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## JONI MARIE IRACI

### Diary of Phillis Wheatley, 1766-1778

July 13, 1766

Dear Diary,

*Today it is the Occasion that marks the Birthday assigned to me by my Mistress and Master. I was given this Diary by Miss Mary and instructed that I could write my Secret thoughts and memories in it. She told me, "No one need ever see it." Mistress Susanna presented me with a Quill and Master Wheatley and Nathaniel had a small Desk made for my use alone.*

*My Secret thoughts are of this very Occasion. They say nothing, yet I know it was on this very Day three years past that I was purchased. I hear them speak of the progress I have made. I am often asked to speak of my early years on African land. I remember It vaguely in my dreams. I never choose to speak of It. I am a Child now, as I was then. I do remember the rules of our Clan. "Do not speak of dreams or memories." I will Write of those I can call to mind. I was Wolof, a Jaam Juddu.<sup>1</sup> I was a Slave at Birth. We suffered greatly from lack of food and water. There was much Warfare. My mother and Father were taken and I was to follow. The Journey was long and the enslavers were of a neighboring clan. At the end of the travels, I gazed upon a great expanse of water. I would not see it again for several days. I was put into a structure where many men and women were*

*secured to walls and poles by fibers. There were few children.*

*The light of the sun pained my eyes when I left the structure. Atop the great sea, I saw a floating traveler. I now know it is called a Ship. I thought the Men from the ship to not be Men at all but to be gods from a sunless dwelling. There upon that ship, I was to journey for many months. Many died and much suffering was endured. I cannot speak of the violations of humanity that occurred upon that voyage. It would damage my virtue. As a Jaam Juddu, I was forbidden to know the religion of the King, yet I endured no infringement upon my person.*

*I was unbound upon the ship and allowed to freely roam the surface. It shamed and frightened me. I chose to stay close to the women and remain silent. No notice was given to me. I endured the lingering stench rather than expose myself to the white gods. I was spared. I am chaste.*

*I have not spoken of this to anyone. I reveal myself now to be free. I trust my eyes alone will see. For no one could fully grasp the horror of it.*

*I will end now as summoning the memory makes me weary.*

*In Truth as I know it to be,*

*Phillis*

*August 14, 1766*

*Dear Diary,*

*I must halt, for the time being, the story of my introduction to the Wheatley household. There is much Commotion going on. I am fluent in the knowledge of the language. In my thirst for words and declarations, I hear and listen to more than my young and enslaved ears should be informed of. Abner has escaped the house. He is not a slave. He is indented as a Servant.<sup>2</sup> His service to Master Wheatley was not for life like me. I listened tell of his thievery. He has left with the fine clothes of his servitude upon his back. There is much talk of him. A reward is upon his head. I am much distressed at the news.*

*There are other Africans within the house. The kindly carriage man Prince,<sup>3</sup> who cared for me upon my arrival is watchful of me. It is ever in my mind that I am not of the same Station as the rest. I am called a Servant, yet I often am the one served. Perhaps the Lessons in words they shower upon me will suit the Family in a means yet unknown to me. I am kindly treated and valued by them all.*

*Ever truthful,*

*Phillis*

December 27, 1766

Dear Diary,

*Christmas was most lovely. I received a Dictionary as a present. I have not let it from my sight since it was placed in my hands. I spend little time with my fellow Servants. My tasks are simple. I serve Mistress Wheatley on the Occasion of her ill health. Yet, I am her companion whenever she has the will to have a social gathering. I see the astonished look upon the faces of her guests as I approach the tea service to be among them. It causes me reason to decline and withdraw from their company.*

*My eagerness and swift learning much pleases my Masters. I hear them boast of my abilities. My lessons have progressed beyond the interests of Mistress Susanna and Miss Mary; Master Nathaniel has taken over the Task. I would be remiss if I do not speak of my increasing devotion to the Religious Faith of my Master. The Bible is my most fervent Tutor.*

*I observed my lessons to extend beyond those of Miss Mary. The knowledge of the Classics has been bestowed upon me from Master Nathaniel's educated lips and I have the gift of Catechism from the Devotee of Congregationalist Doctrine, Mistress Susanna. The Spirit of the Lord would have been denied me had I remained in the African land of my birth. I had no notion of Eternal Life. It is of great comfort.*

Phillis

March 19, 1767

*It is time now, dear Diary, when I must briefly return to my beginnings:*

*I was naked when I exited that Ship, known as The Phillis from which my name originated.<sup>4</sup> I was tied at the wrists in case I had in my mind to run. I could barely stand in my weakened state. The slave traders of Africa were similar to these pale traders of the sea. They bonded their cargo and sold them in the same manner. I was of little use to anyone. Yet, the Wheatleys saw something worth redeeming in my tattered body and soul. Their reasons for taking a child so young elude me. I will come to know one day as time progresses. It took weeks to recover my Strength. I had a wheezing cough that plagues me even now.*

*The City of Boston was a sight of unparalleled wonder for me. I am not yet free to see it without the company of a Wheatley. I must remain at my studies or in Domestic duty. It is only within the confines of Church walls where my Station returns to that of the Enslaved and I am reminded from whence I came. I commune with other Church going enslaved Christians as I too am restricted to sit in the Church Balcony separate from my White*

*Mistress. This is the Law of our Church. I am a Christian in name only. I long to be Baptized in Christ upon the Age of Eighteen with permission of my Master. It is a time of Great Revival. I was once privileged to hear the sermon of the famous founder of Methodism, The Reverend George Whitefield.<sup>5</sup> His fiery preaching reminded me that my Enslavement has been given to me by the Providence of God that He might be known to me. No other Means would avail me of the Acquaintance of God.*

*For this I am as Ever grateful.*

*Phillis*

*July 21, 1767*

*Dear Diary,*

*I have of late so neglected the Entrances of Secret thoughts upon you. I am deep in midst of the opening to the vast world of words. They seem to consume my mind. I am afforded the leisure time to devote to writing. It is what I best desire. I write many elegiac verses. Sadly, in Boston there is much death. I was fated to avoid the Smallpox that has ravaged so many among us. My words afford comfort and have acquired a following of readers bringing familial pride to my Mistress and Master. Poetry impassions my very soul. I write for myself alone, only upon your pages, dear Diary. I have the freedom to write but not the freedom to choose my topic. My leisure time to enter my thoughts upon these pages is waning. My Domestic duties are increasing and my Devotion to Poetry is much encouraged by my Mistress. I have been told I am beyond my years in many respects.*

*I will write down upon this page a poetic work I recently composed and perhaps in a later reading, I myself will assess if I have wisdom of the aged. There is a Muse within me of which I do not often speak. I entered it upon the page this time for no reason I can find. I found Inspiration in the thought that there are some, like me, when I dwelled upon the Shores of Africa, who are without a Christian God. I wrote an "Address to the Atheist." In it I tell of:*

*What curses unbelief doth yield...*

*Atheist! Behold the wide skies*

*And wisdom shall strike thine eyes...<sup>6</sup>*

*It is merely a Demonstration of my Faith. With every word put from Pen to Paper I find improvement.*

*In Truth,*

*Phillis*

January 5, 1768

Dear Diary,

*There has been a lapse in my Devotion to my personal Writings. It is with heavy Heart that I return to You. My own Brethren have misconstrued my Words. I wrote a Poem "On Being Brought From Africa to America." The Words are not a testimony to the Slave trade as is in the minds of Those who share my Heritage.*

*'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan Land,  
Taught my benighted soul to understand  
That there's a God— that there's a Saviour too;  
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
Some view our sable race with scornful eye—  
"Their color is a diabolic dye."  
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain  
May be refined, and join the angelic train.<sup>7</sup>*

*Oh, how sad to find my words are so misunderstood. I have no allegiance to the Slave traders. This is another demonstration of my Faith. All must endure Suffering to reach the Mercy of God. No mechanism avails me the opportunity to offer explanations to my Readers. It was meant as a Warning — Christians as well as Negros are "black as Cain" with Sin. Yet Mercy is at their feet and they "may be refin'd" and mend their ways and be afforded the Kingdom of Heaven. I implored my Readers to accept with certainty that our "sable race" should not be disdained and all should be joined together in discarding our common sinful ways. I speak of "Their colour is a diabolic dye." The "their" I am referring to are those who are sinners not the "sable race" of my brethren. Oh Grant me Mercy, that I may find clarity within my verse.*

Ever

Phillis

June 15, 1768

Dear Diary,

*The weather is most pleasing, yet the climate of my City is one of Unrest. The British have imposed many Hardships upon the Americas. My Master speaks of taxes that are severely curtailing his efforts at Commerce. There was much Turmoil this week upon our shores. The defiant importers of Wine unloaded their cargo without payment of the duties owed to the King. I fear an uprising on the Horizon.*

*The King has agreed to repeal the Levy on Stamps in order to appease my Countrymen. I*

*fear it will not do so. I composed a Tribute in thanks to his Majesty for this trifle. I hope my Readers who are my Brethren will come upon my last lines and come to know my meaning and true desires.*

*Great God, direct, and guard him from on high,  
And from his head let ev'ry evil fly!  
And may each clime with equal gladness see  
A monarch's smile can set his subjects free!<sup>8</sup>*

*Surely Africans on the shores of the Americas should be counted among the Subjects of the King.*

*British Warships about the harbor for many months now. The citizens of Boston seek Liberty from the Chains of British Rule, yet Liberty for Africans it is of no consequence.<sup>9</sup>*

*Ever in truth,*

*Phillis*

*January 4, 1769*

*Dear Diary,*

*Heavy is the Burden of Grief upon my Heart. Ever am I required to compose elegiac poems? The Reverend Joseph Sewell, my spiritual Mentor, has departed this Earth. My condition of poor breathing prevented me from journeying to the New South Congregational Parish of Mistress Susanna. With her kind permission, I worshipped at the Old Congregational Church within a short distance from Home. It was there the Pastor, Reverend Sewell, Our Saviour's dear Servant counseled me.*

*Hail, Holy Man! arrived the immortal shore...  
I, too, have cause, this mighty loss to mourn,  
For he, my monitor, will not return  
Oh, when shall we to his blest state arrive?  
When the same graces in our bosoms thrive?<sup>10</sup>*

*Loud is heard the cries for Liberty among the slaveholders of our shores.*

*Although my bindings are slack, I remain tightly fastened to those who possess me. It is in the midst of Heaven where true freedom awaits.*

*With Candid Truth,*

*Phillis*

September 23, 1769

Dear Diary,

*Mistress Susanna and I too, as her devoted Companion, must remain within the confines of the House. Master Wheatley fears for our safety. There are Soldiers living in this fine City rendering it a foundation for troublesome Times to come, I fear. There is much wailing among the Laborers of the Town. Tariffs are demanded of them. Those without means are imprisoned. Their Families are without support and fear starvation. They enact revenge upon the Wealthy of which I am considered to be among, due to my presence within a family of such. There is much turmoil afoot.*

*In Prayer For Our Troubled Shores,*

*I Remain*

*Phillis*

March 6, 1770

Dear Diary,

*A Disturbance of Great magnitude has befallen our City. By God's Divine Providence, my Dear Master was safe within the boundaries of home and hearth. He was unaware until Morning that carnage had been thrust upon the very Street where his business is situated. It was upon King Street where last evening did British Soldiers discharge their weapons killing five of our precious countrymen.<sup>11</sup> These Martyrs to the cause of Freedom are most worthy of an elegiac farewell. Tyranny invades and rests its threatening head upon our shore. There is much hostility heard in the tone of my Master's voice. I see the fear in my Mistress' weary Eye. I fear I must remain watchful of Her person and Tend to her more fervently. It may be months before I return and put my inner thoughts upon you.*

*I remain,*

*Phillis*

October 2, 1770

Dear Diary,

*Another elegiac poem is constructing itself within my mind full of woe. Another Great servant of the Divine has made his exit from our midst. Two days have elapsed since our beloved Reverend George Whitefield suffered a fit of asthmatic breathing and died from its effects.<sup>12</sup> I must strive to capture the appeal this man held for those residing on our distressed shores.*

*Thou didst, in strains of eloquence refin'd  
Inflame the soul, and captivate the mind.<sup>13</sup>*

*Reverend Whitefield's care was for the liberation of body as well as for the souls of those residing in these Americas. His compassion was deep for the suffering of the citizens of Boston. He was our fervent comrade and guardian. He is a Hero for us all. For We are Americans all. Descended from the Africas or Europe matters not, we are of an American Community as he who is a Saint now, has told us.*

*Grief has emboldened me. I shall address my elegy to his generous Benefactress the Countess of Huntingdon.<sup>14</sup>*

*In Remembrance,*

*Phillis*

*October 11, 1770*

*Dear Diary,*

*How quickly I have returned to you this time. I feel the presence of Reverend Whitefield upon me from his immortal dwelling. My unworthy simple elegy of him was handed over to my Mistress, as is the route all my Writings do take, save these dear Diary. It is with elation that I hesitantly write the following words. I fear I shall awaken and find them not to be written in truth but while in a dream state. Mistress has sold my elegy to the Boston-News Letter and today it has appeared in print for the eyes of many readers to gaze upon.<sup>15</sup>*

*With Excited Reservations,*

*Phillis*

*October 20, 1770*

*Dear Diary,*

*It is I, a simple servant girl, who is the receiver of news of an exceptional nature. This very*

*morning, Mistress Susanna has informed me that The New Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle has published my poem and it is recommended that it be preserved.<sup>16</sup> I am told, a copy of my works is on their way to London. I fear I will have little time for you dear Diary. Mistress insists I compose during all my waking hours.*

*Yours*

*Phillis*

*August 18, 1771*

*Dear Diary,*

*It has been many months since I last made an entry into this volume. I have been preparing for my Baptism. I am to join the Old South Church this very day. I am filled with Joy on this glorious occasion.*

*Ever*

*Phillis*

*August 19, 1771*

*Dear Diary,*

*It has happened. I am fully a member of the Christian Family! My commitment to piety and my devotion to the teachings of Christ are confirmed.*

*A Humble Servant of Christ,*

*Phillis*

*October 15, 1771*

*Dear Diary,*

*This warm Autumn Day finds me in a state of great Anxiousness. I am to be examined by the finest minds in the Colonies. There is talk of the doubt many readers have on the authenticity of my Works. The powerful and influential minds of our Era are among those who find suspect the words I compose come from my person. It is beyond their reasoning*

*that a Negro woman could possess such abilities. I saw in print a quote equating me to an "oranootan and a parrot."<sup>17</sup> I am considered to be an oddity too astonishing to be authentic. It is with dread I await my Examination. I am on trial for all of the current enslaved people of Africa and those to follow. I would be remiss if I did not realize that I also represent my gender as many women in these Colonies are without benefit of any Education and my personal advantages. My devoted Mistress has bestowed upon me a Gift of which no appropriate Value can be placed. My Disadvantages as a Servant are not to be counted as they pale when compared to my benefits.*

*Eighteen learned Men are to be my interrogators.*

*With Anxiety*

*I remain*

*Phillis*

*October 30, 1771*

*Dear Diary,*

*It was unknown to me who were the eighteen Examiners until I was in their imposing presence. I could feel myself shiver with fright. I was put at ease by the presence of Master Wheatley and Reverend Cooper who is my Baptizer. I recognized Governor Hutchinson and Mr. John Hancock among the eighteen.<sup>18</sup>*

*I took a slow breath for fear that a nervous ailment would render me unable to answer. My superior Education imparted upon me by the Wheatleys enabled me to answer the Inquiries with ease. I recited quotes from the Classics to the Gentlemen's satisfaction for today I received word through Mistress Susanna that I have passed the examination. A Document attesting to my credibility is to arrive forthwith.*

*Mistress Wheatley is in search of a publisher so I may present my Poems to my Readers in one volume.*

*With Humble Gratitude,*

*Phillis*

*January 15, 1772*

*Dear Diary,*

*Despite my endorsement by the learned men of these Colonies, no Publisher on the shores of New England will risk taking on the works of a mere Negro Servant.*

*Mistress Wheatley is considering English soil for my entrance into the literary world. I await word of its reception as she has engaged the assistance of her English friends for this purpose. My Mistress and Master hope to obtain profit from my literary efforts. I must take to my bed as I suffer from breathing difficulties.*

*It is With Weary Hesitance I end this note,*

*Phillis*

*May 19, 1772*

*Dear Diary,*

*The plague of my breathing illness has left me unable to write these many months.*

*At the request of my Mistress I take to my Desk to write A Consolation poem to the Reverend Timothy Pitkin, a Minister of my Faith who resides in Connecticut. His wife has recently died in Childbirth. I call on him to remember his Christian Faith at this trying time. I long to be his Muse in order to dissolve his sorrow.*

*Permit the Muse that healing to impart...<sup>19</sup>*

*I fear the year will end with much need for consoling words as sickness and death has affected many among us.*

*Sadly*

*Phillis*

*January 18, 1773*

*Dear Diary,*

*Illness ravaged my body all of the past year and left me in a weakened state.*

*Mistress Wheatley is much encouraged now, as my health seems to be returning in time for the news of much transatlantic publicity regarding my works. The advertisement for my potential book has been altered since its first proposal last year. A reference to me as "at present a slave"<sup>20</sup> did not appeal to the Londoners and my status is now one of servant.*

*The News that her Honorable Countess of Huntingdon has agreed to be my Patroness and allows me the privilege of dedicating my works to her fills me with elation.*

*There is news that a court case has determined that it is now illegal for slaves who arrive in England be returned by force to the Americas. Slavery is verging on abolishment on English shores. The Countess has requested that my portrait adorn the cover of my Works. For this I must sit for an Engraver. My status will be revealed to those in the know as my Master insists I wear a dark colored thin rope around my neck. I am a Slave and need not be reminded. I do as he wishes always.*

Ever

Phillis

April 30, 1773

Dear Diary,

*My recovery from my illness of late has been the cause of concern for my Dear Mistress. I have heard the Master consult the wisdom of his Physician on my behalf.*

*There is talk of having me take the Sea air in order to facilitate my recuperation. Mistress Susanna has written to the Countess. Mistress requests the honor of her Supervision upon my stay in London. I await her reply. I am to accompany Master Nathaniel as he is expected to travel to London on Business within the month. It is with the fusion of eagerness and trepidation that I await my fated journey.*

Ever

Phillis

January 18, 1773

Dear Diary,

*The journey across the Sea was tedious and brought to mind no memory of the passage that first brought me from Africa. I have no recollection of that time.*

*There is a feeling of strange liberation upon my spirit. This visit to London elevates me to a position never realized in the Colonies. There is no shocking look of revulsion as I join the social elite for tea. I am resting well and not expected to arise early. There are no confines upon me with the exception of those deemed appropriate for a woman of virtue. I have yet to visit my patroness as the Countess has fallen ill. This world of England is most*

welcoming to me. I have almost taken leave of my condition.

I am exposed to those of High Social Esteem and have toured the great Museums of London. His Lordship Lord Dartmouth engaged me in a conversation of some length.<sup>21</sup> The amazement of it all has caused me to forget the contents of our talk. Benjamin Franklin, our Colonist statesman has offered his services to me.<sup>22</sup> His views on enslavement are of a confused nature to me. It causes me to doubt his sincerity.

There are no duties put upon me except to be of a gracious nature. The lure of freedom is ever in the Atmosphere. There are many here who would offer me solace. It is as if the Heavens had opened its gates for me to glance within her. The feeling that I would be betraying the trust my Mistress has in me weighs upon my soul.

Ever

Phillis

July 3, 1773

Dear Diary,

My health has been restored to me. My heart is filled with the dilemma of a life altering decision. My health is preserved among London's glorious freedom, yet my heart is tempted by the call of New England and Home.

ADIEU, New England's smiling meads, Adieu, the flow'ry plain

I leave think op'ning charms O spring, And tempt the roaring main...<sup>23</sup>

It is with wonder that I ask myself when in my Chambers I sit: What reason could my Mistress have for tempting me so with the choice of self-emancipation? There should be jubilation in my Spirit, yet I feel pain and sorrow. This is what it means to be Free.

Choice was never available to me before now. Its struggle presses hard upon my shoulders. The will of God is my guide.

Prayerfully

Phillis

July 25, 1773

Dear Diary,

*Master Nathaniel has come to inform me that I sail for home tomorrow. Mistress Susanna has taken ill. My decision could not be to abandon her in her need. I will return Home. Master Nathaniel has given me his word that my freedom awaits. He is to remain in England.*

*With Relief and Gratitude to God,*

*Phillis*

*September 30, 1773*

*Dear Diary,*

*Mistress Wheatley has placed in my hands just this very day, the written words of the man who is the Printer of my Book of Poems. He states:*

*"The book here proposed for publication displays perhaps one of the greatest instances of pure, unassisted genius, that the world ever produced. For the Author is a native of Africa, and let not the dark part of the habitable system, till she was eight years old."<sup>24</sup>*

*Mistress Wheatley speaks to me of my fame across the Sea and in parts of the Colonies. I feel no different.*

*Ever the Same,*

*Phillis*

*October 18, 1773*

*Dear Diary,*

*Boston greeted me with fair skies when our ship sailed into her Harbor a month ago. I was saddened to find Mistress Susanna in a feeble state. True to the honorable words of their son, the Wheatleys afforded me Freedom. I am permitted to live among them and have acted as Secretary to Mrs. Wheatley while she is unwell. I tend to my writing and have the right to profit from my own affairs. Mr. Wheatley is no longer responsible for my person. My book is Published and well received.*

*There is much outcry against the institution of slavery upon the Boston Streets. I soon anticipate the unbinding of those of my brethren still in chains.*

*Ever*

*Phillis*

*November 15, 1773*

*Dear Diary,*

*We are in receipt of the news of Master Nathaniel's marriage to a Miss Mary Enderby. She is the daughter of one of his business acquaintances.<sup>25</sup> He is to remain in England. Mistress Susanna is in need of comfort.*

*Ever*

*Phillis*

*December 3, 1773*

*Dear Diary,*

*My Poems have arrived from London and the subscribers are to receive them at the bookshop. All new Purchasers must pay 3 shillings and 4 pence for the bound copy.<sup>26</sup> News of my book is spreading throughout the Colonies. I must retain my composure.*

*Ever*

*Phillis*

*March 24, 1774*

*Dear Diary,*

*My heart is heavy with sad tidings. Mistress Susanna has succumbed to her lengthy illness. She departed this Earth on the Third of March. It was her wish that no Elegy be written in her honor. It pains me to abide by this wish. It is only on these pages and in letters to her friends that I am free to speak of her. This Good Christian Woman is now received to Glory. I rejoice for her, yet it is my own Sorrow at her passing I speak of. It was Mistress Susanna who was used as an instrument of God to bring me to Him. I find no Fault in her enslavement of me, as I suffered no Hardship. She was my Friend and Mother who brought*

*me to the path of Wisdom and Christian Enlightenment.*

*Master Wheatley has given his permission for me to remain within the household. He is unwell and in need of supervision.*

*My Publications remain consistent and I find myself responding to the Revolutionary Cause so prevalent in our Sentiments.*

*Ever*

*Phillis*

*September 22, 1774*

*Dear Diary,*

*Master Nathaniel has arrived home with his wife to take charge of settling the property of his parents. Master Wheatley is unable to oversee the businesses and I fear all will be sold. I keep busy with my pursuits and place myself in the Hand of God's Providence.*

*Ever*

*Phillis*

*October 26, 1775*

*Dear Diary,*

*The War of Revolution is well upon us. A servant has been sent from Heaven to guide us in the being of General Washington. The Rebellion has appealed to my muse and I see its relation in an all-encompassing Service, which will have an effect on all the citizens of this Earth. As a person of noted repute, I took the liberty of composing a Tribute to the General.*

*Fix'd are the eyes of nations on the scales,  
For in their hopes Columbia's arm prevails  
Anon Britianna droops the pensive head,  
While round increase the rising hills of dead.  
Ah! Cruel blindness to Columbia's state!  
Lament they thirst of boundless power too late.  
Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,  
Thy ev'ry action let the goddess guide.  
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,*

*With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! be thine.<sup>27</sup>*

*King George has taken notice of the Colonies' Rebellion.*

*I have been in Providence since May to be free from the British occupation of Boston. I am once again in the company of Miss Mary, now Mrs. Lathrop.<sup>28</sup>*

*Her dear Husband is a Minister of the Congregational Church. He is devoted to the refugees of Boston. He welcomes my assistance in his endeavors. These are difficult times, I long for my yesteryears. Perhaps Freedom will prove more cumbersome than my former enslavement.*

*Ever*

*Phillis*

*February 28, 1776*

*Dear Diary,*

*It is with awe I write the news that I am in receipt of a reply from General Washington. He praises my Talents but refutes my Praise of him. He has invited me to make his acquaintance should I be in Cambridge. If I were of a braver temperament I would risk harm and cross British lines to be in the presence of greatness.*

*In this Era, where the Colonists engage in conflict to achieve liberty I use my pen as a weapon to speak out against those who enslave my Brethren. I call upon them to look at themselves as present day Egyptians and the Africans as God's Chosen People.<sup>29</sup> God will stand alongside those who suffer from domination.*

*In Truth*

*I Remain*

*Phillis*

*November 29, 1776*

*Dear Diary,*

*I have returned to my beloved home and Master Wheatley. I continue to compose verse on the subject of National interests.*

Ever

Phillis

July 23, 1777

Dear Diary,

As an African Poetess, my obstacles have been many. I overcame them with the support of my Dear departed Mistress. A new and innovative criticism has reached my ears. The Public Advertiser, a London Newspaper printed an attack by an anonymous satirist.<sup>30</sup> Women who pursue literary achievements are deemed "man-like" and of the Devil.<sup>31</sup> This negative distortion of my works sought to damage my reputation in England, yet I found it to be a means of rekindling the Reader's memory of Me in my absence.

There are little funds available for book purchasing and I fear for my survival.

Ever

Phillis

December 25, 1777

Dear Diary,

*The man John Peters with whom I have spent much time of late has this Christmas Day offered to me a proposal of marriage. I hesitate to trade one bind for another. I enjoy independent thought and service to myself. I remain with Master Wheatley for the present.*

Ever

Phillis

March 18, 1778

Dear Diary,

*Five days have passed since the death of Master Wheatley. I was present at the reading of his will where I was notified that I was left nothing. I am held in check by a wave of*

*confusion. My treatment was always that of family, yet I was called a Servant. I am now, God save me, left with thoughts I would rather not have. What were the motives of my Master and Mistress towards me? I cannot ask Miss Mary as she is torn with grief and of ill health. I heard of Sarah, the daughter lost to them shortly before I arrived.*

*Mistress Susanna often had a slip of tongue and called me by the name Sarah when I was still a child. I cannot bring a disreputable thought upon my mind with reference to Mistress Susanna. Her Christian soul was pure and her kindness towards me sincere. I must keep faith. As a wife she was devoted, yet she deferred to her husband's wisdom and guidance. She would not cast me aside to be without assistance. I am assured of that knowledge. Perhaps she sent me to England that I might seek my own emancipation while upon the shores of Freedom. She could not have dared to even whisper the idea upon the air her husband breathed. I tasted the fruit of freedom and left it behind. Would Freedom taken on English soil taste sweeter than the Freedom given in the Americas? I cannot answer with assurance.*

*Was my aptitude a discovery or did Master Wheatley intend me as an experiment to test a theory regarding the abilities of the Negro to experience scholarly knowledge? I fear his intent was such. I complied and now hold many benefits. I am grateful, yet I am stunned. Like any common slave, I now find that I was less to them than they were to me. This truth is my new and Burdensome Master.*

*But how, presumptuous shall we hope to find  
Divine acceptance with th' Almighty mind—  
While yet (O deed ungenerous!) they disgrace  
And hold in bondage Afric's blameless race?  
Let virtue reign— And thou accord our prayers  
Be victory ours, and generous freedom theirs*

*Yours with resigned acceptance,*

*Phillis*

## NOTES

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4. Carretta, p. 1.
5. Carretta, p. 29.
6. Carretta, p. 54.

7. Carretta, p. 60.
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  11. Carretta, p. 72.
  12. Carretta, p. 72.
  13. Carretta, p. 73.
  14. Carretta, p. 76.
  15. Carretta, p. 72.
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  17. Henry Louis Gates, *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*, Basic, 2003, p. 26.
  18. Kate Uttinger, "Phillis Wheatley: The African Poetess," *Leben Magazine: A Journal of Reformation Life*, <http://leben.us/index./php/255phillis-wheatley-the-african-poetess>.
  19. Carretta, p. 86.
  20. Carretta, p. 95.
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  23. Carretta, p. 135.
  24. Gates, 32.
  25. Carretta, p. 145.
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  27. Carretta, p. 157.
  28. Carretta, p. 153.
  29. Carretta, p. 159.
  30. Carretta, p. 168.
  31. Carretta, p. 168.
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