



Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage (Sarah Mills Hodge Fund Publication)

Vincent Carretta

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With *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), Phillis Wheatley (1753?–1784) became the first English-speaking person of African descent to publish a book and only the second woman—of any race or background— to do so in America. Written in Boston while she was just a teenager, and when she was still a slave, Wheatley’s work was an international sensation. In *Phillis Wheatley*, Vincent Carretta offers the first full-length biography of a figure whose origins and later life have remained shadowy despite her iconic status.

A scholar with extensive knowledge of transatlantic literature and history, Carretta uncovers new details about Wheatley’s origins, her upbringing, and how she gained freedom. Carretta solves the mystery of John Peters, correcting the record of when he and Wheatley married and revealing what became of him after her death. Assessing Wheatley’s entire body of work, Carretta discusses the likely role she played in the production, marketing, and distribution of her writing. Wheatley developed a remarkable transatlantic network that transcended racial, class, political, religious, and geographical boundaries. Carretta reconstructs that network and sheds new light on her religious and political identities. In the course of his research he discovered the earliest poem attributable to Wheatley and has included it and other unpublished poems in the biography.

Carretta relocates Wheatley from the margins to the center of her eighteenth-century transatlantic world, revealing the fascinating life of a woman who rose from the indignity of enslavement to earn wide recognition, only to die in obscurity a few years later.

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