

To Mæcenas

by Phillis Wheatley

MÆCENAS, you, beneath the myrtle shade,
Read o'er what poets sung, and shepherds play'd.
What felt those poets but you feel the same?
Does not your soul possess the sacred flame?
Their noble strains your equal genius shares 5
In softer language, and diviner airs.

While Homer paints Io! circumfus'd in air,
Celestial Gods in mortal forms appear;
Swift as they move hear each recess rebound, 10
Heav'n quakes, earth trembles, and the shores resound.
Great Sire of verse, before my mortal eyes,
The lightnings blaze across the vaulted skies,
And, as the thunder shakes the heav'nly plains,
A deep-felt horror thrills through all my veins.
When gentler strains demand thy graceful song, 15
The length'ning line moves languishing along.
When great Patroclus courts Achilles' aid,
The grateful tribute of my tears is paid;
Prone on the shore he feels the pangs of love,
And stern Pelides tend'rest passions move. 20

Great Maro's strain in heav'nly numbers flows,
The Nine inspire, and all the bosom glows.
O could I rival thine and Virgil's page,
Or claim the Muses with the Mantuan Sage;
Soon the same beauties should my mind adorn, 25
And the same ardors in my soul should burn:
Then should my song in bolder notes arise,
And all my numbers pleasingly surprize;
But here I sit, and mourn a grov'ling mind,
That fain would mount, and ride upon the wind. 30

Not you, my friend, these plaintive strains become,
Not you, whose bosom is the Muses home;
When they from tow'ring Helicon retire,
They fan in you the bright immortal fire,
But I less happy, cannot raise the song, 35
The fault'ring music dies upon my tongue.

The happier Terence all the choir inspir'd,

His soul replenish'd, and his bosom fir'd;
But say, ye Muses, why this partial grace,
To one alone of Afric's sable race; 40
From age to age transmitting thus his name
With the first glory in the rolls of fame?

Thy virtues, great Mæcenás! shall be sung
In praise of him, from whom those virtues sprung: 45
While blooming wreaths around thy temples spread,
I'll snatch a laurel from thine honour'd head,
While you indulgent smile upon the deed.

As long as Thames in streams majestic flows,
Or Naiads in their oozy beds repose,
While Phœbus reigns above the starry train, 50
While bright Aurora purples o'er the main,
So long, great Sir, the muse thy praise shall sing,
So long thy praise shall make Parnassus ring:
Then grant, Mæcenás, thy paternal rays,
Hear me propitious, and defend my lays. 55