

## Phillis Wheatley, “On Recollection”

### Description

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

#### “On Recollection”

*MNEME* begin. Inspire, ye sacred nine,  
Your vent'rous *Afric* in her great design.  
*Mneme*, immortal pow'r, I trace thy spring:  
Assist my strains, while I thy glories sing:  
The acts of long departed years, by thee 5  
Recover'd, in due order rang'd we see:  
Thy pow'r the long-forgotten calls from night,  
That sweetly plays before the *fancy's* sight.

*Mneme* in our nocturnal visions pours  
The ample treasure of her secret stores; 10  
Swift from above she wings her silent flight  
Through *Phoebe's* realms, fair regent of the night;  
And, in her pomp of images display'd,  
To the high-raptur'd poet gives her aid,  
Through the unbounded regions of the mind, 15  
Diffusing light celestial and refin'd.  
The heav'nly *phantom* paints the actions done  
By ev'ry tribe beneath the rolling sun.

*Mneme*, enthron'd within the human breast,  
Has vice condemn'd, and ev'ry virtue blest. 20  
How sweet the sound when we her plaudit hear?  
Sweeter than music to the ravish'd ear,  
Sweeter than *Maro's* entertaining strains  
Resounding through his groves, and hills, and plains.  
But how is *Mneme* dreaded by the race, 25  
Who scorn her warnings, and despise her grace?  
By her unveil'd each horrid crime appears,  
Her awful hand a cup of wormwood bears.  
Days, years, misspent, O what a hell of woe!  
Hers the worst tortures that our souls can know. 30

Now eighteen years their destin'd course have run,  
In fast succession round the central sun.  
How did the follies of that period pass

Unnotic'd, but behold them writ in brass!  
In Recollection see them fresh return, 35  
And sure 'tis mine to be asham'd, and mourn.

O *Virtue*, smiling in immortal green,  
Do thou exert thy pow'r, and change the scene;  
Be thine employ to guide my future days,  
And mine to pay the tribute of my praise. 40

Of *Recollection* such the pow'r enthron'd  
In ev'ry breast, and thus her pow'r is own'd.  
The wretch, who dar'd the vengeance of the skies,  
At last awakes in horror and surprize,  
By her alarm'd, he sees impending fate, 45  
He howls in anguish, and repents too late.  
But O! what peace, what joys are hers t' impart  
To ev'ry holy, ev'ry upright heart!  
Thrice blest the man, who, in her sacred shrine,  
Feels himself shelter'd from the wrath of divine! 50

#### NOTES:

**1** *Mneme* The muse of memory; *sacred nine* The nine muses of Greek mythology.

**8** *fancy* Poetic imagination.

**12** *Phoebe* In Greek mythology, "she was identified with the moon" (*Britannica*).

**21** *plaudit* "An expression of praise or approval" (*OED*).

**23** *Maro* Publius Vergilius Maro, or Virgil (70 BCE-19 BCE), "Roman poet best known for his national epic, *The Aenied*" (*Britannica*).

**28** *wormwood* "An emblem or type of what is bitter and grievous to the soul" (*OED*).

**SOURCE:** *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London, 1773), pp. 62-64.

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/GLC06154.pdf>

*Edited by Markesha Grant*