

Phillis Wheatley, "On the Death of General Wooster," 1778

Madam,

I rec^d. your favour by Mr Dennison inclosing a paper containing the Character of the truly worthy General Wooster. It was with the most sensible regret that I heard of his fall in battle, but the pain of so afflicting a dispensation of Providence must be greatly alleviated to you and all his friends in the consideration that he fell a martyr in the Cause of Freedom—

From this the muse rich consolation draws
He nobly perish'd in his Country's cause
His Country's Cause that ever fir'd his mind
Where martial flames, and Christian virtues join'd.
How shall my pen his warlike deeds proclaim
Or paint them fairer on the list of Fame—
Enough great Cheif—now wrapt in shades around
Thy grateful Country shall thy praise resound
Tho' not with mortals' empty praise elate
That vainest vapour to th' immortal State
Inly serene the expiring hero lies
And thus (while heav'nward roll his swimming eyes):
"Permit, great power while yet my fleeting breath
And Spirits wander to the verge of Death—
Permit me yet to paint fair freedom's charms
For her the Continent shines bright in arms
By thy high will, celestial prize she came—
For her we combat on the feild of fame
Without her presence vice maintains full sway
And social love and virtue wing their way
O still propitious be thy guardian care
And lead *Columbia* thro' the toils of war
With thine own hand conduct them and defend
And bring the dreadful contest to an end—
For ever grateful let them live to thee
And keep them ever virtuous, brave, and free—
But how, presumptuous shall we hope to find
Divine acceptance with th' Almighty mind—
While yet (O deed ungenerous!) they disgrace
And hold in bondage Afric's blameless race?
Let virtue reign—And thou accord our prayers
Be victory our's, and generous freedom theirs."
The hero pray'd—the wond'ring Spirit fled
And Sought the unknown regions of the dead—
Tis thine fair partner of his life, to find
His virtuous path and follow close behind—
A little moment steals him from thy Sight

He waits thy coming to the realms of light
Freed from his labours in the ethereal Skies
Where in Succession endless pleasures rise!

you will do me a great favour by returning to me by the first opp^y those books that remain unsold and remitting the money for those that are sold—I can easily dispose of them here for 12/Lm.^o each—I am greatly obliged to you for the care you show me, and your condescension in taking so much pains for my Interest—I am extremely Sorry not to have been honour'd with a personal acquaintance with you—if the foregoing lines meet with your acceptance and approbation I shall think them highly honour'd. I hope you will pardon the length of my letter, when the reason is apparent—fondness of the Subject &—the highest respect for the deceas'd—I sincerely sympathize with you in the great loss you and your family Sustain and am Sincerely

Your friend & very humble Serv^t Phillis Wheatley Queenstreet Boston

July 15th 1778

Phillis Wheatley

Source: Transcript (with some punctuation added) from Vincent Carretta, ed., The Writings of Phillis Wheatley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 135–36. Original in a letter from Phillis Wheatley to Mary Wooster, July 15, 1778, Hugh Upham Clark Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.