

The Long Neglect of William Short

Post by “Joshua” of October 5, 2020 at 6:48 PM

Here's an interesting thought; what do we actually know about this guy?

Judging from Mr. Jefferson's letter in reply, we may infer that William Short, like Jefferson, positively identified himself as an Epicurean. Cassius' recent reading of Frances Wright's other work has me thinking that there might be gems hidden here as well.

He was a talented, capable, brilliant protégé of Thomas Jefferson, and a deft hand at diplomacy. He forsook the dream of a high and polished political career in his pursuit of the love of a French Noblewoman. Despite his career disappointments, he was an accomplished businessman, and retired wealthy while Jefferson himself slipped into debt and penury at the end of his life. He was George Washington's first appointment to office. He loved the new American project, but preferred living in Europe.

Some of his correspondence with the married French Duchess survive. I haven't yet found the texts online, but they might be worth perusing.

Here's an interesting anecdote; one day while canoeing on the Seine with Rosalie (whose much older husband in a marriage of convenience evidently didn't object to their affair), William noticed a boy on the verge of drowning. He dove into the waves to save the boy, and nearly lost consciousness in the rescue. When the party returned to the Nobleman's Chateau, he was treated to a banquet and lauded as a hero. It's probably a coincidence, but the story bears remarkable similarities to Theon's rescue of Hedeia in *A Few Days in Athens*. (This happened in 1790; Wright published in 1822).

Post by “Cassius” of October 5, 2020 at 9:08 PM

Wow that IS a coincidence, and it's a great idea to investigate William Short. I will try to help but keep us posted on anything you find!

Post by “Charles” of October 6, 2020 at 8:37 AM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

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<http://https://www.unz.com/p...PDF&apages=0099>

From the text: "William Short, Jefferson's 'Only' Son"

Much of his writing to her was burned sometime during the Reign of Terror, though few have survived. The small, formatted text denotes the contents of letters, followed and succeeded by chronology and context of each letter.

Post by “Cassius” of October 6, 2020 at 8:41 AM

For some reason that link gave me a problem, but this one works for me:

<https://www.unz.com/print/NorthAme...PDF&apages=0099>

Looks the same, but I couldn't get's Charles to work....

Charles are you able to get that to download a copy of the pdf?

Edit - DUH - I got it -- open up the "tools" icon on the top right of the viewer.

Post by “Joshua” of January 14, 2025 at 6:34 PM

Quote

CASSIUS

I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus,
As well as I do know your outward favor.

Well, honor is the subject of my story.
I cannot tell what you and other men
Think of this life; but, for my single self,
I had as lief not be as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself.
I was born free as Caesar; so were you;
We both have fed as well, and we can both
Endure the winter's cold as well as he.
For once, upon a raw and gusty day,
The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,
Caesar said to me "Dar'st thou, Cassius, now
Leap in with me into this angry flood
And swim to yonder point?" Upon the word,
Accoutered as I was, I plungèd in
And bade him follow; so indeed he did.
The torrent roared, and we did buffet it
With lusty sinews, throwing it aside
And stemming it with hearts of controversy.
But ere we could arrive the point proposed,
Caesar cried "Help me, Cassius, or I sink!"
I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,
Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
Did I the tired Caesar. And this man
Is now become a god, and Cassius is
A wretched creature and must bend his body
If Caesar carelessly but nod on him.
He had a fever when he was in Spain,
And when the fit was on him, I did mark
How he did shake. 'Tis true, this god did shake.
His coward lips did from their color fly,
And that same eye whose bend doth awe the world
Did lose his luster. I did hear him groan.
Ay, and that tongue of his that bade the Romans
Mark him and write his speeches in their books,
"Alas," it cried "Give me some drink, Titinius"
As a sick girl. You gods, it doth amaze me
A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world
And bear the palm alone.

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Another drowning story, again with an Epicurean as the rescuer. I don't know how I missed it before!

Post by “Cassius” of January 14, 2025 at 6:51 PM

Saving someone from drowning is a very apt analogy!