

some overt, others more subtle. Her work is enriched by the tension between traditional form and transformational ideas.
 The following texts are from *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (1966, rev. 1989), edited by Julian D. Mason. Wheatley's spelling and punctuation have been retained.

On Being Brought from Africa to America

"Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land,
 Taught my benighted soul to understand
 That there's a God, that there's a Savior too:
 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
 Some view our sable¹ race with scornful eye,
 "Their color is a diabolic dye."
 Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,²
 May be refined, and join the angelic train.

5

1773

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

Hail, happy day, when, smiling like the morn,
 Fair Freedom rose New England to adorn:
 The northern clime beneath her genial ray,
 Dartmouth, congratulates thy blissful sway:
 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
 She shines supreme, while hated faction dies:
 Soon as appeared the Goddess² long desired,
 Sick at the view, she³ languished and expired;
 Thus from the splendors of the morning light
 The owl in sadness seeks the caves of night.

5

10

No more, America, in mournful strain
 Of wrongs, and grievance unredressed complain,
 No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,
 Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
 Had made, and with it meant t' enslave the land.

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1. Black.

2. Cain slew his brother Abel and was "marked" by God for doing so. This mark has sometimes been taken to be the origin of dark-skinned peoples (Genesis 4.1–15).

1. William Legge, second Earl of Dartmouth

(1731–1801), was appointed secretary in charge of the American colonies in August 1772. He was sympathetic to the Methodist movement in England but not to the American Revolution.

2. Freedom.

3. Faction.

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
 Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
 Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
 By feeling hearts alone best understood,
 I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
 Was snatch'd from Afric's fancied happy seat:
 What pangs excruciating must molest,
 What sorrows labor in my parent's breast?
 Steeled was that soul and by no misery moved
 That from a father seized his babe beloved:
 Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
 Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

For favors past, great Sir, our thanks are due,
 And thee we ask thy favors to renew,
 Since in thy power,⁴ as in thy will before,
 To sooth the griefs, which thou did'st once deplore.
 May heavenly grace the sacred sanction give
 To all thy works, and thou forever live
 Not only on the wings of fleeting Fame,
 Though praise immortal crowns the patriot's name,
 But to conduct to heavens refulgent fane,⁵
 May fiery coursers sweep th' ethereal plain,⁶
 And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,
 Where, like the prophet,⁷ thou shalt find thy God.

1773

To the University of Cambridge,¹ in New England

While an intrinsic ardor prompts to write,
 The muses promise to assist my pen;
 'Twas not long since I left my native shore
 The land of errors, and Egyptian gloom:²
 Father of mercy, 'twas Thy gracious hand
 Brought me in safety from those dark abodes.

Students, to you 'tis given to scan the heights
 Above, to traverse the ethereal space,
 And mark the systems of revolving worlds.
 Still more, ye sons of science³ ye receive
 The blissful news by messengers from Heaven,
 How Jesus' blood for your redemption flows.

4. I.e., since it is in thy power.

5. Heaven's shining temple.

6. The heavens. "Coursers": spirited horses.

7. In 2 Kings 11, a chariot of fire with fiery horses appears, and the prophet Elijah is taken up to heaven by a whirlwind.

1. Harvard.

2. "And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days" (Exodus 10.22). "Errors": i.e., theological errors, because Africa was unconverted.

3. I.e., knowledge.

See Him with hands out-stretched upon the cross;
 Immense compassion in his bosom glows;
 He hears revilers, nor resents their scorn: 15
 What matchless mercy in the Son of God!
 When the whole human race by sin had fallen,
 He deigned to die that they might rise again,
 And share with Him in the sublimest skies,
 Life without death, and glory without end. 20

Improve⁴ your privileges while they stay,
 Ye pupils, and each hour redeem, that bears
 Or good or bad report of you to Heaven.
 Let sin, that baneful evil to the soul,
 By you be shunned, nor once remit your guard; 25
 Suppress the deadly serpent in its egg.
 Ye blooming plants of human race divine,
 An Ethiop⁵ tells you 'tis your greatest foe;
 Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,
 And in immense perdition sinks the soul. 30

1767

1773

On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, 1770¹

Hail, happy saint, on thine immortal throne,
 Possessed of glory, life, and bliss unknown;
 We hear no more the music of thy tongue,
 Thy wonted auditories² cease to throng. 5
 Thy sermons in unequalled accents flow'd,
 And every bosom with devotion glowed;
 Thou didst in strains of eloquence refined
 In flame the heart, and captivate the mind.
 Unhappy we the setting sun deplore,
 So glorious once, but ah! it shines no more. 10

Behold the prophet in his towering flight!
 He leaves the earth for heav'n's unmeasured height,
 And worlds unknown receive him from our sight.
 There Whitefield wings with rapid course his way,
 And sails to Zion³ through vast seas of day. 15
 Thy prayers, great saint, and thine incessant cries
 Have pierced the bosom of thy native skies.
 Thou moon hast seen, and all the stars of light,
 How he has wrestled with his God by night.
 He prayed that grace in every heart might dwell,
 He longed to see America excel; 20

4. Take advantage of.

5. Ethiopian. In Wheatley's time, "Ethiopian" was a conventional name for the black peoples of Africa.

1. Whitefield, born in 1714, was the best-known revivalist in the eighteenth century.

2. I.e., thy customary listeners.

3. Here, the heavenly city of God.

He charged⁴ its youth that every grace divine
 Should with full luster in their conduct shine;
 That Savior, which his soul did first receive,
 The greatest gift that even a God can give,
 He freely offered to the numerous throng, 25
 That on his lips with listening pleasure hung.

“Take Him, ye wretched, for your only good,
 Take Him ye starving sinners, for your food;
 Ye thirsty, come to this life-giving stream, 30
 Ye preachers, take Him for your joyful theme;
 Take Him my dear Americans, he said,
 Be your complaints on His kind bosom laid:
 Take Him, ye Africans, He longs for you,
 Impartial Savior is His title due: 35
 Washed in the fountain of redeeming blood,
 You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to God.”

Great *Countess*,⁵ we Americans revere
 Thy name, and mingle in thy grief sincere;
 New England deeply feels, the orphans mourn,
 Their more than father will no more return. 40

But, though arrested by the hand of death,
 Whitefield no more exerts his laboring breath,
 Yet let us view him in the eternal skies,
 Let every heart to this bright vision rise; 45
 While the tomb safe retains its sacred trust,
 Till life divine re-animates his dust.

1770

1770, 1773

Thoughts on the Works of Providence

Arise, my soul, on wings enraptured, rise
 To praise the monarch of the earth and skies,
 Whose goodness and beneficence appear
 As round its center moves the rolling year,
 Or when the morning glows with rosy charms, 5
 Or the sun slumbers in the ocean's arms:
 Of light divine be a rich portion lent
 To guide my soul, and favor my intend.
 Celestial muse, my arduous flight sustain
 And raise my mind to a seraphic¹ strain! 10

4. Exhorted.

5. Selina Shirley Hastings (c. 1707–1791), Countess of Huntingdon, head of a small society of evangelical churches, was a strong supporter of

George Whitefield. Wheatley visited her in England in 1773.

1. Angelic.

Adored for ever be the God unseen,
 Which round the sun revolves this vast machine,
 Though to His eye its mass a point appears:
 Adored the God that whirls surrounding spheres,
 Which first ordained that mighty Sol² should reign 15
 The peerless monarch of the ethereal train:
 Of miles twice forty millions is His height,
 And yet His radiance dazzles mortal sight
 So far beneath—from Him the extended earth
 Vigor derives, and every flowery birth: 20
 Vast through her orb she moves with easy grace
 Around her Phoebus³ in unbounded space;
 True to her course the impetuous storm derides,
 Triumphant o'er the winds, and surging tides.

Almighty, in these wond'rous works of Thine, 25
 What Power, what Wisdom, and what Goodness shine!
 And are Thy wonders, Lord, by men explored,
 And yet creating glory unadored!

Creation smiles in various beauty gay,
 While day to night, and night succeeds to day: 30
 That Wisdom, which attends Jehovah's ways,
 Shines most conspicuous in the solar rays:
 Without them, destitute of heat and light,
 This world would be the reign of endless night:
 In their excess how would our race complain, 35
 Abhorring life! how hate its lengthened chain!
 From air adust⁴ what numerous ills would rise?
 What dire contagion taint the burning skies?
 What pestilential vapors, fraught with death,
 Would rise, and overspread the lands beneath? 40

Hail, smiling morn, that from the orient main⁵
 Ascending dost adorn the heav'nly plain!
 So rich, so various are thy beauteous dyes,
 That spread through all the circuit of the skies,
 That, full of thee, my soul in rapture soars, 45
 And thy great God, the cause of all adores.⁶

O'er beings infinite His love extends,
 His Wisdom rules them, and His Pow'r defends.
 When tasks diurnal⁷ tire the human frame,
 The spirits faint, and dim the vital flame, 50
 Then too that ever active bounty shines,
 Which not infinity of space confines.
 The sable⁸ veil, that Night in silence draws,

2. The sun.

3. Apollo, the Greek sun god.

4. Dried up.

5. From the eastern ocean.

6. I.e., God created everything (including the "smiling morn").

7. Daily.

8. Black.

Conceals effects, but shows the Almighty Cause,
 Night seals in sleep the wide creation fair,⁹
 And all is peaceful but the brow of care. 55
 Again, gay Phoebus, as the day before,
 Wakes every eye, but what shall wake no more;
 Again the face of nature is renewed,
 Which still appears harmonious, fair, and good.
 May grateful strains salute the smiling morn, 60
 Before its beams the eastern hills adorn!

Shall day to day, and night to night conspire
 To show the goodness of the Almighty Sire?
 This mental voice shall man regardless hear,
 And never, never raise the filial prayer? 65
 Today, O hearken, nor your folly mourn
 For time mispent, that never will return.

But see the sons of vegetation rise,
 And spread their leafy banners to the skies.
 All-wise Almighty providence we trace 70
 In trees, and plants, and all the flowery race;
 As clear as in the nobler frame of man,
 All lovely copies of the Maker's plan.
 The power the same that forms a ray of light,
 That called creation from eternal night. 75
 "Let there be light," He said. From his profound¹
 Old Chaos heard, and trembled at the sound:
 Swift as the word, inspired by power divine,
 Behold the light around its Maker shine,
 The first fair product of the omnific² God, 80
 And now through all his works diffused abroad.

As reason's powers by day our God disclose,
 So we may trace Him in the night's repose:
 Say what is sleep? and dreams how passing strange! 85
 When action ceases, and ideas range
 Licentious and unbounded o'er the plains,
 Where Fancy's³ queen in giddy triumph reigns.
 Hear in soft strains the dreaming lover sigh
 To a kind fair,⁴ or rave in jealousy; 90
 On pleasure now, and now on vengeance bent,
 The lab'ring passions struggle for a vent.
 What power, O man! thy reason then restores,
 So long suspended in nocturnal hours?
 What secret hand returns the mental train, 95
 And gives improv'd thine active powers again?
 From thee, O man, what gratitude should rise!
 And, when from balmy sleep thou op'st thine eyes,

9. Beautiful.

1. Depths. "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1.3).

2. Omnificent: unlimited in creative power.

3. The imagination in its image-making aspect.

4. Woman.

Let thy first thoughts be praises to the skies,
 How merciful our God who thus imparts
 O'erflowing tides of joy to human hearts,
 When wants and woes might be our righteous lot,
 Our God forgetting, by our God forgot! 100

Among the mental powers a question rose,
 "What most the image of the Eternal shows?"
 When thus to Reason (so let Fancy rove)
 Her great companion spoke, immortal Love. 105

"Say, mighty power, how long shall strife prevail,
 And with its murmurs load the whispering gale?
 Refer the cause to Recollection's shrine,
 Who loud proclaims my origin divine,
 The cause whence heaven and earth began to be,
 And is not man immortalized by me?
 Reason let this most causeless strife subside."
 Thus Love pronounced, and Reason thus replied. 110
 115

"Thy birth, celestial queen! 'tis mine to own,
 In thee resplendent is the Godhead shown;
 Thy words persuade, my soul enraptured feels
 Resistless beauty which thy smile reveals."
 Ardent she spoke, and, kindling at her charms,
 She clasped the blooming goddess in her arms. 120

Infinite Love where'er we turn our eyes
 Appears: this every creature's wants supplies;
 This most is heard in Nature's constant voice,
 This makes the morn, and this the eve rejoice;
 This bids the fostering rains and dews descend
 To nourish all, to serve one gen'ral end,
 The good of man: yet man ungrateful pays
 But little homage, and but little praise.
 To him, whose works arrayed with mercy shine,
 What songs should rise, how constant, how divine! 125
 130

1773

To S. M.,¹ a Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works

To show the laboring bosom's deep intent,
 And thought in living characters to paint,
 When first thy pencil did those beauties give,
 And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,
 How did those prospects give my soul delight,
 A new creation rushing on my sight?
 Still, wondrous youth! each noble path pursue, 5

¹ Scipio Moorhead, a servant to the Reverend John Moorhead of Boston.