



Our Nig: or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black

Harriet E. Wilson

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Harriet Wilson (1825-1900) is the first female African American to publish a novel in North America. Her first and only work, "Our Nig: Sketches From the Life From a Free Black" was published in 1859 and was considered lost until 1982 when rediscovered by the scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. The novel is largely autobiographical, tracking the life of a free black women in the Antebellum North. At the age of three, the protagonist Frado is abandoned by her parents and left at the house of the Bellmonts, a wealthy New England family. Her life as a free black woman in the North is filled with hardship and suffering. This realistic tale sugar coats nothing, and the reader witnesses Frado's difficult life as a servant to the family. A groundbreaking work of gender and race identity, Wilson creates a tremendous narrative central to African American history. Much in the vein of Phillis Wheatley and Langston Hughes, Harriet Wilson's novel helped begin the tradition of African American literature in America.

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