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CELEBRATING BLACK
 HISTORY MONTH
 OCTOBER 2020



PHILLIS WHEATLEY: POEMS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS, RELIGIOUS AND MORAL & A MEMOIR OF PHILLIS WHEATLEY, A NATIVE AFRICAN AND A SLAVE

- A hugely important text – the first book of poetry by an African-American author to be published.
- Unique edition – includes an 1834 memoir by B.B. Thatcher.
- Perfect for students – contains explanatory notes, an index of first lines and a note on the text, as well as an appendix containing letters and notices from the first edition of the text.
- Published to coincide with Black History Month 2020.

In 1773, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* became the first book of poetry by an African-American author to be published. At the tender age of seven, Phillis had been brought to Massachusetts, where she threw herself into education, and was soon devouring the classics and writing verse with whatever she had to hand – odes in chalk on the walls of the house. Once her talent became known, there was uproar, and in 1772 she was interrogated by a panel of ‘the most respectable characters in Boston’ and forced to defend the ownership of her own words.

As related in the 1834 memoir also included in this volume, the road to publication was not straight, and while it was clear that such a volume could not be published in America, Phillis was recommended to a London publisher, who brought out the book – albeit issuing with it an attestation as to her authorship, as well as a ‘letter from her master’ and a short preface asking the reader’s indulgence. This edition includes these elements as an appendix, so that the twenty-first-century reader can discover Phillis Wheatley as she should have been read – as a poet, not property.

‘Elegant lines... the style and manner exhibit a striking proof of your great poetical talents.’

GEORGE WASHINGTON

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Phillis Wheatley (1753–84) was the first African American to publish a book of poetry. Taking her name from the slave ship, *The Phillis*, that brought her to Massachusetts and the Wheatley family whose property she became, Phillis showed such a natural aptitude for language that her owners eventually granted her her freedom. Her only work, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* was published in 1773, to great acclaim.

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