

Document #2

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral. By Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston, in New-England. London, 1773. Pages 4–5 and 7.

Phillis Wheatley, a former slave, received her freedom by the end of 1773 and published her *Poems on Various Subjects*. She was the first African American woman to be published. The following text is from the introduction to her book.

PREFACE

The following POEMS were written originally for the Amusement of the Author, as they were the Products of her leisure Moments. She had no Intention ever to have published them; nor would they now have made their Appearance, but at the Importunity of many of her best, and most generous Friends; to whom she considers herself, as under the greatest Obligations.

As her Attempts in Poetry are now sent into the World, it is hoped the Critic will not severely censure their Defects; and we presume they have too much Merit to be cast aside with Contempt, as worthless and trifling Effusions.

As to the Disadvantages she has laboured under, with Regard to Learning, nothing needs to be offered, as her Master's Letter in the following Page will sufficiently shew the Difficulties in this Respect she had to encounter.

With all their Imperfections, the Poems are now humbly submitted to the Perusal of the Public.

To the PUBLICK

AS it has been repeatedly suggested to the Publisher, by Persons, who have seen the Manuscript, that Numbers would be ready to suspect they were not really the Writings of PHILLIS, he has procured the following Attestation, from the most respectable Characters in *Boston*, that none might have the least Ground for disputing their *Original*.

WE whose Names are under-written, do assure the World, that the POEMS specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe) written by PHILLIS, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from *Africa*, and has ever since been, and now is, under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. She has been examined by some of the best Judges, and is thought qualified to write them.

His Excellency THOMAS HUTCHINSON, *Governor*,
The Hon. ANDREW OLIVER, *Lieutenant-Governor*.

The Hon. Thomas Hubbard,

The Hon. John Erving,

The Hon. James Pitts,

The Hon. Harrison Gray,

The Hon. James Bowdoin,

John Hancock, *Esq;*

Joseph Green, *Esq;*

Richard Carey, *Esq;*

The Rev. Charles Cheuney, D.D.

The Rev. Mather Byles, D.D.

The Rev. Ed. Pemberton, D.D.

The Rev. Andrew Elliot, D.D.

The Rev. Samuel Cooper, D.D.

The Rev. Mr. Saumel Mather,

The Rev. Mr. John Moorhead

Mr. John Wheatley, *her Master*.

Questions for Document#2:

1. What is the purpose of Wheatley's comments?
2. What disadvantages does she refer to?
3. Why was there a need to make a statement to the public with regard to Wheatley's work?
4. Who came forward to endorse her work? Do you have any questions about this list? How would you find the answers?