

Phillis Wheatley Peters as Jane Austen's Contemporary?

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"Sitting with Jane" Art Trail

- Bicentenary of Austen's death (July 18, 2017)
- 24 Austen-themed book-shaped benches (Hampshire, England)
- "Jane and Her Forgotten Peers" Bench
 - Artist: Amy Goodman
 - Site: Winchester Cathedral (Austen's burial site)

“Jane and Her Forgotten Peers” Bench

- Austen’s “forgotten peers” – not the ones we expect and actually predecessors not peers
 - Margaret Cavendish
 - Delarivier Manley
 - Eliza Haywood
 - Phillis Wheatley Peters (PWP)

Front of Bench



Back of Bench

Back of the Bench



Austen and three named white “forgotten peers” (Images top left to bottom right: Austen, C18 not C17 Cavendish, Haywood, and not Manley, but Behn)

Quotations (misremembered Austen, misquoted Cavendish, Haywood, and Manley)

Front of the Bench



Elizabeth and Darcy (imitation of 1995 BBC); Elizabeth’s words on dissatisfaction with world and inconsistent people.

PWP writing at desk (imitation of frontispiece from *Poems on Various Subjects*); “On Imagination” verses

*Imagination! who can sing
thy force? Or who describe the
swiftness of thy course? Soaring
through air to find the bright
abode, Th' empyreal palace of
the thund'ring God. We on thy
pinions can surpass the wind,
And leave the rolling
universe behind."*



Quoted passage:

"Imagination! who can sing
thy force? Or who describe
the swiftness of thy course?
Soaring through air to find
the bright abode, Th'
empyreal palace of the
thund'ring God, We on thy
pinions can surpass the
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Why This Image? Why These Words?

Image of woman *actually* writing captures the purpose of the bench: celebrate women writers Austen fans likely do not know but should.

Ode captures the purpose of the bench: celebrate women writers' imaginations. Better fit for homage to writing than Elizabeth's words.

Goodman's Intentions (Artist Statement)

Purpose: "honour...some of the largely forgotten female literary giants of yesteryear, alongside Miss Austen."

Description: "celebrates not only Jane Austen, but her contemporary female novelists that were pioneers in their time for their independence and creativity."

How Does This Apply to PWP?

- Largely forgotten female literary giant? ✓
- Pioneer in her time? ✓
- Creativity? ✓
- Female novelist? ✗
- Independence? ✗

PWP as Austen's Contemporary?

Can someone published two years before Austen was born and died when Austen was nine be her contemporary?

Does making PWP *Austen's* forgotten peer raise her image and amplify her voice? Does it invite viewers to read her work?

Sight and Sound, but Erasure and Silence

- See an image of a Black woman writer: *gives her visibility.*
- Read her words: *her voice is heard.*
- Have no idea who the writer is. *Unintentional erasure and silencing.*
 - PWP not mentioned by name – other peers are.
 - Why not add her name to the scroll? Mistake?

Result: PWP still not recognized.