersa: (Un)natural Law in Statius' Thebaid

1) Statius *Thebaid* 12.642-648

‘terrarum leges et mundi foedera mecum
defensura manus, dignas insumite mentes
coeptibus. hac omnem diuumque hominumque
fauorem

Naturamque ducem coetusque silentis Auerni 645
stare palam est: illac Poenarum exercita Thebis
agmina, et anguicomae ducunt uexilla Sorores.
ite alacres tantaeque precor confidite causae.’

‘Soldiers about to defend with me the laws of the earth and the laws of the universe, make your minds worthy of such beginnings. It is clear that here stands the entire favor of the gods and men and **natura as our leader** and the crowds of silent Avernus. Over there, the soldiers of the *Poenae* trained at Thebes and snake-haired sisters lead their banners. Go quickly and, I beg, trust in such a great cause.’

2) Seneca *De Vita Beata* 8.1

Natura enim duce utendum est; hanc ratio observat,
hanc consulit. Idem est ergo beate uiuere et
secundum naturam.

For we must use *natura* as our guide; reason heeds and consults *natura*. Therefore, it is the same thing to live happily and to follow *natura*.

3) Seneca *Phaedra* 478-482

[iam petimus ultro.] caelibem uitam probet
sterilis iuuentus: hoc erit, quidquid uides,
unius aevi turba et in semet ruet. 480
proinde vitae sequere **naturam ducem**:
urbem frequenta, civium **coetus** cole

And if our youth should be childless and choose a celibate life? Whatever you see, this will be it! Society will last one generation and will collapse on itself. So then, follow **natura as a guide** in life: frequent the city, cultivate the company of your fellow citizens.

4) Seneca *Phaedra* 171-177

miscere thalamos patris et gnati apparatus
uteroque **prolem** capere **confusam** impio?
perge et nefandis **uerte naturam** ignibus.
cur monstra cessant? aula cur fratris uacat?
prodigia totiens orbis insueta audiet, 175
natura totiens legibus cedit suis,
quotiens amabit Cressa?

Are you planning to mix the beds of father and son, to conceive a **confused offspring** in an unnatural womb? Go on, **overturn *natura*** with your wicked fires! Why do abominations hold back? Why is your brother's hall vacant? Will the world always hear of unnatural portents, will nature always abandon her laws when a Cretan woman loves?

5) Seneca *Phaedra* 959-960, 972-979

O magna parens, **natura**, deum
tuque igniferi rector olympi, 960
...
sed cur idem qui tanta regis,
sub quo uasti pondera mundi
librata suos ducunt orbis,
hominum nimium secures abes, 975
non sollicitus prodesse bonis,
nocuisse malis?
**res humanas ordine nullo
fortuna regit**

O **natura**, great mother of the gods and you, flame-bearing ruler of Olympus,

...
But why are you, who rule so much, under whom the balanced weights of the vast universe lead forth their orbits, absent and uncaring of humans, not bothered to help the good and harm the bad? **Fortune rules human affairs according to no order.**

6) Statius *Thebaid* 7.215-218

ast ego non proprio diros inpendo dolori 215
Oedipodionidas: rogat hoc tellusque polusque
et pietas et laesa fides **natura**que et ipsi
Eumenidum mores. [sed tu super urbe moueri]

However I am not expending the dread sons of
Oedipus because of my own pain: the earth and the
sky and devotion and injured loyalty and **natura** and
the customs of the Eumenides demand this.

7) Statius *Thebaid* 11.605-609

'tardane iam, Pietas, longo post tempore mentem 605
percutis? estne sub hoc hominis clementia corde?
uincis io miserum uincis, **Natura**, parentem.
en habeo gemitus lacrimaeque per arida serpunt
uulnera et in molles sequitur manus inopia planctus.'

Devotion, already too late after such a long time do
you strike my mind? Is there human mercy in this
heart? Oh! You conquer, **natura**, you conquer this
miserable father. See, I lament and tears slither
through my dry wounds and my wicked hand follows
after soft blows.

8) Statius *Thebaid* 11.617-622

[uota malae preces.] quisnam fuit ille deorum
qui stetit orantem iuxta praereptaque uerba
dictauit Fatis? **furor illa et mouit Erinys**
et pater et genetrix et regna oculique cadentes, 620
nil ego: per Ditem iuro dulcesque tenebras
inmeritamque ducem. [subeam sic Tartara digna]

Who was the god that stood by me declaring the
curse and taking my words to the fates? **Madness did
this and the Furies and my father and my mother
and my kingdom and my ruined eyes. I did
nothing!** This I swear by Dis and the sweet shadows
and my undeserved guide.

9) Seneca *Phaedra* 1114-1117

[et funeri confertur.] O nimium potens
quanto parentes sanguinis uinclo tenes, 115
natura, quam te colimus inuiti quoque:
occidere uolui noxium, amissum fleo.

Oh **natura**, too powerful, you hold parents with such
a bond of blood, you whom we worship unwillingly:
I wanted to kill my guilty son, but I lament his death.

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