

## Pontheolla T. Williams: On "A Letter from Phyllis Wheatley"

"A Letter from Phyllis Wheatley" is notable for the fresh insight it gives on what could have been the response of the colonial poet to her visit in England. It belies the beliefs of some that she was a docile and gratified participant in her own slavery. Her voyage from America to England prompts her recollections of the "horrors" of the "middle passage," the voyage to America, and slavery. In England she was gratified when "the Countess," her patron, praised her poetry, but she resented the segregated dining area where she was seated. She learned that what seemed like "Eden" also had its "serpent" when she was called a "Cannibal Mockingbird" at the same time she was being feted at teas. Nevertheless, she kept her sense of humor when a young "Chimney Sweep" asked her if she, too, were a sweep. Her forbearance, a saving grace, came from her deeply religious faith.

From Robert Hayden: *A Critical Analysis of His Poetry*. Copyright © 1987 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

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