

Phillis Wheatley, "Ode to Neptune. On Mrs. W-'s Voyage to England"

Description

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

“ODE to NEPTUNE. On Mrs. W-'s Voyage to England”

I.

WHILE raging tempests shake the shore,
While Aelus thunders round us roar,
And sweep impetuous o'er the plain,
Be still, O tyrant of the main;
Nor let thy brow contracted frowns betray, 5
While my Susannah skims the watery way.

II.

The Pow'r propitious hears the lay,
The blue-eyed daughters of the sea
With sweeter cadence glide along,
And Thames responsive joins the song. 10
Pleased with their notes Sol sheds benign his ray,
And double radiance decks the face of day.

III.

To court thee to Britannia's arms
Serene the climes and mild the sky,
Her region boasts unnumber'd charms, 15
Thy welcome smiles in ev'ry eye.
Thy promise Neptune keep, record my prayer,
Nor give my wishes to the empty air.

Boston, October 10, 1772.

NOTES:

1 The title Mrs. W-'s suggests this might be Wheatley's mistress, Susanna Wheatley (see line 6); however, there is no surviving evidence that she ever traveled to England. For a discussion of this issue, see Julian D. Mason, ed., *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, p. 84.

2 Aelus Greek god of the winds.

8 *blue-eyed daughters of the sea* The Nereids, sea nymphs of Greek mythology.

10 *Thames* Father Thames; god of the river Thames flowing through southern England.

11 *Sol* Roman god of the sun.

13 *Britannia* Britain personified as a woman (QED).

14 *climes* Atmosphere (QED).

17 *Neptune* Roman god of water and, because of his identification with Poseidon, the sea (OCD).

Source: *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (Albany, 1793), p. 55. [Google Books]

Edited by Marco Varni