

ARCHIVES

“On the Death of Love Rotch,” a New Poem
Attributed to Phillis Wheatley (Peters)
And a Speculative Attribution

Abstract: This article argues that the manuscript poem “On the Death of Love Rotch” recently recovered from a Quaker commonplace book kept in 1782 can be confidently attributed to Phillis Wheatley (Peters). The attribution of the poem provides crucial new evidence for Wheatley’s early presence and influence in Nantucket, New Bedford, and Newport; supplies new evidence for how her poems first appear in these regions that map onto Quaker ministerial routes; and bares traces of her poetic and political influence on these hotbeds for early abolitionist efforts. In addition to placing Wheatley physically closer to Obour Tanner and others in the Newport community before the Revolution, the poem’s presence points toward other communities of color Wheatley engaged with, including New Guinea and Philadelphia, and the possibility that she wrote an elegy for a Black woman named Rose. Combined the article not only makes a case for the expansion of the Wheatley canon but also demonstrates how attribution studies can inform knowledge of the author’s life, location, activities, public contributions, and influence on the larger cultural climate.

KEYWORDS: Phillis Wheatley (Peters), literary attribution, new poem, early American manuscript culture, African American poetry, women’s manuscript culture, early American poetry, Quaker poetry

**A few lines Written by a Negro Girl about 15 Years
of Age on the Death of Love Rotch her Mistress.**

What? Gone and left us all in Misery—
While thou are fled up to the Regions High?
Repine not, but Adore the Righteous Hand
That gives the Stroke, Recall the Great Command. Weep not.
I opened not my Mouth, O Lord because—
We are Instructed by thy Sacred Laws,—
Patience waits Entrance at the mourners Door

We hope she's happy but the Loss Explore—
 Let not the Loss, O Friend, Distress thy mind—
 All worldly sorrows Volatile as Wind
 Nor tremble Thou, because each tedious Night
 Brings fresh Afflictions to the Christian's Sight
 That Love Emmerge that now Inspires the Pen
 And speaks those words thou must resume again
 Ye know not Friends you yet may meet with Joy
 At Consummation every one reply.
 Happy thrice Happy, thou thyself shall view
 Of Grace and virtue ev'ry Soft'ning dew
 There bliss and happiness forever Reign
 And uncontroled Sing a Celestial Strain
 There peace and virtue never ending Live
 Where Love and Friendship Universal Give.
 There vast profuse Humanity doth flow
 All these enjoyed is Happiness Below.⁴⁰

The Black Rose

A Negro Woman of that Name lately deceas'd, being
 remarkable for her Innocent & sincerely pious Life
 Philad.a 9th mo 3rd 1772

Reason distinguishing 'twixt Man & Brute,
 One Flesh, One Blood all Nations constitute,
 The same the sooty Maid on Afric's Coast,
 As in the British Court, the brilliant Toast;
 Objects alike of the Creator's Care,
 Alike belov'd, the swarthy and the Fair,
 Precious alike is each immortal Soul,
 To the great Lord and Father of the whole
 Through whose effectual, all sufficient Grace;
 The faithful still inherit perfect Peace;
 Free, or in Bonds, of Jew or Gentile Race,
 Few want (who dye and leave a large Estate)
 Some Servile Pen to hail them Good and Great,
 The humble Poor unnotic'd sink to Dust,
 Tho' amicably Good and nobly just,

While Adulation, in obsequious Lays,
To Wealth not Virtue, Chants the Song of Praise.
May no low purpose e'er direct my Pen,
Reverence, undue, to pay to mortal Men;
But, sordid Views, degenerate Custom's Laws,
Contemning, in the righteous Bond-Maid's Cause
(Lett⁴¹ Worth unfeign'd its just Eloguim lack)
“Rise honest muse; and sing” the noble **Black**.

 If to be faithful in a low Estate
Wise without Learning, Without Riches great.
If where those Relatives united blend;
The Tender Mother, Daughter, Sister, Friend,
If where th' harmonious social Virtues meet,
And Piety untainted with Deceit;

 If in so rich a Garden Honour blows
Illustrious then the Life of honest **Rose**.
He who from Guilt delivers the Contrite,
Whose Love can wash the Ethiopian white;
Whose Wisdom can the thing of nought prepare,
To bring to nought the boasted things that are,
Exalt his little Ones whom Men despise,
And thus confound the Wisdom of the Wise,
Hath from this sorrowing Vale of mortal Woes,
Call'd to immortal joys his faithful **Rose**.⁴²