

Review Article

## “On Being Brought from Africa to America” [1]: The Realistic Truths about the Trickeries of Europeans by Phillis Wheatley

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**Abstract:** In this paper, the critical analysis and interpretation of one of the prestigious poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America” by Phillis Wheatley will demonstrate that it is really a metaphor on some realistic Truths about the trickeries used by Europeans in history both in their contact with Africans and in their relationships with black people. Due to the importance and value of each verse of this very short poem, we have proceeded by a linear analysis in order to grasp the main content and meaning of each verse which sheds light on the very important trickeries (methods, processes, lies, hypocrisies and actions) used by white people. And to attain this goal, the analysis turns around theories such as hermeneutics, stylistics and Marxism due to the white man hegemony and feeling of superiority over the black man. As a result one may discover as principal trickeries and in order of denunciation by Phillis Wheatley, the trickery of “Paganism”, the trickeries of civilization and colonization, the trickeries of Religion and Christianity, the trickery of acculturation, the trickery of Racism, and the trickery of the color of skin.

**Keywords:** Truths, trickeries, Paganism, civilization, colonization, Religion, Christianity, acculturation, Racism, color of skin, white people, black people, relationships, realistic.

## INTRODUCTION

The poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America” by Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) may be considered as a metaphor about the trickeries used by Europeans because this poem identified as “The Best of Phillis Wheatley”<sup>[1]</sup> conveys some realistic Truths about the first contacts between Europeans and Africans. Furthermore, it is an allegorical <sup>[2]</sup> poem in which Phillis Wheatley reveals some realistic Truths about the trickeries used by Europeans <sup>[3]</sup> since their first relationships with black people till today.

Indeed published in 1773 and written by the very first African American woman writer of history, it is surprising to realize that the thorough reading of this symbolic poem tells many truths about the methods, processes, lies, hypocrisies and actions used by Europeans (white people) during the first contacts and in their relationships with black people about colonization, civilization, slavery, Jim Crow laws, and blacks mistreatments both in United States of America and in the World.

<sup>1</sup> [https://books.google.ci/books/about/Being\\_Brought\\_from\\_Africa\\_to\\_America\\_The.html?id=3WT6DwAAQBAJ&source=kp\\_book\\_description&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.ci/books/about/Being_Brought_from_Africa_to_America_The.html?id=3WT6DwAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y)

<sup>2</sup> Allegory: a story in which the characters and events are symbols that stand for ideas about human life or for a political or historical situation. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/allegory> Allegory, which encompasses such forms as fable, parable, and apologue, may have meaning on two or more levels that the reader can understand only through an interpretive process. <https://www.britannica.com/art/allegory-art-andliterature>.

<sup>3</sup>That is why this poem as a whole may be considered as the realistic Truths about the trickeries of Europeans ever revealed by Phillis Wheatley

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How does the poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America” expose the different trickeries used by Europeans? So above the general and overall meaning of this poem, what are the truths hidden in this poem? What are the trickeries used by Europeans and which are conveyed metaphorically by this short poem? Those questions will be our concerns in this paper and analysis.

Our topic about “the realistic Truths about the trickeries of Europeans” will be analyzed in this short but meaningful poem through the light of theories such as hermeneutics, stylistics and Marxism. Indeed for a better analysis of the poem we realize in terms of theory and methodology that it will be first a hermeneutic and stylistic study of the poem in order to sort out the truths and trickeries hidden in the metaphorical language used by the poet. And in terms of first contacts and relationships between Europeans and black people, it will be a Marxist study of the poem in order to better comprehend the notion of white people hegemony and the functions of the different trickeries used by Europeans and their outcomes in today’s world.

In a composite set, the hermeneutical, stylistic and Marxist study of the poem will be done step by step to observe how in her literary creation, Phillis Wheatley in a genius way has conveyed so important, practical but also topical truths about the relationships whites-blacks since the beginning and since longtime as a testimony and as a visionary poet.

Indeed, Due to the value and importance of this poem and also due to the message and meaning it conveys, we will proceed by a linear analysis of the poem because each verse (line) is fundamental and incorporates in itself a particular but specific aspect (truth) and reality about the first contacts and relationships between white people (Europeans) and black people (Africans). So each verse will be analyzed in its singularity and specificity so that to grasp all its contents at all levels [<sup>4</sup>] thanks to a critical interpretation taking into account the style, metaphor, and images.

### 1- General Overview on the Linear Analysis of “On Being Brought from Africa to America” and the Trickeries of Europeans

Written in a couplet system of riming pattern a [<sup>5</sup>], bb [<sup>6</sup>], cc [<sup>7</sup>], dd [<sup>8</sup>], this poem of one stanza made up of eight verses (octave) by Phillis Wheatley is characterized as one of her shortest poems. This poem is written in iambic pentameter (five metrical feet that alternate between one unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable).

V1 'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,  
V2 Taught my benighted soul to understand  
V3 That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:  
V4 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
V5 Some view our sable race with scornful eye,  
V6 "Their colour is a diabolic die."  
V7 Remember, *Christians*, *Negros*, black as *Cain*,  
V8 May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

As one may observe at the first reading, this poem seems to be a religious one because it talks about the teachings of Christianity and the speaker’s conversion from paganism to Christianity and also the redemption of the speaker (here the poet) as a Christian focusing on the importance of salvation and the Bible.

This important story about the way the poet learned about the existence of God and the teachings of Jesus but also her spiritual transformation is shown from verse 1 to verse 8 and is reinforced by the fact that the poet uses the Bible symbols and images such as “God”, “*Saviour*”, “redemption”, “*Christians*”, “*Cain*”, “angelic”.

But in reality, the story of this poem is Wheatley’s personal narrative (account) of an actual or real life experience because “The poem describes Wheatley's experience as a young girl who was enslaved and brought to the American colonies in 1761” [<sup>9</sup>]. So the poet and the speaker are the same person.

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<sup>4</sup> Literal meaning, metaphorical meaning, symbolical meaning, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Land, understand

<sup>6</sup> Too, knew

<sup>7</sup> Eye, die

<sup>8</sup> Cain, train

<sup>9</sup> “The speaker describes her experience as a young African girl who was enslaved and sold to the Wheatley family in 1761. While living with the Wheatleys in Boston, the speaker learned about Christianity.”  
<https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/phillis-wheatley/on-being-brought-from-africa-to-america>

And at the bottom of this moral message, when one has an insight reading of the poem, it reveals itself as a real bitter and critical poem which hides in its messages several important trickeries used by white people against black people. It has a profound meaning and importance since it is one of the first poems talking about the relationships between white people (Europeans) and black people (Africans). The line by line interpretation and analysis of “On Being Brought from Africa to America” is therefore important to detect those trickeries or those truths about history hidden in each verse of this octave.

### **2- Verse 1 'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land : Africa in Europeans' mind and conception (or) the trickery of the “pagan land” / the trickery of Paganism (“pagan land”)**

In this first verse our main concern will be the metaphor but also image “my Pagan land” used by the poet to describe her Continent, her homeland, and Africa. This metaphor and image of “my Pagan land” is indeed very important as a poetic code to shed light on the conception Europeans have about Africa or better on the preconceived ideas Europeans have about Africa.

The linguistics style through the possessive pronoun “my” in “my Pagan land” does not mean that it is the poet herself who characterizes her own land or country or continent as “Pagan”. But it means that it is the attribute Europeans (white people) give to the land, the country, the continent of the poet (who symbolizes Africans here). It is a way to accept or to re-appropriate herself the attribute white people use to characterize her homeland when she says “my Pagan land”.

This expression in its stylistic value and in its semantic clarifies the conception, the idea white people have about Africa but also the conception they widespread all around the world.

It is exactly what Europeans thought about the continent Africa, that is why their views and preconceived ideas about this continent are well described by the poetic code “my Pagan land” used here by Phillis Wheatley to qualify her homeland and continent.

The trickery of Paganism through the expression (“pagan land”) was well widespread among white people at that time and was also the hypocrisy or the lie they could use to “enter” the continent and have devil attitudes. In this concern, Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*, describes the brutal impact of capitalism and colonialism on both the colonizer and colonized, exposing the contradictions and hypocrisy implicit in western notions of “progress” and “civilization” upon encountering the “savage”, “uncultured,” or “primitive [10]”.

And since I have been asked to speak about colonization and civilization, let us go straight to the principal lie that is the source of all the others. Colonization and civilization? In dealing with this subject, the commonest curse is to be the dupe in good faith of a collective hypocrisy that cleverly misrepresents problems, the better to legitimize the hateful solutions provided for them. In other words, the essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly-that is, dangerously-and to answer clearly the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies... that the chief culprit in this domain is Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations Christianity = civilization, paganism savagery, from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the Yellow peoples, and the Negroes.<sup>11</sup>

### **3- Verse 2 Taught my benighted soul to understand : the process of civilizing the uncivilized Africans, the savage Africans, and the process of colonizing the savage Africans (or) the trickeries of civilization and colonization (“Teach benighted soul”)**

In this second verse our main concern will be the three metaphors but also images used by the poet to describe the process of civilization and also the process of colonialism. The three metaphors indeed tell about the fact to civilize the uncivilized. So they incorporate the three dimensions which are: the civilized, the uncivilized, and the process to transform the uncivilized into a civilized person. And the three metaphors are namely: “Taught”, “my benighted soul”, and “to understand”.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://monthlyreview.org/product/discourse\\_on\\_colonialism/](https://monthlyreview.org/product/discourse_on_colonialism/)

<sup>11</sup> Aimé Césaire, *DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM*, Translated by Joan Pinkham , MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS, NEW YORK, 1972, pp 32-33.

“my benighted soul” .....corresponds to ..... the uncivilized  
 “Taught” ..... corresponds to..... the process to transform  
 “to understand” .....corresponds to ..... a civilized person

So the three different metaphors and images are very important and symptomatic in the process of shifting someone from a point A to a point B and indeed they play fundamental function in the meaning of the concerned verse in accordance with what happened exactly in the relationships and in the first contacts between Europeans and Africans, between White people and Black people.

In clear, if our concern here is the three metaphors and images: “Taught”, “my benighted soul”, and “to understand” [12]; it means that the whole verse is very symptomatic and significant in terms of representing but also in terms of conveying the notions of civilizing [13] both Africans and Africa and colonizing<sup>14</sup> both African countries and Africans.

Of course when we know what happens in the course of history and namely in terms of relationships between white people and black people, we observe that the poetic codes of “Taught” [15], “my benighted soul” [16], and “to understand” [17] are the *perfect* words to convey the Truth, the reality about civilization and colonization.

They are also the *perfect* words to convey the trickeries of both African civilization and African colonization by Europeans meaning white people. So this verse in its stylistic value and in its semantic clarifies the process, the function, the objective and the meaning of both colonization and civilization as tools invented by white people during their first contacts and in their relationships with black people.

Thanks to this verse we understand clearly that the project of white people through the trickery of civilization and colonization was exactly to make mutation [18]: The “benighted soul” through the process of teaching and education should become an understanding person, an enlightened person or the uncivilized person through the process of teaching and education should become a civilized person.

A	Shifting to	B
“my benighted soul”	teaching/education	understanding person enlightened person
Uncivilized person		Civilized person
A	Alteration in	B

It is very interesting to observe that these realistic truths about the trickeries of Europeans concerning civilization and colonization are incorporated metaphorically in this verse alone. And the idea that civilization and colonization had been Europeans’ trickeries is once again developed by the writer Aimé Césaire when saying: But then I ask the following question: has colonization really *placed civilizations in contact*? Or, if you prefer, of all the ways of *establishing contact*, was it the best? I answer no. And I say that between *colonization* and *civilization* there is an infinite distance; that out of all the colonial expeditions that have been undertaken, out of all the colonial statutes that have been drawn up, out of all the memoranda that have been dispatched by all the ministries, there could not come a single human value. First we must study how colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism; and we must show that each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact, each time a little girl is raped and in France they accept the fact, each time a Madagascan is tortured and in France they accept the fact, civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread; and that at the end of all these treaties that have been violated, all these lies that have been propagated, all these punitive expeditions that have been tolerated, all these prisoners who have been tied up and “interrogated,” all these patriots who have been tortured, at the end of all the racial pride that has been encouraged, all the

<sup>12</sup> Verse 2: Taught my benighted soul to understand.

<sup>13</sup> Civilization

<sup>14</sup> Colonization

<sup>15</sup> **Impart knowledge to somebody:** to impart knowledge or skill to somebody by instruction or example / **give lessons to somebody:** to give lessons to a person or animal / **make somebody understand something:** to bring understanding of something to somebody, especially through an experience / etc.

<sup>16</sup> **Unenlightened:** unenlightened intellectually, socially, or morally (*formal*).

<sup>17</sup> **Grasp meaning of something:** to know or be able to explain to yourself the nature of somebody or something, or the meaning or cause of something / **come to know something:** to realize or become aware of something / **know meaning of words in language:** to recognize and be able to translate the words of a foreign language.

<sup>18</sup> **Alteration:** the action or process of changing something or of being changed.

boastfulness that has been displayed, a poison has been distilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward *savagery* [<sup>19</sup>].

**4- Verse 3 *That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too: The Use of Religion and Christianity as a Bridge and passport to create contact, enter the continent and operate (or) the trickeries of Religion and Christianity ("there's a God, there's a Saviour too")***

In this third verse our main concern will be the two metaphors but also images used by the poet to describe the use of Religion and namely Christianity by Europeans as a passport during their first contacts with Africans and during their exploration and missions in Africa, the continent they considered as “the Pagan Land”.

In this specific verse, the metaphor and image of Religion is symbolized by the poetic code “a God” [<sup>20</sup>] while the metaphor and image of Christianity is symbolized by the poetic code “a *Saviour*” [<sup>21</sup>]. Those two images, metaphors and even symbols are very important to grasp the use of Religion and namely Christianity by Europeans meaning white people in the history because they tell about the use, functions and objectives of Religion and namely Christianity during colonization and also during civilization.

The fact to promote Religion through the existence of a God “there's a God” and the fact to promote Christianity through the existence of a Saviour “there's a *Saviour* too” have been the very first pretext for Europeans or white people to invade other continents and namely the African continent, this continent characterized by them as a “pagan land”.

“there's a God”.....means.....a creator .....corresponds to..... Religion  
“there's a *Saviour* too”.....means.....Jesus Christ.....corresponds to..... Christianity

Through those two metaphors, we better perceive the trickery of Religion and namely the trickery of Christianity used by Europeans (white people) in their first contacts with black people and Africans anywhere in Africa “the pagan land”. And as a result, today it is the white man’s religion and it is the white man’s *Saviour* which are most practiced by Africans.

African people, like it had been the case of the poet herself, have been Christianized through the ideological and Religious concept “there's a God, there's a *Saviour* too” which in reality is indeed one of the trickeries used by the white man in his relationship with the black man. And the fact that they call themselves “catholic missionaries” is part of this trickery.

So this third verse, through images, metaphors and symbols, conveys alone the big and fundamental trickeries of Religion and Christianity during the first contacts between white people and black people. These trickeries of Religion and Christianity will be denounced by some African authors at that time such as Chinua Achebe when he says: “The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart [<sup>22</sup>]”.

<sup>19</sup> Aimé Césaire, *DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM*, Translated by Joan Pinkham, MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS, NEW YORK, 1972, pp 33-36.

<sup>20</sup> Through the expression “there's a God”

<sup>21</sup> Through the expression “there's a Saviour too”

<sup>22</sup> Chinua Achebe, *THINGS FALL APART*, (1958), pp124-125

[https://books.google.ci/books?id=CGaDj8r13WcC&pg=PA124&lpg=PA124&dq=%E2%80%9CDoes+the+white+man+understand+our+custom+about+land+%E2%80%9D+%E2%80%9CHow+can+he+when+he+does+not+even+speak+our+tongue?+But+he+says+that+our+customs+are+bad;+and+our+own+brothers+who+have+taken+up+his+religion+also+say+that+our+customs+are+bad.+How+do+you+think+we+can+fight+when+our+own+brothers+have+turned+against+us?+The+white+man+is+very+clever.&source=bl&ots=TtyBx8VI3t&sig=ACfU3U398TXqkEvcFvARauU60BYHouEoWw&hl=fr&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwii-pXtn\\_T0AhWXA2MBHWhDPsQ6AF6BAgxEAM#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%9CDoes%20the%20white%20man%20understand%20our%20custom%20about%20land%3F%E2%80%9D+%E2%80%9CHow%20can%20he%20when%20he%20does%20not%20even%20speak%20our%20tongue%3F%20But%20he%20says%20that%20our%20customs%20are%20bad%3B%20and%20our%20own%20brothers%20who%20have%20taken%20up%20his%20religion%20also%20say%20that%20our%20customs%20are%20bad.%20How%20do%20you%20think%20we%20can%20fight%20when%20our%20own%20brothers%20have%20turned%20against%20us%3F%20The%20white%20man%20is%20very%20clever.&f=false](https://books.google.ci/books?id=CGaDj8r13WcC&pg=PA124&lpg=PA124&dq=%E2%80%9CDoes+the+white+man+understand+our+custom+about+land+%E2%80%9D+%E2%80%9CHow+can+he+when+he+does+not+even+speak+our+tongue?+But+he+says+that+our+customs+are+bad;+and+our+own+brothers+who+have+taken+up+his+religion+also+say+that+our+customs+are+bad.+How+do+you+think+we+can+fight+when+our+own+brothers+have+turned+against+us?+The+white+man+is+very+clever.&source=bl&ots=TtyBx8VI3t&sig=ACfU3U398TXqkEvcFvARauU60BYHouEoWw&hl=fr&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwii-pXtn_T0AhWXA2MBHWhDPsQ6AF6BAgxEAM#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%9CDoes%20the%20white%20man%20understand%20our%20custom%20about%20land%3F%E2%80%9D+%E2%80%9CHow%20can%20he%20when%20he%20does%20not%20even%20speak%20our%20tongue%3F%20But%20he%20says%20that%20our%20customs%20are%20bad%3B%20and%20our%20own%20brothers%20who%20have%20taken%20up%20his%20religion%20also%20say%20that%20our%20customs%20are%20bad.%20How%20do%20you%20think%20we%20can%20fight%20when%20our%20own%20brothers%20have%20turned%20against%20us%3F%20The%20white%20man%20is%20very%20clever.&f=false)

Nearly everybody was a member of the Party... Its origins can, so the people say, be traced to the day the whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that the whiteman was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar; his humility was touching. For a time, people ignored the voice of the Gikuyu seer who once said there shall come a people with clothes like the butterflies. They gave him, the stranger with scalded skin, a place to erect a temporary shelter. Hut complete, the stranger put up other building yards away. This he called the House of God where people could go for worship and sacrifice... About Jesus, they could not at first understand, for how could it be that God would let himself be nailed to a tree? The whiteman spoke of that Love that passeth all understanding. Greater love hath no man than this; he read from the little black book, that a man lay down his life for his friends. The few, who were converted, started speaking a faith foreign to the ways of the land. They trod on sacred places to show no harm could reach those protected by the hand of the Lord. Soon people saw the whiteman had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position. He had already pulled down the grass-thatched hut and erected a more permanent building. Elders of the land protested. They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible, but the sword [<sup>23</sup>].

**5- Verse 4 *Once I redemption neither sought nor knew* : The capitulation, assimilation, acceptance and acculturation of Africans and black people (or) the trickery of acculturation (“Once I redemption”) and namely of blind acculturation (“neither sought nor knew”)**

This verse and the trickery it incorporates are very important and meaningful because they are the result of all the other trickeries used by the white people toward the black people. Indeed, this fourth verse is the outcome or the result of the trickeries in verse 1, verse 2 and verse 3. Through this verse which itself represents the trickery of acculturation, one can retain that the process of acculturation has ended up through:

Black people’s acceptance of Africa as a pagan land

Black people’s acceptance of their civilization and colonization by white people

Black people’s acceptance of white people’s religion and namely Christianity

Of course the trickery of acculturation conveyed in this verse is indeed a trickery of acculturation which follows the process of capitulation, assimilation, and acceptance. The fact to capitulate, and to accept Africa as a pagan land, to accept white people’s civilization and colonization, to accept and assimilate white people’s religion and Christianity, black people ended up in a real acculturation characterized by the expression “Once I redemption”. But the most striking thing is that one realizes also that black people have accepted a blind acculturation, a notion which is characterized by the expression “neither sought nor knew”.

So in this verse, the two important images and metaphors are the expressions “Once I redemption” and “neither sought nor knew” which together convey the notion and trickery of a blind acculturation of black people. Those two images and metaphors first convey the trickery of acculturation but also the way, the manner it had been done. And it is important to let those two expression work together to better comprehend how much the acculturation or the trickery of acculturation had been profound and is still profound (the intensity of this acculturation) in Africa and in black people mentality.

The trickery of acculturation as said, is justified by the fact that black people accepted and considered their land as a pagan land as promoted by white people. The trickery of acculturation had been possible when black people accepted white people’s civilization and colonization. The trickery of acculturation had been possible when black people accepted white people’s religion and Christianity. And all these trickeries of acculturation have been done in a blind way, a very important aspect mentioned by the poem namely in this verse.

It is very important to understand that the trickery of acculturation which is one of the trickeries of white people (and in our poem the fourth trickery) is in its application a trickery of blind acculturation. The acculturation that had been operated on black people had been done in a blind way; in a way the black man can no longer return to his past, to his culture, to his roots, to his religion, to his identity as a whole (meaning all himself). He forever lives as an “outcast”.

<sup>23</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat*, 1967, pp10-11-12. [https://books.google.ci/books?id=whsbJogawqEC&pg=PA10&lpg=PA10&dq=Its+origins+can,+so+the+people+say,+be+traced+to+the+day+the+Whiteman+came+to+the+country,+clutching+the+book+of+God+in+both+hands.&source=bl&ots=fAS\\_Uzh4mM&sig=ACfU3U2sCKt44uzNdNgXlIczpgNQXVvrKA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjK7JegsqHyAhUhpEKhfBfAxAQ6AF6BAGCEAM#v=onepage&q=Its%20origins%20can%2C%20so%20the%20people%20say%2C%20be%20traced%20to%20the%20day%20the%20Whiteman%20came%20to%20the%20country%2C%20clutching%20the%20book%20of%20God%20in%20both%20hands.&f=false](https://books.google.ci/books?id=whsbJogawqEC&pg=PA10&lpg=PA10&dq=Its+origins+can,+so+the+people+say,+be+traced+to+the+day+the+Whiteman+came+to+the+country,+clutching+the+book+of+God+in+both+hands.&source=bl&ots=fAS_Uzh4mM&sig=ACfU3U2sCKt44uzNdNgXlIczpgNQXVvrKA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjK7JegsqHyAhUhpEKhfBfAxAQ6AF6BAGCEAM#v=onepage&q=Its%20origins%20can%2C%20so%20the%20people%20say%2C%20be%20traced%20to%20the%20day%20the%20Whiteman%20came%20to%20the%20country%2C%20clutching%20the%20book%20of%20God%20in%20both%20hands.&f=false)

And on the basis of the poem through the first three verses we can say that He (the black man) can no longer return to his “pagan land”, he can no longer return to his own civilization, culture and knowledge, he can no longer return to his own god, savior and religion.

This acculturation and namely blind acculturation that the verse four conveys as a whole is very symbolic in the trickeries used by the white man because it represents the result of the other trickeries but the very objective of all the trickeries used by the white man in his relationships with the black people.

It is very interesting to admit that acculturation as trickery is the final step of the different trickeries used in Africa and the main objective of the white people in going in contact with African people in Africa. Indeed the fact to capitulate, to assimilate, and to accept has been the process which leads place to the trickery of acculturation and through this blind acculturation, Africans have rejected Africa and African culture because it is a pagan land to accept Europe and European culture (white culture). They have rejected their civilizations, rich cultures, to be “civilized” by western culture and then adopt white civilization, habits and manners. They have rejected their own religions, gods and religious practices to adopt, practise and perform European religion through Christianity and in a better way than white people themselves.

So thanks to this verse taken as a whole we understand clearly that the project of white people through his different and numerous trickeries was the trickery of acculturation “Once I redemption” and indeed a blind acculturation of African people as it is clearly said by the poet “Once I redemption neither sought nor knew”. About this trickery of acculturation and namely of blind acculturation some African authors will confess the acculturation black people went through in their writings and among them we have Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. “Does the white man understand our custom about land?” “How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart [24]”. And at last the locusts did descend. They settled on every tree and on every blade of grass; they settled on the roofs and covered the bare ground. Mighty tree branches broke away under them, and the whole country became the brown-earth color of the vast, hungry swarm: This passage from Chapter 7 represents, in highly allegorical terms, the arrival of the colonizers. The locusts have been coming for years, but their symbolic significance in this passage lies in the inevitable arrival of the colonizers, which will alter the landscape and psychology of the Igbo people irreparably. The repetition of the phrase “They settled,” an example of the rhetorical device anaphora (in which a clause begins with the same word or words with which the previous clause begins), in addition to the repetition of the word “every,” reflects the suddenly ubiquitous presence of the locusts. The choice of the verb “settle,” of course, clearly refers to the colonizers. The branches that break under the weight of the locusts are symbols of the traditions and cultural roots of Igbo society, which can no longer survive under the onslaught of colonialism and white settlement. Ironically, the “vast, hungry swarm” is not white but rather brown like the earth; the emphasis, however, remains on the locusts’ consumptive nature and inescapable presence [25].

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<sup>24</sup> Chinua Achebe, *THINGS FALL APART*, (1958) pp124-125

<https://books.google.ci/books?id=CGaDj8r13WcC&pg=PA124&lpg=PA124&dq=%E2%80%9CDoes+the+white+man+understand+our+custom+about+land+%E2%80%9D+%E2%80%9CHow+can+he+when+he+does+not+even+spea+our+tongue?+But+he+says+that+our+customs+are+bad;+and+our+own+brothers+who+have+taken+up+his+religion+also+say+that+our+customs+are+bad.+How+do+you+think+we+can+fight+when+our+own+brothers+have+turned+against+us?+The+white+man+is+very+clever.&source=bl&ots=TtyBx8V13t&sig=ACfU3U398TXqkEvcFvARauU60BYHouEoWw&hl=fr&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwii->

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/things/quotes/page/2/>

**6- Verse 5 *Some view our sable race with scornful eye* : new phase in the relationship whites-blacks, and the birth of Race and Racism in the future relations between white people and black people (or) the trickery of Racism (“view our race with scornful eye”)**

This verse “Some view our sable race with scornful eye” introduces us to another trickery of the white man which is the trickery of racism, and which symbolizes the new phase in blacks and whites relationships because it is topical but also dangerous because it is pernicious. Indeed after their redemption, black people will be confronted to a new trickery and to a new form of collaboration, it is racism which is symbolized in the metaphor and image of the expression “view with scornful eye”. In this specific verse, the fact to mention the word “race” and to associate race with the concept and expression “scornful eye” is very expressive of the trickery of racism.

Therefore the two metaphors and images of “race” and “scornful eye” are important here and they are added to the function of eye which is to view in the expression “some view”. And now, in a complete interpretation, one may have the three important images and metaphors which are “view”, “race” and “scornful eye”.

“Some” ..... “view with scornful eye” ..... our sable race  
white people ..... “view with scornful eye” ..... black people  
white race ..... “view with scornful eye” ..... black race

The concept of “view with scornful eye” another group of people which is a metaphor to identify racism in the society is very important. This realistic problem and trickery of racism has existed and still exists in the American society. And when we realize that since 1773, Phillis Wheatley already mentioned it and warned black people about it, we think she is an exceptional visionary poet.

Of course when we identify groups of people in terms of “race”, black race, white race, and we apply “scornful eye” to each other, we are poisoning our common relationship.

And since this trickery does exist therefore for the future relationships, people consider race and apply racism or will consider race and will apply racism. It means that the direction and pattern of the new relationships between them will be the following:

White people ..... “race and racism” ..... black people  
White race ..... “racism” ..... black race

Being defined as the animosity towards other races: prejudice or animosity against people who belong to other races [26] or also the belief in racial superiority: the belief that people of different races have different qualities and abilities, and that some races are inherently superior or inferior [27]. This trickery but also serious problem of racism will lead of course to the birth of several correlated attitudes such as hatred, racial segregation, racial discrimination, sexism, racial barrier; Jim Crow laws, racial violence and massacre, but also this birth of race and racism will give way to new phases of fights and mistreatments among whites and blacks. The American society being a racist society, the poet Claude McKay will fight against and denounce white people’s racism toward black people in many of his writings such as in the poem “barrier”

I must not gaze at them although  
I must not watch you as you go  
I hear but I must never heed  
I must not see upon your face  
For there's the barrier of race,  
You're fair and I am dark [28].

**7- Verse 6 *Their colour is a diabolic die* : the problem of color of skin as the new problem of black people (or) the trickery of color of skin; “the blackness of blackness”<sup>29</sup> the new problem and last problem of Africans and African Americans (“Their colour is a diabolic die”)**

This sixth verse is very meaningful about the trickery of color of skin because identified as “a diabolic die”, the black color of skin becomes a new problem. Indeed the image and metaphor of “colour” in this verse meaning in fact the color of skin or really the black color of skin becomes the new trickery of white people as denounced by the poet. And this aspect or image or metaphor is very important in this specific verse even though it is not clearly stated such as “the

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<sup>28</sup> Claude McKay, “Barrier”, Published in 1922. This poem is in the public domain. <https://poets.org/poem/barrier>

<sup>29</sup> A concept developed by Ralph Ellison in his novel invisible man, through this concept he talks about the color of skin of black people and the problems link to this color of skin, problems such as invisibility, identity, discrimination etc.

black color of skin” or “the color of skin which is black”. In fact to better grasp the full meaning of this verse, we can admit that two images, metaphors are important here: "colour" and "a diabolic die". But also the relationship or the connection white people put between that "colour", and its ability to be "a diabolic die", or its capacity of being "a diabolic die". This new trickery of color of skin, this new phase in the relationship blacks-whites, this new conception of blacks as being "a diabolic die" is in reality the new problem many Africans and African Americans encounter everywhere in the world and namely in the United States today. As a logic and contemporary problem, this trickery of color of skin is like the infant of the trickery of both race and racism; the ones Phillis Wheatley mentioned before when she talks about “race” and “scornful eye”. And as one of the greatest writers of African American ethnic literature, James Baldwin has tackled this problem in his essay entitled “Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind”:  
A bill is coming in that I fear America is not prepared to pay. “The problem of the twentieth century,” wrote W. E. B. Du Bois around sixty years ago, “is the problem of the color line.” A fearful and delicate problem, which compromises, when it does not corrupt, all the American efforts to build a better world—here, there, or anywhere. It is for this reason that everything white Americans think they believe in must now be reëxamined. What one would not like to see again is the consolidation of peoples on the basis of their color. But as long as we in the West place on color the value that we do, we make it impossible for the great unwashed to consolidate them according to any other principle. Color is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality. But this is a distinction so extremely hard to make that the West has not been able to make it yet. And at the center of this dreadful storm, this vast confusion, stand the black people of this nation, who must now share the fate of a nation that has never accepted them, to which they were brought in chains. Well, if this is so, one has no choice but to do all in one’s power to change that fate, and at no matter what risk—eviction, imprisonment, torture, death. For the sake of one’s children, in order to minimize the bill that *they* must pay, one must be careful not to take refuge in any delusion—and the value placed on the color of the skin is always and everywhere and forever a delusion. I know that what I am asking is impossible. But in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least that one can demand—and one is, after all, emboldened by the spectacle of human history in general, and American Negro history in particular, for it testifies to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible [30].

The association of "Their colour" to a "diabolic die" in the process of interpretation and connotation through images, metaphors and symbols leads to the following meanings:

If “Their colour” ..... “is identified as” ..... “diabolic”  
It means that:  
Black color of skin .....“ is identified as” ..... diabolic  
Black people ..... “is identified as” .....diabolic  
“our sable race” ..... “is identified as” ..... diabolic  
Black race .....“is identified as” .....diabolic

Concerning this specific verse 6 "Their colour is a diabolic die", we realize that since long time and exactly since 1773 Phillis Wheatley as a visionary poet had detected the problem of color and namely the problem of color of skin. So since the beginning, since long time, Phillis Wheatley has established the new and real problem the black race will face in their relationships with white people. And still today in 1952, the novelist Ralph Ellison through his novel *Invisible Man* poses the problem of color of skin through the notion of invisibility, the name “Invisible Man” and the concept of “the blackness of blackness”.

In this verse also, one may realize that the expression "Their colour is a diabolic die" puts forth the notion of stereotypes and the perception white people (“some view”) have about black people. These stereotypes and perceptions influence the whole American society as it has been observed by IZA Research Fellow Joni Hersch [31] in the interview entitled “color discrimination remains a big problem in the US—Interview with new IZA JoLE Editor Joni Hersch” [32].

**Five decades after the Civil Rights Act – and six years into the first black presidency – is color discrimination still an issue in the U.S.?**

*Joni Hersch:* The Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects workers against discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, and religion. And yet, discrimination – on the basis of race and color, which are often related but need to be distinguished – remains an important problem in the U.S. today.

**Has discrimination litigation increased?**

<sup>30</sup> James Baldwin, “Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind” in *Fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), pp.103-104.

<sup>31</sup> IZA Research Fellow Joni Hersch, an expert on discrimination who does cutting-edge research at the intersection of law and economics at Vanderbilt University

<sup>32</sup> <https://newsroom.iza.org/en/archive/research/color-discrimination-remains-a-big-problem-in-the-u-s-interview-with-new-iza-jole-editor-joni-hersch/>

We are indeed seeing an increase in charges of color discrimination filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). There were 374 charges filed in 1992. The number of charges has doubled between the 2003 and 2013 period, with 1,550 charges filed in 2003 and 3,146 in 2013.

## CONCLUSION

This thorough critical analysis and interpretation of the poem "On Being Brought from Africa to America" by Phillis Wheatley has permitted to realize that it incorporates many metaphors, images and it denounces the different trickeries the white people used and still use against the black people. Each verse indeed has a meaningful role and conveys important meaning both on the literal level and the connotative one.

We observe that both on the literal and metaphorical analysis of this short poem, she has denounced the trickery of paganism in verse 1 through the poetic code "pagan land". She has denounced the trickeries of civilization and colonization in verse 2 through the metaphor of "Teach benighted soul to understand". She has denounced the trickeries of Religion and Christianity in verse 3 through the expression "there's a God, there's a Saviour too". She has denounced the trickery of acculturation and namely blind acculturation in verse 4 through the metaphor "Once I redemption neither sought nor knew". She has denounced the trickery of Racism in verse 5 through the metaphor "view our race with scornful eye". And she has denounced at last the trickery of the color of skin; the new and contemporary problem of Africans and African Americans in verse 6 through the expression "'Their colour is a diabolic die'".

Thanks to this methodology of linear analysis, we detect the truths and trickeries about paganism, civilization and colonization, Religion and Christianity, acculturation, Racism and at last color of skin in the message of the poet. And all those trickeries are realistic truths about the way white people have collaborated with black people in the society and still do with this concept of white people hegemony in their relationship with black people. Today racism and the color problem (color of skin) are still topical trickeries at the hands of white people. This poem may represent one of the very first texts ever produced by an African American writer and poet about the trickeries white people used against Africans and black people in general.

First step of the process ↔ **the trickery of "Paganism"**

Second step of the process ↔ **the trickeries of civilization and colonization**

Third step of the process ↔ **the trickeries of Religion and Christianity**

Fourth step of the process ↔ **the trickery of acculturation**

Fifth step of the process ↔ **the trickery of Racism**

Sixth step of the process ↔ **the trickery of the color of skin**

As we may observe in the two last verses: (Remember, *Christians, Negros*, black as *Cain*, / May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train); she tries to advise white people about the capacity of human being to transcend his conditions and to change his situation in a better one. But also the two verses call for humanity in the relationships between white people and black people. This last note renders the poem which is a satirical poem into a didactic one, thanks to the advice she teaches to white people. As a didactic poem, it calls to the mind of everybody about human perfection or way toward perfection but also about the possibility for everyone to go to heaven or paradise imaged here as "th' angelic train". The words "*Christians*", "*Negros*", and the expression "black as *Cain*" summarize the whole story of the poem and the process since the beginning till the very new problem of the Negro which is the color problem: the color black<sup>[33]</sup>.

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