



## To the University of Cambridge, in New England

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In the ringing tones of a sermon, the slave poet draws a clear distinction between the backgrounds of herself and the Harvard College students she addresses. Wheatley opens with a statement about how recently she was brought from Africa, “land of errors.” In contrast, the students have had the benefit and privilege of studying the world's best wisdom. Calling them “sons of science,” the poet reminds them, however, that the most important knowledge they will ever have is that Jesus died to redeem them and all other sinners. She exhorts them to be ever vigilant against evil and to shun sin in its smallest manifestations.

The two major notes that Wheatley strikes repeatedly in the poem are her race and the urgency of renouncing sin. A devout Christian, she does more than serve as witness to God's mercy and humans' need for salvation. She testifies to the power and glory of the merciful God who brought her safely from a dark place; it is possible that she is referring to Africa, but she may well be referring to the dark slave ship that transported her to America where, though well treated, she is still enslaved. Again she draws attention to her race and servitude by reminding the students that an “Ethiop” (African) is warning them that sin leads to ruin and damnation. By implication, she seems to be leading them to the conclusion that enslaving fellow humans is one such deadly sin.

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