

# Episode One Hundred Thirty-Seven - The Letter to Menoeceus 04 - On Death (Part Two)

Post by “Don” of September 2, 2022 at 7:36 AM

I can't remember which translation I saw Theognis footnoted for that line, but it was legit.

I certainly didn't uncover that as the source on my own 😊 and the word for word seems like a solid reason to accept it.

As for advocating that position, here's the context with his poem and an excerpt from the Wikipedia article:

He was capable of arresting imagery and memorable statements in the form of terse epigrams. Some of these qualities are evident in the following lines [425-8], considered to be "the classic formulation of Greek pessimism":

Πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον,

μηδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγὰς ὀξέος ἡελίου.

φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι

καὶ κεῖσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμησάμενον.

Best of all for mortal beings is never to have been born at all

Nor ever to have set eyes on the bright light of the sun

But, since he is born, a man should make utmost haste through the gates of Death

And then repose, the earth piled into a mound round himself.

The lines were much quoted in antiquity, as for example by Stobaeus and Sextus Empiricus, and it was imitated by later poets, such as Sophocles and Bacchylides. Theognis himself might be imitating others: each of the longer hexameter lines is loosely paraphrased in the shorter pentameter lines, as if he borrowed the longer lines from some unknown source(s) and added the shorter lines to create an elegiac version. Moreover, the last line could be imitating an image from Homer's *Odyssey* (5.482), where Odysseus covers himself with leaves though some scholars think the key word ἐπαμησάμενον might be corrupted. The smothering accumulation of eta (η) sounds in the last line of the Greek is imitated here in the English by mound round.