

Vincent Carretta, ed., *The Writings of Phillis Wheatley Peters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. Pp. 226. Pb. £35.00. ISBN 9780192885296.

The contradictions of Phillis Wheatley Peters' life and writing are so extreme as to be almost impossible to hold in focus. On the one hand, her genius was encouraged and her fame celebrated, not just at home but well beyond: when she left Boston for London in May 1773, she signalled her departure to the public in a poetic 'Farewell to America' that quickly appeared alongside news announcements in the main New England journals, as well as in publications across the Atlantic. Yet she was also, simultaneously and to an extent co-constitutively, an African-born woman subjected to the injustices and unfreedoms of New England's racist, slave-based society.

Vincent Carretta's valuable edition of Wheatley Peters' writings works hard to hold these difficult contradictions in view, using close attention to bibliography and biography to draw out the often painful ironies of her status as bard to Boston's elite. The notes' careful enumeration of publication venues (172) allows us to gauge the meanings and impact of 'Farewell to America', while the unsympathetic tone of Wheatley Peters' imperative address to the '*Hon'ble* Mr. Thomas Hubbard, *Esq*', in a pamphlet elegy published four months earlier, is suggestively illuminated by a note describing that Boston worthy as 'paradoxically, a slave-trading philanthropist' (171). Beyond the presentation of important new manuscript poems and variants, and the excellent introduction, the notes' judicious compilation of these and many other details is one of the most impressive achievements of *The Writings of Phillis Wheatley* (Oxford University Press, 2019), already a crucial resource for students and scholars. Now retitled *The Writings of Phillis Wheatley Peters* and presented in a more affordable paperback edition, the work represents a compact, palimpsestic accretion of Carretta's long-running scholarship on the poet known as the 'Mother of African-American literature', while also clearly benefiting from the manifold insights of wider post-millennial scholarship on the Early Black Atlantic.

Unlike Carretta's *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings* (Penguin, 2001), the OUP text presents the poet's published and unpublished writings in (substantially updated) chronological order. Reviewers of the hardback have already noted that this organisation tends to decentre Wheatley Peters' one published volume, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), within her wider *oeuvre* and foregrounds the often occasional character of her poetry. It also integrates her private correspondence and manuscript poetry with the publicly circulated verse and proposals, forming a continuum of writings that were carefully pitched to a variety of individual, collective, local, and international audiences; this offers the reader greater insight into the development of her poetics, whereby tropes, figures and prosodic strategies are creatively reused, and often refined, across successive poems and variants. 20 years ago, scholarship on Wheatley Peters rarely lingered on formal and semantic details, focusing primarily on her poetry's biographical and historical correlates; with this edition, it becomes almost impossible *not* to close-read her poems and to register the nuances and complications of their meanings.

This edition rightly avoids any claim to 'collection' or 'completion'. The rapid if overdue expansion of archival and historical research relating to Wheatley Peters exerts a continued pressure on editors and presses to improve and update. A substantially revised edition of Carretta's *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (University of Georgia Press, 2011) appeared in 2023, little over a decade after its first publication. Five years on from the appearance of the hardback and ebook editions, the paperback *Writings* already registers further changes in the field. Most crucially, the updated title follows an emerging scholarly consensus that the poet should be referred to not just by her maiden but also by the name she chose by marrying John Peters in 1778—a recognition of her married identity

advocated for most notably by Honorée Fanonne Jeffers. Carretta's rationale for using 'Wheatley Peters' is set out in a new 'Preface to the Paperback Edition' (ix), which also flags 'significant additions and some corrections'. These include new, recently published entries in the useful 'Further Reading' list, additional bibliographical details for archival materials, and new biographical information, including the poet's residence in Middleton, Massachusetts during the poorly documented period 1780-84 (xx).

As scholars comb North American colonial archives, Wheatley Peters' archive and *oeuvre* continue to grow. In 2023, Wendy Raphael Roberts published her evidence for two new attributions in *Early American Literature*, while David Waldstreicher's encyclopaedic biography, *The Odyssey of Phillis Wheatley* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2023), claims the identification of no fewer than 13 additional poems. As these attributions are tested and either confirmed or challenged, and as new contenders appear, some will surely stick—calling for still further updates and editions of this subtle, radical, and compelling writer.

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