



A Comparison of Writers: Phillis
Wheatley Peters & Honorée Fanonne
Jeffers

BYONCA OWENS

Phillis Wheatley Peters

- Born in West Africa in 1753.
- At around 7-8 years of age, she was brought to America as a slave.
- John and Susannah Wheatley would become her masters.
- She had the opportunity to learn to read and write, also being taught English and classical literature, geography, history, Christianity, and Latin.
- Phillis began writing poetry at about 12 years of age.
- Became a published author in 1773 with *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* making her the first African American to have a published book of poetry.
- She was very popular post-publication.

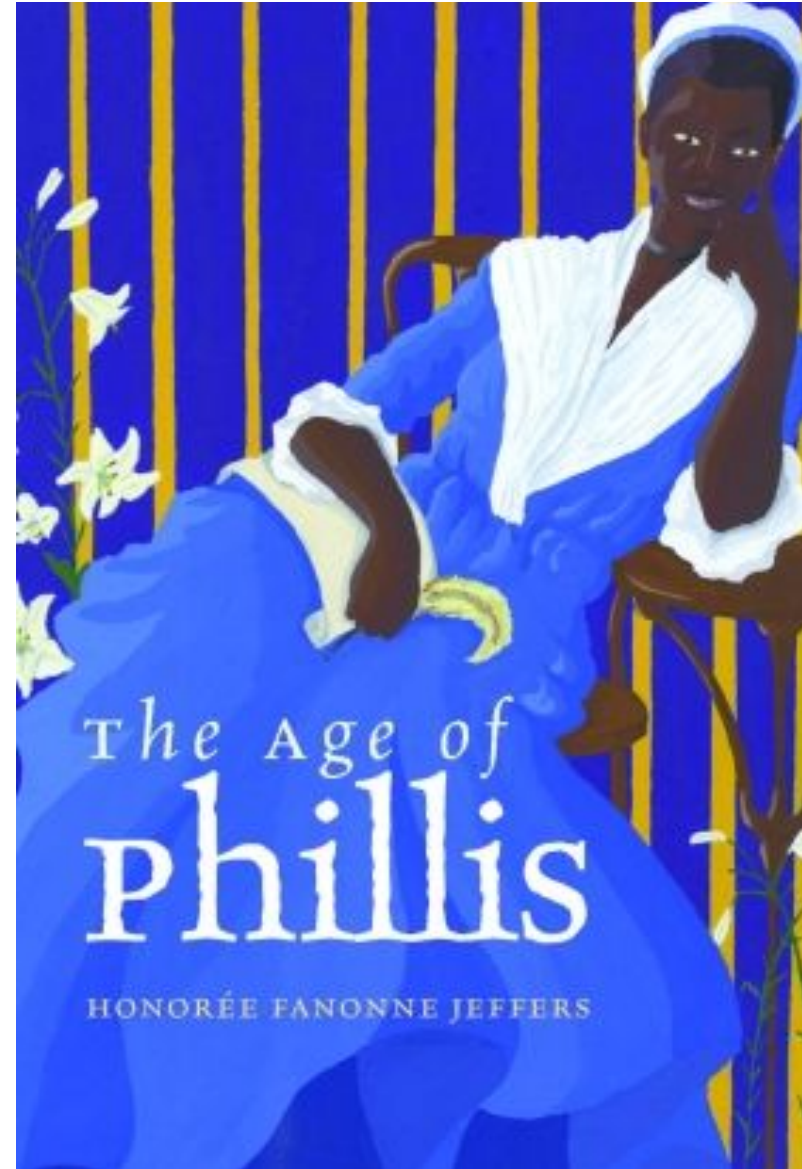
Poems on
Various
Subjects,
Religious and
Moral



Honorée Fanonne Jeffers

- Born and grew up in Durham, North Carolina in 1967
- Her parents were both professors and she learned about Phillis from a young age in school.
- Award-winning author and writer of *The Gospel of Barbecue* (2000), *Outlandish Blues* (2003), *Red Clay Suite* (2007), *The Glory Gets* (2015), and *The Age of Phillis* (2020).
- Conducted about 15 years of research to produce *The Age of Phillis*.
- She is currently an English professor at the University of Oklahoma.

The Age of Phillis



Differences to Consider



Time



Audience



Purpose

Differences to Consider

WHEATLEY PETERS

- 1773
- Predominantly white Americans
- Speaking out against slavery, salvation, knowledge

JEFFERS

- 2020
- Scholars and anyone who reads Wheatley
- Convey the truth about Phillis' writing and allow others to appreciate her as a person

On Being Brought from Africa to America

'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 colour is a diabolic die."

Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,

May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

An Issue of Mercy #2

Why the threats of diphtheria tetanus
malaria smallpox diarrhea dehydration
common cold diseases rape

Why the screaming of the grown shelf mates
a woman or two giving birth Newborns kept
by sailors or capriciously tossed to sharks

Why the banquet of placenta left for rats

The shackled the crowded begging to be killed

Why germs and tribes rechristened Negro
chattering below Vomit

To the University of Cambridge, In New England

The land of errors, and Egyptian gloom:

Father of mercy, 'twas thy gracious hand

Brought me in safety from those dark abodes.

Students, to you 'tis giv'n to scan the heights

Above, to traverse the ethereal space,

And mark the systems of revolving worlds.

Still more, ye sons of science ye receive

The blissful news by messengers from heav'n,

How Jesus' blood for your redemption flows.

Improve your privileges while they stay,

Ye pupils, and each hour redeem, that bears

Or good or bad report of you to heav'n.

Let sin, that baneful evil to the soul,

By you be shun'd, nor once remit your guard;

Suppress the deadly serpent in its egg.

Ye blooming plants of human race divine,

An Ethiop tells you 'tis your greatest foe;

(Original) Black Lives Matter: Irony

Scattered kin, men auctioned by British sires—
Bully tendrils of power, reaching down

for centuries: they arrived to acquire
Native lands and spill that blood for the crown.

British stalking the foreign streets, choke, rough
Up those who misbehave, who dare to greet

soldiers' eyes, decry monarchy: Resist.
The Americans fight back, begin to greet

Redcoats with sneers, in tracts call themselves slaves.
Insist they're tethered, yet the Africans—

the many souls, the wretched, the taken
Who move from *human* to *trafficked*—

Are ignored as white men don paper chains,
The language of wounded throats, chattered chains.

What is the point?

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

ca. 1733-1784

BORN IN WEST AFRICA AND SOLD AS A SLAVE
FROM THE SHIP *PHILLIS* IN COLONIAL BOSTON,
SHE WAS A LITERARY PRODIGY WHOSE 1773 VOLUME
*POEMS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS, RELIGIOUS,
AND MORAL* WAS THE FIRST BOOK PUBLISHED BY
AN AFRICAN WRITER IN AMERICA.



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