



Wie zult gij d'Overmoed, tot Gansche, en tot Heeren
Van Steendam, den de land van Verrean, en gij heyl.
De Gauen van zijn land, in Mouten, en gij heeren,
Heterkenen, alle Gauen, en gij, als d'Overmoed
Mit D'wilde, en gij, heyl, als d'Overmoed
De Gauen, en gij, heyl, als d'Overmoed.

JACOB STEENDAM — THE KOOMAN PORTRAIT.

From a print in the Lenox Library, New York.

NEW AMSTERDAM'S POET LAUREATE

Jacob Steendam was a New Amsterdam merchant and an accomplished poet whose compositions included lyrical poems about whales frolicking in Hudson Bay and starfish on the beach of Manhattan.

Before coming to New Amsterdam, he had been a soldier and slave trader employed by the Dutch West India Company at Elmina, on the west coast of Africa, for more than a decade. In Elmina, Steendam lived with an African woman with whom he may have had children—an experience that touched him, and inspired a poem of unrequited love for an African woman, called *The Might of Chastity*.

*Upon beholding her
He could but ill restrain
Himself from crying out,
O! Blossom of my choice,
What woman gave you birth
In this barbaric land? . . .
Had God united us
In matrimonial bonds,
How happy we could be
We have discovered:*

*Alas, it cannot
(For reasons) come to pass . . .*

Another poem was written for the birthday of Jan Gelendonk, or John Darkyellow, a child of mixed racial origins who was probably Steendam's son.

*Since two bloods course within your veins,
Both Ham's and Japhet's intermingling;
One race forever doomed to serve,
The other bearing freedom's likeness . . .*

The poem concluded with a birthday wish:

*I wish you (in this human form)
Japhet's freedom, long foretold.*

In a perhaps telling insight about Steendam's understanding of the relationships between Europeans and Africans—most likely white men and black women—the slave-trader-turned-poet reveals his belief that the purported curse of Noah upon Ham was lifted when the Europeans and Africans joined together. —Christopher Moore