

# "To S. M. a young African Painter, on seeing his Works"

By Phillis Wheatley

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and markup by  
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To S. M., <sup>SM</sup> a young *African* Painter, on seeing his Works.

1 TO show the lab'ring bosom's deep intent,  
2 And thought in living characters to paint,  
3 When first thy pencil did those beauties give,  
4 And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,  
5 How did those prospects give my soul delight,  
6 A new creation rushing on my sight?  
7 Still, wond'rous youth! each noble path pursue,  
8 On deathless glories fix thine ardent view:  
9 Still may the painter's and the poet's fire  
10 To aid thy pencil, and thy verse conspire!  
11 And may the charms of each seraphic theme  
12 Conduct thy footsteps to immortal fame!  
13 High to the blissful wonders of the skies  
14 Elate thy soul, and raise thy wishful eyes.  
15 Thrice happy, when exalted to survey  
16 That splendid city, <sup>city</sup>, crown'd with endless day,  
17 Whose twice six gates on radiant hinges ring:  
18 Celestial *Salem* blooms in endless spring.

19 Calm and serene thy moments glide along,  
20 And may the muse inspire each future song!  
21 Still, with the sweets of contemplation bless'd,  
22 May peace with balmy wings your soul invest!  
23 But when these shades of time are chas'd away,  
24 And darkness ends in everlasting day,  
25 On what seraphic pinions shall we move,  
26 And view the landscapes in the realms above?  
27 There shall thy tongue in heav'nly murmurs flow,  
28 And there my muse with heav'nly transport glow:  
29 No more to tell of *Damon's* tender sighs, <sup>-Damon</sup>,  
30 Or rising radiance of *Aurora's* eyes, <sup>Aurora</sup>,  
31 For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,  
32 And purer language on th' ethereal plain.  
33 Cease, gentle muse! the solemn gloom of night  
34 Now seals the fair creation from my sight.

## Footnotes

- SM According to *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* , Scipio Moorhead was an enslaved artist, principally known for his painting of Phillis Wheatley, which became the basis for the frontispiece to her 1773 collection of poems. The frontispiece is included in this database. While no signed paintings by Moorhead survive, this poem by Wheatley may describe two of his works. Moorhead was owned by the Presbyterian minister John Moorhead of Boston and was likely tutored by Sarah Moorhead ([Appiah and Gates 62](#)).
- [TH]
- city Wheatley refers to the heavenly city of "New Jerusalem," described in Revelation 21. As many scholars have noted, Christianity offered a not uncomplicated narrative of salvation and hope that was particularly resonant for the enslaved. She continues this metaphor of future bliss crowning current woe throughout this and other poems; see, for instance, lines 23-28, below.
- [TH]
- Damon Damon is a typical name for a male lover in pastoral poetry, poetry that imagines romantic conflicts in bucolic or country settings. Wheatley frequently both references and draws on classical pastoral poetry throughout her *Poems* . For a deeper reading of Wheatley's use of the pastoral, see [John C. Shield's scholarly essay, "Phillis Wheatley's Subversive Pastoral."](#)
- [TH]
- Aurora In Greco-Roman mythology, Aurora (called Eos in the Greek) personifies the dawn.
- [TH]