

"NIOBE in Distress for her
Children slain by APOLLO,
from Ovid's Metamorphoses,
Book VI. and from a
view of the Painting of
Mr. Richard Wilson"

By Phillis Wheatley

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and markup by
Students of Marymount University, James West, Amy Ridderhof*

NIOBE in Distress for her Children slain by APOLLO, from *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Book VI. and from a view of the Painting of Mr. *Richard Wilson*.

1 APOLLO's wrath to man the dreadful spring
2 Of ills innum'rous, tuneful goddess, sing!
3 Thou who did'st first th' ideal pencil give,
4 And taught'st the painter in his works to live,
5 Inspire with glowing energy of thought,
6 What *Wilson* painted, and what *Ovid* wrote.
7 Muse! lend thy aid, nor let me sue in vain,
8 Tho' last and meanest of the rhyming train!
9 O guide my pen in lofty strains to show
10 The *Phrygian* queen, all beautiful in woe.

11 'Twas where *Maeonia* spreads her wide domain
12 *Niobe* dwelt, and held her potent reign:
13 See in her hand the regal sceptre shine,
14 The wealthy heir of *Tantalus* divine,

15 He most distinguish'd by *Dodonean Jove* ,
16 To approach the tables of the gods above:
17 Her grandsire *Atlas* , who with mighty pains
18 Th' ethereal axis on his neck sustains:
19 Her other gran sire on the throne on high
20 Rolls the loud-pealing thunder thro' the sky.

21 Her spouse, *Amphion* , who from *Jove* too springs,
22 Divinely taught to sweep the sounding strings.

23 Seven sprightly sons the royal bed adorn,
24 Seven daughters beauteous as the op'ning morn,
25 As when *Aurora* fills the ravish'd sight,
26 And decks the orient realms with rosy light
27 From their bright eyes the living splendors play,
28 Nor can beholders bear the flashing ray.

29 Wherever, *Niobe* , thou turn'st thine eyes,
30 New beauties kindle, and new joys arise!
31 But thou had'st far the happier mother prov'd,
32 If this fair offspring had been less belov'd:

33 What if their charms exceed *Aurora's* teint,
34 No words could tell them, and no pencil paint,
35 Thy love too vehement hastens to destroy
36 Each blooming maid, and each celestial boy.

37 Now *Manto* comes, endu'd with mighty skill,
38 The past to explore, the future to reveal.
39 Thro' *Thebes'* wide streets *Tiresia's* daughter came,
40 Divine *Latona's* mandate to proclaim:
41 The Theban maids to hear the orders ran,
42 When thus *Maeonia's* prophetess began:

43 "Go, *Thebans!* great *Latona's* will obey,
44 "And pious tribute at her altars pay:
45 "With rights divine, the goddess be implor'd,
46 "Nor be her sacred offspring unador'd."
47 Thus *Manto* spoke. The *Theban* maids obey,
48 And pious tribute to the goddess pay.
49 The rich perfumes ascend in waving spires,
50 And altars blaze with consecrated fires;
51 The fair assembly moves with graceful air,
52 And leaves of laurel bind the flowing hair.

53 *Niobe* comes with all her royal race,
54 With charms unnumber'd, and superior grace:
55 Her *Phrygian* garments of delightful hue,
56 Inwove with gold, refulgent to the view,
57 Beyond description beautiful she moves
58 Like heav'nly Venus, 'midst her smiles and loves:
59 She views around the supplicating train,
60 And shakes her graceful head with stern disdain,
61 Proudly she turns around her lofty eyes,
62 And thus reviles celestial deities:
63 "What madness drives the *Theban* ladies fair
64 "To give their incense to surrounding air?
65 "Say why this new sprung deity preferr'd?
66 "Why vainly fancy your petitions heard?
67 "Or say why *Coeus'* offspring is obey'd,
68 "While to my goddessship no tribute's paid?
69 "For me no altars blaze with living fires,
70 "No bullock bleeds, no frankincense transpires,
71 "Tho' *Cadmus'* palace, not unknown to fame,
72 "And *Phrygian* nations all revere my name.

73 "Where'er I turn my eyes vast wealth I find.
74 "Lo! here an empress with a goddess join'd.
75 "What, shall a *Titaness* be deify'd,
76 "To whom the spacious earth a couch deny'd?
77 "Nor heav'n, nor earth, nor sea receiv'd your queen,
78 "Till pitying *Delos* took the wand'rer in.
79 "Round me what a large progeny is spread!
80 "No frowns of fortune has my soul to dread.
81 "What if indignant she decrease my train
82 "More than *Latona's* number will remain?
83 "Then hence, ye *Theban* dames, hence haste away,
84 "Nor longer offerings to *Latona* pay?
85 "Regard the orders of *Amphion's* spouse,
86 "And take the leaves of laurel from your brows."
87 *Niobe* spoke. The *Theban* maids obey'd,
88 Their brows unbound, and left the rights unpaid.

89 The angry goddess heard, then silence broke
90 On *Cynthus'* summit, and indignant spoke;

91 "*Phoebus!* behold, thy mother in disgrace,
92 "Who to no goddess yields the prior place
93 "Except to *Juno's* self, who reigns above,
94 "The spouse and sister of the thund'ring *Jove* .
95 "*Niobe* , sprung from *Tantalus* , inspires
96 "Each *Theban* bosom with rebellious fires;
97 "No reason her imperious temper quells,
98 "But all her father in her tongue rebels;
99 "Wrap her own sons for her blaspheming breath,
100 "*Apollo!* wrap them in the shades of death."
101 *Latona* ceas'd, and ardent thus replies
102 The God, whose glory decks th' expanded skies.

103 "Cease thy complaints, mine be the task assign'd
104 "To punish pride, and scourge the rebel mind."
105 This *Phoebe* join'd. -- They wing their instant flight;
106 *Thebes* trembled as th' immortal pow'rs alight.

107 With clouds incompass'd glorious *Phoebus* stands;
108 The feather'd vengeance quiv'ring in his hands.

110 Near *Cadmus'* walls a plain extended lay,

111 Where *Thebes'* young princes pass'd in sport the day:
112 There the bold coursers bounded o'er the plains,
113 While their great masters held the golden reins.
114 *Ismenus* first the racing pastime led,
115 And rul'd the fury of his flying steed.
116 "Ah me," he sudden cries, with shrieking breath,
117 While in his breast he feels the shaft of death;
118 He drops the bridle on his courser's mane,
119 Before his eyes in shadows swims the plain,
120 He, the first-born of great *Amphion's* bed,
121 Was struck the first, first mingled with the dead.

122 Then didst thou, *Sipylus* , the language hear
123 Of fate portentous whistling in the air:
124 As when th' impending storm the sailor sees
125 He spreads his canvas to the fav'ring breeze,

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126 So to thine horse thou gav'st the golden reins,
127 Gav'st him to rush impetuous o'er the plains:
128 But ah! a fatal shaft from *Phoebus'* hand
129 Smites through thy neck, and sinks thee on the sand.

130 Two other brothers were at *wrestling* found,
131 And in their pastime claspt each other round:
132 A shaft that instant from *Apollo's* hand
133 Transfixt them both, and stretcht them on the sand:
134 Together they their cruel fate bemoan'd,
135 Together languish'd, and together groan'd:
136 Together too th' unbodied spirits fled,
137 And sought the gloomy mansions of the dead.

138 *Alphenor* saw, and trembling at the view,
139 Beat his torn breast, that chang'd its snowy hue.
140 He flies to raise them in a kind embrace;
141 A brother's fondness triumphs in his face:
142 *Alphenor* fails in this fraternal deed,
143 A dart dispatch'd him (so the fates decreed:)

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144 Soon as the arrow left the deadly wound,
145 His issuing entrails smoak'd upon the ground.

146 What woes on blooming *Damasichon* wait!
147 His sighs portend his near impending fate.
148 Just where the well-made leg begins to be,

149 And the soft sinews form the supple knee,
150 The youth sore wounded by the *Delian* god
151 Attempts t' extract the crime-avenging rod,
152 But, whilst he strives the will of fate t' avert,
153 Divine *Apollo* sends a second dart;
154 Swift thro' his throat the feather'd mischief flies,
155 Bereft of sense, he drops his head, and dies.

156 Young *Ilioneus*, the last, directs his pray'r,
157 And cries, "My life, ye gods celestial! spare."
158 *Apollo* heard, and pity touch'd his heart,
159 But ah! too late, for he had sent the dart:
160 Thou too, O *Ilioneus*, art doom'd to fall,
161 The fates refuse that arrow to recal.

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162 On the swift wings of ever-flying *Fame*
163 To *Cadmus'* palace soon the tidings came:
164 *Niobe* heard, and with indignant eyes
165 She thus express'd her anger and surprize:
166 "Why is such privilege to them allow'd?
167 "Why thus insulted by the *Delian* god?
168 "Dwells there such mischief in the pow'rs above?
169 "Why sleeps the vengeance of immortal *Jove*? "
170 For now *Amphion* too, with grief oppress'd,
171 Had plung'd the deadly dagger in his breast.
172 *Niobe* now, less haughty than before,
173 With lofty head directs her steps no more.
174 She, who late told her pedigree divine,
175 And drove the *Thebans* from *Latona's* shrine,
176 How strangely chang'd! -- yet beautiful in woe,
177 She weeps, nor weeps unpity'd by the foe.
178 On each pale corse the wretched mother spread
179 Lay overwhelm'd with grief, and kiss'd her dead,
180 Then rais'd her arms, and thus, in accents slow,
181 "Be sated cruel *Goddess!* with my woe;

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182 "If I've offended, let these streaming eyes,
183 "And let this sev'nfold funeral suffice:
184 "Ah! take this wretched life you deign'd to save,
185 "With them I too am carried to the grave.
186 "Rejoice triumphant, my victorious foe,
187 "But show the cause from whence your triumphs flow?
188 "Tho' I unhappy mourn these children slain,
189 "Yet greater numbers to my lot remain."

190 She ceas'd, the bow-string twang'd with awful sound,
200 Which struck with terror all th' assembly round,
201 Except the queen, who stood unmov'd alone,
202 By her distresses more presumptuous grown.
203 Near the pale corses stood their sisters fair
204 In sable vestures and dishevell'd hair;
205 One, while she draws the fatal shaft away,
206 Faints, falls, and sickens at the light of day.
207 To sooth her mother, lo! another flies,
208 And blames the fury of inclement skies,
209 And, while her words a filial pity show,
210 Struck dumb -- indignant seeks the shades below.

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211 Now from the fatal place another flies,
212 Falls in her flight, and languishes, and dies.
213 Another on her sister drops in death;
214 A fifth in trembling terrors yields her breath;
215 While the sixth seeks some gloomy cave in vain,
216 Struck with the rest, and mingl'd with the slain.

217 One only daughter lives, and she the least;
218 The queen close clasp'd the daughter to her breast:
219 "Ye heav'nly pow'rs, ah spare me one," she cry'd,
220 "Ah! spare me one," the vocal hills reply'd:
221 In vain she begs, the *Fates* her suit deny,
222 In her embrace she sees her daughter die.

223 *, ^{auth1} "The queen of all her family bereft,
224 "Without or husband, son, or daughter left,
225 "Grew stupid at the shock. The passing air
226 "Made no impression on her stiff'ning hair.

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227 "The blood forsook her face: amidst the flood
228 "Pour'd from her cheeks, quite fix'd her eye-balls stood.
229 "Her tongue, her palate both obdurate grew,
230 "Her curdled veins no longer motion knew;
231 "The use of neck, and arms, and feet was gone,
232 "And ev'n her bowels hard'ned into stone:
233 "A marble statue now the queen appears,
234 "But from the marble steal the silent tears."

Footnotes

auth1 This Verse to the End is ther Work of another Hand. [Wheatley's note.]