

before, to such a degree, as to read any, the most difficult parts of the sacred writings,¹ to the great astonishment of all who heard her.

As to her writing, her own curiosity led her to it; and this she learnt in so short a time, that in the year 1765, she wrote a letter to the Rev. Mr. Occom,² the *Indian* minister, while in *England*.

She has a great inclination to learn the Latin tongue, and has made some progress in it. This relation is given by her master who bought her, and with whom she now lives.

John Wheatley³

Boston, Nov. 14, 1772

On Being Brought from Africa to America

'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land,
Taught my benighted¹ soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Savior too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
5 Some view that sable race with scornful eye:
"Their color is a diabolic dye."
Remember, Christians, Negroes black as Cain²
May be refined and join the angelic strain.³

1773

To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth,¹ His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North America, Etc.

Hail, happy day, when, smiling like the morn,
Fair Freedom rose New England to adorn:
The northern clime² beneath her genial ray,
Dartmouth, congratulates thy blissful sway:³
5 Elate with hope her race no longer mourns,
Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns,
While in thine hand with pleasure we behold
The silken reins, and Freedom's charms unfold.
Long lost to realms beneath the northern skies
10 She shines supreme, while hated Faction dies:
Soon as appeared the goddess⁴ long desired,
Sick at the view, she⁵ languished and expired;

1. I.e., the Bible.

2. Samson Occom (1723–1792), a Mohegan who had become an ordained Presbyterian minister and was a friend of the Wheatleys.

3. A Boston merchant (d. 1778).

1. Unenlightened.

2. After Cain murdered his brother Abel, God "marked" him so that no one would kill him (Genesis 4.15). This story was at times interpreted as explaining the origin of blacks.

3. Race. "Refined": purified (possibly a punning allusion to cane sugar).

1. The second earl of Dartmouth (1731–1801), who was appointed secretary in charge of the American colonies in August 1772, replacing the stern Lord Hillsborough. American sympathizers in England were hopeful that Dartmouth would prove to be more amenable to the colonies' grievances.

2. Region.

3. Reign, leadership.

4. I.e., Freedom.

5. I.e., Faction (internal conflict).