

**Looking Into Phillis  
(On viewing Meredith Bergmann's Phillis Wheatley Memorial Statue)**

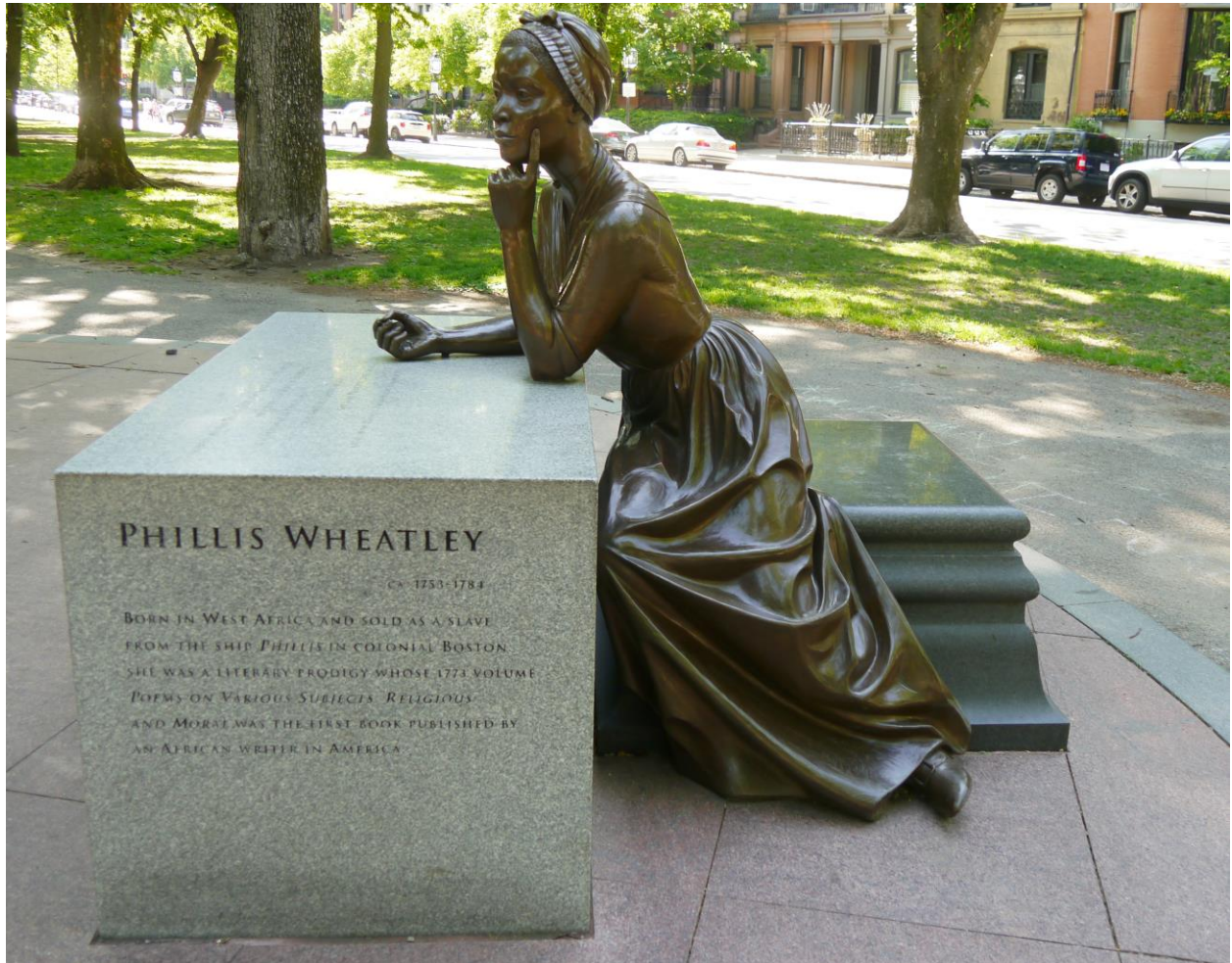


Photo credit: Sarah Ruffing Robbins

There are bronze statues of you in all the right places;  
finally, the world gets to sit and look into you,  
to feel the weight of your words,  
heavy as bronze, free for the taking,  
as someone mistakenly thought *you* once were.

I am standing in front of you, your bronze face  
resting on your knuckles, our brown eyes  
poring over each other...and beyond.  
Are you wondering  
what your name once was,  
who you could have been,  
where you could have grown  
had you only been free to plant your feet  
on a land you chose?

You are the “first Black person,  
the first enslaved person,  
and the third woman in the United States  
to publish a book of poems.”\* This might be news  
to anyone else but you. You knew  
*you* were a poet in Africa. You’d have been  
a poet anywhere...metaphor swims  
in your veins. So does kindness.

You were kidnapped, and yet,  
you never delivered the words your captors  
deserved. Instead, you gave them Poetry.  
A Poetry so profound that it has us  
all mesmerized as we look into the galaxy  
of your words, a solar system with you  
as the Sun. Your Light was too much  
for our America, an America you learned  
to own, but who could never own *you*.

There were some who could not believe  
in a slave who could make her words set sail  
on seas of Faith and Hope. There were some  
who could never fathom a voice as colossal  
as yours. It is a voice we did not deserve.

But here you are over two hundred years later,  
your words still resounding  
an echo of America’s pledge,  
your spirit pondering a dream  
whose heart continues beating. . .  
Hope that America will be what it has promised  
to be for all—a land where Poets and Dreamers  
can plant their words and hearts  
in an abundant Future and Freedom  
that *you* could never fully fathom  
in your brief and Luminous life.

***Poem by Lucinda Zamora-Wiley,  
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\* Quote from Boston’s “Friends of the Public Garden” website:

<https://friendsofthepublicgarden.org/2023/03/01/womenshistory-phillis-wheatley-march-1-2023/>