On Being Brought from Africa to America

Phillis Wheatley

’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 or knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye.
“Their color is a diabolical dye.”
Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain²,
May be refined, and join the angelic train.

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 people (Genesis 4.1-15).

• What is Wheatley’s tone? How can it be interpreted in more than one way?