

THE POEMS OF

Phillis Wheatley

REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION



Edited with an Introduction by

JULIAN D. MASON, JR.

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To the P U B L I C K.

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. ⁴

His Excellency THOMAS HUTCHINSON, Governor,

The Hon. ANDREW OLIVER, Lieutenant-Governor.

The Hon. Thomas Hubbard,	The Rev. Charles Chauncy, D. D.
The Hon. John Erving,	The Rev. Mather Byles, D. D.
The Hon. James Pitts,	The Rev. Ed. Pemberton, D. D.
The Hon. Harrison Gray,	The Rev. Andrew Elliot, D. D.
The Hon. James Bowdoin,	The Rev. Samuel Cooper, D. D.
John Hancock, Esq;	The Rev. Mr. Samuel Mather,
Joseph Green, Esq;	The Rev. Mr. John Moorhead,
Richard Carey, Esq;	Mr. John Wheatley, her Master.

N. B. The original Attestation, signed by the above Gentlemen, may be seen by applying to Archibald Bell, Bookseller, No. 8, Aldgate-Street.

* The Words " following Page," allude to the Contents of the Manuscript Copy, which are wrote at the Back of the above Attestation.

4. Concerning the origins of this statement, see the note to Wheatley's 1772 Proposals. This statement was also used by the publisher of her book, Archibald Bell, as part of his advertising campaign in London newspapers in September 1773. (Robinson, *Her Writings*, pp. 404-5, has a facsimile of one such advertisement.) Apparently because these ads also had some biographical information about her, according to Robinson, *Her Writings*, p. 404, the first volumes of her book produced in London did not have the dedication, the preface, the biographical sketch, or the attestation which are in most copies of the first edition of her book. In one of the newspaper ads (in *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*, September 10-13) this statement is dated October 28, 1772. Robinson, *Her Writings*, p. 270, points out that a number of the signers of this attestation were related by blood or (mostly) by marriage. All were respected persons of position and influence, although they represented various denominations and diverse political views. Information about Oliver (1706-74), Hubbard (1702-73), Bowdoin (1726-90), Cooper (1725-83), and Moorhead (1703-73) can be found with Wheatley's poems having to do with them. Concerning Richard Cary (1717-90), see the note to Wheatley's first letter to the Countess of Huntingdon. Concerning Chauncy (1705-87), pastor of the First Unitarian Church and a respected author on religious subjects, particularly noted for his stand against Whitefield and emotional religion, see Wheatley's poem to Thomas Amory. Hutchinson (1711-80), governor of Massachusetts since 1771, would leave Boston in 1774 and live after that in England. Erving (1728-1816), Gray (1711?-94), and Hancock (1737-93) were promi-

TO MÆCENAS.⁵

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
In softer language, and diviner airs.

While *Homer* paints lo! circumfus'd in air,
Celestial Gods in mortal forms appear;
Swift as they move hear each recess rebound,
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,
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.

nent Boston merchants, and the latter would attain much visibility during the period of the Revolution as a bold signer of the Declaration of Independence. Green (1705?-80), a Tory, was known as a merchant, poet, and wit and for his large library. Byles (1707-88) not only was a Congregational minister but also was known for his poetry and wit (see the Introduction to this volume). Samuel Mather (1706-85), pastor of the Tenth Congregational Church, was a son of Cotton Mather. Ebenezer Pemberton (1704-77) was pastor of the Congregational New Brick Church in the North End (see the notes to her poem on Whitefield). Elliot (1718-78) was pastor of the Congregational New North Church and was known for his antislavery views, as was Gray. Concerning John Wheatley, see the Introduction for this volume and throughout the volume. The five whose names are preceded with "The Hon." were members of the governing council—including Pitts (1710-76). Some of the signers were owners of slaves. (Note that in the printed statement the last names of Elliot and Cary are misspelled, as is the abbreviation of Pemberton's first name.)

5. The Roman Gaius Cilnius Mæcenas was the special friend and patron of Horace and Vergil. This poem was not listed in the 1772 Proposals.

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,
 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.

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,
 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;
 From age to age transmitting thus his name
 With the first glory in the rolls of fame?

Thy virtues, great *Mæcenas!* shall be sung
 In praise of him, from whom those virtues sprung:
 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,
 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:

* He was an *African* by birth.

Then grant, *Mæcenas*, thy paternal rays,
 Hear me propitious, and defend my lays.

ON VIRTUE.⁶

O Thou bright jewel in my aim I strive
 To comprehend thee. Thine own words declare
 Wisdom is higher than a fool can reach.
 I cease to wonder, and no more attempt
 Thine height t'explore, or fathom thy profound.
 But, O my soul, sink not into despair,
Virtue is near thee, and with gentle hand
 Would now embrace thee, hovers o'er thine head.
 Fain would the heav'n-born soul with her converse,
 Then seek, then court her for her promis'd bliss.

Auspicious queen, thine heav'nly pinions spread,
 And lead celestial *Chastity* along;
 Lo! now her sacred retinue descends,
 Array'd in glory from the orbs above.
 Attend me, *Virtue*, thro' my youthful years!
 O leave me not to the false joys of time!
 But guide my steps to endless life and bliss.
 Greatness, or Goodness, say what I shall call thee,
 To give an higher appellation still,
 Teach me a better strain, a nobler lay,
 O Thou, enthron'd with Cherubs in the realms of day!

6. This poem was listed in her 1772 Proposals, dated 1766.