Phillis Wheatley, â??On Imaginationâ?•

Description

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

â??On Imaginationâ?•

Thy various works, imperial queen, we see,
How bright their forms! how deckâ??d with pomp by thee!
Thy wondâ??rous acts in beauteous order stand,
And all attest how potent is thine hand.

From *Heliconâ??s* refulgent heights attend,
Ye sacred choir, and my attempts befriend:
To tell her glories with a faithful tongue,
Ye blooming graces, triumph in my song.

Now here, now there, the roving *Fancy* flies,
Till some lovâ??d object strikes her wandâ??ring eyes,
Whose silken fetters all the senses bind,
And soft captivity involves the mind.

Imagination! who can sing thy force?
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?
Soaring through air to find the bright abode,
Thâ?? empyreal palace of the thundâ??ring God,
We on thy pinions can surpass the wind,
And leave the rolling universe behind:
From star to star the mental optics rove,
Measure the skies, and range the realms above.
There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,
Or with new worlds amaze thâ?? unbounded soul.

Though *Winter* frowns to *Fancyâ??s* rapturâ??d eyes
The fields may flourish, and gay scenes arise;
The frozen deeps may break their iron bands,
And bid their waters murmur oâ??er the sands.
Fair *Flora* may resume her fragrant reign,
And with her flowâ??ry riches deck the plain.
Sylvanus may diffuse his honours round,
And all the forest may with leaves be crownâ??d:
Showâ??rs may descend, and dews their gems disclose,
And nectar sparkle on the blooming rose.

Such is thy powâ??r, nor are thine orders vain,
O thou the leader of the mental train:
In full perfection all thy works are wrought,
And thine the sceptre oâ??er the realms of thought.
Before thy throne the subject-passions bow,
Of subject-passions sovâ??reign ruler thou;
At thy command joy rushes on the heart,
And through the glowing veins the spirits dart.

Fancy might now her silken pinions try
To rise from earth, and sweep thâ?? expanse on high:
From *Tithonâ??s* bed now might *Aurora* rise,
Her cheeks all glowing with celestial dies,
While a pure stream of light oâ??erflows the skies.
The monarch of the day I might behold,
And all the mountains tipt with radiant gold,
But I reluctant leave the pleasing views,
Which *Fancy* dresses to delight the *Muse*;
Winter austere forbids me to aspire,
And northern tempests damp the rising fire;
They chill the tides of *Fancyâ??s* flowing sea,
Cease then, my song, cease the unequal lay.

NOTES:

5 *Helicon* â??Name of a mountain in Boeotia, sacred to the Muses, in which rose the fountains of Aganippe and Hippocrene; by 16th and 17th century writers often confused with these. Hence used allusively in reference to poetic inspirationâ?• (*OED*).

9 *Fancy* Poetic imagination.

11 *fetters* Anything that confines, impedes, or restrains (*OED*).

17 *pinions* â??The wings of a bird in flightâ?• (*OED*).

27 *Flora* Roman goddess of the flowering of plants (*Britannica*).

29 *Sylvanus* Roman god the countryside (*Britannica*).

36 *sceptre* **â??**Ornamented rod or staff borne by rulers on ceremonial occasions as an emblem of authority and sovereigntyâ?• (*Britannica*).

43 *Tithon* â??In Greek Legend, king of Troy, lover of Aurora. According to the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*, when Aurora asked Zeus to grant Tithonus eternal life, the god consented. But Aurora forgot to ask also for eternal youth, so her husband grew old and witheredâ?• (*Britannica); Aurora* â??Roman goddess of the dawn, otherwise known as Eos, represented as rising with rosy fingers from the saffron-coloured bed of Tithonusâ?• (*OED*).

SOURCE: ***Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*** **(Albany, NY, 1793), pp. 48-50. [Google Books]**

Edited by Morgan Stanley