

The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature

by [Henry Louis Gates](#) | Literature & Fiction | ★★★★★★★★★★
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Journal Entry 1 by [al3xa](#) from [Swansea, Wales](#) United Kingdom on Saturday, April 15, 2006

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Journal Entry 2 by [al3xa](#) from [Swansea, Wales](#) United Kingdom on Tuesday, April 18, 2006

'Performing' Race, 'Performing' Gender in 1960's Black Arts era African American Poetry

"Simone de Beauvoir wrote that one is not born a woman; no, and one is not born a Negro". (bell hooks)

One is not born a woman/Negro, but rather becomes a woman/Negro . Moreover, one is not one's identity, but rather one does one's identity. Race and gender identity is theorised as a 'floating signifier' , a discursive 'cultural construction' , a 'historical situation rather than a natural fact' . In Butlerian terms identity is a wholly learned act or performance, formed and maintained through 'entirely imitative...stylized repetition' of the cultural ideal or normative, in which one compulsively and unconsciously performs ideological eternal types wearing the mythic masks of cultural stereotype, which then masquerade as natural or essence. Racial and gender identity is a culturally constructed ideological masquerade where cultural inscription masquerades as biological essence, fiction as fact, verb as noun, fragmented 'I' as unified coherent 'I', nurture as nature and thus ultimately as natural. Furthermore, identity is enclosed within a 'binary logic' , an 'either/or' classificatory system of essentialist categories; I/other, us/them, subject/object, oppressor/oppressed, ultimately male/female, white/black. In which the female/black 'other' is constructed in subordinate relation to the male/white 'I' – this superior/inferior division is thus arguably a 'stabiliser of [white supremacist] patriarchal power' . The binary 'matrix of intelligibility' - which demands a unified 'I' identity; where the emotional self identity mirrors the physical body signifiers of sex and race - has a 'reductive and restrictive [effect]... [which] polarises plurality... [and] collapses multiplicity' . The relationship between race and gender lies thus within the performative enactment of a unified 'I' which is culturally constructed through imitation and repetition of essentialist binary norms, which hinge on historical and cultural context. This essay explores the divisive/unifying, binary, constructed, performative nature of gender and particularly racial identity and the wider implications of this idea of performance of identity on the African-American struggle out of subordinate object 'other' and into equal subject 'I' in the 1960's Black Arts Movement, through the poetic works of Amiri Baraka and Nikki Giovanni.

The 1960's Black Arts Movement grew out of the 'dramatic social upheaval' and 'militant...radical activism' of the 1960's Civil Rights, Black Nationalist and Black Power Movements. Larry Neal described the Black Arts Movement as the 'aesthetic

spiritual sister of the Black Power concept', 'the cultural arm of the black revolution' in the struggle against ongoing racial discrimination. Black Art was informed and unified by a 'quest for 'black consciousness'', and affirmation of black identity which stressed idealised essentialist authentic blackness; 'black pride, black dignity and black self-determination'. Furthermore, Black Art was to 'reflect black life... and unify black people in [their] attack on anti-black racist America'. The Black Art era's racial solidarity - fundamentally characterised by a masculinist 'inversion of the 'us' and 'them'' racial binary - resulted in a (dis)empowering essentialist-binary racial and gender over-performance of black masculinity.

The Black Arts Movements essentialist over-performance of black masculinity manifests in Amiri Baraka's 'literature of inversion' - 'black literature's most prominent call to arms' - which deals with confrontational themes advocating highly provocative language. Baraka - a 'principle architect of the Black Arts' who acts as a 'mirror of his society' - performs a controversial violently separatist, radical, militant-nationalistic, anti-White, anti-Semitic, anti-Women, misogynistic, essentialist black masculinity. Baraka inverts the racial superior/inferior binary to 'black over white', idealising black masculinity as a powerful positive aesthetic. However, as this reading of 'Black Art' will illustrate, Baraka's 'effort to transform representation into presentation' is only superficially empowering and liberating as Baraka ironically presents and performs the very stereotypical black masculinity represented in white culture; thus becoming a complicit force in racial/gender-binary (re)presentation.

Baraka's 'poetic manifesto...of aesthetic politics' is a controversial, aggressively radical, Black Nationalist, end of Black Arts and Black Power Movement, frustration poem, which reflects the disintegration of the Black Arts Movement's early optimism into violent disillusionment and dissatisfaction; 'Fuck poems', 'Poem's are bullshit unless...', and attempts to define the black aesthetic as a revolutionary force. 'Black Art' evokes the black poet as a changer of his society; he is as 'wrestlers' and 'warriors' - the black poet is a powerful anarchistic black radical nationalist revolutionary, brandishing the black poem as the black revolution's cultural weapon - 'poems/like fists', 'dagger poems', 'We want "poems that kill."/Assassin poems' - with which to perform fictional poetic page violence, encouraging actual racial revenge violence. The revolutionary poet and poem pens and enacts 'a metaphorical wish list of black transgressions... [and] political revenge violence', a series of hateful anti-white; 'Setting fire and death to/whities ass', anti-Semitic; 'dagger poems in the slimy bellies/of the owner-jews', and misogynistic anti-women; 'black ladies dying/ of men.../beating them down', rhetoric violence's. Baraka's revolutionary voice posits a radically black aesthetic and calls forth a blacker art and a blacker world; 'We want a black poem. And a/Black World/Let the world be a Black Poem' - poetic and real world are indistinguishable; the written world engenders the real warning and threatening the manifestation of the poems page violence in actual reality. Undercutting 'Black Art's violent rhetoric and central to Baraka's revolutionary vision are utopian ideals of: love; 'Let there be no love poems written/until love can exist freely and/cleanly', the black self; 'love what you are', 'lovers and the sons/of lovers and warriors and sons/of warriors' and black unity 'And Let All Black People Speak This Poem/Silently/or LOUD', illustrating Baraka's central impulse for racial solidarity and collectivism, and his 'search for a positive black awareness', a black aesthetic and a black world.

Baraka's inversion of the racial binary and performance of idealised militant essentialist black masculinity is evoked through 'Black Art's 'rhetoric of negation and affirmation'. 'Black Art's 'deliberately anti-formal formless' rhetoric - which advocates an experimental style, 'Airplane poems, rrrrrrrrrrrrrr/...tuhthuthuthu', and a constructed improvised spontaneity (through stream of consciousness and enjambment) which 'strives to approximate the rhythms of the spoken speech' - is itself a form of negation and affirmation. Baraka's interest in reflecting the 1960s' emotional felt-intensity through 'the actual spoken word' - 'We want live/words of the hip world' - reflects the black artists rejection of a formalised white rhetoric. Baraka's experimental poetic form thus negates white culture in favour of a modern black 'performative ethos' and posits Black Art as a revolutionary black 'I' affirming aesthetic. Furthermore, Baraka's violent negation of the racial and gendered 'other' through the afore-discussed aggressive anti-white/Semitic/women transgressions and the affirmation of the black masculine 'I' through essentially masculine imagery, 'wrestlers', 'lovers and the sons/of lovers warriors and sons/of warriors', empowers black masculinity as a powerful revolutionary aesthetic symbol. Baraka's volatile negation of femininity through profanity-laced invectives, 'gridelmamma mulatto bitches', 'Stinking/Whores!', and page violence towards both black women, 'black ladies dying/ of men', but particularly white women, 'Rape the white girls.../Cut the mothers' throats' - in 'Black Dada Nihilismus'; Baraka's 'cosmogonic "chant" of blackness' - illustrates Baraka's anxious over-performance of traditional black masculine stereotypes in his attempt to affirm and empower the black masculine 'I'.

Amiri Baraka performs an essentialist militant black masculinity through his 'viscous vulgar sexis[t]' rhetoric of negation and affirmation, which embraces the image of 'the revolutionary as rapist'; a 'hyper-heterosexually sexed black male beast who preys on white women' - thus equating black liberation with black masculinity and establishing 'patriarchy as a masternarrative' of the black revolution. Furthermore, as bell hooks argues, Baraka ironically celebrates and romanticises the stereotypical images evoked by racist whites of the black man as primitive, strong and virile. 'Black Art's rhetoric of negation and affirmation reveals Baraka's presentation of black masculinity to be simply a (re)presentation of white patriarchal supremacist hegemony's notions of race/gender. Baraka's masquerade of an eternal type of feared black

masculine identity behind the mythic mask of the black man as a violent inhumane predatory animal is thus a superficially-empowering, self-objectifying, learned, imitated, repeated performance of white racist stereotypes. An act of (re)presentation which complicitly maintains racial/gender identity within a constrictive culturally constructed binary cell, ironically reinforcing the walls of a binary power structure that forever encloses the African-American 'I' as an objectified inferior 'other'.

Against the backdrop of the Second Wave Feminist, Black Art and Black Power movements, 'female "revolutionary poet"' Nikki Giovanni enters the 1960s' poetic dialogue on the female position in the black revolution in 'Beautiful Black Men' and black identity in 'The True Import of Present Dialogue: Black vs. Negro'. Although Giovanni 'was an enthusiastic participant in the Black Arts movement' she was 'opposed to the formulation of the Black Aesthetic' and rejected an essentialist performance of blackness which equated black identity with black masculinity and mimicked white racist stereotypes – a performance and aesthetic which Baraka advocates and defines in 'Black Art'. Giovanni's poetic exploration of the ideologies which enclose female/black 'other' identities in a male revolution and a white world challenges and subverts traditional performance of race and gender.

'Beautiful Black Men' is a vernacular 'celebratory rap' of the "Black is Beautiful" perspective'; 'i wanta say just gotta say something/bout those beautiful beautiful beautiful outasight/black men', evoking the black mans new found pride; a 'joy and pride and strut which has not...come to the black woman.' Giovanni's title 'Beautiful Black Men' recalls Baraka's 'Beautiful Black Women', which calls for black female support, 'Ladies. Women. We need you', 'Help us. women.', 'will you help/us' and subordination 'will you open your body souls, will you lift me up mother' in the masculinity centred black revolution. Giovanni challenges the 'black male resistance to the idea that women should have equal status with men' in a 'black liberation [that apparently] could only be achieved by the formation of a strong black patriarchy', and the belief that the black female was a supportive 'silent strength' in the black revolution while the black male was the dominant 'symbol of the races', through subversion of the 'romanticized concept of idealized womanhood'. Whilst 'Beautiful Black Men's fictional rhetoric 'i' supports the black revolution and admires black masculinity; 'don't have to do anything but walk/on stage/ and i scream and stamp and shout', 'for more beautiful beautiful beautiful/black men', Giovanni's actual poetic 'I' demythologises and deflates black masculinity, 'see new breed men in/.... sandals/where dirty toes peek at me', and exposes the performativity of black masculinity through a radical feminist reversal of the male gaze which echoes masculinist rhetoric; 'winking at me/in their fire red, lime green, burnt orange/royal blue tight tight pants that hug/what i like to hug'. Thus 'Beautiful Black Men' simultaneously celebrates the 'Black is Beautiful' perspective and challenges the exclusive maleness of this revolutionary aesthetic through subtle subversion of essentialist black femininity/masculinity and traditional notions of the black woman as a supportive 'other' to the black male 'I'.

Giovanni's revolutionary verse 'The True Import of Present Dialogue: Black vs. Negro', which posits the central question 'Nigger/Can you kill', explores the Black Art Movements revolutionary murderous ideology and black/negro I/other constructed racial identity. Giovanni's appropriation of an assassin-poem esque militant black nationalist revolutionary rhetoric; 'Can a nigger kill the Man', 'Can you stab-a-jew', 'Can you splatter their brains in the street/Can you kill them/Can you lure them to bed to kill them' - which mimics Baraka's anti-white/Semitic masculinist radical black nationalist sentiment – is oft misread as 'murderous militancy'. 'Although clearly political, Giovanni did not advocate violence'; rather 'she remained convinced that progress at the cost of human lives was not progress at all'. Thus, rather than inciting actual revolutionary violence, 'Black vs. Negro's assassin rhetoric empowers the black self to commit a metaphorical murder of the white 'I's' control over black consciousness through the killing of a constructed Negro/object 'other' identity in favour of a self-defined black/subject 'I' identity;

'Can you kill the nigger/in you/Can you make your nigger mind/die/Can you kill your nigger mind', 'Can we learn to kill WHITE for BLACK/ Learn to kill niggers/Learn to be Black men' – here, 'learning 'to be Black men' involves killing 'the nigger in you'. Giovanni's 'kill your nigger mind' is thus arguably the Black Art Movement's equivalent to Virginia Woolf's Feminist Movement, "kill' the 'angel in the house". Giovanni's Negro is as much a racial white supremacist 'psychological, sociological, and economical fabrication' performed upon the black body, as Woolf's Angel is gender's masquerade of femininity, a patriarchal construction performed upon the female body. Furthermore, as Woolf, Giovanni recognises the necessity of destroying the learned, imitated, repeated stereotypical performance, the mythic masks and eternal types, 'Learn to kill niggers', - which enclose race/gender identity as an 'other' within a patriarchal white supremacist 'I' constructed binary cell - in becoming a truly emancipated autonomous subject 'I' race, 'Learn to be Black men'. Thus the true import of present revolutionary Black Art Movement dialogue, which seeks the freedom, autonomy and equality of the African-American 'I', is an ideological fight - the black self-defined 'I' subject vs. the negro other-constructed 'other' object - freeing the mind so that the body may be free, 'Can you kill your nigger mind/and free your black hands to/strangle', to fight a blacker revolution.

'Black vs. Negro' and 'Beautiful Black Men' illustrate Nikki Giovanni's refusal to be defined - 'I don't see why I should live in

hostage to other people's idea of me' - as an 'I' by a male/white 'other' or as an 'other' to any male/white 'I'. Furthermore Giovanni's subtle yet radical subversion of gender performance in 'Beautiful Black Men' and 'Black vs. Negro's metaphorical killing of a racial eternal type exposes the constructed performativity of the Black Art Movement's black masculinity and marks the beginning of African American poetry's exploration of essentialist notions and traditional performance of a unified racial/gender identity.

Performance of a universal unified intelligible African-American racial identity is of founding philosophical concern throughout the African-American poetic tradition. Phillis Wheatley is critically punished, regarded as 'not really black', for advocating a white literary mask. Paul Laurence Dunbar is praised by W. D. Howells for expressing authentic blackness through a vernacular voice. Richard Wright, in *Blue Print for Negro Writing*, polices racial performativity; promoting the poetic representation of a communal unified black 'I'. The African-American poets' yearning for racial roots is forever marked by a painful absence; Africa is forever a 'Dark face', 'So long/So far away'. Countee Cullen's question, 'What is Africa to me?', unites the Negro artist as s/he forever battles with 'double-consciousness' in a quest for the truth of blackness. This search for an impossibly unattainable unified racial identity is thus arguably African-American poetry's most striking binding theme.

The African-American historical cultural performance of and yearning for an intelligible unified racial/gender 'I' identity is never more potently present in African-American poetry than in the Black Arts Movement's 'struggle for a synthetic vision of black identity.' Though Baraka's performance of a unified racial/gender 'I' identity was an effective survival strategy and a necessary fiction in uniting African-Americans in the black revolutions fight against 'otherness'. Baraka's (re)presentation of white racist stereotypes (re)births a (dis)empowering eternal type of black 'otherness'. Thus a more significant challenge to the politics of 'otherness' is Giovanni's metaphorical murder of the mythic mask of Negro; the destruction of white defined/controlled racial consciousness. However a truly revolutionary challenge to white patriarchal politics of 'otherness' is neither Baraka's inversion of the racial binary nor Giovanni's self-defined blacker 'I', but rather the destruction of hegemony's performance dependant essentialist racial/gender binary structure - which maintains the politics of 'I/'other' binary 'difference' and forever births the black/female/African-American poet as subordinate 'other' to the white/male/Western poetic superior 'I' - through a radically firm refusal to perform the status of racial/gendered 'other'. Thus contemporary African-American poetry's rebirth of the individual 'I' - who embraces racial/gender multiplicity and 'shun[s]... racial or gender partiality' - poses the greatest challenge to the politics of 'otherness' - which requires the performance of an intelligible racial/gender identity in order to impose the binary 'othering' classificatory system. African-American poetry presently holds a fundamentally unique fictional space in which to engender - through subversion and destruction of essentialist intelligible binary notions of race/gender - the revolutionary transformation from being culturally born to the mythic state of eternal other - black/female/African-American poet - to being culturally born to the true state of individual 'I'.

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footnotes for this text wont appear and am too lazy to change reffrencing so for now quotes are from a vague somewhere in the books listed)

Winter 2005 Lvl 2 English Literature with Gender 'African American Poetry' Mark = 80/85

I think I am most proud of this piece above all others as I feel it is the closest to my own original work I have gotten so far as the idea/s behind it originated from my own instintual reaction and my use of predomenantely cultural and literary *theroy* rather than direct literary *criticism* on the pieces of poetry themselves. And although it was way over the word limit I could have kept writing for a hell of a lot longer than i did...:)



Journal Entry 3 by al3xa from Swansea, Wales United Kingdom on Tuesday, April 18, 2006

Phillis Wheatley, '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 Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

Phillis Wheatley ; the 'conventional', 'conforming', "'mocking bird" poet' who went 'a-begging to white America'. Accused of pandering to white American culture and thus described as "'not really black" . A mimetic parrot whose poetry was an example of New England's "'poetic poverty" ; "'worthless trifling effusions"' and so, ironically, "'beneath criticism"' . Or, Wheatley; the self-conscious, 'challenging', 'subversive' pioneer. A 'visionary founder' and 'foremother' of the African American poetic tradition. "'Phillis miracle"' , a "'natural genius"' whose poetry is the "'legitimate" product of "the African Muse"' . The sole tangible fixable truth to be revealed amongst these criticisms is the truly epitomic enigmatic nature of Wheatley, whose figure exemplifies the problematic 'tensions inherent in the African-American tradition' ; writing an African racial identity within the oppressive confines of an American white patriarchal colonial hegemony. With an awareness of the porous circularly influencing nature of culture-on-identity-on-culture, I wish to pursue a contextually sympathetic reading of Wheatley's 'On Being Brought From Africa To America'. Focusing on the manifestation of Wheatley's 'double-voiced consciousness' ; racial 'double-consciousness' expressed in 'double-voicing', within her poetic discourse to further explore the 'dualities and conflicts' of African American identity and the tensions of writing behind the African/American Mask .

Phillis Wheatley the 18th Century African-American female slave poet writing in Christian New England, famous for being the first African-American to publish a book, embodies the essentially female roots of a flowering African-American literary tradition. Wheatley's poetry, written within the historical and literary context of the Revolutionary and Early American Period (1765-1830), is a poetry of beginnings. The beginnings of an African-American slave narrative; a narrative of slavery and freedom written within or of the confines of slavery, of and for freedom and equality, a literature of the 'resistance to human tyranny... dedicate[d] to human dignity'. Writing in the shadow of the Enlightenment, African-Americans sought representation within the American literary tradition as equals to prove their humanity and equality in society. Literature became a covert weapon against oppression, a self-conscious discourse which oft appealed to the dominant white audience through use of accepted literary forms and adoption of Christian values in order to make a claim for equality and freedom. I wish to present the argument that Wheatley, in 'On Being Brought From Africa To America', is creating a slave narrative which simultaneously subverts and conforms due to her complex identity of double-consciousness and pure contextual political and cultural necessity, through focusing on how the aspects double-voicing and the literary mask manifest within the poem.

'On Being Brought From Africa To America' is an elegy on slavery in which Wheatley, wearing a 'mask of generic whiteness', makes an advanced radical claim for universality and racial equality. In reading *On Being Brought From Africa To America* the reader becomes keenly aware of Wheatley's self-division in racial and cultural identity. In Wheatley's poetic voice we hear her two-ness: the stark contrast between her pre-determined social identities; the negro, the woman, the slave and the voice of her adopted culture; 18th Century Christian New England in which she was acculturated. The poem's double-voiced nature allows for several - often contradictory- interpretations which have in the past resulted in volatile critical attacks on Wheatley's poetic voice from both white elitists and black essentialists.

'On Being Brought From Africa To America' relates Wheatley's personal feelings on being brought from freedom in Africa to slavery in America. The poem could be read as Wheatley's possible desire to eulogise slavery. Her poetic voice is informed by the Christian values and beliefs of her adopted culture; 'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land'. 'Mercy' indicates Wheatley does not lament Africa, nor is she regretful of having been brought to America. The self-deprecating treatment of her 'Pagan' heritage and racial 'benighted soul' illustrate her acceptance of a distinctively Christian world view. Furthermore Wheatley's striking advocacy of a language reminiscent of 18th Century missionary work, 'Saviour' and 'redemption', evokes an image of her as 'at one with her [Christian] culture'.

However, I wish to begin countering Wright's argument by drawing attention to the italicisation of 'Pagan' and 'Saviour' which I believe is the initial indicator of Wheatley's double-voiced consciousness, her self- and cultural-division. Although Wheatley does advocate these self-deprecating and other-valorising terms she does not present them as a natural part of the narrative. Rather through italicisation Wheatley to an extent distances these as neither wholly self-representative nor natural self-expressions; they become an aspect of the other voice which speaks through her narrative. Though Wheatley advocates traditional religious language to relate a distinctly Christian view on having being brought from the 'Pagan land' of Africa to Christian America, this too could be read as a self-conscious tactic. The sense of gratitude Wheatley expresses, though certainly representative of her actual feelings, creates a literary strategy; the passive, pious self-image created initially reassures the white Christian readership of their moral justification in displacing Africans to enslave them in America and introduces Wheatley as a non-threatening voice, a writer-reader consensus construct which proves useful in approaching the then delicate topic of racial (in)equality.

A volta occurs in the subsequent passage of 'On Being Brought From Africa To America'. Wheatley turns her attention from the now intelligently and adequately constructed pious self to the white Christian other or 'some' which constitute the majority of her readership. "Their colour is a diabolic die" introduces a secondary voice, one which the speech marks indicate to be outside of her own sphere of thought, the voice of the white racist 'some' who 'view [her] sable race with scornful eye'. Wheatley here is mimicking the societal view of black people as other or lesser. This mimesis could be simply read as the voice of the internalised racism of her society. However, I believe a closer reading reveals that this voice is rather a voice that Wheatley sets out to covertly attack in her poem; through mimesis of their 'scornful' view on blacks Wheatley exposes the contradictions in Christian morality.

The speech marks in "Their colour is a diabolic die" act on several levels; most notably it divides the previously unified I of the narrative, allowing Wheatley to express a voice outside of herself. The quotation marks distance this expressed view from Wheatley's own stance, thus signifying Wheatley as not wholly, as Wright wrongly asserted, 'at one with her culture'. Whilst Wheatley's expressively Christian language indicates the extent of her Christian conditioning and the internalising of white racism ('sable race', 'benighted soul'); the foregrounding of a secondary voice, a voice to be rejected, signifies Wheatley as "torn by contrary instincts" thus 'Phillis Wheatley was never "at one with her culture"'.

Wheatley end-focuses her radical claim for equality and universality in the final couplet; 'Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,

May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.'

in which Wheatley presents a distinctly Christian world view which unites humanity; Wheatley evokes a sense of equality under God; harking to the notion that we are all Gods children. This conclusion may be read as more radical than it at first appears. 'Remember, Christians' is arguably a pun reminding 'Christians [that they] should practice what they preach' and thus '[r]emember' to be 'Christians'. The (un)ambiguous deliberate advocacy of punctuating commas allows for a more radical reading which hangs on the central balancing comma in 'Christians, Negroes'. There is a sense of ambiguity as to who Wheatley is addressing and a un-ambiguity of the presence of a deliberation in this grammatical choice. Instead of 'Remember[...] Christians, Negroes[...] black as Cain', were the narrative voice would simply be reminding Christians that Negroes racial colour 'may be refin'd' through advocacy of Christian values and beliefs and thus 'join th' angelic train', which would suffice were Wheatley to be making a simple claim for equality. Wheatley's deliberate use of aysindetic listing and italics of 'Christian, Negroes' marks the subjects as not simply equal rather they indicate their essential sameness; both are 'black as Cain', and thus by necessity both must be culturally and spiritually, rather than racially, 'refin'd' in order to 'join th' angelic train'. Behind a protective veil of ambiguity and a white mask of Christian language Wheatley makes the covert yet radical statement that Christians too are not necessarily pure, drawing the doubly-radical conclusion that all Christians and Negroes may, through cultural and spiritual refinement, demonstrate their (though essentially Christian) universality.

'On Being Brought From Africa To America' demonstrates clearly Wheatley's duality, her self and cultural division. There are moments in Wheatley's poetry when another voice enters, most notably in the voice of the Ethiop in 'To The University of Cambridge, in New England'. Through her many voiced poems we experience her ambiguity and the confusion of her own racial identity, furthermore they indicate to Wheatley's critically silenced radical stance on slavery. Whilst Wheatley's language voices the moral values of her adopted culture reflecting her acceptance of the white Christian view on African-American slave history. Wheatley's covert literary devices; the afore-discussed italics, speech marks, commas, and the voice of the other, whilst out of necessity practically invisible and certainly silent, speak for Wheatley's covert radical racial voice. Furthermore they indicate Wheatley is simultaneously writing of and for racial equality and freedom. In light of Wheatley's context, writing as a black slave in Christian New England in the shadow of the Enlightenment when 'writing was a principle sign of reason', Wheatley could be read as appropriating a white literary mask in order to write the African out of slavery and into freedom. Wheatley's adoption of Christian morals, Classical allusions (most notably in 'To Mæcenas'), her knowledge of English poets and her intellectual tone are all designed to undo the popular view of the African race as a sable race. Specifically in 'On Being Brought From Africa To America' Wheatley's sophisticated conformity to Christian morality and adoption of accepted literary styles; her mimesis of Neoclassical elegiac verse in the manor of Pope and furthermore her appropriation of formal structures; heroic couplets in iambic pentameter. These devices do not simply reflect her education and acculturation; rather in retrospect they become a literary strategy, a white mask. Her poetry demonstrates her cultural and spiritual refinement and thus her equality with her white literary predecessors. Wheatley becomes a sociological symbol; proof positive of Africans humanity and equality to the European on the 'Great Chain of Being'. The success of Wheatley's appropriation of a white literary mask in 'On Being Brought From Africa To America' becomes evident in history; Wheatley's writing led to her own emancipation in 1773, furthermore the poem was republished in 1838 by abolitionists as 'the antislavery movement's most salient argument for Africans innate mental equality'.

Phillis Wheatley in 'On Being Brought From Africa To America' successfully employs the strategy of an 'African-American literary mask [of] "mimicry, and invisibility"'. Wheatley 'appropriates and revises dominant "white" discourses as part of an effort "to write black selves into the mainstream of American literature"'. Through her "'mask of generic whiteness"'; her "'remarkably unexceptional style"' that convey her "'disguised antislavery statement"' and radical claims for universality, Wheatley fashioned "'an expressive 'black' vehicle"'. Although Wheatley's (un)successful masking strategy has led her to act as a sacrificial lamb to the critical slaughter, one could claim that Wheatley, through necessary subversion within conformity, has paved the way for future African-American writers and thus 'no single writer has contributed more to the founding of African-American Literature'.

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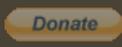
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